



JewishLabour
MOVEMENT

Derek Taylor

SOLIDARITY AND DISCORD

**A brief history of
99 years of affiliation
to the Labour Party**

With a foreword by
Tom Watson

FOREWORD

The Labour Party has a long and proud history of solidarity with the British Jewish community, as this booklet to mark this important moment in JLM's affiliation to the Labour Party shows.

The Jewish Labour Movement helped found the Labour Party, and as one of our oldest socialist societies has always been at the heart of our movement. From its proud roots as Poale Zion to the revived and reinvigorated membership organisation of over 2,000 people, JLM has gone from strength to strength over this past century. I've been a supporter of your work for many years, and it's actually a little known fact that when I was a young political organiser in the Engineering and Electrical Union, one of my favourite tasks was to print the Poale Zion newsletter under the watchful supervision of Lawrie Nerva.

I know that the last few years have not been a happy time for relations between the Labour Party and the British Jewish community. As a party we have been too slow to respond to the growing incidences of anti-Semitism in the party and the reforms and processes the party has introduced to attempt to deal with anti-Semitism simply haven't worked.

I have said before that the increase in anti-Semitism in the Labour Party is a crisis of the soul for us, a crisis that if not dealt with will lead to the Labour Party disappearing into a vortex of eternal shame and embarrassment. I cannot put it any more strongly than this.

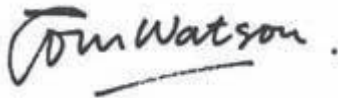
As Deputy Leader I can only promise members of the Jewish Labour Movement that you have my full solidarity and support and that I will continue to monitor and press for action on anti-Semitism within the Labour Party for as long as it takes for it to be adequately dealt with.

I firmly believe that there will always be a special bond between the Jewish community and the Labour Party, based on the shared values and ideology which are encapsulated best by the concept of *tikkun olam*, which reminds us all of our obligation to pursue social justice and work for the good of society as a whole.

I will remain mindful of *tikkun olam* in my ongoing responsibility to support the Jewish community in the years ahead and I hope that JLM will remain affiliated to the Labour Party and continue to work with me in the pursuit of a more just world for us all.

As you read this booklet I hope you will see it as a proud reminder of JLM's achievements within the Labour movement, but also as a catalyst to continue to build and strengthen JLM for the challenges ahead which I hope we will face together, united by our shared values and our proud joint history.

**Tom Watson MP,
Deputy Leader of the Labour Party**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Watson" with a horizontal line underneath.

INTRODUCTION

Whether since the earliest days of Jewish artisans battling for representation within British trades unions at the time of the first 'hostile environment' at the turn of the twentieth century, or later forming electoral pacts with the Transport and General Workers Union to defeat the Passfield White Paper in Parliament, the history of Poale Zion, renamed the Jewish Labour Movement, has always featured days both easy and difficult.

In response to persecution, pogroms and later the Shoah, the Labour Party has over the last century offered solidarity to the Jewish community, standing by its side in hard times and reflecting the hopes and aspirations of a largely impoverished migrant community. Whether this emancipation took the form of anti-racist struggles in Britain, or through the hope of national self-determination in the shape of what was to become the State of Israel, Labour and the Jewish community were as one.

Today, as a culture of anti-Semitism, obfuscation and denial grips the Labour Party, it would be remiss to look back over the last century of JLM's affiliation without recognising that there have always been points of disagreement. Today's discord feels different.

In the wake of the resignation of Luciana Berger MP from the Labour Party, our Parliamentary Chair, many within the Jewish Labour Movement have questioned our ongoing commitment to remain affiliated to the Labour Party.

There are those who believe that we must stay, stand and fight the anti-Semitism our members have experienced, and equally those who believe the time has come to walk away from the Party. As the outcome of our emergency general

meetings demonstrated, for the majority, for now, that time has not yet come. It may well still.

However, equally clear is the commitment that there can be no return to the status quo. In referring the Labour Party to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, JLM has made a clarion declaration that we now believe the Party is institutionally racist. It will be for EHRC to make findings.

In the interim, we have rededicated ourselves to root out anti-Semitism from the Labour Party, and to hold accountable those with the power, position and influence to do something about it. Their failure is not our failure, and they alone must own it.

