



UJPO News



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**75th
Anniversary
Year**

The United Jewish People's Order is a national, nonpartisan, socialist-oriented, secular organization, serving Canada's progressive Jews in individual organizations since 1926 and collectively as the UJPO since 1945.

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Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

The Steal of the Century!

The United Jewish People's Order - Canada, is appalled by the Deal of the Century as unveiled by President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu on January 28, 2020.

Our Aims and Purposes document on this issue states we "...support negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, with a view to ensuring equality, peace, justice, security and prosperity for both peoples. We campaign for an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the siege of Gaza."

The so called "deal" defies and breaches international law in a multitude of areas. At no time were the Palestinians consulted regarding the resolution of the numerous issues of contention. The so-called "deal" incorporates, or steals, the majority of the West Bank into Israel. It will deny the Palestinians, whom the Israelis call "Arab Israelis", any Israeli citizenship rights at all!

It is our firm belief that to ensure a future of justice, equality and dignity for all, the parties (Israelis and Palestinians) through direct negotiations can best fashion a mutually beneficial resolution for a peaceful and prosperous future.

The National Board, United Jewish People's Order – Canada ♦

Using Humour to Fight the Right

Summary of talk delivered by Andrew and Harriet Lyons at UJPO Toronto, January 24, 2020

There is no doubt that political jokes abound, and that many enjoy such humour. Are such jokes a useful means of resistance? Many assume they are. But there are cautionary voices, like the ironic remark quoted in an obituary for the British comedian Peter Cook, who said in an interview that he had founded a satirical club, the Establishment, modelled on Berlin cabarets of the 1930s, "which did so much to prevent the rise of Adolf Hitler." Our talk examined political jokes from a number of settings, to ask the question of whether humor is a useful tool of resistance. A lot, of course, depends on the context in which a joke is told – who is telling what to whom, where and when. Context may determine whether a joke is effective, ineffective or downright offensive.

The talk began with the showing of a video clip from Charlie Chaplin's film "The Great Dictator", in which the Chaplin/Hitler character greets a Mussolini-like visiting dictator at a train station: <https://youtu.be/VXQv-6CXf1g>

The clip shows a train frenetically backing up and going forward, while officials run to and fro to try and align themselves with the compartment. The visitor refuses to alight till a carpet is laid out. It also features several silly versions of the Nazi salute, which is itself a feature in humour about the Nazi era to this day.

We also showed clips satirizing the salute from Jojo Rabbit, The Producers, and a Monty Python sketch.: <https://youtu.be/mFmQJBqQCC0>, <https://youtu.be/FSTiaO0gifA>, <https://youtu.be/hWiyVRNAXcG>, https://youtu.be/wvM_JpqViBA



<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Great-Dictator>

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NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

FROM WINNIPEG

By Ellen Karlinsky, Acting Chair, UJPO Winnipeg

The North End Jewish Folk Choir is working on selections for the annual Warsaw ghetto memorial coming up in April. The theme will be “remembering Auschwitz”. Details are still being worked out. The choir continues to perform to very appreciative audiences at retirement residences and personal care homes in Winnipeg. As always the choir would love new members, in particular male voices! Dora Rosenbaum is our hard-working choir organizer.

The choir lost a treasured member in January when Loa Henry passed away. Loa always found opportunities to champion women and during her time in the choir she put together a book of music and stories of brave women in the resistance. This beautiful book is now part of Loa’s legacy.

Our annual Shmoozefest took place in the fall. It is UJPO’s annual kick-off event where we chat and network with both new and old friends. Part of the afternoon was a special presentation given by a local social justice activist and member of UJPO, David Kattenburg. David shared his experiences and answered questions concerning the five weeks he spent in Palestine in May-July 2019.

UJPO sponsored another lecture series this winter, led by Dr. Itay Zurta, the I. L. Peretz Folk School Yiddish Teaching Fellow from the University of Manitoba. It was well attended and the participants found the talks very stimulating.

The first lecture was entitled “The Return of Jews in Contemporary Poland. Going Beyond Auschwitz”. The following lecture was called “We are Polish Jews: how Polish is Yiddish?” The last lecturer focused on the topic “Non-Jewish Jews – Jewishness Without Borders”.

Our board has undergone a great deal of change in the past year and we are undertaking a process of renewal. One of our members has initiated a strategic planning process and this group is meeting monthly until June when final recommendations will be made to the board. We are planning a program for the spring that will focus on the rise of hate.

We are also making more connections with other progressive groups in Winnipeg. This March we will be co-sponsoring an event called Holocaust to Resistance. This book was written by author and activist Suzanne Berliner Weiss, a UJPO Toronto member. A discussion with Ms. Weiss will follow the book launch.

UJPO will be present at the protest against Trump’s “Deal of the Century” taking place at the Human Rights Museum on February 9.

Several folks have retired from the UJPO board this year and they deserve our recognition and thanks for their hard work and meaningful contributions. We hope they will return to the board at some point in the future. Thank you- go out to:

Harriet Zaidman, our long time secretary,
Henry Shorr , past chairperson
and valued board members Cindy Coker and Ralph Samphir.

2019 was a difficult year for UJPO in Winnipeg. We lost a valued member of our community. The death of Sherman Kreiner on July 1, 2019 was deeply felt across Winnipeg and beyond. Sherman was a long serving UJPO board member and a key contributor to the Secular Jewish Community. Sherman’s voice was always valued, whether at the board table or in the men’s section of the North End Jewish Folk Choir. Sherman was a visionary and a leader and his intelligent analysis and strongly held progressive values had a huge impact on our community. We will miss Sherman so much and our hearts are with his wife Cindy Coker and family. A celebration of Sherman’s life will be held on June 14 at Fort Whyte Nature Centre in Winnipeg.

The UJPO Book Club

Submitted by Roberta Hechter

UJPO has a vibrant book club consisting of from 9 to 14 participants, who meet every 6-10 weeks. People take turns hosting and we gather for a meal, schmooze, sit together over dinner, and discuss the evening’s book. There is always spirited discussion, both about the book and about other topics and tangents that arise. We have read about and discussed Marxism, Neo-Liberalism, current U.S. and world politics, climate change, indigenous history of Winnipeg, Zionism, Judaism, Israel, and human history. There is no better way to get to know people and develop friendships than to share a meal together and have meaningful discussions about the books we read.

Over the past few years we have read:

- “A Marxist History of Capitalism” by Henry Heller, an UJPO member and book club participant. It was wonderful to have the author amongst us to stimulate thoughts and clarify questions.
- “White Trash – The 400 Year Untold History of Class in America” by Nancy Isenberg
- “Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- “This Changes Everything” by Naomi Klein
- “Liberalism: A Counter-History” by Domenico Losurdo

- “Sapiens” by Yuval Noah Harari
- “Stolen City – Radical Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg” by Owen Toews
- “The End of the Myth” by Greg Grandin
- “A Horse Walks Into a Bar” by David Grossman

We are looking forward to our next book club at which we will discuss “Reclaiming Judaism from Zionism – Stories of Personal Transformation” edited by Carolyn L. Karcher. ♦

Upholding the Legacy of Joseph Zuken: Roz Usiskin – Citizen Activist

By the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

In 2017, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba (CCPA-MB) assumed responsibility for the Joseph Zuken Citizen Activist Award, which was established in 1987.

