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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, gays and lesbians and transgender people within and beyond our community;
- promote views that link the interests of Jewish people to the interests of other national and cultural minorities and oppressed groups, locally, nationally and internationally, and to a common socialist future;
- counter myths about the "shrinking", "dying" and "assimilating" diaspora by affirming the vitality of Jewish communities across the world;
- counter Zionist ideology, which subordinates the needs of diaspora Jews to the demands of Israeli state nationalism, and justifies exclusivist, discriminatory and repressive practices towards the Palestinian people;
- promote ideas and perspectives that offer a progressive solution to conflicts involving the Jewish people such as the Israel/Palestine conflict;
- expose and oppose fundamentalist ideas and religious coercion within and beyond our community;
- reclaim a "people's history" of the Jews which connects our historical experience to the struggles of other working people and the oppressed;
- highlight the problems facing minorities in society and within progressive movements and make these concerns central to discussions of socialist strategy here and now;
- support and promote radical progressive cultural initiatives within and beyond the Jewish community;
- promote views which link the struggle to build socialism with the struggle for a healthy and sustainable environment;
- promote a socialism that is culturally pluralist and fully democratic both in its ends and means.

JEWISH SOCIALIST

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
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■ Counting racist attacks ■ New Age conspiracies ■ JFS in the 1960s ■

■ The far right in Israel ■ Diaspora + doikayt today ■ One woman's war ■

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the new issue of Jewish Socialist. Apologies for the long delay since issue 78. We had begun to plan this issue when the world was shaken by the 7th October massacre of civilians by Hamas in southern Israel, that claimed 1,200 lives (though evidence has emerged that a number of them were killed in the Israeli military's chaotic response).

Israel's war of retribution on Gaza's civilians began almost immediately – carpet bombing homes, hospitals and schools, murdering 30,000 people, including thousands of children. Thousands more are missing under the rubble. And many victims of the bombing will struggle to survive from their wounds and starvation, with medical facilities destroyed.

Since 7th October, we, as editors and activists here in Britain, have been caught up in a 24/7 spiral of organising and protest, challenging misinformation, conspiracy theories and false narratives that are being shared by state actors and activists, while trying to amplify the genuine voices of those who challenge the escalation of violence and war.

We have carried out our work in recent months under great time pressure but from a safe distance. In Gaza more than 100 journalists who braved the bombing to document the war of retribution, have been killed, many in targeted strikes by the Israeli military. The world has witnessed months of death and destruction. The claim that this is all done in "self-defence" is nauseating. But this is not just Israel's war. Its military forces follow government directives, but the bombs they drop are supplied principally by the USA, Britain and Germany, whose politicians share complicity with Israel for the outcomes.

And history did not begin on 7th October. The war against Palestinian aspirations for equality and freedom from occupation has existed for decades. When Israel passed its Nation State law in 2018, it wrote longstanding apartheid practices into its Basic Laws. When openly declared racists and fascists were welcomed into Israel's cabinet after the November 2022 elections, the oppression of the Palestinians increased in intensity. Settlers in the occupied West Bank have carried out pogroms with impunity. Hundreds of Palestinian civilians there have been killed, many more wounded, arrested and imprisoned, and homes demolished in 2023 – all before the events of 7th October.

To be clear: we stand fully behind the right to resist occupation, oppression and the siege of Gaza. We stand too against the murderous targeting of civilians and the taking of hostages. Our opposition to acts of terror against civilians applies equally whether they are carried out by individuals, resistance movements or state armies. We call for an immediate exchange for hostages with the thousands of Palestinians detained without charge in Israel, and we support the families of hostages who are protesting against Netanyahu's government and calling for deals to be struck.

It is hard to find chinks of light in this darkness, but since 7th October, the most imaginative, energetic and determined protest movements have emerged across the globe, fighting for justice

and for life. Here in Britain the Jewish Socialists' Group was a co-founder of the Jewish Bloc. This has been formed by several newer and older Jewish groups coalescing to provide a focus for activism that has brought many Jews into protests against Israel's actions and to question Zionism for the first time in their lives. The living, breathing and loving unity in our bloc is being built through a series of Friday night social and cultural events, with poetry, klezmer and Ladino music, dance, and food!

Israel is at its most powerful militarily and has loyal allies but, paradoxically, there is more questioning among diaspora Jews, not just of Israeli policies, but of the whole philosophy of Zionism than at any time since 1948, and there is open critical discussion within Israel about the state being on a trajectory towards fascism.

Ruth Lukom (p18) describes the breadth and beauty of the Jewish protest movement that has coalesced in Britain and integrated into the broader protests against war and for Palestine. It has counterparts growing in several countries. In Israel, anti-war protests were banned for two months but could not be repressed. Despite brutal policing and harassment from semi-official right wing militias, demonstrations are increasingly breaking out. We print extracts here from Dana Mills' diary of essays from within Israel's internal grassroots opposition, which has just been published, (p20). We couple that with a dynamic analysis of Israel's government and the role of its fascist elements, by Michael Sappir, an Israeli living in Berlin (p14).

The fallout from the war on Gaza is fuelling anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism, dividing Muslims and Jews, setting communities against each other. It is being used cynically by government and media to attack democratic rights to protest. As Jews we stand against all antisemitism and in solidarity with all groups facing racism and fascism. And we absolutely defend democratic rights to protest.

Jewish leadership organisations in Britain and some loud, ultra-right wing campaigners, desperate to defend indefensible actions by Israel, have circulated wild claims about the extent of antisemitism, and tried to discredit the mass of people who have taken to the streets for justice for Palestine, for humanity and life, not death and destruction, accusing them of fomenting and engaging in antisemitism. We desperately need an honest and forensic accounting of the problem. Joseph Finlay (p5) has provided just that.

Tensions are high among those who have the greatest stake in the situation, and there are fascist individuals and groups always ready to exploit that. But fascism in the current era is more than opportunism. Fascism in the form of currents promoting a cocktail of ethno-nationalism, authoritarianism, various types of racism and persuasive conspiracy theories is rearing its head in many countries infiltrating and emerging in unlikely venues. Our section from p8 to p15 takes an in-depth look into these worrying trends, drawing on past examples and some surprising present day manifestations. We ignore them at our peril.

This issue of *Jewish Socialist* is dedicated to Rosamine Hayeem, Richard Stone and Keith White, whose recent deaths are an irreplaceable loss to progressive, humanitarian politics. We mourn them all for their principled activism and campaigning, and are grateful for the stalwart support they gave to this magazine. We wish their families long life.

Jewish Socialist Editorial Committee: Julia Bard, Judith Cravitz, David Rosenberg, Raf Salkie, Zach Smerin and Charlotte Prager Williams. With thanks to Sue Levi Hughes for additional proofreading. Cover photo: David Rosenberg

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Restoring Polish democracy?

In the October 2023 parliamentary election the right-wing populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) was ousted after eight years by a broad centre-left to centre-right coalition. Jewish and non-Jewish socialists should rejoice at their temporary setback, but the path forward is unclear.

The Law and Justice (PiS) party's limited welfare policies allowed it to posture as a populist force and win support from Poles tired of 25 years of neoliberalism. Others were enticed by social conservatism, clericalism and bigotry. The government's racism, sexism, xenophobia, islamophobia, transphobia, homophobia and antisemitism ranged from thinly veiled to completely blatant, depending on political expediency. Its anti-

immigrant rhetoric was exemplified by former PM Morawiecki. During the election campaign he claimed that in France, Germany or Sweden, people could not leave their house after dusk due to muggings and murders, blaming "marauding bands of young Muslim immigrants".

PiS maintained relatively stable support throughout its project to turn Poland into a nominally democratic autocracy. Modelled on Hungary, the state envisaged by the party was one of packed courts and propagandistic public media, with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) becoming nepotistic piggybanks. Despite this, the democratic parliamentary opposition – liberal, centrist-agrarian and left blocs – secured a combined 248 seats

in the *Sejm* out of a total 460. They contested the election separately but pledged to work together to restore liberal democratic order. Ultimately, PiS could do nothing but petulantly delay the inevitable.

The former party of power has lost, but has not faded into irrelevancy. Law and Justice has not fractured and remains the largest single parliamentary grouping. Its stooges in the courts, media and SOEs have not disappeared. While the coalition has a comfortable majority, it does not have



Protest banners on a strike against abortion laws in Poland
Photo: Karolina Grabowska.
©Karolina Grabowska

NEWS

enough votes to override a veto on legislation by the PiS-aligned President. He can largely block legislation until his term ends in August 2025.

However, the new government has aggressively attempted to assert authority. Within a week, control over the state radio, television and press agency was wrested away from PiS lackeys. The new Justice Minister is fighting battles on several fronts against unconstitutional organs in the courts and against prosecutors who assisted the former authorities. Several commissions, inquiries and audits have further been launched in order to hold the previous government to account. The final sentencing, parliamentary removal and temporary imprisonment of two PiS MPs, resulting from a scandal dating back to 2006, have exacerbated political tensions.

This spectacle is partly attributable to the forthcoming municipal and Euro-parliamentary elections in April and June. Although the liberal and right-wing media focus on the machinations of the political class, they give less attention to policy that actually impacts Poland's general population. Some urgency has been given to public sector pay rises, especially for teachers, but there is little focus on housing, healthcare or the environment.

Jews in Poland, and beyond, will be especially interested in the government's attitude towards "historical policy", including the legacy of the Holocaust. The new state budget has cut some funding to the frequently propagandistic Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). The Culture Minister has brought in several experts to replace PiS hacks on

the board of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, while pressure is mounting on the PiS-appointed director of the Jewish Historical Institute to resign.

Feminist and LGBT+ rights campaigners formed the backbone of the opposition to PiS, and are becoming impatient with centrist MPs stalling discussions about increasing access to abortion or introducing civil partnerships for same-sex couples at the least. While legislation would most likely be vetoed by the President, pressure on him should be applied, especially since such policies enjoy majority support.

Will the new government follow in the footsteps of the US Democrats, who after defeating Trump in 2020 largely focused on the January 6th storming of the Capitol? Nathan Robinson warned in *Current Affairs* in 2022, that such a strategy might leave the majority of the population alienated from what they perceive as an internal squabble among the political establishment and herald a Trump/Republican victory next time.

Actions to reverse PiS's corrupt and anti-democratic practices should be advertised to the general public, but not at the expense of making systemic improvements in the everyday lives of people in Poland. If policy areas are not addressed, further disillusionment may result in PiS returning to power – this time, almost certainly in coalition with the far-right Konfederacja. Despite focusing on economic populism and making some attempts at distancing themselves from their extremist reputation, Konfederacja significantly underperformed: their small parliamentary gains were well below the projected 13-15%

opinion polls a few months before the election. Some members have decided to return to performative bigotry, including one of their MPs who extinguished a Hanukkah Menorah in Parliament.

The Left bloc has secured a few ministries, but its grassroots connections with the labour movement are weak, as is organised labour itself. Without local grassroots organisations and a vibrant media, it will find it hard to shape ongoing political discourse.

However, while the bloc as a whole lost a third of its parliamentary caucus, its most progressive element – Left Together (*Lewica Razem*) – increased its representation from six to nine MPs in the Sejm. In several constituencies they performed better than higher-placed candidates from the post-communist social liberal New Left. And unlike the New Left, Razem has not entered the government, allowing it to continue presenting itself as an anti-establishment force.

Any progressive, let alone socialist organising in Poland, must take the opportunity of a somewhat improved political situation to develop on all fronts. This applies both to general movements and to explicitly Jewish left organising. We need to develop our own media, help to revitalise the weak labour movement, create new avenues for cultural and educational political engagement, constantly reach out to new people and groups to join our movements, and strengthen ties internationally to link our struggles. Only then will we see the practical results and longterm positive change we so desperately need.

Zach Smerin

CHANGE THE WORLD



Miknaf Ha'aretz are Jewish land-lovers, land-tenders and food-growers, dedicated to building an earth-based, radical diasporist Jewish community in the UK through retreats, courses, youth camps and more.

They believe that connecting to land enables us to connect our community to ancestral practices through ritual, prayer, food growing, justice work, feasting and festival celebration, all of which are rooted in the land and the cycles of the seasons.

They believe that everyone needs connection

to land in order to heal from the multiple oppressions and displacements that have resulted in unjust systems of land access. They are building solidarity across communities impacted by these systems and radically reimagining land justice in the UK.

They also publish zines. Their latest, *Homeland*, takes a radical and critical look at what "homeland" means, and was published in January 2024. Proceeds from it are being donated to Medical Aid for Palestinians.

Find out more at: www.miknafhaaretz.co.uk

MORE THAN A QUESTION OF NUMBERS

On 15th February 2024, the Community Security Trust (CST) published its annual report on antisemitic incidents for the year 2023. It attracted substantial media coverage: "The Explosion in Hatred Against Jews in Britain", raged the *Daily Mail's* front page, while *The Times* led with "Worst Antisemitism for 40 Years Since Atrocities". This coverage was no surprise. At least since 2015, antisemitism in Britain is big news. And news demands sensation. While antisemitism falling or remaining static is not newsworthy, a rise always is. To the casual reader it must seem like there is a permanent antisemitism "crisis".

It was not always so. Statistics were first collected in 1984, when the Community Security Organisation (CSO – later renamed CST) was formed as a quasi-autonomous unit under the Board of Deputies' umbrella. It was funded by the Group Relations Educational Trust, led by 62 Group veteran, Gerald Ronson. The decision to begin recording incidents was probably motivated by the American Anti-Defamation League (ADL) doing so in 1979, and also attempts by the Greater London Council (GLC) to collect hate crime data in London in the early 1980s. In this era, the Board of Deputies preferred to play down antisemitism, painting it as a fringe phenomenon. It was more likely to be the Jewish Socialists' Group bringing incidents of antisemitism to light. The CST recorded around 200-300 incidents per year in the 1980s and 1990s.

CATEGORIES OF INCIDENTS

In 1990 it refined the method, creating the categories it still uses to this day: Extreme Violence; Assault; Damage and Destruction of Jewish Property; Threats; Literature; and Abusive Behaviour. They collate incidents in these categories to give a total figure. In 2023 that total was 4,103, a 122% increase on 2022, and it is these two figures that have attracted the most coverage.

Extreme Violence (GBH or threat to life) has remained, thankfully, rare, with zero or a handful of incidents in each year. Assaults (which include spitting, throwing objects or attempts at such) have risen from around 20-40 a year in the 1990s to 80-120 from 2004 and higher still in the last five years, with 266 in 2023. Damage and vandalism has remained fairly static at around 50-80 incidents a year. Questionably, in 2023, the CST included in this category 53 incidents of tearing down or otherwise damaging posters of the Israeli hostages "as it was Jewish people who printed and put them up, and the majority of the posters' subjects were Jewish too".

Antisemitic Literature (now including mass email) incidents have remained similarly constant: around

20-30 per year, with 22 in 2023. Sometimes the literature recorded is antisemitic only in passing, without specifically being targeted at Jews, as in a bizarre case study of a leaflet addressed to Muslims in Manchester on whether or not cat food must be halal, which quotes a Hadith with an anti-Jewish element.

Antisemitic Threats remained in the 20-30 per year range from the 1990s to 2010s, rising to 80+ from 2014, and a large jump to 305 last year. These are serious incidents that we should be concerned about. Clearly they have risen and continue to rise. There are likely to be some incidents where the victims were targeted because they were identifying themselves with Israel, rather than because they were Jewish; the report does not give enough information to know either way. If so, this would not count as "discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)", in the words of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA), as it would be targeting someone, or something, because of a political position. But the majority of incidents in these categories would likely meet the JDA definition and thus should be counted as antisemitic incidents.

AMORPHOUS INCIDENTS

These, however, represent 775 incidents: 19% of the headline 4,103 figure for 2023. (In 2022 there were 323 incidents from these categories.) The remaining 3,328 "incidents" fall under the amorphous Antisemitic Abuse category. The CST tells us this is comprised of "antisemitic emails, text messages, social media posts and comments", targeted antisemitic letters to individuals, as well as



Swastika daubed on a synagogue in Kent

JOSEPH FINLAY takes an in-depth look at the new Community Security Trust report on antisemitism in Britain in 2023 to assess how useful its approaches are and how accurate it is

"antisemitic graffiti on non-Jewish property". In each case these stop short of being threats – otherwise they would be recorded in that category.

Of these 3,328 incidents, 36% took place online. More than half of the online incidents occurred on Twitter/X. How can the CST justifiably count such incidents as part of a specifically UK total? The internet is international. In most cases it is impossible to state which country a post or email originates in. The individual reporting the incident to CST may be UK-based (whether or not it was directed at them) but the author could be anywhere. And yet, it is this Antisemitic Abuse category that has driven most of the rise of antisemitic incidents in the last 15-20 years, since the birth of social media in the mid-late 2000s created new ways for people to communicate and be unpleasant to each other.

POLITICISATION

It is in this incident category that the greatest risk of politicisation occurs; here the CST records incidents as antisemitic, which many Jews and experts on antisemitism would not. The CST report rarely quotes individual incidents (when it does, these are usually the most obviously antisemitic ones) but there have been so many controversies in recent years in which borderline or even wholly justifiable points have been treated as examples of definite antisemitism. To state just a few types of these: comments about Israel killing children being treated as a "blood libel"; allegations of Israeli power viewed necessarily as a conspiracy; any comparison, whether nuanced or not, between Israel and Nazism ruled immediately out of court; political criticism of Jewish figures automatically assumed to be on account of their Jewishness. There are inevitably examples of such politicisation in the report, not least because 43% of the incidents reported related explicitly to Israel/Palestine and the current crisis.

I don't doubt that many of the incidents in the Antisemitic Abuse category would be seen as antisemitic by most Jews or scholars of antisemitism. But a substantial number, perhaps even the majority, would be much more contested. The wider point, however, is the fact that wildly different types of incidents are collated into a single total, implying that they are all essentially alike and of equal danger. Is this wise? Surely, assaults, threats and desecration of synagogues are much more worrying than conspiracy theories and Israel/Nazi comparisons on Twitter? This collation masks the most serious cases: in each of 2020 and 2021, there were three cases of extreme violence against Jews; in 2022 there was one. If anything should be in the headlines, it should be that. The totalising of vastly divergent phenomena seems designed to perpetuate the ongoing "moral panic" over antisemitism, and to induce the government to combat it through ever more draconian and politicised methods.

The CST is not even the worst offender in terms of politicising antisemitism and in counting unremarkable discourse as antisemitic. There is the upstart Campaign Against Antisemitism, founded in 2014, which axiomatically treats anti-Zionism as antisemitism; the unhinged Twitter fringe of Labour Against Antisemitism; and the highly questionable new "academic" London Centre for the Study of Antisemitism, led by the

"activist sociologist" David Hirsh.