Peter Mason,
National Secretary, Jewish Labour Movement



This booklet contains some extracts from the forthcoming book by Derek Taylor, OBE to be published by Vallentine Mitchell to coincide with the 100th Anniversary of the affiliation of the Jewish Labour Movement to the Labour Party (ISBN 978 1 912676 13 2).

SOLIDARITY AND DISCORD

A brief history of 99 years of affiliation to the Labour Party

At the end of the nineteenth century the Labour Movement and Poale Zion (The Workers of Zion) grew up together. In 2004 Poale Zion would change its name to the Jewish Labour Movement. The rationale for both bodies was the need to improve the appalling conditions of the working class. Slavery in Scotland had only been abolished by the Colliers and Salters Act in 1775. If you had no job, with no income from the state and no old-age pension, it was not surprising that life expectancy in 1870 was only 42. Manny Shinwell was a Jewish Labour MP, a minister in the governments of Ramsay Macdonald and Clement Attlee, and later a member of the House of Lords. When he lost his job before the First World War, he and his wife nearly starved.

Keir Hardie founded the Labour Party and Theodor Herzl the World Zionist Federation. Both organisations had their teething problems. The first Jewish Socialist Society was formed in 1876 and most Jewish workers were employed in the tailoring industry. Their working conditions were:

From 6am to 7 or 8pm, without a break in hot stuffy rooms, no wonder that two thirds of the tailors died of tuberculosis. Hunger and poverty have robbed them of their youth and given them the appearance of old men.

It was hard going. In 1895 the Independent Labour Party, the Fabian Society, the Marxist Social Democratic Federation and the Scottish Labour Party put up 28 candidates at the general election but only polled 44,000 votes between them. The only good news was that Keir Hardie had been elected as an independent MP for West Ham South in 1892, and as a Labour Party candidate for Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare in 1900.

British branches of Poale Zion were founded in Leeds in 1902 and Manchester in 1904. Apart from improving working conditions, amongst their other objectives was to lobby for a National Home for the Jews. Pogroms in the Russian Empire had seen hundreds of Jews killed, women raped and their houses and businesses destroyed. Herzl negotiated with the British government for a National Home. They wanted it to be in Palestine, a totally neglected Turkish province with less than 200,000 inhabitants.

At the time Palestine was:

...impoverished and utterly neglected, denuded of trees. Its coastal plains were deadly marshes depopulated by malaria. The peasantry suffered severely from malaria and trachoma, with no schools or doctors outside the towns. The Turkish government farmed out tax collection to the highest bidders who were usually rich landowners living in the cities. Village and home life were wretched.

Towards the end of the century Jewish immigrants started to arrive in some numbers from Eastern Europe to escape the pogroms and reclaim the land. The newcomers set up a Jewish Agency to buy land on which they could settle. It should be recognised that a large part of what is now Israel was purchased by The Jewish Agency at many times its value from its Arab landlords.

The form of settlement was the kibbutz. The first was in Degania in 1909. Nobody who worked on a kibbutz was paid. The money earned went into a kitty and everything the workers needed had to come from that. It was pure Socialism and much admired by the nascent British Labour Party. There are 270 kibbutz in Israel today.

In 1917 before the Balfour Declaration, the Labour Party issued its War Aims. It was set down by the party and the TUC that:

The conference demands for the Jews of all countries the same elementary rights of tolerance, freedom of residence and trade, and equal citizenship that ought to be extended to all the inhabitants of every nation. But the conference further expresses the hope that it may be practicable, by agreement among all the nations, to set free Palestine from the harsh and oppressive government of the Turk in order that the country may form a free state under international guarantee, to which such of the Jewish people as desire to do so, may return, and may work out their own salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion.

The resolution was agreed before the Balfour Declaration. Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader after Theodor Herzl died, told the Zionist executive in 1919:

I would like it minuted here the good work that has been carried out by Poale Zion among the workers; they have managed to obtain a statement from the large unions.