Joe Zuken was a legend in Winnipeg’s North End. He was a lawyer and politician. He served for 42 consecutive years as a School Trustee and Winnipeg City Councillor. His was a voice for the poor and the working class.

He represented many citizens stripped of their civil liberties and interned without trial by the War Measures Act during the Second World War. He lobbied for welfare rights and provided legal services for free for many who could not afford to pay.

He lobbied successfully as a School Trustee for free text books for all children and for the creation of Kindergarten. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Seven Oaks General Hospital to serve the citizens of the North End.

Upon his death in 1986 a group of citizens came together to establish the Joseph Zuken Memorial Association and the Zuken Trust Fund, which over the years has supported a wide array of community endeavors including Rossbrook House and Neechi Foods to name but two organizations. The fund is now managed by the Winnipeg Foundation.

The Association established the Joseph Zuken Citizen Activist Award to be presented to individuals or groups that have made contributions to the community and the city, particularly in the areas of education, social justice policy and law, municipal government, the arts and the Yiddish language.

Past winners have included Dorothy Betz, Carl Ridd, Mount Carmel Clinic and Olga Foltz.

On December 11th, 2019 at the annual State of the Inner City Report meeting, the Joe Zuken Citizen Activist



Roz Usiskin with (from left) Mel Myers, Jim Silver, Paul Moist
Award was presented to a lifelong North End activist, Roz Usiskin.

Roz has been a lifelong resident of the North End. She graduated from the Yiddish parochial secular school, the I.L. Peretz Folk School and from St. John’s High School, known for its progressive approaches to education. These institutions had major influences on her formative years. At the I.L. Peretz Folk School, she developed her love for the Yiddish language, the literature and history of the Jewish people. She has for decades been an activist on human rights, peace and social justice.

Roz has served as President of the United Jewish People’s Order and as Executive Director of the Manitoba Multicultural Resource Centre. She has also served as the President of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Canada. Roz was a founding member of the Joseph Zuken Memorial Association.

She has authored numerous articles and two books on Jewish Radicalism in Winnipeg. Roz has used her scholarship to preserve the Yiddish language and culture including publishing a book based on Yiddish letters from her own family.

She was a Gold Medal student in Sociology at the University of Winnipeg. Her Master’s Thesis on Jewish radicalism in Winnipeg between 1905 – 1920 has become a classic resource base for anyone interested in our city’s secular left Jewish community.

Roz’s lifetime of activism has been devoted to preservation of the rich working class culture of the North End of Winnipeg.

She spoke with humility and passion in receiving the Citizen Activist Award. Below are some of her remarks.

Joe Zuken was instrumental in the founding of the United Jewish People’s Order, a secular, socialist, national organization that embodied his ideals, his values of

working with others to create a more just, humane society in Canada. Today, as we face a dangerous, toxic political climate, with many political leaders found wanting, less than honest, less trustworthy, we look to Joe Zuken as the example, as the model of what a political leader ought to be. His integrity, his moral courage, his wisdom and leadership should be our guideposts. Joe Zuken remains as our moral compass.

CCPA-Manitoba is proud to be associated with the legacy of Joe Zuken and the progressive ideals and social justice principles that he stood for. ♦

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

FROM TORONTO

By Rachel Epstein

The year started off with catastrophic fires in Australia, warmongering from the American head of state, a spate of antisemitic attacks and tensions over the pending RCMP invasion of the Wet'suwet'en nation who now face armed police as they stand to protect their traditional territories from the destruction of pipelines.

Given this state of affairs, we were in much need of some good laughs on January 24 when our members Harriet and Andy Lyons presented at our first Alt Shabbes of the year. Their theme: Using Humour to Fight the Right. We had some good chuckles due to the video clips they screened, and some interesting conversation about the risks and benefits of using humour in the context of the extreme right.

In other news, the Morris Winchevsky Shule and the Adult B'nai Mitzvah are both running smoothly. Camp Naivelt is gearing up for the Midwinter Mingle on February 29, which will include a special all-ages art activity planned by the Indigenous Solidarity Working Group. The event will also, of course, include schmoozing, swimming and noshing.

March will feature another Alternative Shabbes, this time with the wonderful Suzanne Weiss, author of "Holocaust to Resistance: My Journey". Suzanne, who is an UJPO member, will speak about Jewish resistance and survival under Nazi occupation with a focus, in honour of International Women's Day, on the role of Jewish woman in the resistance and on some "lessons for today".

Plans are already underway for our annual Third Seyder, which will take place on Saturday, April 18. This year's theme is the climate crisis and climate activism. If you know of examples of inspiring climate activism or you have suggestions for songs related to the theme, please send them along!

May's Alternative Shabbes will be a launch for Paul Weinberg's new book, "When Poverty Mattered: Then and Now" – a history of radical politics in 1960s Canada and an illustration of some of the dirty tricks orchestrated by the Canadian government to disrupt activist organizations.

In June, in collaboration with our friends at the Noor Cultural Centre, we are putting together a panel discussion about the legal, philosophical and political questions raised by free speech/hate speech debates. Details to follow.

And, of course, our regular programs Red Yiddish and Zing! Zing! Zing! have started up again and will run regularly through the year.

Here's a list of all upcoming events:

- Wednesday February 26: Zing! Zing! Zing! @ Free Times Café
- Sunday March 1: MWS/UJPO Purim Party @ 918 Bathurst Street
- Friday March 13: Suzanne Weiss Book Event – "From Holocaust to Resistance: My Journey" – in honour of International Women's Day. Location TBD
- Saturday April 18: Third Seyder: Climate Crisis: What is Enough? Vos iz Dayenu? Sala Caboto, Columbus Centre
- Friday May 15: Paul Weinberg Book Event – "When Poverty Mattered: Then and Now". Location TBD
- Mid-June: Free speech/Hate Speech Controversies: Critical Perspectives, co-sponsored with Noor Cultural Centre. Date and location TBD

Regular programming:

- Red (Speak) Yiddish, bi-weekly on Mondays, downtown location
- Zing! Zing! Zing! Last Wednesday of the month at Free Times Café ♦

Grief, Anger, Solidarity: UJPO Response to Recent Antisemitic Attacks

January 8, 2020

The United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) joins with others in expressing our grief and anger at the recent antisemitic attacks on orthodox Jews in New York and New Jersey, as well as the defacing of a Jewish children's camp on Gabriola Island, B.C. This rise of blatant and violent attacks on Jewish people and organizations is a cruel reminder that Jews continue to be targets of hate.

While antisemitism is of course not new, it is being encouraged and allowed to flourish by the Trump administration in the United States as well as right-wing politicians here in Canada – who are actively stoking division between our communities, and normalizing the open expression of racist, antisemitic, misogynistic,

Islamophobic, homophobic and transphobic views and actions.

