

The Russian revolution: how emancipatory hopes and antisemitic poison overlapped

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Review by Simon Pirani of: *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution*, by Brendan McGeever (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). 247 pages.

In January 1918, two months after Soviet power was established in Petrograd, one of the Red Guard units tasked with securing that power on the ruins of the Russian empire entered Hlukhiv, just over the Russian-Ukrainian border, north east of Kyiv. The unit was pushed out of Hlukhiv by the counter-revolutionary Ukrainian Baturinskii regiment within weeks – but soon joined forces with a group of Red partisans who had arrived from Kursk in southern Russia, and took the town back. A pogrom ensued. The Baturinskii regiment changed sides, claiming they had only resisted Soviet power because the “Yids” had paid them to. The Red Guards, thus reinforced, rampaged around the town proclaiming “eliminate the bourgeoisie and the Yids!”

How many of the town’s 4000 or so Jews fell victim is unknown, but it was in the hundreds. Newspaper reports and eyewitnessed accounts detailed how, for two and a half days, families were lined up and shot, their houses were ransacked and Jews were thrown from moving trains. One report described how 140 were buried in a mass grave. There is no doubt that Hlukhiv’s newly-established Soviet authorities were complicit. After two days of constant killing, they issued an order, “Red Guards! Enough blood!” – but then authorised looting. The synagogue was destroyed and the Torah ripped up. The head of the local soviet then demanded payment from the Jewish survivors.

“In the case of Hlukhiv”, writes Brendan McGeever, “Soviet power was secured by and through antisemitism” (page 48). Within days of the massacre, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, who commanded the Red forces in Ukraine, ordered the recomposition of all Red units in Hlukhiv and surrounding areas; those who resisted were to be shot. McGeever judges that this was “likely” a response to the pogrom. He also shows that the Bolshevik centre in Moscow systematically avoided discussing “Red” pogroms publicly. While Jewish newspapers reported Hlukhiv accurately, larger-circulation Bolshevik newspapers failed to identify the “Red” perpetrators.

The Hlukhiv pogrom was a relatively minor precursor to the ferocious wave of terror unleashed against Ukrainian Jews during the chaotic, multi-sided military conflicts of 1919, in which 1-200,000 died. Those pogroms were the climax of a wave that began in 1917, the year of revolution, and amounted to “the most violent assault on Jewish life in pre-Holocaust modern history” (page 2). There is no doubt – and McGeever reiterates it throughout his narrative – that the overwhelming majority of victims in Ukraine in 1919 were killed by “White” counter-revolutionary and Ukrainian nationalist forces, or in territory controlled by them. Neither is there any question that the policy of the Bolshevik leadership, rooted firmly in Russian socialist tradition, was what we might today call “zero tolerance”. McGeever traces how that policy played out in practice.

How is it that the Russian revolution, “a moment of emancipation and liberation”, was “for many Jews accompanied by racialised violence on an unprecedented scale” (page 2)? McGeever answers by focusing, on one hand, on the minority of pogroms committed by (at least ostensibly) “Red” forces, and on the other, on the strengths and weaknesses of Soviet institutions’ response. The strengths, he argues, emanated largely from initiatives by Jewish

socialists, including many who remained outside the Bolshevik party in 1917 and joined during the civil war. McGeever's book is impeccably researched, thoughtfully argued, and – no small thing at a time when academic publishing more and more resembles a sausage machine – well organised and carefully edited. In this review I look at three key issues: the way that antisemitism overlapped with revolutionary politics (e.g. “eliminate the bourgeoisie and the Yids!”); the limits to the Bolshevik response; and the part played by Jewish socialists in combating antisemitism.

“Red” antisemitism

The revolution of February 1917 destroyed the tsarist empire and the legal apparatus of its dictatorship. More than 140 anti-Jewish statutes, which made Jews second-class citizens and confined them to the Pale of Settlement, were swept away, along with legal constraints on peasant farmers, on freedom of speech and assembly, and on much else. But the explosion of social mobilisation, which culminated later in 1917 in mass desertion from the army, land seizures by peasants and factory occupations, had its ugly sides, including a resurgence of antisemitism.

