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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.

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No 78 Summer 2023 £3



WARSAW 2023 NEW NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE



■ Repression in Berlin ■ Protest in Israel ■ Daniel Kahn interview ■
■ Rosenberg execution 70 years ■ The new wave of eugenics ■

WHEN THE GHETTO FOUGHT



On 19 April 1943 the first significant urban revolt against the Nazi occupation of mainland Europe began. Led by some 700 young Jewish fighters, the heroic resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising lasted almost a month until 16 May.

The entire Ghetto population of 42,000 Jews was rounded up by the SS, and in November most were executed in a two-day shooting exercise.

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EDITORIAL

The American writer, Wright Morris, was a harsh critic of those focusing excessively on history. "The past is useless," he wrote. "That explains why it is past." That's not our view at Jewish Socialist. We prefer Malcolm X's take: "History is a people's memory." A memory that continues to live in the present, especially when past injustices remain unresolved.

Memory is fought over – as it should be. Our approach? To illuminate the past as fully and honestly as we can, to open ourselves to new insights and interpretations but ensure that history doesn't stay in the past. We want to enable that history to live and breathe in the present. We consciously aim to put past activism for liberation and justice into conversation with activism by today's fighters for a better world.

In this issue of *Jewish Socialist* we mark three anniversaries and highlight how they live in the present. Two are intimately connected: the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising which began 80 years ago on 19th April 1943, and the suicide as an act of protest by Szmul Zygielbojm, a Polish Jewish socialist refugee in London, on the night of 11th-12th May 1943 after the Uprising was crushed.

It wasn't the only factor that contributed to Zygielbojm's courageous final act. On the day the Uprising began, American and British diplomats met in Bermuda. The failure of their 11-day talks to offer any concrete plan to assist or offer sanctuary to Jews under Nazism hardened Zygielbojm's resolve for his final protest.

And when we witness the harsh and disbelieving attitude of

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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the British state towards refugees today, the lack of concern for, or interest in, their experiences, we recognise a longer-term pattern and mindset.

A delegation of London-based Jewish socialists who visited Poland during the 80th anniversary commemorations, were struck by the efforts of today's activists, curators and campaigners to shift the focus away from the most obvious physical heroism towards more mundane everyday acts of resistance. We have captured some of those insights in our special seven-page section in this issue, starting on page 14.

The other anniversary we mark in this issue is from America 70 years ago, in 1953. The electric chair execution of two Jewish communists, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, convicted on charges of conspiracy at the height of America's McCarthyite Red Scare, despite international protests. They left two orphans, aged six and 10. One of the Rosenberg's grandchildren, Jenn Meeropol writes in this issue (page 6) on the work of her organisation to honour the memory of what her father and grandparents experienced, through a project that makes a real difference to the lives of people today impacted by state repression of activist members of their families.

We also report on the crackdown by Berlin police on demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinians (page 12), and share personal perspectives of left-wing Israelis in harsh times (pages 8 and 10).

We hope you find it a stimulating issue of *Jewish Socialist*.

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Cover photo: Commemorating the everyday heroism in the Warsaw Ghetto, April 2023. Courtesy of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews/Danuta Matloch

CHANGE
THE
WORLD

Right to Remain, formerly the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC), is a small, practical charity which helps migrants to the UK navigate the legal system so they can stay in this country. The team works with communities, groups and organisations across the UK. They provide information, resources, training and assistance to help people to establish their right to remain and they also challenge injustice in the immigration and asylum system. Their vision is "a world in which everyone can exercise their

right to remain with dignity and humanity, where they need to be".

The charity is known for its Right to Remain Toolkit – a comprehensive and straightforward guide to the UK asylum and immigration system. The Toolkit is free to use and is regularly updated to reflect changes in the law.

Their core team, based in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Halifax and Glasgow, consists largely of people who have been through the asylum system themselves, often after struggles lasting many years. They are

assisted by a network of volunteers and their contacts in Bail for Immigration Detainees (BIDS) and other related organisations.

The current head of the organisation is Eiri Ohtani, a Japanese-born woman whose Twitter profile describes her as "bad-tempered". She writes that when she got involved in challenging immigration detention 10 years ago, there were only two MPs whose support could be counted on – John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn.

Information and contact details at: <https://righttoremain.org.uk>

Letter from Chile – unkept promises

On 11th September in Chile we will commemorate 50 years since that fateful day when our democracy succumbed to our own army's treason, with the approval of big business and powerful families, and co-operation from the US government. A bloody civilian-military dictatorship was established through violence and state terrorism that lasted 17 years. On many levels its legacy continues.

Thousands of people were executed or "disappeared" during and after Pinochet's coup, including some Jews. Our research of names from different Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Chile has produced a list of 20 people. Our group – Agrupación Judía Diana Aron (AJDA) – is named after one of those who was executed. Most of these 20 people were politically involved with Allende's government or took part in the underground fight against Pinochet's dictatorship.

Left-wing Jews supported Allende's government but the wider, mainly conservative, Jewish community was a different story. Some left Chile when Allende won the elections in 1969. After the coup, you would see representatives of

the Junta in a synagogue on important festivals. Families of Jews who had been taken by the secret police asked Jewish community leaders to help find them or set them free. They were denied that help.

While it is true that the Israeli Embassy gave some visas to a number of Jews and non-Jews, Israel was one of the first states to recognise Pinochet's regime. When much of the world called for a boycott of his bloody regime, Israel started to sell them weapons and provide special forces training.

Many of us had seen the Popular Unity process and President Allende's leadership as a beacon of hope, bringing a socialist and democratic government that sought to generate profound social transformations so that all Chileans could live with dignity, enjoying the fruits of their own work and the natural wealth of their country. We believed that the new government led by Gabriel Boric, a young president who vindicated Allende's last words in his victory speech and had a transformative discourse for society, would finally throw out the 1980 Constitution drafted by neoliberal conservatives collaborating with Pinochet.

The mostly centre-left governments that followed the dictatorship had only "reformed" this constitution but we were optimistic that the conditions were now in place for the changes we longed for to materialise. We imagined until not long ago that the context for this year's 50th commemoration would be more promising. But Boric's government has been very weak. It was badly hit by the extreme right's triumph in the plebiscite for the constitutional proposal, and the mechanism for drafting the new constitution has a majority of extreme right delegates.

This will not offer Chileans the structural changes they need to break with so much injustice. Fifty years after the coup, despite all the unkept promises, Chileans will have to continue fighting to make Pinochet's legacy disappear, and to build a fairer, more equitable society. There is a lot of work ahead.

Claudio Mandler, member of AJDA

AJDA is organising a panel event in August commemorating the 50th anniversary of the coup and the struggle against it. Check the JSG website, www.jewishsocialist.org.uk for updates.

WISEWORDS

"The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, true and false, no longer exists."

Hannah Arendt
from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Spanish Civil War: new law brings recognition for descendants

Since the fall of dictator Franco, the Spanish government has passed three laws that acknowledge and, in some measure reward, republican fighters and now, since last October, their families too.

A high proportion of Brigadistas – volunteers for the International Brigades who fought for the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War were Jewish and, my family and I, as the daughter and grand-daughters of a Brigadista, were very happy to receive this news.

A brief history of the legislation

The **Spanish 1977 Amnesty Law** came into effect in 1977, two years after Franco's death. The law freed political prisoners and permitted those who had been exiled to return to Spain. But it also guaranteed impunity for those who had participated in crimes during the Civil War

and in Franco's Spain more generally.

The Act institutionalised Spain's "pact of forgetting" – a decision among Spanish parties and political actors, during and after the Spanish transition to democracy, not to address atrocities committed by the Spanish State. The 1977 amnesty has been criticised by scholars for equating "victims and victimisers" and for shielding human rights violators from prosecution and punishment.

Law 52/2007, commonly known as **Historical Memory Law** (*Ley de Memoria Histórica*), recognises and broadens "the rights and establishes measures in favour of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship". Descendants of those who fled the country during the Civil War between 1936 and 1939 could now get Spanish citizenship, as

could those whose grandparents fled Franco's dictatorship, which lasted from 1939 until 1975.

Surviving foreign fighters were also awarded Spanish nationality (see photo). My uncle Sam Lesser received his. My father, Frank Lesser, had died some years previously and descendants were not recognised at that time. However, at a meeting with the then Spanish ambassador, I raised the question of posthumous recognition – and here we are!

The new law enacted in 2022 is known as the **Democratic Memory Law** and includes provisions for the following:

- Education for students regarding the dictatorship
- Nullification of military rebellion convictions from 1936 to 1938
- Creation of a registry for



Frank (left) and Sam Lesser in Barcelona 1938

victims of the dictatorship who were buried in unmarked graves

- Abolition of titles of nobility that were created by the dictatorship
- Spanish citizenship being offered to descendants of Spanish exiles who were born before 1985.

The new law is particularly pleasing to us as it returns to us EU citizenship. And every time we use our Spanish passports we will be reminded of our anti-fascist heritage.

Judith Lesser Cravitz

Windrush 75: a bitter-sweet anniversary



The Jewish Socialists' Group released a strong statement of solidarity on 22nd June, the 75th anniversary of the arrival in Britain of the *Empire*

Windrush, which brought hundreds of Caribbean people to London.

We wrote: "The boat was full of people excited to be coming to the 'mother country' to work, rebuilding Britain after the Second World War. They came full of anticipation, expecting a warm welcome. But many were given the cold shoulder – not just by the climate but in the form of hostility from many British people, who denied them homes as tenants or abused them as neighbours. While we celebrate the diversity introduced by the arrival of people on the *Empire Windrush*, we cannot forget the racism they met."

Describing how many newcomers were concentrated in low-paid, segregated work,

it said that the "clue to this contradiction lies in the ship's name – *Empire*. The *Empire* was, by definition, nationalistic and rooted in notions of white supremacy.

"Most of the people who came at that time planned to work in Britain for a few years before returning to the Caribbean more economically secure. Some did, but most stayed, despite the racism and hostility ... partly because low exploitative wages meant they could not earn enough to return for a better life."

Worse would follow as the community were "sitting on a legal timebomb. Many did not know that they had to legalise the citizenship and residency status of their children. Decades later, people were asked for passports and other documents they did not possess in order to get a job, medical treatment and benefits. A huge and painful struggle was fought in the courts and on the streets before the Government changed the law."

We highlighted an unexpected connection in the ship's history: "Built in Germany in 1930, it was used by the Nazis ... to deport Jews from Norway on the first part of their journey to Auschwitz. Later captured by the British, it was refitted and

renamed post-war to transport people from the Caribbean to work in the UK."

The statement acknowledged how the "Labour Government of the 1940s and the Tories in the early 1960s developed laws and processes that permitted the entry of much needed labour to rebuild the country and fill low-paid jobs but would discourage those workers from settling longterm."

The Tory government's Hostile Environment became "the experience for many Commonwealth migrants since *Windrush* through to today's asylum seekers and refugees."

But the statement finished optimistically: "... a powerful resistance has been growing. Trade Unions that had previously been ambivalent, even hostile to migrants, are today saying to the Home Office: 'Defiance Not Compliance'. We in the Jewish Socialists' Group stand in unity and solidarity with those who came on the *Windrush* 75 years ago and in the years that followed. As we reflect, too, on the role of this boat in the horrors of the Holocaust ... we strengthen our resolve to fight racism and fascism in all its guises, and encourage all, across and beyond our diverse Jewish community to do so too."

You can read the full statement at: www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/news/item/a-bitter-sweet-anniversary

REPAIR WORK

JENN MEEROPOL is the director of an organisation that nurtures and supports the children of activists, and young activists themselves, who are targeted by the authorities. She joined us by video from the USA at this year's Jewish Socialists' Group Seder to tell us about the state-inflicted tragedy in her family that inspired the Rosenberg Fund for Children and describe its visionary and restorative work

My name is Jennifer Ethel Meeropol. I am a granddaughter of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; my dad, Robert, is their younger son. I am the Executive Director of the Rosenberg Fund for Children (RFC) – a non-profit foundation my father founded in 1990. We provide for the educational and emotional needs of the children of targeted progressive activists and targeted activist youth.

While the RFC is a public foundation, it was inspired by personal family history. In 1950, when my dad was three years old, his father, Julius Rosenberg, was arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit espionage. A few weeks later his mother Ethel was arrested on the same charges. They were tried, convicted, and when my dad was six and his older brother was 10, their parents were executed. That was 70 years ago this 19th June.

My grandparents were poor, young, Jewish radicals and communists in the midst of a Red Scare. I'm not going to talk much more about their case, but there's a fair amount of additional information on our website. Instead, I want to focus on my dad's and uncle's experiences as children in the aftermath of their parents' arrest, and how that led to the creation of the RFC and the work we do.

Given the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era and the significant press coverage of the case, it's not surprising that my dad and uncle experienced significant challenges after their parents were arrested and charged. They bounced around for a few years: family members were scared to take them in, so they lived with family friends and spent time in a shelter, lived for a while with their grandmother, and then an orphanage before being adopted by Anne and Abel Meeropol.

As bad as this was, it could have been worse. A community of people rallied to their defence and donated money so they could attend progressive schools and camps, receive therapy and participate in creative and artistic programmes. And their parents' attorney took the boys to visit their mom and dad in Sing Sing prison to try to maintain those family bonds.

In many ways, this was a Rosenberg children's fund before there was a Rosenberg Fund for Children. That's where the RFC's mission springs from. We reach out to families who are living a nightmare



Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in the park, c 1942

similar to the one my dad and uncle survived, and help their kids in the same way the movement helped them.

Who does the RFC help today? Since my dad founded the RFC in 1990, we've awarded more than \$8.5 million to aid thousands of kids. Currently we help about 200 children by awarding grants of over \$400,000 each year. Many of the grants are for artistic or creative programmes: art, dance, drama, music, because we recognise the healing power of art. These opportunities for creative expression can provide a safe harbour for young people in difficult circumstances.

Over the past few years, as we've reviewed applications from people asking for our help, we've heard from immigrants' rights leaders forced into sanctuary or deported in retaliation for their efforts; Black Lives Matter activists who've been fired; anti-pipeline protestors who were attacked; a community leader evicted from the restaurant she turned into a gathering space for homeless and low income members of her rapidly gentrifying community; a young athlete who was harassed and bullied for taking a knee to protest racial injustice and police brutality; organisers who were fired or harassed or both for fighting for a living wage at Amazon and Walmart, Starbucks and other job sites; and many others.

We ensure our beneficiaries anonymity and are committed to protecting their privacy, but I can share a few stories with you about some of our recent grantees.

For several years we awarded grants to a

young woman who grew up as the child of activists. Her mother was an advocate for the environment and animal welfare, as well as civil rights. She was at home with her mom when someone fired a bullet into their house, missing her mother by inches. Two years later, their house was set on fire while they were away. RFC grants allowed her to buy a computer for college and paid for counselling to help her process the trauma of the past few years.

We've been providing support for a number of years for Simon, now 15, who has spent almost his entire life watching his dad suffer with terminal heart failure, a direct result of his activism on a Reservation where he worked to protect tribal members from chemical attacks. Simon's dad was deliberately exposed to life-threatening chemicals in retaliation for his organising. Simon has suffered greatly seeing his dad struggle through multiple hospitalisations and surgeries, and has had a very hard time with anxiety. He has recently discovered a love for skiing; last winter an RFC grant allowed him to continue this healing activity.

My dad coined a phrase I love to describe the RFC: he calls it his constructive revenge. For him, it was about turning negative into positive.

For me, my work at the RFC is first and foremost a way of saying thank you to the thousands of people who organised and sacrificed in very scary times, and sometimes at real personal risk, to provide a community of support for my dad and uncle, and help make it possible for them to become the healthy adjusted people (and wonderful parents) they are today. I'm so grateful to them and glad for the opportunity to carry forward their work and hopefully be part of providing a similar supportive community to kids from very different backgrounds facing similar dark times today.

Find out more

Rosenberg Fund for Children: www.rfc.org

For more about the history, look under the Rosenberg Case menu for a factsheet, timeline or key dates and information about the Exonerate Ethel campaign that was launched by the RFC in 2016 and which the organisation hopes to restart later this year.

You can also join the mailing list and donate to support the work of RFC via the website or on social media.

FROM WHERE I'M STANDING

Treating the Holocaust as a thing apart is not only divisive but obscures the mechanisms by which ordinary people are dehumanised, says **CHARLOTTE PRAGER WILLIAMS**

It's hard as a Jew of Eastern European Jewish descent not to be immersed from time to time in the documents and imaginings about my wider family's experience of the Nazi years. When I was born in 1950, it was only five years since the end of the war and only two or three years since displaced relatives had been traced



and started their journeys to new homes, new countries and of coming to terms with the trauma that had devastated their whole existence. Probably about half of what would have been my wider family lost their lives, and most of those who didn't were displaced. Learning about the slowly emerging truths and coming to terms with these losses, experienced painfully and often speechlessly by my parents, was part of the fabric of my childhood. It has to be said also, that living amongst those who survived, inside and outside my family, is one of the richnesses of my childhood.

My mother grew up in eastern Germany with no knowledge that she was Jewish as she was brought up a strict Lutheran. She left in 1939, aged 20, and never saw her home again. One of her sisters was murdered in Treblinka; their mother survived Theresienstadt – she came to my parents in London in 1945 weighing six stone. My father was a Latvian Jew but was educated in England. Many members of his family were massacred in Riga or Libau (Liepāja); others, whom I knew as I was growing up, found ways out. When my father discovered that his mother had been shot into a pit, he was traumatised, and my sense is he never forgave himself for not getting his parents out.

So I've read, researched, visited mass graves and memorials and where my parents each came from, tried to imagine the world that was theirs from seeing the little that remains. I've taken "never again" into my being and taken action to ensure that it doesn't happen again. But only to Jews? This has never been the importance of it for me.

