



# UJPO News



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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 jointly as the UJPO since 1945.

### Volume #38, Issue #4

Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

## UJPO STATEMENT ON THE VENEZUELA CRISIS

The United Jewish People's Order-Canada firmly opposes the Canadian government's support for the coup by the self-proclaimed Venezuelan President Juan Guaidó. The elections in which the opposition refused to participate were internationally monitored and reported as scrupulously fair. The Canadian government's endorsing the US call for Venezuela's military to take over is a disgrace and anti-democratic.

Canada must immediately retract its endorsement of illegal and criminal acts of war under the United Nations Charter, and criminal acts of state terrorism against the government and the people of Venezuela.

UJPO-Canada supports mobilization of opposition to the Guaidó coup which is ignored by the mainstream media and we support and respect the Venezuelan people's right to a democratically elected government.

Executive Board, United Jewish People's Order-Canada

January 27, 2019

## The 2019-2020 Ben Shek Social Justice Award



Photo by Barbara Silverstein, Canadian Jewish News

The UJPO National Board proudly announces that there are two successful nominees this year.

We congratulate Julia Barnett and Sol Hermolin!

Presentations will take place at Toronto UJPO's Third Seyder, Saturday, April 27, 2019.

Tributes will appear in the Spring issue of UJPO News.

### Save the date!



Photo by Steve Russell, Getty Images

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# NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

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## FROM TORONTO

By Rachel Epstein

The AGM for UJPO-Toronto and the Morris Winchevsky School was held on November 4, 2018 and we are happy to report that three new Board members were elected. Here's a little about them:

### ★Adam Chaleff

A graduate of the Morris Winchevsky School, I grew up spending summers at Camp Naivelt and now get to share our community with my own family, including my spouse, Amina and son, Elan. Raised with the social justice values our community cherishes, I've been part of movements to sustain public services like education, transit and hydro. I've also had the chance to serve on and lead a number of boards, including as vice-chair of the Toronto Public Library Board; president of Wychwood Open Door, which serves homeless and socially isolated folks in the St. Clair West community; and chair of SummerWorks, a curated performance festival to launch new and experimental work in Toronto. I work in communications for a provincial union and frequently contribute to progressive electoral and issue-based campaigns.

Having benefited from the work of all those who came before me, I'm looking forward to collaborating with Rachel, the UJPO-Toronto Board and the rest of the community to ensure we thrive now and for future generations.

### ★Jonathan Brown Gilbert (see interview on page 6)

I'm a young Jewish guy who grew up in Toronto. I now do a lot of community organizing work with IfNotNow, and sometimes with Independent Jewish Voices. Since discovering UJPO a year and a half ago, I've come to many events, helped organize an intergenerational activist *shabes*, and joined the Zing! Zing! Zing! singing group, which prompted a magical visit to Camp Naivelt.

Zing! Zing! Zing! was my introduction to the Yiddish language, which led me to spend last summer learning Yiddish at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts.

I'm excited about the role UJPO can play in the resurgence of the Jewish left in Toronto, and as a home for radical Yiddish culture, old and new! I would be honoured to help contribute to this work.

### ★Anton Guz

Anton Guz is a 26-year-old white trans non-binary bisexual disabled Jew from Kyiv, Ukraine. Anton uses

they/them pronouns. They've lived in Kyiv, Toronto, New York City, small town Indiana, rural Georgia, Nicosia, Cyprus and Brattleboro, Vermont. They are in the middle of an MA in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation which they swear they'll finish sometime before the heat death of the universe. They moved back to Toronto in 2016.

Anton got connected to UJPO by accident through attending the first Intergenerational Dialogue event at the Winchevsky Centre in 2017 and then walking up to Rachel to offer to do an internship there. They wound up working in the office for 6 months, doing things like writing petitions, running events, re-organizing bookshelves, destroying refrigerators and being confused over the phone. Since then, they are a full-time caregiver for their grandmother. Anton also organizes with IfNotNow Toronto and Independent Jewish Voices. They've been known to spend a little more time than is entirely healthy on Facebook and if you'd like to help them do more of that, you can add them by searching Антон Биип Бууп (Anton Beep Boop in Russian) or just Anton. They're really excited to join UJPO-Toronto's Board of Directors and to continue to do work with this organization that embodies a Jewish life they can be proud of, UJPO-brand *narishkayt* and all.

We are also happy to be welcoming back returning Board members:

**David Abramowitz, Barbara Blaser, Hannah Blazer, Charna Gord, Marilyn Tate, Elyse Tera, and Max Wallace.**

**Camp Naivelt:** Despite the ice and snow and frigid temperatures, Camp Naivelt is gearing up for the summer season. The summer programming is almost complete, including special concerts, speakers and community events! This year's Bagel Brunch speakers are a diverse group that will make people want to jump out of bed Sunday mornings to enjoy fresh bagels, strong coffee and lively discussions. Music camp with multi-talented Martin VandeVen and Ameena Bajer Koulack, will take place from Sun., July 7 to Sat., July 13, culminating in a Klezmer/jazz/exploratory concert. This year we are introducing a week-long All Ages Creative Camp from Sat. August 3 to Sat. August 9. The week will include a range of workshops, classes, experiential adventures and projects, creative writing, traditional and abstract painting, film making, life drawing, environmental art, painting personalized Matryoshka dolls, modern and interpretive dance, making a graphic novel, performance art, various craft projects and more. Creative Camp will culminate with a Community Festival of the Arts on Saturday night, August 9.

**Morris Winchevsky School:** The MWS continues to grow and is now home to 42 students. Staff and students were

very sad to say goodbye to much-loved Grades 4-6 teacher, Alex Barnes, who left for a full-time teaching position. However, we are extremely pleased to welcome new teacher, Michal Stein, who comes to us highly recommended from the Danforth Jewish Circle. Michal is a freelance journalist and informal educator, currently doing her Masters of Journalism at Ryerson. She holds a B.A. (Hons) in English and History from the University of King's College and Dalhousie University. She is interested in exploring Jewish history and identity and finds teaching an exciting and fulfilling way to connect with Jewish culture.

We are gearing up for the Purim party on Sunday, March 17 – always a fun party with costumes, prizes and great food!

Zing! Zing! Zing! continues to make its monthly home at the Free Times Café, established 38 years ago by Judy Perly and known for live music and home cooked food. ZZZ is also participating in a cabaret to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. With others, we will be singing the Internationale and Bread & Roses.

**Cemetery Committee:** Yes, we have a cemetery committee and it has been very busy! We have made several field trips to Bathurst Lawn Memorial Park to survey the condition of foundations and cemetery plots, and to get the lay of the land, so to speak! We are in the process, with others, of securing plots in a new section of the cemetery and we are trying to determine the needs of our Toronto members. Watch for a very short survey coming your way! Also, thanks to a generous donation from Marlene Fine and family, the UJPO section at the Bathurst Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery has a beautiful new bench. Now those who visit the cemetery to pay respects to their loved ones will have a comfortable place to sit – one that will last for many years.

**Other Programming:** In November, as part of Holocaust Education Week, many people new to UJPO attended a downtown event that featured Arielle Sugarman speaking on Disability, Racism and Conceptions of the Jewish Body. And as usual in December we had a lively and grease-soaked Chanukah/Khanike party, with a fabulous shpil put on by the B'nai Mitzvah class. We also deepened our learning about gender from Hershel Russell's presentation, "The Joy of Gender". Most recently UJPO-Toronto Board member Anton Guz and UJPO member Marylin Kanee facilitated a well-attended workshop about "How to criticize Israel without being anti-Semitic". Based on a workshop offered by the UK-based group, Jewdas, at last year's Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) conference, the workshop generated much interest and discussion. We are

also planning, in partnership with the Noor Cultural Centre, a panel discussion called "Free Speech/Hate Speech Controversies – Critical Perspectives". Date TBA.

And of course we are gearing up for the Third Seyder which will be held on Saturday, April 27, 2019. In the spirit of Passover we will be highlighting the experiences of displaced people – refugees, immigrants, and others forcibly removed from their homes – as well as those taking meaningful action for social justice. We will also be celebrating the two winners of UJPO-Canada's Ben Shek Social Justice Award: Julia Barnett and Sol Hermolin. Please consider joining us! ♦

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## Statement on Indigenous Rights

*January 14, 2019*

The United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) condemns the legal and police actions taken against the Wet'suwet'en, and supports the hereditary chiefs in withholding consent for any pipelines on Wet'suwet'en territory. We affirm the sovereignty, rights and traditions of the Wet'suwet'en as well as every other Indigenous nation.