McGeever records that, from the start, the soviet movement issued appeals to combat antisemitism, and warned of its ability to “disguise itself under radical slogans” (page 26). And it needed to: speakers at a street corner rally in Petrograd urged crowds to “smash the Jews and the bourgeoisie!” (as the Red Guards would do in Hlukhiv a few months later) (page 24); people queuing to vote for the Constituent Assembly called on “whoever’s against the Yids” to vote Bolshevik (page 31); absurdly, as Alexander Kerensky left the Winter Palace, when his government fell, he read a slogan, painted on a wall, “down with the Jew Kerensky, long live Trotsky!” (page 32).

Before the revolution, the socialist opponents of tsarism had all resolutely opposed antisemitism, although they were divided as to how to respond to its manifestation among workers. (The Russian left parties seem to strike a contrast with those in France, Germany and Austria, where antisemitism ran rampant not just on the streets but among prominent politicians.¹) In 1917, anti-Bolshevik socialists, and the Mensheviks in particular, accused the Bolsheviks of harbouring or tolerating antisemitism. McGeever urges that such accusation be treated with caution: under circumstances when the right-wing socialists were siding with the pro-war government, while the Bolsheviks were siding with the fast-radicalising masses, this was easy mud to throw. But the aspirations that underpinned the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in October – peace, bread and land – can not be neatly fenced off from antisemitism either. “Revolution and antisemitism existed not only in conflict but in articulation as well”, McGeever insists (page 30).

This articulation persisted in the hellish conflict in Ukraine in 1919. McGeever makes a convincing case that, especially (but not only) among Ukrainian peasants, revolutionary hopes overlapped with murderous antisemitism. The peasants, overwhelmingly Ukrainian by nationality, saw towns – with high proportions of Russian and Jewish people, whether workers or middle class – as hostile and foreign. “[T]he ‘cityman’ represented a ruthless profiteer, an oppressor of the poor Ukrainian toiler” (page 91). This perception could turn into hostility to “communists”, who were “urban, non-Ukrainians who stood aloof from peasant life; they were ‘Russian oppressors’ and, above all, ‘speculating Jews’” (page 92). Such prejudices were on one hand fed on by the Whites, but on the other hand could fade into a grotesque combination of pro-soviet antisemitism. “Down with the Yids, down with this

¹ See Hannah Arendt on “Leftist Antisemitism”, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin, 2017), pp 53-65

Moscow Communist government, long live Soviet power!”, shouted peasants in Poltava (page 92).

The violent culmination of this left antisemitism was the armed incursion led by Nikifor Grigor’ev, a peasant ataman who first allied with the Red army and then turned on it. McGeever quotes his *Universal*, a manifesto that called peasants to revolt (page 98):

In place of land and freedom they [the Bolsheviks] have subjected you to the commune, to the Cheka, and to the commissars, those gluttonous Muscovites from the land where they crucified Christ. [...] Down with the political speculators! ... Long live the power of the soviets of the people of Ukraine!

In early May 1919, Grigor’ev, having taken Odessa in the name of the Red Army, turned against the Bolsheviks. Over the next 18 days his units perpetrated at least 52 pogroms, in which at least 3400 Jews were killed. McGeever relates, in excruciating detail, how local Soviets, and some Red army units that were supposed to be fighting Grigor’ev – in particular, the notorious 8th Soviet Ukrainian regiment – joined in. In some regiments, communists who opposed antisemitism were heavily outnumbered by pogromists: in the 3000-strong 6th regiment, which carried out a pogrom in Vasylkiv in mid April, a group of communist soldiers who called on their comrades-in-arms not to attack Jews comprised 42 members, falling to 20 during early 1919 (page 125).

McGeever’s excruciating account of “Red” pogroms should give any communist pause for thought. His insight that the social forces on which the Bolsheviks relied were prone to antisemitism – that it was not, as the Bolsheviks claimed, solely an external, “counter-revolutionary” phenomenon (see below) – is essential. Further, in the conclusions to the chapter on Ukraine in 1919, he writes that “antisemitism provided a conduit for [...] partisan Red Army soldiers to make the journey from ‘revolution’ to ‘counter-revolution’”; that in the social formation that supported Bolshevism in Ukraine, “antisemitism was a dominant form of consciousness”; that the Bolsheviks’ attempts to combat this were fraught with difficulties since “antisemitism and ‘Bolshevism’ were often co-extensive projects in the popular imaginary”; and that the Grigor’ev revolt “seemed to represent what many within the Bolsheviks’ social base in Ukraine desired: a populist leftist government that represented ‘true Bolshevism’ or true ‘Soviet power’” (pages 110-111). This left me with questions.