Our response is to join in solidarity with others who are the targets of hate. Rabbi Michael Adam Latz and Carin Mrotz remind us that “when we are attacked in our most vulnerable place, we often reflexively respond from where we perceive our power. When white Jews experience antisemitism, one impulse might be to respond from our whiteness, to lean into racism. We must resist those impulses.”

We also resist the manipulative misuse of the term “antisemitism” to silence criticism of the policies and actions of the State of Israel. The equation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism has become a brilliant and powerful device to silence the growing number of Jewish, and other, voices that are demanding justice for Palestinians in the face of a brutal occupation. To assume that criticism of the State of Israel is “antisemitic” is not only misleading, it is a painful disrespecting of Jewish history, of the Holocaust, and of the ways that Jews have suffered through time.

Antisemitism is real and is on the rise. We ask others to stand up for us, and we pledge our solidarity with all those who are targets of the current upsurge of hate. Our strength lies in our numbers and in our commitment to each other. ♦

FROM HAMILTON

By Lyn Center

We met in early December to talk about Paul Weinberg’s fascinating new book called “When Poverty Mattered: Then and Now”. The theme is the RCMP surveillance of the Praxis Corporation in the 1970s.

To celebrate Chanukah we gathered at the home of Joyce Wayne and her husband Sandy in Oakville, where we had a lovely lunch and lots of conversations.

Our next “schmooze and nosh” was on February 2, where we talked about a disturbing subject – the current growth of antisemitism around the world. Unfortunately the weather and illness prevented some from coming, but those of us who met discussed the issues with much concern and passion. And I ask, what can we do? ♦

HONOURABLE MENTSHN

Tribute to Joshua Gershman

By Ester Reiter

On December 15th, 2019, a group of UJPO and former UJPO members gathered in the home of Ester Reiter to pay tribute to a prominent member of the Jewish left, Joshua Gershman, who had edited the Yiddish left newspapers for

over forty years. We placed a plaque in our cemetery in Toronto to honour him. We invited people who knew him and what he meant to our organization to talk about who he was.

Joshua Gershman, (called Gershie by some, Joe by others) was born in 1903 in Sokolov in the Ukraine. He came to Winnipeg Canada in 1921, to look for his father who unfortunately had just died, but Gershman soon began a lifetime of activism. He became a fur dresser and dyer, and in 1923 was a founding member of the National Jewish Committee of the Communist Party and joined our precursor organization in Winnipeg. In 1929, Gershman became a union organizer for the International Union of Needle Trade Workers. An article originally published in *Labour/le Travail* called “Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman” gives a wonderful picture not just of the man, but through his recollections a history of the Jewish left in Canada. (It’s easy to find on-line.) An autodidact, or self-taught scholar, Gershman became editor of the Yiddish left newspaper *Der Kampf* in 1936, which he continued to edit for over 40 years. It was renamed *Der Veg* in 1939, and then became the *Vokhnblat*, which ceased publication in 1978 when it morphed into the *Canadian Jewish Outlook* magazine. A fervent Yiddishist and a *farbrenter* (committed) Communist, the years after 1956 were difficult for him. That’s when we learned of Stalin’s murder of the Jewish poets and intellectuals. He remained a member of the party, because he felt that if he was to try to change how the party operated he had to be on the inside. An intellectual, it was very hard as his eyesight began to fail and he could no longer see to read.

Karen Levine (documentary editor of CBC Radio 1’s “The Sunday Edition”) had a close relationship with Gershman. As a young woman of twenty she had the herculean job of organizing and gathering the voluminous writing, correspondence, articles and photos of Gershman for the Ontario Archives. In the process, they grew very fond of each other. She became something like the daughter he never had. Karen came to our gathering and donated the following lovely article she had written when she was visiting the dying Gershman in the hospital in 1988:

She tries to tiptoe into his hospital room to set up her tape recorder, hoping for one last interview but trying not to disturb the sleeping man. He is lying in bed, wrapped in a blue housecoat, with the classical music blaring.

“Hello...hello?”

“Hi Gershman”

“What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean what am I doing here. How are you?”

“What..What.. Why do you come into a room without announcing yourself?” he asked

I tried to calm him.. “You were sleeping. I didn’t want to wake you up.”

“I wasn’t sleeping”: he said forever ready to contradict. “He then eventually softens. “Its all right dear” and gives her a slobbery kiss on the cheek. “Sit down.”

Karen is trying to make sure the tape machine is working. “SIT DOWN” he bellows.

They both knew he was near the end as Gershman had decided to decline both surgery and chemotherapy for the terminal cancer in his kidney.

He tells her:

“I do not regret a single thing I have done in my life as far as the movement is concerned. There is no such thing in the Communist movement as resignations. In the Communist movement you are either in or out. I withdrew my membership because if I resigned, I would have to resign from the ideology and I do not resign from the socialist ideology. On the contrary.

“Do you have one last thing you want to tell me, Gershman?”

“I just want you to remember me. I want you to understand me. And I want you to know that my attitude towards you is not only respect, but a real genuine love that I’ve experienced since I’ve known you, because you are a lovely person, though with a lot of shortcomings. I want you to know that.

“I remain a Communist as I was originally from the first day of the October Revolution. And at the same time, I’ve learned... and I wish I could learn more about the terrible mistakes the international Communist movement made. And now I’m restless and worried about whether we will succeed.

“I want you to know that, in spite of the turmoil that is taking place in the world... the future of the world does not belong to capitalism. The future of the world belongs to the people. The people means labour. Labour means not one party in every country...it means pluralism. It means honesty. It means trying to interpret Marxist science for a new world system.

“If you’ll remember this, I’ll be more than happy and I’ll consider my knowing you as an achievement in my life. Okay, dear?”

He gave Karen his old Yiddish typewriter which he had pounded away on for so many years and the old metal sign of the Vochenblatt hanging on the door of his office, which now sits in a prominent place in her living room. ♦

WHAT’S IN ORDER

A special Mazl Tov to:

Darrel Hotz on his new liver – wishing you a speedy recovery, and keeping you in our hearts.

Speedy recovery to:

Zohar Jaeger-Segal, Sadie Epstein-Fine, David Abramowitz.

Heartfelt condolences to:

Henry Lowi on the death of his mother Dr. Rebekah Naomi Paltiel Lowi at age 94.

Mary Castel, Evan, Camille and Louis, on the passing of Mary’s mother. ♦

GETTING TO KNOW OUR UJPO MEMBERS

Interview with Anton Guz

Interviewed by Sam Blatt, December 19, 2019

Since when have you been a member of UJPO (Toronto)?

I became a member in March 2018, and I first got involved in December 2017.

What brought you to UJPO?

I was really interested in UJPO as a Yiddishist, inter-generational and lefty organization. The event that sold me was the first Intergenerational Dialogue, where I got to sit and have short discussions with Jewish activists decades older than me for the first time in my life. After that event I walked up to Rachel Epstein, whom I’d never met, and asked her if she needed any help. That’s how I ended up working as an intern at the Winchevsky Centre for 6 months.

