

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 collectively as the UJPO since 1945.

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Banner graphic by
Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

Homage to Rachel!

By Barb Linds

On Saturday, June 4th at Christie Pits we had a lovely party to honour Rachel Epstein. Friends, family, colleagues and folks from all parts of the organization shared laughter and a few tears! And Rachel's 98 year old father joined us on Zoom from Vancouver!

Here is a sample of the tributes paid to Rachel that afternoon.

Lynn Lubitz: Rachel, UJPO owes a lot to you for your many talents. Your fundraising skills, the ability to navigate sometimes difficult waters, insert the pandemic here! Your moral and ethical compass, your vision, your intelligence and integrity, and most of all for the great heart that you bring to every project. A true mensch, you have a fundamental sense of decency and respect for others.



Ruth Grossman: As some of you may know, the job description of the executive directorship of UJPO can be a bit of a strange mashup of duties and talents...requiring equal measures of creativity and perseverance, patience and stewardship, advocacy and diplomacy, but above all it requires the ability to be a good listener. From where I sit, Rachel has met these challenges, with humour and with empathy.

Michelle Munk: Last year at the Shule Advisory Committee, Rachel introduced the idea of engaging with some big thematic issues. Together, we had thoughtful discussions of secularism, equity and queering the curriculum. She created a space where we felt confident to share our opinions, she gracefully managed conflict, and she gently and firmly challenged us to engage with important issues in our guidance of the shule.

Shelley Cope: I see the role you played as E.D. as the director in the Theatre of the Absurd. There are so many facets to the Order and lots of quirky people. It takes a great conductor to keep the orchestra in tune and you did it with grace and professionalism that truly astounded me. Thank you for everything and all the best in your next production. You will be missed.

Rachel's remarks were heartfelt and thoughtful:

"Welcome to the *Meshuga* Centre." That's how sue greeted me on my first day of work. I wasn't aware then of the many layers of meaning behind her words.

Many events and moments from the past 5 years are lodged in my memory, but a few in particular stand out:

First off...today. I want to start with a huge thank you to Charna who put a ton of energy into organizing this event. Thank you to Charna, and to sue, and to Marilyn and to everyone else who helped out. It is so much appreciated.

Then there was the time that Lia, Maxine and I were the readers at the Third Seyder and I drank a little too much wine and set the table on fire;

There was the time a classroom at the Winchevsky Centre seriously flooded on the night before the Third Seyder;

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NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

FROM WINNIPEG

By Harriet Zaidman and Ellen Karlinsky

UJPO Winnipeg had its first end of the year barbecue since 2019. Everyone was very happy to see each other and socialize after so long. Our get-together was a big success, with several people signing up or renewing their memberships.

We paid tribute to Mark Golden and Lee Anne Block who both passed away and who we miss dearly. Lee Anne was a driving force in the creation of the healing forest in Winnipeg's St John's Park. She will be honoured in a ceremony this summer at the Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest in North Winnipeg. The board will be planting fruit trees in her honour and inviting family, friends and community members to the ceremony. UJPO members will participate in this event.

At our year-end event we talked about two documents. People looked at the statement passed by the UJPO national board on Israel Palestine and had some interesting feedback. For the most part it got a favourable response. Some felt there should be stronger support expressed for the BDS movement. Others expressed support for a statement recognizing the diverse views of members.

We also discussed a draft brochure that our strategic planning committee developed. It talks about who we are and what we believe and what we do. More discussion is needed and we will pick up on this in the fall.

Our exciting news is that we expect to receive funds from the MWC cultural fund. These monies will support various cultural projects which will include:

- a play reading group
- the development of a documentary on Winnipeg's Jewish Radical community
- a Yiddish for Beginners course
- a Warsaw Ghetto memorial program put on by the North End Jewish Folk Choir (which is supported by UJPO)
- a lecture series by Professor Itay Zutra on some aspect of Yiddish/Jewish literature
- initiatives to support the Judaic/ Yiddish studies program at U of Manitoba.
- continuation of our active Book Club.

We are in discussions about setting a website up for UJPO Winnipeg. We would like to expand our presence in Winnipeg. Having a website will be a part of an outreach and membership strategy.

Looking forward to more in-person events. We wish everyone a good summer.♦

FROM TORONTO

By Barb Linds

I am writing this update from beautiful Camp Naivelt where, since June 6th, I have been the part time Interim Executive Director of UJPO/MWS. The work has been both challenging and rewarding. Rachel has very big shoes to fill!

Our staff are keeping everything moving, and our boards and other committee members have taken on expanded roles to meet the ongoing needs of our organizations. Much appreciation to all of them.

Our very exciting shule program is now over for the year. Thanks to our fantastic teachers, the hardworking shule advisory committee, and to our amazing Education Director, Lia Tarachansky. Heartfelt congratulations to this year's B'Mitzvah graduates, Tamouz Paz, Sese Smith and Julian Loki Danger Steinberg, whose ceremony and celebration were held on July 2nd. A special tribute to Lainie Basman, their teacher, for inspiring and motivating these three young people.

