



UJPO News



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**CELEBRATING
90 YEARS!**

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.

Volume #37, Issue #1

Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

UJPO Statement on the Québec City Mosque Attack

January 30, 2017

The United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) is horrified and sickened after hearing about the six people killed and many wounded by a gunman while at prayer inside the Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec in Québec City on January 29th. UJPO calls for immediate action to protect Muslims from any other attacks and to take swift action against those who are perpetuating the hateful rhetoric of Islamophobia. We offer our sincere condolences to those families and other worshippers affected directly by this attack and wish for those injured a speedy and full recovery.

“As the current period unfolds with many uncertainties, we as a community must support and actively engage with others to not only fight for social justice, but to defend those currently under attack,” says Julia Barnett, President of the UJPO-Toronto Board of Directors. We oppose all forms of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism – any form of oppression wherever and whenever it manifests itself. UJPO is committed to building a better world, to defending basic fundamental rights and never staying silent in the face of injustice. Although we do not have all the answers to what unfolds around us, we know we must support those under attack and show our commitment to fighting back together. In solidarity and as allies, we will not allow the silencing of communities whose voices need to be heard. We will not be silenced. And we are committed to listening and learning how best to give our support. As Jews, we are all too aware from our own histories of what can happen and how fast things can escalate. In the wake of Holocaust Remembrance Day, we say Never Again for Anyone! ♦

United Jewish People's Order



Standing up to Islamophobia and racism – ideas for action

From Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives with thanks to the BC Health Coalition for assembling and sharing the original version of this list.

- Tell Prime Minister Trudeau and Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen to welcome those fleeing violence and deportation under Trump by immediately rescinding the “Safe Third Country Agreement” by adding your name to the petition from No One is Illegal – <https://you.leadnow.ca/petitions/tell-trudeau-welcome-those-fleeing-violence-and-deportation-under-trump>. The petition also asks the Canadian Government to allow special consideration of humanitarian and compassionate reasons for entry to Canada as enabled by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.
- Send an email or call your Member of Parliament demanding concrete action from the Canadian government on the U.S. travel ban. Actions we're asking the government to take include increasing Canada's cap on refugees and ending the “Safe Third Country Agreement.” The Canadian Civil Liberties Association provides excellent sample email and phone scripts for contacting your MP. The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers provides additional information about questions to ask your MP. ♦

NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

FROM WINNIPEG

By Henry Shorr

Here are happenings for UJPO Winnipeg:

- The UJPO Book club met on January 15, 2017. We discussed the book *Underground in Berlin-A Young Woman's Extraordinary Tale of Survival in the Heart of Nazi Germany*. Our next book is *In the Garden of Beasts-Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin* by Erik Larson.
- We co-sponsored with Independent Jewish Voices the January 23 screening of the movie "Open Bethlehem" with Executive Producer Waël Kabbani. This event was very well attended.
- UJPO Winnipeg, with the generous donation of the Zuken Foundation, is holding the lecture series "Jews in Space" with Dr. Itay Zutra. The session topics are: Modern Hebrew Literature- the Zionist Perspective, Modern Yiddish Literature- the Diaspora Perspective, Soviet Yiddish Culture- the Communist Perspective, and Contemporary American Jewish Culture- the Post Diaspora Perspective.
- The North End Jewish Folk Choir is preparing for the April 25 Warsaw Ghetto commemorative event. Choir members and invited narrators will be doing readings interspersed with songs. ♦

FROM TORONTO

By Julia Barnett

As many are aware UJPO-Toronto has a new Executive Director, Rachel Epstein and the Morris Winchevsky School has a new Education Director, Lia Tarachansky. A lot of time and energy was spent by both the Board of Directors (Hiring Committee) and the School's Advisory Committee recruiting, interviewing, hiring and now integrating each of them into their new roles. I can honestly say it was stressful, at times difficult but what an excellent process it was in securing their place with us.

As Rachel transitions, on a part-time basis, into the position of Executive Director, she will be completing her postdoctorate work on LGBTQ family conflict. At the same time Maxine Hermolin has agreed to continue to consult on a part-time basis. Maxine will be working closely with Rachel during this transition period until June 2017. The transition allows us to meet the needs of our office, committees, and overall organizational functioning while Rachel prepares to move to full-time status. Beyond thanking Maxine for all her dedication, hard work, and

welcoming approach to all in our community, we know she will continue to have a strong presence in UJPO, preferably in the relaxed, humorous, and kind-natured way (as is Maxine's way), for many years to come. We are grateful to her and recognize her 20 years as Executive Director and her life-long commitment to UJPO. We can be nothing short of indebted to her.

Rachel Epstein has had a long-time connection to UJPO since the mid 1980's. Her daughter Sadie is a graduate of the Morris Winchevsky School and Rachel has kept a cottage at Camp Naivelt for over 20 years. She brings with her new role a wealth of experience in community organizing, teaching, conflict-resolution and a wealth of board/committee experience along with grassroots organizing from a variety of social/political issues. She is committed to progressive secular Jewishness and would like to build on her connections with other groups to strengthen UJPO, both within the greater Jewish community and among those working for social justice.

We welcome Lia Tarachansky as the Morris Winchevsky School's new Education Director. She is an Israeli-Canadian journalist and film-maker, born in the former Soviet Union. After establishing and heading the Middle East bureau of The Real News Network (therealnews.com), she moved to Canada where she currently teaches the history and current realities in Palestine and Israel.

Lia also facilitates workshops on effective communication across conflict. Lia wants to create an experience-rich curriculum that engages and encourages students to learn about secular Jewishness and social justice, in particular drawing from our ancient cultures and values to tackle today's complex challenges.

Frances Handlarski has retired as the Morris Winchevsky School's Education Director. We'd like to thank Frances for her dedication to teaching and continually developing MWS's secular curriculum.