As an immigrant from Kiev, I feel a lot of kinship with how UJPO works and how its leadership thinks. I feel like the people who founded and who have sustained it must have been similar to me and to my family – we’re from opposite ends of the Soviet Union, and sometimes that doesn’t feel like such a huge gap at UJPO, unlike elsewhere in Jewish Toronto. And I greatly appreciate the solid politics, both now and historically.

In which boards and/or committees are you active?

I’m on the Toronto board (vice-chair, if you want to indulge my self-importance) and on the building committee. I’m also taking the new Adult B’Nai Mitzvah class and I’m sometimes at Red Yiddish.



Anton Guz and their grandmother, Iryna Trid. Anton shared the song "Mir veln zey iberlebn" ("We will outlive them")

What are some of the projects or activities your committee or board has been or is involved in?

At the board we plan events, take care of UJPO business and discuss the future of the organization. I've previously helped facilitate events at the Winchevsky Centre, such as a second Intergenerational Dialogue and a presentation on the political situation and conflict in Ukraine. Also, while working there I reorganized the bookshelves in the office – that book collection is my baby.

What is your life outside UJPO?

I'm primarily a full-time caregiver for my grandmother. I'm involved in anti-Occupation and anti-Zionist education and organizing online, in trans and disability activism, and in discussions and support groups for the post-Soviet diaspora, in Russian and English. *Ikh lern zikh Yiddish far a yor*/I've been studying Yiddish since March, including at the YIVO summer program in New York and while auditing a class at U of T. I play in and run Dungeons and Dragons games at a local game store, and I play video games.

Are you able to bring your non-UJPO activities and skills into a close relationship with your UJPO activities?

I think my ideals about the Ashkenazi community of the future are well represented by UJPO and I certainly try to bring them into my UJPO work. I studied Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at SIT Graduate Institute – a master's degree I might even someday finish – and I feel a lot of those skills are useful surprisingly often, especially around conflict analysis, workshop facilitation, dialogue and mediation.

Are other members of your family involved in or members of UJPO?

No – I brought my grandmother to an event but the language barrier makes it difficult for her.

Have there been any changes in UJPO since you joined, that you would like to mention?

I think more people of my generation – I'm 27 – are involved than a year and a half ago, which is very exciting!

Are there changes you would like to see over the coming years?

I want to see this organization grow into a large, well-known and widely accessible alternative to the meshugeneh mainstream Judaism I feel so alienated and disgusted by. I want people my age to know what I'm talking about when I tell them I'm involved with UJPO. I'm very happy to be building towards that future.

How do you see yourself contributing to the health of the organization?

I'm not quite sure yet! I hope being a young member who's trans, disabled and deeply connected to Ukraine and to Jewish community is healthy for UJPO. Time will tell.

Last and not least – recent book and/or movie and/or play you recommend!

Jojo Rabbit! It's almost impossible to explain in a coherent and attractive way but seriously, go see it. It's the first Holocaust movie I've seen to approach the topic in a healthy and legitimately funny way.

Anything you would like to add /comment/suggest...?

A zisn un freylekhn navem yor far ale! ♦

POETRY, SONGS & WRITINGS

Think of Others

By Mahmoud Darwish, from Almond Blossoms and Beyond. Translated from the original Arabic by Mohammed Shaheen. © Interlink Books, 2010.

Submitted by Harriet Lyons

As you prepare your breakfast, think of others
(do not forget the pigeon's food).

As you conduct your wars, think of others
(do not forget those who seek peace).

As you pay your water bill, think of others
(those who are nursed by clouds).

As you return home, to your home, think of others
(do not forget the people of the camps).

As you sleep and count the stars, think of others
(those who have nowhere to sleep).

As you liberate yourself in metaphor, think of others
(those who have lost the right to speak).

As you think of others far away, think of yourself
(say: "If only I were a candle in the dark").

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) was an award-winning Palestinian author and poet. His literature, particularly his poetry, created a sense of Palestinian identity and was used to resist the occupation of his homeland.

In “Think of Others”, the poet’s message is self-evident. Darwish repeats the same phrases, and urging us to not only be grateful for what we have, but also to help those who are less fortunate. The poems acts as a powerful plea from Darwish to “be the candle in the dark” and to help those are who in need; both near and far. ♦

Analysis by Lydia Marouf

<https://www.palestineadvocacyproject.org/poetry-campaign/think-of-others/>

Native Resistance: An Intergenerational Fight for Survival and Life

By Dr. LaNada War Jack, 2019, The Donning Company Publishers.

Reviewed by Deb O’Rourke

On November 20, 1969, eighty-nine Native American students convinced a few adventurous White boat owners to sneak them across the rough night-time waters of San Francisco Bay, and take over the notorious prison Island of Alcatraz. This event from the human rights breakthroughs of the 1960s stands in significance with the marches for Black Civil Rights and the Stonewall Riots. On the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, Dr. LaNada War Jack launched her book *Native Resistance: An Intergenerational Fight for Survival and Life*.

From her vantage as a veteran of the occupation as well as an academic and lifelong activist, the book is a first-person account of American Indigenous resistance leading up to, during and after the Alcatraz Occupation. Dr. War Jack, a member of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, writes that she was the first Native American to attend the University of California, Berkeley (p. 132). In her first year, she recruited other Native American students, and started a Native American Student Organization that joined with Chicano, Asian American and Black students in the successful Third World Liberation Front strike for ethnic studies departments. Mohawk Richard Oakes was doing similar organizing at San Francisco State University. According to War Jack, the two Native student groups at these universities were “almost inseparable.”

Native Americans had been trying to reclaim Alcatraz since the closing of the prison in 1964 had turned it into surplus federal property. The Treaty of Fort Laramie committed the government to return unused federal lands to them, so initial attempts were made by activists from the



Lakota tribe. In 1969, the students took it on. After several tries, Oakes, War Jack, Native students and their communities and families finally succeeded in securing Alcatraz on that historic night.

Why Alcatraz?

“The island was always a sacred site for the Native Ohlone people,” writes War Jack, “who were ruthlessly slaughtered, with only a few left to tell their stories.” She encapsulates its colonial history as a military prison since 1850, and as a place of internment for Native American resistors, such as nineteen Hopi fathers and leaders imprisoned for refusing to send their children to residential schools.

But the action was never just about Alcatraz. It was about creating an international furor to call attention to the genocidal American policies of termination and relocation. “The governmental efforts to deny us our heritage and to ‘assimilate us into the American mainstream’ backfired with the Alcatraz Takeover,” writes War Jack. Designed to end Indigenous land ownership, identity and culture, these policies had the unintended consequence of bringing people from different nations together in cities where they had been dumped by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). There, they began to support one another and strategize to solve their common problems. With the students of the Bay area as its backbone, the Alcatraz occupation was joined by activists from all over the continent, including a number of Canadians. Through the nineteen months that they held the island, the issues of Indigenous Americans made headlines across the world.