The work of PZ still depended on a few stalwarts. Britain was not Russia and its tolerance to the Jewish community had been outstanding for over 250 years. There had been one minor pogrom in Tredegar in 1911. Whereas in so many continental countries it would have been tolerated and even encouraged by the authorities, the Tredegar magistrates read the Riot Act, the police charged the rioters, the Worcester regiment was brought in from Cardiff and the whole disturbance was over in a few days. Local Jews were sheltered by their Christian neighbours, the council put a penny on the rates to pay for

the damage, and everybody protested that it had just been hooliganism. It remains the only anti-Semitic pogrom in the 350 years since Charles II allowed the Jews to live in Britain. Within the Jewish community Britain is very properly known as the 'Land of Mercy'.

In 1920, after lengthy negotiations, Poale Zion affiliated to the Labour Party. At the Labour Party congress of 1920 a resolution was passed:

...requesting the government to remove the restrictions placed upon the immigration of the Jews and to allow immediate entry to the large number of suffering Jews in Eastern Europe anxiously waiting to be settled in Palestine.

The organisation, in fact, split into Socialist and Communist sections, though the Communists became the Palestine Communist Party.

Support for Poale Zion in Britain came mostly from immigrants who had suffered anti-Semitism in their native countries. A large number of them lived in the East End of London and one of their Boys' Clubs was managed by a former British army officer, Major Clement Attlee.

Attlee's political career had been promoted by the head of the Labour Party in Stepney, a Romanian Jew called Oscar Tobin, who became the first Jewish Mayor of the borough in 1921. He campaigned for Attlee, who was elected to Parliament with the support of the party in 1922.

Ramsay Macdonald was the first Labour Prime Minister, but before he was elected to parliament, he went to Palestine and reported:

...it is impossible for anyone who saw what I saw to be too extravagant in tributes to the Jewish colonisers in Palestine. I saw what was bog being turned into cultivatable land...I saw the morass...being drained and recovered.

In the first Labour government of 1924 Manny Shinwell was made the Minister for Mines and achieved better conditions for the miners. Henry Slesser was appointed Solicitor General. Poale Zion was trying to sort out whether it was Communist or Socialist and, as MI5 was trying to infiltrate all Communist and Fascist organisations, the security services were probably wondering too.

As the mandatory power, Britain was extremely important to Poale Zion and many of the future Israeli leaders were from Britain originally. One was Moshe Shertok, the future Israeli Foreign Minister, who relaxed his hosts in 1951 by pointing out: 'There's no need for us to stand on ceremony. I used be a Labour member of the Stepney Borough Council.'

David Ben-Gurion, the future Israeli prime minister, worked from the Poale Zion office in 1921 and Abba Eban, the long-time Foreign Minister, started his Zionist career with the Poale Zion youth in the 1930s.

One of the Zionist organisations in Palestine particularly appealed to the Labour leadership. This was the Histadrut, which had been founded in 1920 to represent Jewish workers in Palestine. It became a major political and industrial power and its influence in the country was the envy of Labour movements elsewhere.

In 1929 Marion Phillips was the first Jewish woman to be elected to be an MP. She became Secretary of the Womens' Labour League in 1912 and between 1917 and her death in 1932 she was Secretary of the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Womens' Organisations. It was due to Phillips that thousands of women became involved in setting up school meals and play areas for children. She also campaigned for the more safety-conscious designs of houses. In Phillips' day a very large number of homes had no bathroom and inadequate toilet facilities; Phillips made her views abundantly clear:

If Labour councillors will not support us on the demand, we shall have to cry a halt on all municipal housing until we have replaced all Labour men by Labour women.

Phillips became the Chief Woman Officer of the Labour Party and she was the only Jewish Labour MP to survive the collapse of the party's representation in parliament in the election of 1931. Her death from cancer the following year was much regretted.

The second Labour government had not changed its mind about Palestine. Arthur Henderson, the Foreign Secretary, said in 1929:

There is no question of altering the position of this country in regard to the Mandate, or the policy laid down in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and embodied in the Mandate, of supporting in Palestine a National Home for the Jews.