On June 21st I was privileged to attend the online graduation of our Adult B'Mitzvah participants, Jess Abraham, Jennifer Crawford, Zoë Druick, Aaron Lakoff, Robin Vogl and our own Rachel Epstein. It was a truly moving and inspiring evening. Congratulations to all, and a special thank you to Sharoni Sibony for creating and leading this wonderful program!

Our programming continued into the summer with our very special Pride Celebration event, Queer Yiddish Politics and Poetry, held on Sunday July 10th at noon EST. This event was co-sponsored by Independent Jewish Voices. Moderated by Rachel Epstein, it featured Irena Klepfisz and Zohar Weiman-Kelman in conversation about the politics of Yiddish and more.

On July 22nd at 7:00 pm join us at the Winchevsky Centre for our first in person Alt Shabbes evening, including the screening of the documentary *The Jews of India*, followed by a Q & A with the film-maker, Vanessa Laufer. The secular Shabbes ceremony will be outside, and the film screening will take place indoors. We ask everyone to be diligent about COVID - 19 symptoms and to be masked indoors.

Thanks to our great staff, Sophie Bourett-Klein, Saskia Laufer and sue goldstein, who are making all of this happen. For further information or to register for these events please visit our FB page:
www.facebook.com/WinchevskyCtr

Welcome to Daniel Grushcow, our Canada Summer Jobs intern. Daniel is part of our Youth Group, and is working with Sophie to plan the fall Youth Group program. He is also planning a Youth Group excursion on August 1st to Camp Naivelt on the first day of Naivelt Art Week. To register for this excursion contact Daniel at assistant@winchevskycentre.org

Check out our summer program at Camp Naivelt, including Sunday bagel brunches, the Peace Tea, Music Week, Art Camp, Indigenous Solidarity Week, our staged reading of the play *Village of Idiots*, and more. Details can be found on the Winchevsky Centre website.♦

FROM HAMILTON

By Paul Weinberg

Hamilton UJPO get-together, June 25 (in his garden)

Our get together was largely social but there was a spirited discussion about how many South African Jews immigrated to Canada and specifically Toronto. It brought to mind a 2010 book by Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa* which is reliant on interviews and archival matter in both countries.

Early Labour Zionist leaders in the founding of Israel saw their movement as akin to other liberation struggles that had sprung up in the Third World. This did not jibe with the reality of how the Jewish State was founded at the expense of indigenous Palestinians, a significant portion of whom were expelled or felt obligated to leave during the 1948 War of Independence. The Haganah, the major Zionist paramilitary force and a precursor to the Israeli Defence Force became a significant military force thanks to the British Mandate rulers, in face of serious domestic Arab unrest during the later 1930s.

And so, it is not surprising that starting in the 1970s both Israel and apartheid South Africa discovered having a common cause as colonizers in attempting to stave off emerging nationalisms of the original indigenous inhabitants, whether it be Arabs or African Blacks in the respective countries. There was no stomach by Israeli governments, Labor or Likud, to hand back conquered Palestinian territories following the 1967 Six Day War.

One of the architects of the Jewish settlement process in the territories, Shimon Peres, was also a key player in harmonizing relations between Israel and South Africa. Israel sold weapons from Jericho missiles to radar systems and aircraft to South Africa, military forces fighting liberation forces in neighbouring Angola and Mozambique. There was also the transfer of nuclear technology to South Africa from Israel.

Many of the white allies of the Black liberation struggle in South Africa happened to be Jews. But Sasha Polakow-Suransky argues that they always represented a minority in the South African Jewish community.

Today, the discussion in our Hamilton UJPO group was about how disillusionment has set in in 2022 despite the post-apartheid promises of a new South Africa. Today, there is political corruption, violence against migrants from neighbouring African states and immense poverty all around that has not been alleviated despite the wealth in the country.

Naomi Klein, in her book *Shock Doctrine*, argues that the election of the first ANC government in South Africa came about at a time when market oriented neo-liberal policies had swept the world on the right and left from Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair. Black majority rule came about because there was a stalemate in the struggle between the Black liberation movement in the ANC and the white apartheid regime. They later agreed to give up power in exchange for the largely white business community to be left alone and make money as it wished.

Klein says it was a mistake for the ANC under Nelson Mandela not to undertake its promised nationalization of mineral resources which would have redirected funds towards the building of housing and the expansion of social spending in a country like South Africa that has features of both the First World and Third World.

One counter argument is made that solving poverty in South Africa, even if the ANC had been able to implement its social democratic platform, would have been a tall order. Nonetheless, the ANC today does have a tarnished record. And there is nobody in sight large enough to replace them.♦

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There was a phone conversation that me and Lia had with a head honcho at the UJA, trying to get him to understand why we couldn't agree to support the Walk for Israel in order to receive subsidies for shule families;

There was going off with Dominic (our contract custodian) to a furniture wholesale place in Scarborough, and coming back not only with desks and chairs for the WC, but a fabulous old-style chair that sits in my living room.

