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Jewish involvement in the women's suffrage movement in Britain: navigating multiple identities in the Diaspora

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This article has two main areas of focus. The first will explore conversations, debates, and attitudes within the Jewish community, and the second will examine the relationship between non-Jewish suffrage leagues, both religious and secular, and Jewish suffragists and the Jewish League for Woman Suffrage (JLWS).¹ Through these two main sections, I will shed light on the attitudes and involvement of Anglo-Jewry in the suffrage movement in Britain, a topic that remains vastly unexamined.

In the first section, I will rely primarily on letters, articles, and records of meetings and debates from the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC). The JC published a rich variety of opinions on the topic, and provides insight into the different attitudes in the Anglo-Jewish community on the subject. While the JC itself appears generally to have had a more pro-suffrage stance, and includes many letters and contributions from suffragists and supporters of the movement, the publications between 1898 and 1928 also include letters and contributions from anti-suffrage Jews and therefore illuminate (at least part of) the debate between Jewish suffragists and anti-suffragists.

The very existence of a specifically Jewish league in the suffrage movement begs the question of what relations were like between Jewish and non-Jewish suffragists before the JLWS was created, as well as the nature of subsequent interactions between the JLWS and other leagues. Thus, the second part of this article will examine interfaith relations among suffragists and suffrage groups. It draws from various letters, interviews, photographs, and pamphlets from the London School of Economics' Women's Library, the British Library, and the JLWS Annual Reports. I hope to illuminate relationships between Jewish and non-

1 For the scope of this article, I have used exclusively English-language sources. There are doubtless Yiddish-language sources which would be interesting to explore, and which would provide additional depth to this topic.

Jewish suffragists, the level of inclusion of Jews in general suffrage events, and collaborations between the JLWS and other religious and non-religious leagues.

Brief background

The turn of the twentieth century was a time of turbulence and change for the Anglo-Jewish community, for several reasons. First of all, British Jews had gradually been emancipated from the middle of the nineteenth century; by the early 1900s, most adult Anglo-Jewish men were allowed to vote in England. Around the same time, the women's suffrage movement in Britain began gaining momentum. Jewish women's reform groups had begun forming from the middle of the previous century, including the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, originally founded in 1885 as the Jewish Ladies' Society for Preventive and Rescue Work, and the Union of Jewish Women, founded in 1902.² Thus, with a growing interest in social reform and women's rights, Jewish women began joining the suffrage movement in its early stages, although the JLWS was not founded until 1912, almost 50 years after the formation of the London Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867.

Furthermore, though many Anglo-Jewish families had been living in England for several centuries, by the turn of the twentieth century, British Jewry was increasingly becoming a mixture of established Jewish families and Eastern European immigrants. Starting in the 1880s through the early 1900s, approximately 140,000 Jews moved to Britain (compared to around two million who moved to the United States during the same period). At the same time, in England, and especially London, Jews who had been living in Britain for centuries were finally beginning to acquire more acceptance and inclusion within British society. The huge influx of new, non-anglicized Jews worried the more established Jewish population, who feared that their Eastern European counterparts, who were widely considered uncultured and unsophisticated, would set back the

2 For more information about Anglo-Jewish women's activism, see Susan L. Tanenbaum's excellent overview, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880–1939* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014). For further readings on Anglo-Jewish history more generally, see Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656–2000* (London: University of California Press, 2002); David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Eugene Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880–1920* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1988); William Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875–1914* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2004). It is intriguing, but beyond the scope of this paper, that women are much less prominent in the literature on this subject.

acceptance and trust that they had worked hard to gain. It is in the context of these intersections of newly granted emancipation, class struggles, and the conflict between growing assimilation on the one hand and new waves of immigration on the other, that my study takes place.

While immigrant and working-class Jews, living primarily in London's East End, were somewhat involved in the movement (the JLWS even opened an East End branch in May 1913 to try to recruit a wider diversity of Jews into the movement³), the largest number of Jewish participants, including the leaders of the JLWS, came almost exclusively from established middle- and upper-class Jewish families. It is beyond the scope of this particular study, but this fact alone, and its impact on the way Jewish suffragists were received both within the Jewish community and in the suffrage movement generally, merit further research.

