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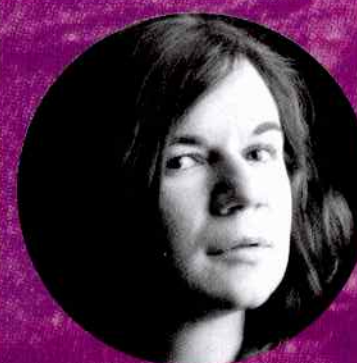
Through this forum we aim to:

- 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

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

No 76 Spring 2022 £3



Interview with
millennial Bundist,
Isabel Frey



My Bundism is
more than a
memory – essay
by Irena Klepfisz



EDITORIAL

Welcome to issue 76 of *Jewish Socialist* which went to press in the week of international Women's Day. We are very pleased that our cover features two women whose backgrounds were very different but who are connected by their core belief in a distinct brand of Jewish socialism – Bundism. In this issue, they describe their overlapping radical, Jewish, political outlooks in their own words.

One is Irena Klepfisz, a Warsaw-born Jewish refugee, writer, poet, teacher and socialist, who turned 80 last April and has lived in New York since the late 1940s. The other is Isabel Frey, a young Jewish musician, singer and social activist from Vienna.

In her essay in this issue (page 23) Irena describes being nurtured by Bundists as she grew up, her deep attachment to their philosophy, and how it has influenced her life journey at different points up to the present day. Isabel, who is interviewed on page 26, did not grow up among Bundists but came to this outlook independently, partly as a result of experiences in Israel in her late teens. She released an album of Yiddish songs, *Millennial Bundist*, in September 2020.

In a few weeks time we will celebrate May Day. Our main cover image was taken on a May Day march in Stockholm, Sweden in 1946, and shows part of the contingent of the Bund, holding their banner in Swedish and Yiddish. Irena and her mother lived in Sweden among Bundists in that period following the war, before moving to America. Her father had been killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Austria and its neighbour Germany provide the backdrop to two other fascinating and challenging articles that we publish here: Sybil Cock, a committed activist against racism and fascism in London's East End and heavily involved also in campaigning for Palestine, movingly describes the complicated connections with the Austrian side of her family (page 28). Wieland Hoban, based near Frankfurt, of English and German parentage, analyses the complexities, contradictions and oppressive actions that weigh down on left wing activists, not least Jewish ones, who are seeking to build common cause with Palestinian activists in Germany today (page 14).

Continuing the biographical theme, we tell the story of the courage and high price paid by Dora Fabian, a brave antifascist who escaped from Germany in the 1930s and came to London to continue her fight against Nazism (page 21).

Jenny Kassman (page 11) offers a stark reminder of the daily and continuing violence and oppression that takes place in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, especially from Israeli settlers abetted by soldiers. This evidence indicates the urgency of the Palestinian struggle for justice and equality.

Questions of right and wrong in Israel/Palestine and the issue of antisemitism are of course separate, but in recent years they

have been very dangerously conflated and expressed in proxy wars within a Labour Party in Britain that is riven with factionalism. When Keir Starmer assumed leadership of the Party in April 2020, he promised that he would make the fight against antisemitism in Labour his first priority. Absurdly, this has led to the leadership driving many Jewish activists out of the Party! We tell some of the personal stories of Jewish socialists, committed activists against racism and for human rights, who have fallen foul of the Party, and share first-hand reports of the shocking events in one Constituency Labour Party over Holocaust Memorial Day this year (page 7).

But we also have more heartening and uplifting stories. Last summer anti-fascist activists in pandemic-hit London were contemplating whether or not it would be possible to celebrate the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street – a pivotal moment in Jewish and anti-fascist history in Britain – through a safe public event. It was organised at short notice, and we are proud that the Jewish Socialists' Group were prominently involved in the organisation and on the platform. In this issue we capture the atmosphere of the day with photos, descriptions and excerpts from the very powerful speeches (page 17).

We are very proud of the contribution of left wing Jews to the fight against the Far Right. It is one that continues on an international basis. In the wake of the fascist coup in Chile in 1973 a number of Jewish activists were among those kidnapped, tortured and "disappeared". One was Diana Frida Aron Svigilsky, a journalist and revolutionary. She was killed, aged 24, in November 1974. In the December 2021 presidential election in Chile, the candidate of the Left, Gabriel Boric, defeated the right-wing populist, anti-immigrant candidate, Jose Kast. Many mainstream and right wing elements in Chile's 20,000 strong Jewish community advocated a vote for Kast because he is pro-Zionist. We publish the public statement signed by hundreds of left wing Chilean Jews organised by Agrupacion Judia Diana Aron in the run up to the election in support of Boric (page 3).

Finally, we are delighted to welcome back our rabbi, who has returned after a spell in the wilderness to answer your questions (page 35).

We hope you enjoy reading this issue!



Cover photo: Bundists marching the the May Day parade in Stockholm, Sweden, 1946. From *The Stars Bear Witness: The Jewish Labor Bund, 1897-2017* edited by Irena Klepfisz and Daniel Soyer (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2017)

Jewish Socialist Editorial Committee: Julia Bard, Judith Cravitz, Mike Heiser, Simon Lynn, David Rosenberg, Raf Salkie, Lynne Walsh and Charlotte Williams. With thanks to Sue Hughes for additional proofreading.

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Chilean Jews confront threats from the far right

Diana Aron Svigilsky (1950 - 1974) was a Chilean journalist and a member of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria party. After the military coup in 1973, She went underground. The following year she was arrested by the secret police of the Pinochet dictatorship and taken to the notorious Villa Grimaldi, tortured and forcibly disappeared.

In the run-up to December's Chilean election, members of the Diana Aron Jewish Collective faced criticism and threats from the far right when they made a statement in support of the young left-wing campaigner, Gabriel Boric, who has now become the country's President.

Here is an extract from their statement. As Chilean Jews, who are committed to creating a more just society where respect for human rights prevails and we can create the conditions for a dignified life for all, including protecting the biodiversity on which that depends, we firmly support the presidential candidacy of Gabriel Boric and call on everyone to vote for him on 19th December 2021.

We believe that the candidate of the extreme right, José Antonio Kast, poses a

serious danger for the future of democracy, culture, justice, social peace and respect for the dignity of all.

Our Jewish history of exile and pain impels us to live and act on the experiences of our people, and to confront the ideologies of stigmatisation and dehumanisation that this candidate advocates.

We are the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of migrants, and of survivors of hate speech against foreigners, against those who are different, against those defined as "others". Such speech generated the conditions for the pogroms, the rise of fascism and Nazism.

We call on the Jews of Chile not to vote for an advocate of such ideas, which underpinned the systematic violation of human rights and brutal crimes against humanity, which were pillars of state terrorism in our country.

We call on the Jews of Chile not to vote for the candidate who has lied about the Nazi militancy of his father, Michael Kast, who joined the Nazi party in his youth (1942), fought in the Wehrmacht on the French front,



and in the Soviet Union and Italy, and was a prisoner of the Allied troops before escaping and migrating to Chile. This is the candidate who has downplayed the crimes of Miguel Krassnoff, one of the worst murderers of the dictatorship, who tortured and killed Diana Aron Svigilsky because of her ideas and because she was a Jew.

As Jews, as Chilean Jews, and as the Diana Aron Jewish Collective (AJDA), we adhere to the Jewish ethical principle of Tikkun Olam – the belief that we must commit ourselves to repair and participate in the construction of a world in which human diversity is respected, where we can all live together whatever people's beliefs and life choices, and where we can build bridges of sisterhood and brotherhood without hatred or fear.

Jews of Chile, let us contribute with hope to building a country for everyone!

CHANGE
THE
WORLD

Grupa Granica/Border Group

Grupa Granica is an alliance of non-governmental organisations that was set up to help refugees on the Poland-Belarus border to obtain their human rights to a place of safety, food, water and medical care. It includes activists from all over Poland, including residents of border areas. Human rights groups risk imprisonment for helping people who have crossed the border. Nevertheless, they go out into the forest to search for anyone who manages to call for help, and have received support from across Poland.

One initiative is for people living in the border area to put green lights in their windows, indicating that they will offer the refugees a meal, emergency supplies, a chance to wash and

recharge their phones. They leave out shoes, milk or bottles of water that volunteers can collect for the people hiding in the forest in bleak, winter conditions.

Now Grupa Granica are offering advice, up-to-date information and support to refugees fleeing from the war in Ukraine. They help organise volunteers and publicise the many ways people in Poland can help – and are helping – from translating and offering accommodation to donating money and items the refugees need.

Here is a list of what they most need support for:

- food and other necessary items for refugees at the border,
- monitoring and documenting the border crisis
- legal and psychological aid

- fuel and communications equipment to transmit reliable news directed at refugees and Polish people (journalists cannot go into the border zone)
- the everyday work of teams in the field and at their desks
- reinforcement of a stable support network for refugees and migrants in Poland
- unplanned expenses needed to respond to a rapidly changing situation.

Grupa Granica say: "By supporting us, you help our newcomers catch a breath and start feeling safe in Poland."

Find out more about Grupa Granica and how you can support their urgent work at www.indiegogo.com/projects/support-refugees-in-crisis-at-the-border-in-poland/

Jewish Socialists support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller rights

Statement 14th February 2022 www.jewishsocialist.org.uk

We share the outrage expressed about Jimmy Carr's comments about Gypsy communities during the Holocaust, which appealed to and amplified anti-Gypsy sentiments in society. This is not the first time Carr has targeted this particular minority.

The victims of the Nazis belonged to many categories, and we mourn each of them equally. The Nazis' first killing programme against civilians was carried out against many thousands of disabled people from September 1939.

Only two categories, though, were marked out for complete extermination: Jews and Gypsies. In absolute numbers far more Jews were killed, but the figures come closer when we examine proportions of their total pre-war populations in Europe. Gypsies and Jews were both categorised as *Untermenschen*, targeted for persecution, and we met our shared fate in Nazi gas chambers. That is why we are so alert to expressions of anti-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) racism.

We have been heartened to hear recent expressions of solidarity with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities from more mainstream commentators in the Jewish community. We need to deepen the understanding within our community of Jews' and Gypsies' shared experience during the Holocaust and bring more and more members of our community into a determined struggle against anti-GRT racism, alongside our fight against antisemitism and expressions of hate directed against other minority communities. And we continue our work to engage our community in combating the structural racism that black and brown minorities/refugees suffer on a daily basis.

In central and eastern Europe where Roma often stand out as physically visible minorities in much less diverse societies than Britain, they face continued discrimination and persecution. In Britain, GRT communities are much less physically distinct – but frequently suffer hate crimes, bullying at school, and discrimination. Last year it was revealed that Pontins Holiday Camps had a list of Irish surnames it gave staff to screen out bookings by Gypsy and Irish travellers – a salutary reminder to the wider anti-racist movement here that racism and discrimination are not simply about colour.

This last point is underlined too by the rising number of antisemitic incidents in 2021, reported in February, which saw a significant increase in attacks with violence. As well as targeting a range of Jewish victims, white, black, secular, religious and "visibly" Jewish Hasidim, a worrying number of antisemitic incidents are perpetrated by people who themselves experience racism, a fact that only the far-right can be gleeful about. Anti-racists must address this urgently to bring our communities together against all racism.

Jimmy Carr's comments should be exposed and challenged but any attempt to police the words of individual comedians is likely to backfire. Our work as anti-racists must focus more seriously and strategically on the principal threat to GRT communities and their way of life, which comes from the state, from the far-right Tory government, especially through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.



That bill is all-embracing in its attack on progressives, threatening fundamental rights of protest. But as we challenge it, we need to stay very aware of the specific ways in which GRT communities are being threatened, and build practical unity with them, helping to defend them from criminalisation, evictions and arrests. We should also support demands to ensure that schools incorporate learning about the fate of Gypsy communities under Nazism in their teaching about the Holocaust.

If our Jewish community leaders are serious about tackling anti-GRT racism, combating discrimination and defending refugee rights, they will need to take a much more critical stance on the Tory Government, a government that Jewish community "leaders" seem so reluctant to criticise because it takes a hard line against Palestinian rights.

If they won't join the dots, we have to do it for them. Anti-racism is not a pick and choose activity. All racism is racism, including racism perpetrated by Israel's authorities and settlers. And if they insist on looking at issues through the prism of Israel and Palestine, then we have to challenge them to stand with anti-racists there too.

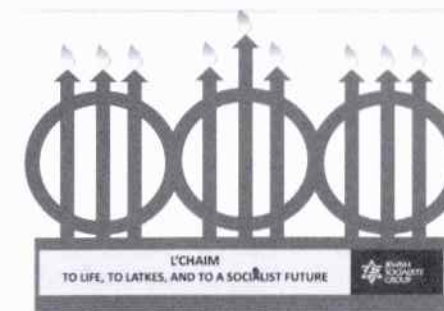
Oil vey! A festival of light and miracles dedicated to the environment

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem during the Maccabean Revolt against the Syrian Greek ruling class. For us as Jewish Socialists, it is a time both for celebration and recommitting to fighting against oppression.

Last December we welcomed more than 70 guests from all over the world to our environmentally themed Zoom celebration, starting with the story of the Maccabean Revolt against the Greek-Syrian colonists. Our version of the Hanukkah story included a Talmudic exploration by Julia Bard of the whether the oil for the everlasting lamp really did miraculously last eight days, or whether Judah the Maccabee broke the boycott of Greek businesses to ask Hermes to courier over new supplies by next day delivery.

It was an evening filled with politics, song, poetry and, of course, latkes. Our thanks go to Terry Conway for her important report from ground level of COP26. Simon Prager entertained us with banter and songs about Hanukkah and *dreydl*s (spinning tops), and Robb Johnson raised the roof with his anthem: "Demand the Impossible Now". For the second year running we were delighted that Irena Klepfisz could join us from America to read her poetry and tell us about her forthcoming book of poems old and new.

Central to Hanukkah is the menorah,



which has eight candles that represent the miracle of the eight days that the lamp in the temple remained alight with just one day's supply of oil. After our Hanukkah guests were invited to light their own menorahs and share them with us on their screens, we dedicated the lighting of each candle to individuals and organisations that have suffered and courageously stood up against those who would try to beat them back.

We dedicated our first candle to the young Israeli Refuseniks; our second to six Palestinian human rights organisations that Israel banned in October, designating them as "terrorist". Our third candle was for care workers and all those working in frontline health services who face a difficult and uncertain time in the next few months; the fourth was lit for the Polish people living on the Poland-Belarus border who shine a green

light in their window to tell refugees that their home is a safe haven. The next candle was dedicated to the Indian farmers who collectively fought recent laws introduced by the right wing Modi government; we lit a candle for the 228 environmental defenders who were killed in 2020 and to the communities who have protected their land for generations in the face of hostility from state security forces and rapacious companies. The seventh candle was dedicated to the United Families & Friends Campaign and those affected by deaths in police custody; and our final candle was for the 31 people who died some time during the 25th November in the English Channel trying to reach safety in the UK.

We ensured that we did more than just light candles by asking our guests to donate to two organisations: Care4Calais, a volunteer-run refugee charity, and Grupa Granica, a collective of groups in Poland carrying out *ludzie ludziom* – people-to-people support for asylum seekers who make it across the Polish Border from Belarus (see *Change the World*, opposite). We raised a fantastic £1,000 from our members and friends, and donated £500 to each cause.

A wonderful evening ended with a commitment to purify and rededicate our precious planet.

HANUKKAH

BY MICHAEL ROSEN

My Communist parents didn't light a candle for Hannukah but some years my father made latkes.

I was set to grating the potatoes. He gave a big speech about how I had to grate them on the "fine" side. Latkes made with "strings" were no good he said. Then I had to grate the onions. He then gave another big speech about how it had to be onions and not apples.

I never knew where all this came from. I never saw the kitchen of his childhood where his Bubbe would have said, "fine" side of the grater onions not apples. I never saw her.

It all went on in a place we never went to called "the East End".

He made the latkes into what looked like flat eggs. He fried them while Mum tutted and said that the oil wasn't hot enough and that he should turn them over sooner.

He then said that we had to eat them just like that. Nothing added.

Who wrote these rules? I wondered. They were too hot to eat at first. When they had cooled down a bit we ate them.

Latkes. Mmmm I liked them a lot.

He sometimes made them at other times of the year too. Maybe that was because he was a Communist, I thought.

What is "Weekend" in Yiddish?

קומט צום ערשטן יידישן סאָפֿ-וואָך
אין נאָרד-מערבֿ-אנגלענד!

The secular Yiddish cultural revival in Britain continues apace as participants look forward to the first weekend (sof-vokh!) of total immersion in Yiddish in this

country, in June 2022 in South Yorkshire. The weekend will include workshops, conversation, music, poetry and walks as well as children's activities. The programme is being put together by members of the UK Yiddish Sof-

Vokh Organising Group, which has grown out of the Yiddish Open Mic Café, a monthly gathering of Yiddish speakers at a range of levels. This first sof-vokh is now fully booked. Let's hope it will be the first of many!

The duty to refuse

We are a group of Israeli 18-year-olds at a crossroads. The Israeli state is demanding our conscription into the military. Allegedly, a defence force which is supposed to safeguard the existence of the State of Israel. In reality, the goal of the Israeli military is not to defend itself from hostile militaries, but to exercise control over a civilian population. In other words, our conscription to the Israeli military has political context and implications. It has implications, first and foremost on the lives of the Palestinian people who have lived under violent occupation for 72 years.