At the end of the school year in June of 1971, the government swooped in to remove the small, exhausted contingent that was then holding it, even as student occupiers were preparing a mass return to relieve them. “We were devastated,” War Jack recalled. But the end of the occupation didn’t mean defeat. At the fiftieth anniversary commemoration, pioneering Pawnee lawyer John Echo Hawk explained: “Beginning in the 1950s, the

policy of the federal government was to terminate our tribes and force assimilation of our people. That policy basically came to an end here in Alcatraz because of the advocacy that came from the Alcatraz occupation. The President in 1970, declared that this policy of assimilation and termination of Indian tribes was over and that the new policy was that of Indian self-determination and the recognition of Indian treaties and of the right of Indian people to continue to exist.”

Canada had its own termination policies, including the White Paper of 1969 that the high profile of the Alcatraz struggle helped Canadian Indigenous activists to quash. The new “Indigenous Rights Framework” proposed by the current Trudeau administration is similarly focused on terminating existing relationships without allowing self-determination. Like the Civil Rights Movement, the impact of Alcatraz may have marked an end of the worst, but in the colonial countries, the legal, bureaucratic and economic oppression grind on, and so does the resistance.

The story of the Alcatraz Occupation has been told a number of times, from the point of view of different participants. War Jack’s account is of an occupation driven by participatory leadership, primarily of communities of youth who, with great effort and many personal acts of courage and imagination, made headlines around the world. This is an extraordinary book, a personal and historical account by a scholar and activist well aware of her place in history. It’s a great read.

Dr. LaNada War Jack’s book can be ordered from <https://drwarjack.com/shop?olsPage=products%2Fnative-resistance>

The link below leads to an account of the Alcatraz 50th anniversary reunion: <https://www.manitoulin.ca/manitoulin-activist-revisits-historic-alcatraz/>

Canada’s Indigenous Rights framework is critiqued here: <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/rightsframework/> ♦

CANADA

Why Is Jagmeet Singh Ignoring Progressive Voices on Palestine?

By Sheryl Nestel, January 15, 2020, rabble.ca

It’s no secret that many members of the NDP think that Canada’s historically progressive party needs a makeover in its relationship to Israel and Palestine.

Nowhere was this clearer than at the party’s 2018 policy convention in Ottawa where the leadership blocked a massively supported resolution in favour of Palestinian rights from hitting the convention floor.

Remarks made recently by NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh signal another alarming backslide when it comes to standing up for human rights and international law in Israel and Palestine.



On December 18, Singh met with prominent members of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) to discuss “issues of interest to the Jewish community”. A podcast recording of the event was subsequently posted by CIJA on December 24. In the podcast, Singh makes a number of statements that reveal a disconcerting lack of understanding of the plight of the Palestinian people and an indifference to the need for substantive support for their cause. Indeed, much of what Singh articulates appears to be a reversal of earlier positions, articulated most recently during the October 2019 election campaign.

Why did Singh decide that appeasing Jewish establishment organizations was more important than heeding the NDP rank-and-file when it comes to Palestine? The overwhelming takeaway from the CIJA podcast is that Singh is intent on demonstrating the degree to which he identifies with Israel. The NDP leader’s aim, it seems, was to quell any concerns that CIJA and its supporters might have about the possibility of his extending solidarity to the Palestinians. You might call this the “Corbyn Effect”, in which progressive politicians scurry to disavow pro-Palestine politics in order to avoid being tarred with the brush of antisemitism that ultimately helped sink the leader of the British Labour party.

In the podcast, Singh takes the position that both Israelis and Palestinians are hurt by what he characterizes benignly as “the conflict”. He declares that there is a path to peace, but offers no details about what conditions might actually produce this. Indeed, there is nothing in Singh’s remarks that even vaguely recognizes the profound injustices that underlie the history and current policies of the Israeli state.

Singh does not mention the innumerable civil and human rights violations against Palestinians that have been documented by both Israeli and international human rights groups. He makes no mention of Israel’s illegal separation wall and settlements which he has seen with his own eyes, and fails to raise the issue of Israel’s imprisonment of Palestinian children. He avoids any discussion of the devastating effects of the blockade of Gaza and Israel’s

response to the nonviolent Great March of Return in which hundreds of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli snipers and thousands have been seriously wounded. Singh appears to attribute no significance to the fact that Palestinian citizens of Israel suffer institutional discrimination and second-class citizenship, and makes no mention whatsoever of the decades-long Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Closer to home, Singh implies that the responsibility for the violence at York University this past November lies with Palestinian solidarity activists, a claim that has been refuted by those who were present as well as by many who have viewed videos posted online by participants. In fact, it is the quasi-fascist Jewish Defense League that appears to be the source of the violent actions.

These omissions are difficult to understand, given that Singh is the leader of a largely progressive political party and one in which justice for Palestinians has been raised repeatedly. Indeed, his failure to put forward any of the issues mentioned can only be interpreted as tacit approval for Israel's policies and for the wave of suppression of free expression on the Palestine issue that is looming with the widespread adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism.

Singh's stated support for the IHRA definition of antisemitism is particularly troubling. He has previously stated that "in a free and democratic society, peaceful advocacy directed toward a government or its policies must never be silenced," but he seems unable to see the danger in adopting a policy which seeks to effectively shut down political speech critical of Israel. Despite substantive problems inherent in this redefinition of antisemitism (for a comprehensive critique, see www.noihra.ca), Singh touts it as a "guiding educational lens" that could prevent forms of antisemitism that may be hidden or cloaked.

There is, in fact, little of substance in the IHRA definition. While the short definition itself is largely benign, what renders it problematic is the inclusion of 11 examples of antisemitism, seven of which relate to criticism of Israel. Indeed, the IHRA definition has been turned into a weapon designed to suppress criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people.

Even the definition's author, Kenneth S. Stern, has denounced its misuse. In written testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives and in several articles, Stern argues that the IHRA definition of antisemitism poses a threat to the freedom of speech and academic freedom of those who are critical of Israel. Opposition to the implementation of the IHRA definition has been expressed by nearly 300 Canadian academics who have signed Independent Jewish Voices Canada's open letter

condemning this initiative. How then, we ask, could such a definition be deemed to be of educational value?

In fact, the IHRA definition has already been used in several cases to paint human rights activists as antisemites and to deny Palestine solidarity activists the use of public venues. Trump's recent executive order targeting Palestine solidarity activism and scholarship largely relies on the IHRA definition to determine which forms of speech will be labelled antisemitic.

In Singh's interview, he argues that those who are "single-mindedly obsessed" with criticizing one country, Israel, demonstrate a latent antisemitism. This is a straw man argument that is often aimed at the Palestine solidarity movement. This view ignores the fact that Jewish groups such as Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV) and Jewish Voice for Peace in the U.S. have been at the forefront of the international movement for Palestinian freedom. All of us involved in social justice work must pick and choose our battles, and for many activists, Jews and Palestinians in particular, the century-long conflict in Israel/Palestine is where, for obvious reasons, we choose to focus our efforts.