As well, I attended the *Jewish Global Network for Justice* in South Africa in December 2016. It was an incredible gathering with other progressive Jews on an international basis. There is a detailed written report available and there will be a presentation on the gathering in the next little while. We will provide advance notice once details are finalized.

Programs:

On Sunday Jan. 29 – Chandler Davis and Natalie Zemon Davis gave a talk on their lives, activism and commitment to making a better world. Discussion was rich, thought provoking and inspiring. The title was: "A Life of Activism". It covered decades of commitment, challenges and victories. (See Ester Reiter's article on page 3.)

Alternative Shabbes gatherings:

Our Friday night potlucks called *Alternative Shabbes* continue. In November our theme was “A Critical Appreciation of Bob Dylan” and in December it was “Latkes and Leonard [Cohen]”. Wonderful music and stories were shared on those occasions.



Walied Khogali, Peter Rosenthal, and Rachel Epstein. Photo by Shlomit Segal.

On Friday Feb. 17 the Shabbes dinner theme was “Why is Carding Still Happening in Toronto?” with a panel discussion including Peter Rosenthal, activist

lawyer and vocal critic of carding; and Walied Khogali, long-time Toronto activist and organizer of the Coalition Against Islamophobia and White Supremacy. Discussion was broad and integrated what is happening from Quebec to Toronto with increasing examples of Islamophobia both in Quebec and Toronto, and ongoing racism – in particular anti-black racism. As well, what allies can do and what we can support, in particular getting involved in the Coalition against Islamophobia and White Supremacy.

On Friday Mar. 31 there will be a community forum to discuss the rise of racism and hate crimes towards Jews and Muslims, and how to respond.

Holidays:

The Morris Winchevsky School’s **Chanukah** celebration in December was a great success with delightful presentations by the Morris Winchevsky School children. On Sunday March 19, a **Purim** celebration is planned complete with Purim *shpiel*, music and of course homentashn.

This year’s **Passover Third Seyder**, which will take place on Saturday Apr. 15, has adopted the theme: *Tikkun Olam 2.0 – Building Creative Solidarity!* Plans for an engaging, interactive event where questions will be posed to stimulate dialogue, building on UJPO-Toronto’s “dotmocracy” exercise which began at the 2016 Seyder with the intention of connecting the dots and making links among social justice priorities that were identified.

Social Justice:

UJPO-Toronto continues to be actively engaged in social justice actions, rallies and political endorsements that include the following:

- Sat. Jan. 21 – Toronto Women’s March
- Sat. Feb. 4 – Anti-Islamophobia and White Supremacy Rally and Endorsement Letter condemning the Quebec City Mosque massacre



Demo against Islamophobia. Photo by Barbara Blaser.

- Tues. Feb. 14 – Strawberry Ceremony endorsement and donation in honour of missing and murdered Indigenous women
- Contribution to Project Hope – in support of Beit Zatoun’s legacy

Toronto Board priorities include Finance Committee work and Strategic Planning implementation. Committees will continue to define their terms of reference and budgets and implement their priorities. ♦

A life of activism

By Ester Reiter

On Sunday, Jan. 29, Toronto UJPO was honoured to have as their speakers Natalie Zemon Davis and Chandler Davis, in an event called “A Life of Activism”. Both arrived from the U.S. in Canada in 1960, refugees from the cold war, and continued their lives of principled engagement.

Natalie described their marriage as unique. When they married in 1948, going against the traditions of the day, Chandler made clear that theirs was to be an egalitarian union. Natalie, a Companion of the Order of Canada, is perhaps best known for her book on Martin Guerre, the basis for the film “The Return of Martin Guerre”. For Natalie, her scholarship is at one with her politics – she chooses to illuminate the lives of those who are not often considered worthy of study, those on the margins, the peasant, the outsider, those negotiating different cultures. She, together with a colleague, taught the first women’s studies course at the University of Toronto.

Chandler Davis, a mathematician, inherited his father’s radicalism. As a promising young PH.D. from Harvard, despite his left credentials which made him questionable, he was hired at the University of Michigan. However, there their troubles began. Charged with writing a “subversive” pamphlet on free speech [which actually was authored by Natalie, but Xeroxed by Chandler], he was hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). His decision was to not protect himself by taking the fifth



Natalie and Chandler Davis. Photo by Errol Young.

amendment but to challenge the legitimacy of the HUAC itself. His case went all the way to the Supreme Court – where he lost and spent six months in jail.

Some Canadian universities in that period took advantage of the brain drain north, and Chandler, his friend and fellow mathematician Lee Lorch, and a number of other colleagues found positions in Canadian universities. Davis, however, maintains that the damage of the cold war is still felt in both countries. It was not just that people were driven out, but the challenging questions they asked in the 1930s about the nature of the capitalist system were largely purged from the history books.

We filled the Winchevsky Centre with about one hundred people in attendance, and the excellent questions and lively discussion that followed the talk could have gone on for hours. ♦

FROM HAMILTON

By Lyn Center

On February 5, we were very fortunate to have Ester Reiter join us for a potluck lunch at my house (14 in all – luckily I had just enough chairs). She spoke in a very animated way about the history of left-wing Jews in North America and in the UJPO in particular. The discussion led into our knowledge of the Jewish community in Hamilton, and David and Marcia Cohen were able to contribute much information.

Thank you to Ester for a wonderful presentation, and to Barbara and Sol Blaser, Paul Weinberg and Nicole Shapiro for your help.

Participants sent these comments: “It was a wonderful discussion.”; “We really enjoyed Ester’s talk and we enjoyed meeting the people who attended and hearing a bit about their lives.”; “Ester was very engaging and even up on the Hamilton portion of her story of the Jewish left in Canada. The afternoon was a lot of fun.”

Gloria Geller mentioned how many Jews became farmers in Saskatchewan in the last century. We asked her

to speak on this subject at our next HUIPO meeting, which will take place in March or April. ♦

FROM VANCOUVER

By Carl Rosenberg

Members of UJPO and the progressive and secular Jewish community in Vancouver mourn the passing of our beloved long-time friend and *chaver*, Sylvia Friedman, on Dec. 22.