The Zionist policy of brutal violence towards and expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and lands began in 1948 and has not stopped since. The occupation is also poisoning Israeli society – it is violent, militaristic, oppressive, and chauvinistic. It is our duty to oppose this destructive reality by uniting our struggles and refusing to serve these violent systems – chief among them the military. Our refusal to enlist to the military is not an act of turning our backs on Israeli society. On the contrary, our refusal is an act of taking responsibility over our actions and their repercussions...

We want peace, and real peace requires justice. Justice requires acknowledgment of the historical and present injustices, and of the

continuing Nakba. Justice requires reform in the form of the end of the occupation, the end of the siege on Gaza, and recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Justice demands solidarity, joint struggle, and refusal.

Extract from a letter published in Israel in 2021, with the signatures of 120 shministim (18-year-olds.)

This call to arms of the shministim – deliberate pun – follows a long tradition of refusal in the face of pain, punishment and social exclusion. Women refusers in particular have been in the spotlight recently, following the release of the film *Objector* in 2021. Here, Atalya Ben Abba described her path to refusal, and the enormous difficulties of achieving conscientious objector status. She never received it. Instead, after a year in prison, the army released her saying, in effect, that she wasn't what they wanted. One of the most interesting aspects of the film was the struggle with her family, probably replicated in many others. Her parents, who of course had served in the army, in high positions, regarded it as a necessary and inevitable part of growing up. By the end of the film, the mother is converted to Atalya's viewpoint

and is seen demonstrating in her favour.

Several other women over the years have made similar points, in particular that military service, far from being a feminist activity, is aimed at removing women from their traditional spheres in order to make them act like men.

This is precisely the point that the shministim are making, that this needs questioning and opposition.

Signatories say: "The message of the letter is to take responsibility for the injustices we have committed, and to talk about the Nakba and the end of the occupation. It's a discourse that has disappeared from the public sphere and must come back. It's impossible to talk about a peace agreement without understanding that all this is a direct result of 1948. The occupation of 1967 is part of the legacy of the Nakba. It's all part of the same manifestations of occupation, these are not different things..."

The shministim are a beacon hope for the future. The treatment they face in military prison and their subsequent difficulties in gaining access to the labour market, are proof that they are seen as a very real danger to the state.

Let's support them in every possible way.

Judith Cravitz

WISEWORDS

"I look at this movement and worry with my heart." The movement was Zionism. And the speaker uttering these words was Hermann Adler, Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue in Britain from 1891-1911.

Born in Hanover but raised in London, he undertook rabbinical training and studies in Prague and Leipzig. In 1897 he denounced Theodore Herzl's political Zionism as an "egregious blunder" and as being "contrary to Jewish principles".

His overall politics were somewhat Conservative leaning, but I think we can almost forgive him. He would

certainly be preferable to the current incumbent, the Tory toady Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who undertook part of his rabbinical training at a seminary in Gush Etzion in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and has been a great recruiter for Jerusalem Day over the years – a day that strikes fear into Palestinian hearts as settlers and other right wing nationalist thugs march menacingly through East Jerusalem, daubing slogans such as "Death to the Arabs" on buildings.

Mirvis also invited Theresa May and hubby as dinner guests the night before she became PM in 2016.

LABOUR'S JEWISH PROBLEM

Britain's Labour Party has had Jewish members since its earliest days and, especially from the 1940s to the end of the 1970s, had a significant number of Jewish MPs. Its Jewish members and MPs held a wide range of views on Zionism, but its sole Jewish affiliate, Poale Zion (rebranded as the Jewish Labour movement in 2004) has held to a rigidly Zionist constitution. Particularly since the leadership change in April 2020, an extraordinary number of Jewish Labour members who dissent from Zionism have been targeted for disciplinary action and treated abysmally. We tell some of their individual stories.

MIKE HOWARD was a lifelong socialist and campaigner against racism, proud of his Jewish heritage, who died after a short illness on 11th November 2021. **LEAH LEVANE**, co-chair of Jewish Voice for Labour and a Humanist celebrant, conducted his funeral service. She writes about her friend and comrade.

When Mike died in November, he was still furious at his suspension from the Labour Party, at the allegations of antisemitism and at the Party's failure to respond to his letters appealing against this finding.

He joined the Labour Party in 1970 and had been a Labour activist in Hackney, Newcastle, Merton and, finally, Hastings, where he was also a councillor for six years. He was selected to stand again for the Council but the suspension made that impossible.

Sadly, it is often only when someone dies that people say what they feel about a person. His funeral was packed, despite COVID and livestreaming of the service. Everyone was asked to wear red, and the Internationale was played in French and English to conclude the ceremony.

Most moving were the tributes from younger Labour Party activists, two of whom carried his coffin, along with family members and two older Party activists. These younger activists said that it was Mike who made sure that new members, especially young members, felt welcome, invited them to the post-meeting gatherings, and talked to them with enthusiasm.

Several said that they learned so much from him, especially about Labour movement history and also Palestine; that so many Jewish people supported justice for Palestinians and opposed the actions of the Israeli state and many opposed Zionism as a political ideology.

Mike was born in Hackney, East London, to a working class Jewish family. His parents, Renee Weinstein and Gabriel (Gerry) Kobelsky were both children of refugees who arrived in 1910. The families came, like so many others, fleeing pogroms and persecution in Lithuania and Poland and, for

one, even a stint in the Tsar's army. Gerry's uncle went to the United States and his father to Glasgow, where Gerry grew up in the notorious Gorbals, while Renee grew up in Bethnal Green and Stepney. Both became shop stewards and active Communist Party members, which is how they met. Mike was proud to come from a Jewish refugee background and attributes his socialism and internationalism to his parents, the values they taught, and the struggles that they and their parents had experienced.

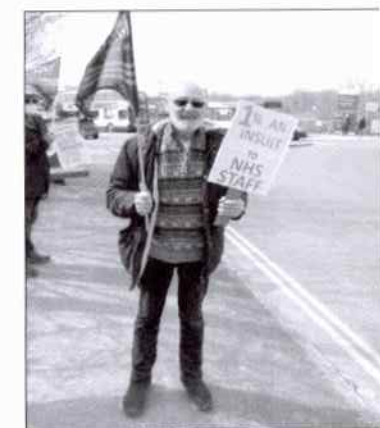
Mike's first yarmulka (skull cap) and first tallis (prayer shawl) are still safely stowed at home; the fact that he kept them, despite not being religiously observant, is further indication that being Jewish was important to him.

But for him, the links between his family's refugee experience and personal experience of antisemitism, especially at school, motivated his activism for justice and equality, against poverty, against racism and for socialism.

Shortly after the funeral at the end of November, Mike's younger brother Tony wrote a furious letter to Keir Starmer, which has not been replied to.

"All those who have known, respected and loved Mike know that your callous and vicious use of ... libellous... antisemitic accusations are only crude tools to further your pogrom of REAL socialists in the Labour Party and added to Mike's personal stress this year, especially as YOU had him suspended from his party on trumped up, anonymous, unsubstantiated and slanderous charges.

"Mike's life's work was, in large part, due to our childhoods which were both blighted with antisemitic bullying in Hackney, the very charge YOU laid upon him, thus you are no better than those self-same bullies; however, unlike you, he devoted his life to opposing and fighting bullying, bigotry and discrimination.... Once again, he was reselected (for May 2021) to represent his local Labour Party in forthcoming local council elections until ... he was, and remained suspended, just three weeks before the election; allowing the Tories to retain the seat. Mike died whilst still fighting your slander, where you deem anyone opposing the Israeli persecution of Palestinians, the continued illegal occupation of Palestine by the Israeli government... as antisemitic..."



Mike Howard

JAY KRAMER, a longstanding member in the same CLP as Mike Howard, received a "Notice of Allegation" from Labour's Legal & Governance Unit in November 2021. She was accused of having "liked" and shared on her Facebook page a fringe meeting called "Defend the Left" taking place during Labour Party conference in Brighton at the end of September. She was given 14 days to respond. These are extracts from her submission.

I am a former Deputy Leader of Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex County Councillor. I have had unbroken membership of the Labour Party for the past 46 years. I have held officer positions in my branch and am a former Secretary and Chair of the Hastings & Rye CLP. I have campaigned in every election since 1997, both parliamentary and local, and have held committee rooms in my house at



Jay Kramer holding the banner of her former Labour Party

every election. I believe I have a reputation in the Hastings and Rye CLP as a socialist, for promoting equalities, for my integrity and for my commitment to winning elections for Labour. I have also encouraged younger members of the Labour Party to put themselves forward for election, especially women. I am of Jewish heritage which is integral to informing my politics.

The context for me sharing and liking this fringe meeting is as follows:

I had been appalled by the Labour Party's treatment of Ken Loach. This man has done an extraordinary amount to effect societal change in terms of social justice. His film *Cathy Come Home* had a direct impact on homelessness and housing policy in the 1960s; more recently, *I, Daniel Blake* exposed the inhumane treatment of claimants in the benefits system, and *Sorry I Missed You* was a landmark film in exposing the appalling treatment

of delivery drivers. Rather than expelling him, the Labour Party should have been proud and privileged to have him as a member.

During the week of conference, one of our democratically elected conference delegates for Hastings & Rye CLP, Leah Levane, was expelled from the party in a way that was designed to humiliate her by calling the police and dealing with her unprofessionally. Leah has been an ambassador for Palestinian rights and has headed up Jewish Voice for Labour as Co-Chair. It is obvious that the leadership of the Labour Party realises that it cannot proscribe Jewish Voice for Labour in case it is challenged legally on antisemitism. It is therefore picking people off to try and weaken the organisation of which I am a member.

Our greatly valued comrade and former councillor on Hastings Borough Council, Mike Howard, died after a short illness recently. Mike was Jewish and proud of that heritage... Many of us across the country are angry and want justice for the fact that Mike remained under suspension by the Labour Party and had not had his appeal heard in months. This was one of the final issues Mike raised before his untimely death.

You may have gathered by now that I have no intention of defending my actions. Based on democracy, free speech, and solidarity I have every right to share and like posts on Facebook. The fact that I shared or liked an organisation does not make me a member or a supporter. The burden of proof is on you.

Four weeks later Jay received an email to say that she had been expelled and was offered the right of appeal. She adds:

I think it is important to speak out and let people know about the purge of socialists in the Labour Party because people may be feeling intimidated. Members' money is being used to trawl through our Facebook pages and pay the wages of anonymous staff in the disputes team.

In parallel, members are leaving in droves. In Hastings & Rye ... the Party has been destroyed and remaining activists are thin on the ground. Instead of fighting the right-wing Tory Government, the leadership of the Labour Party has turned on its own members in an unprecedented attack on democracy. Jewish comrades have been disproportionately attacked in terms of expulsions, notices of investigation and suspensions.

Jay was not the first member of her family to be politically active. Her grandfather, Nathan Kramer, was active as a Jewish radical in the early years of the 20th century. Jay's sister, ANN KRAMER, provides a glimpse of his colourful life.

Born in 1891 in Yanova, Poland, a place that he described in Yiddish as "a town as big as a yawn", Nuta Gregorovitch Kramarz was born to religious parents and was the youngest of nine children. Restrictions on Jews meant he did not have much of a formal education, but he studied the Talmud from a very early age and educated himself in literature and politics.

A lifelong anarchist, he was involved in anti-Tsarist activities at the age of 12. When he was 16 he was arrested and sentenced to four years hard labour in a Tsarist

prison. He escaped from prison and arrived in London in about 1911. He settled in the East End and married Bluma Weisenfeld. Around this time he and his brother anglicised their names: Nuta Kramarz became Nathan Kramer.

The Workers' Circle – a Yiddish speaking Mutual Aid/Friendly Society – was formed in 1909. We don't know whether Nathan was involved in it when he arrived in London. He certainly was later. In 1917, after the February revolution, Nathan left London for Russia. He fought as a colonel

RIVA JOFFE was active in a range of Jewish left wing groups, including Jewish Voice for Labour, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, and the Jewish Socialists' Group. She died on 21st September 2021 after a short illness and is sorely missed by all these groups. Less than a month before that, Riva received notice that she was "under investigation" by the Labour Party for antisemitism expressed in comments on Facebook. Her response to the Labour Party typified her combative and irreverent spirit to the end. In response to the Labour Party's Governance and Legal Unit she acknowledged that the Facebook account they sent an illustration from was hers and she did indeed write the statements they alluded to.

A) You ask me to retract a statement I made in April 2019 criticising Richard Burgon for retracting this statement: "The enemy of peace is NOT THE JEWISH PEOPLE (an anti-racist statement with which I agree) but ZIONISM" (a political movement with whose aims and practice I disagree).

Now ... you will have gleaned from many things I have written, demonstrations I have participated in, carrying placards of Jews for Justice for Palestinians, etc, that I am no fan of Zionism. I consider it an inherently racist ideology, whether the policies and practice are espoused by American Evangelical Christian Zionist politicians or by Israel's government.

Thus, when Richard Burgon (a Member of Parliament for whom I have respect) felt he "needed to apologise" (to persons or organisations unspecified) for what I consider a perfectly valid statement, I was disappointed and angry. Nobody should ever be afraid to call out racism, particularly

racism enshrined in policy and practice. B) Historically, the Labour Party's principles of internationalism were grounded in a human rights-based advocacy for justice and equality. This party supported resistance movements in World War II, but later, its support for resistance to colonisation was not reliably on the side of the colonised. I used to hope that (if in power) this party would hold to account any government across the world that colonises, occupies or oppresses other human beings. For a few short years I believed that a new principled policy might be enacted, but it seems now that the Party's support for liberation struggles is contingent on whether the oppressors are theirs or ours.

This is essentially an issue of racism and equality. Well ... racism has its nuances. Quite apart from direct hatred of "them" (because they are different from "us") there are more insidious aspects; the one relevant here is holding "them" to less high a standard than expected of "us" – the "tyranny of low expectations". Failure to hold Israel's government and the American evangelicals to an equally anti-discriminatory standard that you expect of Britain is deeply patronising. And if it is done out of fear of being accused of racism it is also cowardly and racist. Is it this fear of being accused of racism/antisemitism that keeps you in thrall to the Israeli government and its allies?

C) I am one of many being accused of something or other by the "new management" (aka "House Committee" ...) for some purpose or other, that makes sense only to yourselves. What is it about those of us you are "processing"? Can it really be our views about Palestine that terrify you? Yes – we oppose most strongly Israel's government's oppression of the Palestinians, but then we campaign for justice for all minoritised people. We also want urgent action on climate change. We oppose the arms trade and consequent "foreign war". We are working for a safer, greener and more peaceful world. We are probably on the right side of history.



in the Red Army but at some point would have realised that, as an anarchist, he was not safe in the new Soviet state.

Around 1921 he returned to the East End, by which time his son, Thomas, Jay's and my father, was five years old. Back in London, Nathan, Bluma, Thomas and our aunt Lillian (born 1927) lived in Varden Street, Whitechapel. He corresponded regularly with the anarchists Peter Kropotkin and Rudolph Rocker and became closely involved with the Workers' Circle. In 1923 Nathan became secretary

of the branch (or division) 3, helping to transform it into a large and vibrant branch.

He was also on the Central Committee of the Workers Circle, spending a great deal of time at Circle House in Alie Street. Nathan helped to set up a Yiddish school for the children of Circle members, ran a Branch 3 loan club and promoted Yiddish culture.

Nathan remained a member of the Workers Circle until his death in 1962, by which time the family had moved to Edgware.

The Circle was an integral part

of their lives: it included anarchists, socialists, freethinkers, Bundists, and other left-wing activists. My aunt vividly remembers dinners and gatherings at their Varden Street home, where the level of noise as members debated and argued, was overwhelming.

According to an article in the Workers Circle monthly journal, Nathan, a chain smoker, was well known for his enthusiasm, commitment, energy and oratory. He was also known for his "animus" [as an anarchist] towards communists.

Honestly – a therapist would say, “this frenzy of purging you are driven to – it’s not the behaviour of mature adults. It smacks of desperation, fear and panic”. Is it really us – a quite reasonable group of democratic socialist citizens – that cause you such deep-seated and even pathological insecurity?

D) Oh – and I will not dignify with a response your suggestion that because I refer to “the Zionist Lobby” I am antisemitic, other than to say it’s ridiculous. I am an internationalist. And that I happen to be of Jewish heritage is neither here nor

there. Nevertheless, as you seem to find us Jews so targetable, I will mention my family history: my grandparents were from Lithuania. They became political exiles (c1894) escaping antisemitic oppression by the Russian Empire. My parents were socialist activists in South Africa who fought against racism long before Apartheid was established.

My father was interned for a year as a political prisoner, then subjected to a banning order (1940-41). My family became political exiles in 1948. Now, in my eighties, and on a somewhat smaller scale

certainly, I face becoming a “political exile” from a Party that for a few hopeful years was my political home.

We shall see if, when you have “gone the full McCarthy”, your new, slimmed-down party suddenly develops mass-appeal.

Meanwhile I will be joining a well-respected group of comrades and friends, all “processed and proud”.