Nevertheless, riots in Palestine in 1929 led to the first major disagreement between Poale Zion and the Labour Party. Lord Passfield, the former Sidney Webb, had produced a report suggesting that the riots might end if Jewish emigration was

cut back. At the time a by-election in Whitechapel was a vital one for the Labour government to win. They needed Poale Zion support and after negotiations with Ernest Bevin, it was agreed to back the Labour candidate. The Passfield paper was not utilised and the party and Poale Zion remained in friendly cooperation.

Over 50,000 Jews from Germany and Czechoslovakia were granted immigration visas to Britain in the 1930s and Poale Zion lobbied continuously for their co-religionists. They received a great deal of support from every section of the Labour Party. For example, the relations between the TUC and Poale Zion were always close and particularly so when the Second World War loomed and the plight of Jews in Europe became more desperate. When Ernest Bevin was president of the TUC, he told the Congress in 1937:

One of the great tragedies of the world has been the persecution of the Jews. With the granting of the Palestine Mandate we looked forward with hope to the ending of this persecution. Later, when we saw the remarkable response of the Jews in the building of new homes and their cooperative effort, a development which has won the admiration of the world, our expectations ran high...British Labour in recent years has preserved close contact with the Trade Unions in Palestine. Congress, I am sure, would endorse any consultation...which would assist in the solution of their problems.

In the same year Clement Attlee, now leader of the Labour Party, said:

The wonderful work of reconstruction undertaken by the Jews in Palestine has earned the admiration of all. In these difficult days I should like to assure you of my sympathy.

The fact was, however, that in a future war the supply of oil would be crucial for the armed forces and it would need to come from Iran and Iraq. So, in an attempt to pacify the Arab population, a White Paper was passed in 1939 limiting Jewish emigration to Palestine to 75,000 over the next five years. Thousands of Jews would die in the Holocaust because they couldn't escape to Palestine.

Poale Zion in the 1930s was heavily involved in challenging Fascism and rescuing Jews from Germany. No Fascist candidate was ever elected to the House of Commons but the anti-Semitic policies of the Union of Fascists led to a good deal of violence. The most notable clash was in the East End of London in October 1936 when Oswald Moseley proposed to lead his followers through the Jewish district. Poale Zion, together with members of the Labour Party, trade unionists and communists, strongly opposed it in what became known as the Battle of Cable Street. The police ensured that the march was called off.

The war saw more Jewish members within the armed forces than any other ethnic minority, but nothing could prevent the Holocaust. The Labour Party publication, *Tribune*, discussed the position of the Arab countries in the Middle East in its December 1943 issue:

In the present war the Arab leaders, the Mufti, Rashid Ali (both now in Berlin) and their gang have sold themselves for cash to Mussolini, who exterminated thousands of their Libyan co-religionists. They have also sold themselves to Hirohito...Hitler's agents were more difficult to trace, but we know there were many including some of the most prominent Arabs.

When the war ended there was international horror and pity for the victims of the Holocaust, but nobody wanted to take

in the remnant of survivors. The British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, has been criticised for not doing more to help, but the country's financial position made the profits from British oil companies in the Arab Middle East essential for the balance of payments. Britain finally paid off its Second World War debts in 2006.

The country was effectively broke until Marshall Aid, and Bevin's responsibility was to keep it afloat. Allowing a major influx of Jewish refugees into Palestine would have increased Arab unrest and, as Muslims, the British also wanted their support for the crucial partition of India.

Nevertheless, Harold Wilson, who was in Attlee's cabinet, wrote in 1981:

It would not have been possible for a political party to be more committed to a national home for the Jews in Palestine than was Labour. In the election [1945] the party had uncompromisingly demanded that the 1939 White Paper be rescinded. It pledged itself categorically not to prevent the Jews from achieving a majority in Palestine by immigration... The party had supported the Jewish National Home... since 1917, when this theme had been incorporated in Labour's Statement of War Aims. It had been reiterated eleven times from then to May 1945. A generation of Labour spokesmen...had committed the party, on taking power, to sweeping away all restrictions on immigration into Palestine...At the 1945 conference...Hugh Dalton reinforced the party line: 'It is morally wrong and politically indefensible to impose obstacles to the entry into Palestine now of any Jews who desire to go there.' There cannot have been in twentieth century British history a greater contrast between promises and performance.