Sylvia was loved by everyone in the movements and organizations to which she was so devoted – UJPO, *Outlook*, the Peretz Centre, and the Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir.

As Victor Neuman, an active member of the Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir, put it: “She was a grand lady – cheerful, sociable, quick to share a laugh, tough in defence of her principles and treasured by all. Her family will miss her, Peretz will miss her, the Choir will miss her and so will everybody who came to know her.”

We extend heartfelt condolences to the Jackson/Friedman family, and will have a more extensive tribute for the Spring *UJPO News*. ♦

CSJO

We are excited to announce that the 2017 CSJO Conference will take place June 9-11, 2017, at the University of Illinois at Chicago! Mark those dates on your calendar. We are busy putting together the program and registration packages, so stay tuned for more details in the coming weeks.

Now that we have dates and a location, we are looking for anyone interested in presenting a workshop. The theme this year is “Jews and the Blues.” While you do not need to follow this theme for a workshop, we do encourage anyone with knowledge or interest in the theme to come forward and present.

If you are interested in presenting, please send a proposed title, description of workshop and short bio to Paul Ellenbogen at pdellenbogen@gmail.com.

Thank you in advance for putting together a workshop. We look forward to seeing everyone at this year’s conference! ♦

Turbulent days of early 2017

In light of the current turbulent atmosphere in the United States of America, the Social Action Committee of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations calls on everyone to stay informed, stand up and speak up!

There have been so many troubling actions taking place recently that it is hard to isolate the one that should secure our focus.

We believe the recent ban on refugees entering the United States from seven Muslim majority countries is a fear-based, nationalistic tactic that does irreparable harm. As Jewish people, we have seen what this type of religious discrimination can lead to.

In 1939, the MS St. Louis, a ship carrying hundreds of Jewish refugees, arrived at New York and was turned away. These refugees were sent back to Europe, where most of them suffered and perished in concentration camps. Many of their stories were being told for International Holocaust Remembrance Day, almost at the same time as the signing of an Executive Order barring people who are fleeing from war and violence from entering the United States. This order inferred entry preference to Christians, clearly discriminating on the basis of religion. This is the exact opposite of the values on which this country was founded. This ban refused entry to people who had already gone through the lengthy process of obtaining visas to enter the United States legally.

We believe that the words on the Statue of Liberty are not just lip service, but should remain a guiding principle. ♦
Terry Waslow
Executive Director, CSJO

To read the statement in full, please go to
<http://www.csjo.org/turbulent-days-of-early-2017>.

HONOURABLE MENTSHN

Richard Lee

By Joyce Wayne



It's often a mystery why people choose the professions they do, but in Richard Lee's case it was an inspired decision. Interviewing him around the dining room table of his cozy, inviting home, the home he shares with his wife Harriet Rosenberg, Lee is clearly a person comfortable in his own skin, open to talking about his past, deeply concerned about the future of the planet – and committed to playing an active role in UJPO on the Shule Advisory Council.

Most recently, Lee became an Officer of the Order of Canada and the first insight he revealed about the honour was how surprised he was that during the ascendancy of Donald Trump, the Canadian government was comfortable bestowing this award on a left-winger, and one who'd been a left-winger all his life.

Lee grew up in Toronto's Forest Hill Village, in a typically Jewish neighbourhood "where everyone was wealthier than my family," he remarked, a grin spreading

across his face. His parents were members of the United Jewish People's Order and he credits their progressive politics with influencing his decision to become an anthropologist. Even today, he fondly recalls his mother's words: "Always remember the workers are the salt of the earth." Early on Lee was curious about finding alternatives to the materialist way of life.

Author of the 1979 groundbreaking and award-winning study *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*, Lee's research unleashed a lifelong fascination with these unique people, a distinct population of 1,000 in Northern Botswana. As he wrote, his initial encounters with the San "generated a small industry of anthropologists across five decades and across a wide range of sub-disciplines, from genetics to ethno-archaeology to child rearing practices to folklore and mythology."

For millennia, the !Kung San have cherished their hunting and gathering society and when Richard first traveled to the Kalahari Desert as a graduate student, to observe them, he unlocked the key not only to his own life's work as a professor of anthropology and author, but also of a new way of understanding societies not built on materialism.

He credits his Jewishness (the emphasis on family, food and laughter), his parents' progressive politics (the interest in non-hierarchical and egalitarian societies) and his love of Canada (research experiences in northern Canada pointing the way to non-materialistic practices) in pre-adapting him for a life in anthropology. Lee also credits his anthropology professor at the University of Toronto for igniting this passion. "It was always assumed that I'd be a lawyer," Lee says. "But a wonderful professor, Robert C. Dailey, in first year showed me that I could take on anthropology as my profession."

In graduate school at the University of California Berkeley, Lee's professor approached him with a shopping list of where students needed to dig. "Somebody must go out and live with the bushmen because they are out there living as hunters and gatherers," Lee recalls the professor saying. Richard volunteered.

That decision changed his life. In 1963, at the age of 25, Lee traveled to Botswana. The British were still in charge. "As soon as I arrived, a shadowy figure came toward me and he turned out to be friendly, although the British had warned him that the San people were dangerous," Lee recounts. This tribesman "was very sharp and knew a thing or two."

What was most interesting to Lee was that the San were not nearly as contained as Amazonian tribes who do not wish to have contact with outside people. "Africa is different," Lee said smiling. "They knew about the outside

world, but the San wished to preserve their way of life. They didn't work very hard; they were their own bosses, nominally under a tribal chief, but essentially on their own. They enjoyed a good life, a nomadic life."

When Lee asked a group who the head man was, the San replied: "What do you mean head man. Where do you get this idea?"