With my best wishes for the Labour Party’s speedy recovery,

Riva

AN ACT OF ANTISEMITISM FOR FACTIONAL REASONS

A case study of where refusal to allow a plurality of Jewish opinions in the Party to be heard can lead

For this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day, Sue Levi Hughes was invited by her Constituency Labour Party (CLP), Hornsey & Wood Green, in north London, to give a presentation. Sue’s parents had escaped to Britain from Nazi Germany in the late 1930s; other members of her family died in Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen. For this event she researched and prepared a powerful presentation and talk about acts of resistance by women in the ghettos and camps established by the Nazis. Rabbi David Mason of the Jewish Labour Movement had also agreed to speak about Holocaust remembrance at the meeting.

Hours before the meeting, the local MP, Catherine West, phoned Sue and told her to withdraw the presentation because Rabbi Mason was refusing to share the Holocaust Memorial Day platform with her.

Sue says: “I was just so angry. That response you get when the anger literally floods every inch of your body. I said there is no circumstance that I would withdraw. Why is he asking me to withdraw? She said it was because of a tweet. I asked her, are you able to tell me which tweet it is? She replied ‘I’m sure you can find it yourself.’ I suspect she may not have even seen the tweet.

It transpired that the tweet in question was one Sue had shared several days earlier about the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah. It referred to Israel as an apartheid state – a definition that is widely used by B’Tselem, Yesh Din and numerous other Israeli human rights organisations, as well as Palestinian human rights campaigners.

According to Sue, when the CLP Chair, Anne O’Daly, was informed about what Catherine West had demanded of her, “she was horrified that the MP of all people would try to intervene in that and try and subvert the democratic decisions of the local Party’s Executive Committee.”

After Sue had stood firm, and her stand was backed by the CLP chair who insisted on sticking by a decision that had been made democratically by the EC, Rabbi Mason decided not to attend the meeting. Sue comments: “I think he thought everyone would roll over for him because he’s a ‘community leader’. But he backed himself into a corner.”

That was not the end of the matter, though.



At the meeting itself, another attempt was made to block the presentation by General Committee member and former chair of the CLP, Steve Hart. He would have needed a two-thirds majority to overturn the agenda. A clear majority of the those present voted to continue with the agreed agenda. However, as Sue began her presentation, more than a quarter of the members left the online event.

Sue comments: “When Steve Hart stood up, I knew they had something planned. This had all been thought about and organised in advance. But to organise in advance that you are going to walk out on somebody speaking about the Holocaust – that’s pretty grim behaviour.”

She adds: “I feel that Anne has been treated just badly as me. They bullied her too – for completely factional reasons. We were both treated equally badly.

The overwhelming majority who stayed were very moved by the short film made by Sue Levi Hughes’ about the courageous women who defied the Nazis in the face of impossible odds. Sue is unashamedly on the left of the Party but she subsequently received messages from those who stayed in the meeting who were not factionally aligned, but were disturbed and angered by the attempt to no-platform her. They said: “I’m sorry you were treated like that”; “Your presentation was amazing”; “I lit a candle during it”; “My grandson is

doing the Holocaust [at school] at the moment and I think this presentation would be wonderful”.

Sue says: “I have literally had nothing but an outpouring of support and solidarity from all kinds of people but I feel devastated that ordinary members walked out, and were more concerned with internal, factional differences than with learning about – and from – the women who had the courage to stand up against the terror and who saved many lives, often at the cost of their own. They must have known they were going to lose the vote and they must have known they were going to walk out if they did.

“My parents left Nazi Germany after years of persecution just before the Holocaust; my aunt, uncle and cousins were left behind and were murdered. This is my history and it has affected every aspect of my life. To be honest, I think the way I and the members of Haringey Labour Party have been treated is not only insulting and disrespectful but antisemitic.”

Jewish Socialist asked Sue what she would advise left wing Jewish members in other CLPs to do if they encounter such behaviour: “You have to stand on principle on these kind of things if you know that you are right. I will always stand up for mine or somebody else’s rights if it is just so blatantly obvious. Stand by your principles.”

Despite the disgraceful attempts to stop her, justice was done in that Sue gave her presentation and later, with the encouragement of the CLP’s Black and Minority Ethnic officer, a link to her film was distributed to all Hornsey & Wood Green Labour Party members.

These are the words that Sue used to introduce her presentation.

The Holocaust is part of my family history. My parents and grandparents were refugees from Nazi Germany in the late '30s, after several years when Jews were being persecuted, driven out of their homes and physically attacked. My aunt, uncle and cousins perished in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

The history of the Holocaust is also part of my present. It is a part of me, ingrained into me. I live with it and I live with the trauma my parents unwittingly passed down to me and my sister. My mother’s fear of not having enough food means both my sister and I are unable to throw food away or waste even the smallest scrap.

My families’ fear that we would be recognised as Jews outside of the Jewish area where we lived became my reality and I ditched my recognisably Jewish name as soon as I could. Now I am proud to use my Jewish surname: Levi.

OLIVE GROVES TRASHED YEAR AFTER YEAR

Farmers in the occupied West Bank are cut off from their olive groves by laws that protect illegal Israeli settlements. When they are permitted to harvest the olives, they are attacked by settlers who are supported by the army. **JENNY KASSMAN** reports

Ghassan Mansour and his wife Zohaira (not their real names) were delighted when they received their permit from the Israeli Civil Administration allowing them their yearly four-day access to their grove to harvest olives.

If this year’s figures bore any resemblance to those for 2020, their application was one of the lucky 27% granted in the occupied West Bank. The

Olive tree vandalised by settlers



permit did not apply to all their land. Some years ago, acres of land on which the Palestinian couple and their family used to cultivate wheat and sesame had been expropriated by the nearby illegal Jewish settlement of Har Brakha to form a barren cordon around the settlement.

The couple's happiness this year was short-lived. On their arrival they found that all their trees had been burnt by the Israeli settlers during the long period when they had been prohibited from accessing their grove. The destruction of Ghassan and Zohaira's olive grove has been reflected in the experiences of many of their fellow farmers in the village of Burin where they live, as well as in numerous other places in the occupied West Bank.

Burin is in a traditional olive-growing area south of the West Bank city of Nablus. For centuries its economy, like that of other villages in the area, has been reliant on olives, which have been cultivated there since Roman times. There are still trees dating from that period.

It is an area of undulating hills, once thickly clad in olive trees, with villages tucked away in the valleys. Nowadays the wooded hillsides are pocked with large bare patches, the scars of what were once olive groves. Those were destroyed by Israelis who inhabit the three nearby Israeli settlements, Har Brakha, Rivat Gonen, Yitzhar and their outposts, all built on Palestinian land and illegal under international law.

Situated on the hilltops overlooking the Palestinian villages, these settlements are constantly expanding along the ridges as well as down the hillsides towards the villages themselves. The Israeli residents of all three settlements around Burin engage in violence, theft and destruction against the Palestinian villagers and their lands. The area is known as one of the epicentres of settler attacks which occur throughout the year, and which increase yearly.

Farmers like Ghassan and Zohaira, whose groves happen to be located near settlements, can only access their family land with an army permit — if they are lucky enough to be granted one. Most permits give Palestinians a few days a year during which to harvest their olives. Some farmers may also be given access in the spring to plough the land and prune trees; otherwise they have to tend their trees at the same time as harvesting them. Those farmers who are not granted a permit have to choose between forgoing their harvests and accessing their groves anyway, and risking the consequences.

For Palestinians, to access their land without permits means being attacked, not just by settlers, but by Israeli soldiers with tear gas and stun grenades, which is what happened in October to Ammar Hamayel and his family from Beita, near Burin. "A week ago, my family and I went to go pick our olives; when we arrived near the base of the mountain, they started firing at us. There were women and children with us, so we had to run away. Why should I have to get co-ordination to pick my olives?"

The number of permits granted by the Israeli Civil Administration to enable Palestinian farmers to access their own lands has decreased over the years. In its report, *Creeping Dispossession*, the Israeli human rights organisation, HaMoked, compares how 71% of applications were accepted in 2014, while in 2020 only 27% were granted.

These permits are not binding. Israeli soldiers

have denied Palestinian farmers access to their groves on the dates granted to them, for example, in the event of settler attacks. When this happens, soldiers order Palestinian farmers off their own lands rather than the Israeli trespassers.

Gaining permission from the Israeli authorities to access their lands is just one of the problems faced by the 100,000 or so Palestinian farmers and their families in the occupied West Bank who rely on olives as a source of income. During the harvest, settler attacks increase in frequency. Ghassan Daghlis, who monitors Israeli settler violence against Palestinians in the northern part of the West Bank, described how attacks usually increase by the second week of the olive harvest. This year the attacks started early.

Although the 2021 olive harvest officially began on 12th October, the more intense Israeli settler attacks started on 23rd August, when settlers from Yitzhar torched dozens of olive trees belonging to Akram Omran from Burin. In Burin alone, during the harvest period there were further attacks in which around 250 trees were burnt, uprooted or felled. Some farmers lost trees on multiple sites. One farmer, Jamal Qadus, lost a total of 70 out of his 600 olive trees in five different locations as a result of arson attacks or by trees being cut down.

Settlers attack Palestinian farmers with impunity. On one occasion, about 60 settlers from Yitzhar descended on Burin farmers and their families who were harvesting olives, attacking them with rocks. Israeli soldiers who were in the vicinity did not attempt to stop them.

The presence of Red Cross observers does not act as a deterrent either. On 26th October settlers from Givat Ronen pepper-sprayed members of the Red Cross who had come to Burin on research. They were burnt on the face and hands. It appears no arrests were made. In a statement issued the same day, the International Committee of the Red Cross stated that this was not the first time that their staff had been attacked while carrying out their work in the West Bank.

The army and settlers combine to intimidate Palestinian farmers. While Jamal Qadus, was harvesting olives with his wife and daughter, Yitzhak Levy, the Ravshatz (security co-ordinator) from Yitzhar, arrived and ordered them to leave their grove containing 40 trees. He then called in Israeli soldiers to ensure his order was upheld. When asked to comment later on this incident, the army spokesperson denied all knowledge of it, as did Levy.

Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian homes, with army support, have been merciless. A week into the harvest, 30 hooded settlers from Givat Ronen pelted a Palestinian home belonging to the Eid family in nearby Burin with stones, and lit multiple brush fires on the parched land near the house. Israeli soldiers arrived during the stone throwing, but did nothing to stop the settlers. Neither did they stop them from lighting fires. However, when a group of Palestinians from the village came to chase the settlers away by throwing stones back at them, they were met with stun grenades and tear gas from the soldiers who also aimed them at the house.

Three weeks later, the Israeli settlers from Givat Ronen returned to attack the Eid family's house again, as well as many neighbouring homes. Again,

they hurled stones, with Israeli soldiers looking on. Adil, a member of the family, was hit by a stone and suffered a fractured arm; other Palestinians were badly bruised.

Some house owners and neighbours threw stones back at the settlers to defend their homes. Finally, the settlers began to pull back up the hill, with the Palestinians chasing them. It was then that the Israeli soldiers started to fire tear gas at the Palestinians to defend the settlers. Next, when more villagers started to arrive to help their neighbours the soldiers entered Burin, again firing tear gas and stun grenades.

On 17th October, Daghlis reported that there had been 58 Israeli settler attacks in the northern West Bank relating to the olive harvest, nine of them in the village of Burin.

Settlement expansion, the creation of new settlements and more recently settler farms, all illegal under international law, serve the objective of enlarging the Israeli population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This increase in settlement building is one of the causes of the escalation in Israeli violence, which aims to expropriate Palestinian lands and drive the Palestinian population away from their villages.

When Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz was confronted by Israeli politicians from the Meretz Party who charged him with allowing the security forces to support the settlers during their violent attacks, he replied: "We will work to cut off the phenomenon with all the means at our disposal." Statements such as this have often been made by military chiefs, even though reality shows their intentions are to the contrary.

Gantz's use of the word "phenomenon" to describe settler attacks invites comment. The violent Jewish Israeli settlers of Yitzhar, Har Brakha, Givat Ronen, and of many of the over 280 settlements and outposts in the occupied West Bank do not see their presence and actions as a phenomenon, but as complying with the aims of their religion by reclaiming their ancient homeland which they believe was given to them by God.

Neither does the Israeli human rights organisation, B'Tselem see settler violence as a phenomenon. In its recent report, *State Business*, B'Tselem argues: "The state aids and abets settlers

in violently expelling Palestinians from their land and sometimes from their homes ... to misappropriate Palestinian land in order to build new settlements, expand existing ones and take over pastureland fields and farmland."

The report refers to "the participation of Israeli security forces in violent incidents, the disregard of Israeli authorities for their duty to protect Palestinians and the near complete immunity the state gives settlers who harm Palestinians. "The state condones this violence, giving the settlers free rein to terrorize Palestinians ... although soldiers have the authority and duty to detain and arrest them."

Yesh Din, another Israeli human rights NGO, describes settler violence as a tool for achieving political aims that "serves the government policy of taking over land — and therefore it is flourishing..."

This strong reluctance to stop settler violence is due to the fact that most Israeli politicians, including ex-Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the current Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett (who, at one time, headed the Yesha Council, a settler organisation), favour annexation of the West Bank as part of the Jewish state in which, as stated in Israel's 2018 Nation State Law: "The actualization of the right of national self-determination in the state of Israel is unique to the Jewish people."

Meanwhile, the 2.5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank are seeing a steady deterioration in all aspects of their lives: their traditional livelihoods; their ability to look after their families, lands and properties; to move freely without fear; to study; to worship; to defend their rights as citizens in a political system that deprives them of their human rights, dignity and civil status.

However, most West Bank Palestinians choose to remain. Populations in villages like Burin are expanding as Palestinians live out the principle of *sumud* — steadfastness — against their occupiers.

Like the olive trees which the settlers so vehemently wish to destroy, Palestinians' deep-rooted attachment to their land goes back many centuries. *Sumud* in the context of the Israeli occupation means staying put, and that is exactly what the Palestinians living in Burin and elsewhere in the occupied West Bank intend to do.



Israeli settlers burn olive trees and attack a Palestinian house in Burin while soldiers stand by, October 2021.

The photos for this article were kindly provided by Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights: www.yesh-din.org

Yesh Din documents, collects and disseminates reliable and updated information regarding systematic human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Their work focuses on law enforcement on settlers and other Israeli civilians; criminal accountability of Israeli security forces personnel in the West Bank suspected of offenses against Palestinians; and human rights violations related to takeover of Palestinian land and restricting Palestinians' access to their land.

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CHALLENGING ANTI-

**WIELAND
HOBAN** gives
an inside view
of the context
and dilemmas
for Jewish left-
wing activists



One can't really think of the German Jewish community as a single community but, such as it is, it's estimated at around 200,000. Half of that number are officially registered with communities and synagogues but it's estimated that there are roughly the same number again of non-registered Jewish-identifying people. The large majority of those were not born in Germany – either they or their parents came from the former Soviet Union, mostly from Russia and Ukraine, in the 1990s. Prior to that, obviously, the Jewish population was almost exterminated by the Nazis. Over time, families did increasingly come back – those who had escaped – but of course many emigrated. Even once there had been considerable movement back, the community still only reached a maximum of about 30,000 German Jews.

In the 1990s, in tandem with the collapse of the Soviet Union where Jews also experienced systemic discrimination, the German government decided on what some have called a kind of "reforestation" – that is, stocking up on Jews again, building up the community by importing other Jews. Many of these had an incentive to emigrate. They hadn't been treated very well in the Soviet Union, so Germany – the west, recently reunified – seemed quite attractive.

What happened when they got here was often less glamorous. First of all, they were living in various kinds of immigrant housing, and then there was the sort of thing that happens when you have large waves of immigration – poor organisation and many people ending up in not particularly prosperous circumstances.

By the time these waves of post-Soviet migration had calmed down, they'd brought in tens of thousands of Jews. The children of the first ones to arrive were born in Germany, so they thought of themselves more as German. But very many who themselves came from Russia, remained in Russian language communities. So there is a strange situation in which the majority of Jews in Germany are different from the majority population not only through being Jewish, but also through actually being foreigners, not German, except for the

children who had been born here since the '90s. That creates a kind of double otherness.

In contrast to that, roughly 10,000 Israelis have moved to Berlin over the years – this is a phenomenon that is very specific to Berlin. A lot of these are youngish, liberal or left-leaning Israelis who had a high cost of living, say, in Tel Aviv, and word got round that the standard of living in Berlin is fairly cheap considering that it's a major city. Incidentally, Berlin is also the city with the largest Palestinian diaspora – around 30,000. So you have this rather intriguing situation of a kind of exported Middle East. And in the last few years, Syrians and Lebanese have also arrived, many of them of Palestinian descent.

Altogether, Jewishness as just an ordinary aspect of human identity is something most Germans are not familiar with. The Jews are something very exotic for them; they're associated more with history, with the Holocaust, with death, than with daily encounters or seeing them on TV or meeting with them. That's created a strange situation that goes in both directions – the direction of an antisemitic hostility towards an imagined figure, in the same way that one often finds the highest levels of anti-black racism in Germany in areas where there are very few black people. Then, on the other hand, at a kind of official level – in terms of the state, politics, culture – there is philosemitism, where being very positive about Jews is considered a kind of national duty in the face of the legacy of the Holocaust – a way to atone for what grandparents or parents did, but often in a way that for Jewish people is a bit awkward and strange because there's this distance, this sense of otherness.