And then there was the pandemic: the Clover School (our tenant) suddenly stopped paying rent; we held online check ins for members and organized volunteers to call people we thought might be isolated; the Naivelt Camp Committee carefully and thoughtfully figured out how to plan the summer. I was reminded of our roots as a mutual



benefit society – an organization that takes care of its members.

And there were also many magical moments: at holiday events, at MWS B'Mitzvah ceremonies, at readings, discussions, and in working relationships.

Most of the best moments are about relationships and I'd like to offer some thanks:

First to Maxine. When I arrived in the office Maxine let me know she was a “paper person” and then spent several days shredding paper that had accumulated over her 20 years as E.D. She also spent many days passing on the buckets of information and tips she had amassed over those 20 years.

To Lia who has built a creative, radical and fun learning space in the shule, including completely transforming the curriculum. Thank you to the Shule Advisory Council that has guided and supported Lia and the E.D. for many years. We are also blessed to have an incredibly talented teaching and TA staff and of course, sue, the Queen of snack.

sue also knows more than anyone what the daily operations of the WC look like. She and I have had many moments of laughter, tears, and head shaking, marvelling at the many wonders of humanity. sue also communicates with members and keeps the show on the road.

Thank you to David Wall and Marilyn Lerner who for so many years have shared with us their incredible musical talent and have made, and continue to make, our holiday celebrations so rich and vibrant and full of life.

Thank you to Gin who, with humour, grace and hard work, has brought us technologically into the 21st century...we now have online forms and registrations and...wait for it – a working data base.

Thank you to Dom who continues to weather the vicissitudes of an old building and who shared with me the challenges of being the landlord of an old building.

Thank you to financial administrator Lynn Lubitz who has taken on the complexities of this organization and its finances with energy, interest and commitment. She's learned the cast of characters and has come to care about the organization's values and principles in a way that is way beyond her job description;

Thank you to all the people who have served on the Camp Committee – who do the monumental task of managing each summer at camp and the myriad of issues that can, and do, arise.

Thank you to Saskia who came to us as a B'Mitzvah student and who has stayed on to completely revitalize our social media presence and also brings her musical, technical and political skills to the organization.

Thank you to Sophie who came to us as a summer student and has stayed on to do a brilliant job of coordinating programming, including the upcoming event with Irena Klepfisz and Zohar Weiman-Kelman. Sophie and Saskia are a fabulous team and the organization is better for having them.

And finally, thank you to all the Board members, past and current, who have served on the UJPO and MWS Boards. Serving on a Board can be a thankless task and often people forget that the hours that Board members put in are all volunteer hours, often on top of already too busy lives. Special thanks to Board chairs Julia, Adam and Hannah, all of whom have gone above and beyond. Thank you also to those who have managed the finances, including Max and Marilyn.

I'd also like to do a special call out to the HR Committee – this includes Marilyn, Paula, Charna, Marsha and more recently Barb Linds. This committee has put in countless hours, and I mean countless hours, dealing with hard stuff and I would be remiss to not mention and acknowledge them.

This year I was a participant in Winchevsky's Adult B'Mitzvah program. What I realized in this process is that Jewishness for me is about ritual and celebrations but, most importantly it is about social justice. The Jewish story I am most interested in is the history of Jewish radicalism and activism. UJPO and the MWS are significant to that history. The organization has been around for 90 years and by continuing to transform, to grow and to change, it continues to be a part of shaping radical Jewish history. It is this history that I identify with and that touches me as a Jew. And so for all the *mishugas* and the *tsuris*, this is still my Jewish home.

One of my goals when I started this job was to make the organization attractive to younger people. It seemed critical to its survival. I believe this is happening in Toronto

and I look forward to seeing what the coming years will bring for the next iteration of this radical Jewish organization. I will see you at Rosh Hashanah. ♦

HONOURABLE MENTSHN

Anna Yanovsky, 1933-2022

By David Abramowitz



I met Anna Atanas, and her sister Pauline (Polly), at the UJPO in 1951 at an audition for a pageant. Within the first twenty minutes of our meeting I learned she was an atheist, came from a left wing, union-supporting, Macedonian family and belonged to the youth singers of the Communist Party of Canada! We both were cast in the pageant and our friendship lasted till her death on February 16, 2022.

We lost touch for a few years when she went to Bulgaria to study music but met again at The Workers Art League at which the great Canadian labour cartoonist (and UJPO member) Avrom Yanovsky, was one of its instructors, and subsequently Anna's spouse in 1961.

During these years Anna and Avrom lovingly raised their daughters, Dvoira and Kaethe, who also grew up in the organization as did her stepson, Zalman (Zal) Yanovsky, of The Lovin' Spoonful (rock band). Anna often represented UJPO at its display for the International Women's Day event sponsored by the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace.

