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The JSG is a campaigning organisation which is active on issues directly affecting the Jewish community, other minorities and oppressed groups, and the wider labour movement. The group works and campaigns with other organisations sharing some or all of our aims and always welcomes new members who support our political principles. All members receive a regular internal discussion bulletin, a frequent newsletter detailing meetings and events and can participate fully in our annual conference and in any aspect of the group's work.

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JEWISH SOCIALIST

is a quarterly magazine launched by the Jewish Socialists' Group in 1985 as a forum for radical ideas and opinions on issues directly affecting the Jewish community here and elsewhere and on questions vital to minorities and socialists everywhere.

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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

MODI, NETANYAHU



YOU CANNOT SILENCE THE DIASPORA

■ Jews and GE19 ■ Forgotten East End murder ■ Rise of the Joint List in Israel

■ Poland's museum wars ■ Who are the XR Jews? ■ Romany lives

EDITORIAL

When a representative of the Jewish Socialist's Group was invited to join other speakers in addressing a lively and angry demonstration in London about events that were unfolding in India at the end of February, her input was more than a gesture of anti-racist solidarity with Muslim communities who were feeling the full fury of Narendra Modi's murderous nationalism. It was also an acknowledgement of how matters of Jewish state nationalism have become enmeshed with this issue too, right here, right now.

Progressive forces within both Indian and Jewish diaspora communities are engaged in resisting determined attempts to corral them into upholding reactionary political views which provide a cover for nationalist hatred, violence and discrimination both in India and in Israel/Palestine.

Most of the participants in that London demonstration at the end of a week during which vast areas of North East Delhi were ablaze, were themselves from South Asia or of South Asian heritage, and their comments principally addressed people from the Subcontinent. But the word they used on several placards to describe that devastation in which, suddenly, dozens of Muslims lost their lives, hundreds were displaced, homes were burnt and livelihoods destroyed, was a Russian word probably very familiar to many of our readers: "Pogrom". Our diaspora Jewish community in Britain comprises many descendants of those who fled antisemitic pogroms in the Russian Empire. Another speaker made a powerful reference to the brutal and murderous assault on German Jews during Kristallnacht in Germany in the late 1930s, in which many lives were lost and synagogues were ablaze.

There are indeed historical parallels with current events that our community should be particularly aware of and sensitive to, but there are also very real contemporary links. When Modi became India's Prime Minister, he sought to reshape it according to the Hindutva ethno-nationalist ideology of the far right Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), of which he is a lifelong member. The ambition of the RSS is to transform India's secular state into a hierarchical "Hindu First" state, in which the position and rights of minorities are downgraded, curbed and circumscribed; a state in which Kashmiris remain subjugated. Modi encourages Hindu Indians to purchase property and settle in Kashmir under military protection in order to alter the demographic make-up there. This is akin to the support and encouragement Netanyahu has given to Jewish settlers to expand

their illegal outposts in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank.

Modi has drawn inspiration, friendship and practical support from Benjamin Netanyahu. He was the first Indian premier to visit Israel. Until 1992 India had shown empathy with the Palestinians, and like many other members of the global non-aligned movement, had not recognised Israel as a state. Today Israel is India's largest arms supplier. The Indian purchase of weaponry, tried and tested on the Palestinians, comprises 46% of Israel's global military sales.

It is hard not to see in Modi's widely condemned new citizenship law – the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and its accompanying registers of citizenship, which threaten to leave Indian Muslims disenfranchised – a first step towards ethnic cleansing. It is also an echo of Netanyahu's openly discriminatory Nation State Law of 2018 which also provoked a great deal of anger and strong protests. We salute the bravery of the protesters led by the women at Shaheen Bagh who, at the time of writing, are continuing their sit-down protest against Modi's CAA, though now taking precautions to create more physical social distance because of Coronavirus.

But it is also important to acknowledge the way both Modi and Netanyahu seek to influence the political positioning of Hindus and Jews in the Diaspora. In the recent

British General Election, Hindus were urged to vote Tory because a Labour Conference Emergency Motion had criticised Modi's policies in Kashmir. Labour was characterised as "anti-Indian". This message was pressed home in the Gujarati Hindu heartlands of Leicester, Harrow and Brent. With just over two weeks left till election day, a spokesperson for the Hindu Council in Britain issued a statement in support of Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis's claim that the Labour Party is antisemitic, adding that it was "anti-Hindu" too. The tendency to view political criticism of far right Indian nationalism as "anti-Indian" and "anti-Hindu" has obvious parallels.

In this issue of our magazine, though, we look at some of the positive ways that progressives within Jewish, Indian and other minority groups organised during the General Election (p8), and we also reveal some home truths about Rabbi Mirvis (p3).

For our part, we will continue to link our progressive struggles against both Hindutva and Zionist ethno-nationalist ideology, and encourage the anti-racist and anti-fascist movements here to broaden the scope of their interest beyond Europe and America.



Emergency Demo, 5th August 2019, the day Article 370 was revoked in Kashmir.

Editorial committee: Julia Bard, Judith Cravitz, Mike Heiser, David Rosenberg and Lynne Walsh. With thanks to Sue Hughes and Anne O'Daly for additional editing and proofreading.

Cover image: Demonstration against the Indian Government's Citizenship Amendment Act, organised by South Asia Solidarity at the Indian High Commission in London

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Playing to the gallery

Fresh from his blatantly pro-Tory intervention at the General Election, Chief Rabbi (of the United Synagogue) Ephraim Mirvis was welcomed at the 2020 conference in Washington DC of the right wing lobby group the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Other luminaries sharing the stage at this year's conference included ministerial representatives of the antisemitic, Islamophobic and anti-Roma Hungarian government – a government that urges white Hungarians to "defend the Christian family" by procreating more. The Hungarian Premier, Victor Orban, has called non-European asylum-seekers "poison".

Mirvis was immensely proud of the vicious and mendacious attack on Jeremy Corbyn he had made in *The Times* during Britain's election campaign which, at the time, he portrayed as the intervention of a spiritual leader whose tortured individual conscience told him he must speak out. The gullible media lapped it up and repeated it as if this were true. Among his right wing friends at AIPAC, he confided that he had acted, "not in a unilateral manner but in concert with key Jewish figures and Jewish

organisations," thereby both feeding conspiracy theorists what they like to hear and revealing his personal dishonesty.

So, what did he tell AIPAC? "On the matter of antisemitism," he declared, "we have always acted as one." It was certainly true that in October 1936, tens of thousands of Jews acted as one when they took to the East End streets with local allies to drive the fascists away. But they did so in defiance of the injunctions of the Board of Deputies, many rabbis and the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, who told them to stay indoors and not make trouble. Likewise, when the courageous 43 Group battled with fascists after World War II and forced them off the streets, they were admonished rather than thanked by the Jewish establishment.

At the AIPAC conference Rabbi Mirvis came closest to declaring his true political priorities when he urged the delegates to "use your influence fearlessly for the sake of Jews and Judaism and Medinat Yisrael (the State of Israel)." But defending the State of Israel is different from defending all "Israelis" or all "Jews". He probably cares more for Israeli settlers illegally occupying Palestinian land than he does for the radical Israeli Jews,



who believe in justice and equality, and voted in significantly increased numbers for the left wing Palestinian ("Israeli-Arab")-led Joint List in Israeli General Election. After all, he was a settler himself and the evidence suggests he still supports them.

In the 1970s, when Mirvis was in his late teens, he studied at a *yeshiva* situated among the provocative and illegal Gush Etzion settlements in the Occupied West Bank. Of course, that was decades ago. Perhaps he has since matured and reflected on this. But in 2014 there was an annual fundraiser in New York for that same *yeshiva* which remains to this day on illegally occupied Palestinian land. The keynote speaker that night was Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.

TAKE ME THROUGH THE STREETS OF DALSTON

DAVID ROSENBERG'S walks of London's radical history now include a trail through a part of Hackney that has been significant for ethnic minorities and grassroots activism. Here, he gives a taster of his new walk, *Stories from the Streets: Radical Hackney 1790s-1990s*.

Early 1960s. I was maybe five years old, walking with my mum and my brother through Ridley Road market in Dalston, Hackney while she did her shopping. It was a regular part of my childhood. My grandparents moved round the corner to a basement flat on Colvestone Crescent. My mum worked in the typing pool at a factory producing electronic measuring instruments such as ammeters and voltmeters at the far end of Ridley Road where it meets Dalston Lane. I remember the market as a loud and colourful space. I was fascinated by the goods on the stalls and the displays that spread out from the shop fronts. When we got home that day, there was a funny smell in our flat which got worse over the next few days. But we couldn't trace it. The following week my mum decided that my coat was due for a wash. She emptied the pockets first – and there was a smelly fish that I had taken and put in my pocket from the display outside the shop of fishmonger (and boxing promoter) Jack Solomons.

In that period many of the stall holders were Jewish. In the previous decade Hackney had comprised the largest and most densely populated Jewish area in Britain. During the 1960s many Hackney Jews began to migrate towards suburbia and later many stallholders reflected other waves of migration into the borough: Caribbean, South Asian, Turkish and Kurdish, and West African. By the end of the 1960s, my family had reached Ilford, the sixth place I lived in and our first house. But my grandparents still lived near Ridley Road, and we saw them often, and all my primary school days were in a Jewish school in Clapton.

When I decided, after much encouragement from Hackney-based friends, to develop a walk

of Hackney's radical history, I chose to focus it on the Dalston area. Not only because that part was the most familiar to me but because it had a rich, fascinating and at times very dramatic history, not least with regard to anti-fascism. Ridley Road was a magnet for the fascist movement: in the 1930s, Mosley's movement battled with the Communist Party to wrest the speaking pitch from them where the market met Kingsland High Street. Shortly after World War II, some of the fiercest battles with the anti-fascist 43 Group took place there. And in the period of the 1960s while I was taking a fish from

Jack Solomon's shop, fascists and anti-fascists were taking lumps out of each other there on Sunday mornings. At the factory where my mum worked, she remembers to this day the particular antisemitic jibes she received from some of the workers there who told her that they longed to see "Mosley marching up Ridley Road again".

The remnants of Dalston's industrial past are still visible. Its main industry was clothing, and I tell of the struggles of the 1970s of mainly Turkish women for better conditions. Moving through more residential streets, we pass a block of flats set back



from the road converted from a former synagogue that closed in the 1966. Here I recall Hackney's first Jewish residents back in the 1670s – Sephardi Jews whose families were kicked out of Spain and Portugal in 1492.

We pass through Hackney Downs, site of a rally in the 1790s to celebrate the French Revolution. Attempts to interfere with its long-held status as common land in the 1870s led to mass protests which I describe on the walk. Hackney Downs is also the name of a boys' school that is no more, closed by the government and labelled "the worst school in Britain". But this school was a springboard for the achievement of several individuals who became well known in politics and the arts.

We wind our way back to Kingsland High Street, within sight of Stoke Newington police station, the focus of many angry black community protests over police racism, and then walk back towards where we started via a plethora of current and former innovative and politically significant community projects.

As with all my walks I try to

weave in real personal stories and some of my own and my family's experience in the area. Please take a walk with me!

For further details and to book this or other walks, visit www.eastendwalks.com



Jewish Labour Bund, Melbourne, Australia

It's a long way from Vilna where secular Yiddish-speaking Jewish radicals and revolutionaries formed the General Union of Jewish Workers (the Bund) at a secret location in 1897 based on the principles of frayhayt (freedom), glaykhhayt (equality), gerechtkayt (justice), khavershaft (comradeship) and doikayt (here-ness – "Where we live, that is our country").

But as Bundists went into political exile to far-flung areas of the globe, where exactly "here" was, took new meaning. They established a group in Melbourne Australia in 1928 which still exists. It flourishes today and continues to organise on

those founding principles, working with others who share those values. Within Melbourne's Jewish community they seek to nurture, in particular, a strong sense of secular Jewish identity through Yiddish language and culture.

The Bund in Melbourne runs cultural and political events through the year. And like the Bund in Eastern Europe, which had a children's movement (SKIF) and a youth movement (Tsukunft), the Melbourne Bund has a SKIF group for 8-18-year-olds which meets every Sunday afternoon and organises three camps a year.

In addition to activism in the Jewish

community on social and political issues, they join with other groups beyond the Jewish community in taking up issues of indigenous peoples' struggles, supporting asylum seekers, battling climate change, and supporting labour movement campaigns.

The Melbourne Bund also have a weekly radio show in English and Yiddish, providing news, information, stories and song reflecting a Bundist perspective on a Jewish radio station J-AIR.

Find out more about the Bund in Melbourne at www.bundist.org



CHANGE
THE
WORLD



JEW, CORBYN AND THE GENERAL ELECTION

Despite the best efforts of the establishment institutions of the Jewish community and the right wing of the Labour Party, many left-wing Jews campaigned and canvassed for a left-led Labour victory. The following four pages report and reflect on the general election and its aftermath

When the General Election was called it was clear that it would be an uphill struggle to get Jews to vote Labour, let alone campaign for them. The Jewish establishment had waged war on Jeremy Corbyn, a longstanding supporter of Palestinian rights, from the day he became Labour leader. Despite his anti-racist and anti-fascist record, they claimed that he tolerated and associated with antisemites, and accused Corbyn – a lifelong pacifist – of being a friend of terrorists.

Attempts by those inside and outside the Labour Party to sabotage his work, failed to prevent Labour achieving its highest vote for decades and gaining 30 Seats in 2017, which denied the Conservatives a majority. After that election the gloves came off completely. In March 2018 several Jewish bodies combined with Tories to organise a public protest in Parliament Square denouncing Corbyn and Labour's alleged antisemitism. Officers of the pro-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) spoke alongside Tories at the protest.

