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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
JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP
No 82 Spring 2026 £3



DEFENDING FREEDOM ORGANISING TOGETHER

- Morphing antisemitism ■ A Spanish republican legacy
- Palestinian women's resistance ■ Memories of Majer Bogdanski
- News ■ Reviews ■ Analysis

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EDITORIAL

Although there is so much disturbing, upsetting and worrying news, locally and globally, a parliamentary by-election in the Gorton and Denton constituency of Manchester in February has given us cause for cheer. Its political implications go well beyond this locality.

This has been a Labour seat since 1931, but this time they came third, 3% behind Reform UK, the far-right party whose candidate was Matt Goodwin, a high-profile, right-wing political commentator, activist and former academic. Labour trailed more than 15% behind the Green Party candidate, Hannah Spencer, a plumber and local councillor. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats won derisory numbers, suggesting some degree of tactical voting – Tories choosing Reform UK and Lib Dems choosing the Greens.

Alongside local topics, national and international issues of racism, the growth of the far right, and foreign policy played into the result. Since Labour took power at the 2024 general election with a landslide of seats but a low vote share, it has seen its national popularity plummet, to the benefit of the far right. It has mainly sought to stem this flow not through principled challenges to the far right's scapegoating but by getting in on the act itself, especially over immigration, and ramping up its "patriotic" credentials. This is not simply a matter of tactics. Labour's leadership has shifted the party decisively to the right.

The Green Party, has surged in membership since it elected Zack Polanski, a gay, Jewish anti-Zionist, as its leader last September. It won this by-election by conceding nothing to racist, anti-immigrant, anti-refugee politics. On the contrary, it confidently promoted pro-migrant and refugee arguments, and pro-Palestinian views in a constituency with many ethnic minority voters, especially people from Pakistani Muslim backgrounds. The Greens enthused and mobilised huge numbers of canvassers. On the doorstep, as well as talking about racism and global issues, Green campaigners spoke to voters about basic economic issues, and offered a bold left-wing alternative to rapacious capitalism.

This Green victory should be welcomed by all socialists, antiracists, antifascists and campaigners for global social justice. It has proved that the far right can be beaten by opposing them with convincing arguments, fearlessly expressed, based on strong radical principles with social justice at their heart. We will never defeat racists by echoing their arguments.

There was predictable commentary from the right-wing press and from sore far-right losers. They lambasted the Greens for doing a political broadcast in Urdu – the first language of a significant segment of the local population. We applaud them for doing so, and for showing that they care about the lives and concerns of minorities. Less foreseen, and more worrying commentary has come from certain left-wing individuals who see themselves in competition with the Greens, and whose criticisms of Polanski have even overlapped with the casual antisemitism that oozes from his right-wing opponents.

Labour has learned no lessons from this. Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, who made strong

criticisms of the Tories' Hostile Environment for migrants and refugees when her party were in opposition, is now proudly hardening Labour's own repressive stance against migrants and refugees. A sniff of power, and principles are easily abandoned.

What about the Jewish community? Its increasingly right-wing spokespeople who self-identify as our community leaders, are so desperate to defend Israel's own far-right government, that they seem unconcerned about the strain this puts on their relationships with other minorities. They are shifting closer to hard-right and far-right personalities who combine support for Israel with deep Islamophobia, and who swim in the same waters with those who believe in the antisemitic Great Replacement Theory.

It's small wonder that Reform UK leader Nigel Farage decided the time was ripe to launch a Reform-UK/Jewish Alliance at a hall in the Central Synagogue in London's West End – part of the United Synagogue movement. As you will see on page 6, Farage may have thought he was pushing at an open door but he received an unexpected response. And if that synagogue seems familiar, it's because it was the one that used entirely bogus accusations of antisemitism in January 2025 to pressure the Met Police into banning a Palestine demonstration that was planning to march half a mile away in the opposite direction.

An increasing number of British Jews – though from a small base – are seriously thinking about voting for Reform UK. The better news is that an even greater proportion no longer wish to vote for Tories or Labour but are shifting left towards the Greens, especially among younger voters. See the report on the survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (page 3).

But as the world spirals towards more death and destruction, with Trump and Netanyahu seen as major instigators, a less welcome trend has been asserting itself. There is a revival of poisonous antisemitic currents, rooted in conspiracy theories, among individuals on the left, to a point where some, who claim to be campaigning for liberation, are spouting classic antisemitic tropes about "Jewish supremacy" and "pax Judaica". There are now, also, dubious references to something called the "Epstein Class", which have more than a whiff of antisemitism. This goes well beyond calling out Epstein's sickening crimes, his horrific exploitation of young women and girls, and his links with politically powerful figures. See the articles by Ruth Lukom (page 20) and Julia Bard (page 22) which highlight these currents.

The 1930s fascist, Oswald Mosley, described Jews as a malign and "unclean influence in our national and imperial life". We need a bit of cleaning up of our antiracist arguments to keep them from being tainted by the poison of conspiracy theories.

We hope that, using music and culture to unite us, the mass Together Alliance March Against the Far Right on 28th March will be a springboard to a healthy and effective challenge to hatred and divisiveness within our communities – not just in city centres – and let us concentrate in the coming months on what we are fighting for and how we can do that.

CONTENTS

NEWS

- 3 A polarising community
- 4 Against Trump's terror, at home and abroad; Israeli police break up protests against the Iran war and settler violence
- 5 Roti and roses and bagels too – Zohran Mamdani
- 6 Reform UK or revolution?; A song, a laugh and a tear

REGULARS

- 4 Change the World
- 8 Wiseworlds

FEATURES

- 7 **A straw fire**
Richard Braude reflects on Italy's vast but ephemeral Palestine solidarity demonstrations
- 9 **In the interests of justice**
Australian Zionists are using the law as a weapon in an attempt to silence supporters of Palestine. Raf Salkie reports on how two academics are fighting back
- 10 **Higher fences will not protect us**
Joseph Finlay looks at the responses to the Manchester synagogue attack and proposes a radical change to how we keep communities safe
- 12 **Treasure lost and found**
Majer Bogdanski was a shining light in the Bund both before the war in Poland and later in London. Through a chance discovery David Rosenberg learnt more about his early years

Jewish Socialist Editorial Committee: Julia Bard, Judith Cravitz, Joseph Finlay, Charlotte Prager Williams, David Rosenberg and Raf Salkie. Cover photo: New Bridge Hotel, Newcastle, which houses asylum seekers. Stand Up To Racism counter-protest against far-right campaigners. © Paul Mattsson/reportdigital.co.uk

A polarising community

A recent report from the Institute of Jewish Policy Research (JPR) describes a community that's polarising – perhaps even fracturing – under the stress of conflicting perspectives.

The report, entitled "The end of two-party politics? Emerging changes in the political preferences of British Jews" finds that British Jews are turning away from their traditional voting patterns: away from the two main political parties, Labour and Conservative. Some, on the left of the community, are shifting towards the Greens; others, to a lesser extent, to Farage's far-right Reform UK.

The percentage intending to vote for the Green Party has doubled since 2024, from 9% to a remarkable 18%. And support for Reform UK has almost quadrupled, albeit, from a much lower starting point of 3%, now rising to 11%.

The move away from traditional parties echoes shifts in the wider population but is less pronounced. Although most Jews

will continue to vote for the Labour or Conservative parties, support for both has dropped and, in the case of Labour, for all its posturing on antisemitism, the drop has been dramatic.

The authors of the report seem baffled by the fact that "nearly one in five Jews ... now favours the Green Party – the same party that officially labels Israel an 'apartheid state'." Despite their own research in a separate report showing a rise in anti-Zionist identification, particularly among younger Jews, their interpretation is not the obvious one: that many Jews agree with this label, especially after two years of destruction wreaked on Gaza. Instead, their contorted explanation is that "for a small but significant minority of Jews, domestic priorities and progressive values outweigh foreign policy concerns that touch directly on Israeli governmental and military behaviour." (Our emphasis.)

This is only a cause for concern to those

16 Fabric of resistance

Sue Bard visited a stunning exhibition of Palestinian embroidery, which is an evolving library of memory

18 A warm Spanish welcome

Ilana Lesser Cravitz comes from a long line of activists. The legacy left by her relatives who joined the International Brigades in Spain includes the honour of receiving Spanish citizenship.

20 A star is worn

Ruth Lukom is defiant and refuses to be defined. So is it time to retrieve her Star of David necklace?

22 Left? Right? Antisemitic? Not antisemitic?

Julia Bard finds disturbing expressions of hostility to Jews amongst supposedly progressive campaigners

24 All that remains

Photographer Dave Gilchrist captures the atmosphere of the Jewish cemetery in Lodz, in Poland, a city that was once home to a vibrant, mainly working class community

25 A potent combination

Violinist and composer Anna Lowenstein describes the background and influences for her new album, *Through the Walls*, a Yiddish string quartet

REVIEWS

- 26 *Jews without Money*
- 27 *Time's Echo: The Second World War, the Holocaust and the Music of Remembrance*
- 28 *The Message*
- 29 *On Antisemitism: A Word in History*
- 30 *Small Boat*
- 31 **Off the shelf**
Raf Salkie gives a critical round-up of recent books

whose positions depend on the Jewish community at least appearing to be united behind them, Israel and the British state.

The other side of this polarisation is a more worrying, but not entirely unexpected or unprecedented, pull towards the far right. The researchers again find this difficult to analyse, saying: "11% of Jews now favour Reform UK, a party whose rhetoric on immigration might typically be expected to alienate minority communities, including Jews." Given the alignment of a significant element in the Jewish community (including some in the vicinity of the Chief Rabbi's office) to Israel's racist, fascist government and violent settler movement, it is hardly surprising to find some of them pitching up in Reform UK's camp.

"The end of two-party politics? Emerging changes in the political preferences of British Jews" is available at www.jpr.org.uk/reports/end-two-party-politics-emerging-changes-political-preferences-british-jews



CHANGE
THE
WORLD

Isha L'Isha (Woman to Woman) is the oldest feminist centre in Israel and a leading voice in the struggle for women's rights in the country. It's a community of women building partnership and understanding among women in Israel, regardless of religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual preference, ability, disability or socio-economic status.

Although the organisation is based in Haifa, many of its projects address issues faced by women throughout Israel. For example, through the Women Without Civil Status in Israel project, Isha L'Isha seeks to change existing legislation, promoting a policy which supports the rights and welfare of victims and survivors of human trafficking, asylum seekers, married women or those in a relationship with an Israeli citizen or resident, and migrant workers. The women belong to a

variety of communities, including: Eastern European, Palestinian, African and Asian.

The Gun Free Kitchen Tables project works with other organisations to tighten gun control, particularly in the case of armed security guards who take their weapons home with them. The project has been partially successful, resulting in a huge reduction in domestic killings over a period of three years when guards were not allowed to take guns home. However, in 2016 the legislation was reversed, and the numbers have risen again.

In other areas, Isha L'Isha raises awareness of disability, and supports women who have come out of the ultra-orthodox world. Its internal organisation is non-hierarchical, with equal representation for Palestinian, Mizrahi, Lesbian and Ashkenazi women. Find out more on their website: <https://isha.org.il/?lang=en>

Against Trump's terror at home and abroad

Statement by the Jewish Socialists' Group

In January the Jewish Socialists' Group took part in a determined protest rally in London called by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War Coalition and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which strongly condemned Donald Trump's act of war and piracy against the Venezuelan government, and the bombing in and around Caracas that killed dozens of people.

Trump openly pursues his ultra-nationalist "America First" policy which, of course, defends powerful and voracious American corporations and their interests. His administration is characterised by authoritarianism, gangsterism, terror, racist scapegoating and megalomania. He tramples on democracy, international law and human

rights, starting fires around the globe while claiming to be a peacemaker.

And he brings the same ruthless mindset to his domestic policy. The murder in broad daylight of 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good, by an ICE agent in Minneapolis that same week, was the product of the domestic state terror that Trump unleashed in his first term, which is escalating even more brutally in his second term.

We are heartened and inspired by the collective courage of those taking to the streets in American cities to stand with targeted migrant communities and confront their oppressors together.

As socialists, anti-racists and anti-fascists, we stand in solidarity with those who are the direct victims of Trumpism in



America and around the world. Here in Britain we demand that our own government end its servility towards and appeasement of Trump's far-right administration.

JustVision Media reported: "Three of the victims were shot dead by settlers, while a fourth died of cardiac arrest after Israeli soldiers fired tear gas in the aftermath of one of the shootings." This followed two attacks the previous week, when settlers killed two residents of the village of Qaryut near Nablus.

At a protest in Tel Aviv, the police forcibly dispersed demonstrators after far-right counter-protesters arrived, attacking them verbally and documenting them. Citing concerns about public safety, the police arrested one of the anti-war protesters but none of the far-right agitators.

Another anti-war demonstration was dispersed three days later, and the police arrested a 19-year-old protestor, who told Ha'aretz newspaper: "They started to beat me, to kick me, until I fell to the ground and they handcuffed me and violently shoved me into a police car." He was taken to a local police station and strip searched, which he said they were doing "just to humiliate".

Israeli police break up protests against the Iran war and settler violence

In Israel, police have broken up protests against the war on Iran and against the

escalating violence in the West Bank.

As we go to press, and under cover of the spreading US-Israel war on Iran, Israeli settlers are ramping up their attacks on Palestinian villages. The Israeli army has imposed a total closure on the Occupied West Bank. Checkpoints and gates have been shut across the area, restricting Palestinians' ability to move between districts. At the same time, armed settlers can move about freely, carrying out raids against villagers and murdering them with apparent impunity when they try to resist.

In the first week of March, four Palestinians were killed in two separate villages in the West Bank.



Roti and roses and bagels too

On 2nd January, Zohran Mamdani was sworn in as New York's Mayor. Despite attempts to smear him and his policies, he was supported by many of New York's Jewish community in his victorious campaign. Charlotte Prager Williams reports.

Around one-third of New York's Jews voted for Mamdani, but that overall figure conceals a polarisation in the community based on age, class and religious adherence. In Hasidic areas, Andrew Cuomo, the Democratic candidate (the traditional choice for Jews) won over 90% of the vote. In areas populated by younger, progressive and more secular Jews the vote was overwhelmingly (in some places over 80%) for Mamdani. Although Zionism has been a powerful political force in American Jewish life, especially since 1967, there has been a longer, and perhaps more enduring, radical political and trade unionist tradition, and Mamdani's emphasis on poverty, the cost of living and especially housing chimed strongly with many of New York's Jewish population.

Throughout his campaign, Mamdani drew a firm line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism. This has proved controversial with New York's more establishment Jewish organisations and figureheads, who have been keen to muddy that line and to spell out supposed dangers for Jews in the city. But progressive Jews came out in droves to support his campaign and have welcomed the new Mayor enthusiastically.

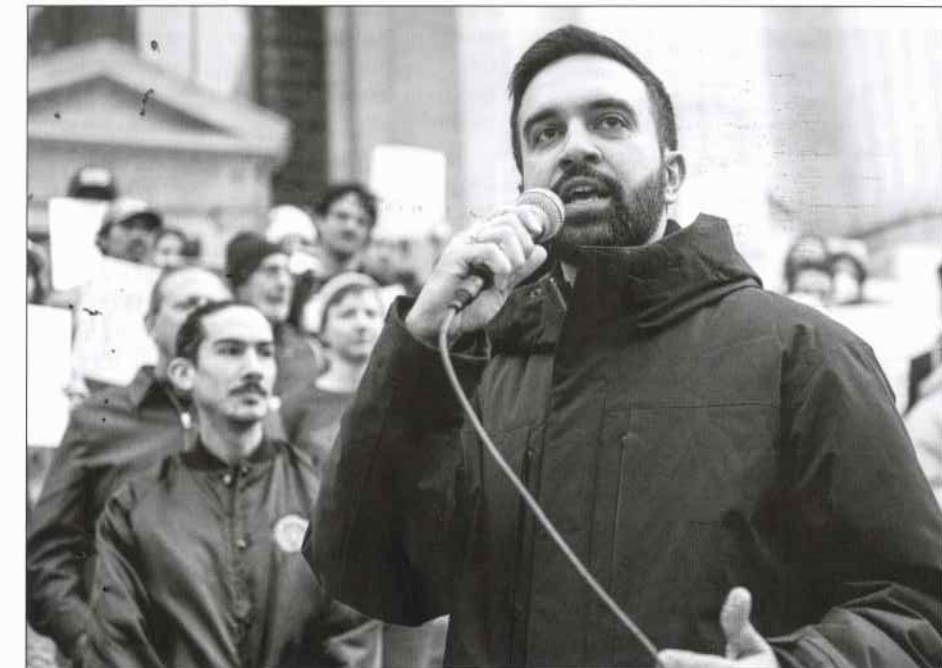
Jews for Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ) said: "We organised for Zohran across generations and denominations with our whole hearts. Not despite our Jewish values, but because of them ... because we believe in a different vision for this city – one where we stand hand-in-hand with our neighbours and build together toward the shared future we deserve, rather than retreating in isolation."