To its credit, the CST discounts as antisemitic many of the incidents that are reported to it; 2,185 were rejected in 2023. That this figure is so high demonstrates the level of paranoia in the British Jewish community and the tendency to assume the worst. Despite this care, the CST is not immune from the politicisation of the community in general. It is counting as antisemitic things that would not have been widely recognised as such in earlier decades.

One example is the phrase "Free Palestine", which accounted for 427 incidents. The CST rightly "does not consider this sentiment to be inherently antisemitic" but reports that in these cases "it was directed at Jewish people or institutions purely because they were Jewish". I oppose directing it at random people who present as Jews, but I want to know more. Were any of them carrying Israeli flags or other Israeli insignia at the time? If it was on social media, did they have a history of pro-Israel posts? If either was the case, then directing the phrase at them would be a reasonable form of political speech.

7TH OCTOBER TIMELINE

A more concerning form of politicisation in the report is the use of a 7th October timeline. The CST reports that it first recorded an incident, apparently inspired by the Hamas attacks, at 12.55pm on that day, when a vehicle with a Palestinian flag attached and an occupant shaking their fist drove past a synagogue in Hertfordshire. It continues by noting 416 incidents in the week after 7th October, claiming that because these happened so soon, "it was the Hamas terror attack, rather than Israel's military response in Gaza, that sparked most of the antisemitism in this country". This is simply incorrect. Israel's military response in Gaza began on 7th October. Within a few days Israel had killed as many Palestinians in Gaza as Hamas had killed in Israel on 7th October. It is entirely probable that antisemitic incidents (or alleged antisemitic incidents) between 7th and 14th October represented misplaced responses to Israel's military campaign, not grotesque attempts to celebrate Hamas's massacre.

One non-Israel related concern about the report is its use of ethnic monitoring. It says that in about a

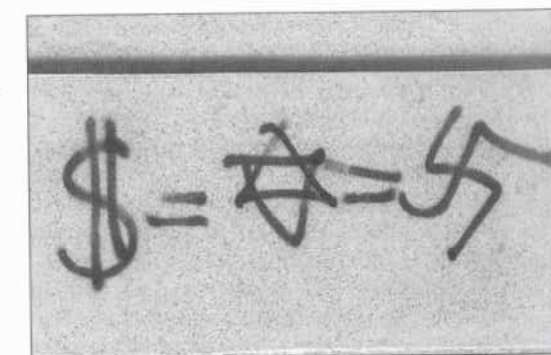


quarter of incidents it "obtained a description of the ethnic appearance of the offender", telling us that, of these, 38% were white, 12% black, and 33% were "Arab or North African appearance". The CST is keen to point out that, in the past, the majority of perpetrators have been white, but adds that in the period from 7th October to the end of 2023, 32% were recorded as white and 41% Arab or North African, emphasising the increased culpability of the latter groups in the incidents of this part of the year. Should the CST be recording ethnic descriptions in this way? It strikes me as unnecessary and unwise. These are not ethnic descriptions but racial ones, imposed from without rather than self-defined. The figures for the last four months of 2023 draw on very limited data – 1,281 incidents out of 4,103 – to cast blame on a group that is heavily racialised in contemporary society, adding to the popular right-wing narrative that Arabs or Muslims are the main sources of extremism and antisemitism. It is controversial enough when the police do this ethnic monitoring; worse when a private security group that seeks to protect one particular ethno-religious group does it.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH?

On reading the report, the reader is assaulted with an unceasing barrage of statistics. How much does this really tell us about contemporary antisemitism? Does it make us safer? We have become so used to these annual reports, and the resultant hysterical media coverage that we presume antisemitism has to be recorded in this way. But it does not. The practice began in 1984. We have no comparable data from earlier decades but from press reports, memoirs and oral history we can safely conclude that antisemitism was historically much higher, certainly in the 1920s,

'30s and '40s. It is not clear that the granular collection and publication of such statistics, with all their inevitable flaws and tendencies towards



Left: antisemitic graffiti
Opposite page: "Bring them home" posters that were being pulled down in the early days of the war in Gaza

politicisation, actually helps make people less antisemitic, which surely is surely the goal.

More substantively, how wise is it for separate bodies to record racist incidents against one particular group only? Can we really do antiracism in siloes, with each group focused only on attacks on their particular community? Wouldn't it be better to have broad-based antiracism organisations, to try and record racist hate crime in general, and to offer community-based approaches to combating it? Such organisations would be less prone to the politicisation I have described; they would fight the conflation of any diaspora group with the government of another country, working together against the structural racism of the British state. Such an approach would reject the British government's philosemitic embrace and assert that our interests lie with all racialised minorities who fight for justice both at home and abroad. It would be better for everyone, and, ultimately, good for the Jews.

WISEWORDS

"No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about."

Edward Said

From his book *Culture and Imperialism*, published 1993.

Said was a Palestinian academic, critic and activist.

He was born in Jerusalem in 1935 and died in New York in 2003.



THE FAR RIGHT UNDER

JEREMY GREEN
investigates a newspaper and a movement with far right views but a radical cultural style

"The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters." So said Gramsci, and he might have been thinking about the strange conjuncture of the "Cosmic Right" – a blend of new age weirdness, alternative healing and wellness, and reactionary politics.

Perhaps the seeds of this movement had been germinating out of sight for a while, but the first shoots became apparent with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. It began with "Stand in the park" protests against the lockdown restrictions, and soon there was a movement – or at least a series of Telegram channels and social media presences – with various names, including the Freedom Movement, the Sovereign Citizens Movement, the White Rose (named after the German resistance to the Nazis).

And there was *The Light*, a free newspaper full of anti-vaccination misinformation, anxiety-inducing material about radio waves and surveillance by the state and big tech, and a ragbag of other conspiracy theories.

It's hard to overstate how horrible *The Light* is. It contains sympathetic articles by and about figures from the traditional far right, like Anne Marie Waters of For Britain and Pegida UK – who in turn uses the paper as a platform to praise Tommy Robinson of the English Defence League. Another regular contributor is Niall McCrae, a former lecturer involved in far right organisation Hearts of Oak, with Tommy Robinson. McCrae has co-authored with Robin Tilbrook, the founder of the far right English Democrats party, originally known as the English National Party. There are articles in defence of Holocaust denial and supporting the genocidal antisemite Graham Hart.

There's homophobia and transphobia, and misinformation about sex education in schools. There are attacks on feminism, women's equality, contraception and abortion rights, and the claim that there is a "war on masculinity".

And there is a relentless promotion of climate change denial and obfuscation, alongside attacks on environmentalists and especially on any restrictions on car use.

The themes in the paper are picked up by an emerging street movement. There are rallies with speakers whose websites feature antisemitic material drawn from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and conspiracy-laden accounts of the toothless United Nations sustainability initiative Agenda 2030. In towns across the UK, and now in Ireland, there are weekly stalls distributing the paper as well as other books and pamphlets. There

is a strong presence in several towns in the South West, and the paper has been spotted in London and in towns in the north.

Groups of protestors converged on Oxford to protest against traffic calming schemes and "Fifteen Minute Cities", another well-intentioned town planning idea about localisation of services, which is characterised as a plan to create urban ghettos in which citizens will be confined. A mob of "conspiraloons" stormed a meeting of Glastonbury Town Council and then crowed that it had forced the administration – the equivalent of a parish council, with few powers – to abandon its non-existent plans for a Fifteen Minute City.

What is this?

For some, this phenomenon is both unprecedented and confusing. Sure, the movement's messages seem to come from the right, but its cultural style doesn't. The people who hand out *The Light* look like hippies. The material often has an anti-corporate or Trump-style "workerist" slant to it, with lashings of libertarianism. In our little town of Stroud, where the movement has gained a foothold among wellness practitioners and some members of the Steiner community, the most prominent supporters are ex-socialists and environmental activists. Some continue to wear Jeremy Corbyn T-shirts and loudly profess themselves to be socialists. *The Light's* editor (a flat-earther) began his involvement in politics as an anti-fracking campaigner.

So a new description and analysis is proposed to explain what's going on. Unsurprisingly some commentators revive the vapid "horseshoe theory" (the idea that the far-left and the far-right, rather than being at opposite and opposing ends of a linear continuum of the political spectrum, closely resemble each other). Others have coined the term "diagonalism" to characterise the leftists who turn right, and this seems to have struck a chord in Germany (as *Querdenker*), where the pandemic and anti-vaxx activism created a steady pipeline from the Greens and Die Linke to the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

Naomi Klein, in her recent perceptive book *Doppelgänger*, prefers to talk about the "mirror world", in which rightwing politicians pick up on areas of anxiety that the left has either ignored or lost its interest – technological surveillance, the failings of the medical-industrial complex, the capture of international organisations by megacorporations, the hypocrisy of the liberal elite and its techno-fixes for profound systemic failures...

I'm not so sure that what we're looking at is so

WRAPS

unprecedented. When "classic" fascism first arrived, in Italy in the early 1920s, some people on the left were confused. Fascism was against traditional conservatives and institutions, against laissez faire and free market economics. It presented itself as a "third way", modernising, beyond traditional conservatism and socialism, and it was in favour of a great deal of state direction of the economy and society – unlike traditional conservatives.

Mussolini's movement in Italy recruited syndicalists and anarchists as well as nationalists. Mosley's British Union of Fascists was preceded by his New Party, which attracted former members of the left-wing Independent Labour Party, and a few stayed the course with the later incarnation as fully fledged fascists. Despite his enthusiasm for the British Empire and colonial wars, Mosley was a campaigner for "peace" in the later 1930s, opposing any kind of confrontation with Europe's Nazi and fascist regimes. Our new rightists are keen to advocate for peace with Putin.

In Germany there were so-called "Beefsteak Nazis", allegedly brown on the outside but red on the inside. Fabians like George Bernard Shaw admired Mussolini's hostility to Italy's liberal institutions. Mainstream social democrats like Henri de Man in Belgium openly embraced fascism.

It's a defining feature of the far right that it presents itself as against the system. Whereas the mainstream right says that the system is under threat and needs to be defended, the far right says that the system has already been conquered by those it defines as enemies, and it needs to be taken back so that the natural order of things can be restored. So they might be revolutionaries, but they want a revolution that will reimpose hierarchy and inequality.

This can get very weird. In the US the QAnon movement and its wider circle of alt-right militant Trump supporters, which talked a lot about the elites and the "deep state", hoped for a military coup to restore the constitution and Trump to the presidency. It is quite alarming to see Free Alex Jones T-shirts on the High Street in Stroud.

So the far right will sometimes be hostile to the same things that the left opposes, but this doesn't really mean that we share common ground. They are hostile to the banking system, but this hostility is grounded in a racialised understanding of financial institutions ("controlled by Jews"). They are hostile to the international organisations intended to ameliorate the worst aspects of capitalist chaos – not because they are too weak to do the job, but because they believe that these institutions are too strong, and so impinge on the rights of nation-states and the free market. They are critical of the health care system, not because it's inadequate to meet the needs of the population but because it's too powerful – and they don't much like welfare or redistribution of any kind.

To be absolutely clear, I'm not saying that they are really classic fascists, and that all that's needed is a Scooby-Doo type unmasking.

The Light is part of a new kind of far right. It doesn't

look like old-style conservatives or fascists. It's prepared for the internet age, but unlike recent conspiracism, which rarely moved offline, it has adherents prepared to spend several days a week handing out a paper in the cold, organising face-to-face meetings and rallies. Their ideas and rhetoric are much more like the US libertarian far right: opposed to state intervention and welfare, and in support of "freedom" for those with money and privileges. And although *The Light* and its supporters are not themselves fascists, the paper has a problematically cosy relationship with some actual fascists.

It picks up supporters in strange places and funnels them towards far right politics. Many of them don't realise that they are being funnelled, and don't have the political background to see what is happening. It builds on seemingly innocuous campaigns such as Keep It Cash, which offer gateways to conspiracy theories that only become evident when one looks further into the promoters, such as the campaign run by Debbie Hicks in the Hayes and Harlington local elections, which was connected with the "Let London Live" anti-vaxx/anti-Covid rules movement.

It's possible that some of the most committed supporters don't even realise this, hence the protestations that they are not far right, the Jeremy Corbyn T-shirts, the claims to be a left splinter group and so on. It doesn't matter what they think about this, what matters is what they do, and from that it's clear that *The Light* is a phenomenon and a project of the far right. Its positions on LGBTQ people, refugees and migrants, and feminism (all attacked as "woke" at best and part of a conspiracy to divide at worst), free speech for racists and antisemites, and climate change denial, should be enough to demonstrate this.

It's important not to be taken in by rhetoric that says we are "all on the same side". However nice the people handing out the paper, whatever they may have been in the past, they are now, wittingly or unwittingly, part of a project that's aimed at building a far right movement.

The purpose of classic fascism was to defend capitalism against the labour and socialist movements – to smash workers' organisations. It's not entirely clear yet, but it looks to me like the primary purpose of this new far right is to defeat environmentalist organisations and protect a system based on the production and consumption of fossil fuels.

Though Hope Not Hate have published a piece (written by our Stroud-based campaigning group) and referred to *The Light* and some other aspects of this phenomenon, and the *12 Rules for What* podcast has also explored this issue in audio form and in their book; it's disappointing that the main anti-fascist organisations don't seem to be taking much notice. It's easy to dismiss this new movement as just a bunch of cranks who will turn out to be mostly harmless. I think that's wrong. Sure, they don't look like the Nazis in 1933, but they do look a lot like the way the Nazis looked in 1923, a mostly fringe group in funny outfits who believed in all sorts of occultist nonsense and were only picking up limited numbers of recruits and votes. We should be taking notice, and preparing to confront their ideas and their presence.



Below: protesters against *The Light's* dissemination of far right conspiracy theories. Opposite page: cuttings from the paper.



FASH APPEAL

In a period where far right voices are getting a hearing in what seem to be unlikely quarters, the left is hampered by its inherited orthodoxies for understanding the appeal of fascism, warns **DAVID ROSENBERG**

The narrow streets of Bethnal Green straggle across East London, hidden like a shameful secret behind the city's façade of wealth. The tiny box-like houses were hastily put up years ago, without thought, without plan, without consideration of beauty or regard to health, to accommodate the unhappy population which manufactures the city's goods.

This sharp commentary depicting the grim reality of working class life in 1936, within a mile of London's citadels of wealth, but seemingly a world apart, was written by Ann Cutmore. She was a frequent contributor to *The Blackshirt*, the weekly newspaper of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF), and drama critic for its more select monthly journal, *Action*. She was one of the party's ideologues.

Her quote is at odds with the conventional left-wing wisdom that depicts the role of 1930s fascism as a force that will repress and guard against working class revolt in order to defend a failing capitalist system.

Clement Bruning, another regular commentator in *The Blackshirt*, showed similar concern for working class victims of capitalism. A column he wrote in October 1935 expressed both surprise and gratitude at the BUF's success in recruiting members in the impoverished East End over the previous 12 months.

Although the BUF was founded in October 1932, it was not until autumn 1934 that it opened its first branch in East London. Its initial recruitment in London had been more focused on the middle and

upper classes but by 1936 it had four very large branches in the East End, rooted in their working class communities, and a big hinterland of supporters in the area. He noted:

The people there, not so well fed or well housed as are the inhabitants of more prosperous London, have yet a deeper patriotism...

Fascism appeals to the sturdy East Ender because it recognises the value and dignity of labour... We are winning wholehearted adherence because we have preached a cause and a system bringing hope and sunlight into lives darkened by long years of hunger, squalor and despair...

In 1936, the BUF began to publish a supplementary local paper, *East London Pioneer*. In its January

1937 issue, it described a home where 18 people lived, sharing one outside toilet and one water tap, both of which were infested with cockroaches. The paper declared that:

The men who are fit to produce Britain's wealth and are fit to fight to protect that wealth are entitled to live as human beings and not as companions of every type of vermin that gather where filth and squalor are rampant.

Of course you would find accompanying text laced through with the most vicious antisemitism that used crude stereotypes and scapegoating, but part of the way they got a hearing for that core ideology was through a genuine attempt to reveal the real conditions of life experienced by people that their readers could identify with.

If these quotes so far have surprised you, try this one for size. On the 100th anniversary year of the Tolpuddle Martyrs' conviction for taking a secret oath to "combine" and collectively resist attempts to cut their wages, a moment marked with a clamour by the trade union movement, *The Blackshirt*, celebrated "these men, living poor miserable lives". It cast them as

early heroes in the struggle against a harsh individualism. They desired nothing more than the right to combine and to protect each other against a common enemy... The fundamental new faith of these men was that unity was strength... The opponents to the Tolpuddle Martyrs were inspired by selfish greed.

Fascism has generally been dismissed as the sworn enemy of trade unions, and many – such as UNITE, the RMT, the FBU and UNISON – today, have a strong record of anti-fascist activism. Under Oswald Mosley's leadership, the BUF regularly condemned trade union leaders as "tools of Moscow" but his fascist economic approach was far from any free market capitalist fundamentalism. He promoted substantial state intervention alongside "productive" capitalism and a high-productivity, high-wages economy, while critiquing speculative capitalism which made the rich richer but produced nothing. Mosley argued in favour of workers' collective struggles to achieve better wages and conditions.

Ultimately, though, any fascist critique of capitalism was sublimated to a deeper and more fundamental ideology that sought to blame one ethnic element (Jews) for capitalism's heartlessness and destructive impacts on society.

The opportunistic deception involved was summed up very well in a communist *Daily Worker* commentary in 1937, which even got reprinted in the right-wing *Jewish Chronicle*:

The Jew is a capitalist; the Jew is a communist. The Jew mixes with Christians; the Jew sticks too much to his own race. The Jew desires and foments war; the Jew is a pacifist and refuses to fight. England is the best country in the world; the Jews rule England.

True, there were Jewish capitalists and Jewish

communists, and many of the Jews who became communists did so out of economic necessity, looking to the Communist Party as a vehicle for challenging the poverty they experienced daily as a result of the actions of capitalists of all faiths (including Judaism) and none.

Too often fascists have been dismissed merely as odd individuals who are psychologically inclined to evil, or extreme, authoritarian racists. But today, when the smarter individuals on the far right are making a sustained effort to identify causes and occupy spaces that have been more associated with the left, it is important to have a more holistic understanding of the way fascism works and the kinds of appeal it makes.

Fascism made a very conscious appeal to youth. When Mosley headed the short-lived New Party between 1931-32, which turned out to be a transitional pathway to fully-fledged fascism, he described the New Party as a "a party of action based on youth" that would mobilise "energy, vitality and manhood to save and rebuild the nation". A very gendered statement but despite this, its emphasis on "action", on deeds rather than words, won it support from significant individuals who had played a part in the suffragette struggle, such as Mary Richardson (pictured left) who had been imprisoned in 1914 for attacking and damaging Velasquez's *Rokeby Venus* artwork at the National Gallery. Richardson became head of the BUF's women's section, though later she quit the party, believing it to be insincere in its promises to women.