The theme of Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) in 2023 was Ordinary People. It's a clever title because it encompasses perpetrators and victims, all of whom were once ordinary people. It hints at a fresh look at how we polarise good people and bad people – very dramatically so in the current era – and reveals what kind of a society and what power structures enabled the mass slaughter. It potentially enables us to examine polarisations of all kinds that we live with in the present, from good Jews (Zionists) to bad Jews (diasporic socialists), from zero-tolerance policies to free speech, and definitions of gender, sex and sexuality. It should open up respectful dialogue; it should make us brave enough to confront the humanity and inhumanity in each of us.

It won't do these things, of course, because the Holocaust has taken on the identity of a thing apart,

and this is what I find hardest to swallow about the commemoration we now have at the end of January each year.

It was edifying to look at the HMD website, where each year's theme is carefully recorded. The organisers have clearly put a lot of thought into encouraging us to learn not only about but also from the Holocaust and have done this in very creative ways. To take a few themes at random, we have The Dignity of Difference in 2007, Don't Stand By in 2016, and Torn from Home in 2019. But despite this, my perception is that in our national consciousness, Holocaust Memorial Day really is about the Jewish experience in 1930s and '40s Europe. This exceptionalising does untold harm to the sufferings of other peoples in the past and present. It damages relations between Jews and other minorities. It stymies discussion throughout the western world about the cruelties inflicted on Palestinians, and as we know, accusations of antisemitism are powerful enough to render impotent a whole generation of socialists.

In Germany in particular, the need to repair past wrongs has led to a culture in which the Holocaust has become what Holocaust Studies theorist, Michael Rothberg, has described as a "unique event in the nation's memorial landscape". The harm of focusing on its uniqueness, rather than on what features it shares with other genocides, is that no other cruelty or oppression can be considered in the same breath. Nor may we examine the underlying conditions that make racist oppression possible, something that the Cameroonian historian, Achille Mbembe, discovered to his cost when he tried to look at the Holocaust in the context of racism resulting from slavery and colonisation. In Germany, the conflation of antizionism with antisemitism has become even more rigid and divisive than it is elsewhere, with anyone remotely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause being censured uncritically.

Earlier this year in Berlin, a Jewish activist was convicted for illegally attending a demonstration in support of Nakba Day. The police had prohibited public displays of support for Palestinians on and around this day. Palestinians were harassed, attacked and detained by police, and one ended up in hospital. This oppressive crackdown on support for Palestine in Germany is widely attributed to shame over the six million murdered in the Holocaust – itself a conflation of Jews with Israel/Zionism. But Ramsy Kilani, a Palestinian who was detained and fined after the Nakba protest in May 2022, believes its real purpose is more sinister: to keep intact the economic benefits of Germany's relationship with Israel.

The extreme position taken by Germany is only a step away from what may become normal in all the other countries and institutions of the world that have adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The terrible irony of Germany being in the vanguard of this deeply divisive and discriminatory movement is harmful both to Jews and to other racialised groups.

A THREAT FROM

ITAMAR SHAPIRA is a guide with Green Olive tours, a company of Palestinians and Israelis offering real and online tours covering the history, culture, and political geography of Palestine and Israel.

In his anthropological research at Haifa University he joins a younger generation of Israeli activists in the West Bank region of Masafer Yatta, who live in, and operate from, a Palestinian village. They stand alongside the Palestinian residents resisting eviction and the demolition of their homes. He paints a sombre picture of the politics, prospects and challenges within and beyond Israel and Palestine.

This article is adapted from a presentation given at a Jewish Socialists' Group meeting in December 2022.

Speaking to the British Jewish public I want to focus our conversation primarily on the future of Palestinians, who really are at risk now, not only in Masafer Yatta but also in the Jordan Valley, Khan Al Ahmar and area C in general. While area A includes the densely populated Palestinian city centres, area C is the outskirts of the cities, or the surrounding villages, where the settlements are. These places suffer daily raids either by violent settlers or the military or both, and are under a concrete threat of confiscation of their land and removal of their villages. These are the areas that can more easily become Judaised – Arab-free – as part of the colonisation project.

It is hard to predict how the last elections will influence the situation on the ground. During most of 2022, for example, Israel had a so-called liberal government which even included an Arab party for the first time, and it was perhaps the deadliest year for Palestinians for a long time. Not only the deadliest year, but also the year in which the Supreme Court allowed itself, for the first time in 15 or 20 years, to rule that the area of Masafer Yatta, which includes more than a dozen villages and hamlets, was illegal, and that the villages there could be demolished in order to create a military training firing zone. I suspect the Supreme Court waited such a long time before making this ruling last spring, because it wanted to balance Israel's hawkish image in the international community, created by Netanyahu, with the Court's more liberal stance. While the government was praised by the international community for being "liberal" or "dovish", it was a good time for the court to appease the right-wingers and the military by allowing the removal of a chunk of Palestinians from their land.

Although we are looking at the dreadful government being formed as we speak, we should also remember that the segregation of Gaza was the policy of a so-called left-wing liberal government. The Nakba of 1948 and the 1967 occupation, the first settlements, the annexation of East Jerusalem, the removal of all the Palestinians from the Jewish Quarter and the Wailing Wall Plaza there and so on, were all carried out by the Labour Party. It is therefore hard to say how things will turn out.

So we have to make a distinction between the symbolic things – what parties are in power, what politicians say, what politicians want, the identity of

politicians based on the groups that vote for them – and what happens on the ground. It seems very hard to connect the events on the ground with the larger symbolic political events, like parties and decisions. Sometimes the elections being won by one side can actually manifest in a reaction on the other.

In Israeli politics, when we talk about left and right, we're largely talking about elitism and non-elitism. Groups who are more connected to Europe and America, to international institutions, academia, journalism, hi-tech, art and so on, are described as "left", and they are usually Ashkenazi. They may or may not define themselves as "left", but the tag "leftist" is usually used today as a derogatory term by right wingers. The implication is that the people who are "really Israeli Jewish", "real patriots", are defined as the right. So, the right-wing is effectively the mainstream, and the terms "left" and "right" more or less align with "elitists" and "patriots". It has nothing to do with socialism or liberalism or anything like that. We shall see soon how the voting of this ultra-right-wing government will play into this social divide.

So what will this new far-right government do? Will the elites react against them, make things less bad, mirroring the situation we had during the last year of a "left" government that kills more Palestinians? Or will this far right government be worse? The danger facing the Palestinians is that the violence is coming not only from the military and the border police, but also from settler-like militias or mobs on the ground, and this is happening both in the West Bank and inside Israel as well. In the violent chaos of May 2021, we saw Jewish militias joining forces with Jewish settlers and the military and the "border police". They have extended the realities of the Occupied Territories into Israeli mixed cities of Arabs and Jews.

The military and the settlers have now become more aligned than ever. A decade or so ago, when we, as Israeli anti-occupation activists, encountered soldiers in the Occupied West Bank, they mostly attempted to stay non-aligned with either us leftists or too much associated with the settlers. Although far from being non-biased, they were not completely synonymous with the settlers. This has changed. In recent years, more commanders and officers on the ground below a certain rank identify

ABOVE AND BELOW

their mission as being the same as that of the settlers. This means not just protecting the settlers and enabling them de facto to take over more land but still concerned with security above all, but now, increasingly, these commanders see the expansion of the settlements along with the confiscation of more and more land from Palestinians and limiting their movement as a divine mission, imbued with religious fundamentalism.

The very high ranks in the military have a different alignment. They are usually the elites that understand the importance of maintaining the Israeli façade of a state that is deeply concerned with not violating human rights, which has the "most moral army in the world". This façade is a game that defines us as being in the West, along with other countries playing the same game. Removing this mask may mean cutting relations with international bodies that make the elites' life so comfortable. It may also mean that they, the officers responsible for indiscriminate bombing in Gaza and other war crimes, could be arrested on their shopping weekends in London or Madrid. A government that pulls off this mask is a danger to them, however they don't necessarily control what happens on the ground when radical settlers and radicalising soldiers merge to raid a Palestinian village.

My greatest fear is something I do not say lightly, but it is something we have seen in many settler colonialist cases: genocide. In many situations – I would even risk saying in most situations, including the Holocaust – they have started from the ground up, with the high ranks only later adopting the horrific massacres that coalesce into intentional genocide. The people who have just elected Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right Minister of National Security, are the ones who usually want to see security and revenge. In a segregated style of living, with inter-group violence and with one side having all the power and the other none, security means getting rid of the Palestinians.

The Zionist "left", namely the elites, is usually more segregated and lives further from Palestinians. They are therefore able to avoid thinking about this question. This political camp is completely irrelevant when it comes to protecting Palestinians. So the situation is frightening. I do not know what forces will stand on the ground when raids will become bloodier than they are now. Other than a handful of Israeli and international activists, hardly a few dozen, the Palestinians in area C are defenceless. Some of them may take up arms, but few do it now; and, of course, this is not a way to



Settlers strolling with an assault rifle. Photo: SM Palestine - Flickr. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14526155>

defend people but rather escalates things further.

The real danger of a genocide is when the world is busier with greater wars – like the one in Ukraine. I believe that European Jews, should perhaps forget for a moment about their Jewishness – about their connection to Israel as Jews – but instead focus on the fact that, as Europeans, they are connected to the war now happening in Ukraine. It can easily escalate. This approach has more significance than whether we have a right-wing or left-wing government in Israel because governments of both colours are based on the same idea of separation from Palestinians, of pushing Palestinians out of their places, of actually defining secure areas as those that have no Palestinians in them. And this is been the case since 1948, the Nakba, up to today. Both right or left governments can easily find themselves engaging in massacres, mounting up to systematic ethnic cleansing or worse, when the mobs and militias on the ground take control of the public spheres.

The really dangerous encouragement may come from beyond Israel/Palestine. Now between five and 10 Palestinians are being killed every week and we have two, three, four, 10... houses are demolished every day. In a larger war, with Iran, or an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, this could turn into something that I'm afraid to even imagine – but I am forced to. Israeli society and the state of affairs in the country has never been so ready for a genocide and we must say this out loud. Therefore, one thing I can ask Jews outside to do is to focus not only on Israel (even if I understand and appreciate your connection to the country) but also on your role as Europeans to push for the war in Ukraine to somehow come to an end before it leads to a larger conflagration.

Find out more

There is more information about Green Olive Tours, how you can join their tours and ways to support them, at <https://greenolivetours.com>

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DEMONSTRATING FOR WHAT?

MICHAEL SAPPPIR, an Israeli who now lives in Germany, analyses the protests in Israel, and assesses the political prospects

There's a crisis of hegemony in the Israeli political system. It's been very difficult for any party to form a stable majority, which is why we have these endless rounds of elections. But in the last election, for the first time, there was a clear majority for a bloc that, for now, seems pretty stable. That's this terrifying far right bloc, which includes the most radical parts of the Israeli right wing, large parts of the settler movement, and all the ultra-orthodox parties.

It's been very tricky for them to form a majority; any party that jumps ship could shift the balance of power. Any of the parties in this coalition could have changed sides and gone with the slightly less right wing opposition, but instead they've committed to this course.

One key aim is to institute measures that will weaken the judiciary and ensure Netanyahu's personal future, because he is at the centre of a series of corruption investigations. He seems to have concluded that he can't win this on entirely fair terms, so he has to try to change the system to avoid it removing him from power permanently or even locking him up. It's obvious why he and his base in Likud want that, but it's less obvious why the rest of this coalition want it. For a lot of them, it's instrumental: they see him as a good figure to unite around for their purposes.

What's interesting for us on the left is what those purposes are. These are really scary things. The Kahanists are still pursuing the basic fascist, genocidal programme laid out by their founder Meir Kahane. This proposes that all non-Jewish people in Israel/Palestine should either be expelled or utterly subjugated and neutralised as a political force. Bezalel Smotrich is now both Finance Minister and, in an unusual arrangement, head of the Civil Administration which administers Palestinian life in the West Bank. He laid out his long-term programme in 2017 in the Decisive Plan, saying that all the Arabs in Israel/Palestine would be offered a choice between giving up any struggle and demand for collective rights, and emigrating with assistance from the state of Israel, and that those who refuse these options will be dealt with militarily. Asked if that would include women and children, he said, "Yes."

They also have an extremely regressive agenda for Jewish Israeli society: a kind of fascist theocracy that will roll back all gains for women and gender and sexual minorities. They're hardcore reactionaries in every sense. There are slight differences between the different streams of the far right in this government but, by and large, this agenda unifies them.

Worryingly, a lot of the other parties in the coalition are also on board with it – not necessarily having it in their programme but in terms of what their base will support. Much of Likud is aligned with this; and in the ultra-orthodox parties, alarmingly, Kahanism has become the mainstream political view. The Haredi communities don't actually vote for the Kahanists because they are under pressure to continue voting for their own community leaders. But during this crisis a lot of young Haredis have secretly voted for the Kahanist parties and there isn't a huge political difference between them.

It's important to be aware of all these agendas that unite the coalition. A lot of the opposition has focused on things like maintaining the rule of law, and oversight and independence of the judiciary, but they're scared to talk about why the far right wants to undo these liberal mechanisms: because it wants to push through its agendas without a judiciary standing in the way.

This doesn't only affect Palestinians and Jewish Israelis; another burning topic for the far right is the tiny population of refugees in Israel. Between 2013 and 2019, the government implemented cruel policies that caused a lot of asylum seekers to return to the countries they had come from, where many of them have died. But there are still tens of thousands that these people want to get rid of.

These are the reasons why the far right wants to de-liberalise the political system. The protest movement and the current opposition bloc are united in opposing these immediate moves, but much of the opposition supports the right's basic agenda. Some parties in the opposition just want a kind of orderly, well-regulated implementation of the same basic idea that the far right have, of enshrining Jewish supremacy through extreme violence, but with some checks and balances. In contrast, the far right wants to empower their militias and the settlers to carry out this genocide bit by bit, and, as the situation arises, just shoot Palestinians on the street and with impunity.

So it would fracture the opposition to talk too much about what the right wing actually wants to do once judicial oversight is removed. This is why, despite months of protest during which the left has consistently, courageously and correctly tried to draw attention to these issues, the opposition constitutionally doesn't focus on this in case the more right wing elements in the opposition give up their concerns about the rule of law and run to their brethren on the right, who will then have a permanent majority.

There's no visible participation of Palestinians in the opposition on the streets. They've been actively excluded. There are a few Palestinians who feel comfortable with the Israeli flags, but they're a tiny minority. From the beginning, though, there has been a small, radical left bloc on these demonstrations with Palestine flags. On the first demonstration there were three or four Palestine flags, and the more centrist and right-wing elements in the protests massively overreacted by bringing truckloads of Israel flags and flooding the demonstrations with them to create a clear nationalist image.

The radical bloc is often violently attacked from within the protests, to stop them waving Palestine flags or raising Palestinian issues and other radical issues. The bulk of the participants in the protest movement are Ashkenazi middle class and even upper class, from various different political factions. What unites them, though, is what they reject, not what they stand for.

A very unusual stance has been taken by some capitalists, with corporations coming out in favour of the protests. In a dramatic showdown at the end of March, while the Histadrut called strikes,

corporations shut down their businesses to signal that the Israeli economy is not on board with the government's plans. As socialists, we're neither used to, nor interested in, being on the same side as capital. I understand the Palestinians saying: "This does not concern us. It's nonsense. There is no Israeli democracy to be saved, and both sides are the same." But knowing what the coalition are trying to do, it is still vital to oppose it.

Although it's not clear-cut on either side, the base supporting the coalition is perceived as more working class and more Mizrahi than the opposition, and it certainly includes a mass of lower income, non-white, Jewish people. The coalition is adept at utilising ethnic identity politics. Discourses developed on the radical left about 10 years ago have migrated to the far right, taking advantage of the fact that the Israeli establishment has been dominated by Ashkenazim who are, on average, better off. That has been used to create a narrative which says that their proposals to upend the liberal order are about justice for the Mizrahi and creating diversity in the Supreme Court. They're speaking to real resentments. Not recognising ethnic hierarchies, and not making room for the Mizrahi working class is a historic blunder of the Israeli left, resulting in this class resentment being weaponised against the left.

There are lively connections between the Israeli right, the Hungarian right and the Polish right but I think the deeper issues motivating them to de-liberalise the judiciary might be different. The Israeli right has learnt from the practical experience of Poland and Hungary that these changes are possible, but Israel is moving ahead far more quickly than Poland or Hungary, trying to do all at once what took them many years.

The journalist Meron Rapoport says that there's a bitter fight within the coalition about this. Netanyahu is inclined to do things more cautiously and slowly but the more radical wing within his party and within the coalition disagree. Yariv Levin, the Minister of Justice who was spearheading this reform, belongs to this more accelerationist wing. Rapoport even conjectured that Levin cooked up these reforms without telling Netanyahu, and just announced them, forcing Netanyahu either to look weak or to get on board. Even though the coalition is united around what they want to do, the way they want to get there is different. Netanyahu has to constantly triangulate between the opposition and his own radical wing to keep the coalition from falling apart.

This could go very badly, very rapidly, but at the same time there's been a feeling that new space is opening up for progress. I wouldn't be too optimistic – but more people are becoming politicised than ever before. Forms of protest that were marginal are becoming widespread. Part of this is motivated by people feeling that it's now or never: if you don't do everything you can now, you're not going to be able to do anything very soon.

A lot of people accepted the protests for what they said they were in the beginning – about preserving the status quo. But over the months the far left has become more accepted within the protest movement, which is quite a big deal. The fact that so many people have come to tolerate Palestine flags and red flags and slogans about democracy for all is an unusual development. Some



Israeli protesters blocking the road

of these radical slogans, like "Democracy for everyone from the river to the sea", have been taken up by the more mainstream parts of the of the protest. There are people waving Israeli flags and saying that, which makes you wonder what they think it means. They might be thinking about more gender equality than about treating Palestinians as human beings, but these slogans not being immediately shot down is still a step forward.