Later in 2018 three Jewish newspapers published a shared editorial describing Corbyn as "an existential threat" to Jews, and lost any inhibitions about calling him an antisemite. Yet, many Jews remained active in the Labour Party, not least in his own constituency. A pro-Corbyn Jewish group – Jewish Voice for Labour – launched on the Labour Conference fringe in 2017, now has more than

We can see no evidence that a victorious Labour government would persecute, disadvantage, hurt, oppress or delegitimise Jewish citizens. On the contrary, the party's commitment to equality and to challenging racism and discrimination, are key to its values and manifesto commitments...

Unemployed Jews, struggling Jewish single parents and pensioners, young Jews facing spiralling tuition fees for higher education, Jewish users of the NHS and mental health services that have been cut to the bone, all need a radical reforming Labour government to help and support them, in the same way as their counterparts in other communities.

In contrast to the JSG and JVL, the Jewish Labour Movement took the extraordinary step of effectively boycotting the election campaign, and canvassing for just a few candidates.

On the eve of Labour launching its Race and Faith Manifesto, which set out positive plans to boost equality for minority communities and to strengthen their security against growing racism from the far right, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis launched a withering attack on Labour to sabotage this event. The right-wing media lapped it up. Then, in an attempt to inflict maximum damage on Labour in the last week of the election, JLM suddenly released their submission to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission inquiry into Labour.

The negativity from the community's right wing, however, was partially countered by the energetic campaigning of younger Jews who organised themselves as Jews Against Boris. Proudly wearing T-shirts displaying their name, their first canvassing activity took place in Johnson's own constituency, where they were supporting Ali Milani, a Muslim Labour candidate, and popularising the slogan of Safety through Solidarity. They declared that: "a vote for the Conservative Party is a vote for a far right that poses an existential threat to all minorities, including us."

Jews against Boris held training sessions and Friday night get-togethers to prepare activists for doorstep work. Where possible they linked up with local Labour supporters from other minorities. In Harrow East they teamed up with Indians Against Tory Division. In Chingford they canvassed Jewish voters who had been influenced by the anti-Labour narrative pushed by "mainstream" Jewish outlets and the media. They produced excellent social media videos through which Jewish activists exposed the support given by Tories to antisemitic, Islamophobic, and homophobic parties in other countries.

Though the election was lost, the energy that went into forming Jews Against Boris has since spawned Jewish Solidarity Action, which adheres to the same principles of Safety through Solidarity in the ongoing struggle against bigotry and oppression.

1,000 members around the country.

Many Jewish Socialists' Group members canvassed for Labour in the election in their own constituencies and several marginals. The JSG published a statement saying:

LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

MIKE CUSHMAN, membership secretary of Jewish Voice for Labour, describes the role their organisation played during the general election

Jewish Voice for Labour, unlike some other Jewish organisations that claim to be part of the Labour movement, had no doubts about the necessity of electing a Labour Government to protect the most vulnerable in our society. We urged support for every Labour candidate regardless of their support for the Corbyn project or their role in trying to undermine it.

It was clear that allegations of "Labour Party antisemitism" would be ruthlessly deployed by our political opponents and that their constant repetition over the past years had put the party on the back foot. Tired and false allegations were repeated endlessly in not only the Tory media but also in supposedly less hostile media like The Guardian and purportedly unbiased media like the BBC. They were accepted as fact by too many voters, and many canvassers were confronted with them on the doorstep.

JVL circulated rebuttals of the most common charges. We prepared detailed rebuttals of key charges such as "Jews not understanding English irony" and the Tunis wreath-laying saga for canvassers who wanted to know how to argue for truthful accounts. Our briefing for canvassers was widely circulated and gave members instant rejoinders for the doorstep. We received substantial positive feedback both from members who deployed the content and from many others who felt reassured that their gut instinct that Labour Party antiracism embraced opposition to antisemitism was based on fact and not on blind faith. It was regrettable that this vital task was left to JVL rather than being undertaken by the Party itself. If it had been, its impact would have been even greater; more important still, it would have demonstrated the Party's self-belief.

In the run up to the election JVL supported the Just Jews initiative: a series of short YouTube videos showcasing Jews describing their positive experiences in the Labour Party. Each video gained wide viewing. Alexei Sayle's flew around the internet: it had a Facebook reach of over a million. The series went beyond Labour Jews: Geoffrey Alderman, a prominent conservative Jewish commentator, exploded the myth that Jeremy Corbyn was a threat to Jews. A separate video of Miriam Margolyes on why she was supporting Jeremy Corbyn and Labour for a better future for both Jews and non-Jews, was shared many thousands of times.

In order to show that many Jews saw through the slurs, JVL encouraged Jewish Party members and supporters to take selfies with placards along the lines of "I support the Labour Party and I'm Jewish" and post them on social media. Flying Tiger compiled the photos into a mosaic image of Jeremy Corbyn which gained much attention.

JVL expended much time and energy submitting complaints about media bias, unfortunately with little impact on the media outlets themselves, but it encouraged Labour members who were pleased to see someone fighting back against the defamation of

their Party. A JVL picket of the BBC to hand in a letter of complaint produced no detectable change in BBC behaviour, but it helped divert attention from that day's supposedly "apolitical" Campaign Against Antisemitism demonstration elsewhere in London.

JVL members were actively involved in local campaigns to return Labour MPs. One highlight was a mass JVL canvass supporting Gordon Nardell, the Jewish Labour candidate in Cities of London and Westminster. The canvass was more interesting than effective. Voters, or even doors, are hard to locate in the centre of Soho. Some CLP officers, unsympathetic to JVL, organised for a mass LGBT+ canvass for the same evening thinking that the two groups would find it difficult to support each other. They were, of course, mistaken. Mixed groups tramped the streets learning from each others' experiences, and ended the evening drinking together in the Admiral Duncan pub, a centre of gay London which had suffered a nail bomb attack in 1989 by a neo-Nazi who hated gays and Jews equally.

JVL officers seized scarce opportunities to be interviewed on radio and TV in order to give a realistic account of the extent, or lack of extent, of antisemitism the Labour Party.

However, the allegations, from both inside and outside the Party, repeated as "fact" on almost every media outlet, had severely damaged the Party's reputation. The demonisation was fatally effective; too many voters had the syllogism of Labour and Antisemitism lodged in their heads, preventing them hearing the many policies in the manifesto that would have radically improved the lives of everyone, even the rich, in Britain.

The election was painful but was an episode not a conclusion. JVL has learned much from the experience and emerged battle-hardened to continue its fight against antisemitism and for Palestinian rights and Labour Party democracy.



JVL canvassing in Westminster

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Jonathan Rosenhead in writing this article.

Contact JVL: www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk

JAMIE STERN-WEINER reports on a packed event celebrating Jewish commitment to socialism on the weekend before the election

L'CHAIM! TO LIFE!

On 7th December more than 100 Labour supporters gathered at Ridley Road Social Club in Dalston, London, for a joyous festival to life (L'CHAIM!) and real change. Organised by the ad hoc grouping Jews4Labour, the evening was a morale booster ahead of the final week of canvassing and a heartfelt middle-finger to those conservative elites, within and beyond the Jewish community, who had sought to discredit and delegitimise the venerable tradition of Jewish socialism.

Our celebration was also a statement of common cause between Jews and other minorities. An open letter organised to coincide with the gathering and published in The Independent the day before made the case that "a vote for Labour in this election is a vote for a more secure and sustainable future, for unity over division, for hope over fear". This statement was read out in full during the event; its signatories included representatives of the Muslim Association of Britain, Holloway Mosque, UNISON, the Indian Workers' Association, the Jewish Socialists' Group, South Asia People's Forum and Jews4Labour.

A notice publicising L'CHAIM captured its animating spirit: *Supporters of the status quo have just one card: endless negativity, designed to demoralise us and make us miserable.*

But we have NOTHING to be miserable about! Jeremy Corbyn's historic candidacy, and the movement which has coalesced behind him, represents fairness, unity, and hope for a better tomorrow. And so, when others seek to grind us down, to drag

us into the muck, and to set us one against the other, we say: To Love! To Labour! TO LIFE (L'CHAIM!)

The atmosphere on the night fully lived up to this billing. Winter blues were banished as comrades of all ages, Jewish and non-Jewish, enjoyed a spirited celebration full of music, talks and magic. The Strawberry Thieves Socialist Choir led the room in such workers' classics as Rise Like Lions, Joe Hill and

The Red Flag as well as the stirring resistance anthem Zog Nit Keyn Mol –inspired by the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and taken up by Jewish partisans during the war. Ian Saville, our compère and Marxist magician extraordinaire, ventriloquised Marx (as socialists are wont to do) and explored the intricacies of the dialectic with the aid of his trademark trickery and a copy of the Financial Times. David Rosenberg recalled the anti-fascist history of Ridley Road, while Julia Bard

emphasised the Jewish community's rich diversity and urged the importance of minority communities uniting against an ascendant far right.

In a message sent from the campaign bus in Wales, Jeremy Corbyn extended to us his thanks and solidarity. Lamenting the "abuse" and "most vile attacks" to which Jews have historically been subjected, and stressing that antisemitism "has no place in our party or society and never will", Corbyn promised that a Labour election victory "will be for all peoples who have suffered racism in any form". He stated his ambition "to create a society proud of its diversity and with the strength to end austerity and inequality", and concluded: "Our socialism binds us together".

The proceedings were fuelled by a healthy provision of bagels and potato dumplings, and closed – as all such gatherings should – with an enthusiastic rendition of The Internationale, in Yiddish.



So here's a statement you never thought you would read: orchestrated efforts are afoot to harass, defame and abuse Jewish Labour Party members out of political life. And guess what? It is the Conservatives and their allies who are the main culprits, as my horrific experience of antisemitism during the Borehamwood Kenilworth council by-election in Hertfordshire in February 2020 attests.

Imagine you had never held public office before. You come out of your busy local rail station in the rush hour and see your own face with a red rosette on a mocked-up newspaper front page on a huge LED screen owned by a leading Tory councillor. It beams down to thousands of commuters in your town, implying you support Islamist Middle East terrorist groups. Worse still, you are Jewish. I'll never forget my body freezing when I saw that image, knowing it would unleash a tirade of hate against me.

As Chair of Hertsmere Labour Party I was used to the rough and tumble of local politics, but nothing prepared me for this. Yet my hounding hadn't started there. The evening before, just four days before polling day, the *Jewish Chronicle* had published a hatchet-job article on me. They dragged up a story from 2015 that I and other Jews had signed a letter defending Jeremy Corbyn against accusations of antisemitism, including his appeals for dialogue on all sides in the Middle East to protect human life.

The following morning my Tory opponent, Brett Rosehill, had printed a letter implying that I was a terrorist sympathiser and that I associated with antisemites. Under the Conservative logo, it was distributed to hundreds of homes in the ward.

Meanwhile Tory Councillors were lining up to incite hatred against me on social media. One claimed I was "the worst sort of antisemite". Another asserted that I and other left-wing Jews are "self-haters". One of my campaign team said she overheard a Tory canvasser shouting in the street that I was a "disgusting Jew."

Then the antisemitic abuse on social media went into overdrive. I was told to go and "die in the gas chambers," was referred to as a "Jew-hating Jewish c**t," and told that I am a "lying Nazi". My family members also received abuse. When I read these I felt like crying. I have worked and volunteered for Jewish charities most of my life, including with Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors. I was married in a synagogue and bring my son up to follow Jewish customs.

The character assassination worked. From having narrowly missed out in the same ward on a coin toss in the May 2019 local elections, I lost this time by 100 votes. Residents told us they had changed their mind about voting for me after reading that libellous letter.

The abuse continued for days, even after defeat. I received an offensive email at work and a threatening message ominously mentioning my unborn baby.

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST TORY HATRED

This caused my heavily pregnant wife great distress.

National media attention followed, including The Independent and the front page of my local paper. The outpouring of solidarity was incredible. Hundreds of strangers contacted me as did several Labour MPs, my Lib Dem and Green opponents and several campaign groups. The Jewish community rallied round, starting with left-wing Jewish organisations including the Jewish Socialists Group, then rabbis and then a supportive tweet from the Board of Deputies. If something good comes of this nightmare, I'm hoping that the support I received from across the Jewish community could be a basis from which we can rebuild the damaged relations with the Labour Party.

Hertsmere Conservatives were left isolated. I have reported them to the police for incitement to racial hatred and they are investigating the antisemitic abuse I received.

But here is what has gone unreported. This is the third election campaign running in which the local Tories have defamed our Jewish candidates, having adopted similar smear tactics against our parliamentary candidate Holly Kal-Weiss in December 2019 and our Council Group Leader Jeremy Newmark before the May local elections. We know that the hunting down of Jewish Labour Party members is also going on elsewhere. For instance, Sara Conway was hounded away from standing as Labour's parliamentary candidate in Finchley & Golders Green.

One of the pieces of "evidence" that the Tories used was to circulate a photo of the only time I have actually met Jeremy Corbyn, when I took one of Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, 87-year old Nora Cortiñas to meet him in Parliament in 2017. As someone who is heavily engaged in the Jewish community, I arranged this visit as one of the Jewish and human rights causes I support. Ironically this was used against me to suggest I am a "bad Jew."

Argentina's Nazi-inspired military dictatorship (1976-83) infamously "disappeared" 30,000 opponents including Cortiñas' son. It targeted Jewish activists – 3,000 perished and many more were tortured.

Rather than "physically disappearing" left-wing Jews as South American dictatorships did then, the Conservatives and right-wing media today are trying to intimidate and defame us to our own community that we love, and in our local areas that we care about, so that we "disappear" from politics or Jewish community life.

Many of us are socialists precisely because of our Jewish values. We should never have to choose between them. We shall never let the Tories intimidate or crush us. The Labour Party nationally has been very supportive. General Secretary Jennie Formby has written to Tory HQ to demand that these attacks on me and Jewish candidates stop. We need to call out Tory antisemitism or harassment of Jewish people wherever it arises.

