

# 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.

## Volume #42, Issue #2

Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

## Statement of Solidarity with Palestine and Palestinian People

### *Background:*

As members of the United Jewish People's Order (UJPO), we have been deeply concerned about the lives of people in Israel and Palestine for many years. This statement is the product of conversation and deliberation among UJPO members across Canada, directed by the Israel/Palestine educational committee of the UJPO National Board (2020-22). The aim of this statement is to articulate our particular perspective as a progressive Jewish community in Canada with a long history of, and present commitment to, social justice advocacy at home and internationally. This is also intended to serve as a statement of our commitment to further action.

### *Preamble:*

We approach this issue as people with diverse identities across generations of Jews in Canada. Among us, we have experienced intense antisemitism, suffered the consequences of the Holocaust, and experienced displacement and dispossession. Through all this, we yearn for a better world. Generations of progressive Jews have struggled to find safe haven for all, away from oppression and genocide, and some have been hopeful that this could emerge in the contested land of Israel/Palestine. It has not. We reject the claim that Israel speaks for us. Other Jewish organizations, many with substantive resources and influence, that have insisted that challenging the State of Israel is the same as antisemitism do not speak for all Jews. They do not speak for us. We insist that no amount of antisemitism, no amount of atrocities – historical or current – can or should ever be used to justify the oppression of another people. We perceive that this oppression is what the State of Israel and its international allies are doing today, at the cost of Palestinian lives. Not in our name. As a secular Jewish progressive organization we have a long established history in Canada. We understand the struggle for justice and the rights of all oppressed peoples affects us at home as well as internationally.

### *Statement:*

We support the right of Palestinians to self-determination in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) (as per United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) and numerous related UN resolutions). We oppose the Occupation and the siege of Gaza, which has resulted in inhumane conditions, effectively an outdoor prison, for nearly 2 million Palestinians.

We support the right of Palestinians to their ancestral lands in the contested territory of 1948 Israel, and to the right of return to those lands (as per UN General Assembly Resolution 194).

We support the rights of Palestinians to live free of anti-Palestinian racism. We oppose anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia as strongly as we oppose antisemitism.

Palestinians and Israelis should have the right to live in peace and freedom.

We support the International Court of Justice Ruling, 2004, which renders illegal the Separation (Apartheid) Wall.

We oppose the illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel's threatened annexation of these territories.

We recognize the tragedy of the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, and the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians.

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# NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

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## FROM WINNIPEG

*By Ellen Karlinsky, Acting Chair, UJPO Winnipeg*

Top of mind for all of us in UJPO Winnipeg is Roz Usiskin. It has been a very difficult time as we reckon with what it means to not have her in our lives. Roz was our inspiration, our mentor, our leader and our dear friend. She held all the historical memories and reminded us to honour our connections to the past. For many of us she was the reason we became involved with UJPO.

We want to pay tribute to Roz and her many accomplishments as an advocate for Yiddishkeit, for Social Justice and for UJPO. We are doing this by carrying on with projects we know were important to Roz.

This year we received a wonderful boost in the form of a commitment of cultural funds from the Morris Winchevsky Centre. These generous monies will allow us to initiate some new and exciting activities.

The UJPO book club has been in place for many years and is still thriving and active.

We have started a play reading club. The first play was a zoom reading of an Ariel Dorfman play *Manifesto for Another World*.

We have held our first Yiddishkeit event and are planning a second which will focus on humour and song.

We have a documentary film in development on Jewish Radicalism in Winnipeg. Roz will feature prominently in this project.

We are so pleased to be offering our lecture series again featuring Itay Zutra who is a prominent scholar and professor at the University of Manitoba's Department of Judaic studies.

The pandemic has opened some new doors for us. Zoom has allowed us to welcome UJPO members across Canada to join our lecture series and other programs.

Our North End Jewish Folk Choir really suffered during Covid. Numbers have dwindled and a search is ongoing for a conductor. The choir hopes to attract new members. The annual Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in the spring is organized by the choir. They hope to hold this event this year.

UJPO Winnipeg is planning to host a forum in early spring. Details are being worked out now. We are concerned in Manitoba about the government adopting the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. Other events on the muzzling of free speech have prompted us to want to do a program around these themes.

The challenges we face as an organization in Winnipeg are many. We are a small board. We have lost too many wonderful board members. We think of and miss Sherman Kreiner, Mark Golden, and Lee Anne Block.

Winnipeg Executive member Joel Kettner lost his mother, Ruth, on February 15, a few months shy of her 100th birthday. She was the founder of the Child Life Department at the Winnipeg Children's Hospital that supported the emotional and psychological needs of children in the health care system. She did groundbreaking work with anatomically-correct puppets and the children's TV station that entertained children in the hospital with age-appropriate programming. At the Department of Pediatrics in the University of Manitoba's School of Medicine she taught medical students the skills needed to communicate with hospitalized children. She was a progressive thinker who took part in Voice of Women vigils against nuclear armament, and was a friend of UJPO. Ruth was a warm, witty, kind woman, loved by all. Our condolences to her family on the loss of their mother, Baba and Baba Baba.

We struggle to grow our membership. We have struggled to attract young people. We will continue to strategize and do our best. We hope our new website will be a positive tool.

One of the most exciting developments for UJPO Winnipeg is the establishment of our own website. This has been a long time coming. Our hard working strategic planning committee has spent a couple of years leading us in the process of defining who we are and what we do. The resulting guiding principles can be seen on the home page of our website. There are many tributes to Roz as well as information about our activities. It is a work in progress. We hope you will have a look at [ujpowinnipeg.com](http://ujpowinnipeg.com) Let us know what you think.

Wishing everyone a healthy 2023 and one that brings our world to a better place. ♦

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## FROM TORONTO

*By Sarena Sairan, Executive Director*

**UJPO-Toronto:** We have accomplished a lot! If you've been reading our Digests, we've held AGMs for UJPO-TO and UJPO National. We are working on coordinating an ECAL/Naivelt Annual Shareholders Meeting date to be set for April 2023. We've had info sessions, educational, and officially adopted our Statement of Solidarity with Palestine and Palestinian People. Our boards have been working hard and diligently on facilitating all our various initiatives. We've held virtual and in-person events, and look forward to a specialized and curated programming schedule later this year.

**Morris Winchevsky School:** Our January semester saw our highest number of enrollment at our Shule in the last five years. We also gained a new, returning teacher to our B’Mitzvah class, Tal Rock. Tal brings enthusiasm and experiential learning to our graduating students! We celebrated Hannukah, Tu B’Shvat and on March 5th will be celebrating Purim. (Please visit our website for all event details). Our adult education class, alongside our adult B’Mitzvah classes, have been thoroughly enjoyed and well attended!

**SAVE THE DATE:** Our Third Seyder will be held this year on Sunday April 16th. Many more details to come!

**STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS:** *Introducing Erfan Talebias, Social Media & Marketing Specialist, and congratulating Shayle Kilroy as Community & Office Manager!*

**Erfan’s Bio:** I am a multi-disciplinary digital artist from Iran, based in Canada. Since the age of 14, I’ve been using photoshop to create and have been adding to my arsenal every year. Now, I’m versed in both portrait and product photography, 2D and 3D animation, the creation of concept art and have maintained my deep love for the pen tool on photoshop. Moving into the future, my goal is to take on more roles to further develop my skills in video editing and motion graphics.



Congrats to **Shayle Kilroy**, our new Community & Office Manager! Shayle has been working part-time with UJPO/MWS as Interim Office Manager since October 2022. She has been part of our community and membership for years, and is now bringing her passion for Yiddish and Yiddishkayt professionally! Shayle has accepted our newly minted full-time position of Community & Office Manager beginning on March 6, 2023. Shayle, we’re so glad you’re here! ♦

*Continued from page 1:*

We support equity and democratic freedoms for Palestinians in Israel, and recognize the right of Jews and Palestinians to live in peace. The future of this beautiful and contested land, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, needs to be determined among all its residents collectively. We will strive for lasting conditions of peace, freedom, and equality to this end.