It's significant that mainstream elements of the opposition have started to talk about radical democratic steps – either starting a constitutional process or passing a Basic Law (these are quasi-constitutional laws) which could enshrine equality as a principle. Again, this is motivated more by gender issues and by the centrist Israeli idea that the Haredis are privileged because they are exempt from military service and receive a lot of social welfare, but it's coming from people like President Herzog and former Prime Minister, Yair Lapid. These are not marginal figures. I'm not optimistic about these ideas being implemented immediately, but this might be the beginning of a process of Israel becoming something more like a liberal democracy, with basic equality before the law, and transitioning out of this ethnically bifurcated apartheid system.

Israelis have been able to maintain a sense of living in a democracy while sitting on top of a military dictatorship by not being forced to deal with these questions at all. There are a lot of ways that such constitutional moves could go wrong, but a lot of vigorous debate would take place about how people want to live with one another. It's hard to maintain this intense movement for months when all you have to offer is: "No to the reforms; yes to the status quo." People weren't that crazy about the status quo to start with, and this has forced them to come up with more radical reasons for rejecting the reforms. Rather than just saying: "Stop the reforms; maintain Israeli democracy," they're saying we need to end these undemocratic judicial practices that are hemming in democracy.

But there are parts of the opposition that can't go there because their agenda is an anti-democratic one. We can't be too optimistic, because the stronger these forces of democracy become, the greater the danger that parts of the opposition will just jump ship and the right wing will have its majority to dismantle liberal checks and balances.

THE FACT THAT SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE COME TO TOLERATE PALESTINE FLAGS AND RED FLAGS AND SLOGANS ABOUT DEMOCRACY FOR ALL IS AN UNUSUAL DEVELOPMENT. SOME OF THESE RADICAL SLOGANS, LIKE "DEMOCRACY FOR EVERYONE FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA", HAVE BEEN TAKEN UP BY THE MORE MAINSTREAM PARTS OF THE OF THE PROTEST.

WIELAND HOBAN of Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East describes the increasingly draconian restrictions on demonstrations by and in support of Palestinians in Germany

PROTEST REPPRESSED

The space for Palestine activism is becoming increasingly narrow in Germany and, since 2022, this has been especially true in the case of events to commemorate the Nakba ("disaster" in Arabic), the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians and the killing of some 15,000 between late 1947 and mid-1948. It was not only a heinous crime, but also a demographic prerequisite for the foundation of a Jewish-majority state, meaning that Israel's creation – like that of other settler colonies – rested on a foundation of gross injustice. Considering the inadequate acknowledgement of these wrongs, which are still routinely denied or minimised in mainstream discourse, often being presented ahistorically, as a consequence of neighbouring Arab countries taking up arms against the newly founded state, commemoration of the Nakba is not only an act of painful remembrance but also one of political defiance. This was especially true in 2023, which marked 75 years since the completion of the expulsions and massacres and the founding of Israel.

The specific repressive measures I will describe here began in 2022, however. Over 100,000 people of Palestinian descent live in Germany, and over 25,000 of those are in Berlin, which has the largest Palestinian population of any European city. It includes people from a great variety of backgrounds, from refugees who arrived from Syria in 2015 or later, to second generation German citizens. This inevitably means that, although the organised Palestine movement is not as powerful as these numbers may suggest, there is a strong base that becomes especially visible at times of military escalation or historical significance. Because of the anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and specifically anti-Palestinian prejudice that is so widespread in Germany, such displays of presence and emotion are considered threatening and run counter to Germany's declared *raison d'état*, namely unconditional support for Israel's "security" – that is, its unchallenged domination of Palestinians.

In April 2022, incidents at two Palestine demonstrations in Berlin – isolated antisemitic slurs and hostility towards people filming – were taken as a pretext for a preventative ban on all events commemorating the Nakba a month later. This was unprecedented; even overt displays of racism and antisemitism at neo-Nazi or Covid denial demonstrations had never resulted in such blanket bans.

Comparing the respective ethnic composition of the different events made it abundantly clear that this was based on racism. This was even expressed plainly in the letter from the Berlin police informing the organisers of several demonstrations that they had forbidden. It cited the danger of "emotionality" among Middle Eastern Berliners, especially after intensifications of violence in Palestine, and the attendant risk of violence towards police and the general public. It is surely nothing unusual for protesters to be driven by emotion, especially when

demonstrating against decades of oppression. As long as they are classified as white Westerners, however, this emotion is not considered a threat. The trope of the "angry Arab", like that of inherently violent black men, was invoked to delegitimise their protest from the outset. The letter also referred to similar expressions of anger in 2021, when the Israeli army attacked the Al-Aqsa Mosque and, following missiles sent by Hamas in response, bombed Gaza once again.

In an attempt to circumvent the ban, the group I represent, Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East, registered a vigil for the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who had been murdered by an Israel sniper on 11th May, in the midst of these events. Since the police could not apply the same racist logic to justify banning it, they resorted to the excuse that this was simply a substitute event, which meant that the same concerns applied.

While these acts of repression took place at an administrative level, the Berlin Police soon showed a more hands-on approach. Two subsequent spontaneous gatherings, flash mobs at which smaller groups assembled briefly with keffiyehs and Palestinian flags, were attacked by disproportionate numbers of police officers, who violently arrested several participants. At the time of writing, some of the resulting charges have been dismissed, but many cases are still being processed. Jewish Voice and the Palestinian group, Palestine Speaks, have meanwhile filed a lawsuit to challenge the bans.

In the light of the 2022 events, it was expected that there would be similar problems this year. And once again, a demonstration some weeks in advance of the commemoration period supplied the state with welcome ammunition.

A group of participants had sung an Arabic song featuring the refrain "death to Israel", and at one point a single protester called out either "death to the Jews" or "Jews are murderers" in Arabic – the exact words were not clear from the video. In the media, this man's call soon grew into the imagined chant of a horde of violent antisemites marching through Berlin, threatening the lives of the Jewish

Jüdische Berliner*innen fordern das Recht auf Erinnerung - AUCH FÜR PALÄSTINENSER*INNEN!

DEUTSCH

In den letzten Wochen hat die Berliner Polizei mehrere palästinensische Veranstaltungen verboten, die an die Nakba erinnern sollen. Diese repressive Politik schützt uns nicht. Nur Solidarität ist der Weg nach vorne. Wir werden als jüdische Berliner*innen ein Zeichen setzen: gegen antipalästinensischen Rassismus und für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden für alle Menschen in Israel. Palästina zwischen dem Meer und dem Fluss! Die Forderung nach Gleichheit ist NICHT antisemitisch - Jüd*innen für Rassismus und autoritäre Politik zu instrumentalisieren aber schon!

ENGLISH

Jewish Berliners demand the right of remembrance - also for Palestinians!

In the past few weeks the Berlin police has banned several Palestinian-organized events commemorating the Nakba. Repressive policies of this kind do not protect us.

Only solidarity is the way forward. As Jewish Berliners we will take a stand against anti-Palestinian racism and for justice and peace for all people in Israel! Palestine between the river and the sea. Demanding equality is NOT antisemitic - exploiting Jews for racism and authoritarian politics is!

Samstag, 20. Mai um 15 Uhr
Oranienplatz, Berlin
www.juedische-stimme.de

VIOLENTLY IN BERLIN



population. There was no intervention from the organisation responsible for disseminating the well-edited footage – a watchdog group called Democ – to correct this narrative, and the alarming spectre created an environment in which a repeat of the 2022 bans was not only likely but would indeed be welcomed by members of the public who may have been sceptical the previous year.

As the first demonstrations were registered, it became clear that the police were taking last year's bans as a precedent: one by one, they were all forbidden. One event planned as a mixture of political speeches and cultural activities was allowed to take place, but the police demanded that any expression of political content be removed, otherwise everything would be shut down. Palestinian food and music were tolerated, but nothing more.

Anticipating that all further events would be prevented, including the large final demonstration slated for 20th May, some Jewish activists registered a rally for joint Jewish-Palestinian commemoration on the same day. We in Jewish Voice put our name to it, and it was allowed to take place.

As usual, there was an immense police presence, and there was also a now familiar group of people filming. Experience has shown that these so-called journalists, who refuse to say what outlets they are filming for even when asked politely, will do their utmost to gather and disseminate footage that will enable any protest to be presented as dangerous and potentially illegal, making it easier to justify further repression. Because of their highly obtrusive approach, which involves getting very close to participants for full frontal shots, there will usually be one or two members who lose their temper and confront them aggressively, providing them with perfect material to demonstrate that the protests are

not only antisemitic and pro-terrorism, but also hostile to the press, creating a clear link to far right events involving intimidation of journalists.

The rally was fairly uneventful until the police kettled part of the crowd, claiming that the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" was forbidden (which it is not) and that the event would be terminated if they continued to chant it. To pre-empt this, the organisers ended it themselves. Nonetheless, the police proceeded to disperse and confront participants, pushing some to the ground and violently arresting them. Considering that the overall justification for their excessive force was the fight against antisemitism, it was notable that the victims of their violence included several Jews. Since the overall motivation for this approach is anti-Palestinian racism rather than genuine pro-Jewish sentiment, however, pro-Palestinian Jews are merely collateral damage.

As if this behaviour were not abhorrent enough, the media simply parroted the lies fed to them by the police, namely that a Jewish event had been infiltrated and disrupted by Palestinian extremists – so we had in fact been rescued, not assaulted, by the police. Even for experienced activists, this level of bare-faced mendacity was new. It is clear that there is more to come, and several politicians have already expressed a desire to ban the "From the river to the sea" slogan. While authorities in other German cities, like Frankfurt and Stuttgart, have shown less restrictive approaches, perhaps because they are less concerned with representing national politics than in the capital, the consequences of such measures would extend beyond Berlin. This makes it all the more essential for activists to insist on the slogan, since forbidding it would be one more step towards an ultimate ban on all expressions of solidarity with Palestinians.

Joint Jewish-Palestinian rally at Oranienplatz, Berlin, on 20th May 2023

WARSAW 80 ZYGIELBOJM

The Jewish Socialists' Group marked the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising by sending a seven-strong delegation to Warsaw during that week to participate in grassroots initiatives with anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigners, including Polish

Jews. We also wanted to mark the 80th anniversary of the suicide as an act of protest by the Polish Jewish socialist (Bundist) Szmul Zygielbojm in London after he knew that the uprising had been crushed. We held an international Zoom

Delegates' Diary

16th April participated in march and ceremony at ghetto monument
17th April Warsaw old town visit
18th April walking tour of ghetto martyrs memorial trail
18th April performance/exhibition Zuzanna Hertzberg on women's resistance during the Holocaust
19th April participated with banner in "Grassroots Commemoration" of the uprising, from Zygielbojm memorial to

Umschlagplatz [deportation point]. David Rosenberg from JSJ read extracts from Marek Edelman's memoirs (in English); Dvora Zylberman from Melbourne Bund among speakers
19th April reception at home of Paula Sawicka from Open Republic (anti-racist NGO)
19th April multimedia projection by Gabi von Seltmann on site of Great Synagogue, Warsaw

20th April informal gathering of left-wing Jews from Poland, Germany, America, Britain
20th April visit to temporary exhibition in Polin Museum: "Around us a sea of fire"
20th April performance/exhibition Zuzanna Hertzberg on Jewish women's participation in Spanish Civil War
21st April Guided walk by Paula Sawicka on traces of Marek Edelman and Michal Klepfisz in Warsaw

FIGHTING FOR OUR SAFETY AND FREEDOM AS WELL AS THEIRS

Irena Klepfisz, New York, remembers the role of Bundists during and after the uprising



It is commonplace to say that the fighters, once they learned of the German aim of liquidation, planned the uprising because they were determined to die on their own terms. But I don't think that was their only motive. I think they were also motivated by the belief that they still had some power to preserve Jewish lives and

to ensure a Jewish future. Surely they must have thought about their friends and relatives hiding on the "Aryan side". Surely they must have believed that the battle inside the ghetto – though doomed – could at least momentarily slow down the German war machine or maybe serve as a temporary distraction, thereby giving those still alive on the other side of the ghetto walls a chance to live one extra day so that perhaps, at some point in the future, they could resume living an ordinary life. In those circumstances, surviving each day was a major victory against fascism...

On 8th May, after weeks of fighting, the Germans surrounded the headquarters of the ZOB, the Jewish Fighters Organization at Mila 18. Some fighters were gassed, some shot. Some committed suicide...

And yet the resistance was not over. Vladka Meed – a Bundist courier for the ZOB, who had been able to slip in and out of the ghetto – recorded how life continued after the uprising. In her memoir *On Both Sides of the Wall* [she wrote]...

... in the autumn of 1943, a small group of us ... gathered for a symbolic celebration of the anniversary of the founding of the Bund.... And although the movement and the life belonged to

the past, it comforted us ... to recall it now ... we recalled the days when such celebrations had been held in vast halls before huge audiences of workers. Now all that remained was pain...

What I find remarkable about this gathering ... is these hidden Jews' refusal to cut themselves off from the past, their insistence on remembering their Bundist roots ... these survivors wanted to remember and to hold on to the ideals and passions of their earlier life...

In his memoir, *The Stars Bear Witness*, Bundist activist Bernard Goldstein provided more details about these Bundists' awareness that the underground needed to continue fighting for Jewish survival and future: "After the ghetto had been destroyed, we faced one urgent task: organizing help for those who were left on the Aryan side..."

At the end of 1943, Bundist comrades set up headquarters in a six-room apartment where they kept all their documents and equipment. Isolated and hiding, they yearned for contact with the outside world... Bernard wrote:

I remember the great joy in July 1944 when the Polish government forwarded to us a microfilm which contained articles from Unser Tsait, the New York Bund magazine... The microfilm was a direct, almost personal greeting from our comrades in America... Using a photographic enlarger, we transcribed all the documents, duplicated them ... and distributed them among the comrades in hiding places. This contact ... reminded us that we had friends ... all was not yet lost...

That phrase ... embodied the hidden Jews' belief in the possibility of a future. And so the resistance continued connecting and supporting those hiding in and around Warsaw. Among them was Hanna Fryshdorf, a survivor of the Ghetto Uprising who'd become a partisan. She was a 22-year-old widow, and nine months pregnant when Bernard brought her back to the city during the summer of the Polish Uprising 1944. But Hanna was soon caught by the Germans; yet she escaped and

WARSAW 80 ZYGIELBOJM

event on 30th April – marking the halfway point between the beginning of the uprising and the anniversary of Zygielbojm's suicide. It featured contributions from a ghetto survivor in New York, Zygielbojm's grandson in Nebraska,

a feminist and anti-fascist activist in Warsaw, members of our delegation in London, and two live songs by Daniel Kahn, an American Jewish musician based in Hamburg. In this section we publish extracts from their contributions.

then went into labour. Bernard hid her in a cellar with other Jews, where, in earshot of the fighting outside, she gave birth to a baby boy, Gabrish, named after his father...

Bernard [later] confessed that a week after Gabrish's birth, he began to fear the baby might endanger Hanna and the group.

I looked down at the shrivelled little bundle in my hands. Surely it was condemned to death anyhow. While it lived it was a burden which might drag its mother to her death. A little pressure from my fingers and all would be over. Before me I seemed to see Gabrish Fryshdorf, hero of the ghetto, rotting in an unknown grave... All that was left of him was this little flicker of life... I laid the baby gently back on its little bed of rags.

I personally know of five child survivors who owed their lives to the devotion and determination not only of their parents but also of their parents' comrades – the infant Gabrish Fryshdorf, the 10-year-old twins Nelly and Wlodka Blit, the six-year-old Elzunia Frydlich and myself – two years old. Bernard Goldstein, Vladka Meed, Marek Edelman, Helena Shefner, Bolek Ellenbogen, his sister Halinka Ellenbogen, Michal Klepfisz, my father – all were instrumental at one point or another in keeping the five us alive –

and these are only the rescuers and children that I can name...

These rescuers took on the responsibility of ensuring our safety while their own lives were constantly in danger ... children were probably the most difficult and potentially dangerous to hide ... there was no blood connection between these incredibly brave, committed souls and the five children I have named. Still, there was a bond between them and us ... rooted in a life with their comrades in the Jewish Labour Bund. They were determined that we children should always know who we are and know about our parents' Jewish life before the war. We were the ones to whom they would pass on their legacy...

It is more common, perhaps easier, to remember unspeakable historical circumstances than to think about the energy, determination and mundane gestures needed for daily survival. History can overwhelm us with its horrors. But remembering the daily heroism of those who believed in and continued fighting for the future should inspire us today as we face the very real threats of fascism around the world. On this 80th anniversary, let us pay tribute to all those who resisted before, during and after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising...

KEEP THE MEMORY OF THEM ALIVE FOREVER

David Rosenberg, Jewish Socialists' Group Warsaw delegation, London, reveals a longer history of resistance in Poland and efforts of commemoration in Britain

The fight on Polish soil against antisemitism and fascism ... began before the Nazi invasion. Majer Bogdanski, a JSJ member from the mid-1980s until he died in 2005, taught us about struggles in 1930s Poland. He joined the Bund in Piotrkow, and was a very active Bundist in Lodz in the 1930s, under what he called a semi-fascist government. From 1936, antisemitic discrimination, calls to boycott Jewish shops, and fascist violence on the streets, all intensified. But so did resistance. The Bund and the left wing of the Polish Socialist Party led that physical and ideological resistance to the Polish far right in the 1930s, and won popular support from the wider Jewish community...

The first shots in the Ghetto Uprising were fired on 19th April 1943. But the Jewish Combat Organization, ZOB, comprising Bundists, Communists and left-wing Zionists, was formally created in October 1942, after mass deportations decimated the ghetto population...