But amidst all her activities there were particularly sad events such as the death of Avrom in 1979 and Zalman in 2002.

Anna joined UJPO, was a member of the Toronto Jewish Folk Choir and the UJPO Youth Singers (forerunner of The Travellers) which toured Canada! She also became a performer in our UJPO Theatre Workshop which evolved into the Toronto Ensemble Theatre (TET). One of her memorable performances was in our production of Sholem Aleichem's *Adventures of Menachem Mendle* playing Mendle's wife, Sheyne Sheyndle. TET also acquired members from the Indo-Canadian Prabasi Society and Anna was cast in one of its productions as a red-headed bar waitress!

Among her interests was membership in the Toronto Outlook Magazine Collective of which she later became president.

Anna bought a cottage at Camp Naivelt and spent many enjoyable summers there hosting friends, daughter Dvoira, grandsons Joshua and Zachary and daughter Kaethe when they visited Toronto. Her love of Scrabble was so great that she and fellow camper Judy Goldie played it on the weekends when the concerts at Naivelt's Lasowsky Centre didn't interest them. My partner Brian and I often joined them.

When Camp Naivelt undertook its extravaganza production *Oy Di Velt Vet Vern Yinger* (Oh the world will grow younger) more than a decade ago about the UJPO "split", when about 200 members left UJPO to form the New Fraternal Jewish Association (NFJA), Anna was a prominent actress.

Anna's life changed by winning a lottery. She purchased a lovely condominium and homes for her daughters. She contributed most generously to her beloved progressive causes. And just a few years ago went to Cuba!

Anna phoned me monthly after I left Naivelt. We exchanged "news" and we schmoozed. After a longer than usual period without a call from Anna, former Naivelter Margaret Rodricks phoned to tell me of Anna's fall, broken hip, successful surgery and, while in the ICU, death on February 16.

We all miss her colourful personality, but, fortunately, there are numerous joyful memories to recall. ♦

Mazel Tov Dr. Martin Schechter

Mazel Tov to Marty Schechter for receiving the Order of Canada – announced on June 29, 2022. The Schechter-Hermolin family is bursting with pride!

Dr. Schechter, C.M., O.B.C., a professor in University of British Columbia's school of population and public health, is recognized for his groundbreaking research in HIV and AIDS treatment protocols and for his leadership in the development of numerous leading edge health institutes. ♦



WHAT'S IN ORDER

Mazl Tov to:

Judie Goldie on the birth of her granddaughter, Freya Black-McDonald

Get well to:

Dominic Modenese, Building Manager for the Winchovsky Centre in Toronto

Vanessa Laufer, mother of UJPO's Social Media Staff person, Saskia Laufer

Heartfelt condolences to:

Roz Usiskin and Vity Bagel on the loss of their sister, Shirley Cochonov

Carl Rosenberg, on the passing of his mother, Donna Tracey Thomas-Falconar and MWS teaching assistant, Shadow Thomas-Coward on the passing of their aunt, Sandra Thomas

The family and friends of Gilliam Halstead, who passed away unexpectedly ♦

POETRY & SONG

Who Said It Was Simple

By Audre Lorde

There are so many roots to the tree of anger
that sometimes the branches shatter
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.

An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.

But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in colour
as well as sex
and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.

Audre Lorde, "Who Said It Was Simple" from *From a Land Where Other People Live*. Copyright © 1973 by Audre Lorde. Reprinted with the permission of the Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency

Source: The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1997)<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42587/who-said-it-was-simple>

From Harriet Lyons:

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) was an African-American, Afro-Caribbean, feminist, lesbian, socialist poet, who had two children during her marriage to a white, gay man. She was a pioneer of the concept of intersectionality, the notion that sources of oppression and privilege are multiple and coexist within individuals. Famously, she is quoted as saying "I am defined as other by every group I'm part of...."

In her "mythobiography", *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, (1982) she wrote about a period in her life when a Communist couple were among the few white associates who would shelter a Black woman in their apartment but made her leave when they found out she had a woman lover, because, at a time when Red-baiting had close links to homophobia, they feared it would bring negative attention to the Party. In her prose and her poetry, Lorde examined the intertwined strands of the ropes that held her back, but also found strength in speaking out from the standpoints of all her identities.

The title of "Who Said it was Simple" could be taken as a manifesto for intersectionality: if identity is not simple, it must be complex. The title is a fitting introduction to the insights into oppression and resistance that make up the body of the poem. The "tree of anger" we are told "has many roots."

The scene described in the poem would indeed appear to be simple, a group of women are assembling in Nedicks, a cheap chain restaurant in New York known mostly for a famous orange drink, before heading out for a feminist march. The speaker is doubtless sympathetic with its goals but cannot let matters rest there. The chatting women are discussing a problem in which the narrator identifies a certain contradiction: the shortcomings of the "girls", almost certainly low-paid women of colour, whose services free the marchers to demand an end to their own oppression.