Free, prior and informed consent as stipulated in the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) doesn't exist meaningfully for Indigenous communities in Canada. In treaty processes and in the decades since, there is often no option not to sign on the dotted line or to retain one's territory intact and work with it according to community priorities. Additionally, the rights of Indigenous nations are protected under Canadian law, including through the 1997 Delgamuqw and 2014 Tsilqot' in Supreme Court decisions. The unceded territories of so-called BC and elsewhere are an opportunity to do things differently, to negotiate meaningfully with the peoples whose eons-long stewardship left a legacy of abundance in the things we all need to live – fresh air and water; complex, intact eco-systems.

UJPO condemns the failure of provincial and federal governments to protect Canada's land, water, resources and eco-systems for future generations, leaving this task to Indigenous people and underfunded organizations. We oppose governments' willingness to abandon human rights, here and abroad, while facilitating the profits of multinational companies. We oppose their sacrifice of future generations of human and other life, for the sake of a giant closing-out sale of Canada's resources.

Climate change is upon us. Even with BC, Alberta and California aflame, governments support industry's fourth decade of resistance to weaning our country off fossil fuels: arguing, even as consumption increases, for "gradual" transition.

UJPO supports the Wet'suwet'en as they declare, "The time is now."

Sincerely,  
Rachel Epstein, Executive Director  
On behalf of the UJPO-Toronto Board of Directors  
*The United Jewish People's Order embraces justice in all its forms.*

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## FROM WINNIPEG

By Henry Shorr

Our annual barbeque was in June. About 40 people attended, enjoyed good food and conversation, and were serenaded by guitarist Aaron Shorr.

The choir was very active last year. There were two new singers. The choir leader retires after this next season. Performances included: Jewish school reunion, Chanukah, Shaftesbury Park Retirement Residence twice, Simkin Centre, Warsaw Ghetto Memorial.

We co-sponsored a weekend seminar on "Israel, Palestine and International Law". One hundred twenty-five people registered. It was live streamed and posted to the Internet.

On November 25 we held a forum on electoral politics called "So You've Been Elected – Now What?" The moderator was Mark Golden. The panelists were Blandine Tona – an NDP candidate in a recent provincial by-election, Anita Neville – a former Liberal MP, and Judy Wasilycia Leis – a former NDP MLA and provincial cabinet minister, and former NDP MP. Also at this event, Roz Usiskin presented the Ben Shek Award to Mark Etkin.

Itay Zutra, instructor at the University of Manitoba, is presenting a UJPO Winnipeg lecture series on Contemporary Israeli Literature.

The UJPO Winnipeg book club is in its sixth year. We had three meetings this fall. We have a core of nine people who attend most meetings, and the occasional guest. We have discussed articles on fascism, BDS, and Jeremy Corbin. We are reading David Harvey's book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* for our next meeting in late January.

UJPO Winnipeg member Harriet Zaidman will be launching *City on Strike*, a novel about the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, on Sunday, April 14. The novel for children ages 10 to 13 is set in the North End of Winnipeg, the home of most Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish, and other immigrants at the time. The novel follows the lives of children from a poor Jewish immigrant family as the events of the largest labour stoppage in Canada's history played out. The issues of racism and "fake news" were key determinants in the crushing of the strike. These issues are just as relevant as

the centenary of the strike is commemorated, with reactionary forces spreading lies about identifiable groups and encouraging resentment against them, with the aim of dividing ordinary people against each another. *City on Strike* will be published by Red Deer Press of Toronto and will be available in early March.

Roz Usiskin, on behalf of UJPO-Winnipeg, has received an offer to donate the UJPO (Winnipeg) archives to the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada. Informal responses from active members appear to favour this offer. The Executive will discuss the proposal shortly. ♦



Roz Usiskin presenting the Ben Shek Award to Mark Etkin

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## FROM HAMILTON

By Paul Weinberg

After the official Hanukkah had come and gone, Rabbi David Mivasair who recently moved to Hamilton and his partner Lil Blume sponsored an alternative event at Lil's to raise funds for lamps for Gaza. Local activists from an array of backgrounds and issues participated in the symbolic lighting of candles with social justice themes. The turnout was great, probably about 50 people in total. Don McLean, the city's veteran environment and climate change campaigner (he fought the good, albeit lost fight against the Red Hill expressway) was one of invited activists. He said he had never participated in anything like it before and he was very moved. It was an auspicious start for Hamilton's new social justice rabbi.

In January, we met at Lyn Center's house to hear Joyce Wayne interview Sol Blaser about his life growing up Jewish, leftist and a veteran member of UJPO. Sol's parents and two brothers were born in Russia and came to Canada in 1926, and Sol was born in Toronto in 1931. He worked in the garment industry in Toronto for 47 years and was a union member. He had some stories about how UJPO acrimoniously debated and split as the oppression of Jews and tyranny of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union became better understood after 1956. And perhaps, people in the organization were finally willing to come to terms with what had transpired. He was born into the UJPO, then known as the Labour League Mutual Benefit Society, became an active member of the Youth Division, and



continues to be a UJPO member. Now in his 80s, he is full of energy and thoughtful in his retirement. As maybe one of the last living members of the old Jewish working class, he has not abandoned his commitment to socialist ideals and values. Joyce and her husband Sandy audiotaped the proceedings so that Sol's anecdotes and stories can be preserved. ♦

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## SECULAR JEWISH NEWS

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By Carl Rosenberg, Vancouver

One of my favourite programs at the Peretz Centre for Secular Jewish Culture is the Fraytik Tsu Nakht, the monthly secular shabes dinner with wine, challah, songs, readings, and presentations by guest speakers. On Friday, Jan. 18, we heard Jean Teillet on "Louis Riel and the Canada First Party".

Ms. Teillet, a great-grandniece of Louis Riel, is Senior Counsel with Pape Salter Teillet Law Firm and specializes in Indigenous rights law. She is an author and lecturer on issues surrounding justice and Indigenous rights and identity. She took part in a two-part CBC radio show, The "trial" of Sir John A. MacDonald, dealing with crimes committed against the Métis and First Nations, arguing the case for the prosecution.

Many Canadians are broadly familiar with Louis Riel's leadership of resistance to the encroachment of the rights and culture of the Métis Nation in the Red River Resistance in Manitoba in 1869-1870 and the Northwest Resistance in Saskatchewan in 1885. Teillet discussed a lesser-known part of this story – the "reign of terror" (as it has been called) against the Métis in Manitoba from 1870 to 1873 that resulted in multiple assaults, rapes and deaths. It was perpetrated by a Canadian military force sent by Sir John A Macdonald to carry out the agenda of the Canada First party, which was every bit as racist as the present-day proponents of the "America First" slogan in the U.S.

Teillet has written a book (to be published this September) which seeks to tell this history from the perspective of the Métis: *The North-West Is Our Mother: A History of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation* (HarperCollins). I hope it is widely read.

On Sunday Dec. 9, the eighth night of Chanukah, Independent Jewish Voices-Vancouver held a Chanukah gathering, "Light Up the Dark in Gaza," to raise money to buy and ship solar lamps to the Palestinians in Gaza. Gaza has suffered an Israeli military blockade – including Israeli-imposed power shortages – for over a decade. It was one of four events held by IJV-Canada. The others were in Ottawa, Montreal and Hamilton.

IJV member Yom-Tov Shamash commented, "Chanukah is called a 'Festival of Lights.' But 'light' is in short supply around the world, especially in Gaza, where the population must survive on three to four hours of electricity a day, thanks to a policy of keeping two million people in the dark in retaliation for electing a Hamas government 13 years ago. Israel has not become one iota safer. So we wanted to shed some light on the stupidity of keeping two million people in the dark and literally bring light by raising money to send solar lights to Gaza."