The appropriation of our suffering by using the language of “antisemitism” to silence Palestinian voices, solidarity with Palestine, and freedom of discussion about Palestinian rights is offensive to us. We oppose the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which in its examples, equates antisemitism with criticism of the State of Israel (<https://www.noihra.ca/>). While we have varied opinions regarding the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, we recognize it as a legitimate, nonviolent movement. We oppose the suppression of the BDS movement in the name of claiming it is antisemitic.

We insist that the Canadian government challenge the State of Israel’s persistent violation of international law regarding the rights of Palestine and Palestinians. The state of Canada, like the state of Israel, does not speak for us.

The United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO) commits to making every effort, every day, to advance solidarity, and to move towards peace, equality, and justice for all in any way we can. ♦

*Approved, Annual General Meeting of UJPO Canada, January 29, 2023*

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## HONOURABLE MENTSHN

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### Tribute to Terry Azar

*By Paula David*

It is with heavy hearts that her family and friends announce the death of Terry Azar on November 1st at her home at Camp Naivelt. Terry had been coping with cancer with her usual optimistic determination for some time and was an inspiration to everyone who loved and supported her. She remained in her magical Naivelt cottage, attending Aquafit, working out at the Gym, maintaining her unique garden, roaming her beloved park, cruising the Brampton Thrift Shops, creating new paintings and spending many hours with family and friends visiting on the Hill.

Terry will be sorely missed by her husband Steve Schulman, her sister Debbie Glicksman, brother-in-law Sam Glicksman, her niece and nephews Daniel, Lianna and Yoni Glicksman and a host of friends and relatives scattered around the world. Terry had a knack for making friends feel like family and creating ‘home’ wherever she lived. Camp Naivelt has been her home base for decades and she was passionate about her love of Naivelt: past, present and future.

As a young woman, while travelling the world, she met Mark Adler (brother of Larry Adler) who brought her to Naivelt, where they settled and celebrated their wedding in

the pavilion in the park. They worked in Toronto and were actively involved in UJPO; Mark, the president of UJPO Toronto and Terry as the Educational Director of the MWS. They lived at Camp where Mark oversaw Camp Maintenance. Mark taught Terry many practical “cabin skills” that she later used to improve, renovate and repair her cottage, creating the beautiful place it is today. Sadly, Mark died early, but Terry inherited his love and commitment to Naivelt and UJPO.

Several years ago, Terry met Steve and they also celebrated their marriage at Naivelt, surrounded by joyful friends and family. She started a new life chapter and she and Steve began spending summers at Naivelt, and winters in San Pedro La Laguna in Guatemala. Of course, wherever Terry went, she created a warm and welcoming home, lots of fun and a zest for adventure with an ever broadening circle of loyal friends. San Pedro became her second home, and she always said, whether it was Naivelt or San Pedro, she was the happiest in the place where she was at the time, with the people she was with at the time!

Terry had a gift for seeing the best in everyone she met, avoiding conflict, and maintained great faith in the power of community. Steve was her loyal and totally supportive partner in all her adventures and was always by her side...in the garden, in the travelling, in the visiting, in the running around and the relaxing, and sadly in the last while, in his caregiving. With Steve by her side, Terry took this last journey with her usual dignity and totally appreciated the love and support from so many of “her people”. They stood beside her on Hill 1, whether in person or online, talking, laughing, crying and laughing some more. A Celebration of Terry Azar's Life will be held next Spring at Camp Naivelt where, at her request, we will gather for good food, good memories and a good time.

If anyone would like to honour Terry's memory, contributions to Camp Naivelt and the ongoing maintenance of its infrastructure would recognize one of her great passions. Please send e-transfers to [naivelpayments@winchevskycentre.org](mailto:naivelpayments@winchevskycentre.org). Payments by Visa can be made by contacting Lynn Lubitz at 647-282-9382. Alternatively, cheques should be made payable to Eldorado Camp and Amusements Limited and sent care of our accounting manager Lynn Lubitz, 74 Zina St., Orangeville ON, L9W 1E7. Please note that Camp Naivelt is not a charity and is unable to issue charitable receipts. ♦

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## WHAT'S IN ORDER

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### Mazl Tov:

-To Ester Reiter, Great Grandmother to Mavis Flora Peters Koulack born on January 24, 2023. Ester is the mother of

Daniel, who is the father of Ameena who is the mother of Mavis. Below is Ester holding Mavis and Ester holding Ameena (born in 1992).



-To UJPO Toronto Board member Harriet Lyons and UJPO National Board member Andy Lyons' son Sean, who writes under the name S.P. Joseph Lyons, and who won the **First Nation Communities READs 2022-2023 Indigenous Children's Literature Award** for his book *Little Bear in Foster Care*. See it here:

<https://goodminds.com/products/little-bear-in-foster-care-anishinaabemowin-english>

### Heartfelt Condolences:

-To Barb Linds and family. Barb's daughter, Sarah Lou, passed away on February 13, 2023 after a short battle with an aggressive cancer. There will be a celebration of Sarah's life in April, details will follow.

Sarah grew up in the UJPO community, spending time at Camp Naivelt and attending the Morris Winchevsky Shule. An adventurous and fun-loving spirit, she was passionate about travel, social justice, and sports, among many other interests. Sarah was a beloved and devoted daughter, sister, aunt, partner, cat mom, and friend to many. She was a blessing in the lives of everyone who knew her, and she will be deeply missed.

-To Sam Blatt and Ronnee Jaeger, on the death of Sam's sister, Pnina Some, of Be'er Sheva, Israel.

### Get Well to:

Barbara and Solly Blaser ♦

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## FAMILY HISTORIES

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*An example taken from our online Mishpoche panel on January 29, 2023, authored by Avrum Rosner.*

Why do we call a family “mishpoche” – a word whose root means “pouring”, or “spreading”? I think I'm starting to understand.

I was born 3 months after my Holocaust survivor parents arrived in Canada. In no time I discovered that, unlike most other kids, I had no grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins ... My Mum had survived by running and hiding. Her first-born son, the brother I never met, died in



her arms at the age of 3 while in hiding under Nazi occupation. My Dad was drafted into the Soviet military the day after the Nazis invaded. My parents heard nothing about each other for the next 4 1/2 years. He came back and found his wife in January 1946 – and heard from her about everyone who had perished (including his mother, and sister, and son). In 1948, a relative by marriage, in Winnipeg, signed a false declaration that she and my mother were sisters, and thus was able to sponsor my parents to immigrate.

My dad never talked about his war experience. My mother never shut up about it, and later lecturing, giving interviews, and writing articles and a book. I'm eternally grateful for that.

Our mishpoche grew a little when my kid brother was born three years after me. He, and later his wife, became and remain an inspiration and an example. But mishpoche means much more than DNA. Having lost everyone to the murderers, our parents decided to adopt new family members. Distant relatives by marriage suddenly became Auntie this, Uncle that, cousins... and we still call each other that. That precious mishpoche has influenced so much of my life's journey.

My wife is not Jewish – but she fit right into our mishpoche from day 1. Our daughter was not born Jewish – nor was she raised Jewish (except for some Yiddish lullabies and bentshing the Chanukah candles, alongside the Xmas trees and presents). Then one day, in adolescence, she declared, to our surprise, that she was... “Jewish”! She has maintained that identity ever since. Today, she is a serious activist in Independent Jewish Voices, and we couldn't be more proud – she's following in the progressive, anti-racist, anti-fascist footsteps of her grandmother and her mother, and strives to embody the best moral code that our people have brought to the world: “Ve'ahavtale'reachakamocho.”

Let's pour it out, spread it everywhere, and never stop, until all humanity becomes one mishpocha. ♦

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## POETRY, SONG, BIOGRAPHY

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### Tu B'Shvat in Canada Park

By Harriet Lyons

*In response to a request that the current issue of UJPO News include a poem for Tu B'Shvat, I asked the Artificial Intelligence app ChatGPT to write a poem about “trees on stolen land.” What it came up with was basically prose arranged in rows, with some good ideas and some good lines, as well as some awful ones. I stole the good stuff, gave it a title, made a poem out of it and submitted it:*

Beneath the shadows of trees,  
lies the stolen land.