In 1947 the British government decided that it was unable to control the factions in Palestine. Its own weakened financial position after the war put enormous strain on its resources and negotiations between the Arabs and the Jews saw no progress. Britain decided to give up the Mandate and hand the problem back to the United Nations. That body decided that partition was the best solution, which the Arabs rejected and the Jews accepted. There was another stalemate.

In the civil war between Jews and Arabs in Palestine there had been British casualties and after 25 years of close cooperation there was, for the second time, conflict between the views of the party and Poale Zion. Both sides, however, roundly condemned the violence which, of course, ended when Britain withdrew from the Mandate.

Israel, as a Jewish state, was finally set up by the United Nations. As Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet delegate to the UN, said in the General Assembly in 1947:

It will be unjust if we do not take into account of this aspiration of the Jews to a State of their own, if we deny to the Jews the right to realise this aspiration. The denial of this right to the Jewish people cannot be justified, especially if we take into account everything that the Jewish people underwent during the Second World War.

Both Russia and America voted for partition, which would establish a Jewish state. It was one of the very few occasions when the two superpowers saw eye-to-eye. The final vote showed 72% of the United Nations countries in favour. The lobbying efforts of Poale Zion had been successful after 50 years, although there was still a great deal of work to do to help create a multi-racial society in Britain and to help Israel survive as an independent nation.

Britain gave up the Palestine Mandate on 14 May 1948. On that day the Secretary General of the Arab League made the Arab position clear. In a broadcast he said:

The Arabs intend to conduct a war of extermination and momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades.

At which point five Arab armies entered the country from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. The local Arabs had been instructed to leave Palestine to avoid getting in the way of the invading Arab armies, to avoid being massacred by the Jews and to avoid being accused of being traitors to the Arab cause if they stayed.

The British police in Palestine told a different story. They reported that:

Every effort is being made by the Jews to persuade the Arab population to stay and carry on with their normal lives.

One official of the Mandatory government commented in the London *Evening Standard* twenty years later in 1969:

I saw and heard what happened then. Long before the end of the British Mandate...practically all my Arab Palestinian staff of some 200 men and women and all of the 1,800 labour force had left Haifa in spite of every possible effort to assure them of their safety if they stayed...The promised invasion by the foreign Arab armies...was preceded by extensive broadcasts from Cairo, Damascus, Amman and Beirut to the effect that any Arabs who stayed would be hanged as collaborators with the Jews.

In 1975 WOJAC was formed – the World Organisation of Jews from Arab Countries. A chair of Poale Zion, Percy Gourgey, worked tirelessly for years to get the world's media to support the just claims of the Jewish refugees, but without success. The Jews in Arab countries had been forced to flee persecution after 1948 but there was never any attempt internationally to get them compensation for their loss of possessions. Over three quarters of a million Jews had to find new homes, most taken in by Israel and resettled with homes and jobs.

The first Jewish Labour MP was Tom Myers who won Spen Valley in 1919. In the Labour victory in 1945 there were 28 successful Jewish Labour candidates. Over the years there have been 100 Jewish Labour MPs and 80 Jewish Labour members of the House of Lords. Thirty of the MPs were lawyers and many were accountants and medical practitioners. It was also a fact that Conservative selection committees seldom chose Jewish candidates. There were only two Jewish Conservative MPs between 1945 and 1970.

Until the Blair years the Jewish MPs were seldom members of the cabinet, but they were responsible for some very important legislation. In the Attlee governments Lewis Silkin, as Minister of Town and Country Planning, created the new towns such as Milton Keynes, for those who had lost their homes in the Blitz. He was also responsible for the National Parks. Manny Shinwell improved the conditions of ordinary soldiers while Minister of Defence. In later years the work of Leo Abse would be key to the legalisation of homosexuality and Sidney Silverman would produce a bill to abolish capital punishment.

Long-forgotten MPs did sterling work; Barnett Stross worked for years to get compensation for miners who had contracted pneumoconiosis at work, and started a 'Lidice Shall Live' campaign to commemorate the slaughter of the inhabitants of Lidice by the Nazis.