The event featured food (especially latkes), and music by Vancouver singer/songwriter Geoff Berner. The centre of the evening consisted of presentations by various "bright lights" – activists from diverse organizations who spoke about the social justice and liberation struggles they have been involved in, and lit Chanukah candles. IJV member Martha Roth introduced the presenters: Saleem Spindari, Acting Senior Manager of Refugees and Migrant Workers Programs at MOSAIC; Earle Peach, an environmental activist with the ironically named Justin Trudeau Brigade; Ingrid Mendez of Sanctuary Health; Chris Stephenson, communications director of Immigrant Services Society of BC; Dawn Morrison, founder of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty; Dalya Israel of WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) Rape Crisis Centre; Donna Baranski-Walker of the Rebuilding Alliance, who connected us by Zoom to Palestinian psychiatrist Yasser Abu Jamei in Gaza; and an Israeli "refusenik," Yonatan Shapira, who in 2003 was one of 27 air force pilots refusing to take part in attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. He is a member of Boycott from Within (Israeli supporters of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel), and he spoke to us eloquently on a pre-recorded message. ♦

### CSJO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

#### "Jews in Comedy: So Funny You Could Plotz"

May 24 (4:00 pm) - May 27 (10:00 am)

National Ursuline College

2550 Lander Road, Pepper Pike, Ohio 44124

We invite you to attend CSJO's annual conference! The weekend will be filled with a variety of topics presented by a well-rounded group of presenters. The conference will open with the Shabbat Gathering on Friday evening. The keynote addresses and workshops on Saturday and Sunday will, as always, be top notch, presented by a mix of internal and external experts. Register here:

<https://www.csjo.org/csjo-2019-registration>

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# HONOURABLE MENTSHN

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## Miriam Garfinkle – 1954-September 2018 - Tribute in Memoriam

By Sam Blatt

Though Miriam Garfinkle was not a member of UJPO, she attended many of our events. UJPO members surely were affected and met up with Miriam on many occasions during her lifetime of activism. She was one of those



unique members of society, active from an early age in social justice and human rights, that we in UJPO – and anyone interested in partaking in social activism – cannot have failed to be impressed and influenced by. Many of us probably knew her at least as a founding member of Beit Zatoun, and a board member there until it closed. If you didn't meet her in person, you may nevertheless recognize her name from the many letters to the editor she wrote decrying varying injustices, locally, nationally, and globally.

As a physician she was utterly devoted to her patients, making a “house call” on a homeless patient in the park where the person lived, or heading out in the middle of winter to find a patient having a mental health crisis. She worked for many years at the Immigrant Women's Health Centre and at the Regent Park Community Health Centre. Her concern was not only for her individual patients, but for the social conditions that lay at the root of many of their problems.

Her activism went far beyond issues related to health care. She fought for an increased minimum wage, lobbied for better funding for reproductive health care for immigrant women, and occupied a Cabinet Minister's office to demand full funding for health care for refugees.

The cause of the Palestinian people was central to her political activism. As a Jew, she felt a special obligation to speak out about this and to say “Not in my name”. She saw the parallels between this issue and the oppression of indigenous peoples in Canada and spoke up often for indigenous rights. What tied her diverse involvements together was a fierce commitment to justice, to doing what was right. She was a committed socialist who was enraged by injustice and never wavered in her belief that the world had to rid itself of capitalism and replace it with a new society based on justice and grassroots democracy. ♦

*Ed. Note: Though I had met Miriam many years ago, I chose primarily to extract the content of the above from the obituary that appeared in the Toronto Star on September*

15, 2018. Visit [www.diemer.ca/Miriam/](http://www.diemer.ca/Miriam/) or see what people wrote about her in “Moments with Miriam” at [www.diemer.ca/Docs/MomentswithMiriam.pdf](http://www.diemer.ca/Docs/MomentswithMiriam.pdf).

*Miriam's friends are launching a “Miriam Garfinkle Social Justice Fund” to support progressive causes of the kind that were important to her.*

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## Remembering Ed Klein

We were distraught by the sudden death of Ed Klein, a longstanding member of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations (CSJO) and leader of the Humanist Jewish Congregation of Queens, N.Y. He was active in several secular Jewish organizations.

A participant in many aspects of CSJO, Ed received his Secular Rabbinical ordination through the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. He was also an attorney, a musician and an exemplary mentsh. In addition to participation in CSJO's many workshops he demonstrated his considerable clarinet skills during many CSJO talent shows. He will be sorely missed. ♦

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## WHAT'S IN ORDER

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### Mazl tov to:

#### Winnipeg

- Harriet Zaidman who on April 14 will launch her new book *City on Strike*, a novel about an immigrant family who are drawn into the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike when workers and soldiers returning from WWI demanded jobs, decent wages and the right to organize.
- Roz Usiskin on the birth of her 8th grandchild.

#### Toronto

- Our Executive Director Rachel Epstein whose film “Hi Mrs. Friedman!” will be screened at the Toronto Short Film Festival at the Carlton Cinema on Friday March 15 at 7:45 p.m. Get tickets in advance!
- Ester Reiter who was included as No. 12 in *Chatelaine* magazine's 32 most important women in Canada in 2018.
- Anna Shternshis, Al and Malka Green Professor of Yiddish Studies and Director of the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, who researched and was an executive producer of the CD album *Yiddish Glory* which was nominated for a 2019 Grammy Award for Best World Music.

### Heartfelt condolences to:

- The Wall Maclear family on the loss of Michael Maclear, father and grandfather, renowned TV broadcaster, author and producer.

- The Buncel Gale family on the loss of Erwin Buncel, father and grandfather.

### Welcome new members:

- Martin and Sharon Moss

### Get well:

- Ross Morgan

### Errata:

In our last issue (page 5) we named Michael Benazon as a founding member of Independent Jewish Voices (IJV). Michael was involved in founding the Alliance of Concerned Jewish Canadians (ACJC), along with Mark Etkin, upon return from the UJPO tour of 2005. Diana Ralph, Judy Haiven, Larry Haiven, and Mark Etkin are among the founding members of IJV. ♦

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## GETTING TO KNOW OUR UJPO MEMBERS

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Photo by Aidan McNally

### Jonathan Brown Gilbert

*Interviewed by Sam Blatt.*

*What brought you to UJPO?*

My first experience with UJPO and the Winchevsky Centre was in May 2017 with Lia Tarachansky's presentation "The Rise of Fascism: Israel in the Age of Trump". I had originally planned to hear Lia speak in Halifax – where I was in university until April of that year – but extreme weather cancelled her flights.

I moved back to Toronto after graduating that spring, and jumped at the opportunity to attend Lia's talk. The moment I learned about UJPO, I couldn't believe I hadn't known about it sooner. I became a member that August. Soon I found my way to the Zing! Zing! Zing! folk choir, which led me to spend a magical weekend up at Naivelt. It

was also my first encounter with Yiddish, which has since become a major interest.

*In which boards and/or committees are you active?*

I joined the Board of UJPO-Toronto at the AGM in November, and I've also recently joined the Social Justice and Culture Committee.

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

On the Social Justice and Culture Committee, we're getting started on plans for this year's UJPO Seyder (and looking for people to join our planning team!)

Something I'm really excited about: We're launching a Yiddish learning circle. Tentatively called **דער שידדי!** Speak Yiddish! we'll be starting off with beginner Yiddish lessons that are led by members of the UJPO community, and hosted in people's living rooms. It's being spearheaded by Ester Reiter and Lev Jaeger – I'll be there too, but mostly as a participant. Part lesson, and part Yiddish schmooze time, we'll also be exploring some interesting Yiddish artifacts that Ester digs up from the UJPO archives. Join us on March 4th!

*What is your life outside UJPO?*

I grew up in Toronto, living near Dufferin and St. Clair West before I went off to school at the University of King's College in Halifax. My work has been a bit of a mixed bag: policy research, community theatre, academia, and community organizing. I spent most of the last year living in the U.S., working at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C., and visiting Boston and NYC, experiencing the resurgence of the Jewish left in the midst of Trump's America. Last summer I was fortunate to get into a Yiddish program – together with long-time Naivelter Shayle Kilroy – at the Yiddish Book Center, tucked away in the countryside of Western Massachusetts. I spent two months there studying Yiddish language and culture, immersed in song, theatre, and political history. My initiation into Yiddishkayt was a transformative experience, and one I hope to share with others.

Just recently, I've moved to Parkdale, applied to graduate school, and am on the lookout for work.

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

Definitely. I do a lot of community organizing work with IfNotNow Toronto, which has been connected to UJPO since it first started here in Toronto. IfNotNow is a movement to end the North American Jewish community's support for the occupation in Israel/Palestine. It was founded in the U.S. during the 2014 war on Gaza, and I was part of the group that expanded it to Canada in the



summer of 2017. We started IfNotNow's first non-U.S. chapter in Toronto, and the second in Montreal a year later. The two-day training that founded IfNotNow's Canadian presence was held at the Winchevsky Centre. IfNotNow was very grateful to UJPO for this support, and later collaborated on an alternative shabes event where Jewish activists across three generations came together to share stories and build relationships with one another. The overlap in our membership continues to grow, and I'm excited to see the places this partnership will take us.