Bend the Arc: Jewish Action challenged the narrative against Mamdani in publications across the state as well as through canvassing and public endorsement. They said: "This race showed that we can win when we're up against Trump and his billionaire bullies, even when they try to use Jewish safety to pit us against each other."

Brad Lander, who ran against Mamdani in the first and second rounds of the contest, became an enthusiastic supporter of the campaign, and the two candidates cross-endorsed each other. Although Lander describes himself as a Liberal Zionist, he is a key figure in JFREJ, whose long record of political campaigning focuses on transforming New York from a playground for the rich to a safe, democratic place free of racism, inequity, and injustice.

Mamdani himself has been mindful of using language that inflames tensions, despite his own pro-Palestine stance. Throughout his campaign, he has taken a determined and bold position against Israel while at the same time showing a huge welcome to and affinity with New York's rich Jewish culture, people and heritage. When asked to comment on pro-Hamas and strongly anti-Israel slogans being shouted outside a synagogue, he said: "That language is wrong. I think that language has no place in New York City."

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) – a large, vibrant and explicitly anti-Zionist organisation – said: "Mazel Tov! Mabrouk! ... This win is for all of us. The fight continues – onward." And a statement from the Jewish progressive group, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, stated: "We endorsed Zohran because we know what is possible when we work together to hold our multifaith, multiracial majority against attempts to break it and pave the way for undemocratic, minority rule. Mazel tov to Zohran Mamdani!"



Zohran Mamdani at a Resist Fascism rally in October 2024. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Andrew Cuomo, the outgoing New York Mayor, ran an Islamophobic, fearmongering campaign, which exacerbated tensions and divisions. Mamdani, in his inspiring inauguration speech, did not hide his disdain for the corruption and hypocrisy of his predecessor's era. Cuomo exploited the fears of Jewish New Yorkers, while Mamdani listened to those fears and reassured Jewish citizens that their safety, and that of all New Yorkers, will be a high priority during his guardianship. He demonstrated his commitment by attending Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services as well as dozens of meetings with rabbis and Jewish leaders.

It's partly their response to the genocide that has engaged the younger generation of New York Jews, but more than that, whenever Mamdani speaks, he includes all peoples in his hopes, dreams and intentions for New York – people of all religions and none, of all ethnicities, rich and poor. His emphasis is on inclusion and working together, on everyone's right to be able to live as valued inhabitants of the city; and his specific references to Jewish culture, reinforce his sincerity.

In his inaugural speech, Mamdani asks "Where else could this good Muslim boy grow up eating lox and bagels every Sunday?" The enthusiasm he expresses for all sides and beings that make up the "gorgeous mosaic" that is New York are infectious.

Reform UK or revolution?

In February, anti-racist Jewish campaigners demonstrated outside and also infiltrated the launch at London's Central Synagogue of a "Reform Jewish Alliance", heckling Farage and disrupting the proceedings. The protesters, from Na'amod and other groups belonging to the Jewish Bloc for Palestine, shouted biblical injunctions to support strangers, and recalled our refugee and

antifascist history, with Carla Bloom saying: "My mother didn't fight the Mosley fascists in Cable Street for this!"

The racist, anti-migrant party, Reform UK is attempting to recruit Jews, despite their leader, Nigel Farage endorsing as "good and true" the "principles" of Enoch Powell, who unleashed racist violence in the 1960s and '70s. He has also amplified the far-right, antisemitic Great Replacement Theory, accusing George Soros of trying "to fundamentally reshape Europe's racial makeup and to end the continent's Christian culture".

Matt Goodwin, Reform UK's candidate in the then imminent Gorton and Denton by-election, endorsed Donald Trump, saying: "Our so-called 'leaders' have been importing millions of people from ... inferior 'honour cultures' from the Third World." Jews' migrant and refugee

history and experience of racism has shown that targeted groups must not be left to challenge it alone.

Ninety years ago, London's East End Jews blocked Mosley's Blackshirts from marching through their shared streets – but only with the support of their Irish neighbours and other antifascists. Today, as Donald Trump lets his murderous ICE agents loose on communities across the United States, encouraging his Reform UK allies to follow suit, a broad coalition of groups, under the banner Jews Against ICE, has protested in Washington DC. In the UK, Jewish groups are joining the Together Alliance and standing alongside those, particularly Muslims, who are at the sharpest end of this ideology today.

In contrast, London's Central Synagogue, which hosted Reform UK's bid to recruit Jews to its Islamophobic crusade, has worked to foment fear of other minorities. It has demonised the peaceful marches for Gaza, claiming spuriously that the protests threatened synagogue congregations.

The destruction Israel is wreaking in Palestine, together with rising tension and insecurity in Britain, are polarising the Jewish community (see page 3). More people are supporting humanitarianism, supporting refugees, and campaigning with other minorities. However, a small but growing fraction of Jews are expressing violent Islamophobia and making alliances with antisemites as long as they

support Israel and attack progressive politics here.

Farage will recruit some far-right Jews, just as Mussolini and Mosley did in the 1930s. But we now know where those fascist movements led. Today, Reform UK's constant vilification of refugees, migrants and minorities, with the collusion of the media and other political parties, is giving confidence to racists and fascists, including antisemites, and normalising their malignant hatred. Once again, we are hearing of people afraid to leave their homes, of children rushing home from school for fear of being attacked, and of people walking miles because they don't dare to travel by bus.

Jews came to this country seeking sanctuary from violence and discrimination. Britain's response was its first peacetime anti-immigration law, the 1905 Aliens Act, which blocked the entrance of Jews fleeing Tsarist persecution in the Russian Empire. It enabled the UK to refuse asylum to all but a few refugees from the Nazis before the war and to slam the door on most of the stateless, violated remnant of the Holocaust after the war.

These were the people Nigel Farage was referring to when, according to multiple reports, he spent his schooldays bullying Jewish students, saying, "Gas them" and "Hitler was right". He now dismisses that abuse as "banter". This is the leader of the organisation the Central Synagogue hosted.

A song, a laugh and a tear

Doikayt is the Yiddish word meaning "here-ness" – the diasporist assertion that wherever we live, that's where we belong. It is now also the name of a band, who have made a fabulous album and hold gigs like no others – lively, funny, warm-hearted, politically uncompromising and welcoming to people of all ages and backgrounds, expressing their call for collective liberation.

Their debut album, which was recorded live in one room, brings together some of the UK's leading klezmer musicians, who are dedicated to the preservation and continuation of Eastern-European Jewish instrumental music. They are: Anna Lowenstein (fiddle), Daniel Gouly (clarinet); Josh Middleton (accordion); Francesca Ter-Berg (cello); Yusuf Narçin (trombones); Oliver Presman (tuba); and Simon Roth (drums).

Have a listen and buy the album here:



<https://doikaytmusic.bandcamp.com/album/doikayt> and get to their gigs, but you'll need to be quick because they sell out fast.

A STRAW FIRE

The general strikes in Italy last autumn in support of Palestinian liberation were extraordinary, unprecedented and – unfortunately – unique episodes. *A fuoco di paglia* – a straw fire – that burns hot and tall, and burns itself out almost immediately.

The images and videos that spread across the web in October took everyone by surprise; as friends and comrades reached out to understand what was happening, many of us stood in the streets and piazzas asking each other the same thing. What had changed, to persuade millions of people to join the demonstrations after two years of organising? Did this mark a change in the tides, that now a breach was opening up in the Italian political environment? Could we actually make a genuine contribution to the freedom of Palestine and its people?

The Italian social movements have been slow to build a worthy response to the genocidal horror of the last two years. The history and fiery fame of an activist and communist past often project the impression to people outside Italy of a continuing tradition of mass organisation of social conflict that is far from the truth. Away from the grand philosophising, the Italian left – of every kind – is weak and disorganised, a broad spectrum of tiny activist collectives and social centres, loose networks, the more active fractions of a few opposition parties, as well as the informal left-wing tendencies within the Catholic church.

While much is achieved in terms of direct support and legal interventions, mass movements – whether in the street or at the polls – have only dwindled since the last gasps of the "alter-globalisation" movement. The election of the Meloni government in October 2022 signalled yet another failure of the Italian left to create an alternative to the periodic European technocratic interventions in Italian political life, and consolidated the growing alliance between far-right and conservative forces.

The invasion of Gaza in October 2023, one year into Meloni's government, found the Italian social movements despondent and disorganised. Worse still, the last two years have seen continued sectarian divisions in the left, broadly speaking between a mainstream, mass project supporting a ceasefire and a range of Palestinian political forces, and a smaller but very vocal push from some of the more radical social centres, including some Palestinian groups, to explicitly support armed struggle.

This is in the context of a society with only a very small presence of Palestinians or people from the Middle East in general (Italy's half-million Arabic speakers are largely from North Africa). Italy is also a society with a very small and declining Jewish population, almost entirely resident in Rome and Milan. For this and other reasons, neither Zionism nor Jewish anti-Zionism are visibly organised forces within Italy – and Zionism itself is generally viewed as a minoritarian, ruling class ideology that has little support among the Italian populace. Indeed, opposition to Israel and its policies of apartheid and violence has been expressed by all political parties across Italy's history, a tendency that has as much to

do with the realpolitik of Italy's position in the Mediterranean and often ambivalent relationship to the US as with any grassroots solidarity.

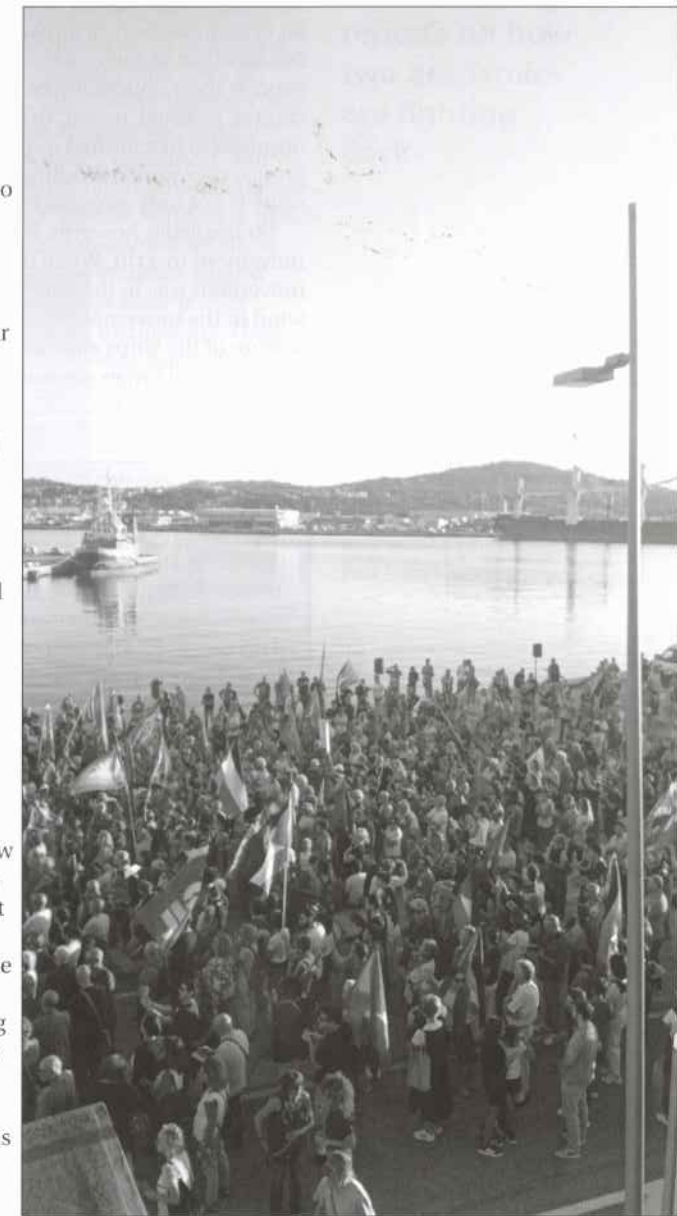
Despite this popular support for Palestinian liberation, the Italian state has been thoroughly intertwined with the military-industrial interests of Israel, especially through the arms company Leonardo. Once the Italian state-owned Finmeccanica, which was renamed after the Renaissance polymath 10 years ago, Leonardo is a small, but strategically significant, contributor to Israeli military tech. It is, however, an extremely important player in the Italian markets, having significantly contributed to economic growth over the last two years (although much of that growth is coming from EU commissions connected with the war against Russia).

This clear opposition between the people and capital did not find significant political and material expression until the events of the Global Sumud Flotilla. Several factors led to the Flotilla becoming a rallying point for pro-Palestinian forces in Italy.

First, the Flotilla organised over the summer months in ports across Italy. A flow of non-Italian activists came through different parts of the country, often contacting people on the edges of Italian activist circles, utilising independent channels of friends and acquaintances, and setting up in port towns often peripheral to Italian political life, rather than the big cities. This meant that, by September, when the media operation truly began, there was already a large body of people across the country who were participating in the logistical operation, as well as on board, and were not involved in longstanding factional debates.

This organisation across the ports created a unified movement that brought northern and southern activists together in manner that is very

RICHARD BRAUDE reflects on Italy's vast but ephemeral Palestine solidarity demonstrations



Italian general strike for Gaza in the Port of Ancona in support of the Flotilla, 19 September 2023
Photo: Ukrain4Pal/
Wikimedia Commons

rare for Italy. The small but very radical dockworkers' union in Genoa – CALP – had members on board the ships, and called for a general strike if anything were to happen to them. This call outflanked the position of the very large centre-left trade union, the CGIL, which called for its own strike day, and eventually joined in with the CALP strike – a testament to the pressure it has been under from its own membership and network after years of weak leadership. This call from Genoa in the north was able to work because there was already a unified movement across the country, including in the southern ports from where the Flotilla ships prepared and launched.

Second, the Flotilla provided a concrete and hopeful action that people could get behind without discussing the future of Palestine. This was an enormous tactical stroke: it overcame the factionalism of the movement, allowing people to express their opposition to the government, to capital, to Israel, to war, to violence and to oppression in a unified manner. It empowered groups that were dwindling, and demonstrated that unity is not only possible but desirable.

Strategically, however, it has left the Italian movement in a rut. While the Flotilla was at sea, the movement was in the streets; the Flotilla was the wind in the movement's sails, and vice versa. The seizure of the ships and detention of its crews by Israeli armed forces signalled the apex and end of the movement at sea and on land. The truce agreed

upon shortly after, between Israel and the Palestinian resistance forces, despite continued murderous violations by the former, also sealed the end of this phenomenal – and, it seems, ephemeral – expression of Italian solidarity.

As is so often the case, Italy looks forward from its state of disaster. This was an avant garde protest for Europe: it followed the rhythm of a capital-intensive, extraordinarily well-organised digital campaign, that swept across social media platforms in Italy. Where once the “strategy of tension” created splinters and factions within society through covert operations, now it is the “strategy of attention” – the commodification and bargaining for digital users’ attention – that created a momentary semblance of unity, but which all too quickly dissolved into shrapnel.

Perhaps the Italian moment should be understood within a kind of global relay of protests for Palestine, in which different communities and national networks take up the baton from moment to moment. Two years ago, in the USA, the protests came thick and fast, as did the repression; much of that movement has now been crushed by a terrifying administration; similar transformations have occurred in the UK and many other countries. But while in one context repression cages people in, or the tools of our rapidly evolving digital culture expand and contract our capacities to organise, in other contexts, perhaps new horizons open up, and the wildfire spreads.

WISEWORDS

Israel Zangwill, writer, poet and playwright, was born in Whitechapel in 1864 to a Polish Jewish mother and Latvian Jewish father. He died in 1926. Zangwill was an early adherent of Zionism, as a solution to antisemitism, but broke with it over insistence on Palestine. He joined the Territorialist movement that sought a Jewish homeland wherever a safe place could be found. He further criticised Zionism both for downplaying potential conflict with the indigenous population, and its willingness to become a pawn of colonial powers.