The demonisation of Labour and the instrumental misuse of allegations of antisemitism, lived on beyond the General Election, as Dan Ozarow, Chair of Hertsmere Labour Party found out

A version of this article was first published in *Labour Briefing*, labourbriefing.org

Dan is pursuing a defamation case against Hertsmere Conservatives. You can donate to his legal costs here: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/solidaritywithdan>

The Jewish Labour Solidarity Network is being launched to support Jewish Labour Party members who suffer abuse. For more information contact danozarow@hotmail.com



KATE LEBOW outlines the progressive religious motivation for specifically Jewish activism in the movement to halt climate change

Rebellion is kosher too!

When Extinction Rebellion (XR), took off in early 2019, a handful of climate change activists realised they had something in common: a desire to connect the fight for climate justice with Jewish ethics and traditions. The result was Extinction Rebellion Jews (XRJ), which has since then become a radical, creative and joyful voice within the wider movement.

Civil disobedience is only part of what XRJ does. Most actions are, in XR lingo, “non-arrestable”: creative reimaginings of Jewish festivals in public space, climate-themed klezmer, outreach to synagogues. Inclusivity is key: XRJ activists include Jews of colour, LGBTQ people, parents, carers, immigrants, and others for whom arrest may not be an option. And we have other resources besides arrest. As Jews we make meaning. We interpret. We sing. We dispute. We daven. And for such a tiny minority, we are highly visible.

Personal reflections by XR Jews

I’ve been searching for years for a way to take action on climate change that feels resonant and meaningful. When I went to the XR Jews climate-change Seder, I felt that this was my tribe. Within five minutes, I was composing an eco-version of “Daiyenu” with Jess, whom I’d just met. The way that Yael and Shulamit were interweaving our story of liberation with the climate crisis felt like the right way to talk about what was happening around the world.

[As] the police began to clear Parliament Square the atmosphere became very charged. But right in the middle of the chaos this religious ritual was grounding what was happening, celebrating the sacredness of this work. This is how I want to live my religion: praying with my feet. **Lucy**

It’s exciting to be a part of a movement on the streets doing something so visible about climate change. I particularly enjoy being Jewishly visible: in other social movements, I’ve never felt there was such an explicit welcome of religious and ethnic minorities or faith groups. Spiritual experience is not pushed to one side. Being fully human is a big part of this.

I loved being at Trafalgar Square wearing an XR kippah, with our XR Jews banner and a sign saying ‘Klezmer here tonight!’ We had so many positive interactions – with passing tourists, Israelis, Jews on their way

to work. There was the potential to communicate with people who wouldn’t normally get involved.

I love the idea of creating temporary autonomous zones [TAZ] – little pockets of how the world could be or should be. ... in the process of campaigning together, we become resilient and create the communities of care and beauty we need in the present moment, whether or not the government meets our demands. **Lianna**

On Sukkot I turned up at Bank tube station and there were loads of police. I had baked some bread, and after the police moved off, I handed it out – and literally ran away. Then I went back to synagogue and read from the Torah.

On the last day of the rebellion, I baked some more bread and someone said, “Oh, that’s the same bread that was at Bank.” Baking is one of the most non-arrestable actions you can do!

At XR Jews, we had a few guys blowing shofars at Sukkot and Yom Kippur. It was a really cool thing to do; it’s also a really, really good tactic. In the square there’s no wifi, the internet’s down, everyone’s really confused. It puts our enemies on the back foot. **Ben**

As a petite white woman, it’s relatively easy for me to leverage the privilege to protest. It’s surprising to me that some people involved in XR wouldn’t

understand how race and privilege shape the movement. At Sukkot, I was having dinner with friends and talking about XR, and a Black Jewish woman said she doesn’t go anywhere near it. I really hope both for the sake of the movement and for inclusion and diversity we figure this one out. **Rachel**

I love feeling like we’re acting in this strong and beautiful tradition of Jewish civil disobedience. Judaism is a resource – civil disobedience is hard to do, and it’s easier when there’s such a proud tradition of Jewish suffragettes, anti-apartheid activists, refuseniks, and so on. A counter-narrative of people who stand up for what’s right.

Jewish practices can be extremely nourishing. We have such beautiful texts and actions, things we’ve been doing for millennia. For instance, we held a Tisha B’Av grieving circle, drawing on a powerful practice that’s been somewhat passed over in progressive Judaism. It made me very glad to have that tradition.

It was a culture shock going back to work after the rebellion. I missed being around so many people engaged in meaningful action, every hour, every day, caring for each other in such tangible ways – feeding each other, offering emotional support during arrests, making music and other creative offerings. It felt close to the core of humans being humans. **Lianna**



It was fitting, for instance, that XR Jew Rabbi Jeffrey Newman’s much-publicised arrest during the October Rebellion was on Sukkot – a harvest festival celebrating the earth and its bounties. In the image that made national news, police surrounded Rabbi Jeffrey as he knelt on the tarmac, draped in a *tallis* and with *lulav* and *etrog* in hand. One deep vein in our liturgy and sacred texts connects us to the seasons and the wonder of nature. Another tells us we are responsible for fixing the world. An XRJ banner at the April Rebellion quoted Rabbi Hillel’s injunction: If not now, when?

FOREVER YOUNG

KATY FOX-HODESS explores the political appeal and significance of Bernie Sanders’ brand of American Jewish socialism.

Democratic presidential primary contender Bernie Sanders is, without a doubt, the most famous living Jewish socialist. In his 2016 primary contest against Hillary Clinton and now against a wide array of Democratic hopefuls, Sanders has performed far better than expected. He has upended decades of political wisdom and done more than anyone to rehabilitate socialism as a viable political ideology in the belly of the capitalist beast, the United States of America.

In many respects, his success is best understood as the result of a profound generational realignment in American politics since the financial crash of 2009. This has seen a wave of left-wing grassroots social movement organising – from Occupy to Black Lives Matter to Me Too – not witnessed in the country since the 1970s. People in their 20s and 30s have come of age in an era of declining living standards and a bleak prognosis for the future. For many of us it is the 78-year-old senator from Vermont who best represents our interests, not his more youthful (and politically moderate) competitors.

Polling has consistently found age as the strongest indicator of support for Sanders and his main rival for the nomination, Senator Joe Biden. While in Sanders’ case, the younger the cohort, the more overwhelming the support for Sanders, exactly the opposite is true for Biden. These patterns hold even in states where Sanders has lost.

Sanders has built a particularly strong base of support among Latino voters – a significant demographic in the United States – as well as Muslims, lower-income voters and independent voters. The problem for the Sanders campaign, however, has been that voter participation

increases dramatically with age and income, as in many other countries. Many Latinos lack an immigration status that would allow them to vote; and because of the vagaries of the party primary system in the country, independent voters are not always able to participate in the selection of candidates.

While his chances of winning the nomination have shrunk considerably since surprise victories placed him as the frontrunner in February, the breadth and depth of his support remain noteworthy signs of shifting political currents in the United States.

Sanders’ candidacy has been particularly significant for Jewish socialists, not least because of the genuine astonishment at seeing someone “like us” (or like our parents or grandparents, in some cases) marshalling mass support from a diverse public. Sanders represents a particularly American variant of Jewish leftism – mostly secular, with its beating heart in working-class immigrant Brooklyn. For most of the 20th century, this form has been strongly over-represented in the labour movement and Civil Rights Movement, the Abraham Lincoln Brigades in the 1930s and the New Left and anti-war movement in the 1960s and ’70s, and so much more. The immediately identifiable cultural features of New York Jews are well known from media representations (think of American comedy, for example, and the evidence everywhere of the influence of Jews on the left). Bernie (as he is universally known by his supporters) is recognised and even loved by a broad swathe of the American public and has benefited from his strong New York Jewish accent, manner of speech and his grouchy and impassioned warmth.

Sanders’ candidacy is a watershed

moment for Jewish politics in the United States in many other ways. A large majority of American Jews continue to identify as both Democrats (mostly as liberal Democrats) and supporters of Israel. This has not changed in the Trump era, despite Trump’s aggressively pro-Zionist stances, including moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

At the same time, a growing movement of American Jews – particularly younger Jews – have substantially changed their views on Israel since the war on Gaza in 2014. Evidence for this includes the explosive growth of Jewish Voice for Peace into a national organisation with chapters across the country, as well as groups like IfNotNow, which recently became the first Jewish organisation to endorse Sanders. He has long been a supporter of Palestinian rights, condemning Israeli settlements as illegal, for example, and considering transferring US aid to Israel to aid for Gaza. These positions would place him in the political mainstream in much of the world but mark him far to the left in the US context.

Sanders has been uniquely placed to benefit from this shift, as well as the shift towards greater sympathy for Palestinians among the American public more generally. While the vast majority of Jewish Democrats have preferred other candidates in the primary (with just 11% supporting Sanders in a recent poll), a core group of Jewish supporters has campaigned heavily for Sanders under the umbrella of Jews for Sanders.

And during the primary, Sanders took the very important decision not to attend the annual meeting of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the primary lobbying body for Israel in the United States, defying years of received wisdom that any viable

THE JOINT LIST'S TRIUMPH OVER HATE

SAMAH SALAIME argues that in the March 2020 Israeli election, the Joint List showed that it is the only real alternative to the racism and incitement of the Israeli right

We did not wake up to a new Israel on Tuesday morning, following the third election of the past year. Every Palestinian citizen of Israel knows the moral ground upon which Israel was founded. We all know the heavy price Palestinians have paid for the historic crimes committed by others against the Jewish people.

From its inception until today, Israel has not ceased in meting out harm to its Palestinian citizens. It has oppressed them, dispossessed them of their land and their rights, attempted to erase their identity, and passed racist laws against them. Arab society is undergoing a process of reconciliation between its Palestinian identity and its Israeli citizenship. And as that process has taken shape, the attacks from the Israeli establishment have only intensified.

Every time it seems we've reached a new low, Israel's extreme-right government surprises us with new forms of incitement, discrimination, and erasure, while simultaneously dragging Israel's Jewish public to normalise racism. The results of the March elections, in which Netanyahu's right-wing bloc will likely end up with 58 Knesset seats, reflected just how widespread racism has become in Jewish-Israeli society. It is yet another step toward undoing whatever democracy is left here.

But from under the rubble left behind by the Zionist movement has risen a new Palestinian people. Victims of Zionist colonialism, represented by the four Arab slates, and with the help of a few Jewish partners, formed the Joint List.

The latest elections revealed just how deeply hatred runs in Israeli society. Everyone is now against everyone. The ethnic slurs, Ashkenazi elitism, and delegitimisation of various minority groups have left the Joint List as the last bastion fighting for basic democratic rights in this country.

To supporters, the obstacles looked too large to surmount in the face of the fascist tsunami engulfing us. But the Joint List, which found itself in the crosshairs of the Zionist consensus, did not have much of a

choice, and trudged on undeterred. Thousands flocked to vote for the List in those final hours before the polls closed on Monday.

The election results reminded us that the Joint List won't save Israel from itself or from its sickness. But saving and strengthening Palestinian society — and what is left of the Jewish left — is an important and far more feasible goal than bringing down the rule of the right. Aside from annulling Trump's "Deal of the Century" this was likely the most ambitious campaign promise made by Joint List head Ayman Odeh. In the meantime, the List has succeeded only in temporarily stopping Netanyahu from declaring victory. The struggle for real change is going to be a long and difficult one.

Despite the gains made by the right-wing bloc on Monday, we do deserve to celebrate small successes. Here is only a partial list of them:

1. We cannot ignore the fact that 90 percent of Israel's Palestinian population supported the Joint List. A significant number of Palestinian citizens who previously voted for Jewish-Zionist parties voted for the List this time around. The List's support in Druze villages — which have historically voted for Zionist parties — doubled at the expense of Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu. Arab mayors also expressed their total support, while those who choose to boycott Israeli elections were relatively muted this time around.

2. The Joint List will have four female representatives in the Knesset this time — an achievement that should not and cannot be brushed off. Each one of these women represents different segments of Palestinian society.

3. The support of our Jewish partners has grown this time, whether due to the breakdown of the Zionist left, the strengthening of the Joint List itself, or the incitement of the right. I hope that the surge in the Jewish vote for the List is the first step toward forming a strong, radical, left-wing, non-Zionist Arab-Jewish party. I do not want Jews to simply support the

struggle of the Palestinian minority inside Israel. I want as many partners in as many struggles facing oppressed people in this country. I do not want us to stand together — I want us to struggle together.

4. We tend to speak about the fact that the Joint List is comprised of four parties. In fact, the list has five components. The fifth party is made up of people like me who do not belong to a party. We do not have an agenda apart from supporting national-liberal-democratic ideas, and there are many of us.

I have no doubt that the four parties have no chance of surviving without the Joint List or the broad base of support by Palestinians who do not belong to a political party. These are the same people who supported the List online, in opinion pieces, videos, songs, and gatherings. Behind them are writers, opinion-makers, heads of civil society organizations, intellectuals, economists, scientists, artists, journalists, etc. This fifth party has enough room for everyone.

5. This might be the first time that the mainstream Jewish public cannot blame the Palestinian public for not "doing its part" by staying home on Election Day and "delivering" a victory for the right. The continual attacks on Palestinian politicians have permeated both the Israeli consciousness and the Palestinian community. There were years in which the criticism of Palestinian leaders was especially lethal, and when many of the Zionist commentators claimed that there was a gap between the Palestinian public and the people elected to represent it. We have now officially debunked this claim.