The description of the Ukrainian peasantry, and peasants who at times found themselves in the Red Army, as “the Bolsheviks’ social base” (on pages 92, 94 and 111) over-simplifies a complex, many-sided relationship. The Bolshevik presence in Ukraine was largely urban (through party branches in the towns, who were active in the soviets) and military. As McGeever acknowledges, the Red Army in Ukraine included large numbers of peasants-in-uniform who had transferred directly from defeated White forces and partisan formations. “Although nominally Soviet, the Bolshevik leadership could scarcely be confident of their allegiance, let alone attempt to control them”; the centralisation of the Red Army in Ukraine was “simply impossible” (page 93).

And this was just the start of the problem. Peasant support for the Reds was often constrained not only by antisemitism but by opposition e.g. to compulsory grain procurement and clashing conceptions of what “soviet democracy” might mean. Rural and urban political cultures really were distant from each other. Across Ukraine, and much of Russia, “green” peasant formations resisted both Reds and Whites, or sided with the Reds, only to revolt against them when the Whites were irreversibly defeated. There were Don Cossack Reds under Filipp Mironov who joined the Red Army but, when they pressed demands for political autonomy, were suppressed; there were the left Socialist Revolutionaries (Borotbisty) (mentioned in passing by McGeever) and of course the formations led by the anarchist, Nestor Makhno (mentioned in a footnote).

To investigate these multiple facets of Ukrainian peasant politics would be another book. But McGeever's book sometimes lacked a sense of this larger context within which the battles over antisemitism were fought. I also wonder whether he attributes more agency to the Bolsheviks than they could possibly have had in Ukraine in 1919. With Grigor'ev, he writes, they "were gambling the future of the revolution on a partisan and highly contentious social base" (page 96), and he quotes Antonov-Ovseenko's absurdly indulgent view of Grigor'ev. Perhaps further research would show that Grigor'ev was simply playing the Reds, who were unable to do more than acknowledge the poisoned chalice of his support, for as long as it lasted.²

Whatever the answer to such questions, they do not detract from the strength of McGeever's main argument. "Red" pogroms were conducted not only by temporary fellow-travellers such as Grigor'ev, but also by more well-established units, and by local party organisations. Examples McGeever gives (pages 108-110) include pogroms during the Soviet-Polish war of 1920 perpetrated by units of the First Red Cavalry, led by Semen Budennyi, one of the Soviet government's most trusted forces. Scores of Budennyi's troops, possibly up to 400, were executed as punishment (page 180).

The Bolshevik response

In 1918, the Bolshevik government in Moscow mounted an emphatic response to the new state's first wave of pogroms – albeit with considerable delay, between the Hlukhiv massacre in March and the formation of the short-lived Commission for the Struggle against Antisemitism and Pogroms in May. It took further action in 1919-20: in the Red Army, pogromists faced punishments up to and including execution, which in keeping with the prevailing chaos were implemented unevenly and sometimes not at all. Jewish socialists played a leading role in coordinating this response, and I discuss this below. Here I look at McGeever's arguments about the political limitations of these initiatives, which comprised one of the world's first state-led anti-racist campaigns.

In early 1919, as antisemitic violence gathered pace, the first senior Soviet leader to take action was Khristian Rakovskii, then effectively head of the Soviet government in Ukraine. He issued an order warning that those spreading "antisemitic propaganda" were subject to arrest, with a specific warning to those in Red Army uniforms of "the most brutal and severe measures" (page 114). This order, issued nearly a year after Hlukhiv, was the first public acknowledgment by a Bolshevik leader that there were Red, as well as White, pogromists. Such frankness in public was an exception to the rule. McGeever shows that the Soviet press was extremely slow to take up the cudgels against antisemitism, and that when it did, it first avoided mention of, and later actually suppressed information about, Red Army involvement.