The BUF claimed to be "the only party that understands youth and can offer it the chance and honour to serve the home country in times of peace". This was a powerful sentiment given the experience of many families compelled to sacrifice so many younger members conscripted for the first World War – a war that was essentially about markets and empires.

The BUF's cross-class appeal to youth centred on a condemnation of the "tired old gang" politicians of the mainstream parties whom they cast as responsible for the economic crisis that so heavily hit young people seeking work. The fascists understood the beauty of generational politics: it obscured class politics and enhanced their cross-class appeal. They *did* try to recruit unemployed youth, and young street fighters, but their much more serious youth policy was played out elsewhere. They formed fascist branches among students in 20 public schools, grooming elite youth as future bearers of fascist and antisemitic politics.

It is depressing that a number of progressive movements today have so uncritically embraced a reactionary generational politics that blames older people/"boomers" in general rather than the cross-generational ruling class as responsible for younger people's difficult lives today. Those playing generation politics today seem blithely unaware of the generation of working class people now in their 70s and 80s whose lives were devastated under Thatcherism.

Fascism

by Michael Rosen

I sometimes fear that people think that fascism arrives in fancy dress worn by grotesques and monsters as played out in endless re-runs of the Nazis. Fascism arrives as your friend. It will restore your honour, make you feel proud, protect your house, give you a job, clean up the neighbourhood, remind you of how great you once were, clear out the venal and the corrupt, remove anything you feel is unlike you... It doesn't walk in saying, "Our programme means militias, mass imprisonments, transportations, war and persecution."

In the 1970s, Mosley's political descendants in the National Front also focused heavily on recruiting youth, especially outside football grounds. But in that decade they were being countered not only by anti-fascists turning out to deny them their spaces, but also through a positive, visionary cultural intervention that turned many young people in an anti-racist political direction. This was Rock Against Racism, which organised

gigs, events and carnivals across Britain in the late 1970s, uniting the growing audiences for punk and reggae in the same venues.

From 1979 to the early '80s this was enhanced through a remarkable musical genre that developed in the Midlands: 2-tone, which pioneered individual bands comprising black and white musicians performing together, conveying powerful messages against racism and sexism and for multiculturalism.

Today we again need to infuse our antiracist and anti-fascist politics with innovative, progressive cultural initiatives that touch people's lives every day and build

more solid bonds between us, as diverse communities with a joint imagined future that's intertwined on so many levels. And we also need to infuse it once again with a powerful politics that re-emphasises the central role of class, both as a reality and as an explanatory tool that cuts through conspiracy/hidden hand theories, and instead gives rational explanations of where and how wealth and power are concentrated in society.

The serious fascists of today won't turn up in Blackshirt uniforms, though there are still a few nostalgics around. You are more likely to encounter them infiltrating neighbourhood or community campaigns on quite mundane issues, or trying to twist frustration and anger about political failings into issues of racial tension and targeting. We need to hone our arguments to expose, isolate and weaken them.



Women in the BUF. Mary Richardson, who had been a suffragette, is second from the left, standing behind the chairs



NATIONAL MYTHS AND

MICHAEL HEISER looks at the ideological mechanisms underlying racism to investigate the relationship between classical fascism and ethno-nationalism today

Vladimir Medem, one of the Jewish Labour Bund's leading theoretical thinkers, argued that capitalism had led to two forms of nationalism – nationalism of the oppressors and nationalism of the oppressed (I explored this in detail in the last issue, "A Precious Legacy", *Jewish Socialist* No 78). Nationalism forces minorities (in Medem's context, the Jews) either to culturally assimilate, and become just a religious minority, in order to take advantage of commercial markets, or to argue for a state of their own in order to control the administrative apparatus which is always in the hands of the oppressors. In both these situations, nationalism is used to hide class differences.

How can this help with understanding nationalism today in a context where ethno-nationalism is on the ascendant – whether in Orbán's Hungary, Netanyahu's Israel, Modi's India or the USA under Trump. Medem's analysis links this to the economic base but arguably cannot explain social factors such as status. How, for example, does Trumpian nationalism appeal to poor whites?

The Brazilian sociologist Jesse Souza, in his 2021 book on racism in Brazil (*Como o racismo criou o Brasil/How racism created Brazil*) provides an analysis of racism that can also be used to think about ethnonationalism. Souza argues that racism, which has many dimensions, is: historically

determined; operates through the transmission of cultural capital to some and its denial to others; is based on the material application of ideas; and legitimises oppression, which can at times be self-oppression. At the same time, he argues that it cannot be reduced to class.

Racism is also linked with a "national myth" – a set of ideas that make

sense. Souza shows how two such myths, inclusion and exclusion, have developed in Brazilian society. In other words, racism in Souza's sense is a "normal" part of society unless there is a specific societal attempt to overcome it.

Although Souza does not specifically analyse nationalism as such, I would argue that his ideas can be used to think about ethnonationalism. For example, he looks in detail at how racism was used in enabling Bolsonaro to come to power in 2018. To attract the vote of the poor, he attacked the left violently. He used the evangelical churches as a base, and cultural issues, such as "traditional family values", and attacks on those opposed to homophobia to mobilise their adherents. This meant that racism could be hidden and made the progressive policies of the left the scapegoat.

Amongst the poor, the main division is between the "honest poor" and those who, in the Bolsonaro vision, are stigmatised as "poor delinquents" – robbers, prostitutes and those seen as "deviant",

including lesbians and gays. The children of the sons of the poor live in a grey zone between morality and immorality, constructed by the higher classes in order to oppress them the better; thus the attraction of "morals" and "public order".

This discourse is racialised, with the "immoral and delinquent" being identified as black. This is attractive to poor whites and those blacks who wish to identify with the oppressor and climb the social ladder. In this context the Brazilian "white trash", like those in the US, argues Souza, do not understand the real causes of their impoverishment, and turn against the blacks who are lower in status, as much as against the middle class "educated" whites. (There is a family taboo against inter-marriage, for example, in the poor Italian-origin communities of São Paulo state, although this would not be said publicly.)

This shows, says Souza, the reality of the "moral economy", which cannot be reduced to economic causes alone as, according to Souza, some Marxists would argue. The "fight against crime" is a euphemism for killing poor black youths, thus reinforcing the excluded as a caste of untouchables against which everyone defines themselves. And the women's anti-Bolsonaro movement "Ele não" ("Not him" – a feature of the 2018 election campaign) were seen as morally inferior to the "religious and popular women" who backed Bolsonaro. The evangelical churches and other religious movements, says Souza, take the place of the state to provide help, and they then promote "family values" amongst them, turning their followers against the "morally inferior" middle class above them and the "black delinquents" below them. The poor are deemed to be responsible for their own poverty.

This is dangerous when it is turned into a political movement, which is precisely what Bolsonaro represents. The attack on "cultural Marxism", taken from Steve Bannon, should be seen in this context. The strategy was successful: in 2018, 70% of the "poor whites" in Southern Brazil voted for Bolsonaro, enabling the anti-PT alliance to take the place of the previous "Lulista" hegemony. I have not seen an analysis by social class of the 2022 election, which Lula won narrowly, but the close result and Bolsonaro's winning "whiter" states like Santa Catarina in Southern Brazil, suggests a lot of poorer whites stayed with Bolsonaro.

Souza concludes by saying that you need an analysis showing how western morality has formed the basis of social recognition and status. It is necessary to demonstrate what racism destroys, in order to understand and show how it legitimates privilege and prevents a real universal social recognition. The key distinction between societies is whether they facilitate universalism or whether they operate a divide and rule policy. Unlike, say, Germany, which, according to Souza, has gone through a process of "collective learning" given its history, Brazil hasn't done this, but could through good schooling, health service, police, justice and opportunities for good employment for all. Perhaps his view of Germany is rose-tinted, but the notion of a collective learning process, which, says Souza can go backwards as well as forward, is a strong one.



Bolsonaro and Trump, kindred ethnonationalists, in 2019.

RACIALISED MORALITY

This analysis helps us assess whether Trump or Bolsonaro are fascists – in other words whether there is a continuum between the practice and theory of classic Italian and German fascism and the ethnonationalism of Trump or Bolsonaro. Alberto Toscano's *Late Fascism – Race Capitalism and the Politics of Class* gives some insights. Toscano shows how the ideology of Italian and German fascism was presaged by settler colonialism, for example in Africa, and that understanding this is crucial to understanding "late" fascism. Secondly, he draws on writings of black American theorists, such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, to argue that the experience of domination and political violence has been differentially experienced in different countries and by different racialised groups. So he expects the authoritarian right to map its obsession with the loss of privilege on to territory, which explains, for example, the Trumpian obsession with borders. Toscano shows how there is a continuum of W E B Du Bois' notion of the "counter-revolution of property", which stretches from the Ku Klux Klan terrorism against Black Reconstruction to the rise of squadristo against labour organising in Italy, and the murderous codification of neoliberalism in Chile's constitution.

There is a clear line from the Brazilian dictatorship of the 1960s, and by extension to military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, to Bolsonaro, not least the use of consent and mandate. The case that the Generals used for taking power in South American countries was that popular elections would install or had installed socialist or communist regimes that were alien to the kinds of values they wanted to promote. Bolsonaro looks back to the

military dictatorship in Brazil as an ideal, and he would have liked to use the rules of democracy to perpetuate his regime, although there is evidence that he would not have been against a military takeover. I would have liked more discussion in the Toscano book on the continuities and discontinuities between those dictatorships and classic Italian and German fascism.

Toscano also doesn't really discuss how the authoritarian right can be fought, other than saying that neoliberalism doesn't provide a way forward. Perhaps Brazil can provide some pointers, in that Lula won the 2022 election against Bolsonaro by building a broad coalition. This included incorporating his centre-right opponent from the 2006 election, Gerardo Alckmin, as Vice President and emphasising inclusivity rather than exclusion. When Bolsonaro didn't turn up to Lula's inauguration in 2023, the opportunity was taken to include a wide range of indigenous and social justice activists to hand the presidential sash back to Lula. Another example may be the 2023 election in Poland which was won by a coalition led by Donald Tusk and included a wide range of centre-left parties. In both these cases, the authoritarian right was defeated by a coalition with an alternative vision. Contrast that with Orbán's Hungary, Modi's India, or for that matter Netanyahu's Israel, where, for very different reasons and in very different circumstances the opposition to an exclusionary ethnonationalist politics does not seem to have come together.

I believe Souza's analysis of racism can be used alongside Vladimir Medem's "economist" analysis of nationalism to interrogate the phenomenon of ethnonationalism.

Jewish Socialist Archive

We are very pleased that the **Bishopsgate Institute** in collaboration with **Jewish Socialist** has created a digital archive for this magazine. So far the first 50 issues are available 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 counter-cultures. *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 JSJ 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.



A BROKEN OF MILITARY

MICHAEL SAPPPIR talked to Jewish Socialist about the politics of the far right in Israel

Jewish Socialist: How much support there is for Netanyahu and those to the right of him?
Michael Sappir: Netanyahu is losing support. He's widely held to be responsible for 7th October, and there's a lot of frustration with the war – not for the genocide, but for failing to rescue the hostages or provide security. Israel has never been in this intense state of warfare for so long and that's taking its toll on society. The government touted this war as the moment to finally go in and finish the job – bring back peace and security, whatever the cost. But the longer it draws out, the less they can claim success. It slowly loses its charm.

It's hard to say who, exactly, is to the right of Netanyahu. Some of those in opposition to him, are moderates in some ways but more hawkish than he



Israelis demonstrating against Netanyahu's judicial overhaul
Photo: Alisdare Hickson (Creative Commons)

is. They will benefit from him losing popularity. Then there are his extremist coalition partners and the religious parties who are pretty much on board with the Kahanists.

The far right always warned that something much like the events of 7th October was right around the corner. The Israeli public is not very well-informed about the rumours being debunked, so what happened that day is largely perceived as just an abuse of innocents by crazed Hamasniks. In the first few days after that, the far right's call for total annihilation of Gaza was very well received, bolstering the far right's position.

Crucially, the international complicity in this genocide has worsened this dynamic. The far right is selling something that can't be achieved. On its own, Israel could not have kept going this long; it could not have used such disproportionate power

to so thoroughly destroy life in the Gaza Strip. This atrocity has been made possible by arms shipments and diplomatic cover from the USA and its allies, including Britain, Germany and Canada. Without that support, the far right approach would collapse. If the only way to commit the genocide was by going house to house with rifles, having to look children in the eye while exterminating them, many of these soldiers dying in the process, their willingness to do it and public support for it would dwindle. Instead, they're told, "There's a Hamas target in that building; fire a missile on it."

JS: Some of the far right parties take no issue with being called fascists. Which are they?

MS: One is Jewish Power – Otzma Yehudit, the Ben Gvir wing, which is Kahanist. Then there is the Religious Zionist party, which is more overtly religious and identified with the settler movement. Otzma Yehudit speaks more to the secular base, many of them poor people, a large proportion Mizrahim. But both now enjoy broader, cross-class and cross-sector support.

JS: Do these parties have political links with far right parties in other countries?

MS: All these parties have such connections, but probably Likud more than the extreme right, whose politics are very inward-oriented. One Likud minister, Amichai Chikli, was publicly palling around with the Swedish right recently, and others in Likud have had connections with the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ). Netanyahu's son, Yair, is definitely a fan of the European far right.

JS: What it is about their ideas that attracts people, and how is the far right using the notion that Israel is the only way of saving the Jews from this kind of catastrophe?

MS: Fascism always rests on a sense of victimisation and grievance, and obviously the Holocaust is a major element in making people feel that sense of vulnerability and loneliness in the world.

For Israelis, it feels as though military might is the only thing that protects them. It should have been evident immediately after 7th October that something was deeply broken with this narrative: What happened that day is exactly what Israel's military might was supposed to make impossible. But so far, that is largely seen as a failure of individuals in the security systems – not something brought about by Israel's militarism. There's a strong desire to regain the lost sense of militarised safety.

IF THE ONLY WAY TO COMMIT THE GENOCIDE WAS BY GOING HOUSE TO HOUSE WITH RIFLES, HAVING TO LOOK CHILDREN IN THE EYE WHILE EXTERMINATING THEM, MANY OF THESE SOLDIERS DYING IN THE PROCESS, THEIR WILLINGNESS TO DO IT AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR IT WOULD DWINDLE.

NARRATIVE SECURITY

The Israeli right has always located violence from the Palestinians in a historical line with Pharaoh, Haman, Cossacks and Hitler. That has intensified. There's a sense in which the basic conception of safety within Israel was broken on 7th October, and because Israel immediately entered into this frenzy of vengeance, with no end in sight, there hasn't been a chance to reckon with what that means.

This may be part of the reason why this government doesn't want to let the war end. Once the war is over, the whole conception of how to move forward will be radically opened up.

JS: Does the Israeli far right's extreme annihilatory racism go along with authoritarian, antidemocratic ideas, and do they have an economic philosophy?

MS: This annihilatory response to the Palestinian question is the centrepiece of their ideology. But they are also antidemocratic in a similar way to other neofascist forces. They don't say, "Democracy is degenerative to the organic nation and needs to be replaced with a dictatorship" like classical fascists did. They say, "We live under a Supreme Court dictatorship; real democracy means a government that embodies the will of the people and can do what is needed."

The judicial overhaul combines implementing this neo-authoritarianism and getting Netanyahu out of his legal trouble. That has been the central programmatic question and the political crisis of the past five years. Now there's less mass enthusiasm for the judicial overhaul. Some key parts of it have already failed. But the government is continuing to try and implement it.

On economics, elements of Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners are intensely involved in American-style libertarianism. A shadowy think tank called the Kokelet Policy Forum drafted a lot of the Bills for the judicial overhaul. There was a big exposé about them last year, and they became widely reviled.

There's a deep contradiction in this "libertarianism", which sanctifies the so-called "right to private property" over actual human rights in a situation in which Palestinians' private property is routinely and systematically violated. But when it comes down to it, these messianic libertarians don't care about Palestinians' rights to property or to anything else. The ultimate programme is that the Jews should have everything and the Arabs should have nothing. Everything else is just a question of how to get there. As it happens, adopting the libertarian posture of defending individual rights against an overbearing state is useful in garnering cross-class support to remove checks on executive power – which they see as essential for "dealing with" the Palestinians.



National Security Minister, Itamar Ben Gvir distributes guns to blackshirts in Israel's Alert Squads.

JS: Some of these people want to drop a nuclear bomb on Gaza. Is there a significant difference between the far right and Netanyahu on this?

MS: I don't believe Netanyahu has strong beliefs on anything any more. He just cares about his survival. There's no clear ideological dividing line between Likud and the far right – with some Members of the Knesset, it's hard to remember if they are in Otzma Yehudit or Likud.

But Likud has some vestiges of its moderate wing, and what differentiates them from the Kahanists is gradualism. The Kahanists propagate this idea that we're holding ourselves back for no reason – that we have to "untie the soldiers' hands". They want an end to any repercussions for soldiers' crimes because they think soldiers should feel free to get the job done: kick out the Palestinians and kill them.

Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the Religious Zionism party, advocates a slightly more refined version of that. His big plan, the "Decisive Plan", was to give the Palestinians a choice between staying, with no collective rights, and being assisted to leave. If they refused both options, they should be fought and killed.

Likud, as the centre right, would want things to be carried out more slowly because it's more manageable and can be balanced with diplomatic considerations. Netanyahu is acutely aware that the international community matters. None of these parties are used to their speech having repercussions. But their words were quoted in The Hague and have been transmitted across the world, and these extremists are suddenly having to back down about things that they clearly believe, but shouldn't have said in public.

JS: Since 7th October, the government has been encouraging Israelis to arm themselves. Does this play into the ascendance of the far right?

MS: Since the so-called Knife Intifada in 2015-16 – the wave of lone wolf, personal attacks with sharp

Continued on next page

MIKE PETERS
uncovers the life
of a young man
whose wit and
courage should
inspire us today



Jura Soyfer Alley in Vienna, with the words "1912-1939 (Concentration Camp). Lyricist, cabaret poet, journalist".

CREATIVE TO THE

Jura Soyfer was born in Kharkov in December 1912 to Russian Jewish parents, who emigrated to Austria soon after the Bolshevik Revolution. He died just 26 years later in Buchenwald. In this short life he made his mark as a journalist, comic artist, poet and fearless political satirist, ridiculing the hypocrisy and injustice that he saw around him. His tragic life, and the work he produced, still have the power to move and shock us into action.