Later, he became a critic of all nationalism, working for a world comprised of cosmopolitan societies based on equal rights. “Nationality, deep as life, but narrow as the grave, is closing in on us,” he wrote.

Zangwill was an ardent feminist and pacifist. After the First World War, he proposed that the way to prevent future wars was by abolishing frontiers, passports, customs and tariffs.

While horrified by that war, he was excited by developments in Russia. He gave a very moving speech at an Albert Hall rally, on 31st March 1917, welcoming the February 1917 Revolution in Russia that deposed the Tsar. In the early years after the revolution, he played a significant part

in the “Hands Off Russia Campaign”.

At that Albert Hall rally he said: “In celebrating this revolution tonight, our first thought should be of those brave soldiers of freedom, those men, women and girls, lashed and tortured, starved and driven to suicide in verminous dungeons, shot without sentence, hanged by bungling amateurs, sent to rot in exile ... And among those martyrs there sweeps before me the long array of those heroic young Jews whose Bund was the brains of the movement for freedom; and who died equally for Russia and for the prisoners of the Pale.* That Pale is now to be swept away, with every other discrimination of race and sect. For that great gesture with which the new Russia has freed my people at a stroke, I do not thank her: I congratulate her.”

* The Pale of Settlement was an area on the western side of the Russian Empire where most Jews under Tsarist rule were forced, by law, to live.



IN THE INTERESTS OF JUSTICE

Nick Riemer is a softly-spoken Australian academic from the University of Sydney, working notably on the history and philosophy of linguistics, and on semantics. I know him well for his work, and also as a longstanding opponent of his country's brutal treatment of asylum seekers. He is a prominent critic of Israel and a supporter of Palestinian rights: his 2023 book *Boycott Theory and the Struggle for Palestine: Universities, Intellectualism and Liberation* is a comprehensive account of how Israeli academics and universities are complicit in the mistreatment of Palestinians.

A few months ago, I received an email from Nick. His message asked for support and fundraising for a legal case against him and a colleague at the university, Professor John Keane, accusing them of racial discrimination. It is interesting that Nick's outspoken support for Palestinian rights only attracted this type of hostility when Israel started to come under intense pressure because of the genocide in Gaza. The complaint was made by four

staff members at the university, who also alleged that the university was “vicariously liable” for allowing the two academics to write and speak out against Zionism.

The case is due to be heard by a federal court in early 2026. Nick says that this is an example of “lawfare”, an attempt to use the law to intimidate and silence political opponents. The first he heard of the complaint was when he was contacted by the complainants’ lawyers. It then turned out that the four staff members had started a crowdfunder for the legal costs involved. The pro-Israel lobby has wealthy supporters, and the complainants probably hoped that the high cost of defending themselves would deter Nick and John from standing firm. It looks like they messed with the wrong guys.

Extending the complaint against the university may also have been a tactical mistake. Professor Mark Scott, the current Vice-chancellor, is “no friend of Palestinians”, as Nick put it to me, but he wants to avoid the university being found guilty of having been soft on antisemitism and – unlike Nick and John – the university has money to pay for top barristers.

Nick says that the case may depend on whether the Court agrees that Zionism is a political ideology, and that believing in an ideology is not a protected characteristic under Australian race discrimination law (unlike, say, skin colour). He also points out that many, if not most, Zionists are not Jewish.

The Australian government has been a strong supporter of Israel throughout the genocide, despite growing public support for Palestinians. The Jewish community in Australia has been torn apart in the process, just like in other countries where the government treats Israel as a strategic ally but faces a backlash because of the slaughter in Gaza.

There are over 100,000 Jews in Australia, including the world's largest Bundist organisation in Melbourne. The leading communal organisation, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, includes support for Israel prominently on its website by “encouraging support for Zionism in Australia”. The British equivalent, the Board of Deputies, is less explicit about its support for Israel, though it does list several Zionist organisations among its members.

In a preliminary hearing of the case against the university, in October 2025, lawyers for the complainants asked the court to consider the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism as an “analytical tool” when considering if Riemer's criticisms of Zionism were antisemitic. They didn't mention that the IHRA definition is presented as “non-legally binding” and that it is a “working definition”, nor that the text has been criticised by many scholars as poorly worded and garbled. Riemer and Keane have never endorsed anti-Jewish stereotypes, let alone

violence against Jews or Jewish institutions. They may have made some Australian Zionists feel uncomfortable, but that is not the same thing.

A 2023 report by the European Legal

Support Centre concluded that “The IHRA working definition of antisemitism is a tool by which the conflation of criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism has been institutionalised and promoted by multiple media platforms and public and private organisations politically aligned with the Israeli government. By labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitic, the adoption and implementation of the IHRA working definition has created new standards of accepted speech that effectively silence advocacy and activism for Palestinian rights.”

Although Israeli politicians routinely claim that they are acting on behalf of “the Jewish people”, there are increasing numbers of Jews who reject that claim, and a significant minority who have never accepted it.

The UK has its own example of lawfare in the Government's widely criticised policy of adding Palestine Action to its list of terrorist organisations. It is important to recognise that the case against Nick Riemer and John Keane is not a criminal case. The Australian Government has not (yet?) imprisoned anyone for supporting Palestinian rights. The arguments used by Australian lawyers are similar, however, and so are the tactics: making people wait for months with court cases hanging over them is intimidating, whether the cases are civil or criminal. As we know, an accusation of antisemitism can cause serious damage to a person's reputation, especially when eagerly amplified by the rightwing press.

Australian Zionists are using the law as a weapon in an attempt to silence supporters of Palestine. RAF SALKIE reports on how two academics are fighting back



Nick Riemer (right) and Prof John Keane

Find out more

Nick Riemer's book, *Boycott Theory and the Struggle for Palestine* can be read in part at <https://tinyurl.com/y6d48ysr>

Their web page for support and fundraising: <https://tinyurl.com/mtvfuer7>

HIGHER FENCES

JOSEPH FINLAY looks at the responses to the Manchester synagogue attack and proposes a radical change to how we keep communities safe

Yom Kippur 2025 was marked by a horrific terrorist attack on British Jews, at Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation in Crumpsall, Manchester. Two people were killed and several more injured, one stabbed by the perpetrator, the others by police bullets as they tried to shoot him. Most important is to name and mourn the victims: Adrian Daulby and Melvin Cravitz. Their names alone typify them as British Jews – classic Anglo first names of a certain generation with a touch of Ashkenazi in their surnames. They are British Jewish everymen – it could have been any of us. It's worth noting that this is largely unprecedented; there have been very few antisemitic murders in British history. Despite the doom mongers, Britain has been, and remains, one of the safest and most comfortable places to be Jewish in the world.

Immediately after the attack, commentators sought to spread the blame beyond the perpetrator, to implicate larger groups of people. This could be reasonable; it seems that the perpetrator was part of an extremist group, so other members should be held partly responsible for his actions. Some responsibility might also be placed on the fact that we have armed police in the UK. Had they not used guns – or had they used non-lethal force to restrain the attacker – then Adrian Daulby might have survived, the perpetrator could have faced justice, and we might have learned more about his motivations for this crime. As in the US, having more guns around tends to mean more victims die, alongside the perpetrators.

But neither of these extended targets received much attention. Instead, the entire focus of the political class, egged on by reckless Jewish communal leaders, was on the pro-Palestine movement, alleged to have created the climate for the attack. Politicians leaned on their pre-existing agendas, seeking to ban or limit demonstrations, suggesting that the discourse of Israeli genocide should stop and, most ludicrously, blaming the government's recognition of Palestinian statehood. They seemed to imply, absurdly, that a confirmed Islamist was radicalised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign demonstrations. That, had the notion of genocide not been in public discourse, the attacker would simply have thought, "Israel is just exercising its legitimate right to self-defence." That when Keir Starmer recognised Palestinian statehood, the

attacker thought, "OK, *now* I will get away with killing Jews at a synagogue." These claims insult our intelligence.

Reports suggested that the perpetrator expressed support for Islamic State, that he had become radicalised during the pandemic period. And one synagogue member testified that he heard him say, "This is what you're going to get for killing our children," which suggests that Gaza was a primary motivation. If so, we hardly need to look to the UK Palestine Solidarity movement for the cause of radicalisation. The attacker could simply have turned on his TV and watched any mainstream channel to see repeated footage of Palestinians being slaughtered in Gaza at the hands of the Israeli army. He would have been radicalised not by conspiracy theories but by the reality of what the Israeli state has been doing.

The real question is: what induced him to connect that slaughter to British Jews? That needs to be our focus, for it was presumably that horrendous leap of logic which led him to carry out the attack. What made him think Jews at prayer were responsible for the death of Palestinians in Gaza? What factors in the last two years could have

led him to the conclusion that Jews and Israel were one, and that an attack on one was an attack on the other?

Here we arrive at the real wider group who bear some responsibility for these deaths: the conflators. The army of politicians, who have constantly spread the idea that the two are the same: that 7th October was primarily an attack on Jews rather than on Israelis; that criticisms of Israel are mostly antisemitic; that people marching are doing so because they hate Jews rather than because they care about Palestinians; and that Manchester happened because we have been too soft on Palestine activism. These politicians say that slogans such as "Free Palestine", "From the River to the Sea" and "Death to the IDF" – which do not mention Jews – are in fact attacks on Jews, which is to (falsely) allege that all Jews oppose a Free Palestine and support genocide. Claiming that these slogans are antisemitic *is, in itself, antisemitic*.

After Manchester, these politicians argued that protests against genocide and for Palestinian rights should have been postponed or cancelled out of respect for Jewish sensibilities, both around Heaton

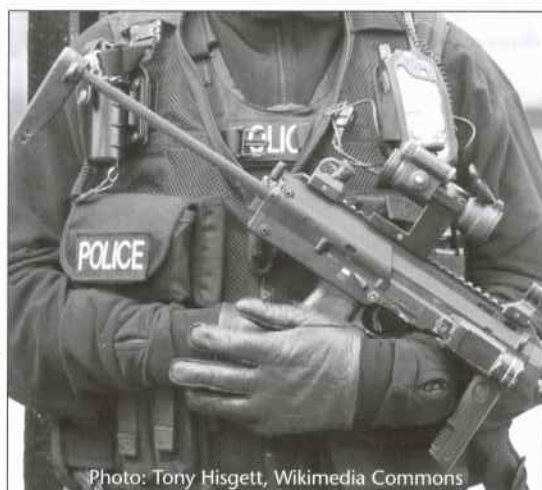


Photo: Tony Hisgett, Wikimedia Commons

WHAT MADE HIM THINK JEWS AT PRAYER WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF PALESTINIANS IN GAZA?

WILL NOT PROTECT US

Park and the 7th October anniversary (as if the two were essentially the same). This demand was incredibly offensive, since it assumed that British Jews support genocide and oppose Palestinian rights. Starmer and others were effectively saying: "You can't protest against genocide as it would upset the Jews."

The leaders of this conflation have been non-Jewish politicians, whether Keir Starmer, Shabana Mahmood, David Lammy or Yvette Cooper, egged on by the odious Robert Jenrick. A verbal tic has been the tendency for ministers to speak of "our Jewish community", a phrase with echoes of court Jews, as if we are a prized possession of the state. Would they speak of our Muslim community? Our Catholic community? To paraphrase David Baddiel, it's hard to imagine them saying this about any other minority.

These politicians have of course been echoing the rhetoric of Jewish communal leaders. But the conflation is being led by the British state. It is only the most recent episode in a long history of state philosemitism, in which the government follows its own self-interest but claims to be acting in defence or protection of Jews. It sets up Jews as a "model minority", in contrast to whichever group it is demonising at any one time. It's the modern equivalent of "middleman theory" – where a minority is placed between the state and the populace, designed to receive the brunt of popular anger, a human shield for the powerful to hide behind. It's been clear for many years that if the state lauds Jews whilst treating Muslims as the enemy within, there is a chance that a few radicalised Muslims will attack Jews, seeing them as their primary oppressor. We have been so focused on "fighting antisemitism" (as if it is an impersonal force that can be defeated), we have overlooked the danger of state philosemitism. Politicians are busy blaming Palestine campaigners; they would be better off looking to their own conflationist and philosemitic rhetoric.

In any such attack, people clutch for solutions, actions that will supposedly prevent this from ever happening again. The first is security: bigger walls, stronger fences, more guards, perhaps armed, more police protection. The trouble is that British Jews have had an incredibly high level of security for around 45 years (inspired by terrorist attacks in Europe in the early 1980s). The Manchester attack should be understood as a failure of our communal security system. The synagogue had a large fence, as most do; the attacker broke through by driving a car at the gate. To respond to this attack by increasing security (how?) would be the definition of madness: doing the same thing and expecting a

different result.

The second common suggestion is to change laws, arrest more people, stop more marchers; what some campaigners have called "carceral anti-antisemitism". This suggestion is clearly targeted primarily at Muslims, so will increase the danger outlined above: Muslims would be targeted by the police and the Prevent programme even further than at present, and the government would tell them that it is doing so on behalf of Jews. Is this really supposed to make us safer? Have we forgotten that over the longue durée, authoritarian states were bad for Jews, and liberal ones that protected basic freedoms far better?

In the period after the attack, British Jewish organisations seemed keen to move on as quickly as possible, to return to their favourite subject: Israel. The planned 7th October memorial events were due just a few days after the Manchester attack, and it was surprising that these were not cancelled or even modified in its wake. It seems that events in Israel are more real to our communal leaders than those that happen here. This too is a result of Zionist ideology; a belief that what happens to diaspora Jews is relevant only if it can be used for pro-Israel purposes.

The Board of Deputies belatedly issued a document entitled, "After the Heaton Park attack: Towards a Comprehensive Government Strategy on Antisemitism". At 10 pages long, with a lot of blank space, "comprehensive" is pushing it. It is an authoritarian, carceral anti-antisemitism wish-list. Limiting the right to protest, more hate speech prosecutions, specifying imams and bands like Kneecap, naming "Islamist antisemitism" as a major threat, calling for the Prevent programme to target "Islamist, far right or far left" antisemitism, more government research on antisemitism, shutting down "Islamist charities" and more. All of it is designed to crack down harder (mostly on Muslims), rather than deal with any underlying issues or offer alternative intellectual approaches that might deal with racism in the long term.

An alternative approach would be to stop treating antisemitic violence as separate, and instead view Manchester in connection with a range of terrorist and violent attacks in Britain in recent



"The Manchester attack should be understood as a failure of our communal security system."

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IT SEEMS THAT EVENTS IN ISRAEL ARE MORE REAL TO OUR COMMUNAL LEADERS THAN THOSE THAT HAPPEN HERE.

decades. The most obvious is the Manchester Arena bombing of 2017, which killed 22 people. But there are many more: the 2016 murder of Jo Cox; the 2017 London Bridge Attack; the Finsbury Park Mosque attack of the same year; the 2021 murder of David Amess MP; the Southport stabbings of July 2024 and subsequent anti-migrant riots; and the recent arson attack on a mosque in Peacehaven to name but a few. The thread linking these is violence arising from conspiracy theories, whether Islamist or far-right/fascist. We should treat all the victims of these, from all backgrounds, as victims of contemporary violent extremism in Britain.

This understanding could lead to a new approach to security. The idea that security at Jewish buildings must be done by Jews for Jews is ideological, based on the Zionist notion that Jews must be strong and defend themselves. But it has some obvious disadvantages: it makes those Jews doing the external security an easy Jewish target – one of the victims was killed at the synagogue gate. The same is true for attacks on mosques: if security is provided by Muslims, they may well become the primary victims of a far-right attacker. And this bifurcation adds to intercommunal fears; Jews see Muslims as a threat, and Muslims see, through state philosemitism, Jews as a group in whose name the government surveils and mistrusts them.

What if Jews and Muslims instead conducted security together, for each other? This would have immediate advantages. If an Islamist extremist was considering attacking a synagogue, they would know that in the process of trying to break in they would likely kill and injure fellow Muslims as well as Jews, a significant deterrent. And when far-right extremists (the “pro-Israel” variety) consider attacking a mosque or a hostel hosting asylum seekers, they would know that in the process they might injure Jews, a group they see themselves as protecting. It needn’t be just Jews and Muslims – anyone who cares about the safety of their neighbours could be part, and ideally pro-Palestine campaigners would also get involved in protecting both synagogues and mosques.