The political organisations understood that the ghetto had entered its final phase.

They urgently needed to start building a



united resistance to make a final stand.

Most underground resistance workers (both Bundists and left-Zionists) operating clandestinely outside of the ghetto, were women. Their role in smuggling messages, goods, and weapons in this period was crucial.

In December 1942, the Polish underground secretly delivered 10 revolvers. They were used by resisters in barricaded positions in mid-January 1942, when the Nazis attempted to restart mass deportations.

Fighting lasted 3-4 days. The deportations were halted. But at a heavy cost. The Bund, especially, lost many fighters.

In response, though, 55 more guns were smuggled in by the Polish underground in late January. Also improvised weapons made in hiding by Bundists such as Irena's father...

Hundreds of starved young fighters ... fought a guerrilla war for nearly four weeks. On 8th May most of the surviving fighters were trapped in a bunker on Mila street, surrounded by Nazis. Most, including their commander, Anielewicz, decided to kill themselves rather than let the Nazis murder them. Some 40 fighters, including Edelman, attempted to escape through the sewers. Thirty-seven of them emerged to continue their struggle beyond the destroyed ghetto.

Edelman's last words in his searing book, *The Ghetto Fights*, published in Polish in 1945, were: "The site where the buildings of the ghetto once stood became a ragged heap of rubble... Those ... killed in action had done their duty to the end, to the last drop of blood that soaked into the pavements of the Warsaw Ghetto. We, who



did not perish, leave it up to you to keep the memory of them alive – forever.”

The book was translated into Yiddish and English in 1946...

He died in

Poland in 2009 – a socialist, internationalist, anti-nationalist, human rights campaigner. Zionist leaders sought to tie the uprising to Israel’s creation five years later, but Edelman, who supported justice for Palestinians, reminded them that in the uprising: “We fought for dignity and freedom, not for territory, nor for a national identity.”

He also challenged another trope ... that sought to elevate the “brave young elite” who were fighting over the already defeated Jews, whom they said “went like lambs to the slaughter”. In Edelman’s view there was no divide; the fighters could not have survived two and a half years in the ghetto without the everyday quiet acts of resistance by the mass of those incarcerated; and those who went quietly to their death with their families showed the same strength as the fighters...

I mentioned Majer Bogdanski earlier. He

often spoke at annual Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorations we organised in the 1980s and ‘90s. In 1991 we asked Majer to focus on a courageous figure who deserved to be better known: Szmul Zygielbojm, smuggled by his Bundist comrades out of Warsaw in 1940 with a mission to tell the West, especially those with the power to act, what was happening to Jews under Nazi occupation. Receiving messages through underground networks, he pursued this mission in different countries. From March 1942 to May 1943 he represented the Bund on the National Council of the Polish Government in Exile in London.

After Majer’s talk in 1991, he asked me, in his beautiful Polish, Yiddish, English, “Should there not be memorial for Zygielbojm in London?” “Of course there should be,” I replied. I promised to help bring this about.

Ageing Bundist survivors in London and younger Jewish socialists (I was one then) began to meet. We decided to seek a memorial plaque...

Through Bundists in America we made contact with Zygielbojm’s family. He had a son, Joseph, who had survived and lived in the US. He was thrilled by our plan to commemorate his father. But we hit many obstacles... It took [several] years for the plaque to be put up. During that time Joseph died, but Joseph’s wife, Adele, their

two sons and their wives, and the next generation came to the unveiling. I spoke of Zygielbojm’s life and death, his enduring messages urging practical solidarity with the oppressed, and reflected on why no memorial for Zygielbojm in London already existed. Zygielbojm, I said, cast “an uncomfortable shadow over how Britain’s military objectives were prioritised. For the Allies it was a costly victory; for the Jews of Europe it was an irrecoverable loss.”

What about Jewish leaders’ lack of interest? I suggested that “Zygielbojm, and the philosophy of the movement he represented, did not fit with Anglo-Jewry’s post-war self-image and values. Too often in our community, material success, high academic achievement, support for Israel, are more prized than contributions to humanity as a whole.”

Esther Brunstein, a Bundist on the Zygielbojm Committee, read Zygielbojm’s suicide letter in Yiddish, and Julia Bard of the JSG read it in English. Adele Zygielbojm, her sons and the Polish Ambassador, Ryszard Stempowski, representing a then more social-democratic Polish government, pulled the curtain rope to unveil the plaque...

In an alarming political climate in Europe and beyond, in 2023, we can remember Zygielbojm by telling his story, sharing his values, fighting oppression, and giving solidarity to those fighting for sanctuary, for freedom and equality.

CELEBRATING EVERYDAY HEROISM

Zuzanna Hertzberg from Warsaw gave a photographic presentation of the initiative she led on 16th April to celebrate everyday civilian heroism in the ghetto. A 150-strong crowd gathered on a terrace above a cinema, in the Muranow district.

The Revolutionary Choir of Cracow sang Yiddish songs there, dedicated to the uprising. A group of women, including Zuzanna, led the march from there to the monument to the ghetto heroes. They carried a cerise floral wreath in the shape of a Jewish star, with ribbons attached displaying words in Yiddish and Polish that celebrated everyday heroism in the ghetto.

We met on this terrace in Muranow for a reason. We were standing on the ruins of the ghetto... on which a new residential district was built after the war... We can still feel what had happened and see what went on there, in a way. A new layer has been added ... the rebirth of the district for the living, and recreation of the urban fabric in what

was, before the war, a living Jewish quarter.

We also met there for another reason: because on the right ... we could see the place where the Great Synagogue stood until 16th May 1943. Today there is a blue skyscraper there. From there on the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a march set off to the first

Participants on the march carried flags with menorahs based on bird designs.

Two monuments were created after the war amid the rubble of the destroyed ghetto, the first a circular memorial by Leon Suzin with Polish and Yiddish text; and Nathan Rapoport’s much larger, dramatic structure depicting ghetto fighters in armed struggle. Zuzanna Hertzberg’s ceremony focused on the neglected reverse side of that larger monument, a bas-relief of Jewish victims, heads bowed, being corralled by Nazis towards the Umschlagplatz – the point of deportation to death camps. Zuzanna describes the content of this ceremony.

post-war memorial designed by Leon Suzin. The words on this memorial are: “To those who fell in the unparalleled heroic struggle for the dignity and freedom of Jewish people, for a free Poland, for the liberation of mankind.” It is located close to the Rapoport monument...

Since the end of the war, no matter

which road was taken and which monument people were going to, this first small one, or the second, which now stands in front of the Polin Museum [which opened in 2013], the commemoration always emphasised those who fought with weapons in their hands. So that’s why I asked people to come ... to the reverse side of the Nathan Rapoport Monument, which has the title: The Last March. And I tried, in a symbolic way, to influence a change in the narrative, changing the way we talk about history – as history written through armed struggle, but also through the persistence and resistance of the civilian population, the heroism of life itself.

I created banners for this commemoration and invited my friends to come with me. On the upper part of each one you can see what was happening *inside* the ghetto and on the lower part, what could be seen from *outside* the ghetto. These photos have not been published before because they were found recently in the house of a descendant of one of the firefighters who took photos of the ghetto as it burned. On the upper part of another banner you see civilian life in the ghetto. The women are laughing, trying to have a normal life, people are celebrating meals together and ... below there is a photo of a carousel (merry-go-round), which was still operating outside the ghetto while there is a huge amount of smoke from the flames of the ghetto...

When the Ghetto Heroes Monument was unveiled in 1948, the white canvas covered the front part of the monument, headed “Combat” ... the title given by the sculptor, depicting people fighting with arms in their hands. The physical act of unveiling took place *only* on that side. This created a pattern where only *this* gesture is repeated... The placement of both reliefs and their meaning could suggest that there were only two options... in opposition to each other – either armed struggle or certain death on the march towards extermination. In fact, both led to the same thing. Both are the story of the same Jewish fate.

We stood on the reverse side of the Ghetto Heroes Monument to

honour the civilians who experienced life in the Warsaw Ghetto, and to build awareness that there are many forms of resistance – that heroism, especially in the extreme conditions of the ghetto, was also the practice of life itself. Armed action was not the only dignified way to survive or

die. It was an act of resistance to find the strength to get up, to fight each day for survival and to try to take care of those close to you – child, mother, sister and anyone else... The act of resistance was to laugh, take care of hygiene and your appearance on a day-to-day basis, but also to enjoy the small things.

Civil resistance was the providing of a meal for oneself and others, the everyday ones, but also those provided by the “community kitchens”, as well as arranging a modest holiday Seder for Pesach. Education was also an act of resistance ... a collective act of those ... teaching and of the students...

According to the concept of this monument by Rapoport, on one side of the monument, in front of the bas-relief entitled Combat, stood a menorah (candelabra) with lions. On the side, where we stood, the bas-relief entitled The Last March was to be illuminated by menorahs with birds. Interpersonal conflicts caused the author to abandon the bird menorahs. Today we know them only from sketches by Rapoport’s close collaborator, Jan Ostrzewski who created the architectural designs of the monument according to the artist’s drawings and guidelines. The lack of candlesticks, and consequently, of illumination for the sculpture was the first step towards the invisibility of the side dedicated to the civilians in the Warsaw Ghetto.

I was able to recreate the menorah with the birds. So when we reached the monument, we lit this menorah with birds, to illuminate this side of the monument ... to remind people of its existence and to make a change in the way we talk about history.

I believe that the choice of birds as guards of the menorahs on the civilian side of the memorial was not accidental. Birds in Jewish tradition symbolise, among other things, human souls going to paradise. That’s why, for the lives that ended too soon, for the souls of those who died in the Warsaw Ghetto, Treblinka, Majdanek and all the other Holocaust sites, I asked Rabbi Joshua Ellis to say the memorial prayer and blow the shofar. The Revolutionary Choir of Cracow sang for us again, and after the rabbi blew the shofar we heard a clarinetist, Pawel Szamburski, who played the *nigun* [tune] dedicated to those who passed away and also to those who survived. At that moment we unveiled the civilian side of the monument.

Then I gave the final part of my speech ... dedicated to current events. Nathan Rapoport said that he wanted to give back, at least in a spiritual dimension, what had been taken away by the destruction. “My task, he said, was to recreate the shadows of mothers and fathers, young and old, so their tragic fate would be remembered by future generations.”



Above: the ceremony at the reverse side of Rapoport’s Warsaw Ghetto memorial. Zuzanna Hertzberg is at the microphone. Far left: Esther Brunstein reading Zygielbojm’s last letter in Yiddish

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We are the next generations ... the depositaries of memory. We carry a piece of their pain, helplessness and anger. For some of us, it's a memory passed on by our ancestors, sometimes non-verbally. The one that, after years of silence, we are trying to stitch together from scraps of recollections and archival material. We are here because they were the heroes and heroines of everyday life.

These are histories, told in our families or in our communities. For others it is the memory of events that should never happen again! Our memory differs but it should not divide us.

Rapoport wrote. "I saw Jewish martyrdom during the occupation not as an isolated historical episode but as a link in a chain of Jewish suffering that stretches back 2,000 years in the form of persecution, oppression, inquisition and pogroms." Rapoport said: "I have tried to emphasise the universal, the enduring and eternally Jewish."

We were all gathered there to

revive, through a ritual commemoration, the memory engraved in the memorial to celebrate the resistance of everyday, ordinary life, but also to realise the message of the relief. Suffering, persecutions, pogroms, oppression of Jewish women and men, this path towards the Holocaust stretched across the axis of time, would not have been possible or would not have taken place on such a massive scale had it not been for the participation, complicity, permission or lack of resistance of the majority of non-Jewish citizens.

Today, the Holocaust scripts are being recreated in front of our eyes on the Polish-Belarusian border. Refugees are unable to come out of the woods and pass unnoticed. Today there is also an "Aryan side" carrying a sometimes lethal threat from its citizens. Sometimes refugees are handed over to the border guards by the local community. There are also blackmailers, who rob the refugees of whatever valuables they have

managed to take with them when there is nothing else left – even family heirlooms.

Border activists find hideouts made by the refugees and build shelters for them where they leave the essentials for survival. When asked for their reasons, those who help answer: "My family saved Jews during the war." Others say: "I help people because my family did not help the Jews."

The mechanisms are similar; the scripts are reproduced. There are and have been no bystanders. We are responsible; we are all guilty. No one expects everyone to go to the border. There are people out there who, by giving up their previous lives and risking their health, provide direct aid. Almost all of us can help the helpers, can contribute to the network of support.

As Marian Turski says: "Let's not be indifferent". This is the motto of this year's commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. So I asked people to break the chain of repetition.

"I CANNOT BE SILENT"

Arthur Zygielbaum, Nebraska, USA, remembers his grandfather Szmul Zygielbojm's courage and devotion to a better world

Ninety per cent of Polish Jews were murdered in the Holocaust... I am a descendent of two of the surviving 10%. When my mother was 16, the Nazis gathered all the Jews from her home town in the town square. She and her older sister were selected to go to a slave labour camp. The rest of her family ... were selected to die in concentration camps. My mother ... endured mistreatment, malnutrition, and long hours of forced labour.

In her later years, she always had butterflies on her clothing, as jewellery, and as decoration in her home. She told us that in the few moments she once had to stand outside and breathe fresh air, she saw a butterfly flit between the ... three rows of barbed wire and electrified fencing surrounding her prison. She wished she were that butterfly so that she could fly away to freedom...

My mother ... wrote, "To have freedom is a privilege. To enjoy freedom is a gift to be cherished."

My father was a newly graduated mechanical engineer. He and his father ... joined a line of refugees trying to get to Warsaw after the war started. The line of refugees was strafed by a Nazi fighter plane. They were separated. My grandfather never knew that his son had survived. My father joined a partisan unit... He came upon a Nazi newspaper in a Nazi headquarters they captured in a small town. The paper included a story about a Jew who committed suicide in London. That man was ... my grandfather, Szmul Arthur Zygielbojm.

My grandfather was a socialist leader in pre-war Poland ... a labour leader and on the city councils of Lodz and Warsaw. He



Ambassador Ryszard Stemplowski, Paul and Arthur Zygielbaum and their mother, Adele at the unveiling of the plaque in London.

was later appointed to the Judenrat, a Jewish council organised by the Nazis to help them control ... the Jewish population. He argued against the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto... He was invited to ... SS headquarters for "high level discussions." He was marked for death.

The Jewish underground tried to get him out of Poland... He travelled by train from Warsaw through Germany ... to Belgium. He then went to Portugal and travelled to the United States. Sponsored by Jewish groups, he travelled this nation telling the story of what was happening to the Jews of Europe...

In 1942, my grandfather was asked to travel to London to

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become one of the two Jewish representatives in the Polish Government-In-Exile. His job was to receive intelligence from Poland about what was happening to the Jews... He was charged with telling the Allies... about the horrors in Europe so that they would do something to save Jews. He was met by disbelief...

Jan Karski, a Polish Catholic, brought him a letter from ... the Warsaw Ghetto... The letter said that the last remnants of Jews were being killed. It demanded that my grandfather take any action he could to inspire the Americans and British to try to save the Jews.

My grandfather met with British and American representatives. They listened politely... They gave many reasons on why they could do nothing.

During the night of May 11, 1943 ... Szmul Arthur Zygielbojm committed suicide in the hope that this would shock the Allies into action...

My grandfather's suicide letters said, "I cannot be silent... By my death I wish to make the final protest against the passivity with which the world is looking on and permitting the extermination of the Jewish people..." Through events like today's commemoration, his cry is not silent...

The Holocaust is but one of the 15 genocides that killed 100,000 or more people since 1900... Genocides are not limited to Jews. As Jews, we are admonished to "Never Forget". We ... feel a sacred obligation to honour the ... millions of Jews who died during the Holocaust. We also commit to help prevent future Holocausts and genocides. So, while we must "Never Forget",

there are things we must "Always Remember".

Always Remember that the Holocaust didn't start overnight. The Holocaust was enabled by over a decade of messaging, banning books, controlling information, taking discriminatory actions, and making changes in law and ... government... Most Germans were good people... mesmerised by distortions of fact, by the creation of false dangers, and the promise of easy answers to eliminate those dangers...

Sadly, we are confronted with false information and misleading easy answers in our politics ... in the United States and many other countries, especially those where the political pendulum has swung far to the right.

We must Always Remember to seek truth, facts, and real solutions to real problems.

Always Remember that any action that discriminates against any group of people ... will eventually hurt all of us...

Always Remember to celebrate the survivors... Celebrate the strength of Jews ... who fought in the many uprisings including in the Warsaw Ghetto, and the strength of courageous people who tried to help the Jews...

in the horrible desperation of my grandfather's last moments ... he wrote, "I wish that the remaining handful of several millions of Polish Jews could live to see the liberation of a new world of freedom and justice... I believe that such a Poland will arise, and that such a world will come..."

A statement of hope... Cherish hope. Cherish freedom. For they, too, are sacred obligations.

THOSE WHO STAYED IN HIDING

Sue Levi Hughes, JSG Warsaw delegation, London, reports on a poignant temporary exhibition at Warsaw's Polin Museum

Around Us a Sea of Fire is an exhibition put on by the Polin Museum that focuses on the perspective of those that were in the ghetto but weren't part of the Ghetto Fighters.

They hid in bunkers and shelters. Rather than obeying the summons from the Germans to go on transports that were headed towards extermination camps, they stayed in hiding.

The opening of the exhibition says: "Their silent act of resistance was as important as the armed combat."

The exhibition comprises of their experiences described in diaries or notes that were picked up during the uprising or immediately after its suppression. The title ... taken directly from a diarist identified only by his surname, Maur...

Reading the testimonies, you are overwhelmed by the range of emotions that they went through – bitterness, kindness, desperation, hope, love, hate, resignation, fear... the exhibition includes the only photographic evidence that historians know of that shows images inside the ghetto ... not taken by the Nazis.