From the beginning of his work on the San, Lee is delighted to report that his discussions with the San were philosophical. "Each man is head man over himself," Lee recalls a member of the San telling him. "No man is more wealthy than the other." As a researcher and as a progressive, Lee fast became beguiled with the !Kung San's philosophy of life and how it fit into certain interpretations of Marxist theory, or now, as he looks back "at Anarchist thinking."

For years, anthropologists claimed it was impossible to have an egalitarian society, but Lee's extensive research and writing about the San belied this opinion and opened an entire school of research into egalitarian and collaborative societies.

Lee was also one of the founders of the Kalahari Peoples Fund. After 40 years, the fund, which raises about \$50,000 a year, is still going strong. "Anthropologists can't just take notes and write articles," Lee insists. ♦

WHAT'S IN ORDER

Condolences

- To the family of Sylvia Friedman, in Vancouver, BC. The next issue of *UJPO News* will include a section devoted to Sylvia's life and history. (See also Carl Rosenberg's Vancouver report, this issue.)
- To the family of Reta Dordick, a long-time member of Winnipeg UJPO who died at the age of 101. Reta was very active as secretary of the local organization for many years.
- To the family of Peter Smollett
- We mourn the loss of Dan Meaney, a member of UJPO Toronto since 2007 and a Naivelt cabin holder until three years ago. Dan was active in the Order in several capacities – as a member of the Culture/Social Justice Committee, leading workshops during music week at Camp Naivelt, and always expanding our music world at UJPO (See article in this issue on Si Kahn). We extend our condolences to his brother John, his niece Margaret, and his partner, Maxine Hermolin. We direct you to his obituary in the *Toronto Star*, at <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/thestar/obituary.aspx?pid=183571721>

Speedy Recovery

Susan Conn and Marsha Solnicki

GETTING TO KNOW OUR UJPO MEMBERS

Joyce Wayne



UJPO News: Since when have you been a member of UJPO-Toronto?

Joyce: I joined UJPO in the spring of 2012.

UJPO News: What brought you to UJPO?

Joyce: Joining an organization is complicated. My father was involved in Montreal. He worked as a cutter in a garment factory, an editor for a Yiddish progressive publication and he was a labour organizer so I heard about UJPO and, of course, about the *Vochebnblatt* from a very young age.

News: In which boards and/or committees are you active?

Joyce: I'm a member of the UJPO-Toronto Board and the Communications Committee. In addition, I'm one of the editors of *UJPO News* along with Sam Blatt, Lyn Center and David Abramowitz.

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

Joyce: The Communications Committee is re-designing and re-writing the UJPO national website. At the same time, we're trying to develop a strong presence for the organization on social media. That means posting on Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis.

I joined the UJPO-Toronto board last fall, so I'm new to it. The first thing I was involved with was discussing the hiring of our new executive director, Rachel Epstein. I'm very excited about having Rachel as the public face of UJPO and I hope to be able to support her in any way that I can.

News: What is your life outside UJPO?

Joyce: I've enjoyed a long and fruitful career as a journalist and as an educator. When I first moved to Toronto, I worked in book publishing as an editor and then at Quill & Quire, as the staff writer. When I was offered a one-year teaching appointment at Sheridan College in Oakville, I took a sabbatical from McClelland & Stewart Publishers, where I was editorial director of non-fiction. I'd planned to return, but I stayed at Sheridan for 27 years, running the journalism program and later opening a centre for new immigrants. Working with refugees and newcomers to Canada, mostly from the Middle East and South America, was the most rewarding time at the college and I remain in close touch with my former students. Some have moved to the U.S., and we're concerned about their status now that Trump is president.

At present, I write a blog for older adults, sit on the board of Mosaic Press and I'm finishing up the edits on my second novel called "The Last Night of the World." It's about a Jewish woman, Freda Linton, who emigrates to Canada from the *shtetl* in the 1920s. In Toronto, she joins the Communist Party and becomes a spy for the Soviets.

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

Joyce: What I admire about UJPO is how seamlessly the members have involved me in activities for which I have some experience. For a time, I was a contributing editor to *Outlook* magazine.

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

Joyce: It's just me and my spouse Sandy right now, although my daughter, Hannah, spent some time at Naivelt this summer. I wish I'd raised her with the Naivelt kids, but there's still time for Hannah to become involved with the next generation.

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

Joyce: Each time I attend an event, I'm heartened by the "younger" faces I see. If UJPO is to thrive, new people must knock on our door and be encouraged to become engaged and active, to make UJPO their home.

I sense a heightening of the political tone of the organization.

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

Joyce: UJPO is a fraternal organization. It's a big unruly family, but in these dark political times, I'm eager for us to become a part of the resistance. No one with a social justice conscience ought to sit by while the Trumpists lay down their authoritarian and racist agenda. UJPO can play an active role in providing a Canadian home for progressive-minded people who oppose this regime and who oppose the corresponding Russian agenda to de-stabilize western democratic governments. I feel very strongly about this.

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

Joyce: That's an interesting question. I can write and I can edit and in this era of social media, I hope I can help to accentuate UJPO's written and digital presence.

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

Joyce: I've just finished reading Masha Gessen's "Where the Jews Aren't," a brilliant history of Birobidzhan and how European and some North American Jews believed this Jewish autonomous region in the Soviet Union was the solution to anti-Semitism and an alternative to Zionism. My father was a great advocate for Birobidzhan and when I was

a little kid, he told me all about the Jewish Communists' hopes and dreams for their own self-governed land. He became disillusioned with progressive politics when he learned about Stalin's purges, but I would prefer to find another way other than disillusion and silence. I see my involvement with UJPO as my way. ♦

POETRY & SONG

A brief history of Si Kahn

By Sam Blatt

For the past several years, *UJPO News* readers have looked forward to Dan Meaney's column of very particular folk songs. Dan held to the philosophy that there are songs that need to be sung, and whatever the occasion, those were the songs that Dan sang – and those were the songs he submitted to *UJPO News* for publication: songs of resistance, union songs and workers' struggles songs.

