



# UJPO News



## INSIDE

- Winnipeg Strike ..... 1
- National UJPO News .. 3
- Honourable Mentshn. 6
- What's In Order ..... 7
- Annual Report..... 7
- Poetry, Songs & Writings 7
- Canada..... 8
- USA..... 8
- Middle East..... 8
- Being Together..... 9

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

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Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

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## The 1919 Winnipeg Strike: The Story of Jewish Involvement

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*Presented on September 19, 2019 at the Winchevsky Centre, co-sponsored by the United Jewish People's Order-Canada and The Socialist Project*

*By Deb O'Rourke*

This year, UJPO co-sponsored celebrations in several cities, to commemorate the centenary of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike.

Venerable UJPO members Roz Usiskin and Harriet Zaidman have both documented the Winnipeg General Strike – Usiskin in academic work and a translation of her father Joseph Wolodarsky's Yiddish memoir, and Zaidman in a novel for youth. In both Winnipeg and Toronto, they presented together to packed rooms. The Sept. 19 Toronto event was co-sponsored by the Socialist Project and moderated by author and professor Leo Panitch. I write this article as one who learned and is learning about this history, from these experts.

Usiskin and Zaidman work in different forms, but both combine rigorous primary source research with stories. Both have family connections to the strikers, and together they brought to life the Winnipeg of 1919: revealing grim conditions in a city divided between an affluent business class and the North End neighbourhood of struggling tradespeople and workers, many recently immigrated from Europe. Wages had stagnated as food prices rose. Unemployment worsened as World War I veterans returned from Europe to an economy that had not yet found its peacetime footing. Industrialization was changing the world of work. Women's work was especially precarious and often literally paid starvation wages. Then as now, immigrants were often blamed for such conditions.

Usiskin laid out some facts about the strike: "By May 1st, the General Strike began and the Sympathetic General Strike was officially called on May 15 bringing onto Winnipeg streets more than 30,000 men and women, 12,000 were unorganized." As days passed, wave after wave of workers, from metalworkers to telephone operators, left their jobs. The strike was broken with the events of Bloody Saturday on June 21, 1919, and ended officially on June 26. From Bloody Saturday, when paid thugs descended on people gathering for a veterans' march, comes L. B. Foote's iconic picture of a streetcar that was pushed over on its side.

With the rise of industry and factories, Usiskin documents: "Collective bargaining became the major issue of the strike... in 1919, union membership had increased from 248,000 to 378,000 with 336 strikes reported across Canada." Some strike participants had revolutionary ambitions, and elites framed any progressive initiative as a direct threat to the status quo: "The Russian revolution of 1917 became one of the major world events that forever changed the World and put fear into the hearts of the world's ruling classes. This was the beginning of the Red Scare around the World."

A self-appointed "Committee of 1000," arose to guard the interests of upper-class Winnipeg. Most participants were anonymous and, according to our speakers, they likely never amounted to more than fifty. They included at least one prominent Jewish citizen, Max Steinkopf, an affluent lawyer, businessman and school trustee. Moderator Leo Panitch pointed out "There was also class struggle within the Jewish community: before the strike, during the strike and certainly after the strike."

The Liberty Temple (Freiheit Temple) was a social and political hub where Jewish Marxists, Socialists and Anarchists ran separate organizations but united in the Workmen's Circle, the Arbeiter Ring. In this milieu, says Usiskin, Jewish radicals, having brought their "secular, radical ideology" from the Old Country, were "militant unionists, defending workers' rights in every way possible. In 1919, they wholeheartedly supported the General strike both morally and financially."

With language barriers limiting Jewish leadership in the Strike Committee, Usiskin says: "Though 'foreigners,' often code for 'Jews,' were accused of fomenting and leading the strike, the Strike Committee was essentially dominated by British leaders of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant background." Yet, she pointed out, the Jewish community "In many ways... bore the brunt of the viciousness of the strike." State, press and business intimidated with propaganda, violence, arrests, police raids, threats of job loss. City police who joined the strike were fired and replaced by "specials," whose brutality was legendary. But even more, with the passage of an amendment to the Federal Immigration Bill, the strikers feared deportation.

Harriet Zaidman's young adult novel "City on Strike" intimately portrays the tensions in the North End neighbourhood before, during and after the strike: as well as the love and security families gave one another through difficult times. We see pre-strike conditions and the unfolding strike through the eyes of the fictional Sitner family, based on Zaidman's own. The young people struggle to help their families survive and, as tensions mount, the racism and political divides reach the schoolyard.