Thus, in the context of these various changes to which Anglo-Jews were required to adjust, Jewish participation in the women's suffrage movement and Jewish responses to this involvement provide insight into the difficult questions of identity that Anglo-Jews were navigating during this period.

The Jewish Chronicle coverage: Jewish reactions and debates

Between the late 1890s and the 1920s, articles and letters published in the *JC* reveal the rise and fall of Jewish interest in the suffrage question. Letters and articles, as well as records of meetings and debates, published within those three decades illuminate the variety of attitudes and opinions within the Anglo-Jewish community. The *JC* was published in English, so it automatically excluded the views of Jews who spoke primarily or exclusively Yiddish. As these were usually lower-class, Eastern European immigrants, the *JC* tended to represent mainly the views of Anglo-Jews, who were generally wealthier and more assimilated into English culture and political life. Several themes emerge from these disagreements within Anglo-Jewry, including debates about whether Jewish clergymen should voice their opinions on the issue, and whether politics should enter the synagogue; whether Jewish participation, in particular militancy, in the suffrage movement might increase antisemitism; and what it meant for Jews to participate in the suffrage movement specifically as Jews.

It is surprising that one of the major concerns of anti-suffrage Jews

3 Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman's Cause: The Jewish Woman's Movement in England and the United States, 1881–1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 139.

seems not to have been the actual issue of whether women should be enfranchised or not but, rather, whether Jewish ministers should participate in the debate. One frequent contributor to the discussion, a Mr. Marion H. Spielmann, wrote in a letter to the editor entitled "Prostituting the Synagogue" that "the synagogue must be kept pure of politics".⁴ He bemoaned the fact that certain Jewish ministers, such as the Rev. Dr. Hochmann (who was on the executive committee of the JLWS), had allied themselves with the cause, and claimed to be supported in this view by the majority of English Jews. He dramatically wrote of "the shrewdness of active suffragists" who, in his eyes, had "gone so far towards capturing the synagogue for their purpose, and have induced a whole hierarchy of Jewish parsons".⁵ A month later, he wrote again, adding that Jewish ministers should abstain from participation in political movements, particularly if they were responsible for a specific congregation and, in his words, "if the unity of the community is more to them than their personal opinions in partisan matters".⁶ The implication was that, should ministers choose to align themselves with a specific view on suffrage, their congregations risked disintegrating. One must wonder if Spielmann realized that, in making this prediction, he was also implying that congregations were too weak or shallow to withstand internal disagreements. This is certainly ironic, considering that much of Jewish tradition centres on questioning and debating ethical issues.

Spielmann's incendiary remarks, accusations, and even threats ("schism will be introduced and a bitter feeling of resentment and antagonism aroused" towards the clergymen "whose object it confessedly is to prostitute the synagogue"⁷) represent a serious issue that many Jews seem to have had with Jewish involvement in the cause. This initial letter was followed by months of letters to the editor presenting arguments both for and against the involvement of Jewish clergymen. Some, like Percy Cohen, another prominent anti-suffrage contributor to the JC, ardently supported Spielmann's views. In the same issue as the one in which Spielmann's original letter appeared, Cohen wrote that "we do not want to degrade the synagogue: we want to maintain a status which is far removed from the turmoil of worldly movements".⁸ Two months later, he

4 JC, 15 Nov. 1912.

5 Ibid.

6 JC, 13 Dec. 1912.

7 Ibid., 15 Nov. 1912.

8 Ibid.

was still arguing his point, stating that the “opinions and prejudices of our clerics on ‘the great social problems’ are not for the pulpit; they are for their parlours and tea-tables”.⁹ Resorting to name-calling, he accused suffragists of fanaticism, and continued, “Are we to preserve the sacred decorum of the synagogue service, untrammelled by the quackery of too-zealous partisans of a political school, or are we to sink the pulpit . . . in the mire of controversy?”¹⁰ The outrage and hostility in Cohen’s, Spielmann’s, and others’ letters is palpable. The violence with which they are written reveals a fear bordering on panic, and one wonders what deeper concern lay beneath their complaints. Would these writers have been so outraged if Jewish ministers had used the synagogue platform to denounce, rather than support, the cause?