The land that once was home  
is now a picnic ground.

The trees have covered the land,  
hiding it from sight.

The land is still stolen.

The trees still do their work. ♦

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### Silent Tears

*Aired on CBC: Jan. 21, 2023, submitted by Ruth Levkoe and David Abramowitz*

“Silent Tears” is a new album that puts the writing of women victims of the Holocaust to music.

The album is not only a testament to what happened to these women, but also served to help them process the trauma they experienced during the Holocaust. Host Nicole Martin speaks to music producer Dan Rosenberg and (Toronto UJPO member and Camp Naivelt cottager) social worker Paula David about their album. To hear the broadcast (a segment of the CBC Toronto Saturday FRESH AIR program) click this link –

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-193-fresh-air/clip/15961518-processing-holocaust-trauma-music> ♦

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### New Biographical Publication

*Excerpt from UJPO member Max Wallace's upcoming book, **After the Miracle: The Political Crusades of Helen Keller**, scheduled for publication in April 2023.*

#### Prologue

In February 1959, four months shy of her seventy-ninth birthday, Helen Keller received a letter from a civil rights activist named George Houser. He was writing to enlist her support for a cause that he knew she held dear. During a predawn raid three years earlier, South African authorities had rounded up scores of dissidents organizing against the brutal apartheid regime that saw millions of non-white citizens oppressed by a dominant white minority. Among the figures charged with high treason – and now facing the death penalty – was an activist named Nelson Mandela, a man still largely unknown even in his own country.

Years later, the fight against apartheid would emerge as a liberal cause célèbre, which would see an array of high-profile figures speak out against the racist system. But in 1959, much of the world was still firmly mired in the Cold War, and the South Africa Treason Trial was inextricably tied to an ideology that had served as a political bogeyman for most of the past decade. Mandela and the other defendants had been charged under the

Suppression of Communism Act, and many Americans were still afraid to associate themselves with any progressive cause – let alone one that carried the explicit taint of Communism.

In fact, Helen herself had publicly stood up to the Red-baiting tactics of Joseph McCarthy a few years earlier and subsequently faced intense pressure from her longtime employer, the American Foundation for the Blind, who suggested that her outspoken political beliefs were jeopardizing her reputation and endangering the cause that she had worked for all her life.

Now, the South African legal defense committee was running out of the funds it desperately needed to fight the case, and Houser believed an endorsement from one of the world's most admired women could provide a much-needed boost. She was still haunted by the nearly three months she had spent in South Africa eight years earlier, where she had been horrified at the squalor and segregation that painfully reminded her of the Jim Crow system that was still very much alive in her home state of Alabama.

By this time, most Americans had forgotten that Helen was once a radical socialist firebrand who had used her celebrity to crusade against the oppression of women, the exploitation of workers, the crimes of Nazi Germany, and the indignities of Jim Crow while extolling the merits of revolution. Many preferred to think of her as the “inspirational” six-year-old deafblind girl who had learned to communicate thanks to a miraculous teacher. If Helen acceded to the committee's request and agreed to lend her name to a cause explicitly linked with Communism, there was a very real risk that the saintly image those around her had worked so hard to cultivate could be shattered. It could perhaps even derail the ongoing negotiations around a dramatization of her life called *The Miracle Worker*.

But Helen had once before chosen pragmatism over principle in an episode involving racial discrimination, and she had regretted it ever since. When the *Defense Trial Bulletin* appeared a month later, it carried an appeal for funds and a poignant statement from one of the world's most beloved icons:

Freedom-loving, law-abiding men and women should unite throughout the world to uphold those who are denied their rights to advancement and education and shall never cease until all lands are purged from the poison of racism and oppression.

It was one more chapter of her extraordinary life destined to be ignored or forgotten in favor of a more familiar narrative.

#### **Excerpt from Chapter Fourteen:**

In 1920, Keller appeared on the vaudeville circuit where the highlight for many audience members was her answers during the question and answer session following her talk, many of which hold up remarkably well today. Among the sampling of questions she fielded during this period:

Q: (During Prohibition). What do you think is the most important question for the country today?

A: How to get a drink.

Q: What do you think of capitalism?

A: I think it has outlived its usefulness.

Q: Do you think that all political prisoners should be released?

A: Certainly. They opposed the World War on the ground that it was a commercial war. Now everyone with a grain of sense says it was. Their crime is they said it first.

Q: What did America gain by the First World War?

A: The American Legion and a bunch of other troubles.

Q: Do you think the voice of the people is heard at the polls?

A: No. I think money talks so loudly that the voice of the people is drowned.

Q: Who are the three greatest men of our time?

A: Lenin, Edison, and Charlie Chaplin.

Q: What is the greatest obstacle to universal peace?

A: The human race.

Q: What do you think of Soviet Russia?

A: Soviet Russia is the first organized attempt of the workers to establish an order of society in which human life and happiness shall be of first importance, and not the conservation of property for a privileged class.

Q: What do you think of Harvard College's discrimination against the Jews?

A: I think when any institution of learning applies any test other than scholarship, it has ceased to be a public service institution. Harvard, in discriminating against the Jew and the Negro on grounds other than intellectual qualifications, has proved itself unworthy of its traditions and covered itself with shame.

Q: Which is the greatest affliction, deafness, dumbness, blindness?

A: None.

Q: What then is the greatest human affliction?

A: Boneheadedness. ♦

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# YIDDISH

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## A Tale of Two LeyenKrayzn (Yiddish reading circles – in Toronto)

Notes by Sam Blatt, author/editor:

1) *I acknowledge that this is not a comprehensive review of LeyenKrayzn in Toronto, not even of the history of such groups in UJPO. As I note below, other UJPO sections fostered LeyenKrayzen and translation groups, with Winnipeg publishing an anthology of Yiddish women writers in 2007 called *Arguing With the Storm*. (Roz Usiskin was one of the translators.) Other Toronto groups were formed, unfortunately disrupted by the pandemic. One such group was Red Yiddish, convened by Ester Reiter and Lev Jaeger, attracting members of a wide variety of ages!*

2) *I invite letters and articles by others, describing the LeyenKrayzn in your cities. (This article is focused on the two Toronto groups of which I am a member.) I invite as well corrections/comments regarding the very successful UJPO LeyenKrayz which I note below, but of which I had not been a member.*

3) *I'm aware that Weinreich and YIVO spell the topic "leyenkrayz", but – just as Khanuka is an unfamiliar spelling for Chanuka, though correct by YIVO standards – there is an argument to be made that words in transliteration should be familiar to a significant portion of the expected reading audience. Hence, I choose "LeyenKrayz" as the spelling in this article.*

Anybody who has had any involvement with Yiddish – learning, teaching, reading sometimes or often – is sure to be familiar with the words "LeyenKrayz". UJPO Toronto had one going back many, many years (guided through the years by Velvl Katz, Nathan Fishauf, and when he died, by his wife Bronya Fishauf). I'm quite certain Winnipeg had one, Montreal, when it was a UJPO Section would certainly have had one, and probably Vancouver too. All the above sections had sufficient Yiddish speakers and readers in the past to populate and keep LeyenKrayzn active for many years.

Ronnee Jaeger and I were and still are "members" in two, the second being a bit of a grandchild of the first. The history is such:

In about 1990 Jewish Federation, with the support of Sylvia Lustgarten, who was then the Executive Director of Federation's Committee for Yiddish (and who is still a UJPO member), and the energetic initiative of Frieda Forman, organized a LeyenKrayz, spearheaded by Frieda, for women, and focusing on Yiddish women writers. For me it was the only "game in town", and having just

returned from a Yiddish class overseas, I suppose gave me the credentials to join this all women's LeyenKreyz. We collected original, mostly unpublished, definitely untranslated, material from many sources: OyfnShvel, (New York Yiddish literary periodical), the Montreal Jewish Library, Yiddish periodicals from elsewhere... From this large collection each member selected one or more writings to translate. The result was the first ever published anthology of Yiddish women writers, in 1994, called **Found Treasures**. This publication found a market thirsty for its contents, and was incorporated into the curricula of a fair number of universities, either under Judaic Studies or Yiddish studies. It has had several reprintings since. Aside from the collection of first-ever translations, the introduction is a most erudite and scholarly original work by Irena Klepfish.