A retired teacher and author of several other books for children, Zaidman said, "I wrote it for children and the interest of children has been tremendous. They are appalled at how people treated others." Her PowerPoint presentation immersed the audience in the experience, much as her novel does. As she does when visiting schools, she donned the scarf her grandmother gave her, a family and cultural signifier: "I talk with the kids about mocking people for what they ate and what they wore, and spreading lies about them. It's not any different than what it was in 1919."

Racism and scapegoating, often used to distract from the real sources of oppression, make the strike a deeply contemporary story. Usiskin noted: "Arrested strike leaders were differentiated on the basis of ethnicity rather than on class. Six Anglo-Saxon leaders were granted bail within a few days of their arrest, while the 'foreigners' – five non-Anglos including three Jews – were denied similar treatment and proclaimed a hunger strike." One was Shloime Almazov, spokesperson for the Arbeiter Ring,

who spent 60 days in jail: "While supportive of the Strike, he was not involved in any way in the Strike Committee but conveniently became one of three Jews plus two Ukrainians who were implicated as the East European 'foreigners' who were seen as the instigators of the strike."

The immediate legacy of the Winnipeg General Strike was hunger, injury and increased oppression. Zaidman noted that on her book tours she discovered "So many people had those stories in their families, but they didn't talk about it. They could be black-listed." Usiskin's analysis found "no doubt in the community that the strike had sharpened attitudes against 'foreigners' and that the government had unlimited power to hound 'political criminals'. Jews felt their place in the Canadian scene was tenuous. However, their resolve to change the political landscape was sharpened."

In the long term the Winnipeg General Strike, and the labour foment happening at that time in other cities, inaugurated a half-century when unions grew in strength. The Strike impacted Winnipeg and Manitoba politics. Max Steinkopf, identified by the Yiddish press as a member of the elite Committee of 1000, lost the 1920 trustee election to Rose Alcin, the first Jewish woman elected to a Canadian political office. Usiskin listed other successes: "In the June 29, 1920 elections, 11 labour leaders were elected as MLA's: three had been jailed, and two – Heaps and Woodsworth – became MPs and both later helped establish the CCF and later the NDP. John Queen, one of the arrested strike leaders, became the mayor of Winnipeg. In seven elections and in 1938 he beat Travis Sweatman, a member of the Committee of 1000. Winnipeggers had long memories."

The speakers find that the Strike resonates with current audiences. Panitch commented on the pride that the newspapers and institutions that opposed the strike in 1919 now show in this spectacular history. Usiskin remarked "It is amazing how much attention this strike has generated, not only in Winnipeg, but in the rest of the country. What spark did the strike evoke today to warrant this unexpected interest?"

Zaidman doesn't talk about the Winnipeg General Strike only as a historical event: "It's an opportunity to talk about racism and the fake news that was spread about six Bolsheviks who travelled across the ocean to choose Winnipeg as the place to start to overthrow the Canadian government... It's all in these newspapers that were published at the time."

She had a "great experience" visiting Kelvin High School, which in 1919 had snipers stationed in its tower to pick off any strikers who might "invade" the South End. "I was a rock star, they mobbed me. They had bought a

classroom set of the books, studied the strike and those children knew everything about the strike. They were completely informed, and they were deeply embarrassed at the way that people had acted in those days. That was quite heartening. That's progress."

Audience members noted that, looking at looming global warming and the rise of student climate activism, the massive strikes of 1919 are indeed relevant to youth.

The authors sold every book they were able to bring to the Toronto events, but Harriet Zaidman's "City on Strike" can be ordered online. ♦

To reach Roz Usiskin by email: [Roz@usiskin.ca](mailto:Roz@usiskin.ca) or by phone: 204-582-8512. Harriet Zaidman's book can be ordered through book stores, through Amazon or Red Deer Press: (1-800-387-9776 Ext 225)

<https://www.reddeerpress.com/Detail/0889955743>

Some strike links:

<https://www.winnipeg.sd.ca/About%20WSD/NEWS/Pages/Kelvin-reflects-on-Winnipeg-General-Strike-100-years-later.aspx>

[http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/34/thirdforce.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/34/thirdforce.shtml)

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## NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

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### FROM WINNIPEG

By Roz Usiskin

The fall season in Winnipeg has come upon us with an unexpected snowstorm that brought trees crashing down upon us and rendering the city to a standstill. Nevertheless, UJPO's activities have continued as planned.

- The Winnipeg Board is undergoing a reorganization with the passing of Sherman Kreiner, a valuable, dedicated and irreplaceable Board member. Also, due to the illness of our Chairperson Mark Golden. But we are happy to report that Mark is carrying on with his wonderful humour, his wisdom and resilience and his deep commitment to the ongoing UJPO presence.
- Roz and Harriet reported on their Toronto talk to UJPO members and friends dealing with The 100th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. They felt it was important to share a bit of Winnipeg's history and the Jewish involvement in that history. A lively discussion followed.
- UJPO's Book Club has started its monthly Sunday get-togethers with a dedicated committed group reading a variety of materials. This past reading was called "Stolen City – Radical Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg" by Owen Toews and deals with the Indigenous community and the city of Winnipeg.

