

Ester Reiter, *A Future Without Hate or Need: The Promise of the Jewish Left in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 340 pp. ISBN: 978-1771130165.

Matthew B. Hoffman and Henry F. Srebrnik, eds., *A Vanished Ideology: Essays on the Jewish Communist Movement in the English-Speaking World in the Twentieth Century* (Albany: State University of New York, 2016), 273 pp., ISBN: 978-1438462196.

The past few years have seen a rise in interest in studies on Jewish communism, and on relations between Jews and the international radical left. These studies have included Elissa Bemporad's *Becoming Soviet Jews* (2013), Jack Jacobs' edited volume *Jews and Leftist Politics* (2017), and recent work by Orit Bashkin, Alma Heckman and Lior Sternfeld on Jewish communism in the Middle East and North Africa. Interest in communist historiography – and the role of Jews in it – has also played out in Canadian studies, such as the 2013 essay by Ian McKay in *Canadian Jewish Studies* and the 2015 response by Bryan D. Palmer, which questioned the extent to which individuals, including Canadian Jews, affiliated with the pro-Bolshevik left were strict adherents of “Moscow Rules” and therefore implicated in Stalinist totalitarianism.

Ester Reiter's *A Future Without Hate or Need: The Promise of the Jewish Left in Canada* adds to this growing field. Reiter follows McKay and Gerald Tulchinsky's *Joe Salsberg: A Life of Commitment* (2013) in arguing that the radical Jewish left in Canada did not strictly conform to the directives of the Third Communist International (1919–1943). She offers a personal, accessible history of the progressive Jewish left in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg that uses ample archival sources (photographs and oral histories) to illuminate the culture of the Jewish left. Chapter 8, “Cultural Life: Sports, Singing, Dancing, Making Music” was particularly interesting in demonstrating the vibrant social and intellectual scene of the Jewish left such as the Toronto Jewish Folk Choir, led by Emil Gartner, which performed at Massey Hall in 1946 with Paul Robeson (222–223). The timeline of important dates for the Jewish left (43–45) is useful for those trying to understand the transformations within the Jewish progressive movement across Canada. Reiter's work contributes to the ongoing documentation of the diverse activities and nuances of the Canadian Jewish left by showing the continuity of the movement into the present day within the United Jewish People's Order and Camp Naivelt.

The book is hindered, unfortunately, by factual errors and confusing writing throughout the work. For example, Reiter states that in Canada's “larger communities, there was always a class line between the ‘uptown’ Jews (most of Sephardic origin – originally from Spain and Portugal) and the newly arrived immigrants from

Eastern Europe” (21). While a small number of Quebec’s early Jewish settlers were from England and of Sephardic background, they were soon out-numbered by Jews immigrating from Germany, England, and Poland. While some ‘uptowners’ were associated with an Anglo-Sephardic elite (by their association with the Sephardic rites of Montreal’s Shearith Israel/Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue), a small minority were originally from Spain or Portugal. Reiter is likewise inaccurate when she writes “Toronto’s Jews originally gathered in what was known as the Ward, Toronto’s worst slum” (22). This only pertains to the wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants after the 1890s. Toronto’s first Jewish settlers, generally more well-off merchants of German and British background, established businesses along Yonge, King, and Richmond Streets and erected Holy Blossom Temple’s first and second buildings (in 1876 on Richmond Street and 1897 on Bond Street) south and east of the Ward.

Other errors include the incorrect naming of organizations such as the United Jewish Welfare Fund (called “the Toronto Jewish Welfare Fund” (134) and “The Jewish Socialist Library” (198)). Reiter claims that this Montreal library was founded in 1914, citing the source of this information as “a web reference.” If she is referring to the Jewish Public Library, founded as the *Yidische-folks-biblyotek* (*Jewish People’s Library*) with the help of Poale Zion (Labour Zionist) activist Yehuha Kaufman and Hebraist and *Keneder Adler* editor Reuben Brainin in 1914, it should be identified as such. In addition, Reiter’s attempts at analysis sometimes fall flat. For example, in Chapter 3, citing Gramsci, Reiter writes that “cultural practices and institutions at variance with that of the dominant classes – a social movement with a different conception of the world, or an alternative hegemony – can develop”. Perhaps she intended “counter-hegemony,” more in line with what the culture of the Jewish left represented. Despite these limitations, Reiter’s book is a valuable reference for the interconnections and differences she draws between the Jewish left communities in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg and her emphases on the culture and activism of women.