Singh's comments to CIJA are not in line with the opinions of NDP voters and, in particular, Jewish NDP voters. In an EKOS poll conducted by IJV and the United Jewish People's Order in 2018, we found that 65 per cent of Jewish NDP voters have negative views of the Israeli government. Moreover, while Singh states in the CIJA podcast that he opposes the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, the same poll showed that 62 per cent of Canadians consider BDS to be a reasonable tool for the achievement of human rights for Palestinians. In a poll published in 2017 by IJV and Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME), 84 per cent of NDP voters considered sanctions on Israel to be reasonable. We wonder what has changed, since Singh responded to a leadership candidate questionnaire circulated by CJPME and IJV in which he declared that he "would consider" the use of targeted sanctions against Israel in response to its human rights abuses.

Finally, in regards to the issue of the IHRA definition of antisemitism and its examples, the 2018 IJV and United Jewish People's Order EKOS poll showed that 72 per cent of Jewish NDP voters believe that accusations of antisemitism are often used to silence criticism of Israel. These discrepancies and reversals are both puzzling and disheartening, particularly in light of the escalation of Israeli aggression and the mounting evidence that Israel has accelerated seizures of Palestinian property in East Jerusalem and actually stands poised to annex the West Bank.

Despite its claims, CIJA in no way represents all Jews in Canada and certainly not in regard to Israel. A profound divide in the Jewish community over Israel's violent and inhumane policies towards the Palestinian people is becoming increasingly apparent in the Jewish diaspora. Those who identify as Jews and who oppose Israel's policies do so because they are committed to social justice for all. Many also do so because they cherish the tradition of justice that is the patrimony of Jews and do not wish to see it sullied in the name of a short-sighted and unscrupulous nationalism.

Jagmeet Singh needs to tell Canadian progressives why he has reversed position in regard to Palestine. Moreover, he needs to take his cues from NDP members and progressive Jewish organizations like IJV, IfNotNow, and others which support Palestinian freedom, not from CIJA, an organization which unerringly toes the Israeli hasbara line, and which will never be a friend of the NDP.

If it wants to preserve its own political and moral credibility, the NDP can no longer afford to dismiss the concerns of the majority of its members, Jews and non-Jews alike, when it comes to Palestine. ♦

Sheryl Nestel is a member of the national steering committee of Independent Jewish Voices Canada. She is an author and was senior sessional instructor in sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto from 2000-2012. She lived in Israel from 1973-1988.

<https://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/independent-jewish-voices-canada/2020/01/why-jagmeet-singh-ignoring-progressive>

USA

US House Passes Resolution Breaking with Trump on Israel Policy

Telesur, December 6, 2019

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a symbolic resolution on Friday backing a two-state solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, following initiatives from President Donald Trump heavily favoring the Jewish state.

The resolution, introduced by Democrat Alan Lowenthal in April aimed to express “sense of the House of Representatives that only a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can ensure Israel's survival as a secure Jewish and democratic state and fulfill the legitimate aspirations for a Palestinian state,” according to the bill.

It also reaffirms continued U.S. military aid to Israel, reported *Haaretz*.

The Democratic-led House voted 226 to 188, largely along party lines, for a non-binding resolution saying that only a two-state solution can both ensure Israel's survival as a Jewish state and fulfill the Palestinians' “legitimate aspirations” for their own state.

Four Democrats voted against the resolution: Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Alexandria Occasion-Cortez and Ayanna Presley. Five Republicans voted in favor.

Since he became president in January 2017, the Republican Trump has been condemned by Palestinian and some Arab states' leaders for reversing long-held U.S. policies to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, move the U.S. embassy to the city in 2018 and cut U.S. aid to Palestinians.

In March 2019, Trump recognized Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, captured from Syria in 1967. And last month, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington would no longer consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be illegal.

Such measures, which help strengthen support for Trump from his conservative evangelical Christian political base, have fueled questions about whether his administration will abandon the idea of a “two-state solution,” with an independent Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. ♦

https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/US-House-Passes-Resolution-Breaking-with-Trump-on-Israel-Policy-20191206-0004.html?utm_source=planisys&utm_medium=NewsletterIngles&utm_campaign=NewsletterIngles&utm_content=18

MIDDLE EAST

Why Jews Should Oppose the Trump/Bibi “Peace Plan”

By Sarah Levinthal Shartal

Beginning with full disclosure: I am an Israeli living abroad. Many of my family and friends live in Israel. I have opposed the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1972; when I was 17 I refused to serve as a soldier in the Gaza Strip. I have continued working for peace and justice between Israelis and Palestinians. I am also the child of a deeply Zionist American Jewish family. My great grandfather, who was the Chief Rabbi of Philadelphia, was one of the founders of the American Zionist movement and my Grandfather was president of the Zionist Organization of America. I grew up breathing in Zionism.

I believe that the Trump-Netanyahu “peace proposal” is a disaster. The attempt to implement it would set back all

hope of peace in this troubled region for decades. An ordinary reader of the document must conclude that this is a plan for the establishment of a Bantustan that requires the complete submission of all Palestinians to Israel.

Some context: roughly 600,000 Israelis live in 230 settlements in the occupied West Bank. Approximately 2.6 million Palestinians live in the same area. Most of these settlements are located in the Jordan Valley, which, under the “peace proposal,” would be annexed outright to Israel, with US backing.

Under the Trump/Bibi plan the Palestinians give up most of the land of the West Bank. The Palestinians keep Gaza and some pieces of the Negev desert. All the settlements and the Jewish only roads remain Israeli. These three areas would be connected by tunnels and bridges, some crossing the Jewish-only roads.

The Palestinians have to disarm their police, military, Hamas, and all Palestinian militia. The Palestinian Bantustan would have to remain demilitarized. The Israeli army would have the right to enter Palestine when “needed for security purposes”.

All international crossings would be controlled by Israel. Palestine cannot have an airport, port, or a navy. The proposed Palestinian statelet wouldn’t even have air, water, or mineral rights. All of Jerusalem would remain Israeli and Jews will be allowed to pray on the temple mount. The Palestinian capital would be relegated to the Jerusalem suburb of Abu Dis.

Moreover the plan proposes that number of Israeli-Palestinian cities in the so-called “little triangle” southeast of Haifa would be “transferred” to Palestinian authority, potentially removing Israeli citizenship from approximately 60% of Israeli-Palestinians.

Finally for all this, Palestinians would give up the right to return and be required to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. This extinguishes all Palestinian aspirations to justice and statehood.

Unsurprisingly, Palestinians around the world have predictably rejected this “peace plan”. This plan must fail. Then why was it proposed?

I believe that the plan was proposed to satisfy the nation political constituencies of these two deeply unpopular right-wing politicians, each heavily implicated in government corruption, and who are likely to be defeated in their respective countries. Although both Trump and Bibi are secular men; their core support comes from religious evangelical fundamentalists. Trump’s Christian evangelist supporters call themselves “Christian Zionists,” while Netanyahu’s core support is drawn from a number of

different religious nationalist factions comprising a movement called the Block of the Faithful, Gush Emunim.