- UJPO's North End Jewish Folk Choir had a slow start this fall waiting for our regular venue at the St. John's High School to be reassigned for our use. In the meantime, the choir has been practising at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in exchange for loaning them the choir's keyboard.
- The choir meets every Thursday evening and we are happy to report that we have welcomed three new singers. In December, the choir will perform for seniors at the Simkin Centre and at the Shaftesbury Residence.
- We are pleased to offer for the third year our lecture series with Dr. Itay Zutra, professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Manitoba. This season Dr. Zutra will focus in on his recent trip to Poland. Specifically he will deal with Yiddish literature on the theme of "Poland after Auschwitz". The lecture series have been a very popular, well attended program.
- Sunday, December 3, UJPO held its annual Shmooze Fest devoted to having members discuss future programs and other organizational concerns. This year, we invited David Kattenberg to talk and show slides of his trip this summer to Israel/Palestine. A lively discussion followed and we welcomed three new members.

*Belated New Year wishes to our UJPO family across the country.* ♦

**Thank you, Jewish Folk Choir**  
— Photo: Walter Mirosh



**Festival Choir conductor, Anna Khomenko, choir member Dora Rosenbaum, and some of the Festival Choir singers.**

Due to the renovations at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Winnipeg this fall, the Festival Choir has been unable to hold their practices there. Practices have been held in the Ivan Franko Manor without the use of a piano. The North End Jewish Folk Choir has shown their love to the Ukrainian Festival Choir by lending us their keyboard piano for free. Their choir said we have helped them over the years by giving them good rental rates and they have enjoyed the friendship of joining with us in choral concerts. Some of their singers now also sing with the Festival Choir. Dora Rosenbaum has been instrumental in getting the use of this piano for our choir. We thank her and the Jewish Choir very much for their kindness. We look forward to getting together with them in the newly renovated ULT in the New Year to join our voices in harmony.

— **Walter Mirosh**  
for the Festival Choir

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## FROM TORONTO

By Rachel Epstein

As always, a busy time for UJPO-Toronto. With the High Holidays over, we move towards the upcoming AGM, Chanukah and Camp Naivel't's Midwinter Mingle, which this year will have a slightly different format.

### **Rosh Hashonah & Yom Kippur:**

This year at Rosh Hashonah we focused our attention on the climate crisis and at Yom Kippur we drew inspiration from recent Jewish activism. Here is an excerpt from Rachel Epstein's opening remarks at Yom Kippur:

Tonight we have chosen to focus our service on recent Jewish activism. We are approaching the one-year anniversary of the horrific attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and, like Jews throughout the diaspora, we grapple with how to respond to the rise of a more blatant and violent antisemitism. At the same time the right is using antisemitism as a "weapon of mass distraction," to defeat movements for multiracial democracy and to exploit the historical suffering of Jews in order to immunize Israel from criticism.

As Emma Green puts it, "The shooting in Pittsburgh has revived old debates about how Jews should relate to power: accommodate reigning leaders or push against them? Prioritize protection of the community, or try to change the world for others? At stake is a vision of Jewishness that does not have to be tied to victimhood and violence, and that sees a possibility for justice in the world... The Tree of Life shooting poses a choice for Jews in North America: either hunker down and turn inward, or stand up, turn outward, and embrace others who are also targets."

Some would argue that the extremism of the right has propagated a renaissance of the Jewish left – more and more Jews alienated from mainstream Jewish institutions are building coalition with others targeted by white supremacy and making solidarity with Palestinians a central feature of their Jewish practice and identity – and thus transforming the very meaning of contemporary Jewishness. The new Jewish left rejects the idea that criticism of Israel is antisemitic and the idea that Israel is the guarantor of Jewish safety or the core of Jewish identity. A central value of much of Jewish left wing culture is "doh-ikayt," a Yiddish term that means "here-ness." As Audrey Sasson, E.D. of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice says: "Where we are is our home. This is what we fight for. This is where we seek kinship."

It is not a choice between protecting our communities OR changing the world for others. As Judith Butler puts it: If I can transpose and expand the ethical principle that I want applied to Jews to all possible minorities, then I am elaborating a principle of equality that binds me to the Mexican detained at the border and the dispossessed Palestinian. The forms of solidarity forged in this way invariably move each of us beyond the confines of identity. In other words, the relations among us are not mere analogies, but living connections, perhaps in the sense that Martin Buber insisted upon when he found spiritual life neither in identity nor in territory, but in a vital relationality based on reciprocity."