At the same time, I think, as is so often the case in European history, that there is also this in-betweenness, between the majority white German society and the other more visible migrant population. The largest groups in that are Muslims, of whom there are about five million in Germany, and people from a black background, who are maybe up to around a million. In Germany there's this very unhealthy separation – one could also most say segregation – of antisemitism in relation to other forms of racism. This is also familiar elsewhere, where antisemitism is treated as a very particular phenomenon, which isn't part of racism.

Jews are often the quieter voices in the whole discourse about racism because they are vastly outnumbered. So often people will feel, because the Holocaust was so exceptional and incomparable – not like all this ordinary colonial

GERMANY'S ANTISEMITISM

violence and genocide – that antisemitism is qualitatively different from anti-black racism, anti-Arab racism, anti-Muslim racism and so on. This really undermines cross-minority solidarity and it's one of the things that I find most harmful in terms of antiracist work and consciousness in Germany. Because many Jews feel very nervous about a threat that they perceive and which certainly is there – bomb threats to synagogues, someone wearing a kippah gets beaten up. A few days ago there was a less severe but high profile case of a Jewish singer denied service in a hotel; the receptionist told him he should put away his Star of David necklace, and of course that provoked great outrage.

At both the state level and at the level of the 16 federal states, there are Commissioners who fight against antisemitism and for Jewish life. So when there are these attacks on Jews – whether they are physical attacks or attacks like the one on this singer, you can be sure they will all be making public statements and there will be handwringing from politicians, saying, "This can't be accepted and we have to do everything to rid Germany of such things." I don't actually recall any case in which there were similar statements or even any attention given to another kind of racist incident.

In Britain there's often talk of a hierarchy of racism regarding how the Labour Party treats these different things. Here in Germany, too, people get very sensitive about it. If you point out, for example, that there was no mention on TV of a Muslim woman who was attacked in the metro, as happened a couple of weeks ago, people get very defensive; they talk about the "oppression olympics" and feel that you're undermining the fight against antisemitism – and of course there are real threats to Jews.

Part of the background to this is 1990 – reunification and the connection with the far right and the new militant philosemitism. From a centrist perspective, German reunification is viewed entirely positively, because the moderately democratic West could finally welcome back into the fold its Communist cousin who had gone astray. There were a lot of people on the left, even the radical left, who, with a militantly anti-nationalist view, saw this reunification as a real ideological attack, because now Germany was being made great again, so to speak. This meant that they had to counter a kind of new nationalism and that's why they called themselves Antideutsch – anti-Germans. But instead of looking at what was actually happening politically, on the ground, they related it to the Nazi past and celebrated, in a bizarrely uncritical way, the Allies who had defeated the Nazis. They threw in their lot with imperialism in a protest against nationalism, which was of course absurd – a kind of anti-Nazi perspective that was totally skewed.

That then shifted more into the mainstream, and these positions have influenced the more

conventional left that maybe didn't have such a militant kind of anti-statist agenda. In the left party Die Linke, this is a real wedge issue because the world view of these aggressively philosemitic ideologues throws a spanner in the works when it comes to relations with migrant communities who have good reason to be less positive about Israel. And that party has plenty of members from migrant backgrounds, even some from a Palestinian background – those who haven't left in disgust or despair.

Beyond these oddball Antideutsch, back in the 1980s, Palestine was one of the great issues for the the international left – there's probably not an important leftist from that time who wasn't seen wearing a keffiyah at some point. That really changed. There was of course the global Islamophobia that came in the wake of 9/11, where any expression of Palestinian self-determination was seen as part of the overall Islamist takeover. Terrorism and of course the Second Intifada reinforced that view, and it's still a really difficult



Antideutsch banner expressing a contorted anti-nationalism

issue to raise in public. It's already considered radical, provocative, to adopt a sort of liberal Zionist, Meretz-ish position here in Germany. So taking it to the point of unambiguous support for the Palestinians, as people like us do, is pretty much beyond the pale. There is an avoidance of analysis, which undermines the coherence of an internationalist leftist view, where liberation struggles all over the world are supported and taken as part of the same phenomenon and the same imperative of liberation, but people campaigning against racism can be ostracised on the left for their stance on Palestine. So it's the the most divisive issue.

I think that because of this separation of the different forms of discrimination, there is also a disconnect in terms of consciousness, where many

HERE IS A STRANGE SITUATION IN WHICH THE MAJORITY OF JEWS IN GERMANY ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE MAJORITY POPULATION NOT ONLY THROUGH BEING JEWISH, BUT ALSO THROUGH ACTUALLY BEING FOREIGNERS, NOT GERMAN, THAT CREATES A KIND OF DOUBLE OTHERNESS

ROUGHLY 10,000 ISRAELIS HAVE MOVED TO BERLIN OVER THE YEARS, AND BERLIN IS ALSO THE CITY WITH THE LARGEST PALESTINIAN DIASPORA – AROUND 30,000, SO YOU HAVE THIS RATHER INTRIGUING SITUATION OF A KIND OF EXPORTED MIDDLE EAST

Jews will think their discrimination or the hostility towards them is not taken seriously – even though it receives more attention than all other forms of racism. They still often feel acutely endangered. And of course there are the bad-faithers who make hay out of this, and use it for a pro-Israel, pro-Zionist purpose.

One major challenge for antiracist work in Germany is to work against this disconnect and to show that, of course antisemitism is specific, in the same way as anti-African or anti-Arab racism is specific. But it's part of a unified phenomenon which should be attacked jointly by anti-racists working together. Often the kind of incitement in the mainstream against Muslims, part of which relates to the threat of Muslim antisemitism, which also relates to the Israel/Palestine situation – all these things undermine having a solid way of combatting racism together.

It's challenging for us, and of course this doesn't even touch on the way anyone who tries to stand up for Palestinian rights is slandered. I could say a lot about that but I'll just refer to one incident. One organisation I'm a member of here is Jüdische Stimme für gerechten Frieden in Nahost/Jewish Voice for a Just Peace. The organisation has existed for over 15 years and in 2019 we were awarded a prize by the city of Göttingen – it's not big but as a university city with an academic history it has a certain significance, and they have an annual peace prize that's awarded by a small jury. Normally the prize ceremony is held at the university, the Mayor comes – it's a significant city event.

Now when it was announced that our organisation had been chosen as a recipient of this prize, there was condemnation first of all from the Central Council of Jews – it sounds as though they represent all the Jews in Germany which is not quite the case, but you could say they represent the conservative mainstream, maybe comparable to the Board of Deputies, pro-Israel. They said it was a terrible decision because we are these extremists who support BDS, for example, and this shouldn't

be encouraged and the decision should be reversed. There was a similar statement from the Mayor of the city, who also demanded that it should be reversed.

Then the university refused to allow its spaces to be used for the prize-giving ceremony, and they thought that would be the end of it. Finally we found a different venue and the ceremony took place. But it goes to show how vicious they can get, even though the majority of our members are Israelis. As I said earlier, most of the Israelis in Germany live in Berlin; many of our members also live in Berlin, and among many of those Israelis you'll find pretty strong leftist views and also anti-Zionist views in some cases. But that's very difficult for philosemitic Germans to deal with or even comprehend, the idea of an Israeli Jew not being in favour of Israeli policy or even of the self-definition of Israel as a Jewish state, as an ethno-state (although Germans don't see that). Yes, there's a real gulf of consciousness – a chasm that we have to close.

Around the same time as the prize ceremony, the bank where we held our organisation's funds closed our account following pressure from various quarters and after demanding that we distance ourselves from BDS. We did not comply, so you had this surreal situation where, for philosemitic reasons or purportedly protecting Jews from the evils of BDS, a Jewish group had its account closed! That was only the second time since the Nazi period that the German state had closed a Jewish account.

I follow what goes on in the UK closely – I grew up there – and so I know how many parallels there are with the situation. But the important difference is that there is a more "grown" Jewish community in England, a community that is not considered as foreign as in Germany. For all the ordeals that you've been facing, I somewhat envy that there's a bit more normality in that regard as well as many difficulties.

This article is based on a talk given by Wieland Hoban to the Jewish Socialists' Group in October 2021.



The Göttingen University Peace Prize was awarded to Jewish Voice for a Just Peace despite objections

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION



Descendants of those who took to the streets in the iconic battle against fascists and police in London's East End in October 1936 were centre stage at the Cable Street 85 commemorations. **DAVID ROSENBERG** captures the atmosphere

Five years ago, in October 2016, I had the honour of convening the 80th anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Cable Street. It was a large, colourful, joyous occasion as we gathered for a rally in Altab Ali Park, east London, then marched south towards Cable Street with a Yiddish marching band helping to lead the way. Flares were lit by a section of the crowd as we did what Mosley's fascists distinctly failed to do in 1936 – and actually marched unopposed up Cable Street. There were no barricades blocking our path, no objects hurled from the tenement flats above the shops.

The participants slowed their pace and lowered their banners as they entered St George's Gardens where the famous mural stands on the side of the old Town Hall building as a graphic testimony to the courageous collective action that occurred on this street in October 1936. The marchers then gathered tightly together in the wider green space behind the mural for a further rally, with many powerful and defiant speakers. On the platform that day was one sole veteran from the battle itself, 101-year-old Max Levitas, born in Dublin but living in the East End from the early 1930s.

Back in 2016, not only Labour members but the whole of the left and the anti-racist and anti-fascist movements had a spring in their step from the Corbyn insurgency, and were regularly taking to the streets on many fronts with confidence, enthusiasm and hope. On that day in October 2016, Corbyn himself closed the rally with a very moving speech, his first outdoor appearance after a gruelling and unnecessary leadership challenge that he eventually won comfortably.

Thirteen months before that, he had laid down a marker, right after his brief acceptance speech on the day he became Labour leader, by heading straight over to address a rally with and for refugees. He had a new political role but his fundamental

priorities hadn't changed. In October 2016, he was similarly making clear his commitment to, and solidarity with, grassroots campaigners against racism and fascism, and emphasising how important this pivotal moment in London's Jewish and working class history was to him and ought to be to others.

October 2021 was inevitably going to be different. The full weight of the political defeat at the General Election in 2019 by the Tories, backed by an all-out war by the establishment and its media, had taken its toll in demoralisation and demobilisation, not just for seasoned left wing activists but for huge numbers of young people who had brought new energy to many struggles in the period that Labour had an insurgent left wing leadership. This was then dramatically compounded by the grim reality of the pandemic, eventually acknowledged by the Tory Government in March 2020, which was devastating families and communities, particularly among poorer and marginalised groups. Despite impressive localised actions around the country by Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion and occasional major mobilisations in city centres, political action on the streets in 2020 and 2021



Photos: Vince Quintivan and David Rosenberg

was relatively muted. Several planned street protests and public meetings were postponed by organisers themselves for health and safety reasons.

A group of us who had previously joined forces to organise both the 75th and 80th Cable Street commemorations did not feel we were even in a position to think about planning anything definite for Cable Street 85 until mid-summer, but in a Zoom meeting at that point there was real

enthusiasm to do some kind of collective public outdoor event, even if it was on a considerably smaller scale. We proposed a more compact programme with a shorter march and fewer speakers. Despite the difficulties, such as the fact that many people were rightly avoiding or minimising use of public transport, we were confident that with energy, commitment and care we could pull this off in a manner that was safe and could offer a fitting tribute to those who fought for our rights as much as theirs in 1936.

But having committed

ourselves, we now faced an equally tricky political problem. This would be the first of the 10 yearly/5 yearly commemorative events that had been held in Cable Street since at least the mid-1980s, which would not be able to be addressed by veterans of that struggle. Max Levitas had died in 2018. One veteran, Beatty Orwell, was still alive, at 104 kenenehora, but housebound after breaking her hip some time ago. We found an imaginative solution.

We agreed that we would intersperse the speeches at the event with special contributions from selected individuals with direct connections to the activists of October 1936. Their parents and in some cases other family members had all been involved in the Battle of Cable Street and in the ongoing fight against fascism in the 1930s.

So, at our commemoration we heard from Beatty Orwell's daughter, June Legg, and from Ruth Levitas, whose father Morry and uncles Max and Sol had all taken part in the Battle. (Morry went on to fight in Spain against Franco's fascists through the International Brigades.) We heard from Jewish Voice for Labour member, Tony Booth, whose parents were Jewish members of the Communist Party. His mum ran a sweet shop actually on Cable Street, and his dad was arrested that day and imprisoned. We heard a moving poem from Michael Rosen that recalled his father Harold and his mother



Connie Isaakofsky who had only started "seeing each other" shortly before they took to the streets on the day of the Battle.

Each of these speakers gave very touching contributions and showed that anti-fascist consciousness and commitment was a treasure lovingly passed between the generations.

They were joined on that platform by trade union speakers, community activists and political figures, including Jeremy Corbyn, and also Apsana Begum, born into a Bangladeshi family a stone's throw from Cable Street. Since 2019, Apsana has been the MP for the East End constituency that includes the south side of Cable Street, where the mural is situated. As co-chair of the rally (with Julie Begum of the Swadhinata Trust) I introduced Apsana – our first and most local speaker – as "the MP for the Cable Street Mural!"

She spoke proudly of the continuity of East End

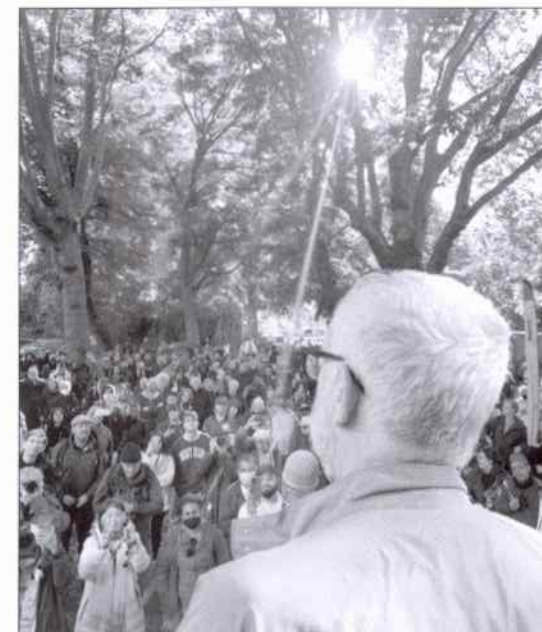


anti-racist traditions and the deep connections between them, as did Nooruddin Ahmed, the speaker for the Altab Ali Foundation. This Foundation was created to memorialise the racist murder of 24-year-old Altab Ali at the peak of National Front activity in the East End in the late 1970s. The series of clashes and campaigning around it are known collectively today as the Battle of Brick Lane. In 1978 – the year of Altab Ali's death – Nooruddin had been one of the key activists in the emergent Bengali youth movements that collectively played such a crucial role in driving the National Front out of the East End.

Other speakers such as Shahriar Bin-Ali, representing the Bangladesh Workers Council,

Harsev Bains from the Indian Workers Association-GB, and Weyman Bennett for Stand Up To Racism, stressed the importance of uniting communities together across ethnic identities and binding them together with the trade union movement in tackling all racism today, as did local UNISON convenor Amina Patel. Communist Party Secretary, Robert Griffiths, the overall convenor of the 85th anniversary commemoration, recalled the pivotal role of the Jewish communist, Phil Piratin, in mobilising and organising anti-fascist resistance in this period, and his continued role in fighting for the people of the East End as their MP just after the Second World War.

Despite the short notice and COVID-related difficulties, several hundred marchers attended, many of whom left glowing accounts on social media about what a "fantastic", "inspiring", "heartwarming" and "uplifting" occasion it was. The only sour notes were, sadly, found in the right-wing Jewish press, especially the Jewish News, whose left-baiting report on the event was written, it seems, by someone who had not even attended. It was replete with inaccuracies and failed to mention any of the seven Jewish speakers (out of 19) who addressed the rally. In addition to the four relatives of the veterans named above, the rally had also heard from Julia Bard of the Jewish Socialists'



Group, historian and author Mary Davis, and Rabbi Herschel Gluck, whose barnstorming speech received the loudest cheering from the crowd.

We had honoured the activists of the past and recommitted ourselves to fighting together for equal rights for all in the present.

The legacy – relatives of people who came out to defend their community on that day in 1936 tell their stories

JUNE LEGG

My mother was 19 at the time, living in tenement buildings in Goulston Street, east London. She was the youngest of three daughters living with their mother in a Jewish household. Her father had died when she was 13...

She was an active member of the Anti-Fascist Group, whose headquarters were in Osborne Street. Nearby was Curley's Café where members used to meet and learned of up and coming meetings of the fascists. They would then go and try to disrupt these meetings...

On the day of the Battle of Cable Street, together with her friend ... they went to Gardiners Corner ... She was amazed by the sight of so many people who had gathered together to stop Mosley marching through the East End to antagonise the Jewish Community.

The Police were out in force, together with horses, trying to disperse the crowds. There was a lot of fighting and it was a very frightening situation. My mother's friend was pushed through a window and was taken to hospital. After recovery treatment, they both went to Royal Mint Street and that's where they saw Mosley and his men waiting to march. She always remembers their thick black belts and the uniforms they wore.