The LeyenKrayz lay dormant for a number of years, and was re-born as twins – though not identical twins! One was a reading (i.e. leyen) and discussion group, the second a translation group, with the goal of publishing another volume dedicated to Yiddish women writers, again under the leadership of Frieda Forman. There was an overlap of membership, and several UJPO members participated in one or both!

Both groups were going strong, meeting weekly, each pursuing its agenda. Both groups met in members' homes, provided a warm social gestalt. The translation group published a second volume, called **Exile Book of Yiddish Women Writers**, in 2013. (One might think that "Exile" is somehow related to "Jewish" – it is not. It is the name of the publishing company, Exile Editions, run by Michael Callaghan, son of renowned Canadian author, Barry Callaghan, the founder.) This edition is dedicated in memory of Chava Rosenfarb and Miriam Waddington, and includes **Afterwords** by Goldie Morgentaler (daughter of Chava Rosenfarb), and a previously published essay by Miriam Waddington, "Mrs. Maza's Salon". There was a book launch at UJPO, with selected readings not only by some of the translators, but also by Saidie Epstein-Fine.

The "reading/discussion" leyenkrayz continued; the translation group took a short break, reconvening in about 2015. Ronnee and I had returned permanently from Israel, and again Frieda Forman included us as she assembled a small group to work towards another volume of translations. After some discussion, we agreed to concentrate on one writer, Lily Berger. Two of her works had been included in the **Exile Book**, and she had published about ten volumes of essays and fiction prior to and after the holocaust. She had a rich history of political activism, (including as a partisan), and literary accomplishments, but was not well known outside a small intellectual circle, and certainly not in the wider world.

Both groups were going strong, meeting regularly, when, as we know, in March 2020, the pandemic struck! This was a catastrophe for both leynkrazn, because – the common wisdom is – meeting together in person adds an element that cannot be compensated for by Zoom or any other technology.

Unfortunately, the discussion/reading group succumbed, and hasn't met either on Zoom or now, in person. The translation group, however, was in a different position. By 2020 each member had chosen and translated two or more of Lili Berger's works. We assembled what we had into a comprehensive manuscript, and submitted it to an academic publisher in 2021. It has undergone several revisions incorporating the suggestions of the editorial staff of the publisher, and a review by academics in the field; we are optimistic that this volume will ultimately (shortly?) be accepted for release. Meanwhile, while waiting, the group has been meeting weekly on Zoom, reading Lili Berger's novels that had not previously been read by us as a group.

As for the discussion/reading group: verveyst... Other groups have filled in the space, so there is no shortage of LeyenKrazn to join, if one is at all interested. As well, the number of available Yiddish classes, at all levels, proliferated during the pandemic (YIVO, Yiddish Book Centre, Toronto Committee for Yiddish, ...) and are experiencing good attendance, notwithstanding that they cost real money. ♦

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## A Little Nosh

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### Bavarian Apple Torte

By Harriet Zaidman

The combination of cream cheese, apples and cinnamon is heavenly. Make this dessert with either a shortbread crust (as indicated below) or on a graham wafer crumb crust. Both suit the dish very well, with the graham wafer crust being easier to slice through.



Granny Smith apples have the perfect structure and taste, but if you happen to have crab apples (and here I refer to the kind grown on the prairies), you'll find the taste sensational.

The torte is best made a day ahead to get the flavours to blend together. It freezes very well after baking, so you can get have your dessert ready well ahead of the event it's destined for. Simply thaw it in the fridge for 24 hours.

Bavarian Apple Torte is a frequently requested contribution to potluck dinners and celebrations. Don't be surprised if it's a crowd favourite.

For more recipes, visit my blog, North End Nosh at [northendnosh.weebly.com](http://northendnosh.weebly.com).

#### Shortbread Crust Ingredients

3/4 cup butter, room temperature  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 teaspoon vanilla  
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

#### Method

Cream the butter and sugar together and add the vanilla. Mix in the flour as you would for dough (the mixture will be somewhat crumbly). Press the dough in the bottom of a 10 inch springform pan. Bake at 230 degrees F. for 10 minutes. Cool before pouring the filling onto the crust.

#### Filling Ingredients

12 ounces (375 grams) cream cheese (1 1/2 bricks), room temperature  
1/2 cup sugar  
2 eggs  
3/4 teaspoon vanilla

#### Method

Using a hand beater or a food processor, beat the cream cheese until soft. Add the sugar and cream well. Add the eggs and the vanilla and continue to beat. Pour this mixture over the cooled crust.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

#### Topping Ingredients

2 cups of finely chopped, peeled apples (3 apples)  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon  
1/3 cup sliced, blanched almonds (optional)

#### Method

Peel the apples and chop into small pieces. If you're using crab apples, don't peel them. The skin is thin and will disappear in the baking process.

Mix the apples, sugar and cinnamon together and adjust to taste. Spoon the apple mixture over the cream cheese filling. Sprinkle the almonds on top, if using.

Put the springform pan on a cookie sheet before baking, in case the apple syrup leaks.

Bake at 350 degrees F. for 50-60 minutes. Serves 12 - 14♦



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# CANADA

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## Hassan Diab, trial in absentia

By Paul Weinberg, February 7, 2023



*Hassan Diab with his family at Ottawa airport on his return to Canada after his detention in France.*

*Credit: Hassan Diab Support Committee*

Hassan Diab's supporters are demanding that the government not put him through another unfair extradition hearing based on thin evidence

Since 2008 Hassan Diab has been on a treadmill of arrests, court appearances, detentions, hearings, trials, appeals and at least one extradition (with a second possibly in the offing) in Canada and France.

"I am surprised by the lack of finality. The Diab case has gone on that long. How many judicial minds in the process has the case gone through," asked Jacqueline Hodgson, a UK law professor at the University of Warwick and an expert in the French criminal process.

Diab is not speaking to reporters on the advice of lawyers assisting his civil suit for wrongful extradition to France against the Canadian federal government. Little is happening in the suit; the government side has not responded, says Roger Clark, a spokesperson for the Hassan Diab support committee.

Diab is Lebanese born, Muslim and a Canadian citizen. From news reports it appears he is highly motivated while always maintaining his innocence, which has been confirmed in court. In the current lull he is teaching part-time at Carleton University in Ottawa. For the challenges ahead he has the backing of such groups as the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, Amnesty International and Independent Jewish Voices.

The latter is important because Diab was originally charged with responsibility for the October 3, 1980 bombing of the Copernic synagogue in Paris where four people died and another 40 were wounded. More mainstream and conservative Jewish organizations in

Canada including the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) supported the 2014 extradition of Diab to France to face charges. But in the ensuing years that call in Canada has virtually died down, THERE especially after French investigative judges found insufficient evidence to try Diab in 2018. Two former executive members of the now defunct Canadian Jewish Congress, Benjamin Shinewald and Bernie Farber, have expressed contrition for how Diab was treated. (CIJA is noticeably silent about this case since Diab's return and has refused interview requests on the matter).

By all accounts it appears that the perpetrator of the Paris bombing was never tracked down. He may even be deceased today.

Yet, Diab remains the sole suspect in France and the victims' families and their supporters continue to demand accountability for the deaths and wounded in 1980. So, the legal travails for Diab continue and Roger Clark worries about how Diab in his later 60s will continue to cope.

"I worry personally and others in the group worry about the impact on Hassan and his wife. It would be wrong to say he is suffering but I know it is extremely stressful on him," said Clark, also a former secretary general at Amnesty International Canada.

An essential detail in this complex story is that Diab has been back home with his wife and two children in Ottawa since 2018. That was when he was released from a French prison after spending about three years in solitary confinement.