I invite you, this evening and tomorrow, as you reflect on your life, your work, and your connections to other human beings, to remember that we are all in this together and to imagine the bonds of relationality and reciprocity that we can forge and strengthen in the coming year.

### **Morris Winchevsky Shule:**

The shule has gotten off to a great start, with students continuing to enroll. It is not too late to enroll your children, including in the B'nai Mitzvah program.

We welcome new Grades 4-6 teacher Iris Benedikt: "My name is Iris Benedikt and I am a visual artist and educator. I believe children have important knowledge, and fostering imaginative learning environments allows them to explore their inner wisdom in playful and critical ways so that they can feel empowered to work towards a better world. I teach outdoor education and art when I am not at Winchevsky and I am excited to get to work with the grades 4-6s and figure out what they care about and how they want to explore their Jewish identities."

We had a wonderful Sukkot celebration on Sunday, October 20. The sun came out to light up the autumn leaves as we built a new Sukkah, thanks to the generosity of MWS parent Tracey Tief, who lent us her canopy. Education Director Lia Tarachansky MC'ed the Winchevsky Family Feud, Shifra Cooper led us in song, and sue goldstein made sure all stayed warm with fire plus warm cider and hot chocolate.

### **Adult B'nai Mitzvah Program:**

We are delighted that the program is underway, with nine participants enrolled, ranging in age from 20s to 70s. The first class was held this past weekend, and the program will wrap up in May. Here's a brief course description:

Welcome to this opportunity to build your Jewish literacy skills! We will explore our unique, progressive (Jewish) identities in the twenty-first century as responses

to what came before us and the kind of world we want to build. What stories do Jews tell about ourselves? What has power over us? For whom and to what do we have responsibility?

Drawing on a set of texts from across the centuries and around the world (biblical and historical documents, ethical writings, fiction, folk traditions, foods, films, visual art, etc.), we will critically examine where “tradition” comes from and what it might mean to us in a secular context. We will explore a range of ancient and modern Judaism and learn tools by which to situate and interpret: sources like the Torah (written law) and Talmud (oral law); the Jewish calendar and holidays; social, political, and cultural authority in Jewish life; and modern religious and political movements from the *Hasidic* to the secular. We do not assume prior knowledge of Jewish history, culture or religion. For those who wish to participate, there will be an opportunity to mark the completion of your studies and your commitment to community in a group ceremony at the end.

### **Camp Naivelt’s Midwinter Mingle:**

Traditionally, Camp Naivelters get together in the city in February at an event known as the Midwinter Mingle. This year, besides the usual food, socializing and general hanging out, the Indigenous Issues Working Group is planning a storytelling workshop to begin a process of reflecting on the history of the land that Naivelt sits on and the relation of this land to Indigenous communities. More in the next issue.

### **Yiddish Book Project:**

We were delighted this summer when Yiddish scholar Miriam Borden became interested in the boxes of Yiddish books haphazardly piled in our storage closet. Miriam, on learning of our book collection, was galvanized into action. Her deep knowledge of Yiddish history and literature helped her to recognize the value and significance of the collection, and her practical and invaluable organizing and networking skills meant that she was able, in record speed, to mobilize a knowledgeable and dedicated team of volunteers who showed up at our doorstep ready to do the somewhat tedious work of cataloguing the collection.

Each morning in August I arrived at work to find Miriam’s team of volunteers laboriously going through each book of the collection, noting its title, author and publisher. By the end of the month, the collection of disorganized and disheveled boxes had been transformed into a clean and uniform collection of catalogued books. Miriam had also connected with both the Fisher Rare Books Library at the University of Toronto and the Yiddish Book Centre in Amherst, Massachusetts, both of whom have expressed interest in the collection. She also has plans

for several book-related events and displays to showcase this unique, interesting and historical collection.

### **Other Events:**

We recently held two highly successful events about important historical moments. The first was an event about Jewish involvement in the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, featuring Winnipeg UJPO members Roz Usiskin and Harriet Zaidman. The second was a book event for Ellen Bessner’s book, *Double Threat*, about the involvement of the Jewish left in WWII. Both events were well-attended and generated fascinating conversations, interwoven with personal memories and familial connections to these historical moments.

Our bi-weekly informal Yiddish classes, known as Red Yiddish, have started up again, as has Zing! Zing! Zing!, our monthly drop-in singing group. Shifra Cooper is replacing Rachel Sheinin who is away for a year. Shifra and Hartley Weinberg invite all those who love to sing to join in!