Among these are images secretly taken by 23-year-old Zbigniew Leszek Grzywaczewski, one of the firefighters that the Germans sent to the burning ghetto to

make sure that the fire was contained within the ghetto walls and that it couldn't spread to the "Aryan" side.

He came from an anti-fascist family ... and he must have realised the importance of documenting events... He never spoke to his children about what he had seen and done.

Found only recently in a Gdansk attic, these photographs are complemented by others ... those of Rudolf Damec which show scenes close to the ghetto wall.

"Here's a man who would walk along the eastern stretch of the Ghetto Wall and take photos," says POLIN's Joanna Fikus. "We know that he had great empathy as he offered a hiding place to a Jewish woman in his home – he was deeply moved by



what was happening and he felt a strong urge to document what he saw."

The Polin Museum presents these stories also with today's world in mind—"people whose houses are on fire, who are forced to flee into the unknown, seeking rescue for themselves and their relatives; people who feel lonely, helpless and abandoned."

The exhibition finishes with the words: "Thou shalt not be indifferent".

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WHO OWNS THE MEMORY?

Ruth Lukom, JSG Warsaw delegation, London, describes the “grassroots commemoration” of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that took place a short distance from the official state commemoration hosted by Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party

As we walked towards the Umschlagplatz holding our JSG banner, a Polish woman approached us. “Thank you for your work and being here”.

She said it several times. Her English wasn’t fluent and she wanted to say so much more. You could tell by ... her eyes... She wasn’t just talking about 1943. We had just come away from the Mila 18 memorial... The small park is now surrounded by newbuild apartments. Behind the elderly speakers, two men appeared on the roof. They casually opened bags and set up rifles. And they were pointed at us. The official ceremony, with its heads of state and prominent officials, was half a kilometre away...

The credentials for attendance there seemed to be either as a member of a nationalist far-right government, or someone in a uniform, or a member of a worthy Jewish organisation that gets invited to conferences by the Israeli government. We weren’t invited to ... the square [where], ... on this anniversary year, huge screens and podiums were erected. A small paper daffodil – chosen as it resembled the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear – was seen everywhere on the people of Warsaw and on the laps of newsmen.

So instead, we gathered ... by the Szmul Zygielbojm memorial. Some of us are quietly critical of the ... ghetto memorials that had been erected. Flat, dark grey, granite slabs that resembled gravestones. But the Zygielbojm memorial is different from the others, and made me stop short. I needed no inscription.

However none of the memorials today were allowed to stand on their own. There were Polish and Israeli flags everywhere ... not placed discreetly, but right up against them like private security guards for a Kardashian. Someone had thought long and hard how to ensure that not a photo could be taken that day

without both the Polish and Israeli states having a starring role.

I murmured my thanks to an anarchist group who held their black flag against them.

Many were furious about the flags and saw it as desecration. “Szmul would be turning in his grave”, muttered one comrade...

We were visiting the Umschlagplatz memorial the previous day when we ran into a large group of young *frum* [orthodox] Jews draped in Israeli flags... None of us wanted to share the space with them ... doubtless the feeling was mutual.

The proud brandishing of Israeli flags is now something you will see every year on ... “The March of the Living” at Auschwitz. The Israeli flag is not the daffodil nor the stone we lay on a grave. It is a celebration of Israeli statehood, which is the posthumous victory we are supposed to celebrate for the mass murder of Jews and other peoples across Europe by the Nazis.

But the flag also denotes ownership. Who gets to tell this story?

In January 2018, the Polish parliament ruled by the far-right Law and Justice Party passed a law that could impose prison terms of up to three years on anyone who claimed Poles had any responsibility for, or complicity in, crimes committed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Academics who dissented were sacked or prosecuted... even Netanyahu’s government bristled, and for a while there were boycotts of visits ... then a compromise was reached...

Israeli youth groups coming to Poland must visit at least one site from a list ... recommended by the Polish government (with the same requirement for Polish youth groups visiting Israel). It also resolved that “organised Israeli study visits may be secured, during their entire stay in Poland, by Polish security guards from private Polish security companies.”

The 16 places recommended



by the Polish side include some that experts say distort Holocaust history and even glorify figures ... responsible for killing Jews.

In July 2022, the Polish Education Minister said: if only Polish guides showed visitors around Auschwitz concentration camp it would avoid historical “distortions”. In the same interview, he claimed that “LGBT ideology” causes depression and suicide among Polish children.

Polish people were asked in 2020: “What do you primarily associate the word “Oświęcim/Auschwitz” with? Forty-three per cent answered: “Polish Martyrdom”.

The one thing the officials got right ... was the... siren at midday – the moment when everyone in Warsaw is reminded of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

As the sound filled the streets, our youth choir – pupils at a humanist school in Warsaw – began to sing *Di Shvueh*, the Bundist anthem that was sung at Marek Edelman’s funeral.

We swear an endless loyalty to the Bund.

Only it can free the slaves now. The red flag is high and wide. It waves in anger, it is red with blood!

Swear an oath of life and death!

As Marek Edelman said in his memoirs “It’s not about giving a testimony of soldiers’ bravery. We were probably brave, and so what. We were defeated. I want to testify about values – men and women, about love and politics, about brotherly bonds.”

INSPIRED BY THE PAST SINGING FOR TODAY

I spent the 1970s collecting vinyl, especially Baez, Bowie, Cohen, Dylan and Marley. By June 1980 I had seen each of them playing live, except Joan Baez whom I saw several times much later. But in the early 1980s I followed a different musical obsession. I sought out Yiddish records, the older and scratchier the better. From exuberant klezmer to revolutionary ballads, I discovered gems. I loved Dovid Edelshtadt’s songs. An immigrant sweatshop worker and anarchist in 1880s New York, he died aged 26 from TB. But what a legacy! His timeless song, *In Kamf* (in struggle) warned the oppressors:

*Ir kent undz dermordn tiranen,
naye kemfer vet brengen di tsayt.
Mir kemfn, mir kemfn biz vanen
di gantse velt vet vern bafrayt.*

You can murder us tyrants,
but the times will bring forward new fighters.
We will fight, we will fight
until the whole world is free.

Some 10 or more years ago, I was in Ilford, at the home of Diana and the late Chaim Neslen. Chaim grew up in Toronto in a family of Bundists. Yiddish was his mother tongue. He put on a CD and asked me what I thought of this track. It was Edelshtadt’s *In Kamf*, but the backing band sounded like The Clash or The Stranglers with a bit of Slade. I was blown away. The singer spat out the English lyrics:

You tyrants may murder or beat us
New fighters will rise in our place
And we’ll fight, and you’ll never defeat us
We fight for the whole human race.

That was my introduction to Daniel Kahn’s music. I loved it. I saw him play live (with Psyy Korolenko) on a magical night organised by jewdas in an East End synagogue in 2015. At our recent International Zoom event for the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Daniel sang his bilingual version of *Shtil di Nakht*, a defiant resistance song from 1942, honouring an act of sabotage by women partisans. Then he sang a darker, more reflective song, *Der Binyen*, by the Yiddish poet, Beyle Shaechter-Gottesman, who died in 2013. It is the title track of Daniel’s new album, produced with his longtime friend and partner in the Painted Bird and the Brothers Nazarov, Jake Shulman-Ment. Jake provides backing vocals and exquisite violin-playing.

So where had his exposure to Yiddish come from? What kind of political and cultural atmosphere had he grown up in?

“My family is pretty deeply Detroit. My mother was born in Detroit, my father in Ohio. My mother’s mother was born in New York, my mother’s father was born in Wisconsin. My father’s father in New York or Cleveland, but even his father was born in New York. It was my great great grandfather who emigrated with the name ‘Cohen’ from Koenigsberg, East Prussia, to New York, so I’m as deeply American as Ashkenazim get!

“My exposure to the Yiddish language was really

negligible. I knew vaguely it was something that my grandmother had spoken. It wasn’t a part of my Jewish cultural or religious education.”

So the immersion in Yiddish came later. But his political identity formed early.

“From my teenage years on, I was increasingly alienated from the Reform kind of suburban, assimilated version of the religion, and from the de facto chauvinism of American middle-class liberal Zionism. I visited Israel for the first time when I was still in high school, and I was pretty organically disillusioned from it, literally without any influence from any kind of public Zionist-critical/post-Zionist/anti-Zionist Jewish perspective, or by general leftist critiques of Zionism, even though I was a budding Wobbly (Industrial Workers of the World).”

Daniel’s family were politically left of centre. “We were all Democrats. My mother – schoolteachers union. We were always pro-union. The things that radicalised me politically were not necessarily linked to any kind of Jewish topic. I was sensitised to labour and anti-racist struggles because I grew up in the suburbs of Detroit. There was a major newspaper strike going on at the time that became violent, and everybody lost their jobs. It was fucking criminal what those companies did.

“I was going to Utah Phillips shows [radical labour organiser, folksinger, poet], listening to Billy Bragg records, The Last Poets and the radical arts movements in Detroit of the 1970s. I was getting into punk rock, that 1980s co-mingling of hip hop and punk rock in New York. I was into hardcore bands and we had a pretty strong 2-Tone scene.”

Different forms of Black music were major influences: “Everything from Fats Waller through the art ensemble of Chicago, Nina Simone. I was into early ska and rocksteady from Jamaica: Desmond Dekker, Toots and The Maytals. I was obsessed with Otis Redding. I loved Mahalia Jackson – spiritual music for a person who’s not particularly religious! Also the Soul Stirrers and Sam Cooke. Later when I got into klezmer I was, like, ok, I could get into Hasidic chant, *nigunim* and *zmires*.”

So when did that klezmer moment happen, and where?

“I had been involved with a Jewish theatre in the Detroit area since I was a kid. That was a space of Jewish cultural collaboration, my foot in Jewishness. But it wasn’t until I was living in New Orleans cutting my teeth as a singer-songwriter that I found myself falling in love with the sounds and texture of klezmer



DANIEL KAHN has gained a devoted following among radical Jewish diasporists for his bilingual versions of Yiddish songs that bring the past sharply into the present, in a style that combines klezmer, punk and Brecht. His new album, *Der Binyen* (The Building) reveals other influences. **DAVID ROSENBERG** spoke with him

music – the New Orleans Klezmer All Stars and the Panorama Jazz Band who played klezmer. I got into the Yiddish language from there.

"I was playing music on the streets – accordion, learning klezmer tunes from friends of mine. That was a way for me to get deeper into the instrument. I did a workshop with Yid Vicious – who win the prize for best band name!

"Then, almost 20 years ago, I went to KlezKanada.

It was the first time I was really in a Jewish cultural space that was welcoming to non-Jews, where it was about the culture and not exclusively about identity. I was also, for the first time, in a space where being Jewish and being critical of Zionism, or being 'other than Zionist' was implicitly tolerated. I could make connections to other people who were questioning. Some of them still faced a lot of backlash from the more conservative 'let's not talk about it'

element there. But that has changed immeasurably, in a more open direction. There's a generational groundswell of folks who are just not buying it any more."

It was partly through KlezKanada that Daniel built a strong personal connection with Theodore Bikel, whose songs and approach to "internationality" were inspirational.

"I met him in 2005, and we engaged very often at KlezKanada. We spent hours talking about translation and interpretation. I hung out with him once for a conference in Vienna, his hometown. We saw each other in California, Boston and New York. He became a real dear person to me, as he was for so many. He also went through a very personal transformational odyssey over Zionism and Israel."

He recorded many Hebrew songs over the decades, but Daniel describes how even Bikel was harshly ostracised later in life for his critical stand. The far-right Jewish Defence League protested outside his show in Toronto.

"I was, like, you fucking *potzes*. Do you have any idea like how much that man did for Israeli culture? His records were the ambassador for the idea of an Israeli culture for decades, and now you're protesting outside of his concert because he gave an interview where he said that we shouldn't be bulldozing people's homes. Like, stop it!"

I asked Daniel about the new album, *Der Binyen*, where another set of musical influences is revealed. It opens with a Yiddish version of Lou Reed's haunting song *Tomorrow's Parties* and closes with a Yiddish take on Tom Waits' classic *Tom Traubert's Blues*. Along the way are Yiddish translations of two Leonard Cohen songs, one Tom Paxton and *My Father's House* by Springsteen. Daniel says he was: "paying homage to the learned elders of English songwriting. I learned guitar playing Beatles songs, Lou Reed, Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan. I learned piano by playing jazz standards and Tom Waits songs. On this new album are songs that have meant so much to me for a long time."

Woody Guthrie was another of those "learned

elders". The album includes a heartwarming collaboration with other singers on a Yiddish version of Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land*. Among a panoply of co-creators and singers, he especially credits Linda Gritz who runs the Boston Workers Circle Yiddish choir.

"She has this incredibly warm, generous, folksy, lefty spirit. She was a natural 'go to' for this. We ironed out a final version of it and we made one of those classic corona videos in the middle of the lockdown, 2021 – everyone singing in their own living room. At the end you'll see Linda singing and my wife Yeva Lapsker and my son Leon dancing around. We released it, just as a video, through *The Forward* newspaper and got Nora Guthrie to sign off on it, registering that as the official Yiddish translation of this song."

Woody Guthrie's daughter, Nora, is president of the Guthrie Foundation. Her maternal grandmother was the Yiddish poet, Aliza Greenblatt. The album version, though, subtly modifies the video version.

"I changed the first line. In the original translation I had: '*kh'hob mir gevandert in a land a frayer*' which can be 'in a free land'. I had originally wanted '*unter hashemayim*' – 'under the heavens'. Someone probably told me that it wasn't so idiomatic in Yiddish to talk about the sky as *hashemayim*. But after January 6th [Capitol Hill], and everything happening in the United States, and George Floyd, I was just so fucking sick of talking about the United States as if it's somehow 'free'. I didn't want to talk about America as place that is any freer than anywhere else, so I put back *hashemayim*. I like it better that way. If there's something high-falutin' about it, my argument is, no one goes around talking about the 'diamond deserts' either!"

My personal favourites on the album include its most optimistic song, *Dos lid fun der molde* – a Yiddish translation from Brecht – and the deeply melancholic *Brokh shtiker* (broken pieces) by Russian/Ukrainian poet Peretz Markish.

"I need to devour more of Markish," says Daniel. "I love his work. That particular setting was done in preparation for a programme I ran in Weimar along with Sveta Kundish and Patrick Farrell last summer, marking the 70th anniversary of the murder of the Soviet Jewish poets. We ran a workshop specifically about setting poems to music. I gravitated to that poem, which relates also to the Springsteen song on *Der Binyen*, about the unrepaired and the irreparable. It was at a time when I was dealing with things that had gone kaput and asking is there a way to move on? To rebuild without the wish to restart? *Brokh shticker* was written during the war and it's impossible to say whether this irreparable shattered mirror is about Yiddish cultural life under Stalin or about the world that was being shattered in the war. It could also have just been about his personal emotional state then."

The album's title song, though – *Der Binyen* – by Beyle Shaechter-Gottesman, is the stand-out track.

"Beyle was a masterful songwriter. She probably wrote it in the 1980s – it's like a dream song or a nightmare song. It's not a *hoys* (house). *Der binyen* is really an *edifice*, and there's this horrible image of a collapsing building. It can be as large or small a metaphor as you need it to be. In those days before your Warsaw Ghetto event, I had been listening to a podcast about the book *Finf yor in varshever geto*, *Five Years in the Warsaw Ghetto*, by Bernard Goldstein. I still haven't read the whole book but certainly his was a name that I knew alongside Marek Edelman and alongside the things that I had heard from Irena

Klepfisz about her family and her survival.

"But I realised I had never really looked at the original source. I spent an afternoon reading through it. I found the part that had been read in English, and the language in the Yiddish was completely different. In that passage there was this mention of their *grandieze binyen vos hot geheysn yidn fun varshe* – that grandiose majestic building that was Jewish Warsaw. And I thought, this isn't the obvious 'go to' song for this type of event, but it gets at the deeply personal loss. It's not about trauma; it's just about massive loss, the human heart of loss. A very human catastrophe. It also connects to now: look at what's happening in Bakhmut and Mariupol – people's lives and worlds being needlessly pulverised."

What is remarkable about the song is that it lifts from the deep sadness and refuses to wallow in it. "Come on, let's dance!" it demands.

"What's more human than that? It's that whole 'hope in despair', 'despair in hope', thing. It needs both of those. Both sides of that need to share the song. I don't think that the point of the suffering is the dancing."

In our conversation, it is clear that when Daniel talks about the Bundists Bernard Goldstein, Marek Edelman, Irena Klepfisz, it is with palpable love and respect for that tradition and philosophy. I asked him about his involvement in a film made by the left-wing Israeli, Eran Torbiner, quite a few years back, about the last Bundists in Israel.

"*S'iz geven an emesdiker koved*. That was a huge, huge honour. It was so wonderful to be among those folks. They would gather there once a week for events. It wasn't all political. They would be literary, they would play games, it was a place for people to shmooze. It was also a great reminder of the complex paradox that is Israeli culture. This generation of Yiddish-speaking Bundists, they're Israelis, critical Israelis. *Lebnsfrag*

[Israeli Bund journal] was a great paper, engaged with totally contemporary topics. There was a lot of talk about how that was really the end of the Bund. Tell that to the teenage Bundists in Melbourne! That was the end of a certain generation of Bundists."

I press Daniel on the extent to which these Bundist themes, with their related concepts of diasporism and crossing borders, are central to what he writes and performs. He crosses borders regularly with this music. Although born in America, he has now lived in Germany for 18 years.

Daniel corrects me: "I was in Berlin, which is not exactly Germany! And now I've been living on a boat in Hamburg for two years, which is more Germany than I thought it would be, but it's also its own world, and I like it. But these themes continue to inspire me, inform me, and guide me, not only in terms of my understanding of Jewish discourses and Jewish politics. That's my way of understanding the broader context of what's going on in the world today, with massive displacement, with so many immigrant communities."