It was useful to read Reiter’s book together with Matthew B. Hoffman and Henry F. Srebrnik’s edited collection *A Vanished Ideology: Essays on Jewish Communist Movement in the English-Speaking World in the Twentieth Century* (2016). While Reiter prefers the term “pro-Soviet Jewish left” to “Jewish Communists,” Hoffman and Srebrnik write that this “is a distinction without a difference, because by the 1930s the Communist parties themselves were to a large extent doing Moscow’s bidding and so were also ‘pro-Soviet’ organizations. They called themselves Communist, and while the Jewish front organizations did not use that word, often preferring ‘progressive,’ they were part of the same communist apparatus emanating from the Kremlin” (5–6). Both books concur that only some Jewish individuals in the progressive movement belonged to the Communist Party (CP), and that its organizations did not always strictly abide by CP policy.

Hoffman and Srebrnik's compilation excels in bringing together in one volume articles from multiple national contexts of the Jewish Communist movement. A core issue for many of the authors is the question of whether Jewish identities or Communist identities came first. The first three chapters focus on the United States. Matthew Hoffman argues that Yiddish-speaking Communist intellectuals like Moyshe Olgin (editor of the *Morgn-Frayhayt*) practiced a form of *Jewish* communist culture, countering the claim that communist policy suppressed authentic Jewish identity. Jennifer Young provides an in-depth overview of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, born out of and alongside the International Workers Order (IWO) and its support for social security and civil rights in opposition to the United States' "melting pot" ideology. Gennady Estraiikh's chapter focuses on how Paul Novick (editor of the *Frayhayt* from 1939–1988) navigated the crises of Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin in 1956 and the Communist Party of the United States of America's denouncement of Zionism following the June 1967 war in the Middle East.

Chapters 4 and 5 are focused on Canadian cases. Srebrnik's article is a comprehensive account of Jewish Communism in Canada with a focus on a variety of "front" organizations that appealed to Jews interested in preserving their Jewish culture in non-Zionist ways. He also gives context for the successful elections of Jewish Communist MPs Fred Rose and J. B. Salsberg in Montreal and Toronto during the Second World War. Ester Reiter's article focuses on women's activism and the culture of the "pro-Bolshevik Jewish left" (selections from her monograph discussed above). Srebrnik's and Reiter's articles are important for Canadian Jewish studies in their illustration of the various reasons why organizations associated with Communism and the Soviet Union were so appealing to Canadian Jews. These include the USSR having been cast in the role of the saviour of the Jewish people during the Second World War (Srebrnik 113) and as "a generational revolt, of young people thirsty for knowledge" (Reiter 138).

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 offer fascinating counterpoints to Jewish Communism in North America in studies on England, Australia, and South Africa. Stephen M. Cullen draws on oral histories to test a six-part model of Jewish support for the Communist Party of Great Britain, concluding that, as others argue in this volume, the individuals in his case study were "Jewish Communists" rather than "Communist Jews." Philip Mendes reveals that Jewish Communism in Australia, aside from the period of 1942–1950 was "a very minor affair," stemming in part from a later and smaller migration of Eastern European Jews compared to other English commonwealth nations, and from a lack of a strong connection between Australian Jews and the non-Jewish left. David Yoram Saks rounds out the articles by focusing on South Africa, the only country where Communists (of whom Jews made up a significant presence of the movement's white members) "actually succeeded in achieving political power with the overthrow of the white minority-rule apartheid system" and the "ushering in of a multiracial democracy" (233).

This book is useful for Canadian Jewish studies for the comparative framework that it offers to other English-speaking national cases. It would benefit, however, from more analysis of this selected theme. The editors did not provide a justification of why the focus was on English-speaking countries. They might have said more on the unique situation of Jewish Communists in Montreal, a city with a majority Franco-phone population, where Srebrnik writes that as many as 70 percent of Communist Party members in Montreal may have been Jewish, compared to 30 percent in Toronto during the 1940s (iii). Further, the editors exclude countries in North Africa and the Middle East in their list of places where members of the Jewish Communist movement were active (i). By failing to even mention Jewish communist activity among Middle Eastern and North African Jews (especially in places such as Iraq which were under British rule), the editors give the impression that Jewish Communism was limited to Jews of Eastern European origin.

Despite these criticisms, Reiter's *A Future Without Hate or Need* and Hoffman and Srebrnik's *A Vanished Ideology* are welcome additions to the field of Canadian Jewish studies. They expand the literature on the Jewish progressive movements in Canada and elsewhere. These works reveal that there is still so much to learn and discuss about Canadian Jews and the radical left.

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