It is important for Jews to recognize that Gush Emunim is essentially a religious nationalist messianic movement. The core belief is that Jewish “redemption of the land “ is necessary to bring Yom HaMoschiah: the days of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. This is one of the major differences between most settlers and the Black Bloc Harredim. Ironically their core beliefs seem analogous to Sabbatai Zevi’s messianism.

Christian Zionists believe that Jewish control of the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem are necessary for the second coming of Christ. Thus both groups, for their separate reasons, believe that God wants Jewish control over all of “Greater Israel”. By affirming these fundamentalist dreams, Trump and Bibi hope to satisfy their core supporters.

Moreover, by blaming the failure of this plan on the Palestinians both Bibi and Trump believe they can justify Israel’s pending annexation of the Jordan Valley. This “peace proposal,” from which no peace could possibly come, becomes the justification for the wholesale annexation and dismemberment of Palestine. This will lead to more Israeli attacks against Palestinian resistance. Furthermore, in Israel, right-wing parties continue to call for the expulsion of all Palestinians from both the Occupied Territories and from Israel itself.

I fear for the people I love, and I grieve. Cry, my beloved country. ♦

Sarah Levinthal Shartal is an Israeli who settled in Canada and who works with disabled people who are homeless and marginally housed.

<https://www.tikkun.org/why-jews-should-oppose-the-trump-bibi-peace-plan>

INTERNATIONAL

The Vilification of Jeremy Corbyn

By Leo Panitch, December 6, 2019

The vilification of the leader of the UK Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, as an antisemite has intensified in the run up to the December 12 election in Britain. What makes this especially troubling, not to say bizarre, is that since he first became a member of parliament in 1983 Corbyn has been the most consistent campaigner against all forms of racism.

In fact, while still a local councillor in London in 1977 Corbyn had already organized a defense of the Jewish population of Wood Green from a neo-Nazi march. A recent compilation of the number of early day motions he advanced in Parliament to defend Jewish people, alongside

other public stances he took to tackle antisemitism – to denounce Holocaust deniers, to commemorate Jewish resistance to fascism, to pressure the police to do more to protect synagogues against vandalism – came to well over 50. And he did all this not only in support of Jewish communities in the UK but also in Iran, Turkey, France, Russia and Eastern Europe. Indeed, the recently retired Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, himself Jewish, unreservedly expressed his belief that Corbyn was in no way antisemitic, having in their 22 years in Parliament together “never detected so much as a whiff of antisemitism” about him.

Smear Campaign

Indeed, there is no way that the antisemitic charge can be made any sense of except as a means of deflecting Corbyn’s support of Palestinian rights against actions by Israeli governments. The smear campaign has mainly involved pointing to intemperate language of others who spoke beside Corbyn at meetings about this over the decades. Scraping the barrel for anything he said himself, one comment Corbyn made about pro-Israeli government hecklers at one meeting not getting his “English irony” has been highlighted.

Given the weak reed this provides for the personal attack on Corbyn, attention has been focused on his allegedly not having done enough to weed out “institutionalized” antisemitism in his party, even though a parliamentary committee report on antisemitism in the UK found “no reliable, empirical evidence to support the notion that there is a higher prevalence of antisemitic attitudes within the Labour Party than any other political party.”

To be sure, there are instances of antisemitic tropes (mainly on the “rich Jews” theme) in some Labour-related social media circles, but much less than in parties of the right. In any case, Corbyn has done more to address this than any previous leader of any party.

Under his leadership, Labour grew to over 500,000 members; yet of some 1100 complaints of antisemitism the party received between April 2018 and January 2019 almost half were found to have nothing to do with the party, while another quarter were lacking in any basic evidence.

In Corbyn’s Own Words

In his leader’s speech to the 2018 Labour conference, Corbyn spoke directly “to all in the Jewish community: This party, this movement, will always be implacable campaigners against antisemitism and racism in all its forms. We are your ally. And the next Labour government will guarantee whatever support necessary to ensure the security of Jewish community centres and places of

worship, as we will for any other community experiencing hateful behaviour and physical attacks. We will work with Jewish communities to eradicate antisemitism, both from our party and wider society. And with your help I will fight for that with every breath I possess.”

Later in the speech, when dealing with Labour’s foreign policy, he added:

“And let me next say a few words about the ongoing denial of justice and rights to the Palestinian people. Our Party is united in condemning the shooting of hundreds of unarmed demonstrators in Gaza by Israeli forces and the passing of Israel’s discriminatory Nation-State Law. The continuing occupation, the expansion of illegal settlements and the imprisonment of Palestinian children are an outrage. We support a two-state solution to the conflict with a secure Israel and a viable and secure Palestinian state.”

Rather than being traduced, Corbyn deserves to be praised for making it so clear that principled support for Palestinian rights does not preclude principled opposition to antisemitism. ♦

Leo Panitch is emeritus professor of political science at York University, co-editor (with Greg Albo) of the Socialist Register and co-author (with Sam Gindin) of The Making of Global Capitalism (Verso). His new book, co-authored with Colin Leys, Searching for Socialism: The Project of the Labour New Left from Benn to Corbyn, is forthcoming from Verso.

<https://socialistproject.ca/2019/12/the-vilification-of-jeremy-corbyn/>

The Danger of the “Ethno-nationalist” State

By Bill Fletcher, Jr., NNPA Newswire Contributor, December 30, 2019

One of the most common features of right-wing populist and fascist movements is the demand for ethnic and/or racial purity. During the course of the 20th century we saw it in its most egregious forms in colonial and white minority regimes in the global South, and in the Nazi-led persecution and, later, Holocaust against the Jews.

Ethnic regimes were largely ignored in the mainstream media of the global North until the early 1990s, even when troubling events, such as genocide in Burundi, were unfolding. It was only with the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the Rwanda genocide (1994) that it became more than apparent that another wave of ethnic cleansing and ethno-nationalist regimes were unfolding.

What are ethno-nationalist regimes? They are political systems that quite openly privilege the alleged rights of a given ethnic or so-called racial group. Apartheid South

Africa was certainly an example of a long-running such regime. But the Rwanda genocide when right-wing Hutus went to war to openly eliminate Tutsis (and those Hutus who allied with Tutsis) using the pretext of a civil war, was yet another example.

Right-wing populist leaders such as Donald Trump in the USA, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel and Narendra Modi in India are quintessential examples of leaders who promote ethno-nationalist regimes. Contrary to early 20th century fascists and 19th century “scientific racists,” they do not rely on the rhetoric of racial superiority or inferiority in justifying their politics. Rather they argue either the incompatibility of different racial/ethnic groups and/or that the specific racial/ethnic group which they claim to represent has been, allegedly, aggrieved over the years.