The dividing line between "Israeli Arabs" (as we are known in Israeli parlance) and our so-called "nationalist members of Knesset" has been blurred. The Joint List is now the only legitimate representative of the 1.5 million Palestinian citizens of Israel. It has received a mandate from the people, and Israeli society and its leadership — from the right to the extreme right — must internalise and act according to this fact.

centre political positions that he has forced on to the table of mainstream political discourse. These include the adoption of a fully public health care system (Medicare for All), a Green New Deal, free university education, paid parental leave and much more. It will be up to his devoted band of supporters — many Jewish Socialists among them — to carry it forward.

surrogates for his campaign. Muslim commentators in the United States have repeatedly noted that Sanders is the first presidential candidate in the country behind which the Muslim community has rallied. Sanders' support among Muslims greatly outstrips his support among Jews.

Win or lose the nomination, Sanders' legacy will be the large number of left-of-

6. Love has defeated hate in these elections. Ayman Odeh and the rest of the list ran a positive campaign, preferring to face all the evil and incitement of the right, led first and foremost by Netanyahu, and respond by putting forth a political alternative based on a vision of hope. It worked. Slowly we witnessed how this kind of positive messaging swept the Palestinian public that gave us the feeling that we have the power to make change.

Odeh demonstrated the virtues and qualities of a true leader that were so lacking in the fake opposition of Benny Gantz, who hoped to defeat Netanyahu by forming a coalition based on a "Jewish majority," and of Labour Party Chairman Amir Peretz and Meretz head Nitzan

Horowitz, both of whom jumped ship from the sinking Zionist left after throwing their Arab friends to sea.

7. We must breathe a sigh of relief that following Gantz's campaign, in which he rejected a partnership with the Joint List, Palestinian politicians will be spared having to decide whether or not to recommend him as Prime Minister — a decision that nearly tore us apart last year. This time around, we have learned our lesson.

This article was first published in English in +972 on 4th March 2020.

Samah Salame was born in Tur'an between Haifa and Tiberias. She is a social worker, community activist, feminist and the founder of Arab Women in the Centre, an NGO which promotes the status



of women in Ramla, Lod and Jaffa, and combats gender-based violence against women, particularly in Arab society. She has lived in Neve Shalom/ Wahat al-Salam since 2000.

Stitching the struggle

Across the district of Hebron, 150 women have created a co-op to produce embroidery that supports them and their family, but continues a Palestinian tradition and is an act of cultural resistance. Natasha Self reports

It's always reassuring to kick off a national speaking tour with the knowledge that your speaker would prefer not to be here. It's not personal to the UK, but Laila Hasan is almost 60 years old and would rather be at home in Palestine, spending time with her six children and 16 grandchildren.

Instead, several times a year she feels compelled to pack heavy suitcases filled with embroidered purses, bags, bookmarks, pillow cases and more, stitched with bright flowery patterns, Palestinian flags and slogans of resistance, and travel across Europe and the US promoting the embroidery co-operative Women in Hebron, in order to help support the livelihoods of its 150 female embroiderers.

Whilst in front of international audiences, Laila seizes the rare opportunity afforded to Palestinians to lay out what their lives are like. Specifically, living and working in the West Bank's largest city, Hebron. She begins all her talks by playing a four minute Al Jazeera film entitled The Most Occupied City in the World?

Hebron has a population of 230,000 Palestinians, who live alongside 850 Israeli settlers. The settler community hold extreme ideologies and are protected by thousands of Israeli soldiers. It's one of the most heated and extreme microcosms of Palestine's occupation. The city is divided into H1, under Palestinian Authority control and H2, under direct Israeli control. H2 carries a truly dystopic feel, where settlers live literally above Palestinians, separated by

netting, often throwing rubbish down on to or through the nets. Palestinians in H2 face curfews, checkpoints and forced closure of shops that are not applicable to the settlers. This has significantly impaired Palestinian businesses, making life very hard for Laila and the women of Hebron.

Laila was in the UK this March for a university speaking tour organised by London-based NGO Palestine Community Foundation (PCF) as part of their wider campaign, Voices of Palestine. This seeks to amplify Palestinian voices in the UK in order to reclaim the narrative and allow Palestinians to articulate their own stories, rather than be spoken for.

Laila is not a polished speaker. She doesn't know what she's going to say before she delivers a talk — even when interviewed during this tour live on the BBC World Service — and no two talks are ever the same. But in that lies her power.

She speaks straight from the gut, relaying her life experiences. It is invigorating to listen to. Sometimes hysterically funny, at other times she quite literally shrieks with anger. Laila came to work for Women in Hebron, set up in 2005 by her sister Nawal Sleimah, after the construction of the apartheid wall cut across the occupied territory and meant she could no longer reach her capital, Jerusalem, where she then worked.

Speaking on the first night of the tour in London, Laila asked of her audience, "Could you live how I live? Could you live where I stay? In front of a settlement. The top of my shop is under his [a settler's] roof, so I'm reminded

every minute." She often doesn't have access to water for drinking or showering. Meanwhile her settler neighbours have swimming pools.

Laila then relayed a recent exchange with a young Israeli soldier who had come to her stall to intimidate her. She jumped about the stage, mimicking how she responded by waving around a Palestinian flag, encapsulating her spirited resistance.

Promoting Palestinian embroidery is also a form of cultural resistance. Not only does selling the goods enable the Hebron families to make a living in the face of occupation, but the Palestinian national craft, known in Arabic as tatreez, is woven with stories of Palestinian struggle and experiences, passed down through the generations, usually through Palestinian women.

Laila's catchphrase is "It's never forever!" She will never stop sharing embroidery and she'll never stop resisting. Unlike those who silence the many voices of Jewish solidarity for Palestinian rights, Laila is very comfortable about the difference between Jews and Zionists. When she visits the USA, she is hosted there by Jewish Voice for Peace. "I can have peace with Jewish people. We could all live together. But I never forever can agree to live under occupation." And quite frankly, why should she?

Natasha Regan Self is Head of Media and Communications for Palestine Community Foundation (palestinefoundation.org.uk). She is a proud Jewish socialist.

Find out more: womeninhebron.com

< candidate from either party must court the support of this powerful political actor.

Sanders has also been quick to defend the first Muslim women in Congress, Palestinian-American Rashida Tlaib and Somali-American Ilhan Omar, from Islamophobic attacks from President Trump, and both women have been key

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OLD TRADITIONS



LYNNE WALSH
meets the
extraordinary
musician and
teacher Polina
Shepherd

Not all those who watched TV drama *The Windermere Children* recently would have recognised a haunting song used to illustrate the youngsters' terrible loss and longing. The story, based on the all-too-real life experiences of child refugees brought to the Lake District in 1945, was deftly produced and showed the traumatic damage to young lives.

The song was *Rozhinkes mit Mandlen* (Raisins and Almonds), the singer, Polina Shepherd. That's a name well known to those who adore Yiddish music, especially the hundreds who sing in her choirs or queue up for her singing workshops. She nurtures the tradition, bringing it alive in the 21st century with a gentle zeal.

Reading about any musician's portfolio of work often provides lists of concerts, bands in which they've performed, recordings released, perhaps even festivals they've curated. For Polina, the list is lengthy, but there's a lot more going on here; this seems to be much less about fame and fortune, than a deep and passionate gusto to breathe new life into centuries-old traditions.

Born in Siberia, Polina grew up in Kazan, capital city of Tatarstan, the predominantly Muslim republic sitting in the middle of the Russian Federation. After perestroika, the reforms initiated in 1986 by Mikhail Gorbachev, things started to change rapidly, not least on the cultural front. Local musician and teacher Leonid Sontz started a klezmer band, *Simcha*, in 1989.

It's impossible to resist mentioning one example of Sontz's determination. In 1995 he and his fellow musicians entered the former synagogue Teacher's House, which the Kazan mayor had for three years been promising to return to the Jewish community. The *Simcha* band barricaded themselves in and occupied the place for three days. It worked.

This was the band that Polina joined in 1990, and she performed with them for a decade. She also toured internationally with her own Quartet *Ashkenazim*, from 1991 to 2007, along the way becoming the principal Yiddish choir leader of the former Soviet Union, and composing original material.

Her work now includes a flurry of projects and

co-working, including as a duo with her husband, Merlin Shepherd, who is one of the world's leading players of traditional klezmer clarinet.

Their work together earned them a fabulous sobriquet. Writer Seth Rogovoy, in *The Essential Klezmer*, said: "I like to think of the duo as the Robert Plant and Jimmy Page of klezmer, with Polina Shepherd channelling the sound of Kashmir (the place and the song) through her evocative vocals like Plant, and Merlin standing with one foot in tradition, like Page and the blues, and another foot in the avant-garde, like Page as Page, reinventing the sound and possibilities of what the instrument can do."

"Polina and Merlin Shepherd – the Led Zeppelin of contemporary Yiddish music."

Meeting her recently, and then witnessing her leading a choir of 70 people who had been strangers to her only hours before, I was struck by both her astonishing energy and the intuitive nature of her work. She clearly thrives on it. "I love the workshops – love them! And I love the choirs. There are so many people with a willingness to learn, and an openness."

The London Yiddish Choir and the London Russian Choir, as well as their counterparts in the city of Brighton and Hove, are flourishing. "You do not need to have knowledge of the language," explains Polina, "A lot of people come to this music from different worlds. We start with nigunim (vocal tunes) – I use that as a warm-up, really. They can focus on the feeling, on the melody – it's the easiest way in. From that, they can get the sense of what this music can be. There's a specific tone, and specific expressions, and they can get that without the language."

Using traditional melodies to ease the way for amateur singers, Polina has a way of making this seem effortless. The lyrics, however, must be tackled at some point. "I might sing a song in Yiddish, which is full of joy, but people feel that it's very sad, and vice versa!"

With Yiddish, Russian and Hebrew songs, both traditional and Polina's own compositions and arrangements, established choir members work hard. The very idea, then, of her running a workshop for only one short day, with 70 disparate

strangers, seems a monumental task. Well, to me, that is – not to her.

When Jo Humphreys, a Jewish ward councillor for Whitton in West London, wanted a spectacular event for Richmond council's Holocaust Memorial Day programme, she immediately thought of Polina's work. The result was "Ashirah – I will sing", a choral workshop at the exquisite Landmark Centre, a former church at Teddington Lock. This, too, has its own story of passion and reclamation. Originally the church of St Alban the Martyr, built in the 1880s, it fell into disrepair and neglect, declared redundant in the 1970s. It was a campaign by local people that saved the place from demolition, and saw it reopened in 1995 as an arts centre. It's a popular venue, though not always as packed as the Sunday evening when Polina and Merlin Shepherd took to the stage. Councillor Humphreys welcomed the audience of nearly 300 people, some of whom were families of Holocaust survivors:

"Music is an integral part of Jewish culture and played an important role during the Holocaust. In many of the ghettos and camps that were established across Nazi-occupied Europe, prisoners played and composed music, often giving comfort and hope in what was a truly dark and desperate time. In some cases, music saved people's lives."

"This event aims to honour Jewish music and culture, whilst paying tribute to those who lost their lives. This day has brought together people from inside and outside the Jewish faith to learn and perform this fascinating repertoire, led by the fantastic Polina Shepherd."

Merlin's opening solo was breathtaking: seductive and wailing, joyous and melancholy. There was foot-tapping from the audience, there were eyes closed in reverie; at one point there was a strong temptation to dance in the aisles. Others more versed in musical theory will tell me (and perhaps reprimand me) that this was not jazz. But something had me dreaming of the Cuban genius Paquito D'Rivera.

Polina's voice, all four octaves of it, soars from lullaby to lament. There are moments when she seems to be channelling something older, atavistic and visceral. Many of her compositions, in fact, have confounded music critics, who are

astonished to find that the folk songs are new. Her album, *Three Centuries Ago*, recorded only in 2014, seems to revive centuries-old songs. She says: "Sometimes people don't really believe that I wrote them – but that's quite pleasing for me!"

This talent had me thinking of the singer/songwriter Shane MacGowan; though poles apart in many ways, his song, *A Pair of Brown Eyes*, bemuses many who can hardly comprehend that it was written and released in 1985.

The inevitable sadness of much of Polina's repertoire is often cathartic, she says. Time and again, she witnesses this in workshops, "I have seen people cry and cry and cry – especially Jewish people, of course. When you know where this music comes from, and what people went through... and some people, you know, do not talk about the Shoah – but they will sing about it."

Certainly, at the Landmark concert, there were tears. The choir looked and sounded every inch professional, their communication with Polina was near-perfect, and their joy in singing for us evident. But there was more happening, of course. There was grief in the room, there was remembrance, and in some of the more stirring songs, there was defiance. I don't have a Jewish family history; I have a Welsh one. The singer/songwriter and activist Dafydd Ewan has an anthemic song penned in 1981. *Yma o Hyd* (Still Here) says: "In spite of everyone and everything, we are still here." It brings battle-scarred rugby players to sobs, invariably.

Polina and Merlin Shepherd are entertainers, but they're also teachers, and archivists and guardians of old traditions. Will I risk wrath if I mention another jazz musician? The poet Adrian Mitchell wrote this, the briefest of eulogies: "He breathed in air, he breathed out light. Charlie Parker was my delight."

Breathing out light is a beautiful thought. Bringing light to dark places, as sometimes only music can do.



Polina Shepherd, musician extraordinaire

LESSONS FROM A FORGOTTEN MURDER

The advice given to antiracists from a veteran Jewish communist 50 years ago remains as valid as ever. **DAVID ROSENBERG** recalls a tragic case obscured by later similar events in the East End

The racist murder of an Asian immigrant in the 1970s East End of London, and the outpouring of grief and anger by the local community that followed it, immediately brings to mind Altab Ali, the 24-year-old Bengali clothing worker attacked and stabbed to death on his way home from work in 1978. His murder was indeed met by a wave of protests led by young Bengalis who had formed themselves into militant youth campaigns to confront the fascists terrorising their community. Their fight was centred on the East End though they took their protests to the West End too.

But Altab Ali was not the first Asian immigrant in east London to be murdered by young people whose minds had been poisoned by racism. That first victim bore the same, common surname and came from the same part of the world in search of better economic opportunities, but he was twice Altab Ali's age. His name was Tohir/Tosir Ali. He, too, was murdered on his way home from work, but in April 1970, only a few months after Altab Ali came to live in London.