Such a community initiative would also move security away from the police and make clear that we do not want to rely on the state and its agencies to protect us. We – a coalition of minorities – will do it ourselves, for each other. A community security model has the capacity to overcome statist tokenisation and repression, and make all of us a great deal safer. As the Jewish singer-songwriter Aly Halpert wrote in her song Beautiful People, written in the wake of the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting:

*They have taken a universe
They have taken a mountain
Our voices echo in the hills
They will not divide us
We will not abide this
We know that together we'll be free
Mourning tragedy
Our safety is with each other.*

This is a revised version of the article first published on Torat Albion, www.toratalbion.org.uk

TREASURE



As I attempted a thorough tidy up of my office space at home during the winter break, I stumbled on an *oytser oyf tsvey teyln* – a treasure in two parts – without realising at first that I had done so. It was a copy of the Yiddish journal, *Undzer Tsayt* (Our Times) from October-December 2005.

Undzer Tsayt began life as the monthly publication of the American Representation of the General Jewish Workers Union of Poland (Bund) in New York in February 1941. At that time, Poland's population, and especially its large Jewish minority (10%), had already spent 16 months under Nazi occupation. By then, Poland's Jews, Bundist or otherwise, apart from those hidden with non-Jews, had been herded into ghettos, where they endured slavery, starvation and brutal repression.

By 1947, the extent of the destruction of Europe's largest Jewish community and its outstanding Jewish socialist movement was horrifyingly apparent. Ninety per cent of Poland's pre-war 3.3 million Jewish population had been murdered or cut down by starvation and disease. Some Bundists remained in Poland trying to rebuild their lives and a semblance of their organisation in difficult physical and political conditions. Some were still in Displaced Persons (DP) camps. But most surviving Bundists were scattered in cities around the world. There they reunited with other survivors and those who had managed to escape before the Holocaust.

That year the Bund held an organising conference to plan a collective future with drastically reduced means. They created the World Coordinating Committee of the Bund, centred in New York, took over the task of producing the monthly Yiddish journal *Undzer Tsayt*, and began to solicit written contributions from Bundists wherever they were now. The journal continued for several decades, at some point moving from monthly to quarterly.

When I read page three of the copy I had found, I realised that this was an especially significant issue, as it opened with a letter to readers announcing that it was the very last issue of *Undzer Tsayt*. Its principal reasons: “...the ebbing away of readers and subscriptions; the losses through ageing and death of their writers, leaders and

LOST AND FOUND

activists – unfortunately a biological process that we cannot halt”. But the letter expressed continued faith in the Bundist progressive ideals and hoped that, one day, a renewed tribune could appear, which would enable the voice of the Bund to continue to be heard.

When I flicked to the inside back cover, I read a short obituary for a Bundist we had got to know very well personally: Majer Bogdanski. He was a remarkable person who arrived in London as a refugee with a Polish army unit after the war, and lived the rest of his life in London's East End where he worked as a tailor – the job he had been trained for as an apprentice in Piotrkow, not far from Lodz in Poland, in the mid-1920s. He died just a few weeks before the final issue of *Undzer Tsayt* was published.

We met Majer in the mid-1980s, in the same period when *Jewish Socialist* magazine began to appear. We invited him to speak to the Jewish Socialists' Group (JSG) about the Bund. It was one of the most electrifying talks I have ever heard at a political meeting – everyone in the room was captivated. In 40 minutes he described so graphically the simultaneously exciting and perilous world of Bundist life that he had been in the thick of in Lodz, in 1930s Poland. The deepest poverty coexisting with cultural riches; pogroms and protests; strikes and repression; literary and poetry circles, drama and discussion groups on forbidden topics; a sports club, a women's organisation, camping trips... Fortunately, we tape-recorded the talk and published it in the third issue of *Jewish Socialist*.

Majer joined the JSG soon after that, and remained an active and inspirational member until he died some 20 years later. He was a living, breathing link with that earlier generation of working class Jewish socialist activists who could describe for us the hardest struggles but also the great achievements of the Bund, especially in 1930s Poland, before it was engulfed in the Nazi Holocaust. In the early years of that decade, he had been called up for 19 months of army service; he was called up again in 1939, before the Nazi invasion.

Stationed in the part of Poland that came under Soviet control after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, he spent 18 months in a Siberian labour camp. He told me he was able to physically survive because, before the war he had got used to going without food for one or two days a week. When Poles in Soviet labour camps – Jews and non-Jews – were allowed to form Polish army units in 1941 to take part in the war, he did so, and fought in several battles before arriving in Britain with that unit after the war.

In 1935 he had married Esther Wolstajn, also a Bundist, and from a family of activists. They upset

many of their more religious relatives, though, by getting married in a secular civil ceremony. They were committed atheists and didn't want rabbis or God to be present at such a special occasion for them. Under family pressure, they eventually had a second ceremony in a synagogue.

While Majer was incarcerated in Siberia, Esther was part of the underground resistance in the Lodz ghetto. Majer later found out she had been murdered at Auschwitz. Prior to that she had been arrested and tortured but had not betrayed her fellow Bundist resisters.

As well as writing articles for *Jewish Socialist*, Majer was a regular speaker at JSG events to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He was a key figure in the committee we set up to get a plaque mounted in London for the bundist martyr, Szmul Zygielbojm, and made heartfelt contributions to debates at our national conferences. Majer loved JSG social and cultural events at Jewish festivals – Pesakh and Chanukah – where he usually sang a Yiddish song and read a translated Yiddish story, often a comic one, from Katie Brown, whom he had known.

On other occasions he read extracts from tragic stories. At a JSG Warsaw Ghetto commemoration in 1988, he read an extract from a Sholem Asch story about a young girl who had been blinded by the Nazis and who did not wish to have her eyes back because of the evil they had witnessed. Majer enjoyed a special role at JSG annual conferences in the 1980s and '90s, standing as the event closed, to lead a rendition of *The Internationale* in Yiddish!

Politically, he was active through his local Labour Party branch in Tower Hamlets, and they nominated him as a school governor. He loved being around children. One of the most beautiful articles that he wrote for the magazine was about being one of the leaders of a group of 10-year-olds, part of SKIF – the Bund's children's organisation in



“WE WANTED TO BE EDUCATED WORKERS ... TO END CLASS DIVISIONS AND OPPRESSION, TO BE ABLE TO SHARE IN THE DELIGHTS THAT WERE ACCESSIBLE TO THE WEALTHY, WHILE REMAINING ORDINARY PRODUCTIVE WORKERS”.

Majer Bogdanski was a shining light in the Bund, both before the war in Poland and later in London. Through a chance discovery, **DAVID ROSENBERG** learnt more about his early years, and describes a man who remained a creative, optimistic socialist and humanitarian throughout his life

Poland. Majer was having a testing time with Srulek Meireovics, the wildest child in the group, "the smallest of them all and the greatest rogue" but, Majer wrote, "during the six months that elapsed from the moment I saw him for the first time, when I feared he would 'break my neck' in the SKIF, until the day we went camping, both of us... managed to become the closest personal friends."

That annual camp organised by the Bund with the SKIF section was called The Socialist Republic



Above: Bundists in London, c.1949-50. Majer is in the front row, second from left.

Opposite: Majer singing at a Warsaw Ghetto Memorial event in the late 1980s.

Bottom right: 12th May 1996, the unveiling of the plaque for Szmul Zygielbojm in Porchester Road, Paddington, London

of the Children. This one was in July 1939, just weeks before the start of the war and the beginning of the Holocaust.

Majer wrote, "The camp was divided into four groups: younger and older girls and younger and older boys. I was assigned to sleep with the younger boys. Srulek asked my permission to put his mattress next to mine... I could not refuse Srulek his request. At 'lights out' ... as soon as I stretched out on the mattress I felt his arm around my neck and soon his whole body rolled itself on to me; I closed my arms around him and felt the warmth of a father towards his little child, and for the whole four weeks of camp I was his mattress..."

"But ... Srulik is no more. He was not yet 11 years old when the Germans occupied Lodz. The date and circumstance of his death I don't know; I only know that there hasn't yet been one day in which he did not stand before my eyes in the morning when they open from sleep and in the evening when they close to sleep again. Of all the 25 ten-year-old girls and boys of the Michalevicz Ring (circle), of which Srulek was the chair, only one was alive after the war." Majer also recalled that of the 750 children aged 10-16 in the SKIF in Lodz, only five survived the war.

As we got to know Majer, we learnt from him that there had been an earlier Jewish Socialist Organisation in England, in the late 1940s and '50s in which he had participated. He had also been active in the Workers' Circle (which had its closing event in 1984) and chaired the weekly Friends of Yiddish Saturday afternoon gatherings from 1983, after the death of its founder, Polish Jewish refugee Avrom Stencl, who founded the group in the East End in the late 1930s. We learnt so much from Majer in the 20 or so years he was a member of the group.

But the second part of the treasure was on page 24 and 25 of this final issue of *Undzer Tsayt*. It

contained a beautiful article (in Yiddish) entitled "They say you are no more – on the death of Majer Bogdanski" by Lilke Majzner, a Bundist living in Los Angeles, who knew Majer and his wife Esther in Piotrkow and Lodz before the war. It describes him, his home environment, his personality and special qualities in that time, decades before we knew him. Lilke Majzner died in 2009.

Here are a few extracts I have translated:

It seemed to all of us that you would live forever – your vitality was so young, your attitude to life was full of life. The thread of your life was long, full of experiences, full of suffering, pain, dreams, happiness, tears and joy ... a reflection of the times in which we lived and live ... You, Majer Bogdanski, this child from Piotrkow and Lodz, this son of poverty and richness. The young Jewish socialist, member of Tsukunft [Bund youth organisation] ... The mandolin player. The singer and creator of music. Guardian of old-new Yiddish songs ... the strong, disciplined human being ... in himself and his environment. Perhaps this discipline – physical and moral – had lengthened your years after so many disruptions in life.

Majer, I want my words about you to be in the first person just as we were sitting there so far back in the past, in your and Esther's room in the city of Lodz long ago. A small room, a bed, a table and chairs, a few pictures, snow white curtains. The mandolin in the corner and a bookshelf ... Esther with her blond short hair and thick glasses – and you – coming from the working class town of Piotrkow. You settled and absorbed yourselves in the big noisy city of Lodz, and very early on linked up with the Bundist movement. You began to work with the SKIF and Tsukunft, as a leader of circles, study workshops and summer camps.

Your clothes were always clean and perfectly pressed. There were times when you had perhaps only one shirt, but no one knew about this because your sole shirt was always clean. You loved to sing and play your mandolin ... Neither of you had lives that were easy...

Years later when the storms of war had me and my beloved transported to the town of Piotrkow, I was acquainted there with your childhood. I saw the home, the courtyard, the whole environment. In the years of wandering and homelessness, you were in the army, and Esther was in her old home. Until her arrest and tragic murder, she had guarded your small personal possessions and lived with the past times, which were, for her, so important and dear, while at the same time actively participating in the illegal work. She perished as a heroine.

When we met many years later in London, after the tragic nightmare, we spoke for many hours about the past ... your life in the army, and then your new life in London. You still remained the disciplined Majer. You achieved

new heights ... You began to create music to Yiddish poems. Your creations gave you such satisfaction – you became recognised not only as a composer, but also a collector of folksongs and an interpreter of them for young students in higher education institutions... When you sent us the four volumes of song anthologies, I was amazed by this colossal work that you put into every line and every musical note. You selected the creations of our poets and transformed them into songs! ...

You continued to stay in contact with friends near and far ... Music and song have lightened your life and brought joy to us, your friends, comrades, students and listeners ... I think of you today, on this day when you are away in eternity. Majer the child from Piotrkow and Lodz ... the disciplined human being, the Bundist, the eternally young and sincere friend."

The anthologies Lilke refers to include the handwritten music of more than 400 melodies that Majer composed to individual Yiddish poems that he collected or which were sent to him. In London after the war, he attended evening classes in Music Theory locally, at Toynbee Hall, and violin classes at the City Lit in the West End.

He self-published the anthologies through Aldgate Press – a workers' co-operative set up in 1981 with funds from the Friends of Freedom Press, which also published the monthly anarchist newspaper, *Freedom*. For some years from 1988, *Jewish Socialist* magazine was printed by Aldgate Press too.

I'm so grateful for the insight that Lilke gives into Majer's home life in Poland. I tried several times to extract information from him about his early life, but he was reluctant to talk in the first person singular. He preferred to talk about "the movement" and what the Bund did collectively! In 2023 I contributed a Foreword to *The Bund: A Graphic History of Jewish Labour Resistance*, published in Toronto. In that Foreword I quoted Majer's response to the question I had posed of what personal aspirations he'd had when he was young. Typically, he replied in the first person plural: "We wanted to

be educated workers ... to end class divisions and oppression," to be able to share in "the delights that were accessible to the wealthy, while remaining ordinary productive workers."

He told me about an episode from when he was 13 years old, the year his mother died, which had an unanticipated outcome many years later. Majer was apprenticed to a tailor to learn lifelong work skills and earn some money. His father worried that Majer



might follow the habits of other young people facing great hardship, and fall into petty crime to enhance his income. As a moral counterweight to this, Majer's father sent him to evening classes at a *yeshiva* (Jewish religious seminary). He went for a year. Majer revealed that, of a class of 30 children, by the end of that year, almost none of them believed in God, quite a few became communists, some became Zionists and he gravitated towards the Bund.

But this exposure to very religious Judaism had an unexpected by-product. He had always been interested in singing and music, and he remembered many cantorial tunes from his time at the *yeshiva*. The Holocaust destroyed a culture as well as a people. Many cantorial tunes of that era were lost forever, but Majer, an atheist, cultural Jew, who rejected religious coercion, transcribed more than 50 of the tunes he remembered and deposited them with YIVO, the Yiddish Institute in America – religious tunes salvaged by the most secular of Jewish socialists.



THE THREAD OF YOUR LIFE WAS LONG, FULL OF EXPERIENCES,
FULL OF SUFFERING, PAIN, DREAMS, HAPPINESS, TEARS AND JOY ...
A REFLECTION OF THE TIMES IN WHICH WE LIVED AND LIVE ...

SUE BARD visited a stunning exhibition of Palestinian embroidery, which is an evolving library of memory



This *thobe* (above), a traditional embroidered Palestinian dress made for a young girl, was damaged when Israel bombed the Rafah Museum in Gaza on 28th October 2023, destroying the building and the majority of its other collections. The force of the explosion threw the child's dress on to the roof of a nearby partially destroyed building. Museum staff managed to rescue it eight months later.

In Scotland, we can see the surviving dress for ourselves on display at V&A Dundee in its exhibition, *Thread Memory: Embroidery from Palestine*. This exhibition explores the practice of *tatreez*, the beautiful and complex hand-embroidery of Palestine and the Palestinian diaspora, and textiles, from the late 19th century to the present day. Collaboration between V&A Dundee, Art Jameel (based in Jeddah and Dubai), V&A South Kensington and the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit has enabled not only the bringing together of a magnificent collection of *thobes*, veils, headdresses and jewellery but also, drawing on Birzeit Palestinian Museum's vast digitised archive documenting Palestinian life and history, the telling of their stories.

Kirsty Hassard's thoughtful and sensitive curation creates a welcoming and atmospheric space that has expanded on the exhibition of the same name shown previously at Haay Jameel in Jeddah by adding material relating to Dundee's longstanding relationship with the West Bank city of Nablus. The Jeddah exhibition was curated by art historian, curator and writer, Rachel Dedman. Her ground-breaking work over the past decade has revealed how the lives of the embroiderers and the production of *tatreez* were affected by, and responded to, catastrophic events and the social and economic changes that came in their wake, and how *tatreez* became an expression of solidarity and "quiet resistance". The voices of contemporary embroiderers interviewed by Dedman animate the exhibition, emphasising the survival of *tatreez* as a living art and craft.

Its embroidery identifies this dress (left) as made by a woman from Beit Nabala, one of 530 Palestinian villages destroyed during the Nakba of 1948. A dress worn for work in



FABRIC

the fields and at home, a large patch around the chest panel, now sewn closed, tells us how its maker breastfed her babies in an ankle-length garment. It's a dress that bears witness to the life of the village before its destruction.