In the Fall 2016 *UJPO News* issue, we published Dan's submission "Going to Work on Monday," written by Si Kahn, with the added note that in the coming issue, (i.e. this issue) we would publish an article by Dan on Si Kahn. Dan was in the hospital when he submitted the song.

To our great sadness Dan passed away on January 4, 2017. (See "What's in Order", this issue). We therefore take it upon ourselves to complete the column in Dan's name, "a brief history of Si Kahn". With Dan's great knowledge of folk music (among other accomplishments, he was the founder of the Flying Cloud Folk Club in Toronto), he surely would have written this article without referring to Wikipedia or "googling" other references; we on the other hand, must confess to using the internet to write this article.

Si Kahn - In Dan Meaney's honour:

Si Kahn is an American folk singer, widely known for his songs, his activism, and his organizing, all of them centering on justice, fairness and equality.

One can deduce from Si Kahn's family history how he arrived to be the musician and civil rights activist for which he is so admired. His parents instilled a strong sense of their Jewish heritage (his father was a rabbi), as well as introducing him to rhythm and harmony. His uncle was an executive in the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, and inspired and shaped Kahn's career in civil rights.

His ties to Judaism are clearly evidenced in his activism. He was the initial organizer and founding chair of Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice (formerly the Jewish Fund for Justice), a national Jewish foundation that supports local community organizing projects dealing with the root causes of poverty. He is a past board member

of the Center for Judaic, Holocaust and Peace Studies at Appalachian State University, North Carolina.

Among Si Kahn's many civil rights activities, he is the founder and until recently the director of Grassroots Leadership, a non-profit organization that advocates prison reform, improved immigration detention policies, and violence prevention. He has been very involved with Save Our Cumberland Mountains, an environmentalist group opposed to strip mining in Appalachia.

The lyrics to Kahn's songs reflect the struggles of workers and their families; two examples with which many are familiar are "Aragon Mill", and "Going to Work on Monday" – both well-known Si Kahn compositions,

(The Aragon Mill was a mill in Aragon, Georgia, built in 1898, which actually operated under various owners until 2002, when it was completely destroyed by fire. Aragon was a one industry town, and though it grew over the years, the song reflects Si's lament over the loss of the village culture.

"Going to Work on Monday" is the sad story of a worker being told by the company doctor that he is no longer fit for work because of lung disease. The doctor says he doesn't know what he has, but is lying. The worker, of course, contracted the cotton dust disease at work.)

Si was a prolific musician, author, and activist, He produced 18 CDs, was the author of four books (all political), and was active in organizing and civil rights. He has won many awards, ranging from his work on environmental issues, his music, and his organizing. Several awards include the words "giving a voice to the voiceless". He is a giant of a person and giant of a musician. Si Kahn is one of the musical gifts that Dan gave us! ♦

(For a more complete history of Si's recordings, awards, activism, and personal life, visit the links below.)

Sourced from <http://sikahn.com/>, <http://sikahn.com/about.shtml>, and other web sites.

YIDDISH

Sholem Aleichem's legacy

By David Abramowitz

After Sholem Aleichem's death, the Yiddish literature he and his two colleagues, Mendele and Peretz created, saw a revival in North America, Palestine (Israel) and Russia. His wife updated the



SHOLEM ALEICHEM (1859-1916)
Yiddish author and humorist

copyrights to all his works to "the family of Sholem Aleichem" ensuring a regular income should his works be republished.

In the 1960's his daughter Marie (Marusi) stated that the country which published the most of Aleichem's work was China: and Soviet Russia published the second-highest number of volumes. After some quiescence, it's re-emerged in academia with Sholem the best/most remembered of his contemporaries. His works reflected the realities of European Jews of his era.

Mendele Moicher Sforim wrote about the Yiddish people's experiences in the tsarist Pale of Settlement; Peretz wrote allegories often utilizing religious motifs. Sholem Aleichem's themes were, and still are, universal and, as it happens, perpetually topical. He wrote of the struggling Jew's impoverished conditions, survival in misfortune, conflict between tradition and modernity, striving, yearning and working for a better, more comfortable life. His hope was eternal.

These themes forged a relevant, modern Yiddish literature which could equate to other contemporary world literature. Many other Yiddish authors followed to even greater acclaim (e.g. I. Bashevis Singer won a Nobel prize); thus Yiddish literature and Yiddish culture, in the original and in translation, continue if somewhat tenuously now.

Early Yiddish fiction was generally sentimental, romantic, with blissful endings. Sholem Aleichem evolved to become the supreme Jewish humorist who tapped into the energies of the East European Yiddish expression and who contrived contemporary Jewish archetypes, myths, and fabrications of unique imaginative power and universal appeal. I contend he didn't invent them; he recreated actual individuals with whom we could readily identify with love and imagination. His subjects were based on authentic people with their incessant problems:

Menachem-Mendel rushes unmindfully from one financial disaster to another; to adapt Pete Seeger's lyrics, "When will he ever learn?"

Tevey is a milkman who supports a wife and seven daughters in a world whose conventions are evolving in directions he could never have imagined.

Motl the cantor's son, an orphan, is not about a sad, sorry-for-himself-loner, but an optimistic, happy though impoverished child and every new experience doesn't affect him as the calamity it really is.

Did he write Tevey to explore his own conflicts as a father of four daughters in an ever-changing, increasingly secular world, or to examine the issues that were encompassing all parents as those times and societal patterns were dramatically changing?

His stories are told by their principle characters frequently as monologues. His characters speak for themselves in their own idiom. Their attributes are woven into their personalities so skillfully and effortlessly that we're unaware of the subtle details which create a Shakespeare-like characterization with a broad variety of emotional and motivating factors for each.

Using this monologue technique for his main characters distinguishes him from his contemporaries. Sholem Aleichem's bittersweet humour permeates his depiction of the destiny of his people as that of the Wandering Jew.