They then made their way to Cable Street where they saw a lorry overturned ... It was there she heard the now famous slogan, "They shall not pass".

... [T]he Police eventually came and announced that the march had been called off. Obviously that



was such incredible news and the large crowds marched to Victoria Park for a rally...

My mother never left the East End, and she is very proud of her achievements throughout her life ... Her generation were amazing people. Witnessing the rise of the fascists and the horrors of the war. Trying to raise families on very little money and without any support.

I asked her, if she had her time again would she still have gone to Cable Street that day. Her answer was she believes that everyone should unite to fight injustice and would do it all again in a heartbeat."

Above: the march arriving at the Cable Street Mural
Top right: David Rosenberg and Apsana Begum MP
Right: Rabbi Herschel Gluck with Nooruddin Ahmed
Below: Julia Bard
Opposite page top: Jeremy Corbyn MP



RUTH LEVITAS

In 1936 Max was 21, my father Morry, 19, and their brother Sol, 17. All three were involved in the Battle of Cable Street. I don't remember being told this, but I can't remember a time when I did not know, nor a time when I did not understand its significance...

Both Max and Morry suffered head injuries on that day, like so many others – injuries mainly inflicted by police batons and severe enough to need stitching. Neither of them ever mentioned this to me; I learned that from their youngest sister Toby, who was only eight at the time.

For Morry, the No Pasaran, They Shall Not Pass, of Cable Street led him ... to the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War. He survived, but only after mock execution, imprisonment, beatings, starvation and spurious scientific measurements by Nazi doctors in a Spanish jail.

Max never left the East End. He organised a rent strike in Brady Mansions in 1938, marched on the Savoy Hotel during the war to secure deep shelters for those living in the East End, served as a local Councillor for many years after 1945, and consistently until his death opposed racism and fascism and fought for better conditions for ordinary working people...

Today we see rising inequality and poverty,



insecure and underpaid work, inadequate housing, falling living standards, an overstretched health service. Life for many, in this, one of the poorest boroughs in Britain, is almost as precarious as it was in the 1930s. These are precisely the circumstances in which racism and fascism thrive, for it serves the ruling class well if we can be persuaded to turn on each other, on those of a different religion or colour or culture, on migrants, on refugees ... we, you – all of us – are refusing that division and restating the message of Cable Street. Our best defence is always unity and solidarity.

They shall not pass. No pasaran, friends!

TONY BOOTH

My mother was born in Cable Street above the family sweet shop and was there, aged just 24, on the day of the Battle. She was already a member of the Communist Party and at 22 had visited the Soviet Union with two friends. She must have been involved in the action but I never asked her about it. I heard from my Aunt Beattie, after my mother died, that anti-fascists came into the shop



to get marbles used as stoppers in lemonade bottles to throw under the hooves of police horses...

... my father ... was one of the organisers of the resistance. At 24, he was already an experienced activist... For my father, the most memorable event happened once the march had been stopped:

I wanted to get home quickly. I walked through Leman street and was pounced upon by five policemen and beaten up severely. I must have been pointed out by one of these agents provocateurs. I was taken into the police station and I shall never ever forget it. There was a police inspector at his desk, and he asked: "What is the charge?" They said: "assaulting the police." He immediately walked out of the office. That was a signal for about 16 police to come in and beat me up again. They beat me severely and I was badly bruised. Then the Inspector came back and said: "That's enough," and stopped them beating me into unconsciousness. I was sentenced to four months imprisonment in Wormwood Scrubs for assaulting the police. I got one month off for so-called "good behaviour".

Mum and Dad met a couple of years later in July 1938. My mother was behind the counter at the Communist Party bookshop in Mayfair. Dad offered her a lift home to Cable Street on his motorbike, on his route to Poplar, and I like to say: "She inclined."

THE BRAVE LIFE AND MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF DORA FABIAN

HISTORY



Recalling the brave life and mysterious death of Dora Fabian, fighting fascism is never easy. Anyone involved in the struggle against far-right organisations today knows that there's always the risk of injury at a demonstration or acquiring a criminal record and damaging your career chances.

Dora Fabian certainly knew the dangers of activism but was not deterred. Few people today have heard of this German émigré, who fled the Nazi regime and came to live in London in 1933. She may well have been murdered by the German secret police, or people working for them, in her Bloomsbury flat in the spring of 1935. She was 33. Her determined fight to stop the advance of Nazism in her own country and across Europe, her resourcefulness and courage, stands as an inspiring model of commitment for today's radicals. In dark times, the left needs its heroes.

Growing up in a professional, assimilated Jewish family in Berlin (home to a third of the country's Jewish population) and with her father a left-wing lawyer, Dora imbibed leftish politics from an early age. Extremely bright, she became a member of the Independent Social Democratic Party while still a

schoolgirl and when at university, attended student demonstrations. Her relationship with official political parties was never a comfortable one. Critical of the SDP's failure to appeal to young people and women – which she recognised as vitally important if fascism were to be resisted – her days as a loyal party member were numbered.

Only a broad-based organisation, in this case, 'the Socialist Workers' Party, which she started with others, would have a chance, she thought, of effectively resisting Hitler's rise to power. Politically astute, even in her 20s, Dora understood the necessity for a mass movement that would include as many groups and opinions as possible, including the communists, in the struggle to defeat fascism. Both narrowness and factionalism had to be avoided if you were serious about your mission, even if that meant rejecting all parties, which she did in 1933.

Dora saw how the Nazis, as well as threatening the rights and freedoms of Germany's Jews, were a threat to the country's women. Understanding the political and psychological appeal of Nazism, she took to print to show the ways in which they were being exploited. She claimed the Nazi party was using women only as 'voting beasts'.

Her insights were based on close first-hand experience, including of Hitler's mass rallies –

dangerous events to attend if you were Jewish, however assimilated. On one occasion she was lifted over the heads of the crowd by an SS man so she might have a better view of the proceedings.

Dora Fabian was prepared to take risks and to seize the moment – something most vividly shown when she rescued the papers of the radical playwright, Ernst Toller. She was released temporarily from custody after her arrest (why has never become clear) and recognising the necessity to act quickly, was soon on board the first train out of



Left: Nazi rally in Weimar in 1932

HER INSIGHTS WERE BASED ON CLOSE FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING OF HITLER'S MASS RALLIES ... ON ONE OCCASION SHE WAS LIFTED OVER THE HEADS OF THE CROWD BY AN SS MAN SO SHE MIGHT HAVE A BETTER VIEW OF THE PROCEEDINGS.

Berlin with Toller's manuscripts.

When Dora arrived in London in 1933 at the age of 32, she was an experienced and pragmatic political activist who had seen the limitations of conventional politics and understood that alternative ways of pursuing her cause might produce better results. These alternatives might not always seem especially dangerous (fundraising, for example, is not on the same scale as blowing up bridges) but if you are a German émigré newly arrived in London, allowed to reside in your adopted country only if you keep your head down – and if your activism is designed to undermine the power of the new German regime – then you may well make enemies.

Dora served as an official translator at the Reichstag Fire counter-trial, set up in London in September 1933 to investigate who was really responsible for starting the fire. As leading communists went on trial in Germany, the counter-trial concluded that they were innocent – and put figures in the Nazi regime firmly in the frame. It was seen as a huge anti-Nazi propaganda victory.

Dora's involvement certainly got her noticed by the authorities. As a socialist, Jewish woman, for her the struggle was both political and personal.

It was also a struggle that crossed borders. With numerous contacts throughout Europe, she sought

to do as much as she could to assist members of her old political party, the SPD, who had been arrested or were in danger of being arrested. Among them was her ex-husband, Walter Fabian. Furthermore, she wasn't content simply to do her political work from London. In the summer of 1934, when journeying abroad was extremely difficult, she travelled to Paris to attend the World Congress of

Women against War and Fascism. The fight against Hitler and all he represented was, for Dora, truly international as well as being connected to women's sex-based oppression.

There is little doubt that the British and German authorities were worried by Dora Fabian's political activities. The fact that she seemed to be able to move so easily between certain groups, whether these were influential English politicians and aristocrats on the left, or German and Austrian exiles living in London, was certainly of concern.

A prime example was her involvement in the investigation into the kidnapping of the anti-Nazi journalist, Berthold Jacob. He had written about secret German rearmament, gaining him a trial for treason in 1928 and a prison term. When he was then kidnapped by an undercover Gestapo officer, and his abductor subsequently jailed, the whole affair was investigated by Swiss police officer Anton Ganz. The next episode saw Ganz travel to London to interview Dora, undoubtedly drawing more

attention from the authorities.

Dora's own part in exposing Germany's air rearmament programme made her a major target. It's one thing to write articles and pamphlets but it's something else to disseminate secret intelligence. When newspapers reported increasing Nazi militarisation and the matter was raised in Parliament in March 1934 by Winston Churchill talking about German "air-rearmament as a serious menace to England and the whole world", neither the British nor the German government could ignore the matter.

Dora suffered intimidation. There was surveillance and menacing letters, as well as break-ins at the Bloomsbury flat in Great Ormond Street that she shared with her companion, fellow émigré and former MP, Mathilde Wurm.

Despite this, the cause was far too important for her to suspend her political activities. Only her death from poisoning in April 1935 could put a stop to her struggle against the forces that had driven her into exile and were in the process of destroying democracy and freedom in her homeland.

There was an attempt to claim that the two women took their own lives – including the manufacture of evidence to make it seem as if Dora had been depressed due to an unhappy love affair. Friends and comrades felt sure that they were murdered by the German secret service operating in London. A letter containing evidence of the so-called love affair had mysteriously disappeared, and when both women were found dead in the flat, there were two packed bags with nightclothes.

It was certainly a horrifying end to an inspiring life. Fenner Brockway, the prominent left-wing MP, called Dora Fabian "one of the most courageous persons I have known", and it is a life from which we may learn today. Pursuing politics outside the conventional parliamentary route was uncertain and demanding but it produced results.

An article or letter to the right person at the right time could lead to action, a meeting with an influential politician might open doors and, above all, passing on information that your enemies would prefer to keep hidden could seriously damage their cause. In this case, it is quite likely that the information that Dora supplied contributed significantly to ensuring that Britain was adequately prepared for war five years later, despite the strong influence of those arguing for appeasement.

In addition, we can learn from Dora's internationalism and her openness to possible alliances and allies, both from across the globe and from across English society. She was always eager to make contacts in whichever city she visited and could mix and connect with people from any class. She knew the benefits of networking before it became fashionable. And she was modern in other ways, appreciating, for example, that if you are to fight your enemy successfully, you need to understand the position of women in any political situation as well as the psychological appeal of the ideology you are opposing.

It's not clear if Dora understood the lengths to which her particular enemy – Hitler's Nazi party – was willing to go to put a stop to her activities. Nevertheless, her short life leaves a legacy of anti-fascist activism too significant to be forgotten.



MY BUNDISM IS NOT JUST A MEMORY

The historian Emanuel Ringelblum organised and led the *Oneg Shabes* project in the Warsaw Ghetto in order to document ghetto life and to record for posterity German crimes against the Jews. In the introduction to his book, *Who Will Write our History?*, Prof Samuel Kassow explains why Ringelblum continued documenting ghetto life even after he learned of German plans to liquidate the ghetto. Prof Kassow writes:

Over time Ringelblum realized more and more clearly that the survivor identity would overshadow the prewar past. The "before" would be erased by the "after." As ... [Ringelblum] confronted the unfolding disaster he fought all the harder to preserve the "Now" and the "Before," to keep the a posteriori label of "victim" from effacing who the Jews were before the war. In a very real sense ... [Ringelblum] saw history as an antidote to a memory of catastrophe which, however well intentioned, would subsume what had been – into what had been destroyed.

Ringelblum's prediction that after "the catastrophe" many Jews would perceive themselves solely as victims/survivors came true – at least as I have observed it in the United States. For many Jews – and not only Jews in the US – memorialising the Holocaust has become a central part of their Jewish identity and for them, Jewish history begins in either 1939, the start of the war, or in 1948, the establishment of the Jewish State, seen as the "answer" to the Holocaust.

Over the past four decades I have taught Jewish Studies courses in numerous universities around the US and, therefore, the majority of my students have been Jews – many of them with 12 years of Jewish education behind them. Yet I have found that almost none of them had any significant knowledge of Jewish life before 1939, and knew very little of the "destruction" – *der khurbn* – itself. Few could answer such questions as: Who were the six million? Where did they live? What were their lives before the war? These young people's knowledge of *der khurbn* has been primarily focused on the sadism and horrors of the camps, and they know very little of life in the hundreds of ghettos across Europe or the challenges faced by so many thousands of Jews passing or resisting in forests and in the underground.

I have found this ignorance of Ringelblum's "before" and "now" painful and also rather peculiar, for I was offered a Jewish history in which the "before" 1939 was vivid and very much alive. The community that raised me in the Bronx in New York City in the late '40s and '50s consisted exclusively of *lebn-geblibene Bundistn*, survivors who were members of the Jewish Labour Bund in

Poland, and who remembered vividly and in great detail not only how they survived the war, but how the Bund raised and nurtured them in the decades before the war. Their stories about *Skif*, *Tsukunfi*, *Morgnshtern*, (the Bund's children's, youth and sports organisations), *Medem Sanatoria* (where young people with respiratory problems were helped), or the Yiddish *veltkehe shules*/secular schools, cultural

programmes, marches and worker strikes, armed fights with antisemites and fascists were intermingled with memories about the war and with anecdotes about their present American lives. They not only loved their Bundist life before 1939, they also continued to honour the Bund's ideals.

I learned all this while eavesdropping on their casual conversations when they gathered together to share an evening of talk, a slice of pound cake and some tea. Not being able to afford a babysitter, my mother would bring me along and I would listen to the stories of their lives before and during the war. Their utter love, continued enthusiasm for their pre-war life was infectious. I envied them. My life in the Bronx seemed but a pale shadow compared to the lives they led. If I was living in *goleslexile*, it was an exile from that interwar Poland.

But there was another element in these reminiscences which prevented them from being simply hazy romanticism and nostalgia. These survivors also discussed and sometimes re-argued endless issues that involved Bundists' criticism of other Jews without worry or fear of being called antisemitic or self-hating. I heard how Bundists unhesitatingly challenged

Zionists, rabbis, and Jewish factory owners; how they acknowledged the existence of criminal elements in Jewish society. In short Bundists weren't romantic or sentimental about Jews or Jewish life. They identified what was wrong, diagnosed what was needed and worked toward improving the life of the Jewish masses. If Jews are illiterate, establish Yiddish *shules* and libraries. If they lacked medical attention, establish clinics. If children suffer from TB and hunger, establish a sanatorium. And throughout the discussion and arguments I saw that these Bundists were never ashamed. As much as

IRENA KLEPFISZ, poet, writer, teacher, activist, was born in the Warsaw ghetto in 1941. She grew up among Bundist survivors in New York, absorbing their philosophy. She describes the impact of that philosophy on her life and what it means to be a Jewish socialist in the 21st century



Irena with her mother in Sweden, 1946



Left to right: Irena Klepfisz with friends, Gaby Fryshdorf and Ewa Heller in Sweden, May 1946

Bundists memorialised heroes and martyrs of the war, they also talked openly about the role of *Judenrats* and Jewish policemen. These Bundists taught me not to be afraid to admit to Jewish problems and not to be defined by antisemites.

And of course many of them served as role models, though it took me years to realise how special this inner circle was. People that I knew by their first names – had well known international Bundist reputations. Bernard was Bernard Goldstein, always the Bund's tough guy before and during the war, but to me the gentlest of men. Vladka, for whom I babysat, was

Vladka Meed, the Bundist smuggler and courier; she sat with my mother and me at Monie and Brucha's seder together with Monie's father Jankev Pat, the Bundist leader; and next to them sat the cultural leaders Chana and Yosel Mlotek.

And there was always talk of Marek, one of the Bund's organisers and fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, who became an international human rights advocate and famous cardiologist – Marek who had to explain over and over again to one interviewer after another why he, Dr Marek Edelman, had stayed in Poland while everyone else had left. But there were so many others, not as well known, whom I listened to on those Friday and Saturday night gatherings, who had survived in different ways and who before the war were involved in the various branches of Bundist political, cultural and sports activities. These were the people who formed my consciousness.

It was listening to their casual, unstructured conversations and memories that I came to fully embrace the Bund's *sotsyalizm/socialism*, *yidische veltlekhkayt*/Jewish secularism, and the principle of *do'ikayt*/"hereness" which I understood as being the right to lead a full Jewish life wherever one happened to be. This was my Jewish "norm." It was only decades later, when I was in my mid-30s and came in contact with other Jewish progressives that I began to understand that my "norm" was virtually unknown.

The moment of realisation solidified in my early 30s when I first became politically active and began to engage with Jewish feminists and Jewish leftists who shared my socialist values, but who considered secular identity as being "nothing" (simply not going to synagogue) and who were uncomfortable identifying as Jews, embarrassed either by the Hasidim or by their own middle-class backgrounds or by Israel or by the constant focus on the Holocaust. Reasons for being ashamed of one's Jewish identity in the left are numerous. Needless to say, no one knew anything of the rich possibilities which Bundism afforded me.