The counterman is described as "almost white." Perhaps to protect the marginal advantage of that status, he bypasses a Black customer to wait on the white women, who chat on, unaware of the racial privilege that accompanies their gendered subjection. Here we have a moment when the women could do something, however small, to speak out against a real oppression, at little cost to themselves. One of them has only to say, "I think he was here first." But no one does. Although the feminist movement enjoined us to see sisterhood as powerful, it has

the ignored Black customer who is identified as a “brother.”

The speaker delineates the strands that make up her own otherness: she is bound by “the mirror” of colour and the “bed” of her sexual desires, as well as by the female sex which she shares with the marchers. Ironically, she wonders which part of her will survive so many “liberations” in a world in which it is, indeed, never simple.♦

A LITTLE NOSH

Mejadra (Middle East Spiced Lentils and Rice)

By Harriet Zaidman

This dish, which originates in the Middle East, can be found in Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi's popular cookbook, *Jerusalem* (Random House, 2012). It has a unique flavour that comes with the addition of a pinch of allspice and cinnamon. If the mixture is cooked through and fluffy after the water has boiled through, then don't let it sit the extra 10 minutes. You don't want the rice to get too dry. I didn't need to do it.

The lentil/rice mixture becomes a complete meal with a dollop of yogurt on the side. The coated onions, sprinkled on top, add a nice texture.

These and other delicious meals can be found on my blog, North End Nosh (northendnosh.weebly.com).

Serves: 4

Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients

1 1/4 cups (250 grams) green or brown lentils
4 medium or 2 large onions
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
vegetable oil as needed
2 teaspoons cumin seeds or 2 scant teaspoons ground cumin
1 1/2 tablespoons coriander seed
1 cup (200 grams) basmati rice
2 tablespoons olive oil or more
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
1 1/2 teaspoons allspice
1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 teaspoon sugar
1 1/2 cups water
salt and pepper

Method

Place the lentils in a small saucepan, cover with plenty of water. Bring the water to a boil and cook for 12-15



minutes, until the lentils have softened, but still have a little bite. Drain and set aside.

Peel the onions and slice thinly. Sprinkle them with the flour and 1 teaspoon salt. Mix well with your hands.

Heat the vegetable oil to high in a medium-sized frying pan. Make sure the oil is hot by throwing in a piece of onion. It should sizzle vigorously. Reduce the heat to medium-high and fry the onions, in batches, for 5-7 minutes. Stir occasionally until the onion takes on a nice golden brown colour and turns crispy. Adjust the temperature so the onion doesn't fry too quickly and burn. Add oil as needed.

Transfer the onions to a plate lined with a paper towel to drain them. Season again with a little salt.

Wipe the frying pan clean and put in the cumin and coriander seeds. Place over medium heat and toast the seeds for a minute or two. Add the rice, olive oil, turmeric, allspice, cinnamon, sugar, 1/2 teaspoon salt and plenty of black pepper.

Stir to coat the rice with the oil and then add the cooked lentils and the water. Bring to a boil, cover with a lid and simmer over very low heat for 15 minutes.

Fluff with a fork. If all the moisture is absorbed, skip the next step (I did) and proceed to incorporating the onions. If there is still moisture, remove the pan from the heat, lift off the lid and quickly cover the pan with a clean tea towel. Seal tightly with the lid and set aside for 10 minutes to let the rice finish steaming.

Finally, add half the fried onion to the rice and lentils and stir gently with a fork. Pile the mixture in a serving bowl and top with the remaining onions. Serve with yogurt and/or any kind of greens.♦

CANADA

Anti-racism and the IHRA definition

By Paul Weinberg and Independent Jewish Voices – Canada, May 9, 2022

A Toronto District School Board employee found himself under fire after emailing his colleagues research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which allegedly violated the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.

Anti-racism or equity education in the schools, corporations and government institutions did not begin with the killing of George Floyd and the rallies and protests inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020. But the events of that year helped to encourage and expand this kind of instruction and make it increasingly relevant.

Not surprisingly, there is also a backlash. So-called woke culture is denounced in France, while U.S. teachers can be fired in some states if they discuss slavery, white privilege, anti-Black racism and gender identity in the classrooms. And legislators in the National Assembly in Quebec are planning to allow the utterance of the N-word by university professors.

What is happening in anti-racism work across Canada is difficult to gauge. Its activity is fragmented and one has to pierce beneath the rhetoric of educational institutions.

The tumultuous events in Toronto last year laid bare the pressures faced by anti-racism educators and activists.

On paper the Toronto District School Board has strong equity policies, but its 2018 adoption of the IHRA threatens to undermine them.

The definition of anti-Semitism of the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) is the accepted working definition for various national governments, including Canada, as well as in some provincial and municipal jurisdictions.