Altab Ali himself rarely travelled beyond the East End where he settled with his uncle and found employment within the busy clothing trade in and around Brick Lane and Hanbury Street. Tosir Ali, by contrast, worked as a kitchen porter at a Wimpy Bar amid the bright lights of the West End, but usually returned late at night, to the dark, forbidding streets between Bromley-by-Bow station and the gloomy housing estates in St Leonard's Street, Bow. Tosir Ali lived in a 3rd floor flat in Phillips House. It was a few minutes after midnight when he was attacked by two 18-year-olds, one a labourer, the other unemployed. After they slashed him with a knife they ran off. Ali dragged himself up six flights of stairs leaving a trail of blood behind him. The motive was not robbery. His wallet containing £10 was found with his body.

The alarm was raised by Helen

Houlihan who lived in the estate opposite. She heard a horrific, piercing scream which she described to a journalist on the local paper as akin to the sound of a "wild animal... a mixture of pain and fear". When she ventured outside she saw Ali staggering along the landing opposite before falling against his front door. He was rushed to nearby St Andrew's Hospital but died soon afterwards from stab wounds to his throat.

This was not an isolated incident. Two

"bovver" boots. The angry, aggressive, "skinhead" subculture had emerged among alienated youth in impoverished working class areas at the end of what was called "the swinging 60s", but in Bethnal Green where skinheads were particularly numerous, it was anything but swinging.

Bethnal Green had a long and inglorious history of certain layers of the working class attaching themselves to racist movements. This stretched from the British Brothers' League of the early 1900s which railed against East European Jewish immigration (or "pauperised aliens" as they put it more politely in public posters and adverts), to the mobs who rioted locally in 1917 when they believed Jews were evading army service, to Mosley's fascist movement in the 1930s, whose Bethnal Green branch held a weekly march to its headquarters in the part of Roman Road known then as Green Street. Post-war the tradition was revived by market traders there, warming to Enoch Powell's targeting of non-white immigrants in 1968.

Local skinheads fell into this tradition more naturally after 1976, when many of them supported violent political groups such as the National Front and British Movement who made a determined effort to organise in the area. But in the late 1960s the East End's skinheads were not yet politically aligned, and their cultural influences, especially in music, overlapped significantly with Jamaican ska/reggae/Rude Boy influences.

Monty Neysmith was a Jamaican-born member of the skinhead band Symarip, formed in 1969, which released the Moonstomp classic in 1970. He remembers spending time with many other black skinheads in that period. The emerging skinhead culture was, he recalls, split between those who essentially identified with the fashion and style, and those "causing racial problems". The latter, he said "would go after the Pakistanis, because they considered them weak, because they

would not fight back." Recently arrived Pakistani immigrants, nervously finding their way with limited English language skills in an insular, unfriendly country, became a target. Other young whites, who were not macho, and who skinheads also perceived as vulnerable, weak and afraid, were targeted too.

A pattern of attacks on East End Pakistanis could be identified from the summer of 1969. Many assaults happened in broad daylight, with passers-by too scared to intervene. Four local social workers collectively published a report in April 1970 based on a survey especially of the first two months of that year when the attacks peaked. Their report described Pakistani immigrants as being "too insular and withdrawn". Their jobs and accommodation were "arranged by fellow countrymen". They were "unlikely to make any initial contact with English people", and had "little opportunity to be integrated." The authors acknowledged that many of the attacks on Pakistanis were carried out by skinheads but observed: "Not all skinheads indulged in 'Paki-bashing' ... although the average young person might be prejudiced against the Pakistanis, he is unlikely to attack them." But, they added: "He might lose this restraint if he joins a gang." And there was another factor. This was learned behaviour: "...some parents do not disguise their prejudice and are encouraging their children to show contempt towards Pakistanis."

The report added that "tensions were reflected in the local secondary school ... some Pakistani children are afraid to go to school." But having identified the influential role that their parents' racism played, it nevertheless concluded that the main reasons for the attacks were opportunist – "to steal money or just crude beatings up."

The geographical areas in which the East End skinheads operated reached across to Whitechapel and Aldgate, and further east through Bow to Stratford and Plaistow. More young people attending West Ham football ground adopted the skinhead style. Racist attacks reported by the local newspaper, the East London Advertiser, through the first six months of 1970, occurred in several East End districts.

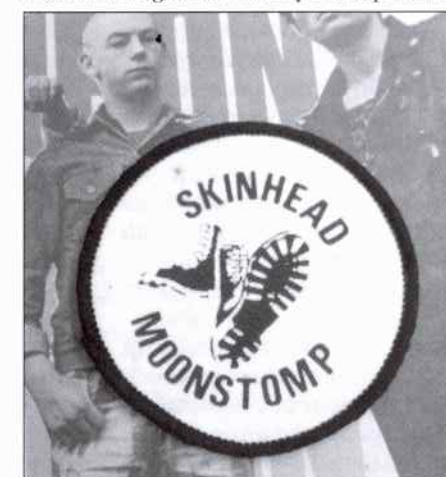
In Hanbury Street off Brick Lane a skinhead gang set fire to a car, scratched others, damaged shop fronts and broke into flats to open up gas and electric meters. In Alie Street near Aldgate there was an arson attack late at night on a condemned building. Around 20 Asians – men, women and children – fled from there. There were repeated attacks on local Muslims outside their main place of worship, a mosque on Commercial Road. Bottles and stones were thrown at



mourners during a funeral procession.

On another occasion six youths assaulted the imam and two other worshippers, one of whom, Mr Hakim, had initially been approached for a light. When he put his hands into his pocket the youth knocked him over and kicked him in the face. But there was also a spark of resistance. The imam's wife warned, "It will be a sore thing for the louts if they come back because I and some other woman judoists will be armed with crowbars."

Two weeks before the deadly assault on Tosir Ali, three skinheads approached an Indian immigrant, Naranaya Vasupillai, on



the street near his Newham home. As they threatened him three more skinheads came up from behind. They knocked him down, smashed his glasses, kicked and punched him leaving him on the pavement with blood pouring from a gash inside his mouth. Pasdman Kesavin, who lived at the same address as Vasupillai, said the victim was his fourth friend to be beaten up by skinheads in two weeks.

In late April there was a series of skirmishes between skinheads and young Pakistanis in Brick Lane. In one incident around 50 white youths rampaged down

Brick Lane smashing shop windows and attacking people on the street. Two Pakistani youths needed hospital treatment that day. Police arrived on the scene and arrested two white youths and two Bengali Pakistanis – an 18-year-old and a 32-year-old shopkeeper. The two white youths were released later while the two Pakistanis were charged.

Several community meetings were called in response to this escalating crisis. Some were led by more establishment bodies: the local Community Relations Council, police, MPs, citizens and church groups. They listened to people's experiences and sought to dampen down conflicts and identify positive steps to improve the situation. Others were organised by militant political groups such as the Pakistani Progressive Party, the Pakistani Workers' Union, Black Panthers, the Black People's Alliance and the Third World Party led by a charismatic activist calling himself Brother Louis. More than 200 young Pakistanis were recruited into vigilante patrols. In a demonstration that followed one meeting, dozens of activists marched on Arbour Street Police Station off Commercial Road. They had placards that read: "Down with Paki Bashing" and "End police brutality", and chanted: "Stop police harassment of Asian people," promising: "We will hit back now!"

At one of several community meetings, mainly attended by local Pakistanis, a familiar, veteran political figure spoke up. Solly Kaye was a Communist Party councillor in Stepney. He had already experienced this situation as a young communist activist in the 1930s East End where the East European Jewish immigrant community he was born into faced ideological and violent physical attacks from fascists and other antisemites. He joined the Communist Party in 1934, took part in the Battle of

Cable Street, and spoke on many indoor and outdoor platforms against fascists.

In a powerful intervention he argued that “the purveyors of racialism can be defeated by united action... it would be the greatest error and worse, if the struggle were left to the immigrant organisations to bear the brunt of the fight... the fight against racial discrimination and violence is part of the fight for a new and better society.”

It had an immediate positive effect. It also contains important principles that we need to restate when communities are under attack now. The responses to today's outbursts of hate must always be wider than the community directly attacked. There is often a stress on the community under attack leading the fightback, but we need to hardwire a reaction to expressions of hate in which wider groups instantly demonstrate an attitude that “their fight is our fight”. We must support each other unconditionally against racist attacks.

Minorities who have suffered similarly are generally good at supporting each other, but Solly Kaye recognised that the onus was also on majority communities. For him, solidarity was the responsibility of all who want a better society. And the fight against racism could not be delayed for other fights to be settled first. Racist attacks on communities always present themselves urgently.

Kaye's intervention implored people to be not bystanders but upstanders when others were attacked. But his statement also coupled the violence the Pakistani community endured with the everyday discrimination they suffered. He recognised that they were intimately linked. He understood that the responses from a wider community to the assaults the Pakistani community were suffering had to provide real, tangible support for them, and ensure the victims felt empowered.

Today, 50 years on from Tosir Ali's horrific murder by young racists, and nearly 42 years on from Altab Ali's murder, we have become used to using the language of “hate crime” to describe the negative treatment of minorities. But what gets categorised under “hate” is actually more than that. Very often it is a defence of the real or assumed privilege that maintains everyday hierarchies, everyday discrimination, everyday oppression. Hate crimes take place within a framework of privilege and power.

The term “hate crime” is too much of a catch-all. We need a more sophisticated language to counter different kinds of negative actions in different ways. We need to develop appropriate and distinct responses to negative social media comment, specific threats to individuals, general threats to communities, and physical attacks.

It is also crucial to recognise that discrimination, whether on the basis of skin colour, faith, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or based on negative stereotypes, can be enacted quite coldly and routinely, without the outburst of emotions implied by “hate”.

If we are to follow the meaning of Solly Kaye's wise intervention, we must recognise that the continuing impact of routine discrimination in limiting people's lives, diminishing their aspirations and opportunities, and depressing their potential, should command our attention just as much as dramatic outbursts of hate that end with blood on the streets.

THE FIGHT

The Polin Museum which opened in April 2013 is simply stunning. It stands within the area that was part of the Warsaw Ghetto during the Second World War – a place of immiseration, suffering, death and destruction, but also remarkable resistance. The square on which it was built was left empty save for an imposing monument towards one end with a sculpture depicting the Ghetto Fighters. The museum entrance faces that monument, but this is not a museum of death. Instead it illuminates 1,000 years of Jewish life in Poland in all its vibrancy, celebrating its Golden Ages while also highlighting the experiences Jews endured during more perilous periods.

In 2016, when I first visited, it was named European Museum of the Year. Its extraordinary multimedia core exhibition was produced by a team of international scholars and curators led by Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who was born in Toronto to Polish Jewish immigrants. Its eight galleries trace the interactions with the indigenous population of individual Jewish merchants who arrived along trade routes from western and southern Europe in the 10th century, through settled Polish Jewish life under different rulers, some more friendly than others, to a socially and politically diverse community, 3.3 million strong, in the late 1930s before it was decimated by 90% during the Holocaust. The Russian-American writer, Masha Gessen, captures the genius of the museum – it offers “polyphonous and contradictory” voices that avoid imposing a dominant narrative.

Its timeline doesn't stop in 1945. It also depicts the renewal of Jewish life in post-war Poland. Despite the increasingly threatening atmosphere for minorities that emanates from Poland's ultra-nationalist, xenophobic Law and Justice Party (PiS) which came to power in 2015, small Jewish communities are growing and flourishing once again in more than a dozen Polish cities.

In its relatively short life the museum has welcomed millions of visitors, including hordes of Polish schoolchildren on organised visits. Its success is a collective achievement, but it also reflects the inspired leadership of its non-Jewish Director, Dariusz Stola, a scholar of 20th century history including the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations. He was appointed initially for a five-year term by the three bodies that shared responsibility for the museum when the project to build one was launched: the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute; Warsaw City Council, and the Polish Government's Ministry of Culture. The City Council donated the plot of land, although until the Holocaust much of that land would have been populated by Jewish businesses and homes.

Stola's relationship with the the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) and Warsaw City Council, two institutions in the partnership to which he was accountable, was very positive, but the third one – the Culture Ministry – became distinctly more problematic when PiS came to power on a Nationalist-Conservative platform. It has increasingly interfered with cultural institutions, pressuring them to tell a history more in line with the values and ideology of the government.



Those values and that ideology focus on Polish heroism and victimhood, rejecting what PiS co-founder Jaroslaw Kaczynski branded “pedagogies of shame” that portrayed Poles as perpetrators, accessories and bystanders during the Holocaust. Undoubtedly there were very brave acts of solidarity by non-Jewish Polish individuals and families in that period but there is also much evidence that thousands of Poles denounced their Jewish neighbours to the Nazis and took part in killings.

In 2017, the director of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk, Pawel Machcewicz, fell foul of the Ministry. He was pushed out in favour of a less prominent figure with right wing political connections. In 2018, the director of the National Museum in Warsaw resigned, protesting lack of support from the Ministry. The Minister of Culture, Piotr Glinski, imposed replacements much closer to PiS's outlook. Many who worked in the heritage sector felt that his hand-picked replacements were unqualified for the posts, and they said so in online petitions.

That same year the Polish government passed a law making it a criminal offence, potentially carrying a custodial sentence, to ascribe blame to Poles or Poland for Nazi atrocities. Poland's more liberal elements were outraged and protested. Stola indicated support for the objectors, stating publicly that this law would inhibit historical research. His dissent was noted by Glinski. Under pressure, the government converted it from a criminal to civil offence, which could not result in a prison sentence, but it succeeded in having a chilling effect on critical voices about Poland's past. Meanwhile PiS set about revising school history textbooks.