The 2018 judges who acquitted Diab confirmed that the defendant was writing his university exams in Beirut and thus nowhere near Paris in the early fall of 1980 when the bomb exploded. Plus, reputable experts testified that hand writing evidence found on a registration card in a Paris hotel where the perpetrator stayed did not belong to Diab.

Twenty-three organizations in France including those representing the victims of the Paris bombing joined the prosecution in appealing the judges' decision. Three years later, they were ultimately successful and a new trial was ordered for April 2023. By then Diab was back with his family mistakenly assuming that his ordeal had ended.

Looming ahead is another trial starting April 3 in Paris. For the first time in his legal history Diab will remain ensconced in Ottawa while across the ocean a panel of judges at the Special Assize Court, which was established in 2019 to deal with terrorism and drug cases, will deliberate on the charges against him. They may potentially decide that the accused (not present in the courtroom) was responsible after all for the Paris bombing

What is known as a trial in absentia for the accused is not legal or constitutional in Canada but is permitted in some EU countries. Donald Bayne, Diab's main Canadian lawyer says his client will be confronted with "a political trial" or "show trial."

Roger Clark confirms that Diab's French lawyer can attend and cross-examine witnesses for their client before the Special Assize Court. With possibly different rules in an anti-terrorist court, that requires further clarification, he says.

It is what WILL BE presented as evidence by the prosecution before the Special Assize Court in April that is of concern to the Hassan Diab support committee.

One scenario provided by Clark is that because the previous handwriting evidence was discredited by the 2018 judges, the prosecution "might concoct other 'evidence'."

Another is that the discredited evidence is reintroduced. Here, the prosecutors will say "the Juges d'instruction (i.e. the French judges responsible for the 2018 ruling) erred in not according sufficient weight to it in reaching their decision to exonerate Hassan "

"I can imagine that questions raised by the prosecution might focus on issues such as "reasonable doubt" or "balance of probabilities," said Clark.

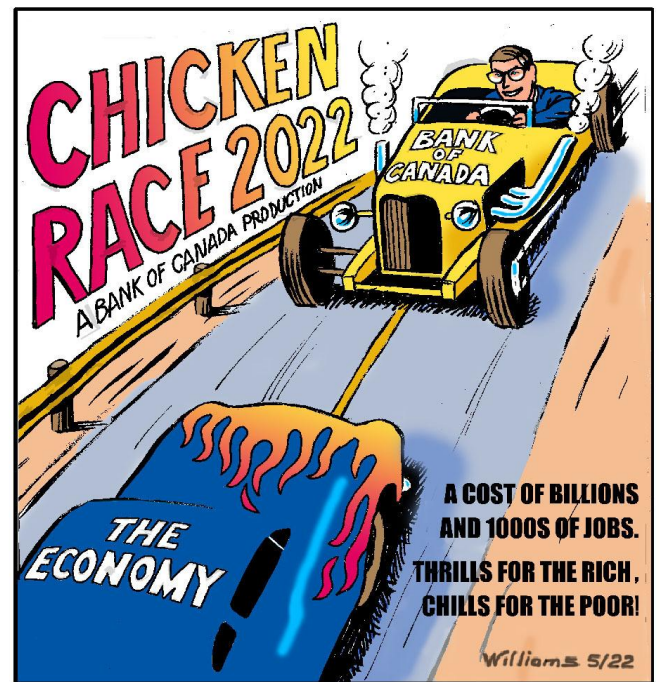
There is also the possible introduction in the Special Assize Court of secret French intelligence against Diab where torture may have been use in the interrogation of suspects. That kind of evidence is acceptable in a French judicial context but not in the Canadian legal system.

In the French justice system prosecutors have the status of a judge. Also, judges specializing in counter terrorism cases work closely in France with domestic intelligence services.

"Raw intelligence (in France) is judicialized and turned into a formal statement in a file and has the status of evidence. I think that is problematic – relying on intelligence where it is unclear as to whether it has been verified, or under what conditions it was obtained. This makes it hard to test out its reliability," said Jacqueline Hodgson.

"The offenses in terrorism cases in France are broadly defined and the evidentiary threshold is low," she notes.

"In the infamous 'association des malfaiteurs' offence (France's counter terrorism law), for example, this is broader than conspiracy and a kind of pre-attempt. The idea is to dismantle groups early on before any tangible threat was attempted. This is quite different from focusing on individual acts and behaviours," Hodgson added.



Cartoon by John Williams

Although the Special Assize Court has set aside most of April for Diab's case, Clark predicts it is likely to be wrapped up quickly. The number of witness statements and cross examinations should be limited, he says, due to the absence of both a jury in the proceedings as well as the accused himself.

Clark said flatly that the verdict at the Special Assize Court is predetermined. "We do indeed fear that an expedited trial will result in a guilty verdict (for Hassan Diab). Such a verdict would be used by the French to ask for Hassan's extradition to serve his sentence in France."

The conviction by the Special Assize Court can be appealed to the European Court of Human Rights but this will be a lengthy and costly process, Clark added.

More immediately, it is expected by the Hassan Diab support committee that France will undertake a second extradition request towards Canada to have Hassan Diab returned upon his conviction in Paris in April.

Considering how much of a fiasco the first extradition turned out to be politically, the question is whether Canada would go ahead with a second extradition for Diab from France, using its same extradition law.

The Diab case originally started in 2008 when the RCMP police arrested Hassan Diab in Ottawa, following the first extradition request from France linking him to the Paris synagogue bombing.

The evidence was thin from the start. Finally, in 2014, an Ontario judge ruled he was forced to send Diab to

France despite weak evidence because of provisions in Canadian extradition law.

Diab's lawyer Donald Bayne says the French authorities misled Canada. Rather than be tried after his arrival to France, Diab was kept imprisoned for three years while the French police continued a fruitless investigation to confirm the guilt of the man held in custody.

For that reason, the Hassan Diab support committee is lobbying the Canadian government to state unequivocally that Canada will reject a second extradition request for Diab from France.

However, the Attorney General David Lametti has chosen to remain silent since France has not yet asked for Diab's return.

One positive result of the lobbying by the Hassan Diab support committee in Ottawa is that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has agreed to begin hearings on Canadian extradition law.

What probably has helped to spur these hearings is that there have been other problematic extradition cases in Canada.

One likely witness before the parliamentary committee is Rob Currie, a law professor at Dalhousie University and an extradition law specialist. He says the sharp difference between the Canadian and French justice systems should not normally be barrier to an extradition request from France.

The key, he continues, is the onus is on the Canadian federal minister of justice to make "better decisions" and not repeat the mistakes of the first extradition."The problem with France is not so much the nature of its legal system as it is that they have persisted in persecuting Diab despite the fact that they had a very weak case in the first place and basically no evidence against him now; they are a bad extradition partner, as demonstrated by this case since there is no way they could prosecute him in good faith or request his extradition," adds Currie. ♦

*Editor's note, February 9, 2023: In reporting that French investigative judges had acquitted Hassan Diab of the charges brought against him in 2018 it was implied he was tried and found guilty. That is not accurate. What happened is that the judges decided from their own research there was insufficient evidence connecting him to the crime in Paris and he was subsequently released. Following an appeal of that decision, Diab is now facing his first trial in Paris, albeit in absentia. This post has since been updated.*

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## MIDDLE EAST

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### Why aren't Palestinian citizens joining the anti-government protests?

By Baker Zoubi February 1, 2023, +972 Magazine

<https://www.972mag.com/palestinian-citizens-israel-government-protests/>

Addressing the crowd at the largest demonstration so far against the new Israeli government, held in Tel Aviv on Jan. 21, Dr. Wurud Jayusi stressed the importance of waging a joint Arab-Jewish struggle against the far-right coalition. But not only was Jayusi, who is head of the Arab Academic Institute at Beit Berl College, the sole Palestinian invited to speak at the demonstration, she was also placed last in a long list of speakers.