The origins of the IHRA remain controversial. It is not universally accepted by all international scholars. Starting in 2016, it has become a tool by which Israel seeks to counter an international boycott, sanctions and divestment movement on the part of groups seeking to draw attention to war crimes and international law violations committed against the Palestinian population in Israel and the occupied territories. Seven out of 11 examples of anti-Semitism in the IHRA definition involve critical comments about Israel.

One major Canadian historian whom I interviewed is not too worried about the IHRA, because the measure is not legally binding in Canada. Nobody in this country calling for Palestinian rights is going to be charged and hauled up



TDSB student equity program advisor Javier Dávila and his dog.
Credit: Javier Dávila

before a court. Furthermore, there are no criminal penalties hovering over BDS advocacy as has been the case in France or some U.S. states. So a McCarthyite witch hunt is not in the works.

Yet, even in its aspirational form, the IHRA can still intimidate and silence.

I have interviewed two teachers at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) about equity or anti-racism instruction, and both feel compromised pedagogically by the board's adoption of the IHRA definition. Both want to remain anonymous, because they fear reprisals from their employer.

The first teacher says there is no problem giving lessons on settler colonialism in Canada, Indigenous rights, "land back," and systemic racism within the Toronto school system.

It is quite another matter to draw parallels between the European settlement of Canada and the Zionist colonization of Palestine. In the latter situation, indigenous Palestinians were uprooted and expelled from the new Jewish state in the course of and following the 1947-48 war, and their emptied properties were made available for incoming post-World War II refugees from Europe. There is an accepted wisdom in the Palestinian community that the Nakba (Arabic for "disaster" or "catastrophe") continues today.

"When we are talking about who is censoring these conversations, there has to be permission to centre Palestinian truths, narratives and perspectives, and history. If the Nakba cannot be spoken of without being subsumed under the speech of anti-Semitism, then we are left with no language," the first teacher says.

Whatever an instructor says publicly before students or on social media has consequences. Say the wrong word, and parents, right-wing columnists, various Israel lobby organizations and opportunistic politicians are ready to

pounce like the vengeful Furies of ancient Greek mythology.

That is what happened to Javier Dávila. For about 15 years, the TDSB student equity program advisor emailed batches of background material on complex equity subjects from an anti-oppression perspective that teachers might want to raise in class.

Then in May of 2021, violence in Israel and the occupied territories erupted and culminated in the bombing of Gaza and Jewish settler attacks on Arab Israelis in mixed towns in Israel within the Green Line.

To make sense of the escalation of violence, Dávila emailed two large batches containing a diverse number of Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian sources. The aim was to provide insights from moderate and radical voices. It did not mean that the student equity program advisor necessarily agreed with all the perspectives, notwithstanding his sympathy for the Palestinian plight.

Apparently, student equity program advisor Javier Dávila was temporarily suspended and investigated in the spring of 2021 by the Toronto District School Board following a complaint by a Toronto Sun columnist Sue Ann Levy with regards to the internal mailouts containing Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian voices which she described as “virulently anti-Israel.”

All this kerfuffle resulted in Dávila being suspended and investigated by the TDSB.

To be clear, the mailouts were not distributed to a broad audience. Rather, they were aimed at a little over 1,000 educators and administrators within the TDSB with the expertise to sift through the material and determine what might be relevant for a class.

Apparently, the TDSB is obliged to take seriously allegations of racism or anti-Semitism directed against an employee even if they are “vexatious,” says my second teacher source.

Dávila garnered sympathy from former students, parents (including some Jewish parents), teachers, unions and Independent Jewish Voices-Canada. A petition containing 5,000 signatures circulated in support. Shree Paradkar, a Toronto Star race and gender columnist, wrote that the board was essentially killing the messenger.

The suspension turned out to be temporary and Dávila found himself reinstated in the summer. Vindication also came from the TDSB’s independent integrity commissioner.

Still in progress is a complaint from B’nai Brith Canada before the Ontario College of Teachers. In turn,

Dávila is suing B’nai Brith Canada and its CEO, Michael Mostyn, for their continued invective.

The whole episode has disrupted Dávila’s life. He is currently on medical leave and not available for interviews. His lawyers, Dimitri Lascaris and Stephen Ellis, provided details of why their client is taking this legal action.

“Despite Dávila’s reinstatement, B’nai Brith continued to smear Dávila using the terms ‘Jew hatred’, ‘glorification of violence’, and ‘openly pro-terrorism’. B’nai Brith further announced a self-declared pro-terrorism ‘campaign for consequences’ against Dávila and filed a formal complaint with the Ontario College of Teachers demanding another investigation and the revocation of his teaching license,” they wrote in January.

All this has echoes of a similar suit, this one successful and launched by Lascaris against the same organization, B’nai Brith Canada.

In the meantime, the decision by the TDSB not to continue the mailouts is being interpreted as a sign of backing away from a previous commitment to equity.

Ryan Bird, an official spokesperson for the TDSB denies this, emailing that Dávila’s mailouts never had the status of official communications with TDSB teachers.