In Ukraine, the coverage of the anti-Jewish massacres was mixed. In April 1919, as reports of pogroms intensified, local Bolshevik party newspapers regularly denounced antisemitism, but the two largest-circulation Red Army newspapers there published not a single article on antisemitism between them. Jewish communists attributed the problem, in part, to Moscow. In mid-May, with Grigor'ev's slaughter campaign in full swing, their protests were finally heeded with the first-ever lead article on antisemitism in *Pravda*, the Moscow-based Bolshevik flagship title. A second, and last, lead article on the subject appeared in June – only after the Orgburo, the day-to-day working committee of senior party leaders pointed out "for the third time" how "essential" it was to speak out (page 128). As for antisemitism in the

² A standard account of the civil war is Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987). Trotsky, when he arrived in Ukraine in May 1919, reported to the Bolshevik central committee that "the prevailing state of chaos, irresponsibility, laxity and separatism" exceeded the most pessimistic expectations. M. Meijer (ed.), *The Trotsky Papers I (1917-1922)* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), p. 431.

Red Army, this was effectively “render[ed] invisible”. A table, categorising pogroms in January-August 1919 by type of perpetrator, was sent to *Zhizn' Natsional'nostei* (The Life of Nationalities), the newspaper of the Commissariat for National Affairs. A column attributing 120 pogroms, with 500 fatalities, to the Red Army, was simply deleted – and the number of killings attributed to Grigor'ev cut from 6000 to 4000 (page 131).

The Bolsheviks' refusal publicly to discuss antisemitism in the state's institutions and army was informed by an understanding of it as an external, “counter-revolutionary” force. McGeever points to key statements by Lenin, who called antisemitism the work of “capitalists, who strive to sow and foment hatred between workers of different faiths, different nations and different races”, and Evgenii Preobrazhenskii, who attributed it solely to “the Russian bourgeoisie”, who use it to “divert the anger of exploited workers”. McGeever argues that such “reductive conceptualisations failed to account for the many-sided nature of antisemitism, and, in particular, the way it traversed the political divide, finding expression within the left as well as the right” (page 120).

After the civil war, as the Soviet state consolidated its institutions and control over its territory, this crude view of antisemitism as a weapon wielded by external enemies became standardised. So did the public silence on “Red” pogroms. One of several examples given by McGeever is a book on the Ukrainian pogroms of 1919 by Sergei Gusev-Orenburgskii, published in Petrograd in 1921. It was “heavily redacted by Soviet censors such that *each and every* reference to Bolshevik and Red Army antisemitism was deleted”, shortening it by 100 pages (page 133). Keeping Red Army antisemitism out of the public domain at all costs became “a well-established practice” (page 135).

The reductive view of antisemitism also disarmed the Bolsheviks before workers and peasants who saw Jews as lazy speculators. “In the popular imaginary, ‘the Jew’ was often positioned in an antagonistic class relation to the ‘working people’”, McGeever writes (page 183). This perception filtered through Soviet and Red Army institutions in numerous ways. Given the circumstances – of being surrounded by an unprecedented racist slaughter – the anti-capitalist discourse used by party propagandists sometimes trod a politically questionable line. What were officials in Moscow thinking when they sent directives in mid-1919, at the height of the Ukrainian nightmare, to “sweep away the speculators who have stolen from you”? What were Red Army commanders in Kyiv smoking when they sanctioned the distribution of posters urging “beat the bourgeoisie”, a wording all too close to the age-old pogromists' chant, “beat the Yids” (page 184)?

Later on, in the 1920s, McGeever relates how Jewish communists discussed the position of Jews in the Soviet state with reference to the fight for hard work and against speculation, “and ‘Jewish speculation’ specifically” (page 202). Here a key trope of left antisemitism merged with the obsession with “honest labour” and productivity, which became prominent in Soviet discourse as the Bolsheviks strove to put the economy back on its feet and restore labour discipline.