When she pointed this out to the demonstrators, her criticism was met with applause. Yet it was quite evident that there was a stark absence of Arabs in the protest crowd. This absence has in fact been true of most of the demonstrations against the Israeli government – especially its plans to reform the judiciary – that have been taking place across the country in recent weeks. Even a protest organized by the Arab-Jewish Hadash party in downtown Haifa two weeks ago did not attract many Palestinian citizens.

At first glance, this seems surprising given the overt racism and intense hostility displayed by the new government toward Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories. But from a lack of identification with the messaging and symbols of the protests to rejecting their narrow goals, Palestinian citizens have no shortage of reasons to stay away. Even so, many Arab political and civil society leaders are urging Palestinians to join the Jewish masses in opposition to the government.

"It is possible that the geographical distance is one of the reasons preventing Arab citizens from participating in the demonstrations in Tel Aviv, but it is certainly not the main one," Raja Zaatry, a member of Hadash's political committee with a seat on the Haifa City Council, told +972. "The main reason is that the Arab public – even though it feels that this extreme government and its policies are dangerous – is indifferent to what is happening in the country in general."

The issues that preoccupy the Jewish Israelis protesting against the government, Zaatry said, are not the same as those preoccupying Palestinian citizens; the demand for equality, resistance to the occupation, and the spread of crime in Arab society do not mobilize thousands of Jewish protesters. "[Israelis] want Palestinian-Jewish partnership



only up to a point,” Zaatry said, “and therefore Palestinian citizens do not see themselves as part of this struggle. We are against both this government and the regime. We want equal citizenship for all.”

Zaatry noted that the lack of Palestinian participation in mass demonstrations in Israel is not new; the same was true of the 2011 social justice movement and the 2020-21 “Balfour” protests against Netanyahu, among others. “The protesters today are calling for a return to the status quo ante, to what came just before the Netanyahu government. And we, as Arabs, frankly, have no desire for that,” Zaatry explained.

Jewish protesters, he continued, “call for democracy, but the Arabs say that democracy is not possible without equality, and democracy cannot coexist with occupation and [military] control over millions of people. [Itamar] Ben Gvir and [Bezalel] Smotrich are not the exceptions; they are part of an ideology that is based on Jewish supremacy.”

### **Defending a court that doesn’t defend Palestinians**

At the heart of the current protest movement is an effort to defend the Israeli Supreme Court against the “reform” led by Justice Minister Yariv Levin on behalf of the government. But Palestinian citizens have never had much trust in the Israeli justice system.

“This is the same court that has failed to protect the individual and collective rights of Arabs in the country,” says Sondos Saleh, a former Knesset member with the Ta’al party. “It is the same court that has not prevented land grabs, has not protected Arab citizens from home demolitions under the discriminatory Kaminitz law, has not defended the status of the Arabic language, yet has allowed other unjust and racist laws to go through. Arabs cannot protest in defense of democracy for Jews only. If the protesters are afraid to speak out against the occupation, discrimination, and racism in a clear way, nothing about our political reality is going to change.”

Despite this sentiment, and despite attempts to attack those carrying Palestinian flags at the demonstrations – most of them left-wing Jews who oppose the occupation – Arab political parties have called on their constituents to join the protests. Ayman Odeh, head of the Hadash-Ta’al list, participated in the first large demonstration in Tel Aviv, organized by the Jewish-Arab movement Standing Together on Jan. 7, and has invited Palestinian citizens to follow his lead. Mansour Abbas, head of Ra’am, also attended the Jan. 21 demonstration in Tel Aviv.

But there is a widespread sense that these politicians’ calls were made with much less vigor and conviction than, for example, the calls for the Arab public to demonstrate against violence and crime in Arab communities in recent

## **Hey Joe are you gonna let Israel get away with murder ?**

CMAC 07 2022 Union-art service.com



*Cartoon by Mike Constable*

years, or the call to participate in a protest against the Jewish Nation-State Law in Tel Aviv in 2018.

Hadash-Ta’al, as well as the Balad party, have argued that the policies of the previous “government of change,” led by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, were just as harmful as their predecessors’; Odeh has repeatedly emphasized that the Bennett-Lapid administration killed more Palestinians in the occupied West Bank than any other government in recent years, while an unparalleled number of Jewish worshippers entered the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound under its watch, in violation of the holy site’s “status quo.”

By contrast, Ra’am – which was part of the Bennett-Lapid coalition but now sits in the opposition – has not expressed such strong opposition to right-wing policies in recent years. In 2021, Abbas even signaled his openness to join a Netanyahu-led government that included Religious Zionism’s Bezalel Smotrich and Otzma Yehudit’s Itamar Ben Gvir, and met with settler leader Rabbi Haim Druckman to try to convince him to support that proposed coalition. Abbas has continued to state that he is ready to cooperate with the current right-wing government on certain issues; his criticisms have instead been focused on the other Arab parties, whom he blames for helping to topple the previous government.

### **An opportunity for coalition building?**

Despite all the reasons not to join, many still believe that the presence of Palestinian citizens in the current demonstrations is vital. “We need a broad protest movement, one that unites Arabs and Jews, unites their interests, unites them in a campaign against the regime,” said Zaatry. “Without the participation of the Arabs – not just in these demonstrations, but also in formulating a viable alternative – the center and the left cannot come to power. As long as the Arabs remain excluded from the decision-making process and the political sphere, the extreme right will remain in power.”



“The Supreme Court legitimized the settlements and the occupation, and it did not treat us, the Palestinians, as full members of a democracy,” continued Zaatry. “But we have no interest in weakening the court. It carves out a democratic space for minorities, even if only partially. We don’t want our situation to worsen. Arab citizens need to do something – not at any price, nor at the expense of our political beliefs, of course, but to take a step forward. The issue is not which flags are waved at the demonstrations, even though flags and symbols are important. The issue is that we are among the victims of this racist regime, and so we must be part of the movement that opposes it.”

“I can’t blame people who didn’t participate in the demonstrations,” said Sally Abed, a member of the leadership of Standing Together, which organized the first demonstration in Tel Aviv on Jan. 7. “It’s like participating in the Knesset elections: I think you should vote and exert your influence, but I can’t blame those who don’t vote. The feeling of distrust is very real in our society, and it cannot be ignored.”

At the same time, Abed believes in the importance of Palestinian citizens participating in the demonstrations – not necessarily to influence the Israeli right, but to build coalitions with the center and the left. “At the first demonstration, there were four Arab speakers on stage, and Palestinian flags were raised with no objections,” Abed said. “It is our duty as a society, for the sake of our rights and for our future, to build a left-wing force that will have an impact. I even believe that this far-right government presents us with an opportunity to rebuild broad resistance based on a common struggle, which includes those on the economic and social fringe.”

For Abed, the fact that the right-wing government has brought Palestinian rights back to the forefront of the political agenda actually plays to the left’s benefit. “It is true that [the government] is doing this for bad reasons, but the mere return of the debate is a good thing that should be taken advantage of,” she noted. “It also brings back the discussion about human rights. The left has the upper hand in these debates and should act on it.”♦

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## **Ronen Hoffman—Israel’s ambassador to Canada—wants out amidst protests against Netanyahu government**

*By Ellin Bessner, Canadian Jewish News, Jan. 22, 2023*

<https://thecjn.ca/news/israeli-ambassador-to-canada-wants-out-amidst-protests-against-netanyahu-government/>

Israel’s new Ambassador to Canada has become the latest Israeli diplomat to resign amidst growing protest against

the policies of the newly installed, right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Ronen Hoffman made the announcement via Twitter late Saturday, Jan. 21. He was in Austin, Texas attending an American-Israel conference, according to an embassy spokesperson – who also told *The CJN* that Hoffman was not giving exit interviews.

Nevertheless, the ambassador’s political broadside on social media speaks for itself.

“With the transition to the new government and to different policy in Israel, my personal and professional integrity has compelled me to request to shorten my post and return to Israel this summer,” Hoffman wrote in the tweet.

### **‘Personal and professional integrity’**

Hoffman’s announcement came on the same day as large crowds of protesters gathered – including over 100,000 in Tel Aviv – to rally against the Netanyahu government.