"In the time that we're living in and the times we're facing, there's so much to be drawn from the Jewish experience of diaspora and the oscillations of home-coming and home-leaving. In terms of political signification, I'm not as interested in being a certain kind of 'ist' as I am in certain kinds of 'isms', as a permeable soup of ideas. I want to be able to bask in the wisdom of so many different 'isms'. Woody Guthrie said 'I'm not a communist but I've been in the red all my life!'

"This idea of diasporism – which inherently relates to *goles* [exile] – has to do with seeds and sowing, being strewn. The idea of *doikayt* [here-ness] is related, but it's not the same. Diasporism is about displacement. *Doikayt* is about this-placement. What is 'this place'? For me, right now it's Hamburg, and that's why I'm singing about sailors and rust!"

Der Binyen

Imagine the building you built on your own,
With your very own hands
Out of red brick and stone
No more than a torn old shirt you have worn
Leaving you naked and stripped to the bone

Now imagine your building, familiar and tall,
How it suddenly burns
And collapses and falls,
And you and your hands and your shoulders and all
Lie buried in the ruins of your very own walls

Why just sit and sigh and let your sorrows linger?
Let us dance a tango with entangled fingers,
A tango till the breaking of the dawn,
Warning our souls
With the burning of straw.

Out of what is this building constructed and made?
Just crumbling pieces of hope and of faith.
And what is this binyen standing upon?
This tower of steel on foundations of straw...

Un vos az der binyen vos du host geboyt
Mit di eygene hent
Un mit tsigelekh royt

Iz nit mer vi a hemdl tserisn, eyn tsoyt
Un du shteyst a nakete biz tsu der hoyt

Un vos az der binyen vos du host gekent
Tsefalt zikh gor plutsim,
Tsi er vert gor farbrent
Un du ligst mit akslen
Mit beyde un hent
Bagrobn in di khurves
Fun dayne eygene vent

Vos-she blaybst du
Epes azoy troyerik zitsn?
Lomir geyn a tentsl
Oyf di finger shpitsn
A tentsle glatjin tog arayn
Un varem zikh
Bay der shtroyener shayn

Vayl fun vos iz der binyen geboyt,
Der gebay?
Fun brekelekh hofn un gloybn ay-ay.
Un af vos shteyt der binyen
Un halt zikh azoy?
Vi an ayzerner moyer
Af balkns fun shtroy

Der Binyen is available from
Oriente Musik
<https://www.oriente.de/en/>
Photos: Adam Berry

A PRECIOUS

MICHAEL HEISER traces the life of Vladimir Medem, who formulated concepts about the lives and rights of minorities that were fundamental to the politics of the Jewish Labour Bund, and are still significant for socialists and antiracists today



Vladimir Medem, founding ideologue of the Bund

February 2023 marked the centenary of the death of Vladimir Medem, probably the leading theoretician of the Bund, whose approach to the national question and the idea of national-cultural autonomy is relevant today. As we see exclusionary nationalism rising in many countries, from Poland and Hungary to Israel and India, Medem's analysis remains a resource for combatting it and nurturing the lives and cultures of Jews and other minorities.

Medem's relatively privileged background was in sharp contrast to most of the Jewish inhabitants of the Pale of Settlement. He was born into an assimilated milieu in 1879, in Libau (Liebaja) in Latvia and grew up in Minsk. His father was a Surgeon General in the Russian army who converted to Lutheranism.

At university in Kiev, studying first medicine and then law, he encountered Marxist ideas, took part in a strike and was expelled. Back at home in Minsk he came into contact with the Jewish workers' movement, the Bund, and was struck by their enthusiasm, spirit of comradeship and commitment. From that time on he used his powers of argument and organisation to bring about a better life for the masses with whom he identified.

Although the Bund was strongly associated with Yiddish, the mother tongue of most of the Jewish workers, Medem himself learned the language as an adult and only started to write articles in Yiddish in 1912.

His revolutionary activities landed him in prison but he escaped to Switzerland and quickly became prominent in Bundist exile circles. He returned to Russia after the 1905 Revolution and spent some time in Vilna, but in 1913 was imprisoned again. Medem was in Warsaw in 1915 when it was taken by the German army and he lived there until 1920 before moving to the United States, ostensibly to promote the Bund in Poland. His poor health had been exacerbated by these periods of incarceration in the Russian Empire, and he only lived in the USA for two years until his death in 1923 at the age of 44.

Medem's major theoretical contributions in the 1900s were written in Russian and translated into Yiddish. His leading work is probably *The National Question and Social Democracy*, written in 1904 as part of a debate within the Bund on the issue. In both the Russian and Austria-Hungarian Empires, a single national and linguistic group was dominant, so the socialist movement had to organise both in the majority national group and also appeal to minorities, whether territorial, such as the Poles or Czechs, or non-territorial, like the Jews.

At first the Bund's activities had been related to socio-economic questions, and they prioritised the fight for *equal rights for Jews as citizens* in Russia rather than *national rights for Jews*. Others argued that, given the antisemitism in the Russian Empire and the abnormal economic structure of the Jewish population, territorial concentration was the only solution to the problems Jews faced. This could be in Palestine, as Zionists argued, or it could be in other countries, as argued by territorialists. For example, the Jewish Colonisation Association,

associated with Baron Hirsch, facilitated the immigration of Jews to Argentina. Although the Zionists sought to appeal to both middle class and poor Jews, one of the Bund's criticisms of Zionism was that it distracted from the class struggle *within* the Jewish community in the Russian Empire.

In his 1904 work, Medem sketches out two forms of nationalism developed by bourgeois interests within capitalism – nationalism of the oppressors and of the oppressed – both of which he sees as undesirable. Ultimately, he says, the difference is about position and markets in capitalist societies and control of the administrative apparatus, which is in the hands of the oppressors, not the oppressed.

The first one necessitates Jews assimilating in order to take advantage of commercial markets, losing their language and customs and becoming just a religious minority. The second means Jews creating their own state. But nationalism is always used to hide class differences in both oppressor and oppressed nations – whether it is advocated by Bismarck or Ahad Ha'am, the founder of "cultural" as opposed to "political" Zionism.

Medem says that both nationalists and assimilationists share a wish to hide from the real sufferings of the place and to smooth over class conflicts: one wishes to expand and fortify their place; the other aims to expand their own horizons by taking on the trappings of another group's place and assume their national colours.

Faced with these two unpalatable alternatives, Medem argues that Jewish workers should be "neutral". Socialists, he says, are neither nationalists nor assimilationists.

If history dictates the course of assimilation, we will not stand in its way. We are neutral. We do not support assimilation as a goal and if history dictates that Jewish culture should remain separate we will not be against that either. We are not against the national colour of a culture, we are against a nationalist politics. But we stand for a popular culture and the right of people to struggle for freedom from oppression. The working class suffers the oppression of a people more than other classes. Mother tongue and literature need to serve the class struggle and the ruling classes use a foreign tongue and legal structure for oppression. But there is both an inside and outside enemy and the fight against oppression from outside is just one of the problems socialists must face.

The Russian socialist party, he says, has supported the rights of nations, and the Fourth Bund Conference declared its support for national autonomy. But in a socialist programme all nations need to have the freedom for cultural development. It is capitalism which causes national conflicts and they can never be solved in a capitalist order, they can only be lessened.

Medem then turns to the position in the Russian and Austrian Empires, which were composed of many different nations, but with one dominant nation, whether that was Russian-speaking or German-speaking. He argued that these

LEGACY

multinational states should not be dominated by a single oppressor nation but that autonomous organisms within the state should be charged with the development of culture, and laws which oppressed national groups must be repealed. The role of the liberal state was to defend individual rights, he said, but looking perhaps towards the specific demands of the socialist movement for the development of the Russian Empire as a constitutional rather than an oppressive state, the state was being called on to play a new role in assuring social and labour rights and supporting cultural development. This would include, for example, universal education up to 16 for both the majority and the minorities, not only in Russian but in the languages – and supporting the literature, art and intellectual forums – of the different nations in the Russian Empire, including the Jews.

In the current Russian state, he said, there would be Russian domination and an attempt to assimilate minority nations. The Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) programme called for self-determination, including education for minorities. But demands are not enough – there also have to be structures. In Austria, for example, the 1867 constitution guaranteed the right of minorities to education in their own languages, but without institutions to implement them, this would just remain words on paper.

In a constitutional Russia there had to be specific national cultural institutions into which national differences could be channelled – educational, cultural and artistic. These would create an alternative to national hatred or assimilation, and allow class conflict to take the place of national conflict. The institutions for each nation would be chosen by general election and would federate freely. That, he said, is the core of national cultural autonomy. These national cultural institutions should exist alongside decentralised territorial democratic institutions but they should be organised centrally and take the place of the demand for "territorial autonomy" for nations.

In this way, the territorial question would be divorced from the national question, and national demands would take their place alongside demands for civil equal rights for Jews and the recognition of the Yiddish language.

Medem's formulation became the basis of the Bund's ideas of national cultural autonomy. This distinguished it from both Zionists and territorialists, and from those in the Russian social democratic movement who thought Jewish workers should assimilate and become indistinguishable from other Russian workers. This became a particular issue in the 1903 congress of the RSDLP. Medem, on behalf of the Bund, moved an amendment to a resolution which was proposing that all nations should have the right to self-determination. The amendment, proposed that minorities should be able to establish institutions that would guarantee cultural development for groups that were not located in a specific territory. The amendment was rejected.

The Bund's position – that the Russian party

should act as a federation and that the Bund should be able to organise as the representative of the Jewish workers – came up against Lenin's view that the party should be tightly organised from the centre. Medem argued that this tight control did not give local sections any freedom of initiative and that a party organised in this way was in danger of simply replacing Tsarist decrees with those of Lenin. Ultimately the Bund was unsuccessful and it left the RSDLP, which proceeded to split into the Bolsheviks, who followed the Leninist line, and the Mensheviks, who supported a more federated position that was closer to the Bund's politics.

Medem's stress on the importance of national cultural institutions provided the foundation for the Bund developing libraries, schools and other organisations, particularly in inter-war Poland, and he was prominent in the early stages of this.

At a 1915 conference to unify Jewish secular institutions in Warsaw, Medem made a more detailed proposal that was accepted: education should be compulsory for Jews and for others; it should be up to Jews to organise Jewish education; there should be popularly elected school councils, financed by the municipality; Yiddish should be the main Jewish language but population groups should be able to choose the language of instruction. To support this, Medem campaigned for the Jewish workers' movement in the USA to help finance Jewish schools in Poland. And together with Noah Prylucki, a Yiddishist member of Warsaw City Council, he organised a petition demanding free Yiddish language education, which gathered 30,000 signatures in Warsaw and 30,000 in Lodz.

Medem's first-hand experience of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the 1900s meant that he had no illusions about the development of Bolshevik rule in Russia. He was completely opposed to Bolshevism, having fought Leninism for 15 years, including over whether the Bund should have autonomy to represent Jewish workers in the Russian Empire.

When, in 1920, the Polish Bund decided to affiliate with the Communist Third International, Medem said he could no longer serve on the Polish Bund's Central Committee, and he resigned from all his positions in the organisation.

Medem left for the United States where he became a journalist on the *Forverts* newspaper, and wrote his autobiography, which goes up to 1915. He died of a renal infection on 17th January 1923. On his tomb was engraved: "Vladimir Medem, the legend of the Jewish labour movement." His name lived on in many Bundist institutions in inter-war Poland, such as the Medem Sanatorium near Warsaw and the Medem School in Lodz, as it does today in the Medem Centre/Arbeter Ring and the Medem Library in Paris.

His ideas also remain relevant to current debates about nationalism and multiculturalism, how we live together as equals, with our cultures supported, valued and allowed to develop freely, and how we promote an alternative to an exclusionary nationalism that belittles and oppresses minority cultures and nations.

A LICENCE

Genetic modification of human beings is dangerous and divisive, says **DAVID KING** from the campaign group **Stop Designer Babies**

This year or next, the British Government will attempt to change the law to allow genetic modification of human beings (HGM), as it has just done for plants and animals. This is different to gene therapy in, for example, lung cells, where genetic changes are not passed on to children. HGM should set alarm bells ringing, as it did in the 1990s. Then, in response to the new technologies, HGM and human cloning were banned or condemned in a string of international human rights treaties and declarations as well as national laws. Yet, despite the global uproar in 2018 surrounding the announcement of the birth of the first GM babies in China, an influential group in the elite science academies of Britain and the US are pushing ahead with moves to overturn those bans. My group, Stop Designer Babies, is preparing to oppose their attempt to change the UK law before the next election. All

commentators on the subject agree that there is essentially no unmet medical need for HGM, since robust existing technologies can allow parents to avoid the birth of children with severe genetic conditions.

A central feature of those scientists' political strategy is to refuse all discussions of the historical and ongoing experience of eugenics and "race science". Faced with scientists' eugenics denialism,

that task falls to those who were targeted for elimination by the first wave of eugenics: disabled people, black people, working class people and Jews.

A HORRIBLE HISTORY

I suspect that *Jewish Socialist* readers will not need reminding in detail about the history of the first wave of eugenics, or what was bad about it:

- The determination to abrogate basic humanist norms of care for the weak, the right to life and the fundamental equality of status of all human beings, in the name of the greater good of the national gene pool.
- The insistence on genetically-determined inequality amongst individuals, and the corresponding racist, antisemitic, classist and ableist judgements about social groups.
- The obsession with national degeneration caused by the over-breeding of the "feckless" working classes, and especially the burden of the "feeble-minded" and other "defectives", leading to their forced institutionalisation and sterilisation.
- The racist immigration laws; the utopian-technocratic drive to remake society on the basis of applied biology, culminating in the murder of hundreds of thousands of disabled people in the Nazi Aktion T4 programme, and finally in the Holocaust.

This is the familiar litany of the horrors of eugenics, and it is bad enough.

But partly because that story is so bad, there is an assumption that (except, perhaps, on extreme fringes of the right) surely eugenics must be dead after nearly 80 years of liberal progress since 1945. Certainly, particularly for geneticists, psychiatrists, demographers and other professions deeply implicated in eugenics, there has been a very strong incentive to get us to believe that, and to distance their ongoing operations from eugenics. The liberal definition of eugenics as state coercion and the "abuse" of science for rightwing and racist political purposes is an ideological narrative that serves the interests of those groups. For example, although the mainstream of eugenics was strongly coloured with the class and race prejudices of the time, it was also championed in progressive/social democratic circles as embodying enlightened, scientific and humane social reform. The continuities of eugenics until the present are so strong that we must be very wary of proposals for HGM, which was always a kind of holy grail of eugenicists.

PERSISTENT IDEAS

After 1945, eugenics was forced to retrench, and many eugenicists were genuinely horrified by what they regarded as the "excesses" of the Nazis. Yet many elements of eugenics persisted, including the continuing implementation of eugenic sterilisation programmes in democratic countries until the 1970s. The family planning and population control movements of the mid-20th century, targeting the reproduction of black and brown people, were funded and set up by eugenicists; counting only the forced and coercive examples of such programmes, they sterilised far greater numbers of people than the pre-war eugenics movement.

Another development of eugenics' mid-20th century Keynesian period (J M Keynes was a devout eugenicist) was the development and implementation by eugenicists of prenatal screening programmes. Although relying officially on parental freedom of choice, these programmes are always justified in health economics reports in the classic eugenic terms of the financial savings to the NHS from not needing to care for and treat disabled children and adults. In a society in which disability oppression remains rampant, in which women still do the vast majority of childcare, and in which benefits for families with disabled children are targeted in austerity programs, the results of these programmes are predictable and would have delighted the eugenicists of the early 20th century.

The third, neoliberal, phase of eugenics began in the 1970s with genetic engineering and the development of IVF by Eugenics Society stalwart, Robert Edwards. The invention of IVF and genetic engineering quickly revived both hopes and fears of eugenics. Silicon Valley spawned a new techno-utopian ideology of trans-humanism, according to which humans would transcend the limits of their existing biology through both genetic and information technology upgrades. Whilst eschewing coercion and overt racism, this

TO KILL?

increasingly popular eugenic ideology has strong echoes of earlier strivings for the "New Man", and has been embraced by some elements of the left.

MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

In the 1990s, the development of techniques for genetic testing and selection of IVF embryos, the genetic engineering of non-reproductive human cells ("gene therapy") and, in 1997, the cloning of sheep, led to the national and international bans mentioned above. For a year or three we all breathed more easily. But these laws have not prevented the penetration of neoliberal market relations into human reproduction and the creation of the beginnings of a free market consumer eugenics. In the USA, for example, egg donation for infertile women is commercial, with most egg donors receiving between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per donation. But if you are a tall, athletic, beautiful woman from an Ivy league University, you can get \$50,000 - \$100,000. The logic of eugenics and capitalism are perfectly aligned: a "superior product" commands a higher price. In the USA, a company called Genomic Prediction offers parents the opportunity to choose which embryos to implant, based upon a numerical "polygenic score" for each embryo; only a public campaign forced it to withdraw tests for genes influencing IQ.

The invention of a new genetic engineering technology, known as "CRISPR" or "genome editing", has put in place the final piece for a neoliberal consumer eugenics. In polls, a significant minority of the population is already interested in genetically "enhancing" their children with all the characteristics that first wave eugenics focused upon: superior intelligence, height, athleticism and so on, as well as racialised signifiers of beauty.

Of course, the cosmetic surgery and performance-enhancing drugs markets provide a model for where the eugenic market will go. In the de-industrialised "knowledge economy", in which intellectual credential-based meritocratic competition has become even more dominant, parents will be obliged to compete to give their children "the best possible genetic start in life". Obviously, since the technology will not be cheap, children of wealthy parents will be able to give their children even greater advantages over other children. The result is likely to be an increasingly stratified society in which your genetic profile is seen as determining your place in society. It is hard to believe that there would be much place for disabled people in such a society.