My first teacher contact explains that Dávila was part of an internal TDSB equity process, starting with a gender-based violence prevention office he led.

Dávila’s mailouts were popular, the first teacher says.

“The reality is educators are asking for this resource because of its value for over a decade and are no longer able to receive it,” they say.

My second teacher source echoed these comments.

“There are teachers now directly teaching about racism, sometimes within the context of a subject,” they said. “Other teachers are not equipped to talk about anti-racism. The board has provided little to no training.”

The dust has settled, but tensions among teachers, trustees and parents persist within the TDSB. Another high-profile incident last year involved author and equity specialist Desmond Cole, who was taken to task for alleged anti-Semitism after calling for a “Free Palestine” and denouncing anti-Palestinian racism at the board before a class at Marc Garneau Collegiate. A large contingent of students did a walkout in support of Cole and Davila.

I asked Ryan Bird at the Board if some healing was required here, but he was surprised by my question.

“Sorry Paul. I’m not personally aware of any division following that policy update,” he said.

What Bird is essentially saying is that the board is sticking with the IHRA.

"It was not controversial," says Shelly Laskin, a TDSB trustee and the mover of the successful 2018 IHRA motion which involved amending the standard definition of anti-Semitism as part of a revision of equity policy.

Today, a resource-challenged Toronto District School Board relies on external parties, including the Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, to provide Holocaust course material for schools. Not entirely a bad thing, considering how Holocaust iconography such as the Star of David worn by Jews living under Nazi tyranny is strangely being appropriated by anti-vaxxers. There is certainly a lot of ignorance and misinformation about what transpired during the Holocaust in Europe among both adults and young people.

However, the FSWC is also controversial as a participant in the original international formulation of the IHRA in 2016, two years before the TDSB adopted its own policy. Today on its website, the FSWC also styles itself as an organization with an expertise in anti-racism education. Yet, it deems as illegitimate criticism of Israel and its documented practices as an apartheid state. A former Liberal MP, Michael Levitt, heads the Canadian branch. (I tried to reach him, but he did not return my e-mail.)

Sheryl Nestel, PhD, an IJV (Independent Jewish Voices Canada) activist and retired lecturer (formerly with the sociology and equity studies department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto) argues that the FSWC course material does not connect to the lived experiences of students, especially those coming from racialized and colonized backgrounds in the developing world.

There is a way to talk to young people about the Holocaust, but not within the narrow framework set by the board. Nestel observes a focus on the part of the FSWC on individual expressions of hate, rather than systemic racism or intersectionality.

"What concerns me about the focus on the Holocaust as the ultimate racist event is that there is a civilizing mission behind this," notes Nestel. "Students have to agree and recognize that the Holocaust is the central event of racism historically. So of course, this dismisses the possibility that these people have come from colonial, racist, genocidal experiences, which disturbs me a lot."

The last word goes to Calgary-based Mark Ayyesh, PhD, a Mount Royal University professor in the department of sociology and anthropology and a Middle East expert. He is currently writing a book about settler colonial sovereignty.

A Palestinian born in the Silwan neighbourhood in Jerusalem, he laments the normalization of the IHRA. "It is in education, it is in politics, it is in media, it is in social media; it is mainstream media; it is in corporations, you name it," he says.

Ayyesh has harsh things to say about the shallow and corporate forms of anti-racism training, particularly at the TDSB.

He recalls that the high school students he addressed last year in Calgary displayed a better understanding of power imbalances and inequalities than some so-called experts.

"These were all racialized students as well in this group. It is racialized students that are driving the more substantive and real anti-racism which includes the fight against real anti-Semitism."

Paul Weinberg is a journalist and member of the UJPO and Independent Jewish Voices Canada.

<https://rabble.ca/anti-racism/anti-racism-and-the-ihra-definition/>◆

USA



"Giant" of labour signs in

At six foot four, A. Philip Randolph wouldn't be pushed around. The founder of the Sleeping Car Porters, the first black union, defied the Royal York Hotel and simply signed into the segregated hotel. A long-time socialist and civil rights activist, Randolph desegregated the U.S. army and organized the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington D.C.

Cartoon by John Williams

MIDDLE EAST

My letter in the current issue of Weekly Worker

By Moshé Machover, London

Why has Israel's prime minister, Naftali Bennett, decided to dissolve the Knesset (Israel's parliament), facing the country with the fifth general elections in less than three years?

Do not take any notice of explanations involving trivial personal rivalries and ambitions. There is one simple overriding reason for Bennett's step: he is a man of 'principle' – at least where it concerns Israel's apartheid legislation. He is prepared to lose office, and perhaps put an end to his political career, if that is what it takes to keep the apartheid regime in the West Bank safe on its iniquitous legalistic basis.