His name is not well known today, but at a time when populism and authoritarianism are on the rise across the globe, he deserves greater recognition. There are signs that his reputation is growing: a well-reviewed new play, *Astoria*, recently produced at a small London theatre, mixes episodes from Soyfer's life with scenes from a drama he wrote of the same name. And at the service marking the 75th Anniversary of the liberation of Dachau in 2020, one of Soyfer's best known works, *The Dachau Song*, was read aloud, and a candle lit in his memory. Tony Britten, the author of *Astoria*, is a passionate enthusiast, believing that "this brilliant young man who, like so many had his life cruelly cut short before he could achieve his full potential", should be properly honoured.

A prominent contemporary of Soyfer's English editor, the publisher and writer John Lehmann, also admired the young man. Lehmann, who took Russian lessons with Soyfer in 1930s Vienna, describes him as "delicate looking ... [with] soft voice, gentle expression and great charm ... but under this mild exterior he concealed ... a strong will and cool courage." The reference to Soyfer's courage is based on Lehmann's first-hand knowledge of his friend's involvement in increasingly dangerous anti-fascist

underground activities, including the production and distribution of illegal pamphlets and newspapers.

Determined to do all he could in his writing to resist the rise of fascism during the 1930s, Soyfer's work – plays, poems, journalism and an unfinished novel – remind us how literature and art, whether serious or, as in Soyfer's case, comically satirical, may contribute to the struggle against all kinds of oppression.

Jura Soyfer's sense of humour was there from the start. Even at school, his liking for fun and ridicule made him more popular with his fellow pupils than with his teachers, who regarded his fondness for funny sketches as indicating a lack of academic seriousness. At university, he spent more time writing articles for the newspaper of the powerful Austrian Social Democratic Party than essays for his course in German Literature and History.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Vienna was known for its dynamic and progressive political and cultural life, but many of Soyfer's articles vividly portray its troubling undercurrents of instability and anxiety. Whilst Freud and his contemporaries were developing exciting new ideas and ways of looking at the world, Soyfer was alert to the fragility of the apparently liberal and civilised culture around him. He mixed with the politically progressive and enlightened Jews of Red Vienna but he knew from personal experience that anti-Jewish feeling was bubbling just under the surface. A teacher called him a "Jew-boy", and as a student he was beaten up by a policeman who told him he didn't want to see any more Jewish faces. More importantly, he was prevented from following a career in teaching.

As well as articles, Soyfer wrote poetry and plays. These are full of wit, absurdist humour and comic

Continued from previous page

objects – the right's approach has been to encourage any armed person nearby to shoot immediately – to assume it's terrorists. To make this possible, they have also encouraged civilians to arm themselves.

Throughout these years, there have been fatal mistakes. In one recent case of a real Palestinian attack on a bus stop in Jerusalem, a civilian used his firearm to take down the attacker. Then two soldiers misidentified him as the attacker, and shot him dead. And past experience in Israel, as elsewhere, shows that flooding homes with firearms leads to far more murders in domestic abuse situations. The "give everyone guns" approach is about ensuring maximum Arab deaths. It's not about creating any security – it clearly makes people less secure.

They have taken advantage of the situation in October and November to create a network of armed militias all across Israel. At that time they were already working on easing the requirements for individuals to receive firearms, and they implemented that immediately after 7th October.

Now it's very quick and easy, and there's very little reason for anyone not to be given a gun licence. People have been buying guns like crazy.

Last March, long before 7th October, Itamar Ben Gvir had obtained a promise from Netanyahu to let him set up a National Guard – militias under the control of his Ministry of National Security. Then, after 7th October a system was in place for local armed Alert Squads – groups of civilians who are given rifles and can supposedly respond if there's a terrorist attack in their neighbourhood. His whole programme is to "give people back their personal security" by arming them. Within weeks, hundreds of these groups had been set up.

The volunteers had to agree to participate in a ceremony where they were given the guns and were photographed with Ben-Gvir himself. They were asked to wear black shirts! People who didn't agree to the photo op were not given arms.

I haven't heard of any of these groups being used for political ends, but it does seem very much like the basis for a far-right paramilitary movement. □

BITTER END

reversals, ridiculing hypocrisy and injustice. In one poem, for example, *Marching Song for German Children*, he adopts the voice of a supporter of the First World War to show the reality of individual loss behind the smart uniforms and military rhetoric:

*Three years Johnny will be brave,
The fourth year Johnny's in his grave,
They'll make his mother understand
No nobler death in the world
Than for the Fatherland.*

And in his plays, too, written to be performed at one of Vienna's small cabaret theatres that were somewhat hidden from the city censors, Soyfer used satire to telling effect. "Does the public really want ... only plays that are well-written but say nothing?" he asked in one article. Skirting the line between what was and what was not acceptable to a regime that was becoming increasingly authoritarian by the day, his works just managed to evade the censor and the police.

Lehmann describes Soyfer's dramas as "full of playful topical wit ... but above all remarkable ... for their human warmth and the tenderness of their idealism." In *Astoria*, for example, working people are coned into believing that a totally fictitious nation can offer them a better life. Soyfer certainly knew the power of propaganda – after all he had visited Germany in 1932 and witnessed one of Hitler's rallies. "I was flabbergasted at the inanity and the brutality of the mass-enthrallment," he wrote. And Tony Britten speaks of the way the original *Astoria*'s "mocking of populism, its anger at the corruption of those in power, its fear of fascism, make it truly a play for today." Another of his plays, particularly relevant to us now, is *The Loyal Citizen of Baghdad*, in which Soyfer addresses the situation of Jews living in a hostile land, where to be both loyal to the country they live in and to be Jewish, is impossible.

In another play, *The End of the World*, Soyfer targets capitalist greed and manipulation, imagining how the powerful might deal with a comet that threatens the destruction of the planet. Rockford (a character based on John D Rockefeller) tells the masses, as he prepares to escape the imminent catastrophe, to be proud to remain behind and to buy End of the World bonds. The mimicry is brilliant, although today we are likely to substitute climate change for the comet.

Soyfer's novel, *Thus Died a Party*, is rather different in style from his other work. Intended to uncover the internal politics of Austria's Social Democratic Party in its struggles to confront the growing threat of fascism, he wrote superbly, says Lehmann, about some of the key political issues of the day. Anxious about the "threat of a curtain falling", Lehmann urged Soyfer to complete the novel as quickly as possible.

Tragically, the curtain did fall before *Thus Died a Party* was finished. Jura Soyfer's luck had run out. Firstly, in a reflection of the absurdity that surrounded him, he was arrested in November 1937 and imprisoned for three months when the police mistook his apartment for someone else's. And then, within days of Germany's annexation of

Austria in 1938, he was warned that he must escape to save his life. Skiing across the Austrian/Swiss border on a freezing March night, he and a companion were arrested just before the frontier. A search of their knapsacks revealed an incriminating newspaper page being used to wrap a tin of sardines. They were both imprisoned and soon afterwards were taken to Dachau.

Other escapes were happily more successful. Friends and family members, including Soyfer's girlfriend, Helli Ullmann, managed, at considerable risk to themselves, to smuggle out many of Soyfer's manuscripts "hidden between shirts and books". After travelling to England in August 1938 and passing on a few copies of the writer's work, Helli went on to New York. There, with the assistance of other Austrian exiles, plans were drawn up to stage one of his plays to help fund negotiations for his release. Just before opening night, though, they heard news of Soyfer's death.

Jura Soyfer does have an afterlife of a sort, despite Nazi attempts to destroy both him and his work. Even in Dachau and Buchenwald (to which he was transferred in September 1938) his spirit stayed strong as he continued to make friends with his fellow prisoners and to use his wit to satirise the regime. One fellow inmate recalled how he put together shows that "brought our homeland closer to us, or that in a general way mocked fascism".

Whilst in Dachau, he and a musical inmate composed *The Dachau Song*, which mocks the motto "Work Sets You Free" that was installed over the concentration camp gate. As more people memorised and secretly sang it, the song became known as an expression of resistance, and by 1940 it had been published in the magazine of exiled prisoners in the British internment camp on the Isle of Man.

Despite his immense resilience and courage, Jura Soyfer was unable to fight off the typhoid that he contracted in Buchenwald while forced to carry out the horrifying task of moving corpses within the camp. A friend who also suffered from the disease, wrote: "His lemon-yellow complexion frightened me." On the night of 15th February, he died just before being granted the visa his friends in the US had been working to arrange.

Helli Ullmann remembers Soyfer as "so full of beans and good spirits, looking like the very prospect of a grand future." Tragically, that future was denied him, but both his courage in the face of the horrors he was living through, and his voice in the form of his writing, live on to inspire future generations.



Top: Jura Soyfer
Above: A trip to
Burgenland in 1929 by
the "Eighteeners", a
group of the Association
of Socialist Middle School
Students. Soyfer is sitting
at the right-hand end of
the middle row.

From a small group of seasoned protesters, a lively and creative coalition of Jewish groups has come together to form a growing, visible bloc in solidarity with the Palestinians on all the protests against Israel's war crimes in Gaza. **RUTH LUKOM reports**

We're sick of writing letters to *The Guardian*. Much good it did anyway.

It was only *The Guardian* which ever reported that it had received a letter from "Several Jewish activists who have condemned..."

So many atrocities. So many wasted words in print.

The establishment Jewish press snorted in derision. The mainstream shrugged and ignored it. There was no Jewish left or any significant Jewish dissent as far as they could see. And yet the British Jewish left has always been active, whether as trade unionists, councillors, Labour Party members or campaigners on local health or environmental issues. They marched with CLPs or trade unions. They marched as LGBT or stood on picket lines. They were elected as union reps and addressed meetings. But they weren't there as Jews. It simply wasn't relevant.

The exception to this was groups like the Jewish Socialists' Group who have always proudly asserted their right to organise as part of a wider labour movement. Our banner and presence attracted curiosity, which was good, because any conversation about the place of Jews in the fight for justice and equality is enlightenment. The banner was there for the NHS and for migrant campaigns and in solidarity with trade union disputes. We're always there for Palestine, though marching with the JSG before 7th October could test your patience. Please remember that some of us have been on these marches since the world shuddered at the thought of Ronald Reagan as US President. But at times we were treated like five-year-olds competing at our first school sports day as some people would approach us, pat us on the arm and say "Well done you..."

The events of 7th October have led to a marked shift in responses to our presence. For that we thank Suella Braverman, most mainstream politicians, and their adoring lieutenants in the Jewish press. Our marches were "hateful" and "full of Hamas supporters". Central London was "rampant with Jew-hating militants". Photos of the demos were scoured for hours so that a bone-headed placard or two could be used to discredit the hundreds of thousands who were calling for a ceasefire. Despite the horrifying reality of the bombardment of Gaza and the murder of Palestinians in the West Bank, most of their energies were devoted to vilifying the Left. And

"protecting Jews". Because – as we were told by the very many non-Jewish politicians and commentators – any attack on Israeli forces is an existential threat to any Jewish person worldwide. Suella and Rishi and Dave and Keir and David L and Lisa have all got our backs.

In late October, Sisters Uncut staged a sit-down protest in Liverpool Street station during the rush hour. Over 500 people sat down on the concourse and chanted "Free Palestine" and "End the Occupation". Draped over the first floor handrail was a huge "Jews Against the Genocide" banner. The utter confusion of the media's celeb Jewish spokespeople to a loud, visible, Jewish presence was delightful. Simon Schama, the esteemed historian, didn't bother examining the footage all over social media and misquoted the chants

JEW



as "Intifada". After retracting, he still called it an "Intifada at a railway station".

Suella has gone for now. The rhetoric quietened as the slaughter intensified and the Israeli leadership openly announced its genocidal intentions. The "Israel-has-a-right-to-defend-itself" parroted by all our political leaders gave way to the mealy-mouthed "a humanitarian intervention".

Our newly-formed Jewish Bloc – including, among others, the Black-Jewish Alliance, Na'amod, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, the Jewish Socialists' Group, Jewish Voice for Labour and Jewdas, as well as individual Jews and activists who have come together – is now a recognised presence. No longer a curiosity. We are getting an entirely different and sometimes quite moving response to what we have previously encountered. It is a combination of gratitude and relief as we have vindicated what everyone knew in their hearts: that what they were reading and hearing in mainstream media about British Jews being united on Israel and Palestine was a lie.

As more groups joined, our Jewish Bloc began organising more methodically. Someone knew a graphic designer and they came up with our watermelon/star logo, which has been picked up everywhere. Before a mass demo, we talk online and arrange a meeting place which is put on to our Jewish Bloc logo and then circulated. Our numbers have grown – up to 1,000 on one demo. The people joining us are a combination of longstanding activists and other Jews who are horrified and angry at Israeli brutality but still wary of the mass protests because of the raw emotions, fear of hostility or uneasiness about the "river and sea" chants.

Since December the Jewish Bloc has met up each month with other comrades and friends for a Shabbat dinner, where we eat, drink, sing and dance, with our group banners draped around the room.

But that's just in London.

Around the country, in all the major cities, Jews are demonstrating as Jews. In Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool, Jews have joined the Palestine demos and organised vigils. Says Carla Bloom, a member of Na'amod in Brighton: "We demonstrate to all and sundry that it's possible to be an 'out' Jew and not support Israel. We encourage other Jews to

ON THE MARCH



have the confidence to speak out against Israel – because the pro-ceasefire argument is strengthened when 'even' Jews espouse it."

And Misha in Scotland says: "I will often march with a wider community group of Jewish people at the protests, or will visibilise myself as being Jewish through holding different signs. To believe in and act for Palestinian liberation is what my Judaism requires of me. The mainstream narrative, perpetuated by both global and mainstream British Jewish institutions, holds the belief that all Jews are Zionists. I identify as Jewish at the demos to resist this narrative: to show that there is Jewish solidarity for Palestine; that there is a global community of Jews who stand in solidarity with Palestine and we are no less Jewish for this."

Both Misha and Carla have been taken aback by the responses they receive. Says Misha: "We often get a lot of people taking pictures of our signs. It can be quite surreal at points where random people at the protests have shaken my hand, thanked me or hugged me."

Carla has experienced the same: "Particularly Palestinians," she says, and "lots of thanks for support and, from some, recognition that it's not necessarily an easy thing for Jews to do." But Misha also has mixed feelings about the responses. "It is sad to know that the absence of the mainstream Jewish community from these spaces means that our small Jewish presence appears as a novelty, rather than something that should be a given ... a sad reflection of the British Jewish disengagement and absence in these spaces."

Our university campuses have also been active. There are now anti-Zionist Jewish student groups in Cambridge, SOAS, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Oxford, Manchester and Warwick. And, after the Union of Jewish Students stated that anti-Zionist groups "damage our Jewish community", Cambridge and the other groups wrote a joint letter in reply, saying: "The assertion that our stance against colonialism, white supremacy, apartheid and genocide is damaging our own communities is sickening. We stand strong, knowing that they are losing their monopoly on Jewish life as the tide is turning among young Jews."

It is five months since we first heard the news of the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians. Protests and solidarity actions for Palestine have widened everywhere. There are many local actions. In Brighton, Carla reports on sit-ins at Brighton station; pickets of Barclays and other businesses that invest in Israel. "There have been people at most of these events holding placards/banners identifying them as Jews,

and speakers (including myself) at a few of them, speaking from a Jewish perspective, plus pickets of L3Harris factory where they manufacture bomb release mechanisms used by IDF."

In Scotland, Misha says: "As well as active protest presence since October 7th, there have also been many spaces to celebrate Palestinian life and culture, as well as to educate about the realities of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation, apartheid and genocide. These spaces have manifested through art fairs, food pop-ups, open-mics, photography exhibits, film screenings, book launches, panel discussions, teach-ins, and public talks."

I asked Carla and Misha what hostility they had faced – whether from family and friends or from the wider Jewish community. Misha reports: "I have faced some hostility in interpersonal relationships. Myself and others in our student group – Kehillah (a group of Jewish students in solidarity of Palestine) – have also faced hostility from the mainstream Jewish student society at our university."

Carla says: "Most of my Jewish friends feel the same as I do, and by mutual agreement I tend not to talk about the issue with the few who don't." And on the demos? "There are usually a number of Israeli flag-waving counter protesters – some Jews, some EDL types, right-wingers, some Christian fundamentalists. There's also been very antagonistic behaviour from members of Sussex Jewish Representative Council plus the filming of kids who are demonstrating."

But I end this report on a positive note. Misha tells me: "Many members of the local Jewish community are involved in the wider Jewish pro-Palestine community group I am in. This group has been a really grounding and meaningful space to have over the last few months to maintain community outside of mainstream Jewish spaces where non-Zionist/anti-Zionist Jews are often excluded/unwelcomed."

Out of this horror there is hope and maybe a new understanding.

So join us. We have work to do.



INSIDE THE

11.11.2023

Ahead of the protests today: why aren't Israelis protesting the war? (Or aren't they?) State of fascism and protest in Israel

I hope all marches pass peacefully today. I am also praying that the rightful call for a ceasefire and protection of civilians in Gaza is coupled by a demand to return Israeli hostages held by Hamas (if you are marching to protect citizens, this is an obvious call)...

The war cut abruptly one of the most interesting and impressive protest movements in Israeli history. Since January 2023 ... millions of Israelis went every week, sometimes several times a week,

to demand that Netanyahu leaves his seat and stop the judicial overhaul (an attempt to intervene in the authority of the Supreme Court and pass more authority to Israel's most right-wing government... This was a truly singular and unique moment and it didn't seem to be ending.

This mainstream protest movement did not really challenge the state of occupation. Indeed, Netanyahu's legacy is first and foremost to normalise "managing the conflict", deepening occupation and apartheid while taking any possible discussion of a political resolution, peace or a difference from the status quo – moving towards full annexation – out of public discourse. However,

CROSSING BORDERS A SCOTTISH EVENT



Crossing Borders, which brings together musicians and performers calling for peace and justice in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel, has had two sell-out shows at the magical Scottish Storytelling Centre in the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town, with the proceeds going to Medical Aid for Palestinians and the British Shalom Salaam Trust trauma appeal. This is an initiative by Scottish Jews Standing With Palestinians, a WhatsApp group formed on 18th October last year. Now 100 members strong, it's enabling a Jewish presence at the weekly demonstrations and marches in Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as spawning its own new groups and events, including these shows.

The acclaimed poet, dancer and human rights activist, Nada Shawa, who moved to Scotland from Occupied Palestine when she was eight, shared her poetry conveying the

profound personal and emotional impact of the relentless, brutal and longstanding occupation, and the current war in Gaza on Palestinians both there and in the diaspora. Nada also read "If I Should Die", a poem written by Palestinian writer and academic, Refaat Alareer, weeks before he was killed by an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City in December.