Upcoming is the MWS Chanukah party on December 15, and on Friday, January 24, 2020 our Alternative Shabbes theme will be: Using Humour to Fight Fascism, featuring Harriet Lyons. Given the state of the world, and the fact that we had a 13 cm. snowfall yesterday, we will be ready for some good laughs by the end of January! ♦

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## **FROM HAMILTON**

*By Paul Weinberg*

Harriet Zaidman, the author of “City on Strike” and Winnipeg UJPO member, came to Hamilton to address a rapt audience at The City & The City bookstore on Ottawa Street North in Hamilton.

Originally, our Hamilton group considered having her do a reading in one of our living rooms. But the decision was made to give Harriet the opportunity to sell books and talk to a greater number of people. A first novel for Harriet, it addresses the impact of the 1919 general strike in Winnipeg on preteens: how their families decided to go on strike and deprive themselves of the basics including food.

What was originally aimed at the so-called young adult market, “City on Strike” has been picked up by people of all ages in Winnipeg, turning it into a local best seller. It seems many families were affected by events in their city a century ago. Harriet told us how ruling politicians at the provincial and municipal level still today prefer to avoid any commemoration of the Winnipeg General Strike and the lasting social impact on Canadian society.

In more recent years the city of Winnipeg, for instance, turned down a request in the community to preserve Victoria Park, which in 1919 was the site of immense

rallies by union supporters and ordinary citizens in favour of the general strike. Instead, municipal politicians approved the building of a condo development, thereby participating in a deliberate effort to erase history.

The success of “City on Strike” suggests local people on both sides of the strike (pro and anti) are today familiar with the 1919 events and that the social class divisions which animated Winnipeg a century ago are not completely gone. We thank Harriet for a wonderful evening. ♦

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## HONOURABLE MENTSHN

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### Remembering Rhea Shulman, 1921-2019

By David Abramowitz

Born in Chicago and raised in Toronto, Rhea Borshay Lee married Wilfred Shulman in 1941, a nascent architect. Rhea raised four daughters, served as education director of Temple Emanu-El Synagogue and was active in the Canadian Council of Jewish Women.



She was the founding Executive Director of Toronto’s Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living, a drop-in day centre for Jewish seniors, serving several thousand members. Also a long-time member of the United Jewish Peoples Order, Rhea remained very active into her nineties in efforts to preserve and foster Yiddish language and culture. I would like to share three of my recollections of our heroine.

My first memory of Rhea was at least a couple of decades ago. There was a suggestion that we update our way to raise funds for the Morris Winchevsky School. Richard Lee, claiming that his sister Rhea was an exceptional fundraiser, encouraged us to contact her. Maxine Hermolin, the school’s Executive Director, and I, representing the School’s Advisory Committee (SAC), arranged to meet with her.

She arrived armed with a series of binders replete with graphs, charts and statistical data. Her presentation was to the point, clear, and concise. It described a number of successful events she developed for Toronto’s various Chinese communities. But her presentation was never implemented given the difference in size between our

membership and the ones for which Rhea’s campaigns succeeded. She recognized this a while later stating she would have to become active in more future organizational activities.

Moving ahead in time we called on Rhea when her grandson, Aaron, was a student in the Morris Winchevsky School (MWS.) We often call on a MWS family to lead our Rosh Hashone and Yom Kipur services. In 2007 we identified her family with three generations – Rhea, her daughter Martha, son-in-law Don Hale and grandson Aaron to lead our Yom Kipur service. They accepted. It proceeded like a well rehearsed event though Aaron had to duck out of camera range when his cold acted up. Rhea and her family were excellent in interpreting the service. It was captured and professionally edited on a DVD by the late Peter Kastner. Rhea came through with flying colours as did her family.

Just three years ago, the UJPO National Board sponsored the annual convention of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations (CSJO) and UJPO Toronto hosted it at the Glendon Campus of York University. Rhea, then 95, was conspicuous in her meticulous attire and attended a variety of panels, lectures and workshops. During a meal break she approached me and, in excellent Yiddish, said the program incorrectly announced the lecture on the 100th anniversary (*yortsayt*) of Sholem Aleichem's death – shouldn't it be of another founder of modern Yiddish, I.L. Peretz? I had to inform her that “last year,” 2015, was Peretz’s *yortsayt* and that 2016 was indeed correct for Sholem Aleichem. I had never heard her speak Yiddish, and it is a rare time, even when I was young (too many years ago), to hear such elegantly-spoken Yiddish anywhere. I was truly impressed.

In all the years I had known Rhea, I wasn’t just impressed, I was amazed at her vivacity, her “*joie de vivre*”, the breadth of the substantive data she knew and willingness to share it, her desire and ability to acquire more knowledge and to do it all in a commendable, sympathetic and humanistic manner. These attributes are not of average people. They are of exceptional individuals who, if we are lucky, grace us with their presence, and friendship.