Another connection I'm excited about is *Briarpatch Magazine*. *Briarpatch* is a fiercely independent magazine committed to labour issues and social justice. It's published in Regina, and my partner Saima happens to be the editor. Lookout for a feature-length article in the March/April issue about the resurgence of the Canadian Jewish left. You might see some names you recognize, including members of UJPO, IJV, and IfNotNow. There are a growing number of Jews looking for a leftist alternative, and publications looking for a leftist Jewish voice – *Briarpatch* is certainly one of them.

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

My aunt Marcy was, for a short time, the education director of the Morris Winchevsky school. I've got socialists on both sides of my family, but somehow it took me 23 years to find UJPO.

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

There is a new generation of lefty Jews who are looking for an alternative to the donor-controlled, centre-right institutions that dominate mainstream Jewish life. Many of them don't even know that UJPO exists, and were never exposed to the rich history and legacy of leftist Jewish culture and politics. I would love for UJPO to invest in engaging these people, and to think deeply about what it would take to successfully invite them into the organization, while also staying true to UJPO's legacy. There will be growing pains, but it's worth it.

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

I see UJPO as a potential home for all sorts of progressive Jewish cultural and political work, and I'm excited to invest my energy in building that. I see myself contributing to Yiddishkayt, new programming around Yiddish language learning, and efforts to bring in more young people. I'm interested in the ways UJPO might draw inspiration from the successful organizing and leftist cultural achievements of groups like JFREJ (Jews for Racial and Economic Justice) and the Boston Worker's Circle.

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

Zing! Zing! Zing! was my first encounter with Yiddish, and without it I would never have applied for that summer program at the Yiddish Book Center. Now, I'm deeply in love with Yiddish, and I can feel that a whole other world of Jewish history and culture has been opened up to me.

There are so many young Jews out there for whom neither synagogue nor Israel are particularly appealing foundations for Jewish life. Yiddishkayt presents a rich alternative mode of connecting to Jewish history, politics, and culture – and many don't even know this history exists. Let's find those people, and build radical Jewish futures together. ♦

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## POETRY & SONG

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### My Sweet Canary By Roza Eskenazi (1920s)

*Submitted by Harriet Lyons*

Readers may wonder why this space is devoted to a song that doesn't seem to have much, if anything, to do with social justice or Jewish culture, to which this column has mostly been dedicated. Let me explain. The song was the signature tune of Roza Eskenazi, a Sephardic Greek Jew born Sarah Skinazi in Smyrna, in the 1890s, and brought to Salonica (now Thessaloniki) by her parents as a young child. Roza grew up to become a leading singer of Rembetika (singular: Rembetiko), a Greek/Turkish art form popular in working class bars near Greek ports in early and mid-20th century Greece. A recent documentary film, *Jewish Women of Rembetika*, showcases the works of Eskenazi and two other female Jewish *rebetes*. Rembetiko, however, was a form defined more by social class and Greco Turkish ancestry than religious identity. Aurally, Rembetika contain echoes of music more familiar to audiences schooled in the Yiddish musical tradition, possibly because of shared Turkish influences.

Both the venues and performers associated with Rembetika flirted continually with outlaw status. The bars were regularly raided, in large measure because the audience and the performers were associated with a restive underclass, suspected of fomenting strikes and other forms of insurrection. The Greek dictator Metaxas banned Rembetika in the 1930s, appealing to nationalist sentiments by citing its Turkish origin. The feature film *Rembetiko* portrays some of this history. (The URL below links to a full version of the film, with English subtitles and lots of music: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=kn2Ryt50Wk8>.)

A particularly popular instrument was the baglama, a much smaller stringed instrument than the bouzouki, hence



more easily hidden from the police. Female performers were widely believed to be promiscuous, and certainly songs like “A Sweet Canary” spoke of a sexual morality different from that sanctioned by Church or synagogue. The song is gentler than other Eskenazi songs, however, which either express fury at unfaithful men or affirm a woman’s right to drink, smoke hashish, and take lovers. One of her most controversial love affairs was with a German officer during the Nazi Occupation of Athens. Whatever her motive and the opinion of the Jewish community, this relationship undoubtedly saved her life and that of other Jews she was able to help, despite being arrested briefly.

Eskenazi achieved fame and acceptance with a national and international Greek audience, performing publicly till shortly before her death in 1980, including a successful tour in the U.S.

My sweet canary,  
You take hold of my mind  
In the morning, when you wake me,  
When you warble sweetly  
Come close to me in my arms,  
Ah, one evening in my room  
Come near me in my arms, I will fill you  
With my kisses.  
Oh jealous bird  
You drive me crazy;  
With your sweet voice,  
You make me your slave.  
Come close to me in my arms,  
Ah, one evening in my room.  
Come close to me in my arms,  
So that I can fill you with my kisses.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=t2ZKR6OldHE> ♦

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## YIDDISH

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### Yiddish Heroism, Hebrew Tears

By Dara Horn, *Winter 2019 Jewish Review of Books*

#### Black Honey, The Life and Poetry of Avraham Sutzkever

Directed by Uri Barbash, produced by Yair Qedar  
Go2Films, 76 minutes

*Ed. Note: The movie Black Honey has been playing in New York and Israel, and hopefully will arrive in Toronto shortly.*

If you went to Jewish school, i.e. where Yiddish was the predominant Jewish language, if you are/were at all interested in Yiddish poetry, then you are familiar with the

name Abraham Sutzkever, probably the greatest Yiddish poet of modern times. What we didn’t learn in school was the amazing life of this wonderful Yiddish poet.

Sutzkever’s life was more action-packed than any Marvel superhero’s – and as stark, gory, and unsubtle as a comic book in its battle between good and evil. This is the story of an actual superhero, a living embodiment of every platitude about fighting evil and never giving up. The platitude about the transcendent power of poetic creativity is a slightly harder sell, even if it did actually save the Sutzkevers’ lives.

The movie, *Black Honey*, is an account of the poet’s life, and a must-see for anyone who cares about literature or Jewish culture.

“Avrom” in Yiddish (“Abrash” to family and friends), Sutzkever was born in Smorgon, Lithuania, in 1913. When he was two, his family was evacuated from the First World War’s eastern front to the remote Siberian town of Omsk, where he lived until the age of seven and where his father died early, at the age of 30. Sutzkever later published a mind-blowing cycle of poems titled *Siberia*, in which he imagined his childhood landscape as a fantastical wonderland infused with his father’s memory; the poems gleam with an awe that’s only enhanced by grief. (The work was illustrated by Marc Chagall. The family moved to Vilna, the “Jerusalem of Lithuania,” where he met his wife Freydke, and where his poetry rocketed him to international fame in his twenties. In 1933, he became part of the writers’ and artists’ group Yung-Vilne, along with fellow poets Shmerke Kacerginski, Chaim Grade, and Leyzer Volf.

In 1941 the Nazis conquered Vilna. They murdered more than 75,000 Jews in a forest outside the city and warehoused the remaining 20,000 in a ghetto of eight blocks. In the ghetto, the Nazis outlawed Jewish births; the Sutzkevers’ baby boy, born after this Pharaonic edict, was murdered in the ghetto hospital as Sutzkever watched. With horror compounding horror, Sutzkever obsessively wrote poems that would become central to the Vilna Ghetto’s extraordinary culture.

These poems don’t merely collect and record pain. They reveal irrepressible beauty and create an unbroken chain through past Jewish traumas. Through partisan organizations, they were read and recited as far away as Moscow. One unforgettable poem, “Moses,” describes a woman abandoning a baby in Vilna’s icy river:

In 1942, the Nazis drafted a squad of Jewish intellectuals, including Sutzkever, to loot Vilna’s cultural treasures, including those housed at YIVO, the city’s renowned archive and research center for Yiddish culture, for a future Nazi institute for the study of “Judaism without Jews.” They were to select important material so that the

rest could be pulped. Dubbing themselves the “Paper Brigade,” Sutzkever and his fellow humanists outwitted the Nazis by using the opportunity (and risking their lives) to rescue and hide many of these treasures; a trove of materials that belonged to YIVO has been rediscovered only in the last few years.