Michael Alpert, singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, who is renowned in the field of Yiddish music and culture, Gica Loening, Scottish and klezmer fiddler, and Phil Alexander, jazz pianist and accordionist, performed solo and together presenting a varied but strongly connected programme. This included the song that lent its title to the event, songwriter and activist Si Kahn's "Crossing the Border", which honours the life of his grandfather, a Jewish immigrant to the USA from Eastern

Europe. Edinburgh's young, six-person and aptly named Och Vey Klezmer Band, were full of life, spirit and musicality. Their rendering of Yiddish poet Morris Rosenfeld's haunting song, "Mayn Rue Plats", moved some of us to tears. The show ended with performers and audience joining together in a unique version of Hamish Henderson's famous song, "Freedom Come All Ye", written in 1960 for the Holy Loch peace marchers and sung on this occasion in Scots and Yiddish.

Awareness of the tragic reasons for this show was ever present, but brought to the fore when we heard Khalil Shaheen's voicenote sent from Rafah. Khalil is a Palestinian refugee born in Rafah refugee camp to a family that had been expelled from Palestine in 1948. He works with the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, and spoke with passion and love of his homeland, Gaza, concluding: "Please don't leave us in the dark."

Sue Bard



Above: Scottish/Yiddish fusion. This photo: poet, dancer and human rights activist, Nada Shawa.

ZION'S DEN

as part of this protest there was a solid anti-occupation bloc of which I have been part. I also had the honour to address this bloc twice: speaking specifically on Gaza and the need to end the siege and protect the 2.2 million civilians who live there. This bloc changed in size and prominence in the main protest; I recall two instances in which it grew, the last attack on Gaza in May 2023, as well as the settler pogrom in Huwara, in which settlers killed one Palestinian, injured over 100 and left huge devastation in the town. Many of us persevered in this bloc realising that the mainstream discourse has, once again thanks to Netanyahu and his cronies, disabled any discussion of Palestinian human rights or an end to the occupation. The main theme under which many organisations and individuals came together was "no democracy with occupation".

Once again, 7th October changed everything; not least, stopped this protest movement that seemed like it wasn't stopping.

Many of the protest organisations have stepped up to take the Israeli state's failure to care for its citizens; to cook, to care, to organise for the internally displaced, for reserve soldiers, for their families and communities at home, and to cook for many *shivas* [weeks of mourning], sometimes consequently... This civil society-run operation is truly astounding and shows just how low the Israeli state has sunk, pushing monies towards the settler lobby and the ultra-orthodox while starving any viable emergency responses. The main efforts in terms of public advocacy have been ... the call to bring back the hostages. It is clear to all around the world that this is not a priority for Netanyahu. Thus, once again civil society is taking the government's place...

His popularity in polls is sinking, even within his own electorate... A majority of Israelis think he has to go, and the sooner the better. For Netanyahu, political life after this horrific time will probably end. I type this with all caution necessary. This is a man who has survived many times in which he *should* have been unseated, and yet now, I say cautiously, it seems even his own electorate thinks he has to go. This also means sadly Netanyahu ... has little interest to end it; even his supporters will demand he goes after the war ends...

The call to return all hostages is pretty much undisputed... It is also significant to say here that

much of the public gathering around these issues is done in the same place where many of the anti-government protests took place, Kaplan Street, opposite the Israeli Ministry of Defense ... many of the bereaved families are raising their voice against Netanyahu, saying very harsh things such as that the blood of their loved ones is on Netanyahu's hands.

So, the protest movement calling for Netanyahu and the entire government to resign is growing in numbers and strength.

A splinter of this protest against Netanyahu, which has started small but is growing in numbers too, is the call for a ceasefire and protecting all civilians. I was present in one of this movement's first organising meetings. The growing fascism in Israel and political persecution [is expressed] in various ways – Palestinian citizens of Israel are often arrested for Facebook posts, for showing compassion towards people in Gaza, or even just for alluding to the Palestinian flag. Israeli Jews are of course more privileged but are not safe either. A teacher was arrested ... and his house violated and searched due to his show of compassion to citizens killed in Gaza.

A friend of mine texted me discreetly and told me she was questioned for seven hours for her Instagram posts...

Add to that very violent streets, both police and right-wingers who are looking to enact violence on *anyone* daring to contest the necessity of the Israeli strategy. The conditions for carrying arms have been eased, so many fascists are now carrying guns.

I don't think Israeli Jews, even leftists, are the victims. We are part of the hegemony and I write from the wrong side of history. However I want to answer the question ... why aren't we protesting the war, like you, in London, New York or Berlin?

First ... it is scary to stand outside and protest when missiles fall where you are. Many people who used to come and protest in Tel Aviv are scared to do so.

Second ... I want to write something about where we are emotionally. In Jewish faith the 30 days after a loved one dies are considered the most intense period of mourning, but then actual grieving starts. We are a society very much processing what has happened to us. Everyone is implicated, whether knowing someone who died, who has been kidnapped, a survivor or someone

One Woman's War

Essays Written in War, for Peace

Dana Mills
Introduction by Sally Abed

THE GROWING FASCISM IN ISRAEL AND POLITICAL PERSECUTION [IS EXPRESSED] IN VARIOUS WAYS – PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL ARE OFTEN ARRESTED FOR FACEBOOK POSTS, FOR SHOWING COMPASSION TOWARDS PEOPLE IN GAZA, OR EVEN JUST FOR ALLUDING TO THE PALESTINIAN FLAG.

DANA MILLS, an Israeli activist for an end to occupation and for peace with justice for Palestinians, kept a diary for four months following 7th October, which has just been published by Five Leaves Publications. Here are three extracts

who has been internally displaced. More often than not we know all of the above. So our first and foremost call is to bring our fellow citizens back.

In addition, of course, there is the growing fascism I wrote about. I am lucky and privileged, working in a sector that won't penalise me if I go to protest ... but this is not true of all Israelis. So there is a price to pay for raising one's voice, even just calling for a ceasefire.

I ... think the movement to protest the war and calling for a ceasefire will grow ... knowing the organisational atmosphere here, it is already happening and likely to expand... I've been at all these protests and they were fairly safe, with only a few right-wingers calling us traitors.

... all organisers know, that once the war ends, a ceasefire is called and/or reserve duty soldiers are back home, the magnitude of the protest here will be unprecedented. Many of us, middle class, liberal, (privileged) citizens are bearing the brunt of the state's failings, of it catering to Jewish supremacy instead of the safety of all – Jews and Palestinians.

Being an Israeli lefty is hard in many ways but I love my community which has always sustained me and inspired me... We are already not silent and we are done with being used as pawns and sacrificed for bloodthirsty politicians...

18.11.2023

My speech in Israel's first authorised demonstration (against the war, to bring back all hostages and for peace)

Up till now, it's been illegal to organise protests and demonstrations. The police and army authorities used a range of excuses: from security ... to saying that calling for a ceasefire in the midst of a war is incitement... after a long legal battle that reached the Israeli Supreme Court, the first demonstration was authorised. On Friday my friend Noa Levy, Hadash Tel Aviv chair (Hadash is the Israeli-Palestinian socialist party) rang and asked if I was willing to speak. I said of course, yes...

There was a massive counter-protest... Lots of Israeli flags and random shouts against us. The demonstration was heavily policed: at the entrance to the protest the police looked at each and every sign to approve its messaging and confiscated some which they didn't like... During the protest itself the counter-protesters did everything they could to disrupt us, including cutting off electricity (we switched to megaphones), shouting loudly beside the speakers (the police didn't say anything and just watched) but we made it, with more shouting than usual.

I thought I'd share with you my speech today.
Stop the war. Stop the massacre in Gaza.
It's been six weeks since our hearts were broken. The pain only intensifies, but with time we gain clarity too.

We will not be quiet and not rest until we return each and every one of the hostages to us. We demand a prisoner exchange deal now. We will not be silent in the face of evil, of incitement and division. We are being turned one against each other. We will not be silent against the fascist hunting of dissenters, especially Palestinian citizens of Israel. We will not be silent when our friends are hunted down, persecuted, fired from their jobs. We will not be

silent when our freedom of expression is abused. We demand a ceasefire now. We demand to stop the massacre in Gaza. We demand a stop to harming civilians. We demand a stop to those images of children buried under the rubble. I say: not in my name! In Gaza and in Sderot children want to live. Stop the massacre in Gaza.

This week we lost a great voice in the peace and human rights camp.

Vivian Silver ... taught many of us that we have no choice but to demand a political solution... We must insist on a just peace, a sustainable peace, peace without oppression and occupation, peace without a cruel closure which for 17 years denies freedom of movement of 2.2 million people, peace between equals, peace between all with equal human rights between the river and the sea.

I will end on Vivian's words: there is no path to peace, peace is the path.

...I was honoured to be speaking alongside Hadash Member of Knesset Aida Touma-Suleiman who was expelled from the Knesset for objecting to the war, Sami Abu Shehadeh (former Balad member of Knesset) and ... Maoz Inon, who lost both his parents in the 7th October massacres.

I got home for a bit, and then went to the weekly vigil for the hostages. It was sadder and smaller than usual; there had been a large march to the Knesset of the hostages' families, so the vigil was dedicated to abducted children as the International Day for the Rights of the Child is on 20th November.

As I walked home, I realised how exhausted I was of it all; not only physically but also emotionally... I am deep in survival mode, and between caring for my family and getting through each day, each day feels anew like a challenge... We are all at the end of our tether. Never have I felt more urgency for peace.

05.12.2023

In memory of Fatmeh Salem

Yesterday we got the sad news that Fatmeh Salem had died. The inimitable matriarch of the Salem family of Sheikh Jarrah [East Jerusalem],

which has been fighting to stay in its home for decades, died without seeing any resolution to her struggle, without knowing that her family will have a house to live in.

Whereas the death toll in Gaza continues to climb in incomprehensible numbers, Fateh's death somehow hit me hard. I got involved in the struggle against evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan shortly after returning to Israel-Palestine in 2021. These two



ASK THE RABBI – SPONSORED PROMOTION

Israel just got one step closer to Europe

Jen O'Cide Real Estate in partnership with BAE, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics invites interest in newly liberated land that has suddenly become available. As the previous inhabitants have decided to leave this area we are very pleased to offer a huge investment opportunity in new luxury developments.

Kiryat Massgrave is an exciting innovative complex of homes, villas and luxury apartments with spectacular views from the river to the sea. Each residence comes with underground car parking and below ground walkways.

Recent research by the Ben Gvir Institute of Jerusalem and the Christ the Saviour College in South Carolina have uncovered archaeological evidence of Jewish settlements. They have discovered Moses' sandals, kitchen equipment, photographs, books and toys belonging to the children of Israel as they headed to the Promised Land.

But for those who want a more European vibe, Kiryat Massgrave offers boulevards with Parisian café culture. Walk on Middle European cobbled streets. Or why not find a London pub to watch your favourite Israeli football teams compete for a European trophy?



areas in East Jerusalem ... are fighting a hard legal battle against settler associations which are trying to displace them through old and expired property claims, arguing that indeed these are Jewish regions of Jerusalem. None of the settlers who are trying to expel Palestinians from East Jerusalem have any direct connections to these areas...

The struggle against evictions in East Jerusalem was one of my first lessons in how Jewish supremacy is enacted through the courts, which often validate the settlers' claims, and give a rubber stamp to violent acts of displacement. I had also encountered this first hand, working with some of the lawyers representing those families, what it's like trying to be a voice against a system that doesn't want to hear you.

Back to Fatmeh Salem. When I was the Director of Peace Now, I got a call saying that there was a solidarity visit of the Meretz Party MKs to the Salem family. I decided to join... Fatmeh sat in the centre of the room, and we all came and shook her hand... Suddenly, news came through; the verdict had been postponed, by a few months. We went outside. An impromptu party was organised in Sheikh Jarrah. There was dancing and merriment. The

community was celebrating not being evicted for a few more months. Fatmeh was lifted on a chair. I remember feeling both vicarious joy, which was overflowing then, and misery. How can one celebrate not being illegally and immorally evicted from your family home?

Whenever I went to protests in Sheikh Jarrah, Fatmeh was there. She spoke often in Israeli events, rare for the Palestinian community in Sheikh Jarrah...

Many Palestinians fighting displacement and

ethnic cleansing either refuse or have lost hope in the Israeli judicial system. They know it is a façade of justice re-enacting settler interests... Some reluctantly go to the courts, represented by either Palestinians or Israelis, yet don't work politically with Israelis. Some do go to the courts and work with Israelis.

I ... have never resented any Palestinian comrade who did not want to work with me. Indeed, there are some complaints against certain associations that whitewash the occupation and apartheid, that give a façade of "coexistence" and working together whereas indeed these associations simply re-enact power imbalances while giving the Israelis the feel-good element of "we have a Palestinian friend". I understand the resentment towards those associations... However ... nothing here will move without some kind of dialogue... Very often these collaborations are behind the scenes; indeed, a good test to all those working towards such collaborations is: do you feel the need for them to be visible so that you receive kudos, or are you happy for your voice to be used without you collecting any gain?

So, I always felt Fatmeh Salem's generosity and humanity was undeserved by us. Whenever she came to me and shook my hand, I felt deeply ashamed... What was I doing? I was failing in holding my state to account to secure her home. Yet, that always also gave me hope, that someone can be as generous as that, to see something beyond the state, the person who is there in front of you, fighting with you, and to be able to shake their hands. I wish we all had half of Fatmeh Salem's moral courage and humanity. The world would be a better place.

One Woman's War is available from bookshops or from fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk/product/one-womans-war-essays-written-in-war-for-peace/, price £10.

WHEREVER WE LIVE,

Two months into the war in Gaza, on 29th November 2023, a group of activists and academics organised an online teach-in on Jewish Solidarity with Palestinians entitled Anti-Zionism, Activism and Liberation for All. **JULIA BARD** was one of the speakers



Henryk Erlich, Bund leader and prescient analyst of nationalism.

I want to start with a small bit of personal history and also a view of Jewish life which underlies both the ideas I'll be talking about and the longevity of some of the debates we're having now.

I grew up in a traditional Jewish home in the heart of the community in north-west London and spent what I considered to be too many hours each week at Hebrew classes. But the Jewish history I learnt stopped in 70CE with the destruction of the Second Temple and started again in the 1940s. I had no real picture of the centuries between those dates when, I was led to believe, Jewish life consisted of relentless persecution, punctuated by the occasional Golden Age. I learnt almost nothing about the 1,000 years of Jewish life in Europe; the millennia of Jewish life in the region that was Babylon; the 2,000 years of Jewish life in India – about Jewish life as a minority among other peoples in innumerable places across the globe.

Since then, I've developed a more three-dimensional view of our long and often internally conflicted Jewish history.

It's true that there were times of bitter oppression, but there have also been long periods when Jewish life expanded and flourished. It wasn't a bed of roses (not many people's lives ever have been) but it's wrong to portray this varied, multifaceted and interactive history as a relentless saga of exile, exclusion and persecution. Instead of seeing ourselves as a beleaguered people, heroically hanging on to our existence – the exception that proves the rule of majoritarianism – we could understand ourselves to be a people for whom diaspora existence, internationalism, being a minority, are normal.

Over the millennia that we have lived across borders and amongst other peoples, we have developed cultures that combine flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness to diverse and changing societies while still recognising ourselves, and being recognised by others, as Jews.

I'm using the word "diaspora", I hope, in the spirit of Paul Gilroy in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. I know that etymologically the word means "dispersion" and has negative connotations, but the reality of diaspora peoples is that we live in a dynamic, interactive, dialectical relationship with other peoples and places. Diaspora is a context in which our identities, cultures and ways of life shift, change, grow and engage with each other, and where, as minorities in majoritarian nation states,

we can act in solidarity with each other.

Zionist ideology claims that life in the diaspora is a dead end for Jews, where we face only two alternatives: assimilation or extermination. By this logic, our only hope for the future is to "normalise" ourselves by joining the family of nation states. The fact that most Jews always have, and still do, live as non-territorial minorities in the diaspora, and haven't been lured by the prospect of being part of a majority in a Jewish state, should be an instant challenge to that. But ideology often trumps reality.

The argument – for and against Jewish nationalism – is not new. It predates the establishment of the state of Israel by a long way and originates in debates that to some extent reflected class differences about how to respond to the intense pressure on minority peoples in the late 19th-century nationalist world. That was a time when borders were being drawn round territories at a rate of knots, creating nation states out of collapsing empires. It's no accident that two conflicting responses – nationalism in the form of political Zionism, and anti-nationalism in the form of the Jewish socialist Bund – emerged almost simultaneously in 1897.

The Bund said: "Wherever we live, that's where we belong." They didn't exceptionalise Jews, but invested in the struggle for justice for Jews alongside non-Jewish socialists and in solidarity with others suffering discrimination or persecution. This was not just opposition to nationalism; it was a positive assertion of both internationalism and a concept called *doikayt* – "here-ness" – an idea that continues to give minorities the confidence to shout the slogan from the 1970s: "We're here to stay; here to fight."

Poland between the two world wars was home to around 3.3 million mainly poor and working-class Jews. In that context, the Jewish socialist Bund – a secular movement, not a religious one – grew into a significant social, cultural, linguistic and political force. Drawing on that concept of *doikayt*, its leader, Henryk Erlich, wrote: "[We] the Jews are not a chosen people, neither in the positive nor the negative sense of the word, but a people like any other nation, and ... even though our history and the social-economic circumstances of our lives are unique, the same rules apply to us that regulate the lives of all other nations in the world."

Bundism was a fundamental challenge to Zionism, and in that period and right up to the Second World War, Zionism was only supported by a minority of Jewish people. The Jewish Socialists'

WE ARE NOT A CHOSEN PEOPLE, NEITHER IN THE POSITIVE NOR THE NEGATIVE SENSE OF THE WORD, BUT A PEOPLE LIKE ANY OTHER NATION, AND ... EVEN THOUGH OUR HISTORY AND THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LIVES ARE UNIQUE, THE SAME RULES APPLY TO US THAT REGULATE THE LIVES OF ALL OTHER NATIONS IN THE WORLD.