Hoffman, 59, is a former Member of the Knesset for the centrist Yesh Atid party, founded by outgoing prime minister Yair Lapid. Hoffman first ran for office successfully under Lapid’s Yesh Atid banner in the 2013 election, then served with that party as part of the Netanyahu coalition government for two years.

When Yesh Atid withdrew its support for Netanyahu in the 2015 election and ran in opposition, Hoffman did not win a seat for a second term.

The Israeli-born son of a farmer was an assistant to Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin, and worked on peace negotiation efforts with Syria until Rabin’s assassination in 1995. After completing a PhD in war studies in the UK, Hoffman founded a think tank on counter-terrorism at Reichman University (formerly known as IDC) in Herzliya, Israel, where he has been a lecturer.

Yesh Atid came back into power as a key member of Israel’s short-lived left-centrist coalition government in 2021, under a power sharing agreement with Naftali Bennett taking his turn as prime minister first.

In his tweet, Hoffman thanked his former political boss for selecting him to his first-ever diplomatic post.

“I am honoured to have been appointed by previous Prime Minister @yairlapid to represent and serve the State of Israel as Ambassador to Canada over a year ago,” he wrote.

(Under the agreement with Bennett, Lapid would become Israel’s prime minister after the government coalition collapsed. Lapid held the job for six months until December 2022, ending with Netanyahu’s comeback victory in Israel’s 25th election.)

Hoffman's resignation notice was sent to the new Foreign Affairs minister Eli Cohen, before he went public with his decision, according to reports.

### **Second diplomat to quit**

Hoffman is the second opposition party diplomatic appointee to give his notice from Israel's foreign service soon after the Netanyahu government swore in its cabinet in late December.

Israel's ambassador to France, Yael German, handed in her notice three weeks ago, in a similar fashion.

She also released a letter addressed to Netanyahu, where she slammed some of the far-right ultra-Orthodox cabinet members in the new cabinet, although she didn't name them directly.

"Sadly, the government you founded and lead – including representatives of parties whose extreme positions are expressed in the fundamental positions of the government, its policies and its statements on legislation – are invalid in my eyes," she wrote.

Public security minister Itamar Ben Gvir has been previously convicted of inciting violence by threatening Arabs, while Aryeh Deri, Israel's new interior and health minister, has served time in prison for financial crimes and breach of trust.

Media reports Sunday from Israel suggest Deri has been booted from cabinet, after a ruling by Israel's High Court of Justice last week that his criminal background makes him ineligible to serve.

While Hoffman's salvo didn't specifically mention the policies which prompted his request for an early departure, the timing of his announcement comes as protests continued Saturday in Israel and Canada.

### **'Vigil for democracy' in Toronto**

Some Jewish organizations, including in Canada, have expressed deep concerns about several campaign promises from Israel's new government leaders that could signal, among other things: potential rollbacks for LGBTQ rights, expanded settlements and annexation in the West Bank, giving the public security minister Ben Gvir more say over the police's rules of engagement with terrorists, and changes to Israel's Law of Return which would make immigration slower and more difficult for non-Orthodox Jews.

However, it is the new legislation aimed at curbing the authority of the Israeli Supreme Court that has raised alarms about Israel's evolution away from being a beacon of democracy in the Middle East.

A coalition of seven Canadian Jewish groups held what they called "a vigil for democracy" in Toronto on Jan. 21.

An estimated 250 people turned out in-person outside the downtown building which houses the Israeli consulate. Another 125 participated virtually, according to Joe Roberts, chair of JSpace Canada, which helped organize the Saturday night vigil.

"This resignation [of Hoffman] should send a clear message across the Canadian Jewish community. If Israel's ambassador to Canada cannot stand by while this government carries out its extreme anti-democratic agenda, how can we stand silently by?" Roberts wrote on Twitter.

### **Hoffman's first year in Canada**

Hoffman took up his new duties in Ottawa on Dec. 7, 2021 with a list of priorities that included expanding Israel's business relationship with Canada, fighting terrorism and antisemitism, and forging research joint-ventures in the fields of food tech, health tech, environment, energy and climate security.

A personal priority has been to connect with Canada's Indigenous leaders.

Hoffman told The CJN in January 2022 that he wore an orange ribbon on his lapel the day he presented his official credentials to the Governor General, to show solidarity with Canada's First Nations.

The embassy has been negotiating with Saskatchewan reserves to bring Israeli expertise to help solve their clean drinking water problems, and arranging a pilot project to bring some Indigenous leaders to Israel.

Hoffman does not intend to pack up and leave Canada immediately, he said, although he wrote that he hopes to be recalled by the summer.

"I will continue serving the State of Israel here in Canada with the same passion and pleasure until a replacement is appointed later this year. I look forward to continue working with all my colleagues and friends until then."

Hoffman moved to Ottawa with his partner, a professor at a university in Israel, and the couple's then-four-year-old son. His two older children from his first marriage were attending university in the United States.

During his first year, he attended the Calgary Stampede, visited Jewish summer camps including Moshava and B'nai Brith of Ottawa, and held the first-ever Canadian Summit of Israeli-Jewish Affairs, a two-day conference in Ottawa in May 2022.

It is unclear whether Hoffman came to the decision to step down on his own, or whether he may have been told to resign as part of a wider political strategy directive from the Yesh Atid camp. He did not explain the timing of his announcement.

The resignation follows just weeks after an upbeat video message which he released for Canadians, ahead of the New Year. In it, Hoffman hinted that he would still be working as ambassador while Israel marks a milestone anniversary in April 2023.

“With 75 years of Israeli independence on the horizon in 2023, I have no doubt that the next year will provide many more opportunities to meet with passionate Canadians to showcase all that Israel has to offer, and to see more of this beautiful country,” he said. ♦

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## **‘No democracy with apartheid’: Inside the radical bloc at Israel’s anti-government protests**

*By Ben Reiff, January 25, 2023 +972 Magazine*

<https://www.972mag.com/radical-bloc-israel-protests-tel-aviv/>

Amid a sea of Israeli flags in downtown Tel Aviv last Saturday, carried by the more than 100,000 protesters attending the biggest anti-government demonstration in recent history, stood a pocket of protesters that looked rather out of place. For those marching past them all evening, they were impossible to miss – and that was the point.

Palestinian flags were waved aloft, while striking black banners were unfurled, bearing slogans such as “There’s no democracy with apartheid,” and “A nation that occupies another nation will never be free.” They chanted in support of the Israeli teenagers currently serving jail time for refusing to enlist in the army, and handed out flyers that concluded: “Instead of mourning a pseudo-democracy, let’s demand change from the root!”

An amalgam of dozens of independent activists, several established anti-occupation groups, and a contingent from the left-wing Hadash party, the “radical bloc” has grown larger and more prominent with each demonstration over the past three weekends, growing to a few hundred people on Jan. 21. And while their numbers may be dwarfed by the wider protest, their Palestinian flags and signs calling for decolonization have drawn the ire of both the main demonstration and the people they are protesting against – escalating to confrontations and physical attacks in every protest so far.

The demonstrations, which are centered in Tel Aviv but also taking place to a smaller extent in cities across the country, erupted earlier this month primarily in response to the government’s plans to strip oversight powers from the judicial system. The calls for “democracy” and “equality” have taken on a strongly Zionist character, with Yair Lapid, Benny Gantz, and other opposition leaders featuring

prominently alongside figures from the military and judicial establishment. Instead of merely joining forces with the main protest, activists from the radical bloc told +972 that they are seeking to be a disruptive presence within it, and to convey the message that a return to the status quo ante will not suffice. [Full disclosure: I am an active participant in the radical bloc as part of the “Kasamba” drummers group].

“Of course this government will affect us in some ways, and I can understand that people are scared, but I think we need to see the bigger picture,” said Jonathan, who preferred to give only his first name. “Israeli Jews will never feel the effects of this government the way Palestinians will, yet [the protests] are not talking about Palestinians. In last week’s protest [Jan. 14], some of the speakers were ex-combat officers who spoke about equality in the army – these are the people talking about democracy. So we wanted to come and put more pressure on this demonstration to look at other aspects: apartheid, occupation, ethnic cleansing, and racism against non-white Jews.”

