

disjointed, repetitious, and punctuated by excessive sub-headings in most chapters. This makes for a choppy narrative, reminding the reader that sub-headings are often the resort of writers who cannot organize their material properly. While the text is, for the most part, well written, the evidence of an editor-author debate over the words “unbalanced” and “imbalanced” has resulted in the unfortunate, repeated use of the non-word, “umbalanced.”

Nonetheless, Genizi offers a compelling story and an intriguing intellectual argument. The book speaks directly to current debates in Jewish and Christian academic circles. It is to Genizi’s credit that, in his exploration of the contradictions within Canadian Protestant churches’ stance on the Holocaust and Israel, he addresses the ideological and theological baggage of both Judaism and Christianity. The result is a thoughtful, balanced study.

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Biderman, Morris. *A Life on the Jewish Left: An Immigrant’s Experience*. Toronto: Onward Publishing, 2000. xvi + 288 pp.

In *A Life on the Jewish Left*, Morris Biderman reminisces about his devoted work and political activity in Canadian leftist circles from the 1920s through the 1980s. The book concerns especially his membership in the Communist Party and his leadership of the United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO), a fraternal organization that offered health and death benefits, an interest-free credit union, and Communist-led political activity. This is a personal memoir in which the reader is made privy to the author’s daily personal struggles and political activities. Biderman was involved in the major milestones of Canadian-Communist history and had the opportunity to meet many of the important players. These reminiscences record aspects of the fight for workers’ rights in Canada during the early decades of the twentieth century. The book, however, is a personal

account and not a scholarly history, making for some lack of precision, especially regarding dates.

While Biderman is endowed with excellent powers of observation and a keen memory, his prose is somewhat simplistic and his analysis of motives is naïve and superficial. I was particularly interested in seeing how Biderman addresses perhaps the most fundamental question that faces western Communists, especially Jews: “How does one reconcile a commitment to Soviet Communism with the reality of Stalin’s bloody and repressive regime which targeted Jews in particular?”

Biderman refers to many aspects of Soviet life that socialists and Jewish Communists found intolerable: rampant antisemitism; the Doctors’ Plot; the murder of leading Jewish writers in 1952; and the sudden and unexplained disappearance of Jewish and other citizens. He acknowledges his own blind allegiance to Soviet policy. Although Biderman deserves credit for the intellectual courage to admit his inconsistency, what is lacking is an explanation of why he and others fell silent, acquiescing to Party discipline. Did denial mark the entire thirty-year of Biderman’s Party membership?

The closest that the author comes to explanation or, perhaps, excuse for his and others’ inaction comes in his description of the Ontario legislature elections of 1955. During the run-up to the elections, J.B. Salsberg, a prominent Jewish member of the Party and member of the legislature for twelve years, delivered a public eulogy of Stalin, who had died two years earlier, calling him a man of peace and a great humanitarian. Salsberg’s opponent played up the support of Stalin and the veteran member lost his seat. “Jewish voters,” Biderman writes, “believed what we Communists did not believe—that Jews in the Soviet Union were being persecuted and subjected to discrimination and antisemitism—and they turned away from J.B. and from the Party and the Soviet Union which he still supported.” (p. 99) Biderman himself published a eulogy of Stalin entitled, *All for the Welfare of the People*. He refers to awareness of ongoing antisemitism in the Soviet

Union, the Doctors' Plot, the purges both in the Soviet Union and the satellite states, and yet, he "still believed in Stalin's fine words." (99)

Biderman's excuse for living with contradictions is that there was a "difference in thinking between Communists who worked directly for the Party as functionaries as opposed to those of us holding positions in Communist-led organizations." (p. 100) While he does not elaborate on this distinction, he seems to be trying to separate himself from the policies of Soviet Communism while still maintaining his ideological support for the Soviet Union. He seems to imply that, since he was not an official representative of Soviet Communism, he could maintain an ideological link with the Party that had disappointed him.

Personal and political redemption came to Biderman as it did to other Jewish Communists in the late 1950s. After Khrushchev's speech to the twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the realities of Stalinist oppression and mass murder were publicly confirmed. Coinciding with military action against Poland and Hungary, a "mini-revolution began brewing, particularly among Jewish Communists." (p.124) On an earlier visit to the Soviet Union, Biderman had requested a meeting with the Communist leadership and the Jewish community to resolve growing doubts about the fate of missing Jews. He was denied permission to ask those questions, and he received no answers to others. Disappointed by the stonewalling, Biderman did nothing at that time. This time, however, the questioning proceeded to its inevitable conclusion.

After Khrushchev's speech, about a year after his visit to the USSR, Biderman spoke out publicly against Stalinist repression and the refusal to question in Communist circles. At last, he recognized that continuing to function politically as a Communist required independence from the Soviets. The 1956 UJPO Statement of Aims and Purposes was a declaration of the organization's independence from the Communist Party of Canada and from unwavering allegiance to the Soviet Union. Not long after this date, Biderman left the Party.

Only in the last chapter of the book does Biderman directly address the question of loyalty to the Soviet Union. He notes that many have asked him about it, and that it puzzled his colleagues. He writes: "Communists are human beings with human faults in abundance. We belonged to a party that was stronger than any religion. To betray it was more than a sin. To challenge before 1956 was unthinkable. We were part of a rigid, dogmatic system that did not question the Soviet Union or local Party leadership." (p. 230) Biderman quotes a colleague, Joshua Gershman, editor of *Der Kamf*, the Yiddish-language, Canadian-Communist weekly, on the impediments to seeing the truth: "Yet where will I go? The Party is my life, without it I am nothing. What will I do, where can I be active?" (p. 163)

This memoir, then, is instructive regarding some of the personal and communal experiences of the Jewish Left in Canada in the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, many of the important questions remain unanswered or are, at best, superficially addressed. But however unsatisfactory Biderman's *apologia pro vito sua*, one should keep in mind that the goal, as Biderman and many of his Canadian Communist colleagues saw it, was the betterment of the people and the workers. The fight was noble though the soldiers were badly flawed.

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Eker, Glen. *Jews Resident in Ontario According to the 1851 to 1901 Censuses of Canada*. Toronto: Ontario Genealogical Society, 2002. v, 234 pp.

Glen Eker has undertaken an enormous task with results that will be of great benefit to demographers, genealogists, geographers, historians, and sociologists. Indeed, anyone concerned with Jewish population or with individual, nineteenth-century, Ontario Jews will find this book a rich resource. Eker has carefully scrutinized the nominal (individual) returns for each of the six decennial censuses taken in Ontario from 1851 to 1901,