A SUBTLE THREAT

It is often suggested that there is a risk of a "new" eugenics, but the truth is that eugenics never went away. Although it suffered a severe blow after the revelations of 1945, it persists in industrial capitalist societies because it is consistent with their fundamental technocratic logic of control of nature, human beings and society through science and technology, and because such societies will

always primarily value people for their productivity. Now, with vastly increased scientific and technological sophistication and in another period of crisis of capitalism, even the right-wing and racist forms are enjoying a resurgence. In such a climate, permitting human genetic modification would be an act of extreme social irresponsibility.

But we must not let the threat of old-fashioned eugenics distract our attention from the far more subtle, pervasive and sophisticated mainstream forms, cloaked in medical benevolence and talk of progress through technology. That ideology is so pervasive in our society that we are increasingly hearing well-meaning liberals asking, "If we can get rid of its racist aspects, and parents are allowed a free choice, then what's wrong with eugenics? Surely it's good to make people better." The answer to this question goes beyond the fact that, of course, in a racist and ableist society, giving parents such choices is bound to empower racism and ableism, permitting them to dictate which kinds of people are born.

Even when crude racism and coercion are not present, what is wrong with eugenics is that, although human beings have different abilities, a civilised and humane society makes a place for everyone; the weak are protected and efforts are made to create as much equality as possible. Eugenics, whether the old-fashioned or neoliberal-meritocratic kind, is always socially and morally wrong and anti-human, because it heads in precisely the opposite direction.

Based on a dogmatic anti-egalitarianism, it tries to ensure that only the most efficient people are born and that undesired characteristics and people are eliminated. Claiming scientific backing, it systematically magnifies and institutionalises inequality.

The threat of a genetically stratified society should be enough to convince anyone, and Jews in particular, that this is a road down which we must not go. Historically, Jews such as Ashley Montagu, René Cassin (who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), Steven Rose, Stephen Jay Gould and many others, including the leading members of my campaign group, Stop Designer Babies, have always been at the forefront of opposing ongoing eugenics and genetic determinism.

It is the task of those groups who were targeted for dehumanisation and elimination in the first wave of eugenics to see through that neoliberal ideology of "reproductive liberty" and progress through technology, and to remind the world of where opening the door to HGM will inevitably take us. The threat is also an opportunity to build a coalition that can overcome the divisions of identity politics and serve as a base for resistance to the many other threats that face us today.



SIMONE WEIL-

MIKE PETERS looks at the life of a courageous and challenging philosopher whose life spanned the two world wars and who put her ideas into practice

You don't expect to find the gravestone of a famous French philosopher in the middle of the Kent countryside, but Bybrook Cemetery near the town of Ashford is the location of Simone Weil's final resting place.

Born French and Jewish in Paris in 1909, her life was short (she died of tuberculosis at the age of 34 in 1943) but packed tight with activity. Her restlessly provocative intellect and unwillingness to simply read her books and philosophise, meant she was hard to ignore in her lifetime, and she remains a thought-provoking and challenging figure today.

For Jews this is particularly the case because of Weil's absolute refusal to identify as Jewish. In fact, she chose to argue in a letter to the Vichy authorities of Nazi-occupied France, who were intent on enforcing a new law banning the employment of Jews as teachers, that her classification as Jewish was a mistake. "As for myself," she wrote, "who do not practice any religion and have never done so, I have not inherited anything of the Jewish religion." The summary rejection of her case suggests that deciding if someone is a Jew or not may not be a simple matter.

Of course, Weil's total abandonment of her Jewishness could be regarded as a classic example of Jewish self-hatred if it didn't so obviously spring from her rejection of all inherited doctrines, orthodoxies and single identities so as to be able to search out her own ideas, beliefs and ways of living.

Whatever else one can say about Simone Weil, and she has certainly been strongly criticised for her eccentricity, her extremism and her embrace of mysticism, it's impossible to accuse her of hypocrisy. She was never content to merely theorise about what is wrong with the world, and this gives her an authenticity that speaks to us today.

Even as a child, Simone showed both her affinity with the suffering of others and her political engagement, by sending her chocolate ration to the soldiers fighting on the Front during the First World War and by joining a march of striking workers through the streets of Paris. Little wonder that she admired Alexander the Great's gesture of solidarity with his men when he refused water from one of his officers.

Later, in her 20s, Weil wasn't content just to write about topics that preoccupied her – for example, the nature of work. Instead, she took on manual jobs in several factories, determined to experience for herself the reality of industrial labour. Furthermore, despite viewing herself as a pacifist, she could not resist the call to fight against Franco and fascism in Spain.

Then, once the impossibility of making peace with Hitler became apparent, she joined the Resistance movement. Interrogated by a Marseilles police officer (she had been forced to flee there in 1939 because of the Nazi occupation of Paris), she refused to give up any information, replying to his abuse – "You are a little bitch. You know that I could

have you thrown into jail together with a bunch of whores." – with the coolest of responses: "I have always wanted to know that environment and I can't see any better way than going to prison to find out about it."

After managing to secure a job at the London offices of the Free French, Weil was not content with a behind-the-scenes role. Small of stature and in fragile health for much of her life, nothing seemed to deter her from her passionate desire to take direct action. "One can no more be a revolutionary through words alone, than one can be a mason or blacksmith," she said. Arguably, no other modern philosopher has been so willing to get their hands dirty or so willing to risk her reputation and her life itself in the pursuit of their ideas.

Ideas were never merely abstract for Weil. She wrote about the psychic, spiritual and political costs of work with a graphic intensity absent from other thinkers, such as Marx: "We are like horses who hurt themselves as soon as they pull on their bits – and we bow our heads. We even lose consciousness of the situation, we just submit."

Because she had been employed in three different factories across France, she knew first-hand that industrial labour pushes workers into a passivity that prevents any rebellion against their own and others' conditions. Never able to appreciate the whole process by which raw material is turned into desirable products, whether a car or cardigan, they have no chance to exercise their creative potential or problem-solving abilities.

For Weil, it was the ways in which modern technology was used, more even than the demands



Right: despite her pacifism, Simone Weil went to fight fascism in Spain in 1936.

A RELUCTANT JEW

of capitalism, that diminishes human beings: "One's attention has nothing worthy to engage it, but on the contrary is constrained to fix itself, second by second, upon the same trivial problem..." As a result, both she and many others, suffered from what she called "affliction" which "entered into my flesh and soul".

"Affliction is a device for pulverising the soul," she wrote; "the man who falls into it is like a workman who gets caught up in a machine. He is no longer a man but a torn and bloody rag on the teeth of a cog wheel."

However, despite this understanding, Weil never lost hope that a better future might be built. If her ideal vision of a "handful of workmen" collaborating on solving a problem, currently seems far-fetched, it is still a vision that reminds us of the human value of small-scale and decentralised co-operation.

Simone Weil is also a relevant thinker for our times because of her recognition that oppression of one kind or another is an inevitable result of living in a complex society. She realised that the modern world, with its bureaucracies and hierarchies, necessitated an elite to co-ordinate and lead. And such an elite, she argued, whether composed of politicians or managers, will protect their privileges by whatever means they can. Hence, she wrote, "the preservation of power is a vital necessity for the powerful ... it enslaves everybody, strong and weak alike." For Weil, this is the case whether we are talking about a communist, a fascist or a western democratic society. The new rise of populist authoritarian regimes gives her view particular credibility today.

Power for Weil was especially concentrated in organisations like political parties, large companies and the state itself – institutions that operate through "collectivity" to shape and organise our lives. Today, more than ever, with the growth of such huge worldwide corporations as Apple and Meta, her insight into how modern societies operate to disempower individuals, is especially pertinent.

Given Weil's hostility to collectivism, it isn't surprising that she turned to anarcho-syndicalism and the strategy of direct action. Thus, as a student and teacher, despite the potential harm to her future career, she frequently attended picket lines and demonstrations. As a result, on one occasion, the mayor of the small town where she was teaching, called for her to be dismissed from her post. The local newspaper described her as "the red virgin of the tribe of Levi", reminding both her and us that her Jewishness could not be abandoned quite as easily as she would have liked.

Furthermore, Weil was a great believer in the capacity of education to empower working people, regularly travelling miles to deliver classes because she thought that knowledge of language and culture would help break down the "degrading division" between "intellectual and manual work" and prepare workers to "take possession of our

entire heritage".

If various forms of collectivism don't provide the grounds for a fair society, neither, according to Weil, does simple individualism. She certainly valued personal freedom, whether it be the right to vote or to express a controversial point of view, but she also recognised that the single individual can never be fulfilled on their own. They need a strong bond to those around them and to the wider society.

Today, when loneliness is common, Weil's emphasis on the importance of what she called "rootedness" – human beings' experience of feeling connected to others and to their home – seems particularly significant. Such ideas are often regarded as reactionary, but it is also important for the left to speak about and to people's desire for a sense of belonging and attachment. Weil reminds us that straightforward promises of economic reward or even justice may not be sufficient to win over hearts and minds.

Simone Weil, by this time a convert to Christianity, arrived in London in 1942 from New York, where she had emigrated from Marseilles with her parents to work for the Free French movement. Living in a rented room in Holland Park, she struggled to get her voice heard at the organisation's Mayfair headquarters, because she wasn't prepared to simply keep her head down. "The suffering all over the world," she wrote, "obsesses and overwhelms me to the point of annihilating my faculties and the only way I can revive them and release myself from the obsession is by getting for myself a large share of danger and hardship."

Although charged with helping prepare ideas to shape French society after the Allied victory, she felt sidelined and depressed, a feeling that became stronger when her two big plans – the first, to parachute nurses into the Front Line, and the second, to parachute herself there – were rejected.

Whilst her relatively obscure death from TB in her early 30s, following stays in London's Middlesex Hospital and a Kent sanatorium, is extremely sad, she remains an inspiring example to those who came after her – something she herself seemed to know. Thus, without any false modesty, she wrote in a letter to her parents just before her death, "I have a sort of inner certainty that there is within me a deposit of pure gold, which must be handed out..."

The "gold" is her life of activism and her writings, both of which deserve to be better remembered today.



Beyond the nation state

GERMAN HISTORY UNBOUND: FROM 1750 TO THE PRESENT
H Glenn Penny
Cambridge University Press, £22.99

From Australia to Siberia, and from Canada to Brazil, longstanding German communities have lived, for the most part comfortably, far away from Germany itself. Some still speak German alongside several other languages, and they practise what they and their neighbours recognise as German culture. German History Unbound explores the past and present situation of Germans beyond the German state.

The author's aim is to "move away from writing the histories of nations and states – which have clear borders and life cycles with fairly well-established beginnings, middles, and ends – to writing histories, even national histories, that flow through those states and pay less respect to their geographical and chronological borders".

This is a refreshing and eye-opening approach to history. The "Unbound" of the title describes perfectly how this perspective liberates you to think, make connections, and understand the dynamic characteristics of human groups that have transcended the nation state, literally and metaphorically, by moving across borders, often numerous times and in different directions, while retaining the continuity of their own identity.

The book is not looking at official German colonies that conquered and took over other people's land, which were just a small element in this diaspora, but follows the fate of groups that were drawn or pushed to live in other nation states, among other peoples.

Some migrated centuries ago, often to neighbouring countries, or lived in places that straddled national boundaries. Others moved in more modern times across borders and oceans from

German-speaking lands or from the lands they had previously settled in. They took with them their languages and dialects, and their ways of life, adapting their cultures to the new terrain, building social, political and economic relationships with the peoples around them as well as with the German state, and developing their own businesses, schools and other communal institutions.

Looking at human experience through this prism is a highly dissident approach, which threatens the hegemonic idea that the nation state is the fundamental definer of identity, as those of us who argue against being defined by nationalism in the Jewish context are painfully aware. It is particularly challenging to look at German history through a lens which reveals such a misalignment between languages, identities, and the boundaries of nation states. The hair-raising trajectory from the relatively recent establishment of the German nation state in 1871 to violent, exclusionary ultra-nationalism by the 1930s, leading to genocide in the 1940s, and the efforts to address or contain that history in the decades after the war (see, for example, Wieland Hoban's article on page 12), mean that it's difficult even to find words to describe the large, diverse and longstanding German diaspora. Much of the terminology which could, in theory, portray the variety, complexity and dynamism of these lives, is tainted by Nazism.

Penny writes: "[M]any German words that were widely used in the nineteenth century took on a new resonance in the twentieth century. Terms such as *Auslanddeutsche* (Germans abroad), *Kulturgemeinschaft* (cultural community), *Stamm* (tribe), *Volk* (people), and *Raum* (space) were especially politicized during the inter-war period and especially under National Socialism." He adds: "the terms *Auslanddeutschtum* and *Deutschtum* (Germans and Germanness at home and abroad) were hotly debated political concepts ... [which] articulated the multiple meanings of what it meant to be 'German' ... in a variety of locations within and outside Europe."

This detailed research which underpins this book ranges across the world. It describes "flows to the east", including German speakers who settled in Hungary in the 13th century and continued to be recognised as "Saxons" into the 20th century, and the important port city of Riga, in Latvia, where 40% of the population was "unabashedly culturally and linguistically German", and dominated local commerce, industry and politics. By 1914, there were 2.4 million Germans living in Russia, most of them in rural areas, working as artisans or agricultural workers. They were part of a continuous flow that started "[w]hen Catherine the Great issued her manifesto welcoming all foreigners (except Jews) in 1762."

Other Germans, including some who had previously made their homes in the Russian Empire, travelled westwards to the Americas, the numbers peaking between 1845 and 1856, at the time of the revolutions, when "some 1.3 million people left German-speaking central Europe". Many of those arriving in North America, moved westwards, some acquiring farmland beyond what they could have dreamt of in Europe, others settling in the growing cities and towns. The later arrivals often followed the patterns of migration and settlement of those who came before them. But "no one, no state or power, controlled or coordinated the movements of these disparate Germans east or west. No one and nothing orchestrated their actions or built their interconnections. Those who tried ... almost always failed." This was attempted, and resented, during the Nazi period, when emissaries were sent out from Germany to take over and impose the state ideology on communal institutions, particularly schools.

There are very detailed histories of particular German communities, particularly in the Americas, as well as an exploration of how contemporary analysts understood the situation of these often successful and comfortable, but stratified and complex, minority communities. This throws up another linguistic hurdle. Terms like "assimilation" and "acculturation" cannot describe these lives because they are predicated on a majoritarian assumption that minorities naturally tend to disappear into a putative majority identity and culture. This ideology is so powerful that, despite the evidence that, throughout history, populations have moved, and societies have been linguistically, culturally and economically diverse, we are still left

with terminology that obscures this reality.

Given the fact that we are stuck with majoritarian language to describe a complex network, or perhaps a patchwork, of minority peoples, it might have helped to draw more on the lives and analyses of other diasporic communities. For the same reason, the book would have benefited from clear illustrations and a decent index. Unfortunately, the images were of such poor quality that the maps, which could have added important clarity, were, for the most part, indecipherable, and the index (like so many others, probably a victim of publishers' cost-cutting) was frustratingly sketchy.

The author nevertheless constructs a striking picture of the lives of Germans beyond the boundaries of the nation state. From Mennonite farmers in Russia to traders in Britain, and from newspaper magnates in the USA and Swabians living on either side of contested European borders, these German communities that crystallised out of empires and feudal princedoms as they morphed into nation states illustrate vividly how minorities naturally persist, adapting, interacting but maintaining their identities.

He uses the term "polycentrism" – a bit of a

mouthful, but one which encapsulates the centredness and rootedness of communities where they are actually living: what Jewish socialist Bundists call "doykayt" ("here-ness"). It is also the term that the Jewish Socialists' Group has used for many decades to assert the concept of equality of all Jewish communities, without any of them dominating, defining or overriding the needs of the others (which Zionism fundamentally undermines).

Penny describes the Germans living outside the German state as having "hyphenated identities" and "pluralities of belonging", an acceptance of "difference and hybridity". These descriptions feel familiar to anyone living as a minority in a majoritarian nation state, whether their history is one of migration or whether they have been colonised. These are not neutral terms or mere descriptions. They are transgressive of boundaries that are used, often violently, to make minorities conform or disappear. This important and fascinating book demonstrates that minorities, discrete communities, language groups, don't naturally assimilate or dissolve into the majority but express their own forms of self-determination. Left in peace, they survive and thrive.

Julia Bard

Jewish Socialist Archive

We are very pleased to announce that the **Bishopsgate Institute** in collaboration with **Jewish Socialist** has created a digital archive for this magazine. So far the first 25 issues are available. The next 25 will be accessible very soon as pdfs – though we will have to wait a bit longer for them to be fully searchable.

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 can or follow a link from the JSG website at www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/js or go to the *Jewish Socialist* page on the Bishopsgate Institute website at www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/jewish-socialist-archive and immerse yourself in radical, secular Jewish material.

We are grateful to Stefan Dickers and the team at Bishopsgate for all their work in developing access to this wonderful, rich resource.

Please visit the archive, delve, learn and enjoy this treasury of Jewish socialist writing.



Descending into guilt

IN MY GRANDFATHER'S SHADOW: A STORY OF WAR, TRAUMA AND THE LEGACY OF SILENCE

Angela Findlay
Penguin, £9.99

We live with the consequences of our parents' and grandparents' misdeeds. How do we deal with our sense of responsibility, and divided loyalties, when we had no control over their behaviour? These are especially acute questions for descendants of Germans. Angela Findlay grew up in England with a German mother and an English father. In her recent book, *In my Grandfather's Shadow*, she searches for the truth about her mother's father, Karl von Graffen (1893-1964), a highly decorated officer in the German army – the Wehrmacht – during the Nazi period.