The Nakba changed everything, including the way *tatreez* was produced. With exile, the suppliers and the industry that had supported traditional dressmaking were lost, and the formerly distinctive local differences disappeared as women from different villages mixed in refugee camps. From the 1950s, charities were established across the Middle East to provide employment for displaced Palestinian women through the production of *tatreez*. What had been a labour of love became waged work, and embroidery became a commodity sold for charity.

This photo (below) shows women living in the Qalandiya camp, participating in the Handicraft Cooperative Society project in 1958.



The way in which *tatreez* is produced, has continued to evolve. Dedman, in her book *Stitching The Intifada: Embroidery and Resistance in Palestine*, discusses the proliferation of embroidery-producing NGOs with the rise of the internet, many of which claim to enable "female empowerment" but do not offer embroiderers any security or a living wage or creative agency. At the same time, says Dedman, "embroidery's purchase is implicitly posited as a form of resistance of its own, and explicitly as a gesture of solidarity with Palestine", but she also acknowledges – as it emerges from recorded interviews – the economic importance of the work to the women and their families and the pride that most embroiderers continue to have in their work, rooted in its connection to their homeland. In Edinburgh, where I live, Hadeel, run by the charity Palcraft UK, is an example of a non-profit Fairtrade shop that aims to provide a sustainable source of income and support for Palestinian craftspeople and artisans.

The Naksa ("setback") of 1967 resulted in Israel's permanent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In 1987 the First Intifada began, a largely non-violent uprising against the occupation. It lasted



OF RESISTANCE



and colour combinations associated with nationhood and resistance.

This dress (above) features birds singing to one another above the sacred golden dome and minaret of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Solidarity and resistance are evident also in the innovative application and influence of *tatreez* on contemporary designers and artists, whose work is included, such as Aya Haidar's plastic bag



embroidery (below), referencing what dislocated people seize when they have to leave in a hurry: from "slippers, candles, blood pressure tablets" to "ruby earrings, emerald necklace, gold rings" and "family photographs and cigarettes."

The exhibition celebrates and documents Dundee's 45-year twin city relationship with Nablus in the West Bank. In 1980, Dundee was the first UK city to be twinned with a city in Palestine. This came about following a visit to the UK by Bassam Shaka'a, the Mayor of Nablus at the time. In that year he survived an assassination attempt by the Jewish Underground (*Makhteret*), an extreme right-wing, fundamentalist organisation considered terrorists by Israel. Shaka'a lost both legs in the car bombing and came to the UK for medical treatment. While here, he was invited by Dundee City Council to visit and consider a twinning agreement to create a formal relationship between the two cities that would foster mutual support, education and awareness-raising. Since that time, the Palestinian flag has been displayed at the City Chambers in Dundee.

Dundee City Councillor Nadia El-Nakla wore this embroidered *thobe* (right) at the Scottish Parliament in 2023, for the swearing-in ceremony of her husband, Humza Yousaf MSP, then First Minister of Scotland.

International law requires

until 1993.

During this time, Palestinian colours weren't allowed in public, and flags were confiscated. In response, women started stitching "Intifada dresses" in secret (opposite page, bottom) to wear on demonstrations, mixing traditional motifs with new designs



Israel, as the occupier of the Palestinian territories, to protect the cultural and natural heritage of these lands. The planning of *Thread Memory* began before 7th October 2023, its mission being to counter the suppression, erasure and appropriation of Palestinian culture and heritage that has occurred instead of protection. Israel's retaliatory and now genocidal response to the massacre perpetrated by Hamas has taken matters to a different level, with the near total devastation and ruin of such ancient cities as Gaza City, Khan Yunis, Deir al-Balah, Rafah and Beit Hanun, as well as the destruction of agricultural lands. In these tragic circumstances, this exhibition pays special attention to Gaza.

For many of us, our only or predominant images of Gaza have been those of destruction and death. The impact of being met with the dazzling geometric embroidery, singing pinks and reds, and striped silks of the historical Gazan *thobes* (like those pictured above) from villages across the region is immense. It is to learn for the first time (or to be reminded) of the social and economic context in which such dresses were made, of Gaza's importance as a linen-producing weaving centre, whose fine *mejallah* cloth and the looms that were designed to weave it were prized throughout the region. It was a region with a multitude of associated enterprises, a place where people went about their business, living normal lives.



Further information

Thread Memory: Embroidery from Palestine is free and on show at V&A Dundee until Sunday 26th April 2026.

Stitching The Intifada: Embroidery and Resistance in Palestine by Rachel Dedman is published by Common Threads Press (2025).8

A WARM SPANISH

ILANA LESSER CRAVITZ comes from a long line of courageous activists. The legacy left by her relatives who joined the International Brigades in Spain includes the honour of being granted Spanish citizenship. She tells her story, and theirs

Ilana as a child, playing chess with her grandfather. Her father is in the background.



Political activism runs in my veins like the words *tikkun olam* (the Jewish concept of repairing the world) through a stick of rock. I feel that I was born knowing that my maternal grandfather, Frank Lesser, aka Efraim and Ernst, (1916-1993) and his brother Sam, *nom de plume* Sam Russell (1915-2010) were among the 2,500 antifascist British and Irish volunteers, many of them Jewish, who joined the International Brigade and fought for the Republic in Spain between 1936 and 1938. And Sam met his future wife there: Margaret Powell had travelled from Wales to volunteer as a nurse. They were among 35,000 volunteers from 53 countries who went to the aid of the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939.

Sam talked about how the brothers became "very conscious, and at a very early age, of the forces facing each other in society", and no doubt similar experiences were spurs for many of the Jewish volunteers who went to Spain, living as they were at a time when antisemitism was rife and overt throughout British society. Sam and Frank had witnessed the establishment trying to intimidate workers during the General Strike of 1926 by massing the army in Victoria Park, their local green space, and Sam described how:

with the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany, alongside the fascists already established in Italy, the inhabitants of East London had to face up to Mosley's fascist blackshirts ... From the stormy streets of Stepney to the sun-scorched sierras of Spain we saw the struggle as the same – not just to defend the people of Stepney, or the Spanish people and their legally-elected Popular Government, but to try and prevent the fascist powers from plunging humanity into a bloodier world war.

My first really tangible awareness of this history came when family plans for the summer were announced early in 1976. Since Franco had died in November 1975, we could, and would, go to Spain on holiday. As the years rolled by, I was aware of archivists, historians, and others interviewing

Frank and Sam, eagerly collecting their memories of an important moment in world history. Formal recognition by Spain of the Brigadistas' contribution came in 1996, when surviving members were awarded Spanish nationality, and in 2007, when the right to dual citizenship was granted. Frank had

died in 1993 but Sam claimed his nationality in 2009, aged 94.

From my earliest years I have been carried along in the tide of family activism. It only dawned on me gradually that not everyone's Saturday music lessons were followed by impromptu CND street theatre in Peckham with their dad and little sister!

Nor were their election days spent helping to collect numbers outside polling stations. My mother, Judith, also imbued me with feminism and took me to Greenham Common. No surprise then that, as an adult, I campaign for my idea of a better world on many fronts. These activities run alongside my deep commitment to promoting Klezmer, the rich Yiddish music tradition which has, until recently, been neglected by the Jewish world, and is still disdained by many.

And so to July 2022, when the Spanish parliament approved la Ley de Memoria Democrática, the Law of Democratic Memory, – a new raft of measures designed to dismantle Franco's legacy. I became aware of the law in May 2023 when my aunt Miriam flagged up an article in the newsletter of the International Brigade Memorial Trust. The piece highlighted Article 33, an offer of Spanish citizenship to family members of International Brigaders who could prove they had "worked continuously to spread the memory of their ancestors and defend democracy in Spain."

It felt miraculous to be presented with an opportunity to celebrate my family's proud history of activism and antifascism by becoming part of a country now able to flaunt the socialist identity stolen by Franco – an identity that Frank and Sam had literally shed blood for all those years ago. More than that, I could legitimately claim status as a descendant of someone whose selfless contribution to Spain's history was truly valued. The fact that these were Jews in large numbers fighting for a left-wing cause is not insignificant; it is part of an alternative to the narrow, Zionism-focused, hero/victim writing of Jewish history that



WELCOME

the officially sanctioned British Jewish community constantly promotes.

As I started to gather my evidence, I kept a weather eye on Spanish politics, getting going in earnest once the socialist government was reconfirmed in power late in 2023, since a right-wing government would have revoked the controversial new law immediately. There followed much boring form-filling, interspersed with happier activities – like the day I spent collecting evidence of my grandfather's status as a Brigadista in the Marx Memorial Library, where it felt strange to have to use actual white gloves to handle family papers now designated as cultural and historical artefacts.

Applicants for Spanish citizenship benefited from guidance on the process from the International Brigade Memorial Trust, and invaluable assistance was provided by Patricia Ure, secretary of the Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales (AABI, Madrid Friends of the International Brigades). She liaised with the relevant ministerial department, visiting several times to talk to officials and, in January 2024, I couriered my precious package to her in Spain. Making an application under Article 33 is free, but in case it went astray I insured the parcel for the cost of replacing documents, apostilles, certified translations, and so on. Alas, Spanish customs took my declaration at face value and demanded that duty be paid! Knowing the papers were safely in the country, I declared them to be [financially] worthless, and my application duly joined the pile in the Ministry.

Then I waited. All of us who had applied waited, and then started to worry as we had read that had applications would fail if we not been notified within a year that they had succeeded. In May 2024 Patricia Ure learned that the clock would only start once a *Real Decreto* (Royal Decree) had been signed.



The King eventually got his pen out, and the bureaucratic wheels started to turn, culminating in an exciting notification in November 2025: I had been granted Spanish citizenship! I was one of 171 descendants of International Brigaders in the first wave of naturalisations.

The Spanish Ambassador gave a moving speech at a celebratory reception for us in London, and glasses were raised as we mingled and shared family stories and artefacts. The significance of granting citizenship to this particular, tiny, cohort was reflected by the substantial item broadcast on Spain's national news that evening.

International Brigade Memorial Trust chair, Jim Jump, summed things up succinctly in an article published in *The Guardian* the next day:

The Spanish government's decision underlines its determination to erase the toxic legacy of the Franco dictatorship. Many families of International Brigaders continued to campaign for the restoration of democracy during those dark years. Spanish citizenship fulfils the spirit of the historic pledge made by the Spanish republic to offer a home for the Brigaders.

I still can't believe it has come to pass. Visiting Spain as a child, and my grandfather's enthusiasm for the land and the people, spurred me to learn the language and enjoy travelling there regularly. Now I feel more than fortunate to have been welcomed as a citizen by a country accepting me explicitly because I am the latest in a line of activists. And my adopted country has a Prime Minister who inspires me with his moral courage, standing up and advocating for democratic values on the international stage.

Sadly, my aunt, Miriam Harris, died before she could complete the process, and administrative hitches mean that Sam and Margaret's daughter, Ruth Muller, is still awaiting citizenship. I'll continue the struggle of doyens (generations) on behalf of all of us, in the spirit of an International Brigade motto: *Por vuestra libertad y la nuestra – For your freedom and ours.*

Find out more

Here are two books from my family's perspective.

I Saw Democracy Murdered: The Memoir of Sam Russell, Journalist by Sam Russell and Colin Chambers (£40.99, Routledge)

Margaret Powell: An Extraordinary Life by Ruth Muller (£10, Crickhowell District Archives Centre), available from <https://crickhowellarchives.org.uk/product/margaretpowell>

Opposite page, three photos of International Brigaders. From top to bottom: Frank Lesser is in the centre. Frank (left) and Sam Lesser (right) Lesser on the right.

This page, centre: Frank (Ernst) Lesser's ID card.

Below: the reception for all those granted Spanish citizenship. Ilana is in the centre at the front.

RUTH LUKOM
is defiant and
refuses to be
defined. So is it
time to retrieve
her Star of
David necklace?

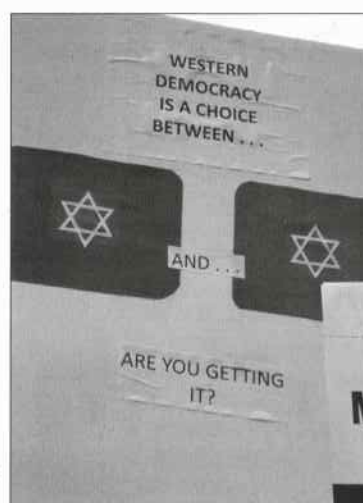
When I was a child, my grandparents bought me a *kameia* – a necklace with a small sefer torah (Jewish scroll) on a gold chain. My grandparents were of the generation that had travelled to the UK on boats and had witnessed relatives murdered in pogroms. They had lived in London's East End while fighting poverty and fascists. I remember my grandmother spoke to me of "your people". Never forget "your people". They were firm Zionists. Other relatives became communists and could have appeared in an Arnold Wesker play, and yet my grandparents felt they had taken a step outside of their tribe.

I mixed with other Jewish children who wore *Magen David* or Star of David necklaces. And then I stopped wearing mine because I went to secondary school and I didn't want to be different and (if I'm honest) Jewish. At 17 I became a Zionist and bought a silver *Magen David* when I was in Israel, and proudly wore it for several years.

I'm trying to remember when I took it off and why. I now think I had unconsciously absorbed that Jewish identity and Zionism were inextricably entwined. I had no feelings of warmth and attachment to religious practice, and felt my identity was a mere fact of my birth – like the colour of my eyes. I proudly wore badges to support the miners and nuclear disarmament – but why wear something that meant I had to be answerable for the actions of a violent militarist state?

Fast forward (and a steady, enriching evolution of my knowledge and understanding of identity and history) to September 2024 and a Palestine Solidarity demo. At this point we've been marching for 11 months alongside many different

communities who are appalled and angry about Israel's actions in Gaza and our government's active participation. We have come from many different traditions of Judaism and coalesced into a recognisable Jewish Bloc that is applauded by all those on the march – people who have been accused by Suella Braverman and other politicians and establishment Jewish leaders as hateful and antisemitic. We have become accustomed to random strangers approaching and embracing us. We have a huge horizontal banner that we carry with the words: Jewish Bloc for Palestine. I have added to it the big watermelon Star of David image



that a graphic designer comrade had gifted us. As I made my way through the crowds on that September day, I saw this placard (left). I shook my head and carried on walking, but it haunted me. I had to go back to talk to the woman holding it.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

A gentle middle-class English lady replied that we must remember that, whoever we vote for (the US elections were imminent) – whether Trump, Harris, Starmer or Farage – we are voting for Zionism. Every western democracy is being manipulated. "Are you getting it?"

Without entangling myself in this puppet-master-lurking-in-the-shadows imagery, I wanted to ask her why she had used the Star of David and not, say, the flag of the Israeli state? I tried to explain that the Star itself was an internationally recognised symbol of a people and a religion. It is on our kosher foods; outside our places of worship; and many Jews present on the march were displaying it too. I pointed to a Jewish Bloc comrade carrying a beautiful banner embroidered with a watermelon Star of David, who had agreed to accompany me. The drumming and noise around us was deafening. I had to speak very loudly to make myself heard.

"You're shouting," she said. "I'm not talking to you." And she turned away.

I've been quietly angry ever since. But it has resurfaced again in the aftermath of the murderous assault on Jews on Bondi Beach on 14th December. Let's be clear. These people were targeted and attacked because they were Jews. Menorahs are lit in public places all over the world. If you just wanted to kill a mass of people two weeks before Christmas, you would find a shopping mall. (A week later in Taiwan a man did just that.) But for some on the left, Israel had organised this massacre. Others focused on the Rabbi leading the service, because he was a vocal, active Zionist in the Chabad movement. "Ah well, in that case..." was many a subtext.

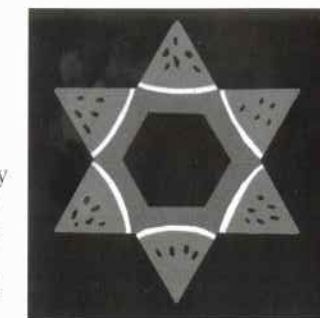
I feel it is time for me to dig out my Star of David and wear it round my neck again.

I shared my thoughts with Julia Bard, who has also been reconsidering whether to wear one again.



A STAR

IS WORN



Her father, who had been surprised when she wanted to wear one as a teenager, said to her: "You don't have to deny being Jewish but you don't have to flaunt it" – a statement, Julia felt, which embodied the conflict for a man who valued his working class background but sought acceptance in the middle-class world of polite prejudice. That push/pull for so many Jews between visibility and emancipation; between assertion and assimilation.