“I don’t think we’re against the protests,” said Yaara Benger Alaluf, another activist from the bloc. “We are certainly against many of the speakers or the people who see themselves as the leaders of the protests, but I agree that this is going to be a bad, dangerous government. And not just in some kind of detached solidarity – I fear it as a woman, and as an LGBTQ person. But [the protests] are talking about democracy without taking into account not only 50 percent of the people who live in the land [between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea], but also all the Palestinian refugees who don’t have any say and whose rights Israel also controls.

“So far these demonstrations are very conservative,” she continued. “It’s the old Ashkenazi elite, who are calling themselves the ‘people of light,’ trying to preserve its power [in the face of] the religious Zionists, who they call the ‘people of darkness.’ But it’s all within the same framework of Zionism and Jewish supremacy, and within the paradigm that it’s okay to occupy another people.”

### **‘A motor for radicalization’**

The radical bloc took shape in the wake of the first major anti-government demonstration in Tel Aviv, on Jan. 7, where, rather than being organized together, activists holding Palestinian flags and signs bearing slogans against apartheid and settler-colonialism were dispersed throughout the wider protest. This left them prone to attacks from other protesters who sought to repress any political expression that strayed beyond the center-left’s usual discourse, fearing that it would be used by the government to paint the entire protest as illegitimate.

The decision by many of the activists to bring Palestinian flags came as a show of defiance after National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir ordered police to enforce a ban on the flag in public spaces. While police in Tel Aviv have so far refrained from interfering in the demonstrations (though police have at times cracked down on those carrying Palestinian flags at recent protests in Haifa and Jerusalem), other protesters have been doing much of their work for them.

In addition to providing greater safety in numbers, the bloc was also conceived as a “motor for radicalization” – as Eyal, who also preferred to give only his first name, put it – for other protesters who are starting to ask questions that go beyond the new government. This, in fact, was one of the lasting impacts of a similar radical bloc that formed during the anti-Netanyahu “Balfour” protests, which took place weekly outside the Prime Minister’s Residence in Jerusalem for much of 2020 and involved regular clashes with police.

“People who had never participated in radical actions against the occupation before Balfour – in Sheikh Jarrah, in Masafer Yatta, and other places – joined these actions after Balfour,” Eyal explained. “It’s true that that is only a small handful of people, but we are already only a small handful, so it strengthened us significantly.”

The activists expected that it would actually be easier this time to insert the Palestinian issue into the messaging of the protests, given that there is already a focus on democracy and equality. “At Balfour, they talked about corruption, but when people go out to shout about democracy, it’s important to remind them that democracy is for all, not just for Jews,” said Eyal. Yet at each of the big protests in recent weeks, activists from the radical bloc have routinely faced aggression from other protesters – from regular shouts of “You’re ruining our demonstration!” to physical violence.

#### **‘A protest of Jewish supremacy’**

At the second major protest, on Jan. 14, where around 80,000 people filled Tel Aviv’s Habima Square and some later marched eastward and briefly blocked the Ayalon Highway, Eyal was one of several dozen activists holding Palestinian flags. “The square was very crowded, and I started receiving a few unpleasant reactions [from nearby protesters]. At a certain point, someone grabbed my arm and didn’t let me go. I managed to get free, and then someone else grabbed my arm. Even though it didn’t escalate, I felt like in a moment I could be on the ground with them kicking me.”

It didn’t end there. Eyal later joined the march toward the highway with his flag, alongside a few hundred others, which included a group of people holding tiki torches.

“Someone tried to snatch my flag, and then he left. Then two more people came and tried to burn the flag [with their torch], and I managed to get away but they kept coming back and trying,” Eyal recalled. “What happened in that protest is that they managed to establish a norm that it is impossible to hold a Palestinian flag outside of the [radical] bloc. But a protest in which Israeli flags are allowed but Palestinian flags are forbidden is a protest of Jewish supremacy.”

Islam Azem was also attacked at the Jan. 14 protest for holding a Palestinian flag, this time by a bystander. “Some guy just saw the flag and came and started hitting me,” he told +972. “I called over the police, but they just separated us and told me to go home, even though lots of people filmed the attack.” A week later, on Jan. 21, Azem was attacked again while holding a Palestinian flag, this time by people within the protest. “They broke the stick I was holding the flag with,” he said, adding that next week he’ll be back again with his flag, which he sees as “a symbol of fighting the occupation.”

Azem is one of very few Palestinians showing up to the mass demonstrations in Tel Aviv. “I think it’s because the protests are about protecting the Supreme Court, which Palestinians don’t really support, because it allowed the Jewish Nation-State Law and authorized evictions in Sheikh Jarrah,” he posited. “But in the radical bloc I meet a lot of people who think like me. And a lot of young people are coming [to the demonstrations] who have never met activists from the radical left, so it’s also an opportunity for them to hear voices that they don’t hear in their daily lives.”

#### **‘These have been Israel’s policies for 75 years’**

Standing with the radical bloc on Saturday, though organized separately, were activists calling themselves “the bloc against the occupation.” Uniting a broad array of established anti-occupation organizations, this bloc was dominated by activists from Looking the Occupation in the Eye, a group of mostly over-40s who organize weekly demonstrations against the occupation in the West Bank and Tel Aviv, as well as joining Palestinian-led protests in Sheikh Jarrah and elsewhere. “Balfour opened a lot of people’s eyes [to deeper-rooted problems], and we want to do that here too,” said Ronit Shaked, an activist with the group.

“We spoke to people we knew in different organizations and said we need to stand up together, there’s no sense in being scattered,” she continued. “In Israel, it’s always: ‘We’re not talking about that now. We’re not talking about the occupation. We’re not talking about the Nakba. And now [the other protesters] tell us we’re stealing their demonstration. But this is also our battle, it’s not just



theirs. And you can't talk about equality while ignoring 20 percent of the population even inside the Green Line, and you can't talk about democracy while there's an occupation. So we're here to say that this is also part of the struggle – it can't be separated.”

Shaked was shocked by the level of vitriol the anti-occupation activists faced in these demonstrations from the very beginning. “We're being attacked all the time, even if we're not with [Palestinian] flags,” she said. Nonetheless, last Saturday, the group handed out thousands of stickers and posters to sympathetic protesters, bearing slogans like “There's no democracy with occupation,” “Palestinian lives matter,” and “Jewish and racist” – a twist on Israel's traditional self-definition as “Jewish and democratic.”

“I went to get more posters because we handed out everything!” said Shaked. “There were over 100,000 people there, so a few thousand is not a lot, but it's a lot for us; I go to protests in the West Bank with 15 people and think that's a lot. Many people stopped and spoke to us – I'm optimistic some will join our activities. Maybe I'm naive.”

Benger Alaluf also saw some reasons for optimism in Saturday's demonstration. “I was actually surprised,” she said. “Many people stopped, read the signs, took pictures, and took our flyers. I saw people reading something, asking ‘What is that?’ and then Googling it.” Yet despite the new enthusiasm, the activists of the radical bloc still see a long way to go in encouraging people to look beyond the current government to the roots of the problem.

“We're trying to explain that, like with many other things in Israeli society, [the conventional narrative] is actually the wrong way around,” explained Benger Alaluf. “For them, this government is ruining democracy, and will bring years of violence, racism, and misogyny. But these have been Israel's policies for 75 years. This government isn't a deviation from that, maybe it's just more magnified. There is something about the whole historical narrative that needs to be shifted. I don't think the bloc is the answer to everything – there is a lot to do.” ♦

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## UNITED JEWISH PEOPLE'S ORDER

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

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585 Cranbrooke Ave,  
Toronto, ON, M6A 2X9  
**Phone: 416-789-5502**  
**Fax: 416-789-5981**

Email: [ujpo@ujpo.org](mailto:ujpo@ujpo.org)

Website: [www.ujpo.org](http://www.ujpo.org)

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