Sholem was aware of leaving a legacy. The "new" theatrical medium in the early 20th century was the silent film. None of his plays had been successfully produced professionally during his lifetime. Could their adaptation to silent film breathe life into them and introduce them to a broader international audience? He started adapting his dramatic works into silent film scenarios but died before any were produced. However, a silent film called *Broken Barriers*, based on "Tevey's Daughters" was allegedly produced and released in 1919 (just three years after his death.)

Most of the world knows of him through the American musical "Fiddler on the Roof". The village of Boyberik, where the stories were set, is based on the town of Boyarka in Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire). Yet the musical we know has watered down much of the tales and created a new shtetl – Anatevka. The original Tevey tales are a complex mix of joy in tradition, misfortune, catastrophe and fleeing the pogroms. These are not portrayed in the Fiddler we see. We never learn that Tevey's wife Golde and Tzeitl's husband Motl both died (Tevey's daughter Shprintze had committed suicide). Also, in *Lekh-Lekho*, upon learning of the Jews' expulsion, Chava leaves her Russian Orthodox husband, wanting to return to her family and share their exile. In the Russian stage version, Tevey-Tevele (Sholem Aleichem's translation into Russian), which I saw in Kiev at the Ivan Franko Theatre in September, 1991, Chava is fleeing the pogrom with Tevey when her husband suddenly comes running out of the forest towards Tevey. When Tevey asked why he returned, he replies "I have to be with my wife's people", at which time he embraces Tevey. Tevey forgives them and together they wander off in the distance to some unknown destiny.

Sholem's dramatic depiction of the wandering Jew was more poignant in Kiev in 1991, as this was probably the last production of the play to be performed in the Soviet Union, which some two months later ceased to exist. Many Soviet Jews were actually being targeted and harassed, by resurgent fascist groups, resulting in many making aliyah to

Israel (and subsequently North America). And thus the tales' relevance continues today as refugees of other nationalities seek safety abroad. ♦

CANADA

Finally! A ban on asbestos

*By John Cartwright, President of Toronto & York Region Labour Council, a carpenter by trade and founding director of the Building Trades Workers Services.
December 15, 2016*

On December 15th, 2016, the government of Canada finally announced that they will move to ban the import, export and manufacturing of asbestos products. CLC President Hassan Yussuff and Insulators Union leader Fred Clare joined three Cabinet Ministers at an Ottawa hospital for the announcement. The Canadian Labour Congress has made the ban on asbestos a key demand of the Trudeau government, the culmination of a decades-long campaign. One of the champions of this campaign was Pat Martin, former Winnipeg NDP Member of Parliament. He started his working life mining asbestos, and then went on to head the Carpenters Union and Building Trades Council in Winnipeg before being elected to Parliament in 1997. He was relentless in demanding legislation to ban the deadly substance.

Two decades ago the construction unions in Toronto created an organization to handle Workers Compensation cases. The staff at the Building Trades Workers Services dealt with thousands of cases over the years, but the heart-breaking ones were those from asbestos and cancers. So I am glad to hear the politicians finally announce some crucial steps to curtail asbestos use. It's long overdue, and it shouldn't have to wait another year to implement. But today I am thinking of my brother Neil Borland – who paid the ultimate price for Canada's love affair with this miracle substance.

And along with his image, the union call that urges us to "Mourn the dead, and fight like hell for the living". ♦

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/318248465019492/permalink/694306887413646/>

Ed. Note: Article abridged for this publication.

USA

Get ready for the first shocks of Trump's disaster capitalism

By Naomi Klein, January 24, 2017

WE ALREADY KNOW that the Trump administration plans to deregulate markets, wage all-out war on "radical Islamic terrorism," trash climate science and unleash a fossil-fuel frenzy. It's a vision that can be counted on to

generate a tsunami of crises and shocks: economic shocks, as market bubbles burst; security shocks, as blowback from foreign belligerence comes home; weather shocks, as our climate is further destabilized; and industrial shocks, as oil pipelines spill and rigs collapse, which they tend to do, especially when enjoying light-touch regulation.

All this is dangerous enough. What's even worse is the way the Trump administration can be counted on to exploit these shocks politically and economically.

Speculation is unnecessary. All that's required is a little knowledge of recent history. Ten years ago, I published "The Shock Doctrine," a history of the ways in which crises have been systematically exploited over the last half century to further a radical pro-corporate agenda. The book begins and ends with the response to Hurricane Katrina, because it stands as such a harrowing blueprint for disaster capitalism.

That's relevant because of the central, if little-recalled role played by the man who is now the U.S. vice president, Mike Pence. At the time Katrina hit New Orleans, Pence was chairman of the powerful and highly ideological Republican Study Committee. On September 13, 2005 – just 14 days after the levees were breached and with parts of New Orleans still underwater – the RSC convened a fateful meeting at the offices of the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Under Pence's leadership, the group came up with a list of "Pro-Free-Market Ideas for Responding to Hurricane Katrina and High Gas Prices" – 32 policies in all, each one straight out of the disaster capitalism playbook.

To get a sense of how the Trump administration will respond to its first crises, it's worth reading the list in full (and noting Pence's name right at the bottom).

What stands out in the package of pseudo "relief" policies is the commitment to wage all-out war on labour standards and on the public sphere – which is ironic because the failure of public infrastructure is what turned Katrina into a human catastrophe. Also notable is the determination to use any opportunity to strengthen the hand of the oil and gas industry.

The first three items on the RSC list are "automatically suspend Davis-Bacon prevailing wage laws in disaster areas," a reference to the law that required federal contractors to pay a living wage; "make the entire affected area a flat-tax free-enterprise zone"; and "make the entire region an economic competitiveness zone (comprehensive tax incentives and waiving of regulations)."

Another demand called for giving parents vouchers to use at charter schools, a move perfectly in line with the vision held by Trump's pick for education secretary, Betsy DeVos.