My two key words would be defiance and defined. I am defiant. Not proud. Being Jewish is who I am. Sometimes it gives me joy and at other times pain. Not pride so much as acceptance and a feeling of empathy with other minority people who experience the same.

And the defining. The Zionist right have been shrieking: "You're not a real Jew!" at us since way before the horror of 7th October 2023 and the genocide that has followed. When they weren't accusing us of being rape apologists, they ridiculed those who spoke out, calling them "Aza's" – because our public statements started with "As a Jew I condemn...". We accept it and manoeuvre our way through it like dog crap on pavements and bad tv. But we still feel a sense of theft. Not a stealthy pickpocketing but like a bailiff snatching away a cherished belonging and saying, "I'm taking this away. It's not yours any more."

We know who we are. Wearing this Star embraces our growing, vibrant diaspora as we watch the stale and bitterly divided, corporately funded Jewish institutions fall away and become irrelevant, except to a legacy media that no one pays attention to any more. This new Judaism has discarded Zionism. It evolves and is enriched because of our interactions

with other minority communities. Our Jewish community is inclusive of different ideas and identities, and doesn't ascribe legitimacy on an unquestioning adherence to Israel.

We have many sisters and brothers in the non-Jewish left but there are still those on the left who think an assertion of one's Jewish identity equates to support of ethno-nationalism and Jewish supremacy. Some know about our rich radical history but think it's irrelevant. And – echoing the Zionist right – ascribe our "purity" to unquestioning adherence to the antisemitic statements of their martyrs.

I have read what they think about who deserves to live and who deserves to die in the comments sections about the Bondi beach massacre. I'll be wearing a Star of David for them. It may provoke a reaction and I'm comfortable with inviting a conversation with those who are genuinely curious about what's happening and how we got here – given that these get shut down everywhere else. (I don't expect they'll all be good outcomes but so be it.)

I'll wear it for that nice English lady who thinks she's supporting Palestinians but is just a good old-fashioned antisemite, instead. I'll wear it for the people on Bondi beach and Ahmed al-Ahmed who risked his life to save people he didn't know. I'll wear it for those who were in Manchester's Heaton Park Synagogue on Yom Kippur. I'll remember the words of Nana Lukom: "Your people." But I'll add my own coda. My people among many.

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

THE JEWISH WORKERS'
BUND
בונד
PAST, PRESENT AND
FUTURE

LEFT? ANTISEMITIC?

JULIA BARD
finds disturbing
expressions of
hostility to Jews
amongst
supposedly
progressive
campaigners

Put your phones away. The quiz is about to begin. Round one: I will give you seven quotes. You need to decide whether they come from the left or the right.

1. "It's not a belief ... that organised Jewry has a massively disproportionate hold on the mass media; it's a fact."
2. "This is Britain. We are occupied."
3. "My father told me the Jewish lobby is the most influential lobby."
4. "Jewish supremacy is the epitome of evil."
5. Ashkenazi, Mizrahi and Sephardi are made up words for Jews to distinguish themselves from Goyim. ... What unites them is Judaism—where 'Goyim' and Jewish supremacy come from.
6. "Pax Judaica, the new Jewish supremacist empire succeeding and usurping US hegemony."
7. "In order to give the goyim no time to think and take note, their minds must be diverted towards industry and trade. Thus, all the nations will be swallowed up in the pursuit of gain and in the race for it will not take note of their common foe."

Traditionally, the far right has been the main repository of antisemitic ideas (conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, racial stereotypes) and practice (discrimination, abuse, physical attacks), and the challenge to those ideas has come primarily from the left. Over the last 10 years, though, the political establishment has used antisemitism to try to discredit the left and supporters of the Palestinians by aggressively imposing as orthodoxy the concept of "new antisemitism". This claims that the chief threat to Jews comes from the left, usually dressed up as opposition to Zionism.

The main mechanism for reconfiguring our understanding of anti-Jewish racism was a determined campaign to establish the flawed, bitterly contested IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as a single acceptable interpretation and give it quasi-legal weight. The battle to prevent it being forced on institutions generated millions of words, tweets, reels, memes and recriminations among socialists about how to understand and respond to what quickly came to be called the weaponisation of antisemitism.

Some of the debate was erudite, but much of it was shallow and defensive, drifting into oversimplification and conspiracy theories. In the resulting cacophony, David Feldman, Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, said: "When it comes to antisemitism many of us literally don't know what we're talking about and are happy to admit it. And as for the rest of us who think we do know what antisemitism is, we are congenitally unable to agree among ourselves."

The one thing we thought we could depend on was the far right's consistent hatred of Jews. But some of them are – or appear to be – making an exception for particular Jews. There are still the old-

time fascists who attribute all the problems of the world to the murky machinations of all Jews everywhere. But others, both in Europe and the United States are so drawn to the ultra-nationalism and anti-Muslim racism of Netanyahu, the violence of the settlers, the living example of an apartheid state in Israel, that they are prepared to make an exception for far-right Zionists. More than an exception: they are keen to join them in their murderous Islamophobia.

Tommy Robinson is one of these. He has recently done the rounds of Poland, where he was welcomed by his far right antisemitic friends, and from which he returned to launch his campaign to rescue Christianity from the Muslims. He also received an invitation to Israel the day after the attack on Yom Kippur on Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester, to be embraced by far-right Jews as a courageous fighter against Islam.

This isn't unprecedented. There are historical – and more respectable – examples of people who supported nationalist Jews while expressing hatred and mistrust of internationalist Jews. Lord Balfour was not only the author of the "declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations" promising to facilitate the establishment "in Palestine a national home for the Jewish people", he was also a white supremacist and an antisemite who, in 1905, as Prime Minister, brought in the Aliens Act. This was the first peacetime legislation restricting immigration into Great Britain, the foundation of all subsequent anti-immigration law, and it was aimed at preventing the entry into Britain of Jews escaping discrimination and persecution in the Tsarist Russian Empire.

Even the International Churchill Society, whose mission is "honoring the memory, preserving the legacy of Winston Churchill", acknowledges that he believed the Bolsheviks were an illegitimate minority consisting mostly of Jews ruling over the "real" Russian majority, referring to them as "the tyrannic Government of these Jew Commissars" and "adherents of this sinister confederacy". But that didn't inhibit him from enthusiastically supporting the creation of a Jewish home in the Holy Land which, fortuitously, aligned with British imperial interests in the Middle East.

Every form of racism has its own features, and what characterises antisemitism, is the belief that Jews have a sinister influence over other people: that they are underhand; not what they appear to be; convincing fakes, conspiring to achieve power, especially through control of the media. Blaming a single, shadowy culprit for inequality, poverty, conflict and powerlessness has a magnetic pull.

An overarching conspiracy theory, shared across the far right, is the Great Replacement Theory. This fantasy of white supremacists bundles all their racism into a hierarchical system, with Jews at the top, encouraging migration to replace white people with non-Europeans, especially Muslims,

RIGHT? NOT ANTISEMITIC?

and bring down European civilisation.

The Great Replacement Theory is a feature of Donald Trump's National Security Strategy, which claims that "it is more than plausible that within a few decades at the latest, certain NATO members will become majority non-European". Trump also backed the violent, far-right demonstration in Charlottesville in 2017, which left many people injured and a civil rights campaigner dead, and where white supremacists carrying placards with the words "The Goyim Know" and "The Jewish media is going down" chanted: "You will not replace us!", "Jews will not replace us!" Trump defended the white nationalists, saying they included "some very fine people", just as he eulogised Charlie Kirk, who, amongst a deluge of fascist rhetoric said: "Jewish donors have been the Number 1 funding mechanism of radical, open border, neoliberal, quasi Marxist policies ... This is a beast created by secular Jews, and now it's coming for Jews."

Neither has Nigel Farage been coy about his hostility to Jews, referring to the Jewish "lobby" and "globalists" – code for the "international Jewish conspiracy". He has called George Soros "the biggest danger to the entire western world", who "wants to break down the fundamental values of our society". The Guardian has reported that earlier in his career, "Farage discussed supposed plots by bankers to create a global government, citing Goldman Sachs, the Bilderberg group and the financier George Soros as threats to democracy."

In the current political turmoil, some of the right's conspiracy theories are seeping into the left, especially on social media. When people don't have to look into the faces of actual Jews, they seem quite comfortable making unverifiable claims of fakery, secret scheming, behind-the-scenes lobbying, corrupting political processes and buying loyalty. The names Goldman Sachs and Rothschild crop up in socialist discussions about wealth, power and influence much more often than the Duke of Westminster, James Dyson or Richard Branson. But these deep-seated stereotypes of Jews are not confined to the rich; they are also being used within the left.

There are some extreme examples of Palestine supporters and socialists swallowing whole the claim by Israel and the Zionist establishment that "Jew" is synonymous with "Zionist" and therefore "the Jews" are a valid target. At least one prominent campaigner for the Palestinians quotes hard-line fascists like former British National Party leader, Nick Griffin, and Holocaust denier, Nick Fuentes, and, like others, is more comfortable challenging "Jews" than "Zionists".

Zack Polanski, has been targeted by Reform UK, who, not entirely unexpectedly, published an antisemitic AI image of him that would have fitted nicely into Der Stürmer. Some of the language used about him is reminiscent of the attacks on Michael

Howard, who, according to Ann Widdecombe (now Christian Reform UK campaigner), had "something of the night about him". Unfortunately, though, this is not confined to the far right. Facebook is full of socialists who, rather than addressing his politics, think they've nailed him by saying he's a Zionist stooge, a fake, is suspiciously popular with the media and, to top it all, was a hypnotist! Didn't he change his name? That just proves what a shape-shifter he is. (I'd better not mention my cousin, my uncle, and my most married women and celebrities!)

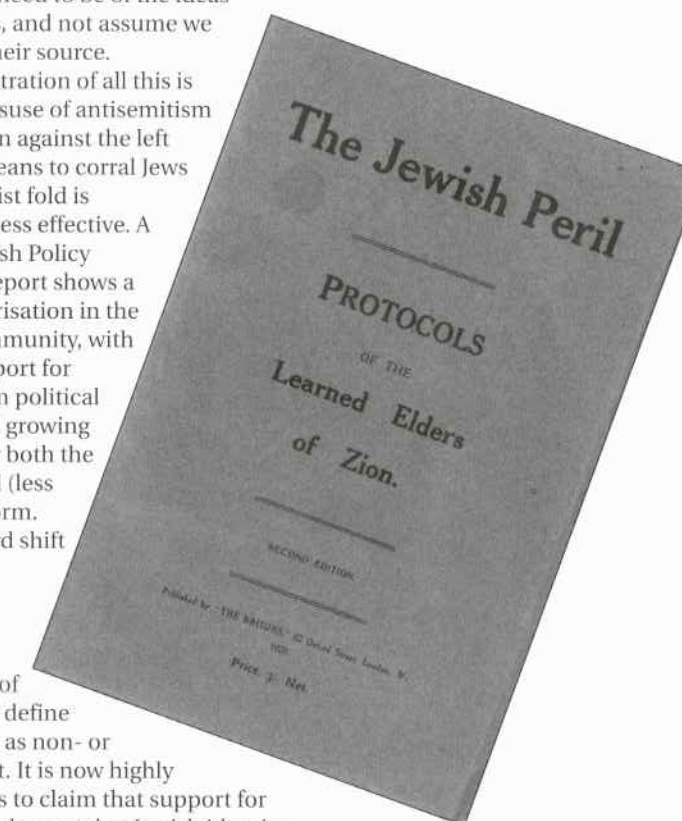
Conspiracy theories are not new on the left, and as well as coming from an increasingly right-wing mainstream ideology, they have often come from a more apparently progressive direction such as elements of the yoga/wellness/New Age movements that have their roots in fascist ideology. That's a topic for another article but indicates how critical we need to be of the ideas themselves, and not assume we can trust their source.

The frustration of all this is that the misuse of antisemitism as a weapon against the left and as a means to corral Jews into a Zionist fold is becoming less effective. A recent Jewish Policy Research report shows a sharp polarisation in the Jewish community, with falling support for mainstream political parties and growing support for both the Greens and (less so) for Reform. The leftward shift is striking among younger people, nearly half of whom now define themselves as non- or anti-Zionist. It is now highly contentious to claim that support for Israel is fundamental to Jewish identity.

This should leave us with a clear political direction: to challenge the increasingly explicit antisemitism from the right; to intercept the slide into conspiracy theories on the left; to give people within and beyond the Jewish community confidence to challenge both Israel's genocidal actions and ideology and antisemitism; to recognise the common interests of all minorities; and to act together to challenge all racism, including Islamophobia.

Here are the answers to the quiz.

1. Far right. 2. Left. 3. Far right 4. Left. 5. Left 6. Left 7. Far right.



This is a revised version of an article that was first published in the Morning Star on 23rd December 2025.

ALL THAT REMAINS

Photographer **DAVE GILCHRIST** captures the atmosphere of the Jewish cemetery in Lodz in Poland, a city that was once home to a vibrant, mainly working class, community

In late December last year I travelled to Lodz to visit the Jewish cemetery there, the second largest after Berlin. Unlike its counterpart in Berlin, the Lodz cemetery has far fewer grand tombs. It is dominated rather by the Ghetto Field, the place of internment of most of the 40,000 Jews who died from hunger and disease during the period of the Lodz Ghetto.

Renamed Litzmannstadt by the Nazis, Lodz was the second largest ghetto after Warsaw. Its gates closed in April 1940, sealing it off from the outside world. The Nazis liquidated the Lodz Ghetto in 1944, deporting the inhabitants through the Radegast Station to Chelmno and Auschwitz, and when the Soviet army entered Lodz on 19th January 1945, only 877 Jews were still alive.

Lodz was the longest surviving ghetto, partly due to its factories that produced material for the Wehrmacht. It was presided over by the controversial chairman of the ghetto's Jewish Council, Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski.

Lodz was also a well-documented ghetto thanks to the work of the heroic photographers Henryk Ross and Mendel Grossman who, at the risk of their lives, recorded the atrocities that were perpetrated there.



A POTENT COMBINATION

MUSIC

As I sit down to write this, it's hard to know which part of the story to tell you first. I'm in my father's "study" – a room lined with books spanning Sanskrit dictionaries, modernist small press poetry and, of course, the compulsory four-shelves of Jewish trauma. I've taken to coming here in the mornings to choose and listen from his other extensive library: a vast collection of string quartet recordings. This room is loaded. Not only with books and music, but with grief. My Dad passed away nearly a year ago (on my birthday, the upcoming spring equinox) and this morning routine has become something of a ritual: of connection and process.

Why am I telling you all this? I suppose because my father and his particular and extensive interests are at the core of the story of my album, *Through the Walls*. The album is a collection of original klezmer tunes, written and arranged for string quartet, and features field recordings, interviews and storytelling from my native Stamford Hill in London. It also features some of the UK's finest klezmer string players, Francesca Ter-Berg and Flora Curzon (Fran&Flora) on violin and cello and Meg Hamilton (She'koyokh, Kosmos Ensemble) on viola.

Growing up, I would often go to sleep hearing my Dad practising his violin and viola through the walls of my bedroom. Various configurations of fellow keen amateur string players would then turn up of an afternoon, be fed a Victoria sponge, and bash through some Beethoven together.

Through other walls in the house came the sound of our Hasidic neighbours *davening* (praying) in their *shtibl* (small synagogue). Like clockwork on Shabes (Saturday), louder and more frequently on High Holy days. Always slightly anarchic, sometimes more virtuosic if a cantor was in town. This murmur of black-coated, white-stockinged starlings was a constant of my childhood. A source of amusement growing up, but now, as a professional klezmer musician, a source of inspiration, fascination and learning.

It seems almost inevitable, then, that I would write a string quartet of new Yiddish music, given this particular meeting of sound worlds that came to me, through the walls. This sound world is depicted most explicitly on the track "Hasidic Waltz", where I sample a recording I made from my garden of a beautiful *nign* (melody) being sung around Rosh Hashonah (Jewish New Year). I took the melody of it and let it run away with me.

I have been studying klezmer music for 15 years and writing this album for nearly half that time. The genesis of the album occurred when I moved into a flat in the beating heart of Hasidic commerce and community, above a shoe shop in Stamford Hill proper.