It is interesting to note that in all their seething letters on the topic, nowhere did they criticize Jewish clergymen who voiced anti-suffrage opinions. The only ministers under the scrutiny of Spielmann and his comrades were those who stood with the suffragists. Was their problem really that political issues were being brought into the space of the synagogue and that Jewish clergymen were using their leadership positions to encourage discussion of worldly issues, or was it rather that Jewish ministers were using the synagogue platform to gather support for a cause that Cohen, Spielmann, and others did not support?

Some contributors to the *JC* addressed this very question, pointing out the hypocrisy of Spielmann and Cohen’s outrage. Charles B. Mabon, for example, wrote that “if it was so fundamental that Jews, as Jews, should steer clear of politics, why did they deal with the Aliens Bill, the ‘White Slave’ Traffic Bill, and the Shops Bill?” and added, “if Jews, as Jews, are entitled to be interested in the passage of one Bill through Parliament, they may likewise be interested in the passage of other Bills, even when one of them happens to involve Woman Suffrage. The real fact is, however, that Mr. Spielmann is not so anxious for the ideal ‘purity’ of the synagogue as he is afraid of the independence of women”.¹¹ Indeed, it seems that if the issue really were the separation of synagogue and state affairs (which is, arguably, an arbitrary distinction to begin with), one would expect Spielmann, Cohen, and their supporters to take issue with Jewish ministers addressing other political topics as well.

While Spielmann’s original letter inspired letters of agreement and

9 Ibid., 24 Jan. 1913.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 29 Nov. 1912.

support, it also provoked strong opposition, as just described. Some opposing letters simply argued that ministers should have the same freedom to express their views as any other man or woman. Other contributors went further in their support for bringing political and social debates into the synagogue, arguing that it was not only the right but actually the responsibility of Jewish ministers to encourage their congregations to participate in social justice issues. Miss K. S. Birnstingl, for example, wrote that, "the glory of Judaism consists precisely in the fact that religion . . . forms the basis of every branch of life's necessities".¹² Along similar lines, one "A. Tchefar" asserted that "religion is nothing if it does not inspire and guide every activity and interest and ideal of its possessor".¹³

In addition to freedom of speech and ethical responsibility, another argument in favour of Jewish ministers being involved in the debate was the contention that the synagogue had become so removed from everyday life that congregations had begun to grow stagnant and stale. A writer for the section "The Communal Armchair", for example, wrote that "Anything that would arouse the synagogue from the lethargy and the quasi-euthanasia which distinguish it must in the end be of value to it".¹⁴ Another contributor, in a letter to the editor, wrote, "No wonder there is stagnation in the synagogue if Mr. Spielmann is right in claiming, as he did in his first epistle, to represent the majority of Jewish congregants".¹⁵ This stagnation, it was argued, stemmed from the fact that services were indeed devoid of modern social and political issues, and that the synagogue, in separating itself from burning current issues, decreased the relevance of Judaism in everyday life. The issue of the isolation of the synagogue from serious political and social matters was even addressed in the first JLWS meeting, in which it was reportedly said that "the time had come when the churches would be alive to what went on outside their walls".¹⁶ Early the next year, in 1913, a Miss Ethel Behrens also wrote to the editor, asking, "how can we expect the preacher to give us his very best when we limit his power of speech to subjects of a dead formalism, when his spirit which is urging him to speak is probably flowing in other directions?" She added that many Jews were disheartened by the lack of spirituality in the synagogue, and that many felt that the synagogue had

12 Ibid., 6 Dec. 1912.

13 Ibid., 22 Nov. 1912.

14 Ibid., 6 Dec. 1912.

15 Ibid., 20 Dec. 1912.

16 Ibid.

become “a water-tight compartment, which soon becomes a dead letter instead of a living spirit which should permeate every thought and action of our lives. Why should it not be the function of the synagogue to take the lead in social reform?”¹⁷ Thus, while many Jews were concerned that inclusion of political issues would corrupt the synagogue, many others, in contrast, felt that it was an essential step in reviving congregations and maintaining the relevance of Judaism in Anglo-Jews’ everyday lives.