We have been truly blessed by her being and sharing. There is now a chasm which no one can fill. The old popular song “To know, know know you, is to love, love you...” might have been written about her. Let us all remember what a beacon she was in life and let it inspire us all in our future endeavours.

Memorial donations may be made to the Morris Winchevsky School Education Fund. ♦

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## WHAT'S IN ORDER

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### Mazl Tov to...

- Marilyn Tate and Lev Jaeger for their terrific performances in the play “Emma’s Visit”, performed by the Toronto Workers’ Theatre Group. The Theatre Group is part of the Toronto Workers’ History Project.

### Heartfelt condolences to...

- The family and friends of Irina Ershova on her passing.
- Karine Silverwoman, Jordan Muszynski and family on the passing of Karine’s grandmother, Zichrona Lebracha.

### Speedy recovery to...

- Pat Rayman
- Mark Golden
- David Abramowitz
- Lyn Center

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## NATIONAL UJPO

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### Annual Report of the UJPO National Board 2018-2019

By David Abramowitz

2020 will mark the 75th anniversary of UJPO as an organization which grew out of the rejected members of the Workmen’s Circle (WC) who formed individual groups upon their 1926 expulsion from the WC. For the WC on the other hand, this will be the first year that there will no active WC in Canada.

The ability of UJPO to respond to changing times and including its attempts to recruit younger members have met with mixed successes and losses over the years. Its roots in the labour movement and overall efforts to support progressive social justice causes as international and local influences varied through “good times and bad” has kept us relevant.

We are at present a much smaller organization, having lost two of four of our sections in Montreal and Vancouver. Our remaining Winnipeg and Toronto sections are experiencing a rebirth of our current and future priorities and organization. Our Winnipeg section, suffering from leadership health issues and loss of a vital executive resource, undertook a significant reorganization action which resulted in three new members and there was a meeting on November 23 (yesterday) to carry on with the momentum. Keep up the good work Winnipeg.

In Toronto we have added new aspects/functions and committees to our constant progressive priorities. The most recent is the Indigenous Issues Working Group (IIWG) which seeks to support UJPO in the journey from a colonial position of defensive entitlement to the recognition that Jewish settlers are guests on this land and obliged to abide by Indigenous protocols. Our Executive Director is asking that this AGM elects a Board of involved activists who will successfully bring our evolving programs to fruition.

The National Board’s role is also changing. We recently sponsored the excellent, well attended program on the 1919 Winnipeg strike with participants whose families were involved. It is well reported in this issue of *UJPO News*. We are ourselves undergoing a transition which will enable us to have affiliate members in locations where there are no sections to serve those Canadians with similar values. Our ability to adapt to changing times and oppose racism, oppression and fascism in all its forms has kept us alive. Sadly, by living in the glory of its Yiddishist past, the WC, with whom we had a past relationship, has a declining, aged membership and sold its last Canadian material asset in Toronto, its building.

Our future relevance as a progressive, secular Jewish organization will depend on the success of our recruitment of committed younger members who, with support of our mutual values, will carry the organization forward. ♦

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## POETRY, SONGS & WRITINGS

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### Links on the Chain

*Holocaust to Resistance: My Journey*, by Suzanne Berliner Weiss. Toronto, Roseway Publishing, 2019

By Harriet Lyons

As I read this book, the title of my favourite social justice anthem kept popping into my head and, near the end, I was delightfully surprised to discover that title in Weiss’s summing up of the lessons she has learned from her remarkable life. The song, Phil Ochs’s “Links on the Chain” is a rebuke to American union members who refused to stand beside African Americans in their struggle for equality. Readers who want to hear the song or see the full lyrics can find them here <https://genius.com/Phil-ochs-links-on-the-chain-lyrics>, but the following two stanzas underscore its message:

And then in 1954, decisions finally made  
The black man was a-risin’ fast and racin’ from the shade  
And your union took no stand and your union was betrayed  
As you lost yourself a link on the chain, on the chain  
As you lost yourself a link on the chain

And then there came the boycotts and then the freedom rides  
 And forgetting what you stood for, you tried to block the tide  
 Oh, the automation bosses were laughin' on the side  
 As they watched you lose your link on the chain, on the chain  
 As they watched you lose your link on the chain

Weiss ends her book with a recounting of a speech she gave to a French audience in which she says that she, and many others, were saved from death in the Holocaust by thousands of “little links” in a “great chain of solidarity.” Before she reaches this place, Weiss tells us the story of a life that could well have left her bitter and rejecting, but instead has led her to a strong plea for tolerance and inclusion.