In March 2018, Polin launched a temporary exhibition called Estranged on the 50th anniversary of a shameful episode in post-war Polish life when antisemitism was used as a potent political weapon that originated in a faction fight among the country's ruling Communist authorities. People were removed from the Party, and forced out of their jobs. It led to an exodus of 13,000 Jews from Poland. Explaining these events was a challenge for the Polish populist/far-right, because in their parlance, “Communist” and “Jew” were interchangeable terms. But what PiS took particular exception to was the section of the exhibition which suggested that antisemitism was continuing in Poland under the current government. Among the examples displayed were online comments by employees of a government-supported TV channel.

Glinski accused Stola of running “very aggressive politics at the museum”. He said that Stola's actions

“did great harm to this institution by politicizing it.” When Stola reached the end of his term, it was anticipated that, as a successful and highly regarded Director, his contract would be extended for a further term. The representatives from the City Council and the JHI supported this but the Culture Minister insisted on a new open selection. Stola had to reapply for his own job. His sole contender was a member of the Jewish community, a lawyer who lacked experience in running a museum. But Glinski would not authorise Stola's reappointment, and without that authorisation Stola could not continue working at the at the museum. Stola encouraged his deputy, Zygmunt Stepinski, to become Interim Director while he waited for Glinski's approval. A year later the situation had not changed but under the rules that the partners had initially agreed, no Interim Director could remain in post for more than a year. Stola did not want his deputy to become a victim of the Polish government's vendetta so in February this year Stola officially resigned and Stepinski stepped in and took over.

Stola was philosophical about the events that had taken place. He told one interviewer: “It's all about loyalty and control. The government doesn't like any institute that deals with history to be autonomous and independent. To be honest, I'm surprised it took them so long to come after me.” He knew his card was marked when he challenged the government's attempted revisionism concerning the Polish record during the Holocaust, and its threat of punishment.

Stola told Emma Salzburg of Jewish Currents “They want to have a beautiful, rosy, glorious picture – a great Polish nation, heaven for the Jews, the homeland of toleration.... But the right doesn't want to see antisemitism, or pogroms, they don't want to see collaborations with Nazi Germany during German occupation... It's the history with all the dark pages thrown away... But trying to intimidate and silence historians is something we cannot accept.”

The Polish elections last autumn confirmed the PiS majority in the Sejm (parliament) but it lost control of the upper house to the less rightwing Civic Platform. The left, squeezed out of representation in 2015 partly by its own divisions, did better than expected in 2019, and has 49 seats in the 460-seat Sejm, but a far-right, more unashamedly antisemitic grouping, Konfederacja won seats too. Fascists were out in force in November within the annual Independence Day marches, but the small and beleaguered anti-fascist movement also had a bigger mobilisation that day. The battle over antisemitism and other bigotries in relation to the past and present is likely to get sharper in 2020.

Warsaw's highly-acclaimed Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews has found itself in the crosshairs of an attempt by the country's populist-right, authoritarian government to control the past as well as the present. CARL LEMPERS reports



Dariusz Stola, former director of Polin Museum

ON THE TRAIL OF

ROSS BRADSHAW explores Romany lives, past, present, and those cut short by the Nazis, in the context of his own family's history

The images only last seven seconds. Despite their short duration they amount to a complete film documentary of the deportation of Jews somewhere in Europe, to the extermination camps of the National Socialist Third Reich.

At first we see the side of a goods wagon and the huge roundheaded clouts nailed into its vertical boards. Over the breadth of six planks, someone had chalked '74 Pers' in bold figures and flowing letters.

The camera ... sweeps along a hand which seems to be bolting a door... Then the camera comes to rest on the head and upper body of a young girl who is standing in the crack of the sliding door of the train wagon. ... Her head is covered by a light fabric and a trace of dark hair escapes beneath the headscarf; the face under the tightly pulled cloth is oval with deepset eyes. The girl's mouth is slightly open and her upper teeth can be seen.

The girl in the wagon is looking out... When the seven seconds have elapsed, the film continues with other shots of the bustle which always accompanies the departure of a long train, such as

this one getting ready to leave the internment camp for Jews near the Drepte village of Westerbork, on its way to the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen...

Aad Wagenaar, the Dutch journalist who wrote the piece above, saw this short film 11 times over the spring and summer of 1992 either on television or in places of remembrance; the girl was always described as Jewish. In Holland that image is known second only to that of Anne Frank. Aad decided to trace the

girl to find out who she was and what happened to her and. Did she survive?

She did not. Anna Maria Steinbach was murdered at Auschwitz. She was not yet 10. And she was a Sinti girl whose family name was Settela. There were 26 non-Jewish Steinbachs either murdered or missing presumed dead. The only one of her family to survive was her father who was away when they were rounded up. He died shortly after the war, having tried and tried to find anything remaining of his family.

CLOSER TO HOME

In 2004 some Travellers had set up camp in the park behind where I lived in Nottingham. The council, having refused them skips or even a supply of water, evicted them, leaving a mess which was reported in the local press. My mother was visiting at the time. She had an annoying habit of reading out letters

from the local paper and she read out one which said that this would happen again and again, councils playing pass the parcel, until proper stopping places were available. After saying she agreed with every word, my mother asked if I knew we came from a Traveller family. I was 52 at the time, and she had never talked about it, though all the time I lived at home she had what she called "Gypsy friends". Her gold jewellery mirrored theirs. Her favourite Sunday hobby was going to caravan sites or looking at vans for sale. She loved the old vardos (traditional covered wagons), and until I left home my grandmother and I spent every school holiday in a caravan, sometimes on unauthorised sites, as well as every weekend, regardless of the weather, with my mother joining us after work on Saturday. As a child I played with others making marks outside people's houses as to the character of the householder. This was patrin, the codes that Romanies left for others in the days of door-to-door calling. For my birthday that year my mother sent me a copy of a book, The Kirk Yetholm Gypsies, which includes a photo of 13 long-dead relatives of mine.

That does not, I think, make me a Romany but it adds something to hearing the words Gippos or Pikey, both of which I have heard and once was able to challenge. I've also been called *zhid* in Poland, not in a nice way. If it happens again I might be tempted to say, "No, actually, *cygan*." This is the standard word for Gypsy in Poland, which also means cheat or swindler. *Cyganski* means deceitful.

So far a variety of names – Sinti, Romany, Gypsy, Traveller... I could add Kale for the Gypsies of Spain, the Manush of France, the Domari of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, the Roma from Eastern Europe, the English Romanichal... The term Gypsy itself is considered to be old-fashioned, though there is the Gypsy Council in the UK. What they have in common is a history of discrimination, school exclusions, bullying, colour prejudice (most are dark). Their assorted languages have a common root in India: *manushi*, for example, means woman in Hindi and Romani but what they share above all is a history of repression and, in some cases, portable skills.

There are other ethnic groups with "service nomad" history – Bargees, showmen, Irish Travellers, Scottish Travellers. Strangely the first Holocaust Memorial Day in Nottingham was organised largely by me and someone whose parents were Bargees, and we formed half the team that organised a major project on antisemitism in 2004 involving 15,000 people. At the opening of that event, my late friend, Esther Brunstein, a Bundist who had been in the Lodz ghetto and in Auschwitz, made a point (as she almost always did) to mention the Gypsies who were in Auschwitz. Indeed, there was a separate Gypsy ghetto in Lodz. She knew that, apart from Jews, Romanies were the other group destined to be wiped out and she knew, of course, about the experiments made on them by Mengele.

TRAVELLER LIVES



CULTURAL TRACES

A few years ago there was an article in the local paper about some lads from Newark who had decided to make a dictionary of "Newarkese" – of all the uniquely "local" words only spoken in the town. Words like *jukel* (dog), *jall* (go) rocker (speak), *yog* (fire)... You guessed it of course: these are all common Romany words. Some such words have gone into English, like *kushti* (good), *chavie* (boy, in English *chav*...). This was the town that in the late 1970s still had notices in pubs saying "No Gypsies". It's a town where some Romanies live on the authorised site at Tolney Lane but hundreds of others live in houses. You can see how many when there's an important funeral and people line the streets. The dictionary of course never appeared; someone must have told the lads.

Lots of people don't say that they are Romanies. Being openly a Romany is a good way to not get a job. The 2011 census for Nottinghamshire revealed 441 Travellers and one Roma. Hmm! The day I gave a version of this article as a talk at Nottingham UNISON's Holocaust Memorial Day, I passed six Roma in the street. There are also traces of the Gypsy past here. I can think of two local Gypsy Lanes and one Tinker Lane, the traditional stopping places, the hatchin tans no more.

There are perhaps 100,000-200,000 Romanies and Roma in the UK, both groups with high birth rates. Romanies have been in this country since the 16th century, even though at times you could be hanged just for being one.

The Nottingham Jewish writer Rose Fyleman wrote a children's book where some middle-class children found a child in the country and took it,

thinking that some Gypsies must have stolen it and they needed to take it to the police. It turned out that the child's nursemaid had nipped off to see her boyfriend and no Gypsies were involved, but the book reflected the myths that Gypsies stole children. Blood libel, anyone? Ironically, the reality was the other way round, with Romani children often being taken away. One of the storylines of Philip Pullman's *Book of Dust* had the "Gyptians" trying to get back their stolen children from the Magisterium. Pullman gave one of the Gyptian leaders the name of Faa – the best-known Romany family name from the Kirk Yetholm of my grandfather's family. Neat. Romanies have also been exoticised in other literature; I'm thinking here of DH Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy*.

PERSECUTION AND RESISTANCE

Nobody knows how many Sinti and Romany people were killed in the Holocaust. This was the *khurn* of Yiddish speakers, the *Porajmos* or the *Samudaripen* of the Romanies, though these words are contested in the same way as the terms Holocaust and Shoah are. We do know that 20,000 were killed in Auschwitz, but the total lost has been estimated as anything between half a million and a million and a half. The late Jewish Socialists' Group member Donald Kenrick described in his two-volume work *The Gypsies in the Second World War* how they were massacred throughout Europe, being almost wiped out in Romania and Croatia. He also described the slow build-up of restrictions which mirrored those placed on the Jewish people. This did not start or finish with the 1929 "Centre for the Fight Against Gypsies in Germany".

Anna Maria Steinbach, en route to Auschwitz

We know that our current government felt comfortable about including in their manifesto a commitment to "tackle unauthorised traveller camps", giving police unwarranted power to seize property and vehicles, to make intentional trespass a criminal offence and to give local authorities more power within the planning system to prevent sites developing. I am pleased that a Romany friend of mine has enlisted the support of our MP, Nadia Whittome, to oppose this. I would suggest that the "antisemitism Czar" John Mann adds this to his brief but his views on Romanies are not what you might call sympathetic. Some minorities count for more than others if you are John Mann.

I want to end by looking at resistance. On 16th May 1944 Romany and Sinti people in the Zigeunerlager at Auschwitz resisted the liquidation of the camp with homemade weapons. The camp was finally ended on 3rd August when 2,897 children, women and old people were gassed. But 16th May is celebrated as a day of resistance. Recently 105 Roma took part in a demonstration in London against the Slovakian LSNS, a neo-Nazi group. Debbie Abraham organised the Roma from London, Derbyshire, Dover and Yorkshire, working with other anti-fascists to stop the LSNS rallying their British supporters. In Slovakia she recalls being called cigany (that word is all over East Europe), a dirty Gypsy, and being shot with a birdgun when she was ten. She recalls trying to wash off her brown skin colour. Just as the Tories' manifesto puts Travellers outside the community, she felt she was not "part of the collective" in Slovakia. The Romanies carried their flag – green for the earth, blue for the sky, overlaid with the 24-spoked wheel, the Chakra, a reminder of the Indian origins of her people. The LSNS meeting was abandoned.

INTERWOVEN LIVES

My grandfather was an old soldier in World War II. He was called up because he had military training, having been in the Territorial Army. He was promoted to being a Regimental Sergeant Major in the field. At one stage he was in charge of a convoy that fell behind enemy lines as the Germans swept south following the Italian surrender. His convoy included some Glasgow Italians who made contact with Partisans and he spent time fighting with them. He died when I was four so I have no idea whether he thought about his ethnic background in relation to the war he was fighting, but I like the idea that he was fighting against those who wished to wipe out his people. My mother, as a teenager, was working in munitions in Britain, doing her bit too. Had the Germans invaded the UK, I would no more be here than would my Jewish partner.

Jews and Romanies have something of a shared history. Ian Hancock, author of *We Are the Romany People* taught Yiddish for a while, and his London grandfather passed himself off as Jewish in order to get work in the sheet music industry, a Jewish trade. I've recently heard Roma street musicians playing klezmer music in the street, and klezmerim playing Gypsy music.

The Jewish organisation for human rights, René Cassin, has protested to the British government over its policies towards Travellers. But on Holocaust Memorial Day this year a local Labour ex-MP sent round something urging us to remember the six million. Fine, but what of the rest?

THE VOICE

It has been inspiring in recent years to witness the widespread and articulate response of young people to the political and climate crises that have erupted during the last few decades. Yet despite the intensity and wide ranging content of the debates I cannot avoid an occasional uneasy feeling that something indefinable is missing.

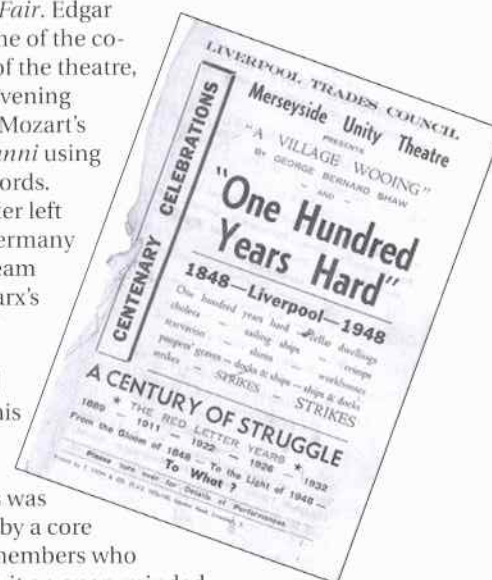
It is customary for a younger generation to look askance at the elderly (I am 91) and complain about being lectured on present day deficiencies. Looking back I think there may be something to be learnt from my experiences when I was in my 20s.