Smuggling books led to smuggling weapons for Vilna’s partisans, providing Sutzkever with links beyond the ghetto’s walls. In late 1943, the Sutzkevers escaped the ghetto through the sewers, traveling hundreds of miles on foot through swamps. And then came the moment when poetry saved their lives. The members of the Jewish Antifascist Committee in Moscow were astounded by Sutzkever’s epic poem “Kol Nidre,” with its eyewitness evidence of the genocide in progress, and they succeeded in getting the Kremlin to send a plane to rescue the poet and his wife. The first plane they sent was shot down by the Germans and crashed on a frozen lake. To reach the second plane, Sutzkever and Freydko had to walk through an area full of landmines. They walked to the rhythm of his poems. “Sometimes I walked in anapests, and sometimes in antibrachs,” he told the Israeli scholar Dory Manor.

After the war, Sutzkever was called to testify at Nuremberg. Then he and his wife made their last great escape, this time to pre-state Israel – where Sutzkever almost singlehandedly maintained the country’s Yiddish literary culture until his death in 2010, at the age of 96.

There’s one other moment in *Black Honey* where a musical instrument comes up. In that memorable scene, we learn about Bruno Kittel, an SS officer who supervised the Vilna Ghetto’s liquidation. Talented in both music and murder, Kittel set up a piano at Vilna’s deportation point, where he played concertos as Jews boarded trains to extermination camps. During one mass deportation, a teenage boy approached Kittel as he played, begging for his life. Kittel took out his pistol and shot the boy dead with his right hand, while continuing to play the piano with his left.

Sutzkever never returned to Germany after testifying at Nuremberg, refusing all invitations.

Sutzkever’s career once he arrived in Israel was a long one: He lived to 96 and continued publishing Yiddish poetry for most of those years. ♦

Hadas Calderon, the granddaughter of Avraham Sutzkever, speaking on the 100th anniversary of his birth. (Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.)



*Dara Horn is the author of five novels, most recently Eternal Life (W. W. Norton & Company).*  
<https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/4993/yiddish-heroism-hebrew-tears/>

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## CANADA

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### NDPer sponsors anti-JNF bid

*By Ron Csillag, January 25, 2019*

A member of Parliament has agreed to sponsor an e-petition that calls on the government to revoke the charitable status of the Jewish National Fund of Canada (JNF).

This is the first time an MP has lent support to an effort to rescind JNF’s tax-exempt charitable status in Canada and marks the latest development in a long-running battle by those opposed to the JNF’s charitable status.

Quebec NDP MP and national revenue critic Pierre-Luc Dusseault has agreed to sponsor petition E-1999, which, as of this writing [Jan. 21], had garnered more than 1,400 signatures. It went online on Jan. 9 and will close for signatures on May 9.

E-petitions are an official system whereby petitions that are sponsored by an MP and receive 500 signatures will be tabled in the House of Commons. The government must then respond within 45 days.

It was submitted by Independent Jewish Voices of Canada (IJV), which is considered an outlier within the Jewish community, due to its support for the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel.

On its website, IJV calls itself “a grassroots organization grounded in Jewish tradition that opposes all forms of racism and advocates for justice and peace for all in Israel-Palestine.”

The JNF was recently the subject of a scathing story by the CBC, which reported that the charity was under a Canada Revenue Agency audit for using charitable donations to build infrastructure for the Israel Defence Forces, “in violation of Canada’s tax rules.”

The JNF responded by saying that it stopped funding projects on Israeli military bases in 2016 and that the projects only “indirectly” involved the IDF, because they were for children and youth on land owned by the IDF.

In a subsequent interview with the CJN, JNF Canada’s chief executive officer, Lance Davis, said the charity is working with the CRA on its review and issued staunch defences of JNF’s financial transparency and donor accountability.

The e-petition, which is addressed to the minister of national revenue, says JNF Canada “engages in

discriminatory practices, as its landholdings are chartered for exclusively Jewish ownership, lease and benefit, as noted by the United Nations, the U.S. State Department, a former attorney general of Israel and the JNF itself.”

It says evidence “strongly indicates” that JNF Canada violates the Income Tax Act, common law and Canada Revenue Agency policy over its IDF-related projects.

As well, it claims the charity violates Canadian and international law “by enabling physical changes within occupied territory, thereby helping Israel effectively annex land within occupied territory, and, in the case of east Jerusalem, deepen control over land already annexed illegally.”

“Notably,” it adds, “the JNF Canada-funded Canada Park was built on the lands of three Palestinian villages destroyed following the 1967 war in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.”

It also accuses JNF Canada materials of depicting “occupied territory as part of Israel, a representation that runs contrary to Canadian foreign policy and international law.”

It calls on the minister of national revenue to revoke JNF’s charitable status, if the charity is found to violate the Income Tax Act, or CRA guidelines and policies.

It was initiated by Rabbi David Mivasair, a longtime IJV activist now based in Hamilton, Ont. He called the e-petition “part of an ongoing process” to hold public officials accountable.

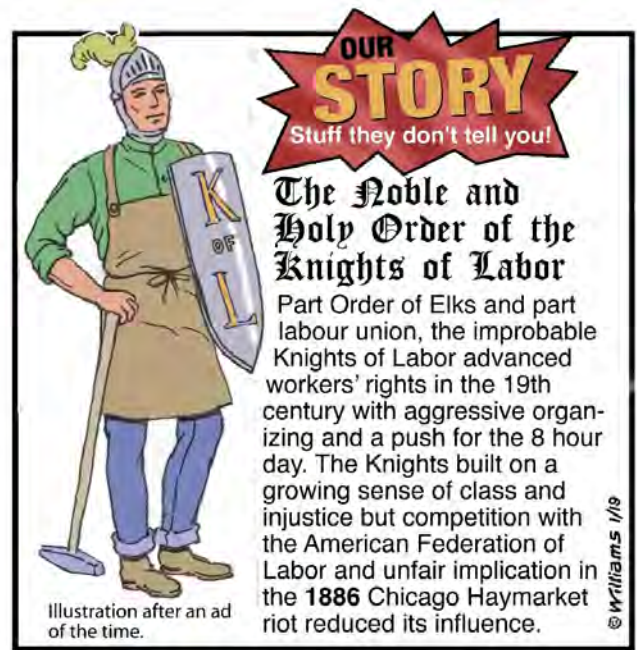
“It’s incontrovertibly factual that JNF Canada is in violation of Canada’s tax laws,” Mivasair claimed. “It has been for decades. It’s been reported for decades.”

This latest campaign “is not something that I take any pleasure in doing, but feel is morally necessary to be done,” he added.

According to guidelines for MPs, no debate is permitted when a member presents a petition. An MP “may make a brief factual statement (referring to the petition being duly certified, to its source, to the subject matter of the petition and its request, and to the number of signatures it carries), but members are not allowed to read petitions nor are they to indicate their agreement or disagreement with them.”

In 2017, IJV submitted an 85-page complaint about JNF Canada to the CRA and the national revenue minister. That followed many other campaigns designed to pressure federal officials.

This is the first time IJV has submitted a parliamentary petition and it’s “just one way of drawing public attention to this,” said the group’s national coordinator, Corey



Cartoon by John Williams

Balsam. “We’re assuming [officials] will look into it and not much more than that. [But] it’s definitely a big step for our campaign.”

He said Dusseault is “not someone who’s very engaged [in the issue], but he heard the concerns and saw the evidence.”

Dusseault did not reply to the CJN’s requests for comment.

In a statement posted to its website, JNF called the e-petition “as empty and scurrilous as earlier efforts to delegitimize the outstanding work of the JNF and, by extension, the existence of the state of Israel.”

JNF said its outreach suggests “that those who are applying any degree of critical thinking see the petition for what it is and are dismissing it as not worthy of engagement.” ♦

<https://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/more-politicians-pledge-support-for-anti-jnf-petition>

## New EKOS poll: Jewish Canadians sharply divided on Israel-Palestine

*IJV-Canada, February 19, 2019*

A national survey has revealed that a significant proportion of Jewish Canadians are critical of Israel and its policies toward Palestinians. It also reveals that almost half (48 percent) believe that accusations of antisemitism are often used to silence legitimate criticism of Israeli government policies.