I would practise violin, learning klezmer tunes whilst looking out through our balcony windows, on to the parade. I watched daily life go by; the rhythm of the weeks and years punctuated by Shabes or the holidays. During this time, it amused and intrigued me to think of various tensions at play. Here I was, an

outsider who was also a bit of an insider. A secular Jewish outsider, who'd grown up adjacent to the ultra-religious. An insider, dedicating my life to a tradition of music inherently linked to the Ashkenazi life of Stamford Hill. Yet an outsider because, for the most part, klezmer music is forgotten or viewed as archaic by many within the community.

I developed relationships with the locals, growing familiar with the daily life of the shops, their keepers and their customers. I decided it would be fun to write a tune for each shop on the parade and although this didn't exactly happen, the idea informed a number of tunes on the album. "Gasn Nign", meaning simply, a street tune. Or "Dobriden", a type of welcoming tune, inspired by the sonic shift of the street on Shabes. When the beaten-up Volvos stop honking, the rest of London can be heard waking up.

On "Geyn Tsu Getter's", the music is interwoven with an interview with Mr Getter, the grocer I became friendly with, and whose cousin I knew from my parent's road. He and his wife, although perhaps a bit bemused, welcomed me turning up at their doof with my Zoom recorder and some *rugelakh* (pastries). They were generous with their knowledge of the history of the area and the businesses that have come and gone over the years. They also spoke about their ways of operating in the world via their business and their friendship with my (*goyishe*) landlord at the time.

They talk of treating everyone who comes into their shop the same, of attending weddings and funerals of their non-Jewish neighbours. This confirmed my own changing view of the community. I had been brought up to view our ultra-religious neighbours as fanatical and oppressive. And whilst I know it's still a community that is untenable for some to remain within, my time living above this shop opened my eyes to the nuance and multiplicities that exist in all communities. As well as the appreciation and admiration for community full stop.

In our current surreal, hostile and divisive times, one of the things I hope to say with this album is that we must keep listening to and absorbing nuance. We must keep our walls porous enough to hear through.

Violinist and composer, **ANNA LOWENSTEIN**, describes the background and influences for her new album, *Through the Walls*, a Yiddish string quartet



Photo: Rah Petherbridge

Find out more

Through the Walls is released on Adhyaropa Records.

You can order it from Bandcamp: <https://annalowenstein.bandcamp.com/album/through-the-walls>

For details of forthcoming performances and to join the mailing list, go to www.annalowenstein.com

REDISCOVERED RICHES

JEWS WITHOUT MONEY

Michael Gold
PublicAffairs
Out of print but available secondhand

It's very strange to look through your shelves at home and come across a book that you don't remember acquiring. That happened recently when I saw what I call a proper old book, a hardback edition of Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* containing 309 thick pages, each turning a lighter shade of the book's deep brown cover.

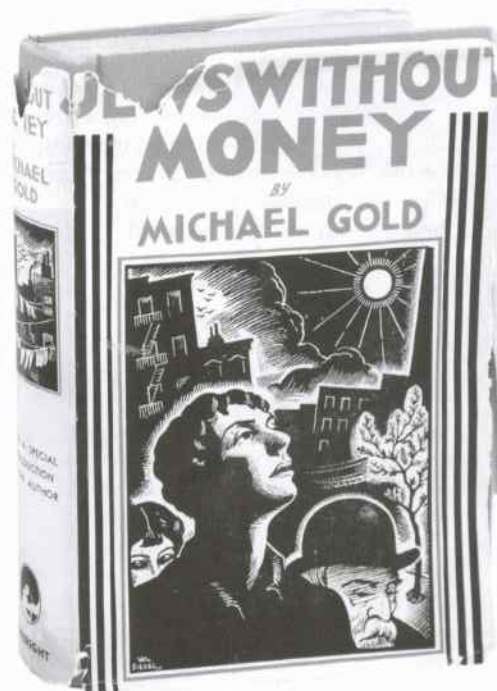
The book's 22 chapters, in a semi-autobiographical style, describe the daily struggles of Jewish Eastern European immigrants living in New York's Lower East Side ghetto. The edition I held in my hands was an American import, first published in 1930. I was intrigued by how popular the book must have been because I was looking at the 16th (1937) reprint. There had been 11 reprints in 1930 alone, two in March and three in April. *Jews Without Money* has been translated into 16 languages, including Yiddish.

Inside the covers was an interesting reproduction of a woodcut depicting a wooden cart containing food for sale. People are standing around chatting; some are looking out of tenement windows; children are playing; and laundry hangs high up on a line. Inside the book I found the handwritten signature and date "M. Weiner 1938". My father-in-law, Matthias Weiner, would then have been aged 24 or 25. I showed the book to my wife, Pauline, who also didn't recall seeing the book. We wondered whether her father would have read that book at home in Leeds or perhaps on a train and bus journey to and from Barnoldswick, where he worked as a well-respected supervisor in a mill – and where he had been invited to stand as a local council candidate for the Communist Party.

Despite its descriptions of tough daily life, *Jews Without Money* is an enjoyable and sometimes amusing read. It is written in the first person; the main character's name is Mikey Gold. Unlike many other novels, it can be described as a "riches to rags" story. Mikey's father, Herman (who firmly believes in the American Dream), starts off fairly successfully as the owner of a suspender factory and, following issues with a relative, and a workplace accident, ends up being impoverished, but the family is too proud to beg for charity.

I particularly enjoyed the chapter entitled "Mushrooms in New York", in which Mikey's family visits Bronx Park. His mother is eager to recreate her memory of a Romanian forest, and prepares for the journey by packing a mouthwatering lunch of salami sandwiches, pickles, cake, oranges and hard-boiled eggs. I chuckled when, as their busy subway train approaches New York, Mikey's father says: "In Roumania it is a little walk to the country, here it is a fight for one's life."

Michael Gold's birth name was Itzhok Isaak



The book and its author, Michael Gold, speaking to a New York crowd on May Day, 1930. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Granich, born in 1893 in New York to Romanian immigrants. In 1914, he came across an unemployment protest. Although he wasn't looking for trouble, trouble found him, when, whilst trying to stop an elderly person from being attacked by police, he was himself attacked. It is said that Gold was grateful to the police officer (and the beating he received), as it introduced him to literature and ideas of revolution. Indeed, the following day, Gold purchased his first copy of the socialist journal *The Masses*. He went on to become a lifelong communist, and contributed many articles to that journal and others, and was soon to be regarded as America's most famous communist writer.

Although Gold wrote extensively, *Jews Without Money* was his only novel. As a Jewish communist, he also spoke at rallies and attracted attention from, and was blacklisted in, McCarthy's persecution of leftwingers. His political views clearly feature in *Jews Without Money*, with a rousing message in the final chapter.

This novel lives on in our memory of Michael Gold, who died in 1967 aged 74. It is an excellent social history of Jewish people struggling to survive in poor areas of New York after having escaped from antisemitism in Eastern Europe. **Stuart Goodman**

MONUMENTS IN SOUND

In this award-winning tour de force, Jeremy Eichler looks at four key musical works which were born out of the devastations of World War Two. "Each responded to the rupture through intensely charged memorials in sound": *Metamorphosen* (Richard Strauss); *A Survivor From Warsaw* (Arnold Schoenberg); *War Requiem* (Benjamin Britten); and *Babi Yar Symphony* (Dimitri Shostakovich). This is a journey through a hall of dark mirrors and sounds. Eichler's main contention is that the listener becomes a participant in "some of the defining ethical and aesthetic statements of the 20th century".

Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, the twin stars of the Frankfurt School, play a Virgil-like role in guiding Eichler into and beyond the Nazi inferno. Adorno famously declared that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz. In 1962 he wrote that "because the world has outlived its own demise, it needs art as its unconscious chronicle". For Eichler, the "unconscious chronicle of music" serves as "a witness to history and as a carrier of memory for a post-Holocaust world". In listening anew to these musical memorials, we become witnesses.

The first half of the book traces both the promise and the collapse of the *Bildung*, the idea that humanist art and culture would lead to personal transformation and liberation. After years of persecution, aspiring German Jews in the 19th century were among the greatest champions of Goethe, Schiller and the music of Beethoven. Yet the Nazi era ripped the *Bildung* (and the promise of Jewish emancipation) to shreds. "The German and the Jewish were, to adapt a phrase from Adorno, the 'torn halves' of an integral whole to which they no longer added up."

Written using Schoenberg's own text in 1947, his *A Survivor From Warsaw* was the first post-war attempt to convey a stark musical response to the genocide. The brutal commands of a concentration camp sergeant are interrupted by a powerful male chorus singing Shema Yisroel. How are we meant to respond?

Initially, Adorno celebrated *A Survivor* in both form (dissonant) and content (uncompromising). Subsequently, he distanced himself from the piece. Eichler summarises Adorno: "to instrumentalise or aestheticise the victims' memory is necessarily to violate it. In these terms, a 'true' memorial must accomplish the impossible: communicate the event while preserving its utter inscrutability, honour the victims while rejecting any and all ascriptions of meaning." Eichler, nonetheless, suggests that it is up to us how we listen and how we react.

After seizing power, Hitler vowed to wipe out the "Jewish stranglehold over Western music". When Bruno Walter was thrown out as conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, Strauss stepped up to take his place. At the Bayreuth Festival, its defiantly anti-fascist guest conductor, Arturo Toscanini, refused to have anything to do with the new regime. Again, Strauss took over. As if this was not enough, his daughter-in-law was Jewish and her grandmother,

along with other family members, died in the camps. What price complicity?

Written in the final years of the war, Strauss's *Metamorphosen* differs profoundly from *A Survivor*, not least through a lack of clear intention. What exactly is being memorialised here? Is this short piece, which is performed more regularly than any other Second World War memorial music, meant to represent a personal, national, or even a universal grief and shame? Years before, in response to Wagner's operatic epic of mystic redemption, Strauss had sniffed: "I don't know what I'm supposed to be redeemed from." On the wrong side of history, it's not hard to imagine what he wanted now in the way of redemption.

The second half of *Time's Echo* looks at Britten's *War Requiem* and Shostakovich's *Babi Yar Symphony*. Inspired by each other, these two star composers were also linked by their shared experience as outsiders. As a gay man and pacifist, Britten won himself few friends in wartime Britain and beyond. After the bombing of Coventry's landmark cathedral in 1940, Britten was commissioned to write a piece to commemorate the new modernist cathedral. His choice of libretto, featuring Wilfred Owen's anti-war poetry, was hardly what the authorities might have had in mind. Eichler wryly comments that the *War Requiem* "challenges all of the classic civic and patriotic virtues typically reinforced by war monuments".

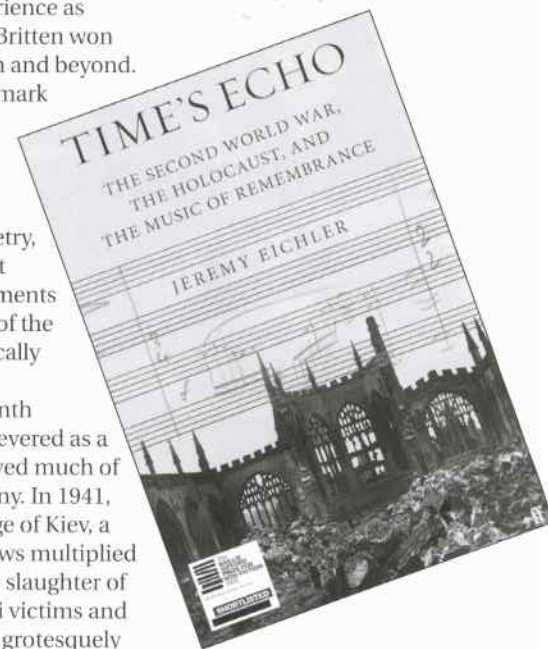
Shostakovich's extraordinary Seventh (Leningrad) Symphony in 1942 was revered as a symbol of Soviet resistance. Yet, he lived much of his life in terror under Stalinist scrutiny. In 1941, at a ravine near Babyn Yar, on the edge of Kiev, a horrifying Nazi massacre of 30,000 Jews multiplied over the years, filling the site with the slaughter of many more tens of thousands of Nazi victims and opponents. Stalin and his successors grotesquely covered up, literally and figuratively, this massacre, which did not fit the Stalinist narrative. In 1961, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a young Russian writer, wrote a poem with the opening lines "Over Babi Yar, there is no monument." For different reasons, both the Stalinists and the Nazis had conspired to hide the truth. Shostakovich set the opening movement of his 13th symphony to Yevtushenko's plea to remember. There was now a monument. In her poem *Music*, Anna Akhmatova writes: "Only music speaks to me, when others turn away their eyes".

Eichler suggests that, to reach across the chasm of history, "music indeed possesses a special relationship to memory. Through a performer's rendering of notes set down on a page decades or centuries ago, we listen to moments of lost time, summoning from the ether glimmers of what another era has written, heard, dreamed, hoped, and mourned. The music may also recall visions of a more fair and just world that remain no less vital today for having not yet come to pass."

Tony Graham

TIME'S ECHO: THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE HOLOCAUST, AND THE MUSIC OF REMEMBRANCE

Jeremy Eichler
Faber & Faber,
£10.99



A RESPONSE IN WRITING

THE MESSAGE

Ta-Nehisi Coates
Hamish
Hamilton,
£18.99

Ta-Nehisi Coates shot to fame for "The Case for Reparations", an article he wrote in 2014. In it he argued for reparations to be made to Black people in the USA because of structural inequalities arising from the legacies of racialised slavery. But Coates was criticised for using West Germany's post-Holocaust reparations to Israel to bolster his argument. His critics were not opposed to reparations being paid to individual Holocaust survivors. Rather, their point was that the reparations were paid to a state that was itself built on colonial appropriation of Palestinian land and the expulsion and attempted erasure of Palestinians and their culture.

The Message is in part Coates' attempt at his own individual reparation for the error he made in the article. "Within days of publishing 'The Case for Reparations,'" he writes, "I began to feel the mistake. But it took years for the depth of that mistake, and thus my own debt, to compound."

It was important to Coates in both these works that he listened to the words of living witnesses.

The climax of *The Message* comes when, following Coates' 10-day trip to the

West Bank and Israel in spring 2023, he travels to the home of Hassan Jaber, a 91-year-old survivor of the infamous massacre at Deir Yassin in April 1948, who now lives in a town outside Chicago. Jaber was 13 when Zionist militias came to his home and blindfolded and executed one of his brothers. "He told me that he was too young to fight, and when the battle seemed lost, he was charged with carrying his sisters, aged three and five, out of the village to safety."

In his attempt at reparation through writing *The Message*, Coates also refers to other kinds of messages, not necessarily from him. A crucial one he draws attention to, is the overall message of the state of Israel to the Palestinians within its borders, which is: "You'd really be better off somewhere else."

The book contains further messages from Coates himself. Importantly, from the opening word, the whole volume is addressed to Coates' "comrades" – younger writers he teaches at one of the USA's historically Black universities. His message to them concerns the power and responsibility of writers to contribute to revealing and dismantling oppression through their words. Coates sees a particular role for writers who have lived experience of the oppression they are undoing. Yet Palestinians were notably absent from the editorship and journalism of the mainstream

corporate magazines Coates worked for before writing the book, including *The Atlantic*. What with time became Coates' "genuine longing for Palestine" also made him appreciate Palestinians' "notions, ideas, dreams, ambitions". The book ends with the message that this needs to change. Palestinians should be heard, read and cited. Their stories are not, in the end, for him to tell, but "[demand] new messengers".

These specific passages and Coates' general message to his students about writing as a threat to the powerful made me think immediately of Israel's systematic murder of journalists across Palestine, as well as the complete erasure of schools and universities in Gaza since 7th October 2023. Such horrific genocidal practices add even more weight, if it were needed, to his point about the pre-eminent importance of reading and citing Palestinian writers in general, including those writing about Zionism and about Palestine.

For Jewish socialists who may be on a journey towards anti-Zionism it will be useful to read *The Message*. It is a courageous, honest and beautifully crafted account of a process of learning about the history of Zionism and its impact on Palestinians. Coates connects this story throughout with his own understanding of the Confederacy in the USA and its continuing importance today, both as a myth and a material influence.

The book is also grounded in an understanding of the role of British colonialism in the making of a Jewish supremacist state and, in particular, the closeness of the US to Israel. Visiting The City of David, just south of the Temple Mount in East Jerusalem, which he describes as a national myth-producing archaeological theme park, Coates notes that a plaque at the site bore the US flag and contained the following inscription: "The spiritual bedrock of our values as a nation comes from Jerusalem. It is upon these ideals that the American republic was founded and the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel was formed."