Weiss’s childhood was marked by both rescue and rejection: hidden by a French peasant family during the war, the rest of her childhood involved orphanages, a foster family in Paris and an adoptive family in New York, all milieus where she was cared for but not made to feel truly loved. Miraculously, she located her deceased mother’s sister in Brooklyn, but this relationship too was not an easy one. Her adoptive mother and her aunt at one point had her committed to an institution for wayward girls, because she took shelter with a friend after an argument with her adoptive father. Later in life, she learned that her aunt’s husband was, by some definitions, a collaborator, though by others he was a victim of circumstances who paid a high price in guilt for protecting his family. Weiss later reconciled with as many people in her family as she could .

Weiss joined the Socialist Workers Party at an early age and was a devoted loyalist until she was sent to work in union shops in Louisiana as part of a program of alliance building, where she encountered racism and sexism that she could not ignore. After leaving the SWP, Weiss moved to Toronto and obtained university degrees in psychology and gerontology, and worked to enrich the lives of older adults, notably at Baycrest Centre. She has continued to work for social justice on many fronts, including First Nations and environmental activism and Israel/Palestine issues. She has made alliances with good people wherever she could find them (including joining UJPO), having concluded that ideological purity is less important than willingness to work to fix problems, one issue at a time.

Visiting the region where she had been hidden, Weiss discovered that the people who had saved children’s lives had many motives and came from various parts of the political spectrum, including even the odd German officer who was willing to look the other way. If anything united them, it was ties to their neighbours.

*Holocaust to Resistance* is a compelling read, and this reader found it a useful antidote to the anger aroused by my favourite song of resistance. ♦

## CANADA



Cartoon by John Williams

## USA

### CSJO 50th Anniversary Update

Ursuline College has, once again, offered a wonderful contract to hold the CSJO 50th anniversary celebration on their beautiful campus. Mark your calendars, make your travel



arrangements and look for updates regarding our programming. Look forward to go on May 22 through May 25 in Pepper Pike, Ohio, just outside of Cleveland. Further information in our next issue! ♦

## MIDDLE EAST

### Why Fight the Adoption of the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism?

*By Barry Trachtenberg, Jewish studies professor, Wake Forest University, Winston Salem NC*

Unfortunately, both the government of Israel and Zionist groups throughout the world – and Canadian organizations

in particular – are currently using society’s legitimate concern about antisemitism to redefine antisemitism to include criticism of Israel and of the Zionist ideology behind it. Their goal is to suppress, and even criminalize, criticism of Israel and support for Palestinian rights.

One of the primary vehicles that Israel and its supporters are using in this campaign to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition of antisemitism (IHRA-WDA). An international campaign is currently underway to have this definition adopted by governments, universities and other public institutions. The IHRA-WDA is a deeply flawed document. It fails as an adequate objective standard with which to identify antisemitic incidents or antisemitic speech. It was initially written as a set of guidelines for researchers, agencies and governments monitoring incidents of antisemitism in Europe, and was never intended for legal and administrative purposes.

The actual definition of antisemitism in the IHRA-WDA is vague and tautological, and it provides virtually no help in deciding if a particular incident is or is not antisemitic. Seven of the eleven examples of antisemitism in the definition equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. Unfortunately, the examples are being taken up by advocates of the definition as absolute litmus tests.

The primary goal of those promoting this definition is to either ban or criminalize criticism of Israel and Palestinian solidarity advocacy. This has been observed in jurisdictions that have adopted the IHRA-WDA, and we are seeing early signs of it in Canada, where the centre for Israel and Jewish affairs (CIJA) is lobbying to have the definition adopted by all levels of government, and included as part of all university codes of conduct. It is also working to “educate” police about “the new antisemitism” using the IHRA-WDA.

The Zionist strategy of adopting the IHRA definition is misguided. This is borne out by the results of a recent survey of Jewish Canadians done by Ekos research: Approximately 60% of Jewish Canadians do not see criticism of Israel as antisemitic in and of itself, and half believe that accusations of antisemitism are “often used to silence legitimate criticism of Israeli policies.”

CIJA makes clear in its own press releases that adoption of the IHRA-WDA is part of its campaign to fight the “new antisemitism” whereby Israel is necessarily a stand-in for Jews, Zionism is an essential and core Jewish tenet, and trenchant critiques of Israeli policies and actions are almost always motivated by antisemitism rather than a legitimate concern for Palestinians or for human rights.