JEWISH LABOUR BUND LEADER, HENRYK ERLICH, 1933

THAT'S WHERE WE BELONG

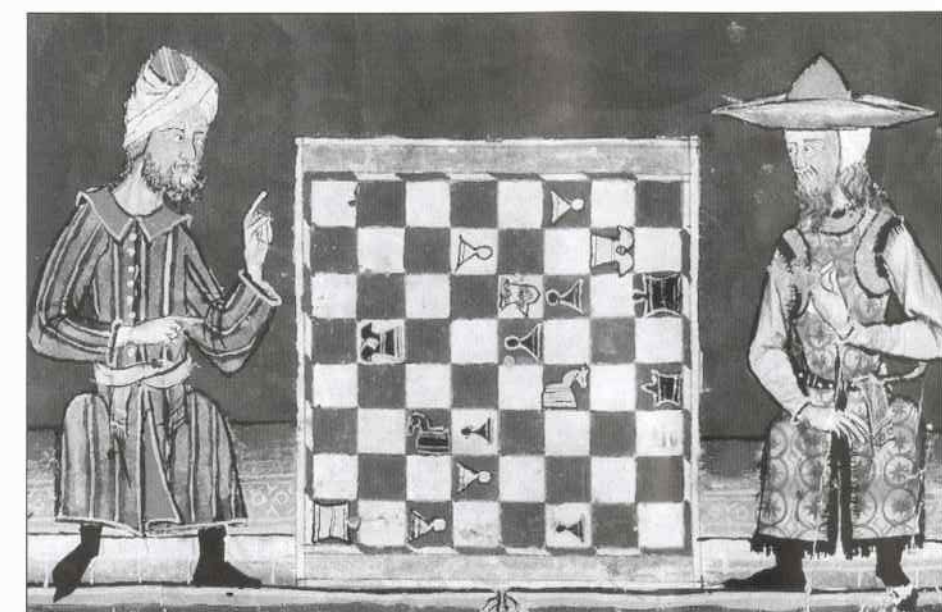
Group is just one of the inheritors of its legacy of ideas which treasure diversity, collaboration and solidarity. We are seeing that in action in the Jewish Blocs on the Gaza demonstrations, where diverse Jewish groups are finding enough common ground to work together in solidarity with the Palestinians, but which also attract non-Jews especially from other minority communities (see page 18). This is a bottom-up politics, which facilitates the creativity that emerges from sharing cultures, traditions and languages as resources for a common future.

It's an optimistic view, drawing on a long history of living as one among other peoples. And it starkly conflicts with the pessimistic Zionist narrative, which portrays Jewish diaspora history almost like a thriller – an exceptional tale of survival against the odds, from which we've emerged triumphant as a demographic majority in a territory where we define the borders.

That triumph is embodied in the terrible fate of the Palestinian people, whose land has been colonised and lives destroyed before our eyes, to create and maintain that demographic majority. But that isn't all. The logic of colonisation which characterises the Zionist insistence on a singular vision of Jewish life – as a majority in the Land of Israel – of course by definition defines the Palestinians as an existential threat; but it also defines Jews who refuse to conform to that vision as a threat, or even expendable, if they get in the way of Israel's political alliances. One example was in Argentina between 1976 and 1983, when many human rights campaigners were forcibly disappeared. These included disproportionate numbers of progressive Jews who were arrested and disappeared by the Junta, which was being armed by the Israeli government.

There has been a consistent attack on diaspora Jewish cultures and languages. Just one example: in the early days of the Israeli state, when large numbers of survivors of the Nazi Final Solution took refuge in Israel because few other countries would accept them, their mother tongue, Yiddish, was mocked; their Yiddish language newspapers were banned, and kiosks that continued to sell them were set on fire.

Diaspora Jews who value our history, languages and culture have been treated with contempt. Hebrew and Zionist historiography have been imposed on Jewish life and its institutions;



diaspora communities have been drained of resources that could nurture their futures, in favour of supporting Israel.

The tradition of debate, the arguments, conflicts and rows that have always characterised Jewish life – embodied in the old joke about the Jew alone on a desert island who builds two synagogues so there's one he can refuse to go to – are now being so heavily policed that the very words and phrases we use to express ourselves are being proscribed.

But this is how nationalism works, and although Zionism has particular characteristics, it's no better or worse than other forms of nationalism.

I'll end by coming back to the Bundist, Henryk Erlich. In 1933, when the Nazis had just come to power in Germany and were eyeing up Poland – a period he described as "a time of nationalistic bacchanalia", when "nationalism ... has been stripped naked" – he warned that, if the appropriate circumstances arose, "Jewish nationalism would show its sharp teeth and nails no less than the nationalisms of other nations."

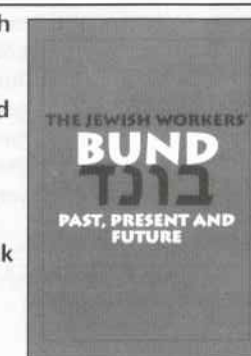
He said, presciently, of the movement led by the far right, revisionist Zionist, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who was making apologies for Hitler then, and whose inheritors are in power in Israel today: "[T]he only thing missing in order for them to become the same beasts is some muscle strength, some territory, and a political opportunity."

Illustration from a 13th-century book depicting a Jew and a Muslim during the Golden Age in Al-Andalus, when diverse peoples lived creatively together before the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Spain.

The event was chaired by Hana Morgenstern; the other speakers were Haim Bresheeth, Em Hilton and Barnaby Raine.

The ideas, activities and achievements of the Jewish Workers' Bund, which was founded in 1897 and whose high point was between the world wars in Poland, are at last coming into their own after decades of being undermined by both the Zionist telling of 20th-century Jewish history and a skewed interpretation of Bundist history and ideas by orthodox Marxists. Our pamphlet brings the history and ideas of the Bund to life through a variety of voices.

You can buy a copy for £5 + £2.50 p&p – write to jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk for details. Or read it online or download it from the Publications and resources section of the Jewish Socialists' Group website at www.jewishsocialist.org.uk or



The Jews' Free school (JFS), born in London's East End, has been a key institution in Anglo-Jewish history for nearly 300 years – a symbol of Jewish anglicisation nurturing respectable, patriotic, self-confident Jewish citizens. But in the rebellious 1960s, when it was located in Camden Town, something else was brewing within. **ED ROSEN** remembers

He was coming down the corridor towards me. There was no escape. Coming fast, looking straight at me with that menacing street fighter look – a scowl on his battered boxer's face. I was trapped. He stopped and put his sweaty face up close to mine and bellowed: "Rosen!" "Yes sir," I said, as I stood my ground. Looking him straight in his beady eyes, almost hidden behind his thick lenses. "Why are there no revolutionaries in the 6th Form?" "Don't know sir, but I'll ask around." His face broke into a toothless smile. Mr Goldberg then gave me a tut and walked off down the corridor towards the staffroom.

Mr Goldberg was a member of the Communist Party and my Economics teacher at the Jews' Free School (JFS). He had been at the Battle of Cable Street and was still fighting fascists well into the 1950s.

So were there any revolutionaries at the JFS in the mid '60s?

I attended the JFS between about 1962 and 1968. My grandfather, Harry, had gone to a similar Jews' Free School in the West End. They lived in Soho, where his father was a tailor. These are my personal memories of what politics looked and sounded like at school between 1965 until the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967.

The JFS was located in Camden Road, which was not a noticeably Jewish neighbourhood. Many of the almost 2,000 pupils came from north London. My family lived in Elgin Avenue, Maida Vale, and having to travel through Camden Town on a daily basis, I couldn't help but notice that the place was becoming hip. It was fast becoming one of the places where the then emerging counter-cultural revolution was happening.

This was not the revolution Mr Goldberg had in mind, but the revolutionary vibes of rock and roll seeped through into our classrooms. The *Hatikva* (Israel's national anthem) was taking a distant place in the humming lives of the members of the 6th Form, because in August 1965 the Rolling Stones had released *I Can't Get No Satisfaction* and the world changed. The revolution had begun, with music starting to subvert how we saw the world. The *Hatikva* was immediately replaced by the new Beatles song, *We All Live in a Yellow Submarine*, which could be heard in the 6th Form and in the playground at lunchtimes when it was not raining.

Bob Dylan played the Albert Hall in late May 1966. My friend Greville and I were deeply into Dylan. We were convinced that he was the Messiah that Rabbi Halpern had been banging on about during Hebrew lessons. But the Rabbi was not for turning, despite our powerful arguments that

Dylan was the bloody Messiah. Our clincher argument was that Zimmerman (Dylan's real name) was Jewish. The whole Department of Hebrew Studies refused point blank to embrace the truth, even though the evidence was overwhelming. Their reply was that Dylan was Welsh and couldn't possibly be the Messiah.

But Dylan was saying something much more real to many of us than anything taught to us by the Rabbis. He was talking about a new politics and we were all ears. By 1967 we had an active anti-Vietnam War group in the school which had become a forum for animated discussions on politics and our future society. So when Dylan sang *Masters of War*, we knew the revolution was around the corner.

The anti-Vietnam War movement at the JFS was one expression of the strength of socialist thinking at the school that completely dominated the school culture and pushed any Zionist thinking to the periphery. Not only did we all want to live in a yellow submarine, we also wanted socialism.

When the then Labour Minister of Education, Patrick Gordon-Walker, unwisely visited the school in 1967 (may his learned soul rest in peace), a heated argument broke out when one JFS pupil had the chutzpah to challenge the Minister's socialist credentials. To avoid the shouting and jeering, Dr Edward Conway quickly rescued the Minister from the red mob and whisked him off to tea in his study.

Dr Conway was our esteemed Headmaster and a true educational revolutionary. He was determined to enable a socialist(ish) culture to permeate the school like a giant joss-stick whose Comprehensive Education fragrance wafted across the school. Dr Conway launched a kind of soft permanent revolution in the school, through which the virtues of comprehensive education were pushed in the daily school assemblies, in classes that he led and through the hidden curriculum of the JFS.

In his book, *Going Comprehensive*, which was published in 1970, Dr Conway described his vision for a total educational revolution, with his school, the JFS, presented as a shining example of a successful comp in action. And this vision has been with me since then as I journey towards the land of milk and honey and comprehensive education for all.

The prevailing culture in the JFS was socialist. Most of the teachers had seen active service during the Second World War or had gone through that war experience as young people. Their values and beliefs were shaped by the sacrifices their generation had made. They became active makers

I REMEMBER ONE OF HIS ASSEMBLY SPEECHES ... WE WERE TO TELL OUR PARENTS THAT WE WERE NOT ALLOWED TO GO TO SPAIN ON HOLIDAY, BECAUSE OF FRANCO

YOU LEARN SCHOOL TODAY?

of the post-war welfare state, seeing this as the first expression of a new socialist society. For them there was no going back to the bad old days.

We understood that we were in a comprehensive school based on political values of fairness, justice and equality, and that these were aligned to Jewish values we were encouraged to advocate and propound in our relationships outside. I think back on it as a very radical culture, in which our Jewishness was celebrated as an expression of congruent values with the prevailing values of British society, as it was seen then, as an evolving society, which of course came to a full stop.

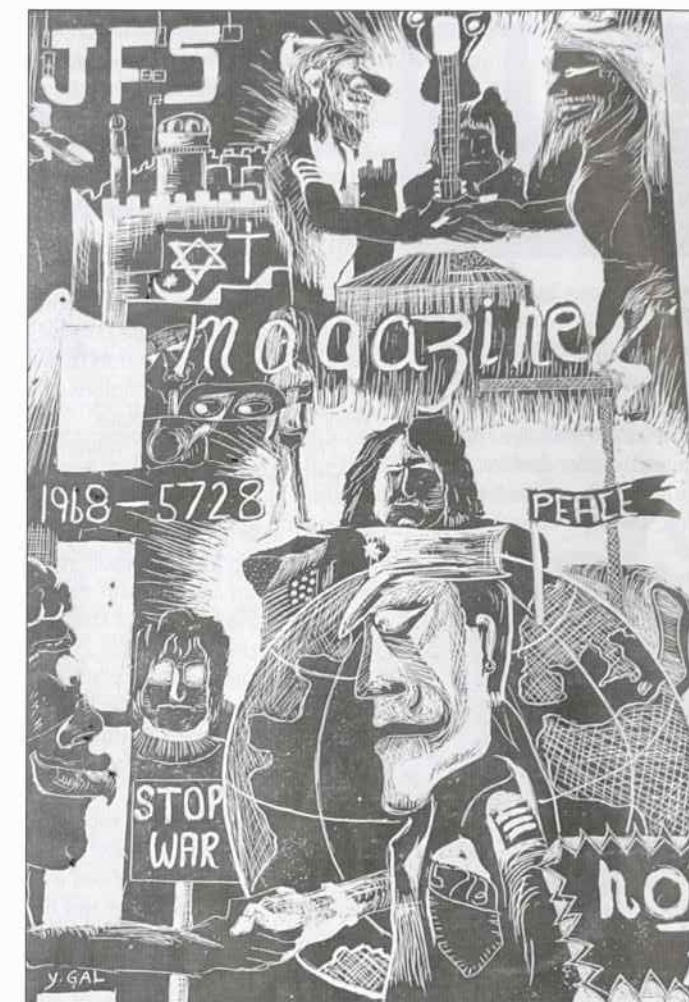
I remember Dr Conway talking to us about respecting other cultures. He had a very strong commitment to antiracism. When the first group of Asian immigrants from East Africa arrived in Britain, he celebrated that. I remember one of his assembly speeches was about not going to Spain. We were to tell our parents that we were not allowed to go to Spain on holiday, because of Franco.

To combat racial discrimination was a very strong message at school. I joined the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) in 1964-65 and, looking back on it now, that was me integrating and internalising the messages I was getting from school.

We knew that some people didn't like Jews. My mother's father had a kosher butcher shop at 11 Cable Street until 1958. During the Battle of Cable Street it became the armoury for kids who wanted to fight the fascists. My mother told me stories of being up on the flat roof throwing objects down on the police who were trying to clear a path for the fascists to march.

We knew that we were going to have to cope with a low level of antisemitism throughout our lives. We encountered antisemitism from our neighbours where we lived. There were gang fights between ourselves and the local, mainly Catholic, young boys. On the walls around where I lived there was a slogan, "Perish Judah". I looked at it, and I thought, what does this mean? One of the first demonstrations we went to as a group of young boys – we were 12 – was up to Trafalgar Square when Colin Jordan (National Socialist Movement) had his first rally. A whole community went to break it up.

Near JFS we were attacked by boys from a neighbouring school because we were Jews. It would build up, reach a crescendo, then die down. At times we had a police van outside the school to protect the kids. The boys from the other school were better fighters, so one of the kids in the class said, "I'm gonna get my big brothers." Five of them came down one day from Stamford Hill. They had a shotgun on the back seat of their Zephyr car. When these five bigger blokes got out, the boys from the other school retreated. We saw this as a huge victory. Later there were fascists who would come up and shout antisemitic abuse through the school railings.



Socialists were in the majority, politically, at the JFS in 1966-1967. One group stands out in my memory, which was a group of big, very tough Jewish kids from Stamford Hill and all points east who made up the donkey-jacketed Young Communist League contingent. They occupied the steps on Torriano Avenue along one side of the school. Also, the Young Socialists, who had it in for our Harold, even though the then Prime Minister was keeping us out of the Vietnam War. But we felt the Labour Government was backsliding on nationalising everything that moves. (What did we know?)

The JFS also had an anarchist contingent led (yes, I know) by Julian who insisted on walking barefoot around the school until Dr Conway chucked him out. Julian was always going on about A S Neil and Summerhill School, arguing that that really was a comprehensive school. Maybe he had a point.

On Friday 3rd June 1967, Dr Edward Conway expelled me from the JFS. I had left school without his permission to volunteer for the war. But as he addressed the school assembly, I was taking my seat on the last El Al flight out of Heathrow. And that's another story.

Rebirth of the Bund

Today we remake the Jewish Labour Bund

This is the founding statement of a new initiative in America and beyond to re-establish the Bund



The General Jewish Labour Bund was established in Vilna in 1897 as a secular, socialist, Jewish party dedicated to fighting for a better world and against antisemitism. We seek to re-establish the Bund today for the same reasons and with the same guiding principle: *doikayt*, and the same rejection of ethnonationalism in favour of working toward a fairer world on a local level.

Doikayt is Yiddish for Praxis

The Bund's philosophy is centred on the Yiddish term *doikayt* which translates to "here-ness" in English.

In contrast to the Zionist vision of withdrawing to an enclave and becoming not only a single nation, but a nation state, Bundism understands the Jewish experience as inseparable from the diaspora, and works to better conditions for all – wherever we live in the world. Zionism and Bundism were both founded in the same year, and the predictions of Bundists who opposed Zionism have come to pass in the intervening century and a quarter.

The Bund's idea of *doikayt* is our understanding of how Jews have flourished in the diaspora. We say:

- The diversity of the Jewish people, the bond with our global community, the safe harbour afforded strangers in a strange land, is the life of the Jewish people.
- Jews must work where we live for the benefit of all, preferring integration over assimilation.
- We must strengthen our communities, workplaces, and economies by making them more democratic, exemplary, moral, and marked by respect for all, striving for both justice and peace.
- We strive to ensure the future of the Jewish people by fostering new Jewish culture and studying real Jewish history wherever we live – teaching Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic and all the mother tongues of our global Jewish heritage.
- We dedicate ourselves to mutual responsibility with our neighbours, and to defending the rights and dignity of all, as

the best way to represent our people against all manifestations of antisemitism. ○ We fight for the lives and the dignity of the working classes wherever they live as a practical expression of our Jewish values.

What anti-Zionism means to us

Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are not the same thing, and they are not substitutable for each other. We are anti-Zionist Jews because we maintain the original, internal, steadfast, Jewish opposition to the precepts of Zionism, and to the actions of the resulting ethnocentric state.

Zionism is a political movement which, exactly like the Bund, formally began in 1897 in Europe. Originally a movement within the larger Jewish world, the Zionist dream sprung into a durable reality after cementing an alliance with the British Empire, at the expense of the local Palestinian population. But Zionism is neither identical with Judaism nor with Jewishness; as a people we have spent more time outside of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel than we did in those formative years before the Common Era.

You may accuse both movements of being utopian. But Bundists recognised that the Zionist idea of utopia was dystopian, with its demand that land and homes be taken by force from our cousins who had been living there, continuously, since before the Kingdom of David. Rather than being a safe haven, Israel became a perpetual war zone, with compulsory tours of duty and mandatory shell shock. The ascent to nation statehood took on responsibility for the descent into an ethnic cleansing, which we justified by pointing to the Holocaust – as if our suffering entitled us to pay it forward.

Ethnic supremacy, whether German, Palestinian or Israeli, is an unacceptable response to the horrors of World War II, then as now. As Rabbi Hillel said, do not unto others what is hateful to you. Jewish activism for civil rights in the diaspora has always been connected to working with other minority groups toward full recognition of our common human rights. In Israel such alliances are taboo; even interreligious marriage is forbidden by Israeli civil law.

There is talk in Israel of a "demographic bomb", of the unsustainability of occupation, of an ultimate choice which faces Zionism: ethnic supremacy or democracy? There can only be one moral choice, and we stand against any who

would choose bigotry over lasting justice as a means of establishing peace. We ask the same question of every government on earth, everywhere we live.

The rising generation needs the Bund

As the living survivors of the Holocaust dwindle, as revisionism and antisemitism rise, we cannot rely on mainstream Jewish institutions' moral authority to protect the Jews of the diaspora as partners of a Jewish supremacist Israeli state. A generation is rising who recognise Israel as oppressor and the Palestinian people as the victims of Zionism's bloody utopian vision. Today's Jewish institutions have nothing to offer a Jew of conscience – who hears the echo of our ancestors' cries as the ghetto walls collapsed on to them – when they see the devastation of Gaza brought about by our own family members in the IDF. No amount of messaging or public relations theory can erase a foundational injustice.