In 1948, after I was demobbed from the RAF I decided to study in Liverpool. I joined a left-wing theatre group, Merseyside Unity Theatre. It was dominated, but not exclusively, by communists. Its charismatic leading figure, Jerry Dawson, was a committed Marxist with a profound knowledge of European history, literature and theatre. The principal feature of the theatre's shabby two-room premises was an auditorium capable of seating up to 200 people.

On Saturday evenings its tiny stage saw a remarkable series of plays, readings and recitals. I still recall memorable performances of Lorca's *House of Bernardo Alba* and Sean O'Casey's *Shadow of a Gunman*. Sunday evenings were given over to history, literature and the arts, often with distinguished outside lecturers. Communist activist and literary critic, Arnold Kettle, led a discussion on *Vanity Fair*. Edgar

Criddle, one of the co-founders of the theatre, spent an evening analysing Mozart's *Don Giovanni* using 78rpm records. Criddle later left for East Germany to join a team editing Marx's *Sämtliche Werke* (Collected Works). This wealth of cultural influences was sustained by a core group of members who brought to it an open-minded, marxist-based investigative scrutiny. For me this represented a welcome compensation for the deficiencies of my almost negligible wartime education.

Stimulating and enjoyable though the company of the membership was, I was hesitant about identifying myself closely with its Communist Party affiliation. I had spent almost three years in Germany and had visited France and the Low Countries and witnessed the aftermath of the Nazi occupation. In the 1950s I used my summers to travel across Europe, east and west. I had seen the impact of authoritarian



OF EXPERIENCE

governments and developed distaste for it.

In Germany I encountered the squalid and fetid atmosphere of a Displaced Persons camp like the ones to which Holocaust survivors had been sent. My own Jewish identity had been eroded during the war. Evacuated when I was 10, my family broken up by war service, it was another 10 years before I saw the inside of a synagogue again. I consider my Judaism and Yiddishkayt as an inheritance to be worn lightly, not as a burden. My few contacts with Jewish survivors were instructive. It has been customary recently to consider the role of Bundism versus Zionism at that time. But for years I have posed the question: "If you were a stateless Holocaust survivor from the east, aware of reports filtering through of pogroms in Kielce and elsewhere, with refuge in the west closed and faced with the British government's policy of resettling Holocaust survivors in Germany, how would you have responded to the Jewish Agency's blandishments of a promised return to the 'Golden Land', your ancestral homeland?"

The first hints of the upheaval that was to come, like a distant cloud on the horizon, occurred one morning in 1953. Working in the Life Room, a rumour spread among the students, "Stalin has died". I was ambivalent about Josef Stalin and his cult. I had seen the monstrous image of his personality circulated in Soviet films and read what seemed to me a great piece of comic writing in his essay on linguistics. But in 1956 the great disruption occurred: the Suez debacle, the Hungarian uprising, and then news filtering through of Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin's "cult of personality". Peter Fryer's reports from Hungary in the *Daily Worker* had been the first signs of disillusion and betrayal. As the revelations intensified, my communist friends from the Merseyside Theatre seemed in shock. Decent and well-meaning people, they shared a common feeling of betrayal and mourning for a lost illusion.

From these ashes a brilliant phoenix arose: the New Reasoner Group, founded by EP Thompson, John Saville and Raymond Williams. From 1957 to 1959 it published a remarkable series of journals, which now can be consulted online and which still deserve study. The New Reasoner Group was a spearhead aiming to revitalise socialism in Britain; it had much in common with the wave of Eurocommunism sweeping across Europe, strongly influenced by Antonio Gramsci. In Britain the *New Reasoner* sought to revive the traditions of English



socialism, tracing its roots as far back as the 17th century. Perhaps its most successful issue was one devoted to the work of William Blake. Unfortunately the exuberance of this phenomenon became eclipsed by the complexities of the ongoing political struggles, and the *New Reasoner* eventually became subsumed in the more arid pages of what eventually became *Left Review*.

As for my leftist friends, once they had adjusted to the shock of the revelations, their outlook gradually modified and they became activist members of the Labour Party. But by that time I had become only an occasional visitor to Liverpool and my life had entered a new phase.

So what did I learn from those distant years?

Above all I learnt the value of attentive reading. We read Marx of course but applied what we gained from it to all aspects of whatever we read and to our experience of life in general. The analytical habits of thought it encouraged rendered us suspicious of simple slogans and superficial solutions. In those days we were free from the constant disruptions from Facebook and Instagram and the other manifestations of social media. It is this lack of sustained critical attention that I often feel is missing in today's young political activists.

My advice is to put aside your laptops and smart phones and read deeply; it doesn't matter greatly what you read – Blake or Baudelaire, Proust or Joyce – provided you read with a consciousness of the perspectives of class and history that a reading of Marx provides. You don't have to plough through *Kapital*, but at least read the *Grundrisse* and one of the essays, say *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, if only for Marx's brilliant and sardonic humour. As for Zionism, I wonder how many of those expressing opinions about Israel and Zionism have read Herzl's *Alt Neu Land* or Vladimir Jabotinsky's *Two Essays on Zionism*? My own view is that Zionism started to come to its end in 1948 and finally expired in 1967, when it was replaced with Revisionism.

In addition I would argue that although it ceased to operate in 1972, the publications of the Situationist movement are still as relevant as ever. It is rewarding, after reading Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life*, to apply their lessons to contemporary politics and culture. They provide a striking corrective to the constant bombardment we are subjected to from the mass media.

Perhaps these distant memories from an almost forgotten past might still have some relevance to the present.

LIONEL BURMAN looks back at a lifetime of cultural and political learning, with important advice for younger activists



Historian EP Thompson, founder of The New Reasoner Group and author of *The Making of the English Working Class*

SEX, POLITICS AND RELIGION

WHO COULD ASK FOR MORE?

WHITECHAPEL NOISE

by Vivi Lachs
Wayne State
University Press,
2018

With the influx of thousands of immigrants from Eastern Europe around the turn of the 20th century, the makeup of the UK's Jewish population changed dramatically. In 1881, the largely English-speaking Anglo-Jewish population stood at some 60,000. By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, they had been joined by over 100,000 Yiddish-speakers, mostly from the Russian Empire. While some made their homes in some of the larger towns and cities around the UK, the vast majority settled in the East End of London.

Whitechapel quickly became the hub of a densely populated and vibrant Jewish community, the centre for all the essential social, cultural and

it or know it by heart, or is it just me? This period is before the era of recorded music so there are no Top 40 lists or record sales figures to give us a steer on these questions. There was no prime time TV nor radio shows, and there were no YouTube video clips.

But poems and song lyrics were published in the Yiddish press, and they were performed in the music-halls where choruses were repeated over and again so audiences were still singing them as they left the theatre. And there are accounts in both the Yiddish and English language press of songs or performances that aroused passions in one way or another. So Lachs tries to ask questions like: "How many people read it?"; "How many heard it?"; and "What was their response?"

And then, the most intriguing question: "Why?". What is it in these songs, in this music, that touches a nerve or strikes a chord even? Lachs looks at the subject matter of the songs and finds that sex, politics and religion loom large. The emigration of thousands of mostly young people, disproportionately men, disrupted the traditional patterns of life in both the old and the new communities. Immigrants had to adjust to different social mores as well as a new language, and there were pressures to anglicise, to conform to the new way of life, emanating from both the English society surrounding them and from the established Anglo-Jewish community.

These tensions are reflected in songs such as: Vaytshepel, mayn Vaytshepel; Dray Schvester (Leicester Square); Hashivenu Nazad (Take us back!); and Victoria Park. Lachs takes the reading of these songs a stage further with meticulous textual analysis, looking for instance at the significance of linguistic borrowings from English and Hebrew, and the use of Cockney slang and highbrow English. And she alerts us to the humour in them, which is everywhere and wide ranging, from satire to self-mockery. It helps if the audience come out laughing as they'll be more likely to come back next time.

Lachs also looks in some depth at musical idiom and styles of performance. Songs were often written quickly, sometimes in response to events, sometimes in order to fulfil schedules, and it helped if they could be fitted to a tune that the audience already knew. So songwriters borrowed tunes and musical phrases from the English music-hall, from American

economic activities. The area was teeming with shops and street markets, workshops and small factories, schools and synagogues, meeting places and libraries, theatres and music halls. The language in use was almost exclusively Yiddish. The only exception was in the state schools, where many children had their first encounter with English at the age of four or five.

Subtitled "Jewish Immigrant Life in Yiddish Song and Verse, London 1884-1914", Vivi Lachs's book looks at how the lives and concerns of these people were expressed in their own language, in poetry and song. Lachs is a cultural historian, an educator and a musician, and she brings perspectives from all these disciplines to her work. The result is a model for research into popular music and song.

Popular music is popular because people like it. Any analysis has to ask: "How many people like this?" and "How do we know?". Does everybody like



Opposite: Morris Winchevsky socialist activist and songwriter

POEMS

by Michael Rosen

Census

The census man came round and said what are you? I said that I don't fill in that bit because it's always used against people. He said that's not true, he said he always filled it in and look at me. I looked at him. He was black. I said, no I don't fill it in and he said he would fill it in for me. I said, you can't do that because that would be you defining me. He said he could do that if the occupier would not say what he was. I said, what will you put me down as? He said he would put white. I said, well actually I'm Jewish. He said that comes under religion. I said I know it's a religion. He said I can put you down for that under religion, then? I said, well you can't actually because I'm not a religious Jew. He said, then you are not Jewish. I said, I am and he said, I don't have Jewish under this other part of the form. No, I said, that's because someone, somewhere decided that I can't call myself Jewish on the form. Well, he said, I'm afraid that's nothing to do with me. No, I know it's nothing to do with you, it's to do with people who don't want me to be counted as Jewish. He said, Mmm. I said, have you got Irish there? He said, Yes, are you Irish? I said, no, I'm not Irish but some people who are not Irish say they are Irish even though they're not born in Ireland, it's a bit like that with me, only I'm not Irish. Oh, he said, where were you born, because we could put that. I said I was born in Harrow, I don't think that's a country.

No, he said, it's not, but I thought if you were born in Israel I could say you were Israeli. Yes, I said, but I wasn't born in Israel. No, he said, you were born in Harrow. That's it, I said, Harrow

Customary

I remember my dad reading George MacBeth's poetry textbook for 6th formers: "Eliot's antisemitism was customary for the time."

"It wasn't 'customary' in our house," my dad said.

Judeo-Christian

The New Right say that they love our "Judeo-Christian culture" and so in a stroke wash away and clean up hundreds of years of Christian and post-Christian persecution of Jews

Defence

Love Boris Johnson's great grandfather defence: how can I be Islamophobic when my great grandfather was a Muslim?

On that basis Nazis' great-grandchildren must be Nazis.

Actually I can't be sexist: my great grandmother was a woman.

These poems are from Michael Rosen's latest collection, Mr Mersh, published by Smokestack Books, £8.95.

Michael Rosen has also just published The Missing: The true story of my family in World War II, Walker Books, £8.99.



popular music and from the Hebrew liturgy.

Music halls were by their very nature noisy places. People went there to talk, preferably all at the same time, and performers needed to establish a rapport with their audience or they wouldn't stand a chance of being heard. Lachs has managed to track down a few press reports, sometimes just incidental comments, that give us an idea of how some performers worked their audience. All this helps to give us a flavour of the times and the part these songs played in people's lives.

Throughout the book Lachs highlights the part played by a number of poets and songwriters, foremost amongst them the socialist activist Morris Winchevsky. One of his best known songs is *Dray Schvester*, about three sisters who can be seen every day in Leicester Square.

*Di yingste farkoyft dortn blumen,
di mitelste - bendlekh fun shikh,
un shpet in der nakht zet men kumen
di eltste vos handelt mit zikh.*

The youngest sells flowers there,
The middle one - shoelaces,
And late at night you can see approaching
The oldest, who sells herself.

And if, after reading the book, you're left feeling that this is music and songs that spoke to people, and you'd really like to hear it for yourself, Lachs has recorded some of the songs on a CD with Klezmer Klub: Whitechapel mayn Vaytshepl (KRCD001, 2009)

Michael Shade

THE REVOLUTION – WAS IT GOOD

ANTISEMITISM AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

by Brendan McGeever
Cambridge University Press, 2019

Pogroms are usually associated with the last decades of Tsarist rule, particularly following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. The pogroms of 1881-83 that emerged out of the fractures in Tsarist power, in turn fractured the lives, families and communities of the millions of Jews who were confined to the Pale of Settlement on the western edge of the Russian Empire. Physical attacks, discrimination, and increasingly draconian restrictions on education, work and movement coloured the early lives and informed the politics of the generation of Yiddish-speaking Jews who came to adulthood at the turn of the century. Many Jews left Russia during this period but for those who remained, this recurring violence prompted a re-evaluation of their political and economic situation – of the significance of their identity, language, culture and community, and their relationship to the state.

By the time of the Kishinev pogrom on Easter Sunday 1903, when armed gangs ran amok, murdering, raping and ransacking the homes of Jews, revolution in Russia was a real possibility. The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDRP) responded quickly. Despite overwhelming disagreements that culminated in the Bolshevik/Menshevik split, the Party's Second Congress in the summer of 1903

passed an uncompromising resolution which "called on comrades 'to ... combat such movements and explain to the proletariat the reactionary and class inspiration of antisemitic and all other national-chauvinist incitements'." However, the RSDRP's claim that antisemitism has "everywhere found adherents among the bourgeois, and not among the working class sections of the population" conflicted with the experience of the Jewish Workers Bund, who said that this claim "sidestepped entirely, the complicity of Russian workers in the pogroms."

Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution outlines the changing perspectives of progressive activists, from the Narodniks/Populists (anarchists) of the 1880s, some of whom saw the 1881-83 pogroms as expressing "an 'awakening' of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry", to the socialists of the

early 1900s who argued that antisemitism was a defining feature of Tsarism, and therefore in conflict with the workers' struggle against exploitation and oppression. This is the historical backdrop for Brendan McGeever's lucid and detailed exploration of the decision-making, debates and discussions that determined the Bolsheviks' responses to the shocking re-emergence of pogroms during 1917 and, on a devastating scale, during the years that followed.

McGeever's aim is twofold: to investigate the relationship between revolutionary politics and antisemitism; and to explore the Bolshevik attempts to combat anti-Jewish violence and ideas, not only in the general population but also within the revolutionary movement itself. Drawing on



archived minutes, correspondence and reports of debates, he gives a forensic account of the arguments, manoeuvres and processes leading to the Bolsheviks' attempts to combat these eruptions of racism.

The limitations of an orthodox class analysis in explaining antisemitism were to become evident even during 1917. The liberatory promise of the revolution, not only for the working class but for people suffering all kinds of oppression across the world, including racial oppression, made it appear self-evident that antisemitism was incompatible with revolutionary politics. Indeed, in the wave of racist violence that erupted during the spring of 1918, most of the atrocities were perpetrated not by the working class but by the peasantry, encouraged by the counter-revolutionary White Army. Nevertheless, the reality was more complex. Quoting Moishe Postone, McGeever points out that, although primarily emanating from the political right, "[i]n moments of crisis antisemitism 'can appear to be anti-hegemonic ... the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination'."

FOR THE JEWS?

This was manifested in a proportion of the attacks being carried out by the Red Army even as it struggled to protect the revolution, raising profound dilemmas for the Bolshevik Party. The situation was complicated by the Red Army recruiting from a peasantry historically steeped in antisemitism. To complicate the picture, many soldiers, including officers, changed sides depending on local victories and defeats. Nevertheless, McGeever gives examples of proletarian Red Guards conflating "the bourgeoisie" and "speculators" with "the Jews", and using antisemitic slogans and violence, supposedly in defence of the revolution.

and were rooted in the communities under attack. McGeever describes the Jewish socialists' response to pogroms as being based on "ethical" considerations, in contrast to the "political" motivations of the Bolsheviks. But these are not dichotomous. Rather they are overlapping concepts. Although this was a matter of life and death for the Jews, they were not fighting just to protect themselves. They envisaged their future, as Jews, as being within a socialist society that they were working to create. So they inhabited both the revolutionary movement and the Jewish communities they emanated from, and the ethics and political necessity of combatting antisemitism

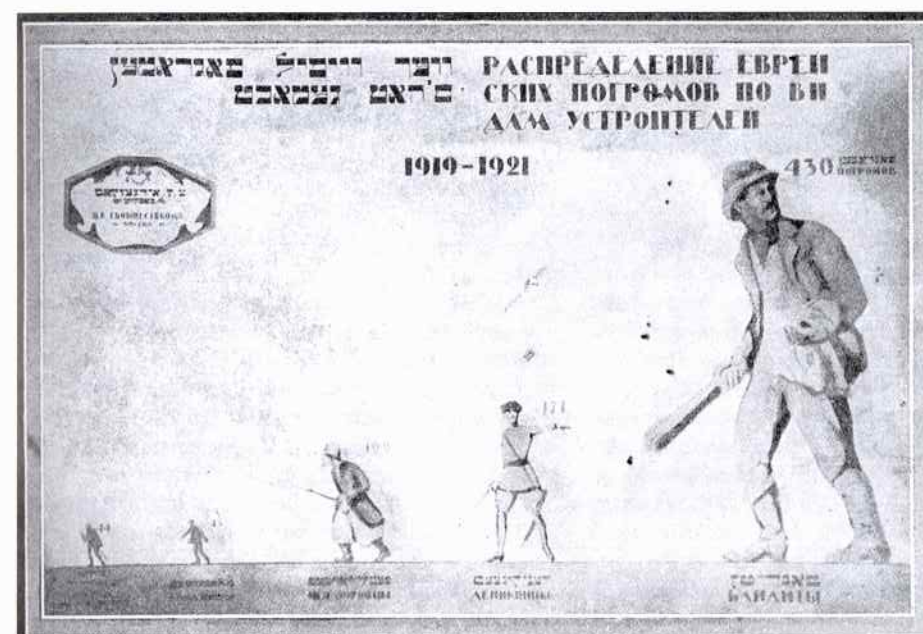
were inextricable.

As waves of pogroms continued between 1917 and 1919, the government needed the knowledge and experience of those activists in order to formulate strategies to challenge antisemitism. In practice, the Bolsheviks not only worked with Jewish members of other parties to

Opposite page: First Conference of Jewish Communists Sections and Jewish Commissariats, Moscow, 23rd October 1918.

Left: "The distribution of Jewish pogroms according to their organisers." Poster produced by the Jewish Social Committee for the Relief of Victims of Pogroms (Evobshchestkom) for an exhibition on pogroms in Moscow in 1923.

Both from the Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.



He argues that, in response to increasing waves of violence, it was Jewish non-Bolshevik socialists from different political affiliations who devised and initiated strategies that were taken up by the Soviet government rather than orders being passed down from the Party. That despite an increasing tendency towards centralisation, the impetus and demand for urgent action to combat antisemitic violence came from activist Jewish groups who put aside their disagreements with each other to campaign for government acknowledgement that antisemitism, including murderous mob terror, was being perpetrated by people fighting for the fledgling communist state. McGeever describes the peak of antisemitic violence in Ukraine in 1919 which, though primarily carried out by counter-revolutionaries, "found expression across the political divide, and no political formation remained unaffected by its structuring impact, including Bolshevism."

The Jewish non-Bolshevik activists, from the Zionist Poalei Zion to the diasporist Bund, had an organic relationship with the Jews in the Pale of Settlement. They spoke Yiddish and had grown up

combat the pogromists but, McGeever argues, Jewish socialists were the "architects of the Soviet confrontation with antisemitism".

This is a complex and unfamiliar story and there is more research to be done. I would be particularly interested to know more about the debates between and connections between the Jewish factions who brought their analyses and experiences to bear on the rapidly changing political circumstances. It would also be enlightening to have a picture of the individual lives of those Jewish activists who were the bridge between their own, Yiddish-speaking communities and the rapidly transforming Russian state.

McGeever combines an engaging writing style with meticulous research and documentation of the behind-the-scenes debates and political manoeuvring, painting a fascinating, complex and unexpected picture of the role of Jewish political activists in Russia in the fight against antisemitism before, during and after the revolution. Read it – but wait until the book comes out at a reasonable price in paperback at the end of 2020.

Julia Bard



WE FIGHT FASCISTS: THE 43 GROUP AND THE FORGOTTEN BATTLE FOR POST-WAR BRITAIN

by Daniel Sonabend
Verso, £20

With fists, bricks,

After VE Day in May 1945, the British government lifted the Defence Regulations under which the country's home-grown fascists had been interned as potential traitors. Some fascists, interned under Regulation 18B, had already been released on "compassionate" grounds, and others had managed to avoid internment altogether. Before the war was even over, they began to organise, at first through fundraising to support the wives and children of internees, and then with increasing boldness in more openly political organisations. By the end of December 1945 there were several openly fascist organisations in operation, arranging meetings in halls and on street corners, their captains jockeying for position as they waited for their once and future führer, Oswald Mosley, to return and lead them.

In May 1946 four young Jewish ex-servicemen came upon a fascist platform at Whitestone Pond in Hampstead, chased off the speaker and the stewards, and then rushed to tell others at Maccabi House in West Hampstead what they'd just done. Thus was born the 43 Group, originally an organisation of Jewish ex-servicemen, but soon open to others who weren't Jewish, or weren't former servicemen. Women participated as equal members, though none seem to have been part of the group's leadership. The Group's aim was to fight fascism, politically and physically, in ways that more cautious and respectable Jewish organisations, including the Jewish Defence Committee and the "official" Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX), found unacceptable.

And fight they did, with their fists, with bricks and bottles and coshes, and with their own publication *On Guard*. Using material which includes interviews with former group members originally gathered for a documentary film that didn't happen, Daniel Sonabend's book tells their story in intricate and affectionate detail. It's a more thorough treatment than the only other book about the Group, Morris Beckman's *The 43 Group: Untold Story of Their Fight Against Fascism*, published in 1993 which is more a personal memoir.

Sonabend tells of the efforts to break up fascist marches and overturn street platforms. He describes vicious fights with fascist thugs acting as stewards and with policemen who were often in sympathy with the fascists, and in any case carried out their duty to protect fascist meetings on the orders of the Labour Home Secretary Chuter Ede.

Much of the story was familiar to me, because my dad was a 43 Group member. He had a collection of copies of *On Guard*, and several souvenir brochures from the fundraising balls that the Group held. As a kid I'd grown up on tales of platforms overturned and street meetings broken up. I knew about the "elephant" – the armoured lorry that formed a mobile speaker's platform for the fascists; about the "Aryan squad" of blond, blue-eyed Jews who infiltrated Mosley's movement, and about the wheezes the Group pulled, including

the time they dressed up as police officers to abduct and beat up one of the fascists.

Like the members Sonabend interviews, for my dad participation in the Group was the part of his life of which he was most proud. He hadn't served in the forces – his father, who had volunteered in the Great War and been gassed at Ypres in 1915, had moved heaven and earth to get his only child a job into a reserved occupation – and his involvement in the 43 Group had been his "war". He talked often of the camaraderie and the excitement of participating in street fighting. When the ageing veterans of the Group began to hold reunions in the early 21st century, he was excited to attend. He shlepped me along to one, and beamed with delight when his hero, ex-paratrooper Gerry Flamberg, told me in his earshot that "your father was a real shlogger (powerful hitter)".

But I still found things to surprise me in Sonabend's book. The extent to which, so soon after the end of the war, the resurgent fascists openly embraced Nazi iconography, slogans and imagery, and the participation of actual German Nazis, including an SS man ostensibly in the UK for denazification, who marched in the fascists' drum band alongside aristocratic fascist sympathisers. The occasional social personal contacts between the fascists and their Jewish enemies – though I'd had a hint of this when, some time during the 1980s, Mosley's former chief lieutenant Jeffrey Hamm had actually phoned my dad at his shop to suggest that they met for coffee and to reminisce over old times. The virulence of antisemitism in all strata of British society, including in the working class and within the Labour Party, catalysed by the sharpening conflict between British soldiers and Zionists in late-Mandate Palestine; I hadn't known about the days of anti-Jewish riots, including the smashing of Jewish shops and attempts to burn down synagogues that followed the Irgun's execution of two abducted British seargants in August 1947.

I was also, despite myself, shocked by the level of violence that characterised the fighting between the Group and its fascist enemies. I'd participated in anti-fascist demonstrations during the 1970s and 1980s but I don't recall seeing anything like the armoury that Sonabend reports: knuckledusters, coshes, knives, razors, potatoes studded with razor blades... Perhaps men who had only recently used guns and grenades were just less fastidious about lower grade weapons.

Sonabend is very good at chronicling the details of the battles against the fascists from Ridley Road to Brighton and beyond. He's also very good at describing the conflicts within the fascist parties and grouplets, the manoeuvring between Mosley's would-be deputies, the splits and the betrayals, and Mosley's increasingly desperate attempt to find a post-Nazi future for his movement as a pro-European, anti-Communist force. I think this analysis actually makes it clear that, despite what

bottles and coshes



the 43 Group thought at the time, there really wasn't much scope for a fascist revival in Britain in the post-war period. Although there were some hard times in the immediate aftermath of the war and the cruel winter of 1946-47, the economic collapse that Mosley expected did not occur. Britain's Conservatives did not see the need for a strongman to overthrow Atlee's Labour government by force, and if they had, they probably wouldn't have turned to an obviously discredited has-been like Mosley.

Sonabend is also good on the politics of the Jewish community, including the tensions between the Jewish establishment and those who wanted to take a more assertive stand against the renaissance fascists. The lines were not always drawn where they might be expected: the Group had allies within AJEX and inside the Board of Deputies, as well as support from rabbis of some provincial congregations. Most importantly, they also had support from Jewish-owned businesses large and small, which made donations both openly and secretly, to fund the organisation and the burgeoning legal defence costs.

He's less strong, I think, on the relations between the Group and the left. He does refer to the convergence of actions with the Communist Party, to overlapping membership in the cases of some individuals, and to the organisation of a Communist "cell" within the Group. But he doesn't give the politics of left-wing anti-fascist organisations the same lavish detail that he devotes to the fascists themselves. So there's no feeling for the twists and turns in Communist Party strategy in the fight against fascism. He's aware of the extent to which the 43 Group members began to identify as Zionists, so that several of them (including Vidal

Sassoon, who was always proud of his role in the Group) went to fight in the emerging Israel Defence Forces but he doesn't seem to know that the period of his story takes place during the brief honeymoon between the USSR, the international Communist movement, and Zionism. This goes some way towards explaining how the Group could so often stand together with Communist fighters, and could actually take a consistent position against racism in America and South Africa in the pages of *On Guard*, while steadfastly maintaining that it was "non-political". In his wrap-up of what Group members did next, he talks about those who went on to business and career success, but not those who remained involved in left-wing politics.

It's mean to quibble too much about what's not in the book which already weighs in at some 370 pages. This is a thorough account of the 43 Group and its fight against resurgent fascism in Britain which will stand as the authoritative text for years to come. For me it was also thoroughly enjoyable, bringing back to life my dad's stories of his time as a shlogger.

Jeremy Green