"Humpty Trumpty" by Carolyn Lehmann (Hamilton)

All these measures were announced by President George W. Bush within the week. Under pressure, Bush was eventually forced to reinstate the labour standards, though they were largely ignored by contractors. There is every reason to believe this will be the model for the multibillion-dollar infrastructure investments Trump is using to court the labour movement. Repealing Davis-Bacon for those projects was reportedly already floated at Monday's meeting with leaders of construction and building trade unions.

Back in 2005, the Republican Study Committee meeting produced more ideas that gained presidential support. Climate scientists have directly linked the increased intensity of hurricanes to warming ocean temperatures. This connection, however, didn't stop Pence and the RSC from calling on Congress to repeal environmental regulations on the Gulf Coast, give permission for new oil refineries in the United States, and to greenlight "drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."

All these measures are a surefire way to drive up greenhouse gas emissions, the major human contributor to climate change, yet they were immediately championed by the president under the guise of responding to a devastating storm.

The oil industry wasn't the only one to profit from Hurricane Katrina, of course. So did a slew of well-connected contractors, who turned the Gulf Coast into a laboratory for privatized disaster response.

The companies that snatched up the biggest contracts were the familiar gang from the invasion of Iraq: Halliburton's KBR unit won a \$60 million gig to reconstruct military bases along the coast. Blackwater was hired to protect FEMA employees from looters. Parsons, infamous for its sloppy Iraq work, was brought in for a major bridge construction project in Mississippi. Fluor, Shaw, Bechtel, CH2M Hill – all top contractors in Iraq –

were hired by the government to provide mobile homes to evacuees just 10 days after the levees broke. Their contracts ended up totaling \$3.4 billion, no open bidding required.

And no opportunity for profit was left untapped. Kenyon, a division of the mega funeral conglomerate Service Corporation International (a major Bush campaign donor), was hired to retrieve the dead from homes and streets. The work was extraordinarily slow, and bodies were left in the broiling sun for days. Emergency workers and local volunteer morticians were forbidden to step in to help because handling the bodies impinged on Kenyon's commercial territory.

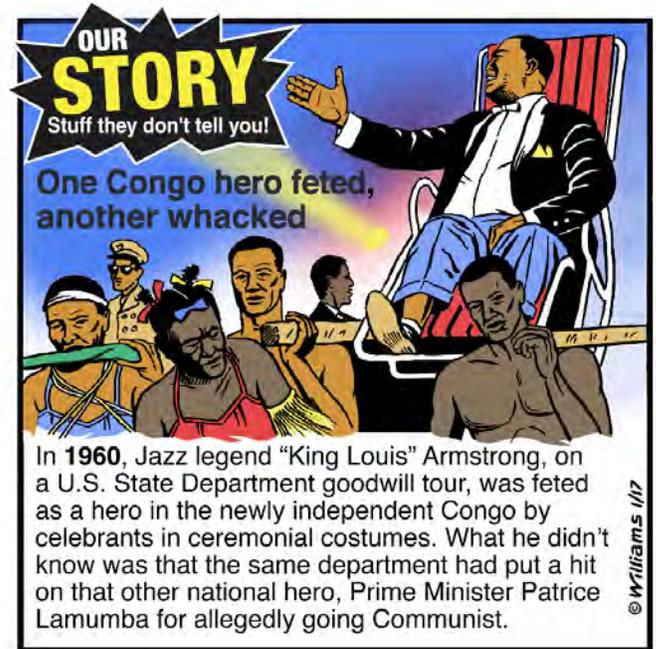
And as with so many of Trump's decisions so far, relevant experience often appeared to have nothing to do with how contracts were allocated. AshBritt, a company paid half a billion dollars to remove debris, reportedly didn't own a single dump truck and farmed out the entire job to contractors.

Even more striking was the company that FEMA paid \$5.2 million to perform the crucial role of building a base camp for emergency workers in St. Bernard Parish, a suburb of New Orleans. The camp construction fell behind schedule and was never completed. When the contractor was investigated, it emerged that the company, Lighthouse Disaster Relief, was actually a religious group. "About the closest thing I have done to this is just organize a youth camp with my church," confessed Lighthouse's director, Pastor Gary Heldreth.

After all the layers of subcontractors had taken their cut, there was next to nothing left for the people doing the work. For instance, the author Mike Davis tracked the way FEMA paid Shaw \$175 a square foot to install blue tarps on damaged roofs, even though the tarps themselves were provided by the government. Once all the subcontractors took their share, the workers who actually hammered in the tarps were paid as little as \$2 a square foot. "Every level of the contracting food chain, in other words, is grotesquely overfed except the bottom rung," Davis wrote, "where the actual work is carried out."

In Mississippi, a class-action lawsuit forced several companies to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in back wages to immigrant workers. Some were not paid at all. On one Halliburton/KBR job site, undocumented immigrant workers reported being wakened in the middle of the night by their employer (a sub-subcontractor), who allegedly told them that immigration agents were on their way. Most workers fled to avoid arrest.

This corruption and abuse is particularly relevant because of Trump's stated plan to contract out much of his infrastructure spending to private players in so-called public-private partnerships.



In the Katrina aftermath, the attacks on vulnerable people, carried out in the name of reconstruction and relief, did not stop there. In order to offset the tens of billions going to private companies in contracts and tax breaks, in November 2005 the Republican-controlled Congress announced that it needed to cut \$40 billion from the federal budget. Among the programs that were slashed were student loans, Medicaid, and food stamps. In other words, the poorest people in the United States subsidized the contractor bonanza twice: first, when Katrina relief morphed into unregulated corporate handouts, providing neither decent jobs nor functional public services; and, second, when the few programs that directly assist the unemployed and working poor nationwide were gutted to pay those bloated bills.

This is the disaster capitalism blueprint, and it aligns with Trump's own track record as a businessman all too well.