This preoccupation with whether the issue of women’s suffrage should be addressed in the synagogue (a concern which sparked more debate in the JC than the issue of women’s suffrage itself) sheds light on the constant negotiation between secular and Jewish life faced by diasporic Jews. Synagogues in the Diaspora are contained Jewish spaces within overwhelmingly non-Jewish ones; their walls literally delineate a boundary between Jewish life and secular life. Thus, for some, like Spielmann and Cohen, the inclusion of secular politics into the synagogue was perceived as an invasion of this Jewish haven, an attitude which in turn reveals a more general anxiety about the loss of Jewish identity among Anglo-Jews. The early twentieth century was a time of significant assimilation for Jews in England; while this was celebrated for many reasons, it makes sense that it would also evoke fear about the possibly detrimental impact of assimilation on Jewish identity. Regardless of whether Cohen, Spielmann, and others were for or against women’s suffrage, the fact that their opposition to Jewish ministers’ involvement was widely shared betrays a deep-seated fear of acculturation in the face of growing assimilation.

For others, the inclusion of political and social issues in the synagogue was, to the contrary, essential. As Jews became increasingly assimilated into English culture, the strict segregation of Jewish and English issues actually alienated those Jews who wanted to become more integrated in British society. These Jews did not feel that the discussion of secular affairs in religious services threatened the sanctity of the synagogue, as they did not feel that their Jewish and British identities were mutually exclusive: they believed that their Judaism could help inform their decisions in secular affairs. Ultimately, the debate about whether Jewish ministers should participate in the women’s suffrage debate, especially in the space of the synagogue, remains an issue of identity, and the struggle of diasporic Jews to blend their religious and national identities without losing either.

Another question that was repeatedly addressed in the letters sent to

¹⁷ Ibid., 10 Jan. 1913.

the JC was whether Jews should be involved in the movement specifically as Jews, and what the implications were if they did join. This particular debate peaked in the JC letters in 1912 and 1913, coinciding with the founding of the JLWS. The Jewish community seems to have been widely divided about whether Jews being involved as Jews would inflame or reduce antisemitism in England, and whether or not it was the duty of Jews to involve themselves in this fight for women's rights.

One contributor, who, in a letter dated March 1912, warned of the rise in antisemitism if Jews were to get involved in the cause, sparked much of this debate. The anonymous author, who signed his letter "Mentor" (perhaps Leopold Greenberg, the editor of the JC at the time),¹⁸ prefaced his criticism by writing about his admiration for the "splendid courage and fine fervour" of militant suffragettes. However, he then went on to voice his fear of the danger of Jews joining militant branches of the movement. He gave an example of a man in the West End whose shop window was smashed and who spread the word that the violence had been committed by "a dirty little Jewess". "Mentor" wrote, "Do you not see . . . how dangerous it is to us, when Jews take a place in the ranks of unrest?" Rather than smashing windows and dodging the police, he condescendingly suggested, Jewish women were better off educating the community "by instructing them in the historic status that has been accorded by Jews to their womenkind", and teaching them about the respect and honour that Jewish women, according to him, receive.¹⁹

"Mentor", in addition to standing against women's right to vote, was clearly preoccupied by the antisemitism that he feared Jewish involvement might trigger. The one example that he was able to provide was enough to launch him into a patronizing rant about how Jewish suffragettes might better spend their time and energy. One wonders whether his advice that they avoid the movement, especially its militant branches, and instead educate others (presumably non-Jews) about the "proud and noble" position of women in Judaism, was motivated more by his fear of antisemitic backlash or by his anti-suffrage stance. Regardless, his assertion that it was dangerous for Jews to "take a place in the ranks of unrest" betrays an anxiety about the possible repercussions of Jews becoming involved with messy secular politics. This fear in turn sheds light on the delicate social position of Jews at the time, whose emancipation was still recent.