Never again means to anyone else, not only to Jews, and we bear a special responsibility to prevent this type of devastation.

We cannot build anything solely out of negation. That is why the Jews of the 21st century need the Bund. We are faced with existential crises as a globe, and the world must take them on together, and face them joyously, with a positive vision of a common, shared prosperity. We fight for our lives by building lives worth fighting for, by building families and creating art and pursuing justice – both civil and economic.

Fortunately, there is a rich Jewish history in every corner of the globe wherever we find our home. Our history tells us that the only way we have persevered as a people is by facing these threats together, as a community that shared its wealth and cared for the poor and the sick out of duty and without thought of recompense.

Jews have voted with their feet: more of us live outside of Israel than inside. We practice *doikayt* every day. Let us face the challenges of the world with diversity as our strength and justice and dignity as our highest pursuit.

We believe the future belongs to a 21st-century socialism, not a 19th-century nationalism. We cannot convince swords to become ploughshares; they must be beaten by our own hands. Peace is harder than war, and a sustainable, just peace is only winnable through our collective labour.

Find out more at www.derbund.org/

JOURNEY FROM A LOST WORLD

This beautiful, inspiring, elegiac book is the story of the author's journey – a journey from Baghdad to Israel in 1950, aged five, and from Israel to England. But Avi Shlaim's journey was at different levels. It was geographical and it was cultural. It also became a political journey to his own position today.

His personal experiences illustrate a bigger story of the Jewish exodus from Iraq to Israel in 1950, following the creation of Israel in 1948. His story and his words speak more eloquently than any reviewer can, and so for the most part, I quote directly from his memoir.

The book is "a glimpse into the lost and rich world of the Iraqi-Jewish community". Perhaps, coming from what he describes as a prosperous, privileged family, he may see the past through rose-tinted glasses. But his memories are precious.

"We belonged to a branch of the global Jewish community that is now almost extinct. We were Arab-Jews. We lived in Baghdad and were well integrated into Iraqi society. We spoke Arabic at home, our social customs were Arab, our lifestyle was Arab, our cuisine was exquisitely Middle Eastern and my parents' music was an attractive blend of Arabic and Jewish... We in the Jewish community had much more in common, linguistically and culturally, with our Iraqi compatriots than with our European co-religionists."

Of all the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire, the one in Mesopotamia was the most integrated into local society, the most Arabised in its culture and the most prosperous... When the British created the Kingdom of Iraq... the Jews were the backbone of the Iraqi economy.

Jewish lineage in Mesopotamia stretched as far back as Babylonian times, predating the rise of Islam by a millennium. "Their influence was evident in every branch of Iraqi culture, from literature and music to journalism and banking. Banks – with the exception of government owned banks – and all the big markets remained closed on the Sabbath and the other Jewish holy days." By the 1880s there were 55 synagogues in Baghdad.

Shlaim describes how in Iraq there was a long tradition of religious tolerance and harmony. "The Jews were neither newcomers nor aliens in Iraq. They were certainly not intruders." By the time of the First World War, Jews constituted one-third of the population of Baghdad.

He contrasts Europe and the Middle East. "Unlike Europe the Middle East did not have a 'Jewish Question'. Iraq's Jews did not live in ghettos, nor did they experience the violent repression, persecution and genocide that marred European history. There were of course exceptions, notably the infamous pogrom against Jews in June 1941, for which the actions of British imperialism must take substantial responsibility."

By 1941, antisemitism in Baghdad was on the increase but was more a foreign import than a homegrown product. There was a violent pogrom

against the Jewish community named the *farhud*. The Jews were seen as friends of the British; 179 Jews were murdered and several hundred injured. It was completely unexpected and unprecedented. There had been no other attack against the Jews for centuries. Avi gives many examples of Muslims assisting their Jewish neighbours.

And yet he writes: "The overall picture, however, was one of religious tolerance, cosmopolitanism, peaceful coexistence and fruitful interaction."

The critical moment was the creation of Israel. "As a result of the Arab defeat, there was a backlash against the Jews throughout the Arab world. 'What had been a pillar of Iraqi society was increasingly perceived as a sinister fifth column,' with Islamic fundamentalists and Arab nationalists identifying the Jews in their countries with the hated Zionist enemy.

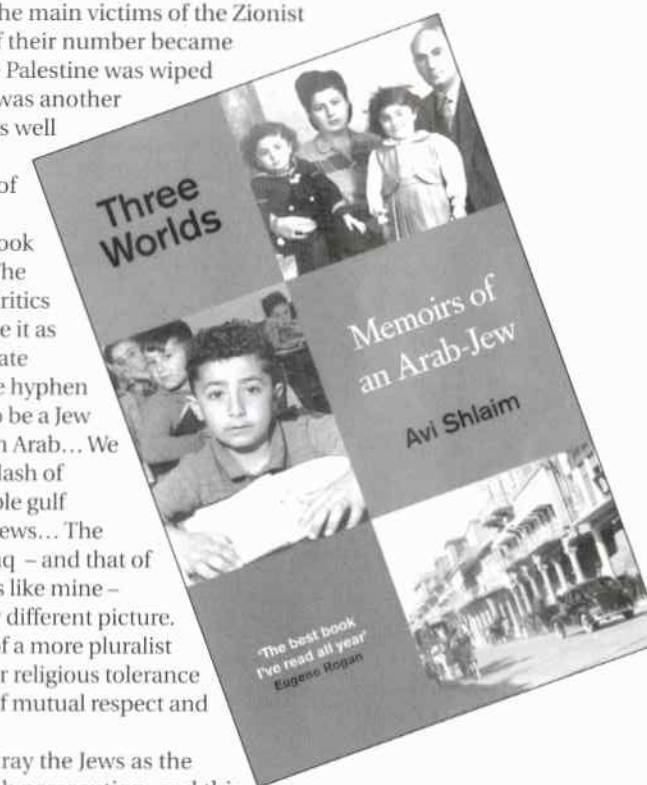
Palestinians "were the main victims of the Zionist project. More than half their number became refugees and the name Palestine was wiped off the map. But there was another category of victims, less well known and much less talked about: the Jews of the Arab lands."

The subtitle of the book refers to "Arab-Jews". "The hyphen is significant. Critics of the term Arab-Jew see it as... conflating two separate identities. As I see it, the hyphen unites: an Arab can also be a Jew and a Jew can also be an Arab... We are told that there is a clash of cultures, an unbridgeable gulf between Muslims and Jews... The story of my family in Iraq – and that of many forgotten families like mine – points to a dramatically different picture. It harks back to an era of a more pluralist Middle East with greater religious tolerance and a political culture of mutual respect and co-operation."

Yet the Zionists portray the Jews as the victims of endemic Arab persecution, and this is used to justify the atrocious treatment of the Palestinians. Thus the narrative of the "Jewish Nakba" to create a "false symmetry between the fate of two communities. This narrative is not history; it is the propaganda of the victors."

On 29th November 1947 the General Assembly of the United Nations voted for the Partition of Mandate Palestine into two states: one Arab, one Jewish. The General Council of the Iraqi Jewish community sent a telegram to the UN opposing the partition resolution and the creation of a Jewish state. "Like my family, the majority of Iraqi Jews saw themselves as Iraqi first and Jewish second; they feared that the creation of a Jewish state would undermine their position in Iraq... The distinction between Jews and Zionists, so crucial to interfaith

GRAHAM BASH reviews a groundbreaking personal and political autobiography



THREE WORLDS – MEMOIRS OF AN ARAB-JEW
Avi Shlaim
Oneworld Publications, £25

harmony in the Arab world, was rapidly breaking down."

Iraq's participation in the war for Palestine fuelled tensions between Muslims and Jews. Iraqi Jews were widely suspected of being secret supporters of Israel. With the defeat of Palestine, a wave of hostility towards Israel and the Jews living in their midst swept through the Arab world. Demonstrators marched through the streets of Baghdad shouting "Death to the Jews." And the government, needing a scapegoat, did not simply respond to public anger but actively whipped up public hysteria and suspicion against the Jews.

At this point, official persecution against the Jews began. In July 1948 a law was passed making Zionism a criminal offence punishable by death or a minimum sentence of seven years in prison. Jews were fired from government jobs and from the railways, post office and telegraph department; Jewish merchants were denied import and export licences; restrictions were placed on Jewish banks to trade in foreign currency; young Jews were barred from admission to colleges of education; and the entire community was put under surveillance.

The number of Jews leaving Iraq to the end of 1953 numbered almost 125,000 out of a total of 135,000. The Jewish presence going back well over 2,000 years was destroyed.

And yet, for all this, the mass exodus did not occur until 1950-1951 in what was known as the "Big Aliyah". The majority of Iraqi Jews did not want to leave Iraq and had no affinity with Zionism. Most who emigrated to Israel did so only after a wave of five bombings of Jewish targets in Baghdad. It has long been argued that the bombings were instigated by Israel and the Zionists to spark a mass flight of Iraqi Jews to Israel, needed as they were to do many of the menial jobs and to boost numbers in the army.

The author makes a forensic examination of the evidence – based on examination of documents and on interviews – and concluded that three out of the five bombings were carried out by the Zionist underground in Baghdad. A fourth – the bombing of the Mas'uda Shemtob synagogue, which was the only one that resulted in fatalities – was the result of Zionist bribery; and there was one carried out by a far right-wing, anti-Jewish Iraqi nationalist group.

When the Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel, their experience fell short of the Zionist myth. At the airport in Israel, many were sprayed with DDT pesticides "to disinfect them as if they were animals". They were then taken to squalid and unsanitary transit camps. Some camps were surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by policemen. The immigration and settlement authorities had no understanding of their customs and culture. "They thought of them as backward and primitive and expected them to take their place at the bottom of the social hierarchy and be grateful for whatever they were given... The lens through which the new immigrants were viewed was the same colonialist lens through which the Ashkenazi establishment viewed the Palestinians.

"We were Jews from an Arab country that was still officially at war with Israel. European Jews... looked down on us as socially and culturally inferior. They despised the Arabic language ... I was an Iraqi boy in a land of Europeans."

For his grandmothers, Iraq was the beloved

homeland, while Israel was the place of exile. "Migration to Israel is usually described as Aliyah or ascent. For us the move from Iraq to Israel was decidedly a Yeridah, a descent down the economic and social ladder. Not only did we lose our property and possessions; we also lost our strong sense of identity as proud Iraqi Jews as we were relegated to the margins of Israeli society." The experience was to break his father.

"The unstated aims of the official policy for schools were to undermine our Arab-Jewish identity... A systematic process was at work to delegitimise our heritage and erase our cultural roots." It was a clash of cultures. The Mizrahim were earmarked to be the proletariat – the fodder to support the country's industrial and agricultural development. As one author put it, "We left Iraq as Jews and arrived in Israel as Iraqis." They were clearly, to borrow from current jargon, "the wrong kind of Israeli".

Shlaim's journey was a political one too. His message and his warnings are unequivocally universalist. "The Holocaust stands out as an archetype of a crime against humanity. For me as a Jew and an Israeli therefore the Holocaust teaches us to resist the dehumanising of any people, including the Palestinian 'victims of victims', because dehumanising a people can easily result, as it did in Europe in the 1940s, in crimes against humanity."

He had previously argued that it was only after the 1967 war that Israel became a colonial power, oppressing the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. However, "a deeper analysis ... led me to the conclusion that Israel had been created by a settler-colonial movement. The years 1948 and 1967 were merely milestones in the relentless systematic takeover of the whole of Palestine... Since Zionism was an avowedly settler-colonial movement from the outset, the building of civilian settlements on occupied land was only a new stage in the long march... The most crucial turning point was not the war of 1967 but the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948."

And more: "the two-state solution is dead or, to be more accurate, it was never born... The outcome I have come to favour is one democratic state ... with equal rights for all its citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion." He is absolutely right in my view.

His family's story "serves as a corrective to the Zionist narrative which views Arabs and Jews as congenitally incapable of dwelling together in peace and doomed to permanent conflict and discord... My experience as a young boy and that of the whole Jewish community in Iraq, suggests there is nothing inevitable or preordained about Arab-Jewish antagonism... Remembering the past can help us to envisage a better future... Arab-Jewish coexistence is not something that my family imagined in our minds; we experienced it, we touched it."

Optimistic? Yes, perhaps over-optimistic. But towards the end of this masterpiece, Avi Shlaim justifies his message. "Recalling the era of cosmopolitanism and coexistence that some Jews, like my family, enjoyed in Arab countries before 1948 offers a glimmer of hope... It's the best model we have for a better future."

This article was first published on the Jewish Voice for Labour website at www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/avi-shlaim-three-worlds-memoirs-of-an-arab-jew/

An enticing sketch for a bigger picture

Many Ashkenazi Jews I know, including me, look up to the Bund as an inspiration – or *the* inspiration – for the organising we do on the radical left. I would even say that some of us idealise them. But I have yet to hear a critique of its ideas, and was hoping that this book would include one. It's interesting to me that it didn't. It is, however, full of many other things: short profiles of important Bundists; stories of adversity, state repression and antisemitism on the one hand, and strength, solidarity and hope on the other.

I appreciated learning new things about the movement: that for some time the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) defended Bundists against antisemitic attacks; the English translations of Bolshevik (majority) and Menshevik (minority) from Russian; and stories of female Bundists, including Pati Kremer.

As someone who rarely reads long history books, I also appreciated this book's brevity (100 pages), the moving illustrations that accompany the story, and its quick pace. I read the book in an hour – pretty good for covering an entire movement, several countries and many decades! This does mean that if you want a comprehensive history of the Bund, you'll need to look elsewhere. I recommend reading this book among other resources about the Bund (including the *Treyf* podcast's three-part interview series from 2020).

The book left me with several questions about the story. Why did the Vilna Circle (progenitor of the Bund) have to meet in secret? Why did S V Zubatov turn from a Vilna Circle member to an informant and police officer (*khas ve kholile!* God forbid)? Which laws had the Bund's Central Committee broken when they were arrested and in some cases exiled in the late 1890s? As an activist, I also wanted to know more about how the Bund organised, their structures and strategies, and how these evolved over time and across borders.

On the one hand, it's good that the book generated curiosity; on the other hand, I wish it had included a bit more background and context.

In addition, as a Yiddish speaker and teacher, I wanted to see more Yiddish on the page, as this was so central to the Bund's philosophy and activities, and was beloved by its members. I enjoyed the illustration of an election poster in Yiddish, and a short segment of conversation in transliteration in the section about the Czernowitz conference.

However, this account contains a crucial inaccuracy. The conference did not agree that Yiddish was *the* language of the Jews, but rather *a* language of the Jews. This was perhaps the most contentious debate of the conference and, ultimately, the participants couldn't agree about whether to prioritise Yiddish over the newly emerging Modern Hebrew.

Recognising this inaccuracy, I wondered what

else in this book might be contested by readers with a deeper knowledge of the Bund's history than I have. For example, David Rosenberg – who wrote the foreword to the book – has emphasised the Bund's heyday in Poland in the 1930s, which is understated here. In this flourishing period, the Bund created libraries, drama groups, sports clubs, youth and children's movements, a women's group, anti-eviction campaigns, and institutions such as the Medem Sanatorium outside Warsaw, for young people from poor backgrounds. The Bund also had many councillors elected throughout Poland in the late '30s, and were poised to stand candidates in the national elections that were cancelled when the Second World War broke out. They were really on a roll.

The book's ending, in keeping with the movement's determined aspirations for the future, is hopeful. The story ends with the Holocaust and a quote by the poet H Leivick, which asserts: "The branch of Jewish culture identified and nurtured by the Bund – secular, humane, activist – was not exterminated. It survived transplants across continents, expressed in the work of Jewish authors, judges, artists, performers, political leaders and troublemakers."

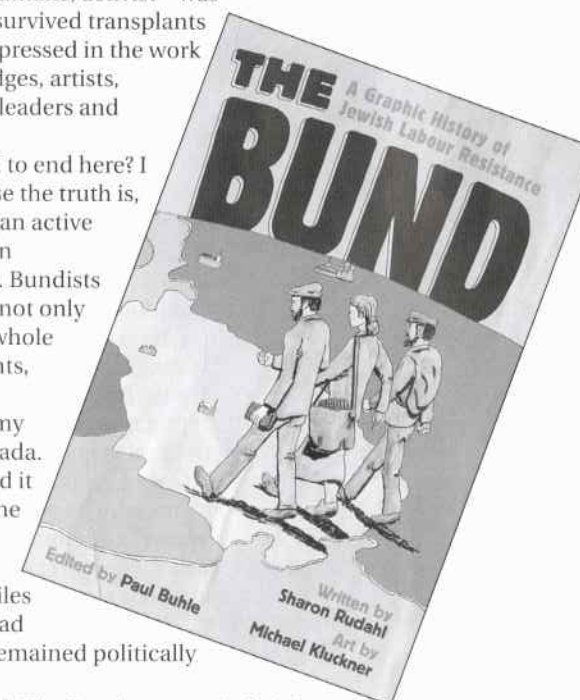
Did the story need to end here? I wish it hadn't, because the truth is, it didn't. There is still an active chapter of the Bund in Melbourne, Australia. Bundists went on to influence not only political leaders but whole parties and movements, such as the New Democratic Party in my home country of Canada. I would have preferred it if the history told in the book had extended beyond the Holocaust, if the profiles of notable Bundists had included those who remained politically active after the war.

Nonetheless, I think *The Bund* captures in brief both key information about and the guiding spirit of our beloved ancestors. They describe one of the movement's goals as encouraging a "proud and self-respecting Jewish culture". In political moments like these, when it can be challenging and even painful to be Jewish, I appreciate the reminder that we can – and must – remain proud of our people, our culture and our history. This is a perfect way to remind ourselves of what we can be proud of.