To insist that Israel cannot be protested or objected to, to mandate that collective Jewish power cannot be analyzed or debated, or to conclude that Jews, because they were once victims of one of humanity’s greatest genocidal crimes, are somehow immune from becoming perpetrators of acts of violence against other peoples, would only reinforce the antisemitic belief that Jews are a fundamentally different people. ♦

<https://www.noihra.ca/about.html>

<https://ijvcana.org/defend-free-speech/antisemitism-its-use-and-abuse/>

*Read the IHRA-WDA:*

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

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## The Work of Being Together

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*By Alex Verman and Emily Green*

This time of year invites us to think about repentance. We offer apologies (and forgiveness) to friends and loved ones, to resolve disputes and get to the root of wrongdoing.

Even for those of us who aren’t religious, this is a meaningful practice. The more we think about ourselves as connected to our wider community (Jewish and otherwise), the more it makes sense to see repentance and forgiveness as part of the hard, significant work of being together – growing through mistakes and conflicts, working with one another to improve ourselves and our relationships.

Jewish culture teaches us that an apology is not enough to really resolve an issue: the best form of *teshuvah* (to atone/ repent/ return) is to correct the situation, and to ensure that we don’t repeat the same mistakes. In other words, an apology is a great start, but it’s only a start. The next step is to redress harm and repair the relationship with an open heart.

This theme feels especially relevant in light of the recent demonstrations against climate change: UJPO participated in the Climate Strike in Toronto on September 27. At the march, organizers repeatedly encouraged us to think about climate justice through the lens of anti-racism and decolonization. They argued that when people talk about climate crisis, it’s important to connect the issues of greed, capitalism, and consumption to the exploitation of Indigenous land. Colonization creates climate change: the world’s biggest polluters, like the US Army or the Canadian and American oil industries, are only able to produce so much waste and pollution (and profit) because they have invaded and occupied Indigenous lands and resources.

When we look at cases like Standing Rock or Unist’ot’en, it’s clear that fighting against climate change

means fighting for Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy. This issue is also very close to home. The community of Grassy Narrows has been struggling for clean water for decades. In the 60s and 70s, a pulp and paper mill polluted the Wabigoon and English rivers with mercury. The mercury poisoning is on-going – from the bioaccumulation of toxins in fish, and from buried barrels of waste from the mill continuing to leach toxins into the water system. The government has *yet to put forward the funding that it committed for a mercury care home*.

Yom Kippur is a time for true repentance, which means moving beyond apologies and helping to redress harm. For us at UJPO, we can use this holiday as an opportunity for active solidarity.

If you're unsure where to start, here are some ways for UJPO members (and our friends) to stand in solidarity with Indigenous people:

- Seek out Indigenous voices, and share them with your networks! The corporate media isn't always interested in uplifting Indigenous stories, so it's on us to do our research and raise awareness.
- Challenge racism in ourselves and our interpersonal relationships. Speak up, speak out, and say no to dehumanizing depictions of Indigenous people. Negative stereotypes about Indigenous people are everywhere. The more we help change that narrative, the more we help change public attitudes.
- Commit time and money to Indigenous resistance and supporting Indigenous people. Attend demonstrations, donate to campaigns, and lobby politicians in response to calls from Indigenous communities. Don't hesitate to give generously – the public purse is lined with profits made off of their land (often without their consent); the harvests of this land are abundant from their people's tending (for millennia past as well as in the present); and because we, as settlers, are living on the lands from which Indigenous peoples continue to be displaced.

This isn't always going to be easy and comfortable, but

that's okay; there's a lot that we can learn through the messy process of commitment and solidarity. And remember: unlearning racism, giving resources, volunteering time and energy, and raising awareness are all important steps. But true justice won't come until this land is given back to those who have lived on and protected it for thousands of years. We must work with the eventual goal of restoring land and resources to Indigenous communities. ♦

*Emily Green* (she/her) is a Jewish Canadian settler who is always seeking ways to unlearn colonialism and to be an accomplice with Indigenous resistance. Emily bartends, gardens, and studies anti-colonial strategies at York University. She is a former Shule teacher and part of UJPO-Toronto's Indigenous Issues Working Group.

*Alex Verman* is a writer and critic based in Tkaronto. They are a member of the UJPO Social Justice and Programming Committee and the UJPO Indigenous Issues Working Group.

The *Indigenous Issues Working Group (IIWG)* seeks to support UJPO in the journey from a colonial position of defensive entitlement to the recognition that Jewish settlers are guests on this land and obliged to abide by Indigenous protocols. Through building trust and relationships; through engaging Indigenous teachers and through doing our work of challenging our colonial cultures; the goal of the IIWG is to work ourselves and the organization through to becoming trustworthy allies or accomplices – partners in tearing down the oppressive systems that poison our lives and our mother planet. ♦



Climate March Toronto September 27

## 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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<https://www.winchevskycentre.org/newsletters>

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