But with that realisation came another – perhaps more painful. Like my parents and their friends, I became politically active because I experienced specific dangers and challenges. However, unlike my parents, my greatest challenge and danger was

not antisemitism. I felt relatively safe as a Jew in the US. My sense of safety, however, was threatened when I came out as a lesbian and became engaged in the feminist and lesbian/feminist movements of the 1970s. So rather than antisemitism, it was homophobia that pulled me into political life, a homophobia that saturated American life including American Jewish communal life. This proved to be a difficult period for me: discovering simultaneously that the Bund and its principles had been forgotten or erased by Jewish progressives and that its adherents, my childhood heroes and heroines, were not perfect. It was countering ignorance that forced me to actually start reading about the Bund and become more educated about the movement that had so shaped my thinking. It was Jewish homophobia that made me stop being romantic about the interwar period in Poland.

Contemporary Jewish homophobia forced me to see that my "*do'ikayt*" was not the same as that of my parents. Issues of homophobia and gender identity were unknown to them: they recognised antisemitism, but couldn't have imagined its genocidal manifestation as the Holocaust; they challenged Zionism but knew nothing of a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between Palestinians and Jews. They recognised a few other Polish minorities, but saw Jews as the largest, most visible and probably most oppressed. In the US, Jews are among the smallest of American minorities. And unlike American Jews today, who are fully integrated into American political life, during the '30s Polish Bundists were just beginning to experience some political power.

The interwar Bund's views on *veltlekhkayt*/secular identity were also different. In those first three decades in Poland, a system of secular Yiddish schools had developed alongside Yiddish libraries and theatres, Yiddish newspapers and publishing houses – all contributed to a thriving Yiddish culture. Much of this also existed in the States, but after the war it was fading quickly. Like Bundists before me, I accepted Yiddish culture as my legacy while, paradoxically, becoming fully rooted in the English language. Yet despite all these differences and contradictions, I continued to feel a direct connection to the Bund of that generation.

So here is what I have taken from Bundism and here are some areas that I needed to challenge or expand.

In gerangl/In struggle

Without shame or self-consciousness, Bundists identified what was wrong and tried to fix it. Loyalty to the tribe, however, did not make them romantics and did not make them hide problems that were in need of being addressed. The Bund taught me not to be afraid to admit publicly to Jewish problems. That Bundist commitment to free discussion and critical analysis guided all my anti-homophobia and Middle East peace work.

It also enabled me to be critical of the very period that had always fascinated me. As my feminist and lesbian consciousness developed, I became painfully aware of the absence of women in my Yiddish education. There were no women intellectuals, political activists, or writers in the Yiddish cultural lessons included in curricula of my *shule*, *mitl-shule*, and later post-doctoral work in

Yiddish literature and culture.

When I became active, the American feminist calls to recognise the challenges and struggles of women echoed the recognition that Bund gave to common people or those generally marginalised. Yet, somehow, Jewish women's lives were not given special notice as having perhaps different needs from those of men. Though secular, a lot of the sexist and patriarchal attitudes so easily condemned in observant Jewish communities, were replicated in progressive communities. Following the examples of those who taught me in the Bronx, I was not going to whitewash the past or continue the amnesia.

Veltlekhkayt/Secular identity

I believe in the Bund's formulation that secularism isn't just assimilation or not going to synagogue. *Veltlekhkayt* includes building Jewish life by establishing Jewish education and fostering Jewish culture. I was taught that one couldn't just be against something, one had to be for something. One of the destructive effects of our focus in the US on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is that it has sapped energy away from working to enrich Jewish life here in the States. I struggled with my Middle East activism because it took time away from my Bundist commitment to pass on Yiddish culture in general, and Yiddish women's history and culture specifically, through my writing, translations and teaching. Eventually I felt it became more important for me to do this cultural work, and I began to focus my energy more on that than on the Middle East.

Simultaneously, *veltlekhkayt* has emerged as a wider and even more complicated concept than in my parent's generation. Unlike the Polish Bund of the '30s, American Jews are slowly coming to recognise Jewish multiculturalism and know that there are different ways of expressing one's secular identity. In the States, Jews from Middle East countries and Jews of Colour are emerging as visible groups within communities previously perceived as purely Ashkenazi, and forming connections between Jews and other minorities, who are also grappling with issues of identity and their own traditions. The visibility of LGBTQ Jews in all areas of Jewish life is also something that would have been inconceivable to the pre-war Bundist generation.

Do'ikayt/"Hereness"

Do'ikayt within the Bundist framework has not simply meant anti-Zionism. It also demanded building Jewish identity, a refusal to just blend in, an insistence on remaining and being fully, distinctly Jewish, wherever Jews happened to be. Like earlier Bundists, I see *do'ikayt* as entwined with strengthening our Jewish identity and committing ourselves to a Jewish future in our



chosen environments.

There are other Bundist principles that motivated me, such as looking to the margins towards those who are invisible, who seem to exist on paper only: the single mother struggling to feed her children; the woman prisoner who never had any options. Or the Bund's emphasis on

memory and history so that as Jews we know our various heritages, know who we are and where we came from, understanding that history binds us as a people and guarantees a Jewish future. These Bundist principles have always been an integral part of my life and work.

And I believe they saturate my life in terms of the many decisions I make, the way I write, where I devote my energy. I believe, as did the Bundists before me, that for people to thrive, to have meaningful lives, they must be part of a just society and a just society is where all people thrive. There is a Yiddish song, *Avreml der mavikher*/Avreml the pickpocket, which expresses this in very simple terms and was written by the great Yiddish poet Mordechai Gebirtig. Throughout most of the song Avreml boasts about his skills as a grifter and thief, and claims to be admired for being the best of all con men.

But in the final stanza, Gebirtig, who was a member of the Cracow Bund, provides Avreml with self-awareness and a critical analysis of his life. In this stanza, Avreml begins to lament his criminal actions and envisions what his tombstone might have contained – not a list with his criminal achievements – but rather a list of his virtues:

*Do ligt Avreml, der feikster mavikher
A mentsh a groyser geven volt fun im zikher
A mentsh a fayner, mit harts, mit a gefil,
A mentsh a reyner, vi got aleyh nor vil
Ven iber im volt gevakht a mames oygn,
Ven s'volt di fintstere gas im nisht dertsoygn
Ven nokh als kind er a tatn volt gehat
Do ligt Avreml, yener voyler yat!*

Here lies Avreml, the best of all pickpockets
He would have certainly been a great person
A fine person, with heart and feelings
A moral person, as God wants him to be
If only his mother's eyes had watched over him
If only the dark street hadn't raised him
If only when he as a child had a father
Here lies Avreml, a great guy!

Gebirtig shows us that Avreml is a criminal because of his environment. If Avreml's environment had been different, he might have become someone to be admired for his humanity, his morality. In this song, Gebirtig articulates the Bund's belief in people's inherent goodness, but a goodness that can only be activated in a just and humane society.

And that too is exactly my Bundism – in Yiddish and English.

New York City Lesbian and Gay Pride March 1989. The Yiddish words are *Der freylekhe folk*/The happy (gay) people
Photo: Rachel Epstein

This essay is based on two talks: "Bundism's Influence Today", given at YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York City, 16th September 2019; and "For Socialism, for Freedom. The Jewish Bund: History of Yesterday, Memory of Tomorrow", presented at the University of Genoa, 22nd April 2021.

SINGING TO CHANGE

ISABEL FREY'S updated, multilingual versions of political Yiddish songs are calling the crowds to action. **LYNNE WALSH** spoke to her



Most young musicians would admit to the fantasy of singing to a packed auditorium, selling albums by the million, or being recognised by fans wherever they go.

For Isabel Frey, who has recently released the glorious album, *Millennial*

Bundist, there is ambition, but it's driven by a deeper, richer motivation than the craving of fame. Her musical offerings are unlikely to be lost in the transient world of celebrity; they are rooted, and radical. There's a huge clue in the title of the work, released in autumn last year. The album includes Yiddish revolutionary songs, reworked and enlivened for contemporary audiences. Isabel takes these anthems, rendering them in Yiddish and German, so that they're both atavistic and bang up to date.

Her rendition of *Daloy Politsey* (Down with the Police) rallied more than 5,000 protesters in May 2019. She'd performed regularly at the weekly anti-government demos in her home city of Vienna, writing new verses to attack Austria's right-wing coalition. Extending the lyrics to "*Nieder mit HC*", she aimed at HC Strache, then Vice Chancellor of the country. He was involved in a corruption scandal around that time, was soon expelled from the Freedom Party which he had chaired, and "retired" from politics. The day the scandal broke, Isabel stood on top of a van, her voice dulcet and determined, as the crowd joined in. Their singing now forms part of the track on her album.

It's a joyous testament to the German language's dexterity with the compound adjective, combined with Isabel's inventiveness, that we can enjoy the line: "We don't want any borders or security apparatus. And especially not a proto-fascist-ethno-nationalist-state!"

Isabel may be a protest singer, but she defies simple definitions. The story so far reveals a search for identity – as a Jewish socialist woman – and a refreshing approach to the complexities of heritage, upbringing and peer influences. Born into a secular Ashkenazi Jewish family, she was active in the socialist Zionist Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. So, how did this 26-year-old travel from there to here, as a proud Bundist and a woman who says: "...my Jewish identity is rooted in the diaspora, not in Israel?"

Q: You were brought up in a secular Jewish family – what are your earliest memories of wondering about why some Jewish families were orthodox?

A: I guess when I ... saw other more religious families, especially in the orthodox shul that we (and other secular Jews) used to visit. I was part of

the secular, socialist Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair, and we had a kind of a competition going with the Bnei Akiva, who were observant. I remember thinking that they were crazy in not turning on the lights on Saturdays.

Q: You went to shul, had a batmitzvah, then to Israel and the kibbutzim – did you feel that these were "family traditions" rather than religious observance?

A: Yes, none of this was out of a sense of religious observance but rather a feeling that this is my tradition and these are my roots, very connected to my family.

Q: Your experiences in Israel – you have said that there was an awakening. What did you expect of Israel? What sort of society did you think it would be? And what was the reality? What disappointed you? Did you feel that it had been romanticised?

A: It's not like I hadn't been to Israel before, but I just hadn't spent extensive time there or anything beyond a few weeks of more touristic visits. I guess I expected to come to a place that still carries some of the spirit of socialist Zionism, a kind of secular, lefty Jewishness, that still was adapted to the current circumstances of the occupation and the settler movement.

To my great disappointment, I realised how marginal these positions are, and how many contradictions there are in socialist Zionism that only became clear to me when I was there.

Q: You made a reference, in an interview, to the Thai workers on a kibbutz, who had replaced Palestinian workers. How did that make you feel?

A: It was uncomfortable – less because they had replaced Palestinian workers, more because it was just a very grim picture of how the spirit of socialist Zionism had been killed by global capitalism.

I barely interacted with the Thai guest workers but I saw they were doing the same work me and my friends were doing in the lemon grove of the kibbutz at about 10 times the speed! That's when I realised that we are actually just spoiled Jewish kids from the cities playing dress-up.

Q: You got involved with social justice movements in Amsterdam – how, and why?

A: I went to Amsterdam to study. I found a nice university programme there and wanted to move away from Vienna, so it was a bit of a coincidence. I got involved with a lot of different movements – the anti-racist and decolonial movement, national university protests against the neoliberalisation of the university, the squatters' movement, the environmental movement, the feminist movement, and just general left-wing/anarchist subculture.

HEARTS AND MINDS



Q: You've said that you "stumbled upon the tradition of Yiddish revolutionary songs". How? Were these sung at demonstrations?

A: No, I just started listening to them on YouTube. A friend introduced me to the *Arbetlose marsh* and then I heard Daniel Kahn's version. Then I joined a Birthwrong trip organised by the London-based collective, Jewdas, and learnt a lot more revolutionary Yiddish songs there.

Isabel Frey's album includes many of these, *Arbetlose marsh* (March of the Unemployed), *Ale vayber megn shtimen* (All Women Can Vote), *Di grüne kuzine* (The Green Cousin) and *Kinder jor* (Childhood Years).

Q: You were in Montreal. Was that another experience of seeing how the diaspora lived?

A: Yes, it was on the Azrieli Scholarship to attend KlezKanada in 2019. Montreal was fascinating to me – to just see another city that is so deeply Jewish, yet different.

Isabel recently threw her hat into the ring to run with the Links party in Vienna, for the District Council of the Leopoldstadt, historically the city's most Jewish area, and still home to many Jewish institutions.

Q: What is your role now with the Links party? Are you a city councillor?

A: No, I wasn't voted in and I might have gotten a seat later when the first person on the list retires, but I decided to decline it for time reasons. I am working on my PhD (in ethnomusicology/gender studies on Yiddish music and the Jewish diaspora), and also on my music, and I'm slightly burnt out from the pandemic, so I've been taking a bit of a break. But I'm still staying involved with the party for sure, especially as a musician.

Q: On your music, how do you feel when you sing to crowds? Are you there to communicate political messages to them? To rally them?

A: Singing in front of crowds at political protests is really thrilling and exciting. It's so different from

singing in concert, because it's less about the art and the aesthetics, and much more about the collective effect and the political messages. Although I wouldn't say that I communicate a single message – I think my music can be read in many different ways. *Daloy Politsey/Nieder mit HC* is the most relevant. I rewrote the anti-tsarist song to fit the protest, and it became somewhat of a hymn.

Q: How would you feel if you were asked to do a tour or offered a deal to do more albums?

A: Sure, I'm happy to tour and also plan on doing more albums. I love being a working musician, but that doesn't mean I want to leave behind the activist contexts in which I play music.

Q: You're a Bundist. How do you explain Bundism to others?

A: I usually say Bundism is a particular form of Jewish diasporism from the early 20th century, which occupied a space between assimilationists and Zionists. This is something that is very inspiring to me today. I'm proudly Jewish, and yet I refuse for my Jewishness to be the basis for the oppression of others, in particular, Palestinians.

Q: Your "stumbling into Yiddish songs" seems to have now directed your life – including your PhD. Why do you think this has happened?

A: True! I really don't know how to answer this question. It just happened! It's just such an exciting journey to be on and it's far from over.

So, if you haven't heard Isabel Frey for yourself yet, go to YouTube, or find the album. Look out for her tours, hope to see her at a concert hall or stadium.

But if you should be on a demo and spot her atop a van singing a protest song you recognise, go and join the crowd singing along with her.

You know the old words, and she'll teach you the new ones.

Visit Isabel Frey's website: isabelfrey.com and find her album here: worldlisteningpost.com/2021/09/22/isabel-frey-millennial-bundist.

MY NAZI AUNTIE

In November 2018 **SYBIL COCK** documented what she could piece together of her family story and remember from her childhood and youth as she grew up, shuttling between Britain and Austria in the decades following the war



Sybil with her cousins, mother and aunt, around 1959, the last time Elsi visited Austria. Right to left: Kurti, Aunt Traudl, Sybil, Elsi, Christina, Traudi and Hermann

My grandfathers were born in the late 19th century, in time to serve on opposite sides of World War I. My parents, Elsi and Alan, were born in the 1920s. Alan was a Londoner; Elsi was born in Vienna.

My Austrian grandfather, Adolf (Ado, as he was known to everyone), was an academic at the Agricultural University in Vienna. He was also a member of the Nazi Party in Vienna throughout the 1930s at a time when it was proscribed (though clearly tolerated). The family was well-to-do, Catholic and conservative in every sense of the word. It was common for my relatives to refer to themselves as "South Germans" rather than Austrians.

Ado was also a refugee. He was born and brought up in the German Sudetenland, in what is now northern Czechia, and a family home was maintained there until the end of the war. The exodus of Germans from the Sudetenland in 1945 was never forgiven and was constantly talked about. My mother's younger brother, who died in the 1930s, is buried there, and the family lamented their inability to visit the grave after the war, amid constant talk of the lower-race Czechs who had taken over their farm.

My mother, Elsi, was born in Vienna in 1922 and she died in 1961. I was eight and my sister Christina was six. It was devastating, of course.

Sadly, I never got Elsi's story. My Londoner dad, Alan (born in 1926), died in 2005 and even then, at

senior communist official. My grandfather, Ado, being an ex-Nazi who had held a prominent academic position, was not able to work again in Austria. He lived out his years doing good works as a scientist on cattle breeding for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Colombia. Earlier in his career he had done similar work in the Basque country and in German Cameroon.

My mother and her sister lived in the basement of the house in Vienna and we were told many stories of how they were harassed by the people upstairs. The French were considered the most decent of the occupiers; the Russians by some way the worst.

Elsi was now a university student in Vienna. She came to England in 1948 on a work placement and met Alan. They worked together and fell in love. She had to go home but Alan was determined, and pursued her across war-torn Europe (think Third Man movie). They married and settled in Cambridge, then moved to Edinburgh.

Alan had been a full-on Labour Party member since joining at the age of 18 in 1945. I believe that Elsi shared his views and wanted us brought up as "British", away from the Catholic and conservative influences of her Austrian family, although we did visit Austria regularly. My first visit was by train as a baby, and involved laboriously crossing several occupation zones in Vienna, Austria and Germany.

I don't think my grandparents would have tolerated Alan were it not for their total snobbery. Dad was from a working class East End family but he had won a scholarship to Cambridge and worked as a scientist in fields similar to my Austrian grandfather's.