The creation of Israel raised the question of dual loyalty again, but Sidney Silverman MP made the position crystal clear at the World Jewish Congress in 1949 when he said:

I think that the Jews who are most troubled by the problem of dual loyalty are just those Jews who never believed in a National Home for the Jews and who have never admitted any loyalty to the Jewish people as such. For me, the creation of the State of Israel involved no new loyalty, involves no conflict of loyalties of any kind. I hope I was loyal to my Jewish people before there was a state of Israel, and I see no reason why I should not continue to be loyal to my Jewish people after its creation. If there is any question, if there was any question of divided loyalties, it is not created by the State of Israel. It is created by twenty centuries of history, which none of us can alter.

The Jewish Labour MPs were supporters of Poale Zion and many of their wives helped with the creation of the new Pioneer Women section after the war which was affiliated to the organisation. Although men had predominated in the past, the chair of Poale Zion in 1923 was Leah L'Estrange-Malone, who would be a prominent councillor on the LCC for many years.

The victory in the War of Independence brought to a successful end the main objective of Poale Zion since its foundation more than 50 years before - a National Home for the Jews had been created and recognised by the United Nations. The seemingly impossible had actually happened. The question for Poale Zion was: what now? It naturally followed that senior figures in Poale Zion went on Aliyah. Back home, it was recognised that a fresh set of aims and new officers would be needed to justify the continuance of the organisation and to move it forward.

In 1957 Sidney Goldberg, Poale Zion's Secretary, took the initiative in establishing a new parliamentary body called the Labour Friends of Israel. In time Anthony Greenwood, who would chair the Labour Party in 1963-1964, was the first chair of LFI and Goldberg remained its Secretary for many years. The LFI was formed at the Labour Party conference with the support of ex-cabinet ministers, Labour peers, members of the National Executive, 60 MPs and members of the TUC and Cooperative movements. It would be defined in 2003 as 'A Westminster based lobbying group, working with the British Labour Party to promote the state of Israel.'

As it had plenty of non-Jewish members, it was typical that the initial meeting was addressed by Herbert Morrison and Ian Mikardo. Over the years the membership would grow and there would be local branches outside London, according to the enthusiasm of local individuals.

While the relations between Poale Zion and the TUC had been very friendly, few Jews achieved senior roles in the organisation. The exception would be Roger Lyons, who was General Secretary of MSF (Manufacturing, Science and Finance), Joint General Secretary of Amicus and President of the TUC in 2003.

By 1970 Poale Zion had been affiliated to the Labour Party for 50 years. It had been a fruitful partnership. As Morgan Phillips, the party secretary, wrote in 1960:

My colleagues and I place great value on your presence beside us in the Movement, not only because of the zealous and devoted service you have always rendered in the struggle for progress in Britain, but also because you have provided a bridge of understanding between ourselves and our comrades in Israel.

Poale Zion and the Jewish Labour Movement have long been committed to a negotiated two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. The Oslo Accords was welcomed. The 1997 Labour Manifesto commitment 'to a secure alongside a viable Palestine' were in tune with the values of the organisation. Labour Conference fringe events included shared platforms between the PZ/JLM Israeli Labour MPs and the PLO.

In 1977, however, there came a major change in Israeli politics when Likud, a right-wing party, gained power in the Knesset elections. For the first time the influence of the Histadut was not reflected in the government's manifesto. From Poale Zion's point of view the position deteriorated further in 1981 when Christian militia massacred many Arab refugees in camps in Lebanon. The Israeli forces in the country didn't stop them. As a consequence resolutions were passed in Labour conferences condemning the Israeli inaction. There had also been disquiet when Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear facilities.

In the latter case Israel had sound justification, later proven justified in the wars against Saddam Hussein. The country was at war with Iraq against its wishes and had every right to defend itself by weakening its enemy. Peace treaties would be signed with Jordan and Egypt, but Syria, Iraq and Iran remained belligerents.