Israel has so far avoided annexing the West Bank: there are too many Arabs there. (Before doing that, Israel will want it ethnically cleansed, as were the Syrian Golan Heights prior to being annexed.) In the meantime, Israel operates in the West Bank a regime of harsh military tyranny, an elaborate system of rule by military edicts, kangaroo courts and brutal physical repression. But in order to exempt the Jewish colonists from this regime, Israel enacted in 1967 'temporary' emergency regulations, granting to these Israeli citizens living outside Israel's territory the same legal status as that of citizens living inside the country. They have the same civil rights and are subject to the same civil and criminal laws as Israelis living in Tel-Aviv. These regulations – which form the legalistic basis of what is patently an apartheid colonial regime – are valid for a limited period and must be extended every few years. For the last 55 years, this has been a virtually automatic affair. But, this time round, extension, due this month, has come up against a political obstacle.

Bennet's hotchpotch coalition government – formed one year ago on the basis of a single 'principle': anyone but Bibi (Netanyahu) – has a paper-thin majority. All its Zionist members (including the 'left'-Zionist Meretz) agreed to vote for extending the apartheid regulations. But for the Islamists of the United Arab List (the first ever Arab party to participate in an Israeli ruling coalition) this was a bridge too far. When renewal of the regulations was tabled in the Knesset on June 6, the government did not have a majority. This would have been no problem if the rightwing opposition, which zealously supports the apartheid regime, had voted according to their ideology. But Netanyahu, a sly tactician, asked his Likud party and its allies to vote against extension, thereby causing its defeat. He knew that Bennett,

a committed rightwing religious Zionist supporter of colonisation, would refuse to lead a government devoid of the legalistic instrument of apartheid in the West Bank.

Israel now finds itself back in the tumult and uncertainty of the two years preceding June 2021. Unless Netanyahu manages to form a government, the present coalition is likely to continue as a caretaker government led by Yair Lapid, with Bennett as alternate prime minister. The emergency regulations will be frozen until a new Knesset is elected, probably in October or November. What government will emerge then is uncertain, but it is a fair bet that it will continue Israel's long-term shift to the extremes of rightwing, obscurantist Zionism.

[https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1400/letters/♦](https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1400/letters/)

Israel has reached another impasse. The experiment will go on failing

By Hanin Majadli Jun 23, 2022 9:44 PM

Opinion – Haaretz.com

Congratulations, Israel has reached an impasse. Once again. And the current one is the most justified impasse it has yet reached.

It's high time to realize that the political dead-end will continue to be part of our lives for many years. In fact, its origin doesn't lie in the Knesset at all, but in the deepest essence of the State of Israel – a Jewish state. This self-definition *a priori* restricts the composition of governing coalitions to either a right-wing government, an even more right-wing government or a Jewish unity government.

In other words, if the essence isn't democratic, it's only a matter of time until democracy itself collapses. The impasse is the result of this collapse.

Think for a minute. What's the official reason for Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's decision to dissolve the government? The fear that he wouldn't be able to extend the regulations that apply Israeli law to West Bank settlers – which are apartheid regulations.

In other words, the government has collapsed because it isn't able to guarantee the continuation of apartheid. Bennett was willing to sacrifice himself and his future as long as apartheid continues as usual. What's important is that when the election takes place, they'll all talk about a "celebration of democracy."

Thus the depth of the impasse is equal to the depth of Israel's moral collapse, and they feed off each other. A government can't call itself things like "a government of change" or "a government of healing" when it sets aside the deepest and most painful wound of all and declares up front that it won't touch it.

This gridlock will be resolvable only when enough Israeli Jews understand that there are only two options – a Jewish state that isn’t democratic, or a true Jewish-Arab partnership. And by partnership, I don’t mean one based on political extortion in exchange for economic extortion. Israel’s Arab citizens shouldn’t have to give up the rights they deserve in exchange for money or investments in infrastructure.

An Arab citizen isn’t supposed to be a hostage or a subject begging for what ought to be self-evident. He should feel that his rights are upheld regardless of the political situation. True partnership has to rest on a basis of equality. Full equality at every level – civic, economic, cultural and also national.

What “national” means is obvious. Until Israeli Jews understand that occupation and apartheid are their country’s most deeply rooted self-definitions, and that therefore any change or cure must address them, everything will remain stuck.

The players may change – the parties, the Knesset members, the ministers and the prime ministers – but this is mere foam on the ocean. What has to change is the underlying structure, the infrastructure on which Israel is built – an undemocratic infrastructure based on Jewish supremacy, discrimination against all other citizens and continued occupation.

It’s no accident that the right is getting stronger. It’s no accident that MKs Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich are getting stronger. It’s no accident that an absolute majority of the Knesset is right wing. It’s happening precisely because this understanding is gradually sinking in. The strengthening of the radical right is a reaction to that understanding.

It’s a survival reflex. The more Israeli Jews begin to grasp the depth of the moral rot, the more they vote for people who don’t care about morality – people who are motivated only by the same old Jewish supremacy, but this time in a version with no shame and no restraints. And they’re right. Why play at being democratic when you aren’t?♦

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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