The situation in India at this very moment is illustrating the evolving and serious dangers of ethno-nationalist regimes. The political forces around Modi and his political party – the BJP – have been promoting anti-Muslim rhetoric and practices for years. Their objective is nothing short of eliminating the secular basis of India and replacing it with a Hindu ethno-nationalist state. The recent legislation advanced by Modi and passed in Parliament that offers citizenship to refugees from neighboring countries UNLESS they happen to be Muslim demonstrates the depths of depravity of such regimes. It is, therefore, not surprising that India is exploding.

Netanyahu is a close cousin – politically speaking – of Modi’s. He and his party – the Likud – have always aimed to eliminate the Palestinian presence from not only the occupied Palestinian territories, but from Israel itself. But it is not only the Palestinians that Netanyahu, et.al. wish to eliminate. The language of the regime when it comes to other alleged outsiders is particularly provocative and echoes that of Hindu fascists in India in describing undocumented immigrants, in the case of Israel, as “infiltrators.”

Right-wing populism and ethno-nationalism have become major parts of the global political landscape. It is not only the appearance of Donald Trump; nor is it just Britain’s Boris Johnson. It has emerged, like chicken pox, in numerous places. And, if one is not careful, it can emerge even within the ranks of the oppressed when, in desperation, we sometimes seek to distinguish ourselves from some “Other.” ♦

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is the executive editor of globalafricanworker.com and the former president of TransAfrica Forum.

<https://blackpressusa.com/commentary-the-danger-of-the-ethno-nationalist-state/>

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Continued from page 1: Using Humour to Fight the Right

We mentioned Henri Bergson’s theory of humour, published in 1900, as a useful screen through which to examine exaggerated characterizations of the Hitler salute. Bergson posited that laughter resulted when “something mechanical was encrusted upon the living,” creating a contradiction between the natural flow of life and unsuccessful attempts by rigid social norms to contain it. Humour that makes fun of militarization and bureaucracy (like the Nazi salute jokes) is particularly susceptible to Bergsonian analysis. Chaplin is said to have been influenced by Bergson in both the “The Great Dictator” and “Modern Times”, with its workers enslaved to ridiculous clockwork machines with giant gears. It is worth noting that Bergson’s essay on laughter was published in France at the height of the Dreyfus affair, in which Bergson himself refused to take any public part. The argument of the book could certainly be read (and has been read) as a commentary on the posturing of the French military establishment, but if it was, it was a very indirect one, which may offer a hint about the limits of laughter as critique.

The Chaplin clip also illustrates widespread attempts to make dictators and would-be dictators look foolish and pompous. Many such jokes date from the period when Hitler was newly in charge, e.g.:

Aaron meets Moshe in Berlin and asks him what he has done the whole day long.

“I was at the funeral of Hitler!” he replies.

“And how was it, what happened there?”

“Oh it was surprising,” says Moshe. “First they let the coffin down in the hole, but then pulled it out, then let it down again, pulled it out again and so on. About ten or twelve times!”

“But why?” asks Aaron astonished.

“Oh, no wonder, with this enormous applause he had!!!”

In his book “Dead Funny”, a study of humor in Nazi Germany, Rudolph Herzog (son of the film director Werner Herzog) suggests that most jokes of this variety, when told by ordinary Germans, were not subversive in either intent or effect, and that some had an almost affectionate tone. His key example describes the many medals worn by the pompous and self obsessed Goering, including one that consists of a horizontal arrow. When an observer asks what

that medal signifies, he is told that the arrow means that the display is continued on Goering's back. Such jokes, Herzog argues, were told by people who were aware of their government's weaknesses, but not inclined to active resistance.

These jokes have much in common with contemporary jokes about Trump and Doug Ford, and may indicate both the pervasiveness and the limits of this type of humour. We showed some clips as illustrations of Trump/Ford humour:

<https://youtu.be/k-LTRwZb35A>
<https://youtu.be/C17CALH4HyQ>

Jokes of this kind, even if they don't constitute effective resistance, may tell others that one belongs to a group that "knows what was going on" and can be trusted to share that knowledge in the right spirit. The anthropologist Michael Herzfeld called this process the creation of "cultural intimacy."

Later on, when it became evident that Germany was losing the war, a more subversive form of humour arose, which was punished more severely, such as this one, for which a female munitions worker was executed:

"Hitler and Goering are standing atop the Berlin radio tower. Hitler says he wants to do something to put a smile on Berliners' faces. So Goering says: 'Why don't you jump?'" Even when punishment became more common, Herzog argues, it was often selectively applied to people whom the regime wished to dispose of for other reasons, with the jokes as a convenient excuse.

This observation calls to mind another dictatorship, which ruled in Nigeria from 1984 to 1999. Ken Saro Wiwa was the author of a popular television series which poked fun at endemic corruption, something the government claimed, without much evidence of success, to oppose. The show and Wiwa's writings were tolerated, until Wiwa became a political activist in opposition to environmental depredation by oil companies in the Delta region, where his people, the Ogoni, were located. Then, Wiwa was arrested and ultimately hanged. When the gallows didn't work on the first attempts, Wiwa made a final joke about

governmental inefficiency, and then said, "the struggle continues", his last words. In Wiwa's case, humour and struggle worked side by side, but he didn't delude himself that humour was sufficient.

There was also a genre of dark humour, that Jews caught up in the Nazi terror told each other, which may have acted as what James C. Scott has called "a hidden transcript", underground humour found among oppressed people with few other modes of resistance. In one such joke, an S.S. officer offers to spare a prisoner's life if he can guess which of his eyes is glass. The prisoner correctly guesses the left, because, he says, "It looks almost human."

There were also jokes told by the allies, in part to convince themselves that German firepower was not invincible, something that became truer as the war went on: "When a silver aeroplane flies over, it's American. When there's a green plane, it's British. When there are no aircraft, it's the Luftwaffe."

Humour was also employed by the allies to win hearts and minds among the enemy populace. Herzog describes BBC broadcasts into Germany that included comedy segments aimed at sowing opposition to the regime. Many Germans listened to these broadcasts, though listening to foreign radio could earn a trip to a concentration camp, or even death.

The Nazi regime also used humour, notably radio sketches of the harmless, affectionate joke variety. Hitler did employ one technique that has an eerie resonance to Trump today: insulting catch phrases about his adversaries: He called Neville Chamberlain "the umbrella fella", Roosevelt "a cripple" and Churchill "a drunk".

In ordinary times, humour can make potentially fraught, but basically valued social situations easier. Even here, however, there are often objections to making fun of things some would rather change than laugh at. What is the role of humour in settings that are NOT tolerable, like Nazi Germany or, for many people, Trump's America? Does humour give us the courage to fight back (or at least survive), or does it normalize the abnormal and encourage its acceptance? ♦

UNITED JEWISH PEOPLE'S ORDER

The United Jewish People's Order develops and perpetuates a progressive secular approach to social and cultural matters, our Jewish heritage, the Yiddish language and holiday and festival celebrations; we sponsor secular Jewish education, musical and cultural groups, concerts, lectures, public forums, and take part in social action and related community activities.

Opinions expressed in signed articles are the authors' and not necessarily those of UJPO.

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