The survey – conducted between 25 June and 5 September 2018 by polling firm EKOS and co-sponsored by organizations Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV)



and United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) – is the first to ask Jewish Canadians about their actual views of the Israeli government and its policies toward Palestinians.

survey results are detailed in a report released today entitled, “Two Jews, Three Opinions: Jewish Canadians’ Diverse Views on Israel-Palestine.”

On specific issues related to Israel-Palestine, Jewish Canadians are sharply divided, with high proportions opposing Israeli policies toward Palestinians:

- More than a third (37 percent) have a negative opinion of the Israeli government;
- Almost equal proportions oppose (45 percent) and support (42 percent) the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel;
- Almost a third (30 percent) think that the Palestinian call for a boycott of Israel is reasonable, and 34 percent also oppose Parliament condemning those who endorse a boycott of Israel; and
- Almost one in three (31 percent) oppose the military blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The report's author, Diana Ralph, notes that “the survey's findings indicate once again that the federal government and its major political parties are out of touch with the views of Canadians on these issues, and that, like Canadians generally, many Jewish Canadians do not support Canada's uncritically pro-Israel stance.”

“Jews that hold views highly critical of Israel are often portrayed as marginal, especially within the institutional Jewish community,” commented Ralph, a founding member of IJV. “This survey demonstrates that, on the contrary, they are increasingly reflective of the maistream.”

Rachel Epstein, Executive Director of the United Jewish People's Order, added “I am heartened to see that many Jews don't fall prey to the idea that valid criticisms of Israel are antisemitic. This unethical manipulation belittles true antisemitism, which, as we recently witnessed in Pittsburgh, is on the rise.”

A random sample of 359 Jewish Canadians aged 18+ from EKOS' online/telephone research panel, Probit, participated in the survey, which holds a margin of error of +/- 5.17% 19 times out of 20.

The survey report is available online here: <https://jvcanada.org/2019/new-ekos-poll-jewish-canadians-sharply-divided-on-israel-palestine/> ♦

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## USA

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### Jewish Voice for Peace's approach to Zionism

Jewish Voice for Peace is guided by a vision of justice, equality and freedom for all people. We unequivocally oppose Zionism because it is counter to those ideals.

We know that opposing Zionism, or even discussing it, can be painful, can strike at the deepest trauma and greatest fears of many of us. Zionism is a nineteenth-century political ideology that emerged in a moment where Jews were defined as irrevocably outside of a Christian Europe. European antisemitism threatened and ended millions of Jewish lives – in pogroms, in exile, and in the Holocaust.

Through study and action, through deep relationship with Palestinians fighting for their own liberation, and through our own understanding of Jewish safety and self determination, we have come to see that Zionism was a false and failed answer to the desperately real question many of our ancestors faced of how to protect Jewish lives from murderous antisemitism in Europe.

While it had many strains historically, the Zionism that took hold and stands today is a settler-colonial movement, establishing an apartheid state where Jews have more rights than others. Our own history teaches us how dangerous this can be.

Palestinian dispossession and occupation are by design. Zionism has meant profound trauma for generations, systematically separating Palestinians from their homes, land, and each other. Zionism, in practice, has resulted in massacres of Palestinian people, ancient villages and olive groves destroyed, families who live just a mile away from each other separated by checkpoints and walls, and children holding onto the keys of the homes from which their grandparents were forcibly exiled.

Because the founding of the state of Israel was based on the idea of a “land without people,” Palestinian existence itself is resistance. We are all the more humbled by the vibrancy, resilience, and steadfastness of Palestinian life, culture, and organizing, as it is a deep refusal of a political ideology founded on erasure.

In sharing our stories with one another, we see the ways Zionism has also harmed Jewish people. Many of us have learned from Zionism to treat our neighbors with suspicion, to forget the ways Jews built home and community wherever we found ourselves to be. Jewish people have had long and integrated histories in the Arab world and North Africa, living among and sharing



community, language and custom with Muslims and Christians for thousands of years.

By creating a racist hierarchy with European Jews at the top, Zionism erased those histories and destroyed those communities and relationships. In Israel, Jewish people of color – from the Arab world, North Africa, and East Africa – have long been subjected to systemic discrimination and violence by the Israeli government. That hierarchy also creates Jewish spaces where Jews of color are marginalized, our identities and commitments questioned and interrogated, and our experiences invalidated. It prevents us from seeing each other – fellow Jews and other fellow human beings – in our full humanity.

Zionist interpretations of history taught us that Jewish people are alone, that to remedy the harms of antisemitism we must think of ourselves as always under attack and that we cannot trust others. It teaches us fear, and that the best response to fear is a bigger gun, a taller wall, a more humiliating checkpoint.

Rather than accept the inevitability of occupation and dispossession, we choose a different path. We learn from the anti-Zionist Jews who came before us, and know that as long as Zionism has existed, so has Jewish dissent to it. Especially as we face the violent antisemitism fueled by white nationalism in the United States today, we choose solidarity. We choose collective liberation. We choose a future where everyone, including Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, can live their lives freely in vibrant, safe, equitable communities, with basic human needs fulfilled. ♦

<https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/zionism/>

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## MIDDLE EAST

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### **The Knesset candidate who says Zionism encourages anti-Semitism and calls Netanyahu 'Arch-murderer'**

*Few Israelis have heard of Dr. Ofer Cassif, the Jewish representative on the far-leftist Hadash party's Knesset slate. On April 9, that will change*

*By Ravit Hecht, Haaretz, Feb. 16, 2019*

Ofer Cassif is fire and brimstone. His words are blazing, and he bounds through his modest apartment, searching frenetically for books by Karl Marx and Primo Levi in order to find quotations to back up his ideas.

Cassif is third on the slate of Knesset candidates in Hadash (the Hebrew acronym for the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality), the successor to Israel's Communist Party. Cassif is likely to draw fire from opponents and be a conspicuous figure in the next Knesset, following the April 9 election.

Indeed, the assault on him began as soon as he was selected by the party's convention. The media pursued him; a columnist in the mass-circulation Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper, Ben-Dror Yemini, called for him to be disqualified from running for the Knesset.

Cassif, who was one of the first Israeli soldiers to refuse to serve in the territories, in 1987, gained fame thanks to a number of provocative statements. The best known is his branding of Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked as "neo-Nazi scum." On another occasion, he characterized Jews who visit the Temple Mount as "cancer with metastases that have to be eradicated."

On his alternate Facebook page, launched after repeated blockages of his original account by a blitz of posts from right-wing activists, he asserted that Culture Minister Miri Regev is "repulsive gutter contamination," that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is an "arch-murderer" and that the new Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, is a "war criminal."

*Do you regret making those remarks?*

Cassif: "'Regret' is a word of emotion. Those statements were made against a background of particular events. That's what I had to say at the time. I didn't count on being in the Knesset. That wasn't part of my plan. But it's clear to me that as a public personality, I would not have made those comments."

*Is Netanyahu an arch-murderer?*

"Yes. I wrote it in the specific context of a particular day in the Gaza Strip. A massacre of innocent people was perpetrated there, and no one's going to persuade me that those people were endangering anyone. It's a concentration camp. Not a 'concentration camp' in the sense of Bergen-Belsen; I am absolutely not comparing the Holocaust to what's happening."

*You term what Israel is doing to the Palestinians "genocide."*

"I call it 'creeping genocide.' Genocide is not only a matter of taking people to gas chambers. When Yeshayahu Leibowitz used the term 'Judeo-Nazis,' people asked him, 'How can you say that? Are we about to build gas chambers?' To that, he had two things to say. First, if the whole difference between us and the Nazis boils down to the fact that we're not building gas chambers, we're already in trouble. And second, maybe we won't use gas chambers, but the mentality that exists today in Israel – and he said this 40 years ago – would allow it. I'm afraid that today, after four years of such an extreme government, it possesses even greater legitimacy.

"But you know what, put aside 'genocide' – ethnic cleansing is taking place there. And that ethnic cleansing is

also being carried out by means of killing, although mainly by way of humiliation and of making life intolerable.

### **Clarity vs. crudity**

Given Cassif's style, not everyone in Hadash was happy with his election, particularly when it comes to the Jewish members of the predominantly Arab party. Dov Khenin, for example, declined to be interviewed and say what he thinks of his parliamentary successor. According to a veteran party figure, "From the conversations I had, it turns out that almost none of the Jewish delegates – who make up about 100 of the party's 940 delegates – supported his candidacy.