18 Suggested by Kuzmack, *Woman's Cause*, 140–41.

19 JC, 15 March 1912.

Responses flooded in over the following weeks in 1912. Some, such as Flora Sidney Woolf, suggested that it was not the fact that the Jewish woman was a militant suffragette, but rather that she was Jewish at all, which spurred the shopkeeper's antisemitism.²⁰ Others went further and argued that Jewish participation in the movement might actually facilitate their efforts to gain social inclusion. Birnstingl, for example, wrote that "when Jews try to conceal their Judaism, when they ape the customs of the majority with the purpose of ingratiating themselves, when they stand aloof from a minority fighting in a good cause, for fear of incurring the displeasure of the majority, these things lower Jews and Jewesses alike".²¹

In these three contributions alone ("Mentor"'s, Woolf's, and Birnstingl's), one can see the spectrum of opinions concerning the involvement of Jews in the movement. "Mentor" feared that participation would incite antisemitism, Woolf argued that antisemites would always find reasons to hate Jews regardless, while Birnstingl felt that participating in the movement actually had the potential to reverse antisemitism, by showing England that Jews were invested in non-Jewish social and political issues. This range of positions is representative of the struggles of Jews in Diaspora, which are still prevalent today, to navigate the multifaceted intersections of Jewish and national identities and to deal with the ever-present threat of antisemitism.

In addition to debating whether Jewish participation would incite antisemitism, English Jews also disagreed about whether the Jewish League would intensify their separation from English society. Critical as ever, Percy Cohen argued that the formation of a specifically Jewish league "nurtures the spirit of sectarianism; it reeks of an unbalanced religiosity; it gives an undeserved vitality to the old phrase 'Jews qui Jews'".²²

While some, like Cohen, opposed the creation of a Jewish league, the idea also met with much good will. On 21 March 1913, for example, one contributor wrote in the JC that the "establishment of a Jewish League appears to me to be a sign of the magnificent vitality of Judaism, when, under circumstances so far removed from its Eastern Origin, it is able to give inspiration to a great and growing movement for political emancipation".²³ Additionally, in notes on the first meeting of the JLWS, Mrs. Auerbach, one of the council members, is quoted as saying that, after watching various

20 JC, 22 March 1912.

21 Ibid., 29 March 1912.

22 Ibid., 15 Nov. 1912.

23 Ibid., 21 March 1913.

religious suffrage leagues form, she decided that “Jews should not fail to take their full share in the social progress of the country. . . . They had charges levelled against them for segregating themselves, but had they not followed the lead in this matter they would have singled themselves out as a truly peculiar people”.²⁴ While Cohen expressed fear that the formation of a Jewish league would deepen the chasm between Jews and non-Jews, Auerbach clearly believed that the formation of the JLWS would allow Jews to become a more integrated part of English society.

Some supporters of this perspective used the existence of various Christian leagues to justify the existence of a Jewish one. Israel Zangwill, for example, in an interview with the *JC*, said, “As to Jews having a separate society of their own . . . they can hardly join the Church League Society! And there is no reason why they should not have a similar body to accentuate their special interest in the movement especially if they regard themselves as a religious body”.²⁵ Indeed, even in the first annual report of the JLWS, the League itself states that its formation was inspired by the existence of other religious leagues. Thus, for the founders, members, and supporters of the JLWS, the existence of a Jewish league in no way segregated Jews; on the contrary, it allowed them to fit better into the movement, especially at a time when other religious leagues were forming as well (I explore this issue of the JLWS in the second part of this article).