Tamara Micner

THE BUND: A GRAPHIC HISTORY OF JEWISH LABOUR RESISTANCE

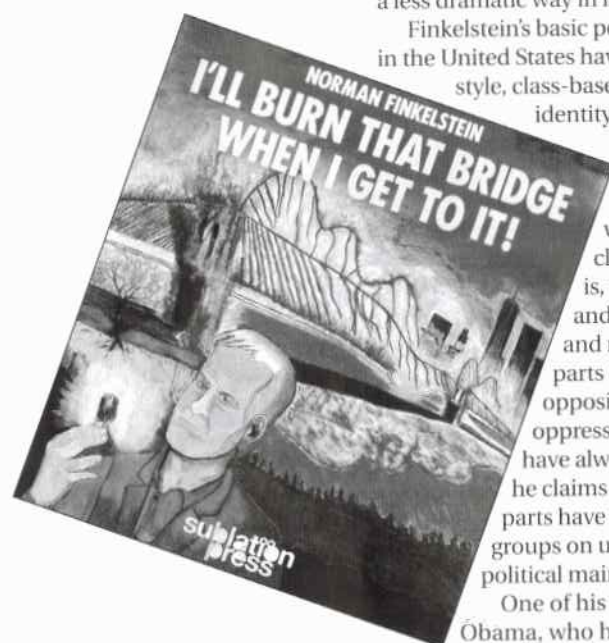
Sharon Rudahl, Michael Kluckner and Paul Buhle
Between the Lines, £22.50



Spleen, sarcasm and serious arguments

I'LL BURN THAT BRIDGE WHEN I GET TO IT: HERETICAL THOUGHTS ON IDENTITY POLITICS, CANCEL CULTURE AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Norman X Finkelstein
Sublation Media
ebook, £6.99



I read this book as news came out that the Mel Brooks film *Blazing Saddles* hit the cinemas 50 years ago. The film was a brilliant – extremely funny but very tasteless satire about racism. Some of the best scenes still make me laugh out loud, particularly when Jim (Gene Wilder) reminds Sheriff Bart (Cleavon Little) that “You’ve got to remember that these are just simple farmers. These are people of the land. The common clay of the new West. You know... morons.”

This book by Norman Finkelstein reminded me of that film. It is angry, sometimes funny and often in bad taste. The author is fully aware of that: his first chapter is headed “Confessions of a Crusty, Crotchety, Cantankerous, Contrarian, Communist Casualty of Cancel Culture”, and it is indeed a crotchety and contrarian rant. No doubt some Jewish socialists won’t want to read any further. That’s a pity, because his stream of spleen and sarcasm raises some important issues, which he often deals with in a less dramatic way in later chapters.

Finkelstein’s basic point is that many progressives in the United States have mistakenly abandoned old-style, class-based left activism in favour of identity politics, which he lampoons as the belief that it is more important to campaign about the oppression of black women than of the working class. In Finkelstein’s view this is, at best, a banal waste of time and, at worst, actively dangerous and reactionary. For him, the good parts of identity politics – its opposition to other forms of oppression beyond class oppression – have always been part of the left, but he claims that, unfortunately, the other parts have now moved from marginal groups on university campuses into the political mainstream.

One of his main targets is Barack Obama, who he describes as a “stupefying narcissist” and “the cynical triumph of form over substance, color over character. He is the cool Black dude who is also the reliable ... ‘mascot of Wall Street.’” Another is the US Democratic Party, which sabotaged the Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016 and 2020. Finkelstein writes:

...the movement behind Bernie Sanders endeavored to build a broad coalition on the premises that the system no longer functions for the overwhelming majority of the American people; that to make it work requires a radical redistribution of wealth; and that even as all the “have-nots” would benefit from “our revolution,” those who have suffered most would benefit more.

He argues that:

...identity politics in its many guises – from the cold calculation of the Democratic Party to

weaponize biological difference to the preening and posturing of radical-chic hustlers – played a most pernicious role in wrecking the most hopeful movement to come along in generations, and has become a fundamental hindrance to the radical transformation of our radically unjust society.

It’s important to remember the popularity of the Sanders campaign and how it was crushed by the Democratic Party (just as Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters were crushed by elements in the UK Labour Party). Some of the destruction was done under the pretext that Sanders was ignoring US racism, even though Bernie had been involved in Civil Rights protests as far back as the 1960s when he was a student. He also notes that Sanders’ poverty reduction programmes would have disproportionately helped poor black people.

Finkelstein lays into Kimberlé Krenshaw, Robin Diangelo, Ibram X Kendi, and other American intellectuals, who I confess I have never heard of. He claims that left-wing movements have always been against sexism and racism, but that nowadays these have become dangerous distractions from the fundamental class struggle.

In the other parts of his book, Finkelstein criticises (abusively) what he calls cancel culture – the silencing of dissenting voices, which was once the work of McCarthyism and has now been adopted by parts of the left, notably in the controversies about transgender people. Under the heading of academic freedom, he argues that even pernicious doctrines like Holocaust denial should be discussed with students.

Finkelstein has himself been a prime victim of “cancel culture”, having been dismissed by at least two US universities because of his outspoken criticisms of Israel. He has been sidelined by the mainstream US media. He has, in fact, written for many years about Israeli savagery in Gaza, since long before the current slaughter, notably in his eloquent 2021 book *GAZA: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom*. Interestingly, he has dismissed the one-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict as unrealistic, arguing that the two-state solution, though imperfect, is supported by international law and numerous UN resolutions, not to mention the vast majority of countries in the world.

Despite Finkelstein’s rambling sarcasm and insults, I would still recommend this book, along with the many interviews and talks available via his website (normanfinkelstein.com), because, in essence, they are a serious response to the depressing failure of the left to gain traction in the rich western countries. I don’t agree with him that the identity politics brigade are as much to blame as he makes out, but he would no doubt agree that the relentless neoliberal attacks on the working class have been the main reason for this failure.

Finkelstein can be very annoying, but we can learn from him.

Raf Salkie

Moving stories told from experience

This book is a wonderful account of child migration told through oral histories. It undertakes the task of giving a voice to the child migrants who have sought refuge in Britain from 1930s to the present day, and who are so often erased in popular discourse surrounding migration.

Nightingale begins the journey with two children who came to the UK with the Kindertransport in 1938. Blanca talks in the sitting room of the same house in Stoke Newington where she lived when she first arrived over seven decades earlier. Richard arrived from Jamaica aged seven and was caught up in the Windrush scandal, costing him his career, benefits and nearly his life in the UK. Zohra came from Pakistan in 1975 and is now creating jewellery inspired by her Asian-Muslim heritage and religious and spiritual beliefs. Linh Vu fled Vietnam after the war, with her father in a fishing boat, at the age of seven, when Saigon became part of North Vietnam. Ahmed from Somaliland came to the UK with his family aged 11, and had to grow up fast after losing a parent. Yosef from Eritrea fled forced military conscription. And a group of Syrian children were sent to a Scottish island in 2015 as part of the Syrian Resettlement scheme and were welcomed by the island’s remarkable schools.

Nightingale’s style is informal; she inserts herself into the text with subtlety, reminding the reader of the research being conducted, but without de-centring the stories of the children. Sometimes commenting on the decor in the house, the chintz pattern on a teacup in the café where the interview is being held or the weather on a particular day, she invites the reader to sit with her as she listens to the stories. This offers an insight into the interviews themselves as well as the stories of the children and adds a depth to the writing that would have been otherwise absent.

The text is beautiful and allows a rich exploration of everyone’s stories: from the mundanities of daily life in their countries of origin – stealing cherries from nearby fields – to tales of harrowing journeys, escaping bullets and being conscripted to war as a child soldier. The research is accessible, easy to follow, and includes a healthy dose of criticism of the government’s recent Immigration Acts.

Transferring oral histories to the written word means that some of the stories can be hard to follow: the speaker will often run through their experiences rapidly or introduce a tragic event without much preamble, so the reader has to halt or reread a passage to find the thread.

There is much less focus on migration after the 1990s, which means a lack of analysis of current discriminatory hostile environment policies that introduce further complications for migrants upon arrival to the UK. Policies like Asylum Support accommodation, where people stay in hotels for years awaiting dispersal to anywhere in the country with no autonomy or choice, and incorrect age

assessments, lack of access to higher education, being unable to work or rent legally, all further compound difficulties for migrants and their children. There is currently very limited research on the impact that living in hotels and moving schools repeatedly has on a migrant child’s ability to reach their full potential. Nightingale does touch on this in *Child Migrant Voices* and there were stories such as Malek’s, who has applied for a four-year post-graduate medicine qualification to become a doctor, and of child migrants who overcame educational challenges to go on and be politically, personally or creatively brilliant. However, not all of these government policies were located in the context of the Hostile Environment, which means that analysis of today’s terrain for migrants is lost. Legally, the immigration landscape today is wholly different for the kids arriving via small boats from Calais than in the Kindertransport in the 1930s. Nightingale leads the way for others to follow to explore this in more depth.

In today’s climate, the government and mainstream media are committed to demonising immigration and othering refugees, referring to migrants as “swarms” and “pests”. They are too distracted by what migrants might “take” from “us” to consider the richness they may offer. A quote from Lord Dubs in the book says that “history will judge this shabby government and its weaponization of refugee lives” was a gift: from now on I will only refer to our government using the prefix “shabby”. Eithne Nightingale offers a glimpse of what the world might be if we shifted this perspective to one of openness.

These are rich stories of resilience and courage, with cultural histories, food and languages, creative pursuits such as dance, theatre, performance art, poetry, painting, and life-saving work such as nursing on COVID wards. All the children in this book have contributed something brilliant to Britain, and child migrants will continue to enrich our country, if we let them.

While reading *Child Migrant Voices*, it is hard not to think of the children of Gaza, who right now are being denied safe and legal routes out of that territory, while our shabby government is placing the lives of those children at risk by directly endorsing Israeli aggression and refusing to call for an immediate ceasefire.

Esme Kemp

CHILD MIGRANT VOICES IN MODERN BRITAIN

Eithne Nightingale
Bloomsbury,
£17.99



On the record

WHERE ARE THE ELEPHANTS? A MEMOIR

Leon Rosselson
PM Press, £15.99

*Look here, said the fellow with the grey flannel skin
and planted on his bald head: Keep off the grass
it's absolutely clear that you can't dance here
'cos you haven't got a licence, your credentials
won't pass
and according to subsection A of paragraph Z
you're defaulting on your payments for the
upkeep of the dead.*

Those who have heard Leon Rosselson's songs over the years may have wondered where on earth they come from. They are not typical protest songs, with sing-along choruses, surges of willpower set to soaring melodies, and clear indications of What is To Be Done. There's a degree of curiosity and a breadth of imagination that is uncommon.

Leon Rosselson's memoir *Where Are the Elephants?* offers a wonderful insight into his life, his work and his perspectives. It begins with Leon's communist upbringing in the 1930s and '40s, and particularly the influence of his father, a Jewish

refugee from Tsarist Russia and loyal member of the Party. Leon recalls the invigoration he felt in the singing of Soviet war songs, and the victory of the Red Army over Hitler, and his musical apprenticeship singing left-wing folk songs in the London Youth Choir.

Most importantly, however, he recalls the way cracks appeared in his image of the Soviet Bloc, amidst the persecution of Jews in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, the revelations by Khrushchev of Stalin's crimes, and the invasion of Hungary by Red Army troops. For many who had spent their lives fighting to end exploitation, the ground now moved beneath their feet, undermining not only their faith in Eastern Bloc regimes but core certainties as to what they were fighting for.

Leon chronicles his struggle, amidst this political rubble, to reconstruct a vision of the world turned upside down. That vision was sketched in distinction to Stalinism, and in opposition to the post-war order in Britain, as well as to the austere, atomic social democracy of the Labour Party and to the boredom and misery of managed industrial capitalism. The Labour government, Leon noted, brought some basic industries under state control, but that was "in no way common ownership, workers' control, or workers' co-operatives".

Leon's songs often go much further than critiquing the unequal distribution of things. They're about the muffling of our hopes, the constriction of our movements, the narrowing of our desires, in order that the wheels of industry and statecraft can keep on turning. He describes the impact on his thinking of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and his "critique of the consumer society that dehumanises people, manipulates their desires so that they find their identities in the commodities capitalism pressures them to buy."

Curiously absent from Rosselson's personal-

political story is the 1970s. The memoir moves fast from the defeat of the French student movement and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, to the victory of neoliberalism in the 1980s. The tremendous upsurge in industrial organisation and militancy that occurred in between doesn't offer much punctuation to this series of setbacks. Grunwick is mentioned, but framed as a forerunner of the defeats to come.

This is not, however, a depressing book. It expresses some of the things we say quietly to ourselves when going about the business of fighting for a completely different world. The uncertainty, the doubt, the tentative interest we might feel in a new struggle or movement, the occasional worry that we might just be pissing in the wind, and, most of all, the willful determination to keep imagining the barely imaginable.

In 2008, I mentioned to Leon that I'd just caught the start of Leonard Cohen's comeback tour. He wasn't impressed and told me that Cohen was a charlatan. And so I was amused to find two whole pages of this memoir fleshing out, in a searing and witty way, exactly what was wrong with the doomy Canadian. "Where he ventures away from *me me me* songs he becomes vague and obfuscatory, throwing in religious references and hinting at a profundity he cannot attain." In Rosselson's mind, Cohen is a "songwriter who strains to deliver the 'poetical'", and his output is symptomatic of those who regard song as a junior partner to poetry rather than a distinct art form. One of the problems, Rosselson tells us, with songwriters who aspire towards poetry, "is the belief that poetry equals mystification and obfuscation and that poetic language should be clotted and opaque".

Songwriting at its best, Leon argues, is less like poetry and more like theatre. It's performed in character, and driven by events and stories. Certainly, where metaphor exists in Leon's songs, it is rarely particularly abstract. We see Barney's tower being built and taken down. We hear the entirety of the *Conversation on a Mobile*, whose miscommunications seem to represent a deeper alienation – as we might if we were in the theatre. By the time we encounter a more unworldly metaphor – "a toothache in my heart" – its meaning is in no sense oblique.

It is perhaps because of this absence of poetic pretension that Leon is less reticent than a great many artists to discuss, in a matter of fact way, the origins of his songs and the thinking and events that underlay them. This is one of many things that makes this book a very rewarding read for anyone whose mind has ever bubbled whilst listening to Rosselson's words.

Most of all, this memoir makes a powerful case for a certain kind of optimism of the intellect. Not a conviction that all will turn out well, or that all has turned out well elsewhere, or that our strategies will always succeed. Rather a belief that even without any of the above, our efforts to imagine a wholly new tomorrow, and our attempts to bring it about, remain urgent, important and uplifting.

Reuben Bard-Rosenberg

Frail but unshakeable

Rosamine Hayeem

1936 - 2024

Rosamine Hayeem was a stalwart activist all her life and a member of the Jewish Socialists' Group. She was born in 1936 and grew up in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, in a thriving Jewish community, originally from Poland and Lithuania, including German Jewish refugees brought out in the 1930s.

Rosamine was the only child of Lily Fryde, whose family came from Johannesburg. Rosamine was born with a genetic lung condition, and doctors gave her only three days to live. Her infant tenacity amazed them then, and stood her in good stead all her long life.

Her parents divorced, and her mother became the first woman chartered accountant in Rhodesia. She was an energetic woman, prominent in the Bulawayo community, who raised her bright, politically aware and socially active daughter alone, making frequent visits to Johannesburg for medical treatment.

Rosamine matriculated at 16, top of the cohort and won a scholarship to the University of Cape Town. Despite doing brilliantly there, she wanted to be journalist and pestered the editor of the *Cape Times*, who eventually gave her a job, so she left university and became a reporter. However, due to her anti-apartheid activism she was expelled from South Africa. Fascinated by Africa, Rosamine hitch-hiked, aged 17, from Cape Town to the borders of what was then the Belgian Congo.

After her mother died, tragically young, at 49, Rosamine emigrated to Israel in 1959, helped by her South African relatives who were amongst the early Zionist pioneers to Palestine. She was taken under the wing of her mother's cousin, Auntie Birdie, part of Rosamine's Yiddish background.

Rosamine was vivacious, bright, with a strong penchant for reading, which never left her. She had boundless energy, despite her tiny frame, which she put to great use in her poetry, journalism and teaching. Her writing showed a rare capacity for warmth, humour, observation and understanding of people and situations.

She picked up Hebrew quickly, and met Abe, an architecture student from London, in 1965 at the immigrants' club in Tel Aviv. Despite her love of the hot climate, she left Israel for London, where they were married, so Abe could resume his degree.

Rosamine had a variety of jobs, in academia and as a teacher. After 1967, which was a turning point in their views about Israel, she and Abe adopted two mixed-race children, Gilad and Lilya, who converted to give them a Jewish identity. In 1970 Rosamine gave birth to Judith, who had spina bifida and hydrocephalus. Rosamine was a passionate advocate for the underdog throughout her life. Having a child with a disability introduced her to the world of exclusion and both she and Abe fought tenaciously to get Judith accepted in mainstream education. The rest of their lives were a constant fight for equal rights for people with disabilities and against the racism that Gilad and Lilya experienced at school.

This echoed the antisemitism Rosamine had experienced in Rhodesia. She had rebelled against

the visible inequalities so prevalent in the Bulawayo of her childhood and became active in the Anti-Apartheid Movement in London. It was through this activism that Israel's real nature became clear, especially with its arming of the apartheid state. Once South Africa became free and independent, Rosamine, like so many other Jewish activists, turned her attention to the Israeli state and became an activist for Palestinian self-determination.

Rosamine had such a frail physique. She always looked as if a good strong wind would blow her down, but this did not deter her from a lifelong dedication to justice and equality. She could be found among the crowd at campaign meetings looking like a little bird but brimming with passionate argument. After the tragic death of their youngest daughter, Judith, at the age of 49 in 2019, and a subsequent incidence of breast cancer in the same year, Rosamine's health deteriorated, and especially the progression of her lung condition.

Many bouts of hospitalisation followed and a withdrawal from active participation in the many causes that were dear to her, except online. She found these last few horrific months distressing as she not only had to cope with the ebbing away of her physical strength, but also the mental trauma of seeing the devastation visited on a captive people by a genocidal state.

She had a talent for friendship, maintaining an abiding interest and involvement with all those close to her. Winters were always a major trial. She had to shelter from the onset of winter viruses and Covid as her lungs were incapable of dealing with infection, and increasingly antibiotics were ineffective. But she used her time in isolation to concentrate on her love of writing, including long emails to friends, and has left a treasure trove of beautiful words.

Rosamine was a courageous soul whose strong spirit radiated from her frail body – a real mentsh, who fought heroically right to the end. Ultimately, her lungs failed, but her strength and compassion for life will remain as a lasting memory to all those who knew and loved her.

Our condolences go to Abe, her lifelong partner and soulmate.
Diana Neslen

SONG OF THE EARTH by Rosamine Hayeem

They say there is the song of the earth about us	And sparkled beautiful as a tear
That we do not hear	Where the day budded in pink and
May I die on the cross of my madness	lilac not to wither
Or perish unstroked by the moon	But rested soft as a cheek
Unborne by mortal flute notes	Against the hard sunburnt arm of the
And by man uncherished	day's end
If I lie to breathe breath into a poem	And where one note with a thousand
Or adorn myself with mystery stones	trills
To draw the eye for naught	Held all the notes that were ever
	heard
But where the ice and the fire blended	And yet was one clear liquid cry –
And were still fire and ice	That was the murmur of the breeze
Where the one water drop touched	Between the living and the dead
the ground	Ignorant of graves or new flesh



The songs featured in the memoir are available in a specially compiled retrospective album available on CD and vinyl from propermusic.com or <https://leonrosselson.co.uk/>