"He is perceived, and rightly so," the party veteran continues, "as someone who closes doors to Hadash activity within Israeli society. Each of the other Jewish candidates presented a record of action and of struggles they spearheaded. What does he do? Curses right-wing politicians on Facebook. Why did the party leadership throw the full force of its weight behind him? In a continuation of the [trend exemplified by] its becoming part of the Joint List, Ofer's election reflects insularity and an ongoing retreat from the historical goal of implementing change in Israeli society."

At the same time, as his selection by a 60 percent majority shows, many in the party believe that it's time to change course. "Israeli society is moving rightward, and what's perceived as Dov's [Khenin] more gentle style didn't generate any great breakthrough on the Jewish street," a senior source in Hadash notes.

"It's not a question of the tension between extremism and moderation, but of how to signpost an alternative that will develop over time. Clarity, which is sometimes called crudity, never interfered with cooperation between Arabs and Jews. On the contrary. Ofer says things that we all agreed with but didn't so much say, and of course that's going to rile the right wing. And a good thing, too."

Hadash chairman MK Ayman Odeh also says he's pleased with the choice. "Ofer will go for very sharp positions at the expense of the breadth of the alliance. But his sharp statements could have a large impact."

*Khenin was deeply esteemed by everyone. When he ran for mayor of Tel Aviv in 2008, some 35 percent of the electorate voted for him, because he was able to touch people who weren't only from his political milieu.*

Odeh: "No one has a higher regard for Dov than I do. But just to remind you, we are not a regular opposition, we are beyond the pale. And there are all kinds of styles. Influence can be wielded through comments that are vexatious the first time but which people get used to the second time. When an Arab speaks about the Nakba and about the

massacre in Kafr Kassem [an Israeli Arab village, in 1956], it will be taken in a particular way, but when uttered by a Jew it takes on special importance."

*He will be the cause of many attacks on the party.*

"Ahlan wa sahlan – welcome."

Cassif will be the first to tell you that, with all due respect for the approach pursued by Khenin and by his predecessor in the Jewish slot, Tamar Gozansky, he will be something completely different. "The three immediate dangers to Israeli society are the occupation, racism and the diminishment of the democratic space to the point of liquidation. That's the agenda that has to be the hub of the struggle, as long as Israel rules over millions of people who have no rights, enters [people's houses] in the middle of the night, arrests minors on a daily basis and shoots people in the back."

"Israel commits murder on a daily basis. When you murder one Palestinian, you're called Elor Azaria [the IDF soldier convicted and jailed for killing an incapacitated Palestinian assailant]; when you murder and oppress thousands of Palestinians, you're called the State of Israel."

*So you plan to be the provocateur in the next Knesset?*

"It's not my intention to be a provocateur, to stand there and scream and revile people. Even on Facebook I was compelled to stop that. But I definitely intend to challenge the dialogue in terms of the content, and mainly with a type of sarcasm."

### **'Bags of blood'**

Cassif, 54, who holds a doctorate in political philosophy from the London School of Economics, teaches political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Sapir Academic College in Sderot and at the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo. He lives in Rehovot, is married and is the father of a 19-year-old son. He's been active in Hadash for three decades and has held a number of posts in the party.

As a lecturer, he stands out for his boldness and fierce rhetoric, which draws students of all stripes. He even hangs out with some of his Haredi students, one of whom wrote a post on the eve of the Hadash primary urging the delegates to choose him. After his election, a student from a settlement in the territories wrote to him, "You are a determined and industrious person, and for that I hold you in high regard. Hoping we will meet on the field of action and growth for the success of Israel as a Jewish, democratic state (I felt obliged to add a small touch of irony in conclusion)."

Cassif grew up in a home that supported Mapai, forerunner of Labor, in Rishon Letzion. He was an only

child; his father was an accountant, his mother held a variety of jobs. He was a news hound from an early age, and at 12 ran for the student council in school. He veered sharply to the left in his teens, becoming a keen follower of Marx and socialism.

Following military service in the IDF's Nahal brigade and a period in the airborne Nahal, Cassif entered the Hebrew University. There his political career moved one step forward, and there he also forsook the Zionist left permanently. His first position was as a parliamentary aide to the secretary general of the Communist Party, Meir Wilner.

“At first I was closer to Mapam [the United Workers Party, which was Zionist], and then I refused to serve in the territories. I was the first refusenik in the first intifada to be jailed. I didn't get support from Mapam, I got support from the people of Hadash, and I drew close to them. I was later jailed three more times for refusing to serve in the territories.”

His rivals in the student organizations at the Hebrew University remember him as the epitome of the extreme left.

“Even in the Arab-Jewish student association, Cassif was considered off-the-wall,” says Motti Ohana, who was chairman of Likud's student association and active in the Student Union at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. “One time I got into a brawl with him. It was during the first intifada, when he brought two bags of blood, emptied them out in the university's corridors and declared, ‘There is no difference between Jewish and Arab blood,’ likening Israeli soldiers to terrorists. The custom on campus was that we would quarrel, left-right, Arabs-Jews, and after that we would sit together, have a coffee and talk. But not Cassif.”

According to Ohana, today a member of the Likud central committee, the right-wing activists knew that, “You could count on Ofer to fall into every trap. There was one event at the Hebrew University that was a kind of political Hyde Park. The right wanted to boot the left out of there, so we hung up the flag. It was obvious that Ofer would react, and in fact he tore the flag, and in the wake of the ruckus that developed, political activity was stopped for good.”

### **Replacing the anthem**

Cassif voices clearly and cogently positions that challenge the public discourse in Israel. “Peace will not be established without a correction of the crimes of the Nakba and [recognition of] the right of return,” he shouted.

*What do you mean by “right of return”?*

Cassif: “The first thing is the actual recognition of the Nakba and of the wrong done by Israel. Compare it to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa, if you like, or with the commissions in Chile after Pinochet.

Israel must recognize the wrong it committed. Now, recognition of the wrong also includes recognition of the right of return. The question is how it's implemented. It has to be done by agreement. I can't say that tomorrow Tel Aviv University has to be dismantled and that Sheikh Munis [the Arab village on whose ruins the university stands] has to be rebuilt there. The possibility can be examined of giving compensation in place of return, for example.”

*But what is the just solution, in your opinion?*

“For the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.”

*That means there will be Jews who will have to leave their home.*

“In some places, unequivocally, yes. People will have to be told: ‘You must evacuate your places.’ The classic example is Ikrit and Biram [Christian-Arab villages in Galilee whose residents were promised – untruly – by the Israeli authorities in 1948 that they would be able to return, and whose lands were turned over to Jewish communities]. But there are places where there is certainly greater difficulty. You don't right one wrong with another.”

*What about the public space in Israel? What should it look like?*

“The public space has to change, to belong to all the state's residents. I dispute the conception of ‘Jewish publicness.’”

*How should that be realized?*

“For example, by changing the national symbols, changing the national anthem. [Former Hadash MK] Mohammed Barakeh once suggested ‘I Believe’ [‘Sahki, Sahki’] by [Shaul] Tchernichovsky – a poem that is not exactly an expression of Palestinian nationalism. He chose it because of the line, ‘For in mankind I'll believe.’ What does it mean to believe in mankind? It's not a Jew, or a Palestinian, or a Frenchman, or I don't know what.”

*If you were a Palestinian, what would you do today?*

“In Israel, what my Palestinian friends are doing, and I with them – [wage] a parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle.”

*And what about the Palestinians in the territories?*

“We have always been against harming innocent civilians. Always. In all our demonstrations, one of our leading slogans was: ‘In Gaza and in Sderot, children want to live.’ With all my criticism of the settlers, to enter a house and slaughter children, as in the case of the Fogel family [who were murdered in their beds in the settlement of Itamar in 2011], is intolerable. You have to be a human being and reject that.”

*And attacks on soldiers?*

“An attack on soldiers is not terrorism. Even Netanyahu, in his book about terrorism, explicitly categorizes attacks on soldiers or on the security forces as guerrilla warfare. It’s perfectly legitimate, according to every moral criterion – and, by the way, in international law. At the same time, I am not saying it’s something wonderful, joyful or desirable. The party’s Haifa office is on Ben-Gurion Street, and suddenly, after years, I noticed a memorial plaque there for a fighter in Lehi [pre-state underground militia, also known as the Stern Gang] who assassinated a British officer. Wherever there has been a struggle for liberation from oppression, there are national heroes, who in 90 percent of the cases carried out some operations that were unlawful. Nelson Mandela is today considered a hero, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but according to the conventional definition, he was a terrorist. Most of the victims of the ANC [African National Congress] were civilians.”