I speak German well and remember being called a "Nazi" at school in the 1950s. Elsi had a strong German accent and I know that she faced a great deal of anti-German racism in rural Cambridgeshire, but less in Scotland.

1961. Our mum was about to die. Of course, we didn't really know. We were sent to Austria to be with my aunt Traudl and her husband Kurt and our much-loved cousins. It was rural. We went to school. Skiing was the PE lesson. They could all ski but we couldn't. She died on 3rd February 1961.

We were utterly traumatised. Christina, at six, was too young to understand the fuss.

School was fine, as were the cousins. And the enormous love we got from Traudl and Kurt. Much kids larking about.

After less than a year we went home to be with Dad in Edinburgh. Dad and Mum really didn't want us to be brought up as Catholics. Or Nazis. A "housekeeper" was engaged to live with us. Shockingly for the Austrians (and probably for many of the Edinburgh neighbours), she had a black "illegitimate" two-year-old daughter, whom we adored.

From 1961 until about 1970 we went to Austria every year for most of the summer, to a town in the south, but also visiting our grandmother in Vienna. It was heaven. Cousins to play with. A stable, loving family.

LEAGUE

Uncle Kurt had been an officer in the Waffen SS. He was a Nazi in the 1930s and cheered on the Anschluss on the streets of Vienna. His memoir tells us about his war service. He was eventually captured in Normandy in August 1944 and then spent two years in prisoner of war camps in the UK and the USA. He wrote about his war service in a memoir which describes the banalities of war, the incompetence and brutalities. He somehow kept his SS pistol, which we were in awe of, although the house was full of guns as he was a hunter.

When we were children in Austria, some of the talk around the table was about the Jews. Much was also about Hitler.

When I "came out" as a socialist in 1967, my beloved aunt told me: "Sybil, you should have heard Hitler in Nuremberg. You would have loved him. Your mum did. He spoke for the people. I know you are a communist [I was 15]. The Soviet Union is a good thing. They don't have strikes there. The workers are kept in their place."

1965. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in Rhodesia. I knew about this of course, as a political 13-year-old, but was shocked to hear the Austrians' reactions. They were in full support of Ian Smith. Traudl once told me that there was no point in providing baths for "coloureds" – they would only use them for storage.

They fully believed in keeping the Aryan race pure – the word *Rassenrein* (pure bred) was bandied about. There was class superiority here too; Traudl thought she could tell the social class of a baby by looking at its face.

There was casual antisemitism at every opportunity. Antisemitic stories and jokes were told daily over meals. They denied the existence of concentration camps, suggesting that possibly the British had built them to "make it look like the Nazis had been exterminating Jews". Churchill was the bogeyman here – complicated arguments for a young teenager.

And anti-immigrant stuff. The Turks (*Gastarbeiter*, guestworkers) are taking over our country. The ones that land in Austria are the ones that are too lazy to go on to Germany. They crash their cars on the way north on the motorway (the road from Yugoslavia and beyond was very close to our town).

Then we would go home to political normality. Dad extolling Harold Wilson. His best mate from school and university was Jewish. Arguments about Labour's policy in Vietnam. Me getting involved in student politics – I joined the International Socialists as a student in 1974 and have remained politically active all my life.

Later on I tried to argue with the Austrian relations about the difference between Soviet "communism" and socialism, from a State Capitalist point of view, but didn't get very far. In the 1970s they were more concerned about my degenerate morals and the length of my boyfriend's hair than about my politics. My political consciousness was honed by this.

One of my grandmother's sisters, Tante Grete,



told me in 1971 that she had been the single anti-Nazi in the family. She had somehow helped to get Jews out of the country in the 1930s. Again, I never followed this up and she died shortly afterwards.

By the early 1970s I had given up arguing with the Austrians but carried on visiting. This was a very loving family.

Of the three Austrian cousins (all five of us of similar ages), the oldest – and our favourite – was Hermann. Like me, he was political, but initially extremely right wing like his parents.

Christina lived in Vienna with the cousins in 1973, and at that time Hermann, at 23, was the most right wing and outspoken of them about the Nazis.

Intellectually, he had worked it all out, read *Mein Kampf* and believed in it totally. He questioned Christina about the race of any friends. There were ribbons on photos of Hitler on the anniversaries of his birth and death.

After Hermann's "conversion", when he started to date Olga, he wouldn't talk about it much and he must have felt very guilty about it.

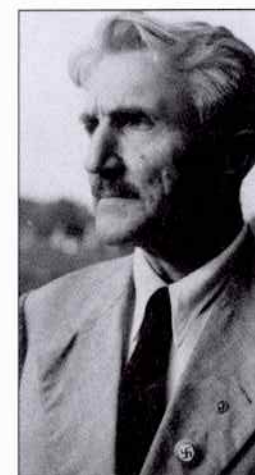
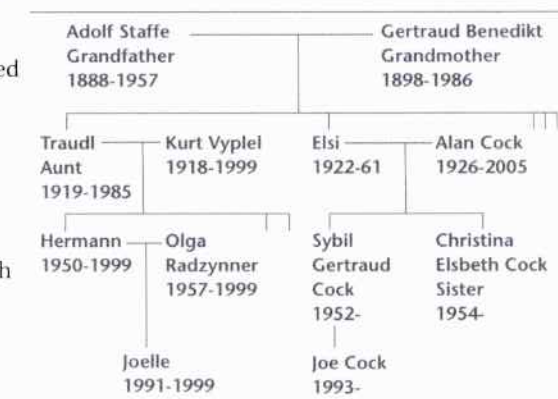
Hermann fell in love with Olga in the mid-to-late-1970s. Olga was Jewish, the child of communists from the Lodz Ghetto. They somehow survived the concentration camps – again I have no details. Olga's parents were remarkable people who showed me notebooks into which, during their time in Lodz, they had meticulously copied Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

Hermann and Olga "lived in sin" secretly from his parents. Neither of his parents would ever "give the hand" (shake hands) with a Jew. *Die Hand geben* is very important in Austria.

Aunt Traudl died in 1985 and my grandmother a year later. Hermann finally felt able to marry the love of his life after all those years.

Kurt became reconciled to the Jew in the family, especially after the birth of his granddaughter, Joelle. Although he retained his virulent antisemitism and

Above: Sybil, right, with her sister Christina, grandmother Gertraud, aunt and uncle (her mother's younger siblings) Below: grandfather Ado wearing a swastika on his lapel



A SLICE

OF JEWISH LIFE



Cousin Hermann and his daughter, Joelle

racism, it was mediated by the fact that he had worked all his life and been forced to mix – he was a well-travelled professional. His wife, our loving aunt Traudl, was a proud *Hausfrau* whose views never changed, even given the huge pain that her racism caused her son.

In 1989, watching television with Kurt in Austria, we saw shots of the First Intifada in Palestine. I had my own reaction but kept it fairly quiet. I was shocked to hear Kurt shout: "Those bloody Jews, they get away with anything!"

We continued to visit Austria, and my son, Joe, became friends with Joelle in the mid-1990s. I talked and talked with Hermann about our family history. Olga transliterated the impossible Gothic handwriting of family letters. We were the "Born Guilty Generation", a term coined by Peter Sichrovsky in his 1987 book, *Schuldig Geboren* – *Kinder aus Nazifamilien* (Born Guilty – Children from Nazi Families).

I don't remember much of these discussions and, of course, wrote nothing down.

The story ended very tragically in 1999, when Hermann, Olga and Joelle were killed in an air crash. Uncle Kurt died shortly afterwards of a broken heart.

I have not lost every link with my Austrian family, my Nazi Auntie League, but there is nobody left that I can talk to. In Vienna, a city I loved, especially with my cousin Hermann, I'm just another tourist.

I am telling this story because I am about to visit Auschwitz. I am not guilty, but the people I loved most as a child were very guilty. It is a hard thing to grow up with. I also know that the constant political discussions in my childhood had a huge impact on my politics. I am so very grateful to my Dad, Alan, for his political sense, even if I still disagree with his views about Harold Wilson and Vietnam.

And the lesson for all of us is to write down stories. Our history is important.

AFTERWORD

Joe and I were delighted to distribute copies of this story to participants on the 2018 trip to Krakow and Auschwitz in Poland organised by Unite Against Fascism, and we were very moved by the reception.

In the summer of 2019 I returned to Krakow, and we visited for the first time to the village in Moravia-Silesia where my family's house had been. It is a Czech village now, with no signs of its large German speaking population.

The church in what is now Kujavy – Klantendorf was the German name, one that resonated throughout my childhood – has an extensive graveyard with some old German tombstones stacked against a wall, none of them my relatives'. One 19th-century German priest of the parish has a memorial at the church door.

In the nearby town we were told that plenty of Germans come, like me, looking for memories, but there are none to be found.

In December 1936, Morris Myer, the editor of the London Yiddish daily newspaper *Di tsayt* (The Times) described a new book as keeping Yiddish culture alive, saying:

This book shows that Yiddish is productive: that even here in London, where Yiddish-speaking Jews find themselves like those shipwrecked on a small island in the middle of a wide English-language cultural sea bubbling with life, it can be productive and creative. Here, the Yiddish word will not be drowned in the huge, steaming English sea, as long as there are people with the passion and desire to express themselves in Yiddish: create stories and scenes of Jewish life in our own language.

The author of the book was I A Lisky, the pen-name of Summer Fuchs. Yehude Isomer Fuchs was born in Yezerna, Eastern Galicia (today Ozerna, Ukraine) in 1899, the youngest of four boys. He had a religious education and went to one of the Jewish vocational schools run by philanthropist Baron Hirsch. By the time Summer was 12, his older brother Avrom was becoming the well-known Yiddish writer A M Fuchs. In 1924 Summer went to join Avrom in the Yiddish literary circles in Vienna and, so as not to be confused with his brother, he adopted the pen name Lisky (Polish for fox).

In 1930, after an antisemitic incident, Lisky left Vienna and came to London to live with his oldest brother in Bethnal Green. He quickly became involved in Yiddish activities, and was enthusiastically adopted as the new young Yiddish writer. He was politically active in communist-leaning organisations, including the Workers' Circle. As well as writing for *Di tsayt*, he co-edited its evening edition, *Di ovent naves* (Evening News), and was on the editorial board of the communist journal, *Yidish*, together with the poet, Avrom Nokhem Stencl, and essayist N M Seedo. In 1937, a few days after Myer's review, his book of short stories, titled *Produktivizatsye* (Productivization – pictured right), was published. Six of the stories are set in Eastern Europe, six in London. Despite Myer's exuberant introduction to Lisky's book, his review continued with stern criticism, and let's not forget that Lisky was on the payroll of *Di tsayt* at the time:

I think that Lisky has one big failing, he is too one-sided. He belongs to a well-known school, and is totally bent in that direction. In Lisky's opinion, the entire struggle both between different people and within an individual is a product of economic relations, class interests and class tendencies and strivings. He hasn't yet risen to a level where he can look more deeply into human psychology.

Yiddish reviewers were known to be stern critics, but Myer's words are somewhat unfair. Lisky was an active communist and anti-fascist, and of course these views are paramount in his work, yet his writings are far more nuanced than a polemical tract. He was at pains to show the

complexity of ideological positioning. His characters, both Jewish and gentile, struggle to find ways to live that speak to their politics and give them a sense of self worth. We do meet characters who are very certain about their beliefs, but the main characters are generally in the process of forming their views and changing their minds.

Take the title story *Produktivizatsye*, which concerns Sam Stricker, a poverty-stricken, uneducated tinsmith, his (unnamed) wife and their eldest son Abe. Abe has been offered a scholarship to study medicine and the story concerns whether he should take the scholarship or become a worker. Sam's mantra is that a worker must be productive, which excludes becoming a professional. However, his gut tells him that it's more complicated, and he struggles to make a decision. When Sam goes to pay his rent, his landlord proffers: "Really it's better for Abe to work with you in the workshop. Times have



changed, you see, Mr Stricker. I've read in the papers that we Jews have too many educated children. Hitler and Mosley weren't completely wrong in the slogans they declaimed. It's us ourselves who are guilty. We push ourselves forward too much in the eyes of the world. Jews must become workers."

When Sam goes to hang out in his usual restaurant, the owner Mr Gradel tells him: "We mustn't let our children study today... They slave away and work themselves to death before they've finished studying, and subsequently they are superfluous to society, like in Germany. Jews have to be productive, become artisans or work on the land."

Sam's wife is the frustrated pragmatist who sees studying as a way out of their poverty, and in exasperation asks him: "And you are a worker Sam.

And are you doing well?" Sam refuses to listen to her, and takes her to Gradel's restaurant to be convinced by the communist activist, Vogman. Here in the restaurant we meet Lisky's fictional East End workers of a range of political persuasions: Mr Spiegel, the Zionist, is a regular, although he is unpopular amongst the left-leaning customers for constantly going on about Zionism with his "Hebrew blathering" and because he hobnobs with the Anglo-Jewish wealthy Zionists in the Zionist Federation. Yet Spiegel raises his status when he puts down a more unpopular restaurant regular who is making fun of Vogman. And then we meet Vogman, who holds his politics and anti-fascist activism as a badge of honour. He is well informed, and he puts forward opinions and answers questions with conviction. We hear about anti-fascist events in London: a meeting held by the British Union of Fascists in the Albert Hall; a large public event at the Olympia Hall in Hammersmith; and a counter-demonstration in Hyde Park. To Sam's dismay, Vogman is irritated with Sam's indecision, and he ultimately endorses Sam's wife's opinion, which prevails at the end.

Lisky's writing often includes events that occurred in 1930s London, such as the anti-fascist meetings mentioned above, which feel documentary-like in their detail. In other stories, he describes the noise of the fountain in Trafalgar Square during a demonstration of the hunger marchers; the intensity of the lights and the uncomfortable and itchy wigs in a story on the making of the film *Jew Suss* with East End extras; and the emotive atmosphere of Zionist nationalism in Lyons Corner House in a story of capitalist speculation on buying land in Palestine.

You get the sense that Lisky was there as participant or observer, and it gives his stories an almost autobiographical immediacy. So too with his frustrated female characters who are usually the ones with a strength of conviction, in contrast to the muddled and uncertain male characters. We can see the influence of Lisky's powerful and fiery life partner in the writer N M Seedo, the pen name of Sonia Husid, who was a formidable intellect. Friends of the couple relate stories of them as older people, having divorced and remarried, sitting on a bench in the park near their home in Stoke Newington, aggressively arguing about politics.

Lisky's dedication to Yiddish lasted throughout his life. He co-edited *Di idische shtime* (The Jewish Voice) and published his own newspaper, *Dos yidische folk* (The Jewish People) from 1966 until 1988. Lisky was a regular at Stencl's literary circle, Friends of Yiddish. The *Jewish Chronicle* obituary in 1990 called Lisky "one of the country's last significant Yiddish writers ... whose optimism about the future of Yiddish was an inspiration to young students of the language."

Quotations are translations from Morris Myer, "Dertseylungen fun I A Liski," *Di tsayt* 30/12/36 and "Yehuda Lisky", *Jewish Chronicle*, 11th May 1990. Lisky's stories are translated in *London Yiddishtown* (see review on page 29).

A vibrant Jewish writer in 1930s London brings to life the ethical and political debates of the time, as **VIVI LACHS** explains

Lisky's book of short stories, *Produktivizatsye* (Productivization),

With thanks to Ian Birchall for coining the phrase Nazi Auntie League in 1982.

I could not have written this without the help of my sister Christina.

This is my story, however, I have written it for Joe, in the hope that he will understand his family better than I did mine.

Even-handed to a fault

LABOUR'S ANTISEMITISM CRISIS: WHAT THE LEFT GOT WRONG AND HOW TO LEARN FROM IT
David Renton
Routledge,
£19.99

David Renton, a left-wing barrister, is definitely a good thing. This book, unfortunately, is not. It accuses "very many people on the left" of "causing reckless offence" to British Jews, and encourages them to "to talk to the people you disagree with, not in a spirit of score-settling, but from the hope that you might change their mind".

This might be sound advice if we weren't in the middle of two wars. One of them is the attack on the left of the Labour Party, which has been going on for decades but became particularly vicious when Jeremy Corbyn became leader in 2015. It is now common knowledge that right-wing members, MPs and paid employees of the party worked ruthlessly to undermine Corbyn and his allies.

The second one is the war waged by fanatical supporters of Israel in the Jewish community against Jews who refuse to fall into line. This too is not new: admittedly, things have changed since I grew up with a JNF collection box in every Jewish home, a prayer for the State of Israel in the Shabbat service, and the routine assumption that "the Arabs" were barbaric Jew-haters who wanted to destroy "the only democracy in the Middle East" where Jews had "made the desert bloom". Friends and relatives flocked to help the Israeli army in 1967. Over time it dawned on me and other Jews that the Jewish state had always been based on racism and ethnic cleansing, and that Jewish institutions in the diaspora had been morally corrupted by Zionism. The invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was a turning point for many of us. Some of us disengaged from these institutions, while others began to challenge them.