McGeever describes how, during the civil war, local, and even national, Bolshevik officials often retreated before a mass of demands that Russians, rather than Jews, be sent to fill responsible posts, and a constant barrage of unsubstantiated complaints that Jews were avoiding front-line service in the Red Army. He looks at a proposal by Lenin, made in November 1919 when the Bolsheviks were putting together institutional structures in Ukraine, on top of civil war wreckage, to “keep a tight rein on Jews and urban inhabitants, [...] transferring them to the front, not letting them into government agencies (except in an insignificant percentage and in particularly exceptional circumstances, under class control)” (page 193). The proposal was adopted and published in a sanitised version with the reference to Jews omitted. But McGeever argues convincingly (page 195) that Lenin was responding to the widespread belief that Jews were underrepresented at the front and overrepresented in

comfy offices. Another recommendation made in Bolshevik leadership meetings was to counter antisemitism in the Red Army by deploying Jewish communists in regiments dominated by peasants, which “would have the effect of reducing counter-revolutionary sentiments among the Red Army milieu” (page 187). To my mind, that was a good suggestion, although McGeever thought that, while motivated by a desire to counter antisemitism, it emphasised “changing Jews” rather than changing those with antisemitic ideas.

This controversy over the deployment of Jews in Ukraine was part of a longer-standing discussion about Jews taking prominent Soviet state positions. Trotsky, the ultimate assimilated internationalist Jew, spoke in 1923 and wrote again in his autobiography in 1930 about how in 1917 he had refused some of the most senior state positions for fear of acting as a red rag to antisemitic bulls chasing “Jew-communists”.³

Jewish socialists' practice

The first Soviet state responses to the 1918 pogroms came at the end of April, in Moscow, when the regional government body (Moscow Sovnarkom) coordinated a propaganda campaign, and called on the Cheka (extraordinary commissions, the embryonic security police apparatus) to act against pogroms. McGeever shows that these actions were preceded by, and pushed forward, by a group of non-Bolshevik Jewish socialists. In March 1918, in the midst of an unprecedented revival of Yiddish culture after the 1917 emancipation, these Yiddish speakers – members of the Poalei Zion, the United Jewish Socialist Workers Party and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries – formed the Moscow Evkom (Jewish committee) (page 56). They protested vehemently at the lack of central action against rising antisemitism; on 11 April their representative, David Davidovich, addressed the All Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK, effectively the government). “It was the non-Bolshevik Jewish socialist who pressed antisemitism on to the agenda of the Bolshevik leadership. This dynamic would resurface time and again” (page 66). For the Jewish socialists,

[T]he slaughtering of Jews was not epiphenomenal, nor was it a mere facet of the revolutionary process. It was the fundamental question in the spring of 1918, and it shaped their own engagement with the revolution during this period.

The earth-shattering political events that followed – the outbreak of the Russian civil war, the failed German revolution of November 1918, and the Proskuriv pogrom by the Whites in mid-February 1919 – galvanised Jewish socialists. The Jewish groups – like many other socialist parties across the old Russian empire – split, usually along pro- and anti-Bolshevik lines. The Jewish communists, retaining varying degrees of autonomous organisation, merged into the Bolshevik party. They called on Jews to join the Red Army to fight Whites and pogromists. As one of these groups, the Komfarband, declared at its founding conference in May 1919, the pogroms had “not been able to stop the revolutionary process”, but on the contrary, had raised “the level of revolutionary energy among the urban [Jewish] poor, before whom stands the prospect of physical extermination” (page 148).

The Jewish communists' response to the pogroms was underpinned by an “ethical imperative”, in McGeever's phrase (pages 85, 160-161, 171). They spoke from the subject position of “racialised outsiders”, a concept he borrows from the sociologist Satnam Virdee. There was a tension between this and the approach of most Bolsheviks, for whom the fight against pogroms was subordinate to the larger struggle against counter-revolution. This was starkly evident at a conference of the Evsektsiia (Jewish sections of the Bolshevik party) on 1 June 1919. Ia. Mandel'sberg, a Komfarband representative, interjected in a debate about the

³ Trotsky, *My Life*, chapter 29 <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/>>; Valentina Vilкова, *The Struggle for Power: Russia in 1923* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), pages 183-184

sections' orientation to the Jewish middle class, that "the main enemy of the Jewish working class is antisemitism, and to fight it we need urgently to outline a set of concrete measures". Semen Dimanshtein, head of the Evseksiia and more ideologically committed to Bolshevism, retorted that "antisemitism is not a special Jewish question, as Mandel'sberg thinks ... it is a plague on the revolution; it is the slogan of the counter-revolution" (page 163).