*In other words, today’s Hamas commanders who are carrying out attacks on soldiers will be heroes of the future Palestinian state?*

“Of course.”

### **Anti-Zionist identity**

Cassif terms himself an explicit anti-Zionist. “There are three reasons for that,” he says. “To begin with, Zionism is a colonialist movement, and as a socialist, I am against colonialism. Second, as far as I am concerned, Zionism is racist in ideology and in practice. My supreme value is equality, and I can’t abide any supremacy – Jewish or Arab. The third thing is that Zionism, like other ethno-nationalistic movements, splits the working class.”

He continues, “Zionism also sustains anti-Semitism. I don’t say it does so deliberately – even though I have no doubt that there are some who do it deliberately, like Netanyahu, who is connected to people like the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban, and the leader of the far right in Austria, Hans Christian Strache.”

*Did Mapai-style Zionism also encourage anti-Semitism?*

“The phenomenon was very striking in Mapai. Think about it for a minute, not only historically, but logically. If the goal of political and practical Zionism is really the establishment of a Jewish state containing a Jewish majority, and for Diaspora Jewry to settle there, nothing serves them better than anti-Semitism.”

*Do you support BDS?*

“It’s too complex a subject for a yes or no answer; there are aspects I don’t support.”

*Do you think that the Jews deserve a national home in the Land of Israel?*

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘national home.’ It’s very amorphous. We in Hadash say explicitly that Israel has a right to exist as a sovereign state. Our struggle is not against the state’s existence, but over its character.”

*But that state is the product of the actions of the Zionist movement, which you say has been colonialist and criminal from day one.*

“It’s true that Zionism started as colonialism, but what do you do with the people who were already born here? What do you tell them? Because your grandparents committed a crime, you have to leave? The question is how you transform the situation that’s been created into one that’s just, democratic and equal.”

*So, a person who survived a death camp and came here is a criminal?*

“The individual person, of course not. I’m in favor of taking in refugees in distress, no matter who or what they are. I am against Zionism’s cynical use of Jews in distress, including the refugees from the Holocaust. I have a problem with the fact that the natives whose homeland this is cannot return, while people for whom it’s not their homeland, can, because they supposedly have some sort of blood tie and an ‘imaginary friend’ promised them the land.”

*I understand that you are in favor of the annulment of the Law of Return?*

“Yes. Definitely.”

*But you are in favor of the Palestinian right of return.*

“There’s no comparison. There’s no symmetry here at all. Jerry Seinfeld was by chance born to a Jewish family. What’s his connection to this place? Why should he have preference over a refugee from Sabra or Chatila, or Edward Said, who did well in the United States? They are the true refugees. This is their homeland. Not Seinfeld’s.”

*Are you critical of the Arabs, too?*

“Certainly. One criticism is of their cooperation with imperialism – take the case of today’s Saudi Arabia, Qatar and so on. Another, from the past, relates to the reactionary forces that did not accept that the Jews have a right to live here.” ♦

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/premium.MAGAZINE-knesset-candidate-netanyahu-is-an-arch-murderer-zionism-encourages-anti-semitism-1.6935511>



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# INTERNATIONAL

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*Ed. Note: Going to press during the fluctuating situation in Venezuela is disconcerting. There is so much which the mainstream media don't report. One event was the more than 400 members of different political and social organizations, committees from more than 80 countries, which attended the International Peoples' Assembly in Caracas from February 24-27.*

*The US resolve to take Venezuela's oil, gold and other natural resources is frustrated by the armed forces' loyalty to Venezuela. Juan Guaidó's strategy (if it was his) to publicize the shipping of "humanitarian aid" to Colombia but planning to clandestinely bring it in from Brazil was unsuccessful. See <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Rogue-Groups-Attack-Brazil-Venezuela-Border-Causing-Shutdown-20190224-0016.html>*

*Whatever tactics take place from the time of writing to the date you read this are unknown. We expect that Maduro's offer to negotiate will remain ignored.*

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## A short guide for Canadian anti-imperialists on the current crisis in Venezuela

*By Laura Avalos and Susan Spronk, Socialist Project, February 11, 2019*

With the Lima Group meeting in Ottawa, on February 4 the news of the crisis in Venezuela has hit Canadian headlines. This short guide intends to provide some key talking points for progressives who might not be ready to comment on what is happening in Venezuela, but are critical of the interventionist stance of the Canadian government.

### **1) Canada should not follow the USA's foreign policy position on Venezuela, particularly given its history of self-interested interference in the region.**

Trump has appointed controversial U.S. diplomat Elliott Abrams as special envoy for Venezuela. Abrams was convicted for misleading Congress in Iran-Contra affair, and was linked to the failed coup against Chávez in 2002. He is also implicated in the whitewashing of the massacre of a thousand men, women and children by U.S.-funded death squads in El Salvador, when he was Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights in 1981.

U.S.-led interventions do not bring peace and justice, or promote human rights: quite the opposite is true. To name but a few recent examples: the U.S.-led invasions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya led to regime-change, but also intensified humanitarian crises and led to long, drawn-out civil wars. For more information, see the recent

blog by Gus Van Harten and article in *Truth Dig*. There are no guarantee that a U.S.-backed intervention (e.g. oil sanctions and military invasion) will bring peace and 'restore democracy' in Venezuela.

Alfred de Zayas, former UN Expert who visited Venezuela as a U.N. representative in 2017, points out that the U.S. is violating international law by attempting a coup in Venezuela. He notes, "The mainstream media has been complicit in this attempted coup... This reminds us of the run-up to the Iraq invasion of 2003."

### **2) Canada's position undermines due process and democracy in the region.**

Like the U.S., Canada does not have right to do whatever it feels like in other countries; Venezuelan polls show a strong majority of Venezuelans aren't happy with Maduro and would like to see him removed via a negotiated solution but not via foreign intervention.

The history of North American imperialism means that any new government in Venezuela that came to power through this process would be seen as tainted.

Canada's public statements recognizing Juan Guaidó, President of the National Assembly, as the interim President of Venezuela undermine the legitimacy of due process in Venezuela.

The International Electoral Accompaniment Mission of the Council of Electoral Experts of Latin America (CEELA) issued a report on the May 2018 Venezuelan presidential election and states that the electoral process for the Presidential and State Legislative Council Elections 2018 complied with all international standards and national legislation, particularly in the fields of audit and electoral administration.

### **3) Canada's reputation (deserved or not) as a champion for democracy and human rights is once again being put into question.**

In many other cases, a country's failure to follow democratic norms has not bothered the Canadian government: China, United Arab Emirates, Egypt (2016), Honduras (2009 and 2017), Brazil (2018), so why is Canada jumping on board with the Lima Group, which was only established because previous efforts by right-leaning governments failed to win majority votes at the Organization of American States (OAS)?

It is deeply disappointing to see Canada taking a one-sided approach. In supporting the opposition in Venezuela, which is quickly moving even further to the right, Canada is contributing to the exacerbation of the conflict which may possibly lead to an escalation of violence and civil war.

### **4) There is an alternative to military intervention.**

Canada should support a negotiated, peaceful solution to the crisis in Venezuela and foster dialogue between the elected government and the opposition, under the auspices of states from the region (and not Canada and the USA).

Canada should support calls made by the governments of México and Uruguay, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to offer their offices to mediate a dialogue.

The United Nations Secretary General António Guterres and Independent UN rights expert calls for compassion, not sanctions on Venezuela.

Renowned linguist Noam Chomsky, filmmaker Boots Riley, and over 70 other academics and experts on Latin America condemn the U.S.-backed parliamentary coup and call for a renewal of the dialogue process that took place between the Venezuelan government and opposition groups in 2016-17.

Canada has played a leadership role in the past in favour of peace, democracy and human rights, such as playing a positive role in the 1980s in El Salvador peace negotiations. Canada's role was crucial in helping broker the El Salvador 1992 Peace Accord through the United Nations. We could be playing a similar role in Venezuela by partnering with the Uruguayan and Mexican governments rather than the American government under Trump.

For more information on what is happening in Venezuela, please see this useful podcast produced by the Dig, with Alejandro Velasco, Gabriel Hetland and Naomi Schiller. ♦

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<https://socialistproject.ca/2019/02/short-guide-for-canadian-anti-imperialists/#more>

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## 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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