Coates' journey through and beyond *The Message* has a further use for Jewish socialists. This relates to our antifascist activism. Once written off by radicals as an apologist for neoliberalism, it was Coates, perhaps emboldened by having written a book that so effectively confronted the myths of Zionism, who took on liberals and centrists in the mainstream media following the murder of US far-right activist Charlie Kirk. Coates is definitely not an advocate of political assassination. But, in contrast to those such as Ezra Klein, who remained uncritical about Kirk's politics in the wake of his killing, Coates showed his effectiveness and commitment as an antifascist by publishing an article in *Vanity Fair* exposing some of Kirk's most hate-filled words to a wider audience. As with Coates' carefully crafted narration of the road he travelled to antizionism, there is much to learn from here.

Ben Rogaly

A THOROUGHLY MODERN MOVEMENT

For many years I have struggled to recommend a single-volume, popular book on antisemitism. Amidst a range of polemics, the best bet was Steven Beller's *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, published way back in 2007. Finally, we have a successor, albeit one that cites Beller's book as a model, the British-Jewish-born Columbia History Professor Mark Mazower's *On Antisemitism*. Mazower has previously discussed his grandfather, Max, a Bundist activist in Russia in the early 20th century. It certainly feels like some of that Bundism has influenced Mazower's book, a careful but effective deconstruction of Zionist understandings of antisemitism.

Mazower's most significant move is his choice of period. Some histories of antisemitism attempt to go back 2,000 years or even further, positing antisemitism as a timeless hatred that has remained constant over millennia. Mazower is having none of that. His work essentially begins with Wilhelm Marr's coining of the term in 1879, and the rise of antisemitic parties and movements in the years that followed.

Mazower connects it to a range of "anti-words" that emerged in the mid-19th century: anti-abolitionist (1854), anti-Slaveryist (1862), anti-Negro (1862), anti-Coolie (1869), and anti-Chinese (1872). Mazower posits anti-semitism (to use its original spelling) as a counter-emancipatory movement: seeking to reverse the recent moves to emancipate Jews in Europe and return them to their previous status as a tolerated-but-subjugated religious group. He dates this process to the French Revolution and the 1848 revolutions, which turned Jews into equal citizens, attracting a popular backlash in the process.

Not for Mazower the now commonplace view that antisemitism is a matter of stereotypes and tropes; rather, he frames it as a concrete political movement that began after German unification and had as its deadly climax the Holocaust some 60 years later. He notes that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, only in Karl Lueger's Vienna did antisemitic movements achieve parliamentary success, and it was Vienna where Adolf Hitler came of age and saw the political potency of antisemitism.

The First World War gave political antisemitism a new lease of life: on the Eastern Front the Tsarist army deported hundreds of thousands of Jews into the Russian interior, seeing them as a potential pro-German front; while in the West, the British and Americans believed that gaining the support of "international Jewry" could help them win the war. And once Germany had surrendered, the stab-in-the-back myth grew – the claim that surrender had been forced through by German liberals, democrats and communists, all of whom were

seen as under the control of Jews.

This latter claim formed the basis of Hitler's antisemitism – he saw Germany's territorial (and imperial) destruction at Versailles as due to "Judaean Bolshevism", and in the Nazi paranoid imagination, their antisemitic programme was a form of self-defence against Jewish control and subversion. While other fascist or conservative regimes at the time disliked and discriminated against Jews, it took the Nazis to try to expel them from society, and from the Reich itself. When, because of their early military success, the Nazis found themselves ruling over millions of Jews in Eastern Europe without anywhere they could easily expel them to, they moved from 1941 towards a programme of mass extermination.

Mazower does not discuss the Holocaust in detail, since libraries have already been written about it. He does, however, include a chapter on the aftermath of the war, where antisemitic attitudes persisted in much of Europe, where Jews returning to their homes were sometimes killed, and where Stalin's Russian nationalism became increasingly antisemitic. It is Stalin's death in 1953, rather than the end of the Second World War, that marks the end of the heyday of political antisemitism.

This history forms the first half of the book. It is ostensibly uncontroversial, although its choice to define antisemitism in this narrow historical way inevitably will be. Its precision makes it difficult to marshal for political causes, and it is this postwar politicisation that Mazower addresses in the equally compelling second half.

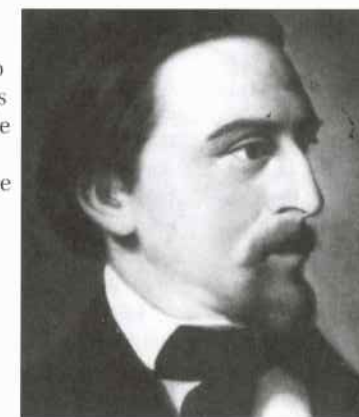
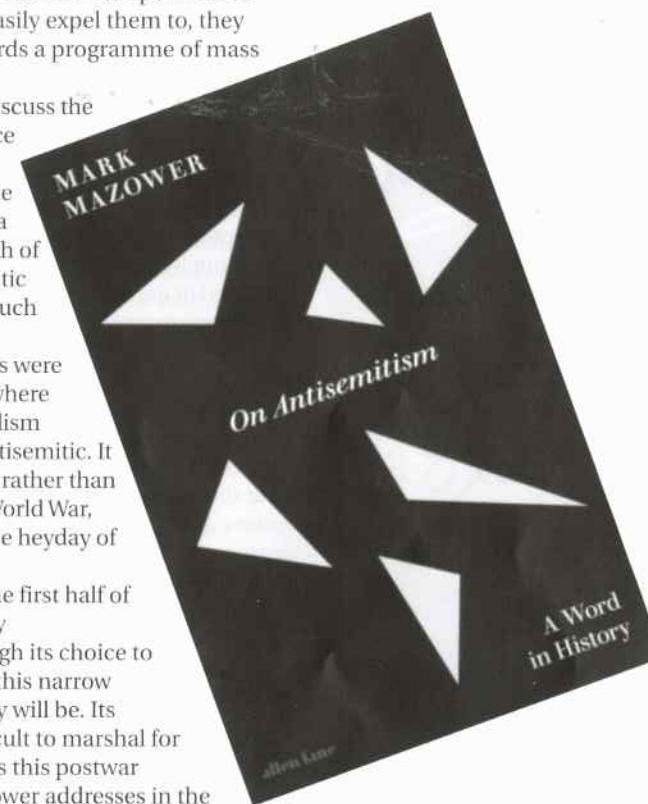
The central story Mazower narrates is how antisemitism went into terminal decline in the West after the war, becoming by the mid 1950s an increasingly fringe and ostracised pursuit. However, this transformation occurred in parallel with the establishment and existence of the State of Israel, a

state which gradually discovered the efficacy of painting antisemitism as an ongoing threat to its survival. Every adversary was depicted as a new Hitler, every terrorist attack a new pogrom, every criticism of state policy a new blood libel. From seeing antisemitism as a thing of the past in the early years of statehood, Zionist and Israeli leaders came to see it as the primary reason for international opposition and criticism.

The turning point was the 1967 war, when Israel quickly became

ON ANTISEMITISM: A WORD IN HISTORY

Mark Mazower
Allen Lane, £25



Left: Wilhelm Marr, who coined the term antisemitism

viewed as an imperial power, leading the Anti-Defamation League to coin the concept of the "New Antisemitism" in a 1974 book. Mazower carefully narrates the intellectual shifts since then, drawing heavily on Antony Lerman's detailed account. Mazower brings the book up to date with a discussion of campus battles at Columbia since October 2023, which seems to have been a motivation for writing the book. He is always fair, saying that he felt that the ostracisation of Israeli students that he witnessed was wrong, but not necessarily antisemitic, and that unfair treatment was being meted out in all directions. Calling contemporary debates on antisemitism a "hall of mirrors" he concludes by saying that "a term that

began as a way to describe the hostility faced by Jews as a minority struggling for their legal rights is now used to defend a Jewish majority state depriving the minority within it of theirs".

There are gripes if one seeks them: the focus on the US in Part 2 doesn't leave much room for discussions of antisemitism elsewhere since the 1970s, and, given the author's background, the lack of discussion of postwar Britain is disappointing. But this is to nitpick. Mazower has done those of us who take critical and non-Zionist approaches to antisemitism a great service, creating a well-written and clear guide to one of the most confusing and contested subjects of our time.

Joseph Finlay

DUTY, GUILT AND MORALITY

SMALL BOAT

Vincent
Delecroix
Translated by
Helen
Stevenson
Hoperoad
Publishing,
£12.99

The term "small boats" has come to mean everything the right does not like about foreigners, particularly poor foreigners. So not a lot has changed substantially since our Aliens Act of 1905, which was designed to deter "undesirable immigrants" – and we all know who *they* were. Although this author is French and tells the story through a French lens, the issues are not strange to those of us in the UK.

Vincent Delecroix takes as his starting point a real event: in November 2021 an inflatable dinghy carrying migrants capsized in the English Channel near the boundary between French and British waters. It was one of several boats attempting the crossing that night, and not the only one that needed help. Of the 29 people on board, mainly Iraqi Kurds, Afghans and Ethiopians, 27 died in the freezing sea. *Small Boat*, part fact and part fiction, imagines the migrants' final hours and relates from transcripts the French coastguard operator's negligent and callous response. Through the operator's fictional internal

monologue and her interview with the police investigator, Delecroix explores many issues of personal and community responsibility, and constructs a layered dialogue about blame, moral agency and the limits of duty. It's a painful read, but an important one.

Much of the book is taken up with the imagined police interview, in which the operator tries in myriad ways to evade responsibility, some convincing, others much less so. Her responses seem shockingly crass, yet via this device the author is exploring diverse issues of ethics, maritime law, living with guilt, the grey area of legal and moral responsibility, the place and meaning of compassion, and what happens when a person is pushed beyond their psychological and emotional capacity. Perhaps most importantly, the author opens up questions of wider responsibility, asking

about the political systems that force people to take such terrible risks with their lives, and about the complicity of all of us. The operator declares in despair: "These people were sunk long before they sank." And as Jeremy Harding sums up in his introduction: "Standing at the sea's edge she looks behind her at a vast hinterland in which one obstacle after another conspires against the lives of people who have covered great distances to take the final gamble."

It was disturbing to find myself warming to this angry and despairing woman, who apparently did not care that night, and who could probably have saved the lives of 27 people – but it happened. We learn that her defensiveness is a psychological trick she plays with herself so as to distance herself from the terror and tragedy that she witnesses in the course of her work, and about her poor working conditions in which she seems to have no support for the stress and inhuman toll of the job she does. We learn of her scarcely coping with being a single parent with a night job, and the contradictory pulls of the cultures she lives amongst: of hostility to migrants on the one hand and the glorification of saving lives at sea on the other.

Finally, we learn of her torment as she imagines those drowning. It becomes clearer and clearer that she is moving in and out of a sense of reality; that images of the sea and its victims are swimming in and out of her consciousness and clouding her perceptions. In her cup of coffee she sees little dinghies bobbing about but actually they are biscuit crumbs; across the desk in the interrogator's office, she sees out of the window construction workers wading in water. In a moving passage she describes the sea as a Leviathan that consumes migrants: "Every night we feed that gaping maw, and stuff into it little pieces we've scraped off the edges of the coast, spoonfuls of twenty, thirty poor people – men, women and children – and the monstrous maw gulps it all down, foaming at its mouth."

I found this a courageous and heartbreaking book, asking fundamental questions about what makes us human.

Charlotte Prager Williams

OFF THE SHELF



Marilyn Garson has had an unusual life. She grew up in Canada, in a strongly Zionist family. After University she went to work for aid organisations in Cambodia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, then moved to Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the 1980s before spending several years as an aid worker in Gaza. Long before the current genocide, she realised that the Zionist ideology of her youth was full of lies and omissions: Gaza was, in the words of the then UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, a "prison camp". She decided to unlearn her Zionism. She also decided to reclaim her religion, Judaism, studying the Torah and Jewish ritual.

Returning to the town of Hokianga in Aotearoa, Marilyn was ignored, criticised and ostracised by the small local Jewish community for trying to blend her anti-Zionism with Jewish observance. Her book, *Jewish not Zionist* (Circaidy Gregory Press, £11.40) describes the bitter attacks against her and tries (mostly unsuccessfully) to understand them. She was, and apparently still is, "mystified" by the abuse she has received from individual Jews and from local and national Jewish organisations. She is clearly a very determined and principled woman. Together with a Jewish friend, she formed a branch of Alternative Jewish Voices in Hokianga, and then joined Global Jews for Palestine, an alliance of 25 Jewish groups in 19 countries that are part of an international Jewish movement for Palestinian rights.

Did she persuade anyone to change their mind about Israel? It isn't clear. It's a problem that many Jews around the world who support Palestinian rights are wrestling with. Marilyn seems to have done what Christians would call "bearing witness" and hoping that at least some Jews will listen to her. There are no magic solutions here.

Rachel Shabi's book *Off White: The truth about antisemitism* (OneWorld Publications, £10.99) says some good things, but I hesitate to recommend it to readers of *Jewish Socialist*. The rather pretentious subtitle is unnecessary; in fact, it is misleading, because Shabi's main point is that antisemitism is too complex to be reduced to one single truth. I also react badly to vague claims about "the left", like this one: "all too often, the left has forgotten to apply to antisemitism the frames of analysis readily available within our movements". That may sound profound, yet in fact it isn't. Nor do I like the authorial "we" that is supposed to include readers, as when she writes: "In different ways, and to varying degrees, we are all bad at talking about or understanding antisemitism."

Shabi fills the book with many personal stories, which often distract from her main argument. To pick one example from many, her chapter about the demonisation of Jeremy Corbyn is not bad, but it starts like this: "One summer evening in 2019 as I loitered in the kitchen of a house party in London, the subject of anti-Jewish racism came up." Shabi is perfectly entitled to go to house parties in London, but why tell us about it? A serious discussion of left-wing issues needs to do better than this.

So what is this truth about antisemitism, and what can we do about it? The opening chapters deal with a supposedly tricky dilemma facing Jews – are we white or not? Do we tick "White British" on

surveys of our ethnicity if there's no "White other" available?

Probably many Roma people face a similar problem and hesitate to choose any type of "White" because in Eastern Europe many Roma have darker skins than, say, ethnic Romanians. Shabi points out that for Jews like her, of Iraqi origin, the answer is even less clear. Some Mizrahi Jews have darker faces than Ashkenazi Jews. When skin colour is used to classify (usually "other") groups of people, Jews and Roma can be hard to fit in.

I'll try to sum up Shabi's "truth" like this: despite the many bad faith accusations of antisemitism in Western countries, and notwithstanding the knee-jerk claims of antisemitism that successive Israeli governments (and Starmer's Labour Party) have aimed at their critics, and even though the international far right thrives on conspiracy theories which blame many of society's ills on Jews, and acknowledging that the most fanatical Christian supporters of Israel are whack jobs, anti-Jewish oppression is bad and a real issue, one that "the left" needs to take seriously.

To be fair, Shabi criticises the IHRA Working "Definition" of antisemitism quite well, analyses the anti-Corbyn smears robustly and applauds attempts by Jews and Muslims to work together. Her heart is clearly in the right place. I couldn't, however, find any concrete suggestions in the book about how to take antisemitism more seriously. There is no mention of the Jewish Socialists' Group or Jewish Voice for Liberation, two organisations that have spoken out against antisemitism on the left for many years. The author could have written a useful book, but sadly this isn't it.

Moving quickly on, Tony Kushner's book *The Jewish Pedlar: An untold criminal history* (Manchester University Press, £25) starts with the sad story of a Jewish pedlar turned smuggler, Jacob Harris, who was hanged in 1734 for the murder of three people. The murders and the execution took place in Ditchling, near Brighton. Kushner uses the story as the starting point for an examination of pedlars and criminality in Jewish history, mostly in Britain but also in other countries.

It's a messy story, with many twists and turns, and one which historians have tended to ignore because it does no credit to a Jewish community trying to move into the comfortable middle class. The book prompted two questions in my mind. Firstly, who supplied the pedlars? There must have been many merchants who did very nicely thank you by equipping door-to-door salesmen. Secondly, Roma people, another marginalised group, have often been pedlars.

I have a theory that many gentiles at some level regard Jews as (if you'll pardon the expression) up-market Gypsies – better educated and more middle class, but not quite belonging. I'll leave you with that rather disturbing thought.

Raf Salkie gives
a critical
round-up of
recent books