None other than Mikhail Kalinin, the chairman of the VTsIK and titular head of the Soviet state, who was attending the meeting as a guest, intervened, implicitly supporting Mandel'sberg. He pointed out: "There are no other people who have shed as much blood as the Jewish people have ... no honest person can remain indifferent to the current mass murder of the Jews." Arkadii Al'skii, like Dimanshtein a committed Bolshevik, refuted Kalinin's argument, insisting that "Jewish communists fight under the banner of the Russian Communist Party against all enemies of the revolution, no matter who they are"; they approached the issue of antisemitism not as "Jewish national-Communists" but as "Communist Jews who have no connection with the Jewish bourgeoisie" (page 165). Kalinin, to the astonishment of the meeting, walked out. Would that Mandel'sberg and others had been able to adapt a slogan from the future: "Jewish lives matter."

It is to McGeever's credit that he has recovered these pioneering discussions on what we would today call the politics of anti-racism. The conversations were cut short. In the early 1920s, many of the most prominent Evseksiia activists were dispersed, to work in Soviet departments or universities, or to continue their struggle in other countries. By the time of the major post-civil-war state campaign against antisemitism, launched in 1926, the Soviet state had changed beyond recognition. In the run-up to the first five year plan and forced collectivisation, antisemites were added to an "ever-growing list of harmful enemies, alongside kulaks, priests, wreckers, speculators and hooligans", McGeever writes (page 214). The campaign was motivated less by a desire to protect Jewish life than by the larger state project of targeting threats to the regime. Including much of the peasantry, it could be added.

Concluding comments

Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution is welcome because of the care with which McGeever examines the history of the revolution as an interaction between political forces – the Bolshevik party, and the Jewish socialists who fought alongside it – and society. The particular problem of antisemitic violence is abstracted from the general process of revolution and civil war, into which it has often been subsumed. For communists, McGeever's work is especially timely. We live at a strange conjuncture, when hero-worship of the Bolsheviks has been resurrected in the mythical construct of "ecological Leninism".⁴ Rather than yearning for 20th century heroes to resolve our 21st century problems, McGeever focuses soberly on how the Bolsheviks, and others, dealt with the life and death problems in front of them.

The internationalism with which the Russian revolution became associated, its function as a focus for anti-imperialist struggles throughout the twentieth century, now appears to be one of its most significant legacies. The Bolsheviks "can not claim exclusive credit for putting the struggle against colonialism on the political agenda of the 20th century", Steve Smith concludes in his recent history of the revolution, but it was the Communist International (Comintern) that "popularised militant anti-imperialism" and served as a training ground for leaders of national liberation struggles.⁵ Without minimising the Soviet Union's imperial

⁴ On "ecological Leninism", see for example Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2020), and this reviewer's comments in: S. Pirani, "The direct air capture road to socialism?", *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, March 2021.

⁵ S.A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: an empire in crisis 1890-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

dimension, Smith adds, the Soviet “commitment to affirmative action and empowerment programmes for ethnic minorities” looked forward to much that changed in the second half of the twentieth century elsewhere. Priyamvada Gopal, in her history of resistance in the British empire, argues that the overthrow of tsarism had “a galvanising influence on resistance to imperial rule in many parts of the world”; the Comintern “was a significant catalyst” to the process of resistance, even though its vacillations were sometimes part of the problem.⁶

Against this background, McGeever’s focus on the first and most immediate manifestation of national or racial oppression during the revolution – the frightful assault on Jews – seems especially relevant. His account of the overlap between the emancipatory hopes raised in millions of people by the revolution and the poison of antisemitism is compelling. As for the socialist actors in his story, he shows how the Bolsheviks’ efforts to counter antisemitism were hamstrung not only by the dire circumstances, but by their narrow, ideologised understanding of how antisemitism worked. Kalinin’s implicit rejection of that approach, pushed by the Jewish socialists at the Evseksiia meeting in June 1919, really stuck in my mind. In many ways the Jewish socialists’ struggles – alongside, and sometimes in sharp disputes with, the Bolsheviks – foreshadow the struggles that Gopal describes, by African, Indian and Caribbean socialists with their British and other counterparts later in the twentieth century. Working over the lessons of those struggles, notwithstanding the real human tragedies that surrounded them, is inspiring.

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⁶ Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: anticolonial resistance and British dissent* (London: Verso, 2020), p. 211