Findlay never met her grandfather; he died a few days after she was born. But her grandmother kept many pictures and letters from the war and from his three years as a prisoner of war after 1945. Findlay was haunted by him throughout most of her life. The central question in the book is whether Karl was complicit in or even enthusiastic towards Nazi atrocities, or whether he was just a career soldier who had the bad luck to serve an evil regime.

The book begins with some dramatic vignettes which are expanded later. In February 1945 Findlay's grandmother and her 10-year-old daughter join a huge stampede of Germans desperate to travel west from Berlin, away from the advancing Soviet army. In April that year, after Hitler's death, her grandfather waits in a village in northern Italy to surrender himself and his men to American troops. In August 1987 the 22-year-old author enters a prison in Sydney, Australia, where she is due to teach art classes to inmates, many of them violent criminals. "For years she has been searching for a solution to the inexplicable sense of her own badness. 'This is it!' the cells of her body seem to sing in unison. 'This is it!'"

The book goes into detail as Findlay retraces her grandfather's route across Poland and Belarus, and towards Moscow during Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and then his transfer to Italy where his troops fought the Allies at Monte Cassino and elsewhere. Among his letters home to his wife is this sentence, written during the first phase of Barbarossa:

"Behind our backs the SS is clearing up."

Findlay wonders, as anyone would, how her grandfather could refer to the mass murder of Jews and Communists, and the eradication of whole communities (she actually mentions Grajewo, where my mother's family came from) as if the SS were "polite catering staff clearing the tables and washing up after the army had eaten". Later she learns that General von Graffen only disobeyed one order during his career: in 1944 the Allies bombed the tiny country of San Marino and many civilians hid in railway tunnels. The order came down that Findlay's grandfather should use his artillery to destroy a particular tunnel, which he knew contained about

40 women and children. He refused, was made an honorary citizen of the country, and was still remembered with affection for this act of humanity when the author visited in 2018.

Findlay's grandmother defended her husband until she died, telling her granddaughter that "those were different times" and that anyone who has not lived under such a monstrous regime has the right to judge those who did. I sympathise with that excuse, and I am not entitled to criticise Findlay's way of laying to rest the agonies that seem to have wrecked much of her life. Nonetheless, I feel duty bound to ask some uncomfortable questions which the book glosses over.

Firstly, Karl von Graffen served in the First World War as well as the Second. That experience must have affected him, with its injuries, deaths of friends, psychological trauma, and the after-effects of the Armistice, which was widely regarded among German soldiers as a "Dolchstoß im Hinten" (stab in the back) by the civilian authorities, notably by Jews. None of this is mentioned in the book, but it must have made Karl susceptible to antisemitism, German nationalism and the (largely accurate) idea that Germany was cruelly mistreated by the Versailles Treaty agreements in 1919.

In addition, the "von" in her grandfather's name suggests an aristocratic, and presumably wealthy, background. When Findlay's grandmother and her children fled from Berlin in 1945, they headed for the family estate in Schleswig-Holstein, the northernmost region of Germany between Hamburg and Denmark. It would have required money, connections and luck for them to reach there at that time – none of this elaborated in the book – and once there, the family appears to have avoided most of the hardships that many German civilians suffered after the war.

Another question is how much German civilians, including Findlay's extended family, knew about the economic crimes of the Nazis. The Holocaust wasn't just a mass slaughter; it also involved a gigantic theft of Jewish money and possessions. Many "ordinary Germans" were happy to benefit from this, and the claims that "Wir wussten nicht" (we didn't know) are hard to take seriously.

Then there is the whole issue of "good" soldiers, supposedly behaving with "honour" as they did their "duty". This is the category that Findlay would have wanted her grandfather to belong to, though, to her credit, she doesn't shrink from examining evidence that Von Graffen may have done awful things, especially during the years he spent on the Eastern Front. The harsh reality is that, when soldiers sign up, they effectively agree to switch off their moral compass and do whatever their government tells them. Every country's elites honour their armed forces. That includes the UK, despite plenty of well known instances of war crimes by British soldiers (think of the Amritsar massacre, then Malaya and Kenya in the 1940s and '50s, and more recent atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan). Findlay's grandfather may have

genuinely believed that Operation Barbarossa was justified if it prevented "Bolsheviks" from destroying Europe, but it seems to have been the failure of the Wehrmacht to overrun Moscow and Leningrad, the horrific cold of successive Russian winters, and three years as a POW, which left him broken, not any growing political awareness on his part.

Talking of political awareness, readers of *Jewish Socialist* will wish that Findlay showed more of that herself. The book is full of detail about her psychological traumas and those of her immediate family, and I have no doubt that her inner struggles were genuine. Her work as an art teacher in prisons sounds wholly admirable. There is, however, little analysis of how capitalism wrecks lives, especially in its colonialist forms, and sows divisions which lay the groundwork for crude nationalism and for fascism.

The book reminded me how many of the

creature comforts that people take for granted in Western democracies come from the organised theft of colonialism and the profits of slavery. I am grateful to Findlay for making me think again about these questions. Unfortunately, the grinding detail with which she describes her personal journey towards healing occupies so much of the book that I fear most readers will lose patience and give up before they reach its conclusion. I didn't need to know so much about the hotels she stayed in on the way to Moscow, to pick just one example. In addition, the mini-lectures about (among others) various therapies, the book by Professor X of the University of Y, spiritual guidance, reincarnation and neuroepigenetics become tedious. I am glad to have read this book, but I fear that few others will persist with it.

Raf Salkie

A movement detached from its context

This is, for the most part, 137 pages of disappointment with the feeling that somewhere in there is a better book struggling to get out. I'd hoped that the author really had uncovered some unknown-to-me connections between proper class struggle anarchists and the people who had founded and developed the kibbutz movement. Spoiler alert: he hasn't. The book is about how the early kibbutzim were, to an extent, inspired by the writings of some utopian socialists and spiritually oriented Tolstoyans, and not only driven by necessity towards communal living – but that's hardly a surprise. After finding out that, in 1938, Emma Goldman had written favourably about anarchist comrades among the Jewish settlers in Palestine I was hoping to find out more, but I didn't.

Instead we learn that some of the founders of the utopian and "nonpolitical" socialist currents among the early Zionist settlers had read Kropotkin. Others were inspired by a mainly-forgotten German Jewish utopian called Gustav Landauer, who had once been a class struggle anarchist but moved towards the slightly creepy, spiritual-awakening, personal transformation tendency. Ironically, Landauer ended up Education Minister in the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic before being murdered by the Freikorps as the republic was overthrown.

More familiar figures are also discussed, like the prophet of Jewish personal transformation through physical labour A D Gordon, and the Labour Zionist Chaim Arlosoroff (the book doesn't mention it, but his former girlfriend Magda became Mrs Goebbels, which surely merits a Netflix mini-series). Horrox cites both of these as influencers of another sort of socialism, distinct from the Marxism of the Labour Zionists in Poalei Zion and Left Poalei Zion, in the emerging Jewish settler community in interwar Palestine, which he chooses to call anarchism. I'd be very surprised if either Gordon or Arlosoroff ever

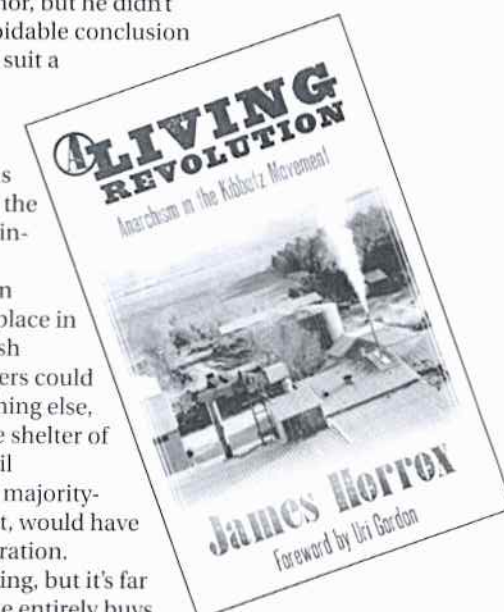
thought of themselves as anarchists. Arlosoroff was a big fan of staying close to the British, and was also instrumental in the Ha'avara agreement with the Nazis, so not exactly your typical anarchist.

The author also claims that: "During the 1930s many anarchists within the kibbutz movement travelled to Spain themselves to join the CNT-FAI militia." Although the book has a lot of footnotes he doesn't cite any source for this. I couldn't find any trace of it in web searches. There is no mention of it in *Madrid Before Hanita*, the film about Jews from Palestine who went to fight in the Spanish Civil War, though that does focus on the International Brigades so is more about volunteers who were Communist-oriented. I wrote to a few people with some expertise in this area but they knew nothing about it, and I contacted the author, but he didn't respond. I am left with the unavoidable conclusion that this "fact" is just made up to suit a narrative.

Weirdly, there is almost no account of the historical and political context in which this was happening. Zionist immigration, the construction of the Zionist state-in-waiting, and the creation of the network of utopian communes on which the book focuses, all took place in the framework enabled by a British colonial occupation. Zionist settlers could be Marxists or anarchists or anything else, but they could not do without the shelter of the British military forces and civil administration. An independent, majority-ruled Palestine, democratic or not, would have put an end to Jewish mass immigration.

Horrox touches on this in passing, but it's far from the focus of the book. And he entirely buys into the Zionist argument that the refusal to employ Arab labour was a principled, moral refusal

LIVING REVOLUTION: ANARCHISM IN THE KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT
by James Horrox
AK Press, £13



to be exploiters, rather than a conscious attempt to create an ethnically segregated labour market, explicitly on the South African model. He treats the Histadrut as if it were a "normal" trade union, rather than an instrument for the construction of that segregated labour market, ignoring the historical analysis of, for example, Zachary Lockman's *Comrades and Enemies*.

There is another book to be written about the subjective commitment to socialism, and even Marxism, by people who were objectively engaged in a colonial enterprise that was tied to British imperialism. It's not a straightforward matter of hypocrisy. History is full of ironies like this, the Kurdish eco-anarchist Rojava enclave in northern Syria that sheltered under the umbrella of US air power being the most recent. The Zionist socialist parties were mainly accepted as such by their comrades in other countries, even in apparently revolutionary internationals like the International Revolutionary Marxist Centre, in which Left Poalei Zion and Hashomer Hatzair participated as the representatives of Palestine alongside the Bund from Poland and the POUM from Spain.

Horrox does describe the minutiae of kibbutz organisation in the glowing terms I remember from my days in a Zionist youth movement, but doesn't give a moment's consideration to the fact that some kibbutzim were built on the ruins of depopulated Arab villages, or that almost none of them have ever admitted an Arab member. Oh, and he repeats uncritically the assertion that there was "no crime" within kibbutzim, ignoring all that has come to light about sexual harassment and rape.

It's really a shame, because there is an important book to be written about what the kibbutz experience means for at least one kind of anarchist model of the transition from capitalism to something better. Despite all the above, and despite the awful context, it's possible to still be enthusiastic about the kind of self-managed enterprise and collective consumption offered by the kibbutz, and to see a very high level of

communal sharing and a very low level of private property as a viable and even luxurious alternative to privatised individual and family existence. Even knowing what I do about the history, I still retain a great affection for the feel of kibbutz life that I experienced in the 1970s and '80s.

These ideas about "secession" and "walkaway", of building an alternative economy within the shell of the existing society, are increasingly popular, as they often are when more direct political programmes for change seem hopeless. There is a lot of hope placed on Community Land Trusts, co-operatives, social enterprises, and mutual aid networks.

And the kibbutz experience was perhaps the best opportunity that this model has ever been given. The kibbutzim were not marginalised or despised outsiders in the Zionist proto-state, or later in Israel; they were cherished, cosseted and treated as an elite, akin to the English landed gentry. They had access to cheap land from the Jewish National Fund and cheap credit from state and semi-private financial institutions.

So the ultimate failure of the kibbutzim to thrive, even in these favourable circumstances, but within the overall context of an increasingly unequal and consumption-driven society, ought to be instructive. Rather than radiating socialism, however defined, out into the wider Israeli society, the kibbutzim instead absorbed the worst aspects of that society into themselves. Horrox does describe what can only be seen as the degeneration of the kibbutz model, even within its own terms, though he doesn't really explain why the kibbutzniks themselves don't, for the most part, seem to have thought it was worth preserving or defending.

There's some quite interesting stuff in the end about new forms of urban collective living and about the small anarchist groups in Israel that are, to Horrox's disdain, mainly uninterested in the kibbutz history, but it can't make up for the missed opportunities of the book.

Jeremy Green

This review was first published on Jeremy Green's blog at <https://jezzascuriousblog.blogspot.com>

Beatty Orwell 1917 - 2023

Beatty Orwell, who has died aged 105, was a long-time Labour councillor, former Mayoress of Tower Hamlets (her late husband, John, was Mayor), and great-great-grandmother; the centre of her large East End family. But long before any of those achievements, the teenage Beatty was involved in some of the most decisive – and dangerous – moments of British antifascist history.

Beatty was born in Aldgate, east London, in 1917. Her father, Israel, was a porter at Spitalfields Market; his parents had come over from Russia. Her mother, Julia, was a cigar-maker.

An East Ender her whole life, Beatty grew up in Brunswick Buildings in Goulston Street: "We had a little scullery, too small to swing a cat."

Beatty's "marvellous" father died when she was only 13, leaving her and her sisters, Rebecca and Esther, to support their mother. Beatty left the Jewish Free School in Bell Lane the next year, and began work as a dressmaker.

Oswald Mosley's uniformed Blackshirts were soon becoming a menace to the East End Jewish community, gathering in street corner meetings designed to intimidate. When I first met Beatty, she told me that, as frightening as it was, it also made her furious: she used to "sometimes shout at them".

"Beatty! What did you shout?" I asked, impressed. But she wouldn't tell me until her daughter June, then in her 70s, was safely out of the room to spare her blushes, because what she used to shout was: "Fascist bastards!"

Beatty was there at Olympia in 1934, protesting outside when Mosley's British Union of Fascists held a 15,000-strong public rally. It quickly descended into violence as a number of suicidally-brave antifascists who'd made it past security, interrupted the proceedings and were brutally beaten.

Then came Cable Street in October 1936. Mosley

planned to march his Blackshirt army through the heart of the Jewish East End. Beatty's immediate, personal response was: "We are not having that here!" Fortunately, hundreds of thousands felt the same.

"So many people, you couldn't imagine. Dockers, Scottish and Irish..."

It was a marvellous atmosphere, we were all shouting "They shall not pass!" Then the news came through that the fascists had been turned back. We marched past the place where fascists had their barracks – I remember they threw flour over us, shouting, really angry! In Victoria Park we had a big meeting with thousands of people. I'd never seen anything like it in my life, and I used to go to all the meetings."

Beatty stayed political to the end; whenever I saw her she wanted to know the latest antifascist news, and regretted not being able to make the annual Stand Up To Racism rallies, but gave me messages of support to read out.

Beatty leaves three children, June, Benny and Maureen, 12 grandchildren, 19 great grandchildren and eight great great grandchildren – and an incredible legacy of courage and determination.

As we fight back against those dark fascist forces today, may the phenomenal Beatty Orwell continue to inspire us.

Louise Raw



Beatty with her daughter, Maureen, and the JSG's David Rosenberg, in front of the Cable Street Mural

ASK THE RABBI

Our respected teacher is here to solve your problems in these troubled times.

Dear Rabbi

My daughter who lives in Israel wants to take part in the demonstrations against Netanyahu's attacks on democracy. I've noticed however that there are some people who are holding Palestinian flags and I fail to see what the Palestinian people have to do with democracy in Israel. Can you advise?

The Rabbi replies

I agree. Perhaps your daughter's time would be better spent supporting righteous Jews in their protests against US Christian missionaries gathering near our Western Wall, where they pray for "the increase of God's salvation promises and plans for

Jerusalem and Israel". None of these people were born here, so how dare they come to our country and attempt to erase our historical, religious and cultural identity, on the basis of selected quotes from the Bible.

Dear Rabbi

I felt an existential threat to my Jewish existence during the 2015-2019 years of the Labour Party and so I voted Conservative. However I am disappointed with their record and am considering voting Labour in 2024. Is it now safe for me to do so?



The Rabbi replies

We are all a lot safer now that those who existentially threatened us have been expelled or suspended from the Labour Party. What a relief for us and the *Daily Mail*. I much prefer to see party members in discussions with business leaders than in noisy protests about poverty or migrants' rights. (These migrants are somewhat glib with their use of the word "threats". What do they know? They'd do well to speak to Margaret Hodge who was once sent a letter by a solicitor.)

Dear Rabbi

I listened to the speakers at the National Conservatism conference in May 2023 who spoke of the insidious influence of Cultural Marxism throughout our media and educational institutions. Despite not knowing what it is, I am now very anxious about it.

The Rabbi replies

Our rabbis didn't teach us about Marxism in the yeshiva, so I have consulted a variety of colleagues to answer this question. From what I have been told,

Marx was an observant Jew with a big beard before he went into retail with his friend Spencer. He shaved his beard off and began selling women's underwear from a penny cart he wheeled around, shouting: "Each according to their gusset!" But Marx started wearing the underwear and makeup while reading stories to children in the British Library, and changed his name to Carly's Capital Commodities. This is Cultural Marxism, and wearing a costume in front of children is dangerous unless you have a religious title.

Praise where it's due

Finally, because this magazine can only appear in the 18th week after the Feast of Holly but during the Fast of Philip, we missed an opportunity to congratulate the Labour Party's National Executive Committee for commissioning Martin Forde QC to produce a report on bullying, racism and sexism in the party. What a refreshing change for a political party to be honest about its processes and sometimes its failures. We look forward to its publication by the end of 2020.