If relations with the Israel government became frostier, this in no way affected the warm cooperation between the government and the Jewish community. Poale Zion and the Labour party had been friends for well over half a century by now. The conditions of the poorer people in the country had been massively improved and much of the Jewish community had fought their way out of poverty. With a Conservative government in power, both organisations turned their attention more to building a multi-cultural society and fighting the far right. Poale Zion joined in the creation of

the Anti-Racist Alliance, working with the black community. PZ worked to ensure that the Labour Party devoted sufficient financial and human resources to combatting the rise of the BNP. The number of anti-Semites in the party remained tiny. The lessons of the Holocaust were not forgotten.

When Poale Zion was founded it appealed, primarily, to the young idealists who believed solutions to centuries-old problems could be found. By the 1980s the founders and their successors had largely departed the scene. Names like Jacob Pomeranz and Morris Meyer, who had carried the organisation during the First World War were long gone. Lobbying for a National Home, the pillars of the 1930s, like Abraham Richtiger, Maurice Rosette, Berl Locker and Dov Hoz, were mourned.

Newcomers had, of course, taken their place; Ian Mikardo, MP, was a tower of strength and his wife, Mary, continued to give massive support to the Pioneer Women. Shneier Levenberg, who was chair in 1945, would be President in 1997. The mainstays of the organisation would be Lawrie Nerva, Henry Smith, Edwin Strauss and Judith Bara.

As the years went by, Poale Zion widened its objectives and played its part in advocating more anti-racist legislation, lobbying for the Jews to be allowed to leave Russia and supporting causes as diverse as the Cambodian boat people and Labour candidates in local and general elections.

The number of Jewish Labour MPs had reached an unprecedented 36 in the October 1974 election and a number took office in Poale Zion in later years. Gerald Kaufman was a vice president, Ian Mikardo, chair for some years from 1985, and Lord Stanley Clinton Davis, Louise Ellman MP and Luciana Berger MP have all had senior roles more recently.

It was an extraordinary achievement for Tony Blair to win three successive elections for Labour and in his cabinets were a number of Jewish MPs. He summed up his views on the community when addressing the 350th anniversary of the resettlement of the Jews in this country in 2006:

Throughout these years, the community has shown how it is possible to retain a clear faith and a clear identity and, at the same time, be thoroughly British. As the oldest minority faith community in this country, you show how identity through faith can be combined with a deep loyalty to our nation.

In 2008 it was 100 years since the passing of the Oath Act which made it possible for elected Jews to take their seats in Parliament by swearing on the Old Testament. Gordon Brown, the Labour Prime Minister, had this to say:

Jewish MPs have made major contributions to the work of our governments...This comparatively small community has always supported our country admirably and has shown that an ethnic and religious group can do so without sacrificing their historical traditions...our energetic minority of Jewish citizens have done - and still do - great work in our parliaments.

In recent years, the subject of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party has been a source of dismay for both the Party leadership and the Jewish Labour Movement. Following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the Party in 2015, and an influx of new members, a sense that anti-Semitism within the Party was being normalised and left unchecked by the Party's leadership took hold.

After growing concern over the Party's handling of a series of complaints relating to Labour members and elected representatives, the Jewish community, supported by JLM, took the unprecedented step in April 2018 of protesting Her Majesties Loyal Opposition in Parliament Square.

The following summer would be one of the most difficult for JLM and the Labour Party for some time. Following interventions from 68 rabbis from across the denominational divide Labour finally adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism and its contemporary examples under duress.

Citing the ongoing crisis of Labour's anti-Semitism woes, JLM's Parliamentary Chair, Luciana Berger MP, would resign from the Party in February 2019. Her resignation set off a wave of further departures from within JLM's rank and file. It further precipitated an emergency meeting in March 2019, where JLM members of the now rapidly growing movement met both in Manchester and London to debate JLM's 99-year affiliation to the Labour Party after which it was decided to stay within the party, at least until the April AGM.

"The Jewish Labour Movement helped found the Labour Party, and as one of our oldest socialist societies has always been at the heart of our movement. From its proud roots as Poale Zion to the revived and reinvigorated membership organisation of over 2,000 people, JLM has gone from strength to strength over this past century.

As you read this booklet I hope you will see it as a proud reminder of JLM's achievements within the Labour movement, but also as a catalyst to continue to build and strengthen JLM for the challenges ahead which I hope we will face together, united by our shared values and our proud joint history."

From the foreword by Tom Watson, MP



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