The response of the Board of Deputies and their ilk was to become more stridently pro-Israel. Rabbis gave learned sermons about "The centrality of Israel" (pronounced as a single word) as a key part of being Jewish. The prayer for Israel is now followed every week by a blessing for the Israel Defence Forces. Communal Jewish organisations regularly denounce Jews who do not line up behind Israel as self-haters, "Jews in name only", and "fake Jews".

When Corbyn was elected Labour leader, these two groups of bullies joined forces to destroy him. His principled opposition to the invasion of Iraq and his support for Palestinian rights made him a serious threat. Key figures of the Labour right, like John Mann and Margaret Hodge, joined forces with Mike Katz of the Jewish Labour Movement and Stephen Pollard, the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, to accuse Corbyn and his allies of antisemitism. The accusations were eagerly amplified by the

mainstream media, including the BBC and *The Guardian*.

Renton seems to think that these people would have been amenable to rational argument if they had been spoken to nicely. I doubt it. He writes that Pollard "is cited several times in this book for the care he took to expose left-wing antisemitism". This is surely rather generous given that since 2018 the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the misnamed and feeble "press regulator" created by the billionaire-owned corporate media, has found the *Jewish Chronicle* to have breached its code of practice on at least 28 occasions. The paper has also lost, or been forced to settle, in at least four libel cases over the same period. Almost all these failures involved fabricated accusations of left-wing antisemitism. When Corbyn spoke out earlier this year against a visit to Britain by Viktor Orbán, the openly antisemitic Prime Minister of Hungary,

Pollard tweeted: "Oh just FUCK OFF you Jew-bating racist". Careless (that should be "baiting") and perhaps a little uncaring ...

Renton tries to be the even-handed scholar, standing above the fray, criticising the Labour right as well as the left, the Jewish Labour Movement as well as Jewish Voice for Labour and the JSJ (lovable David Rosenberg gets short shrift). I have learned to distrust this tired trope, but quite apart from that, when thuggish bullies, supported by the media, join forces to attack socialists, the time for even-handedness is probably over.

There is, of course, antisemitism in the Labour Party. Research suggests that it is far less prevalent than in the wider society, but anti-Jewish sentiment has been around for so long that it would be miraculous if the Labour Party avoided it entirely. Some socialists are tempted by the many conspiracy theories about Jews. Of course we must challenge these. The harsh truth, though, is that most of so-called left antisemitism is the discomfort that some Jews feel when a core part of their Jewish involvement is held up to the light and condemned. When those Jewish attack dogs insist that opposition to Zionism is always antisemitic, it can look like a way for mainstream Jews to escape from that discomfort.

The plain, sad fact is that the Jewish community has become corrupted by decades of Zionist propaganda. This corruption is eating away at the community from the inside. The main thing that the Labour left got wrong was not to recognise the extent of the corruption. It is also the main thing that David Renton gets wrong in this book.

Raphael Salkie



A poignant picture from the inside

"Yiddish is having a bit of a moment," a *Jewish Chronicle* columnist said to me about two years ago on one of Vivi Lachs' "Great Yiddish Parade" walk-and-sing-alongs through the East End of London. It was hard to know how to reply. If I'd been quick-witted enough, I might have said: "Have you been to Stamford Hill recently?" The thousands of Haredi Yiddish-speaking Londoners in Stamford Hill are but a small part of the maybe 500,000 to 750,000 Yiddish speakers throughout the world (a growing population, with a plethora of journals and an increasingly strong online presence – check out *Yiddish24.com*, for example). But I knew what was meant: that it was hard to ignore the recent growth of interest in, and celebration of, Yiddish in the secular world.

But maybe that last sentence has just a tiny bit of exaggeration; it's really quite easy to ignore Yiddish in the secular world, unfortunately. A good example can be found in the recently-released set of essays and articles, *Age of Confidence: Celebrating 20 years of Jewish Renaissance*

(www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/shop/age-of-confidence) This is not to criticise the wonderful work of *Jewish Renaissance*; it is simply to note that in the essay on British Jewish Literature there is not a word about Yiddish writers except for a reference to "the (now forgotten) Yiddish culture of the East End" (brackets in the original). The Yiddish writers Katie Brown, Arye Myer Kaizer and Yehuda Itamar Lisky, who are the focus of Vivi Lachs' book, were all writing and communally active in the period covered by the essay, as were the various theatrical, journalistic and literary circles within which they moved. But they seem to be all part of the "now-forgotten Yiddish culture of the East End" (though not if Vivi Lachs has anything to do with it!).

Published by Wayne State University Press, you could be forgiven for thinking that *London Yiddishtown* might be a rather dry, academic work, but quite the opposite is true. It is full of the humour and good-natured mockery which is typical of Lachs' three writers (Brown, Kaizer and Lisky). Publishing their stories in the popular Yiddish newspapers of the day, the writers reflected the foibles of the community they knew so well, with all its jealousies, pomposities, absurdities and contradictions. Lachs has chosen to present translations of 26 short stories which typify the range and output of each of her three writers, providing poignant, humorous and illuminative illustrations of the Yiddish-speaking East End in a variety of contexts, from family squabbles over naming children to fighting the Blackshirts on the streets.

For example, there are Kaizer's tongue-in-cheek descriptions of the various social strata of Yiddish-speaking society in the story "The Whitechapel Express", aka London bus number 647, which runs from the allrightnik neighbourhood of Stamford

Hill to the docks via Commercial Street. Or Lisky's story, "Productivisation", in which a couple nervously consult someone who everyone considers to be a Bolshevik, about whether their son should become a worker or take up a scholarship to become a doctor, and receive an unexpected answer. Or Brown's story "Krismes Presents", where the narrator's children are so insistent on having a Christmas party, and Christmas presents, that she takes them to a Chanukah charity bazaar, with unfortunate consequences.

London Yiddishtown helps the reader begin to understand from the inside the seismic changes occurring within the Yiddish-speaking community centred around Whitechapel between 1930 and 1950, where the largest concentration of Yiddish speakers in the UK could be found at that time. The major themes that emerge in the stories centre around the relationships between women and men, and between different generations, acculturation and antisemitism, and responses to the role and extension of Zionist ideas.

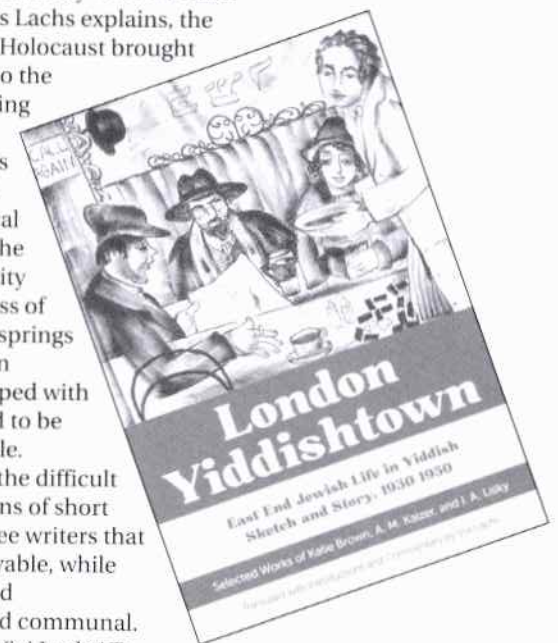
In addition to the lively translations (benefiting from Lachs' period as a translation fellow of the Yiddish Book Centre in Amherst, Massachusetts), Lachs provides an engrossing 40-page section in the book which describes the literary landscape of the three writers. For example, central to many pre-war communal Yiddish activities was the Workers' Circle Friendly Society, with its main venue in Great Alie Street. Brown, Kaizer and Lisky were all either members or spoke there. As Lachs explains, the Second World War and the Holocaust brought both physical destruction to the fabric of the Yiddish-speaking East End (for example, the Workers Circle building was badly damaged), as well as emotional and psychological devastation to so many of the Yiddish-speaking community who had to deal with the loss of family, friends and the wellsprings of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe. How the writers coped with all of that and still managed to be creative is utterly remarkable.

Vivi Lachs has achieved the difficult feat of producing translations of short stories from each of her three writers that are both amusing and enjoyable, while also sketching their lives and circumstances, personal and communal. *Yasher-koyekh* (well done), Vivi Lachs! To everyone else, read the book – *un hot hanoie* (and enjoy)!

Steve Ogin

Vivi Lachs writes about Lisky and his writing on page 26 of this issue of *Jewish Socialist*.

LONDON YIDDISH-TOWN – EAST END JEWISH LIFE IN YIDDISH SKETCH AND STORY, 1930–1950: SELECTED WORKS OF KATIE BROWN, A M KAIZER, AND I A LISKY
by Vivi Lachs
Wayne State University Press,
£23.50



New traditions for turbulent times

THERE IS NOTHING SO WHOLE AS A BROKEN HEART: MENDING THE WORLD AS JEWISH ANARCHISTS
 Edited by Cindy Milstein
 AK Press, £15

Cindy Milstein is a long-time activist, and the author or editor of several excellent books including *Anarchism and its Aspirations*, a short and engaging primer of anarchist thought. *There Is Nothing So Whole as a Broken Heart: Mending the World as Jewish Anarchists* is an anthology of essays, rants, poems and artworks – there's even an annotated Purim spiel and a rabbinical rumination on Jewish time.

At the core of this book are two powerful, consistent threads. The first is positive: the emergence (or, better, resurgence) of distinctively Jewish dimensions within contemporary anarchist communities, primarily in the US. Milstein and the contributors to the book identify trends in this resurgence, including celebrations of Yiddish and Ladino languages and cultures, religious practices reshaped around feminist and queer identities, and anti-Zionist and antifascist organising. This last trend points towards the second powerful thread: the murder of 11 Jewish congregants at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh by a white supremacist in 2018.

The shock, grief and rage at these murders flows out from chapter after chapter. The Rebellious Anarchist Young Jews (RAYJ) Collective created artworks and held an antifascist Shabbat to mark the anniversary; Jordana Rosenfeld joined the Pittsburgh Chevre Kadisha; they and many others held a radical shiva in the street to prevent President Trump's motorcade from reaching the synagogue. In the chapters and artworks of this book, the Tree of Life massacre becomes a thing to be held up, remembered, sung about, and cried over. Milstein reflects on Joe Hill's defiant slogan, "Don't mourn – organise!" and the sense of futility around both of these:

[G]iven the magnitude of the new forms of brutality that we face, there's a palpable sense of despair about the possibility of organizing ... And even if we wanted to mourn, we come up against another contemporary conundrum: the theft of our traditions around grief – whether from colonialization and capitalism or, relatedly, Christian dominance – and thus the loss of knowing how to grieve well or at all, much less in community with others.

At the end of *Nothing So Whole as a Broken Heart* one is left with a powerful impression that for many Jewish anarchists, primarily but not exclusively in the US, the reclamation of Jewish rituals and the building of open, loving communities around these practices has opened up spaces for both mourning and organising.

Amongst many other things, *Broken Heart* is a

powerful celebration of ritual – both Jewish and anarchist. As Jay Tzyia Helfand writes, "Our rituals are tools to carry culture. They offer technologies for us to wield our power, channelling legacies of resistance. They invite us to drop into our feeling and longing, moving with precision and spirit toward the world that we're fighting for." For the contributors to this anthology, rituals are tools to build and sustain communities, to circumscribe spaces and times, to experience with the body, and to build into memory. And rituals, like traditions, can be recreated to serve new purposes: in "Ritual Technology For a Liberated Future", Jay Tzyia Helfand offers a ritual for transgender Jews to follow when taking estrogen or testosterone, including lighting a candle and reciting *Shehecheyanu*, the prayer for new experiences. There is radical potential in old rituals too, like the messages of liberation in the Pesach story. Yael Leah and Yaelle Caspi describe a seder held outside Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection. rosza daniel lang/levitsky lists additions to the traditional seder plate: the beetroot, the orange, the crust of bread, and olives to represent Palestinian solidarity.

There are so many wonderful stories and treats in this book. Ali Nissenbaum's "Ghosts of Lublin: Memory and Grief" is an engaging tale of contemporary Holocaust tourism, Zionism and Polish nationalism, heritage and diasporas. Milstein's own "Antisemitism Hurts" reads like a punch in the gut. Ami Weintraub's reflections on the shootings at the Tree of Life, where she worked, draws on her family history in Russia at the time of pogroms to recognise that beneath the thin veneer of assimilation in American Judaism there remains a rarely acknowledged cultural resilience to violence and trauma. The papercuts, posters and paintings by artists including Jay Saper and Wendy Elisheva Somerson pepper the book with new and old Jewish image-making traditions turned to radical ends.

How refreshing it is to read a book in which Palestinian solidarity is assumed, if not taken for granted. In which left antisemitism is treated as an unpleasant everyday reality rather than a divisive political football.

This book illustrates a few dozen different ways of living an angry, ambiguous, difficult relationship with Jewishness and the defiant pleasures of conjuring up distinctively Jewish atmospheres within radical spaces. I cycled across town in the rain to buy it and read it more rapidly and hungrily than any book I can remember. I lent it to a Jewish anarchist friend with the sense that I was prescribing a cure for something. I have recommended it to anarchist friends who are not Jewish and now I recommend it to Jewish comrades who are (perhaps) not anarchists.

Gabriel Moshenska

ASK THE RABBI

In the early years of *Jewish Socialist* we had a regular popular column called *Don't Ask the Rabbi*. Our rabbi took a sabbatical for around 25 years to consider a difficult question, gave up on it, and has now returned to resolve problems for today's troubled readers

Q: I am an observant Jew and keep kashrut. I love Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Is it true that it is no longer kosher?

A: Yes. After their decision that they will no longer sell their product in Greater Israel, I have determined that this ice cream can no longer be regarded as kosher. You may think that the ingredients alone determine this. You are wrong. As always it is our holy books that reveal the answers we are looking for. You will see that there are 10 letters in the name Ben & Jerry's. The 10th letter in the Hebrew alphabet is Yod: י

You will note the Yod resembles a melting ice cream and doesn't sit erect on top of a cornet. It is weak and turns away from the word of G-d. This is a divine message that this ice cream is treyf.

Don't despair. There are other ice creams. Forget Ben & Jerry's. Why not try Binny and Benny's – a coalition of beautiful flavours that

somehow seem to merge into something very familiar. Or there is Burnt Olive Tree – an ice cream made by West Bank settlers and a great favourite with our brave soldiers from the IDF. But for a truly kosher ice cream do try Jesus-is-our-Lord-Milk-of-Christ made by the Evangelical Church of World Deliverance, North Carolina. Pure white vanilla only.

Q: We wondered if there were any technological devices you could recommend for a 21st century Jewish home?

A: Can I suggest some "smart" candlesticks manufactured by Pegasus. Just plug them-in to your router and make sure you type in your router password. The Shine-a-Light-on-You candlesticks remind you to light the candles when Shabbos is due, play music, and they are interactive.

We love Tzipi our source of good information. Only the other

day one of our children wanted to know the meaning of the word Nakba. "Ask Tzipi," we replied, and so they did and found out it is a work of fiction and that anyone who uses that word is an antisemite. Did you know there are lots of antisemitic words and phrases like "the Palestinian People" and "Palestinian self-determination."

For extra home security why not try Elbit's doorbell. Unlike other devices that show who is at your front door this doorbell creates an iron dome around your doorstep in case an existential threat tries to push a leaflet through your letterbox during an election campaign.*

*STOP PRESS: Elbit's doorbell has been temporarily withdrawn from the market as the heat-seeking missiles are not able to distinguish between a Labour Party canvasser and the postman.



Ten Nights Since They Killed George by Mark Tilsen

from *There is Nothing so Whole as a Broken Heart*

Somewhere between sitting vigil and shiva
 I sit and watch
 call and text
 did you make it home yet
 are you okay
 they're shooting people on Live
 Lake Street is burning
 From DC to Boston
 Chicago Minneapolis Austin
 Denver Oakland SF and LA
 Waiting for people to get out of jail to check in
 as if worry had its own gravity or power
 I see the hot takes and counter hot takes
 movement critiques
 I feel the smallness of my opinion and I'm grateful for the awareness
 I stand down when I can hear the morning birds sing
 whispering my heretic prayer for my friends and loved ones
 live
 live
 live

Mark Tilsen is a Lakota Jewish poet, educator, water protector and sommelier of memes.

THE ARCHIVE IS COMING!

We are excited to announce that the Bishopsgate Institute in collaboration with *Jewish Socialist* is creating a digital archive for this magazine. Every issue will be available to search by issue, author, subject or keyword in an attractive and accessible way.

Jewish Socialist magazine was conceived in 1984. The first issue, produced with cow gum, Letraset, galley proofs and scalpels, came out in spring 1985, and it was groundbreaking. We had an enthusiastic reception which has never waned. In recent years we have seen a wonderful blossoming of confident Jewish radicalism and flourishing Jewish countercultures.

Jewish Socialist now finds

itself among a constellation of progressive initiatives that are reflected in our pages.

You will be able to go to the *Jewish Socialist* page on the Bishopsgate Institute website or follow a link from the JSG website and immerse yourself in radical, secular Jewish material from spring 1985 to the present.

We would like to thank Stefan Dickens and the team at Bishopsgate for all their work in developing access to this wonderful and rich resource. The first 25 issues will be available in a few weeks with the rest to follow.

Look out for announcements on the *Jewish Socialists' Group* website, Twitter and Facebook for a launch date and details!