Trump and Pence come to power at a time when these kinds of disasters, like the lethal tornadoes that just struck the southeastern United States, are coming fast and furious. Trump has already declared the U.S. a rolling disaster zone. And the shocks will keep getting bigger, thanks to the reckless policies that have already been promised.

What Katrina tells us is that this administration will attempt to exploit each disaster for maximum gain. We'd better get ready. ♦

<https://theintercept.com/2017/01/24/get-ready-for-the-first-shocks-of-trumps-disaster-capitalism/>

Portions of this article were adapted from "The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism".

MIDDLE EAST

SodaStream boss blames Netanyahu for Palestinian job losses

Daniel Birnbaum accuses Israeli PM of perpetuating conflict with Palestinians for his own benefit.

3 August 2016

In this revealing article, the chief of SodaStream Israel blames Prime Minister Netanyahu for prohibiting the Palestinian workers in his plant, in the West Bank, from receiving permits to work in the relocated plant within the Green Line.

He completely exonerates the BDS movement from this loss of jobs – which he says Netanyahu had blamed them (BDS) for.

Read the complete article at the link below. ♦

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/03/daniel-birnbaum-sodastream-boss-netanyahu-palestinian-job-losses>

INTERNATIONAL

Venezuela on the brink

By John Wight, January 4, 2017

The crisis engulfing Venezuela appears to have reached the point of no return. Inflation is heading for 1000% while shortages of food and other essentials are now widespread. It has prompted many to speculate that it is just a matter of time before President Maduro is forced from office and Chavism is consigned to the dustbin of history.

The legacy of Hugo Chavez

When Hugo Chavez first came to prominence in the early 1990s, as a young military officer leading a failed coup attempt, Venezuela was a country that appeared ripe for revolution. Despite possessing some of the largest oil reserves in the world, it recorded some of the worst social indicators anywhere in Latin America. This was in contrast to its status in the 1970s as the richest and most stable country in the region, boasting high growth and low inequality compared to its neighbours.

But then came the eighties and the onset of instability – reflected in three failed coup attempts and one presidential impeachment – which sent economic growth south and with it social justice, as the rich and wealthy sought to maintain their wealth at the expense of the poor.

External factors were key in this regard, specifically the arrival of Ronald Reagan onto the global political and geopolitical stage. The neoliberal reforms he introduced, authored by a clutch of ideologically driven madmen

emanating out of the now infamous Chicago School – associated most prominently with the work of free market fundamentalist guru Milton Friedman – were a disaster not only for working people in the US but throughout the world, particularly the Global South. Countries such as Venezuela, despite its enormous oil wealth, were vulnerable to capital flight, particularly to the US, predicated on the role of the dollar as the world's international reserve currency. The process of dollarization, in which those who could preferred to hold most of their money in dollars rather than their domestic currency, effectively reduced countries such as Venezuela to the status of US neo colonies, led by governments whose overriding priority was to appease Washington rather than serve the needs of their own people.

When Hugo Chavez came to power in 1999, having abandoned force and embraced democracy, it seemed the region was witnessing its political and economic rebirth, one that involved breaking the chains of servitude that had bound them to Washington's agenda since the Monroe Doctrine laid claim to the region in the interests of US domination in the 19th century. Not only was Chavez a man of the left who took inspiration from the life of the continent's Great Liberator, Simon Bolivar, he had risen to power as a member of the country's much maligned indigenous population. This breaking of centuries of racial prejudice was of enormous historical significance, helping to lay the political ground upon which Evo Morales, likewise of indigenous heritage, was elected President of Bolivia in 2005.

Indeed prior to Chavez becoming Venezuela's president in 1998, under the auspices of his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), it was almost impossible for left wing leaders to win elections in Latin America. Afterwards it became almost impossible for them to lose. Inspired by his example and popularity with the poor, progressive governments arrived in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru in the years following, producing a seemingly unalterable shift to the left in a continent that had long been accustomed to right wing dictatorships, military juntas, and proto-fascist governments in the decades previous.

Achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution

Chavez was intent on utilizing Venezuela's oil wealth to transform the lives of the masses of the people, instead of allowing it to remain in the hands of the nation's oligarchs, who used it to fund exorbitant lifestyles redolent of Miami Beach, Monaco, and Beverly Hills. The Venezuelan president undoubtedly kept his word, as over the next decade a social transformation took place in the country, measured in vast improvements in literacy, healthcare,

housing, and the overall share of the nation's wealth redistributed to the poor. Social spending doubled under Chavez from 11.3 percent of GDP in 1998 to 22.8 percent of GDP in 2011. The Gini coefficient, measuring income inequality, improved from one of the highest to one of the lowest in the region.

These achievements should be considered in the context of a relentless attempt by the forces of the right in Venezuela – the oligarchs in control of the private media, big business, and other economic interests – to block, derail, and even overturn the country's democracy with an attempted coup in 2002, followed by a politically orchestrated strike within the oil industry in 2002-03.

The current crisis

Eighteen years on from 1999 and the crisis that has enveloped the country under Chavez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, shows no sign of abating. A sharp decrease in global oil prices has had a grievous impact on an economy whose one export of note is oil. It is a factor commonly found in oil rich countries, wherein the abundance of oil can distort rather than enhance economic development.

However the real question is who or what is responsible for the price of crude plummeting a mammoth 60 percent since 2014? For the answer look no further than Riyadh. ♦

Ed Note: Read the remainder of the article at the link below. John Wight is the author of a politically incorrect and irreverent Hollywood memoir – Dreams That Die – published by Zero Books. He's also written five novels, which are available as Kindle eBooks. You can follow him on Twitter at @JohnWight1.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/01/04/venezuela-on-the-brink/>

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<http://ujpo.org/ujpo-news/>

Affiliations:

Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations (CSJO);
Canadian Peace Alliance (CPA);
International Institute for Secular Humanistic
Judaism (IISHJ)

Edited By UJPO National Board Members

Volunteer produced

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