While the Jewish League did, by definition, create a separate branch for Jews, this does not mean that it necessarily segregated Jews from the larger movement. In fact, as will be seen, Jews remained greatly involved in non-denominational branches of the movement, and the JLWS itself collaborated with other branches of the suffrage movement. The interplay of social inclusion and exclusion is an issue that diasporic Jews have grappled with for centuries; the question of how to participate in the suffrage movement, without becoming segregated but while maintaining a distinct identity, was no exception. A contributor to the *JC* of 8 November 1912 described this apparent paradox: “The establishment of the League proves . . . that on this question, as on so many others, there is the absorption of Jews in a social problem that moves society at large on the one hand, and on the other, the very natural desire of Jews to segregate and sectionalise as Jews their own special efforts in the direction of the problem’s solution”.²⁶ Indeed, assimilation without acculturation or, in

24 *Ibid.*, 20 Dec. 1912.

25 *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1912.

26 *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1912.

other words, how to be included in and contribute to society at large while maintaining a distinct Jewish identity, has always been a pressing issue for European Jews, and the varied reactions to the formation of the JLWS are a perfect example of this perceived dilemma.

Jewish participation and interfaith relations

It seems obvious to begin an examination of relations between Jewish and non-Jewish suffragists by looking at the JLWS's manifesto. As its First Annual Report (1913–14) states, the JLWS was founded on 3 November 1912.²⁷ The report mentions other denominational leagues as early as the first few clauses, stating that, “The League will carry on Propaganda work on constitutional lines, parallel with those of the existing Church, Catholic, Free Church, and Friends’ Leagues”.²⁸ Similarly, the report later states that “the absence of a Jewish Society advocating woman Suffrage seemed an invidious exception”, and “no reason existed why the Jewish point of view should not be represented . . . nor why a Jewish Society should not work alongside with the Church, Free Church, Scottish Churches, Catholic, and Friends’ Societies”.²⁹ These statements suggest that the formation of the JLWS was inspired by the existence of other religious leagues, and that its founders hoped to create a league in line with its Christian counterparts. Thus, it seems that the aim was not, as some might suggest, to separate Jews or to react against exclusion from other branches, but, instead, to conform to the trend of growing religious suffrage leagues.

Further supporting the idea that the League's formation did not arise from interfaith exclusion or hostility, the report later lists the various associations of the JLWS with other leagues. In June 1913, the JLWS, represented by Mrs. Auerbach, was present at the International Congress of Suffrage Societies in Budapest. Along with other suffrage leagues, it signed the petition organized by the Actresses' Franchise League in April 1913, and, in February 1914, joined the Council of Federated Women's Suffrage Societies, “in order to keep in touch with the general Suffrage Movement”.³⁰

In addition to affiliations with secular leagues, the document describes

27 The Jewish League for Woman Suffrage, *First Annual Report* (London: JLWS, 1913–14), “Report”, 9.

28 *Ibid.*, “Objects and Methods”, 3.

29 *Ibid.*, “Report”, 9.

30 *Ibid.*, “Co-operation With Other Societies”, 11.

collaborations between the JLWS and other religious leagues. On 6 November 1913, for example, the JLWS met with all the religious leagues in a meeting and reception hosted by the JLWS treasurer, Mrs. Herbert Cohen.³¹ The report states that “the combined efforts of the religious societies were of such a highly satisfactory nature that it was decided that these bodies should band themselves together into a Standing Committee of the Religious Suffrage Societies”, which would meet every three months, and “take united action when it was possible”.³² Thus, it is clear that relations between the JLWS and other leagues were generally amicable, and that the JLWS not only participated in many non-Jewish suffrage groups and events, but was also instrumental in facilitating collaboration among religious leagues.

Various other documents reveal generally amicable interfaith relationships as well. Correspondence shows a mostly collegial relationship between Jews and non-Jews in the movement. On 13 November 1912, for example, less than two weeks after the founding of the JLWS, a letter from the London Society for Women's Suffrage (LSWS) office, addressed to the JLWS secretary, Miss Franklin, reads, “Thank you very much indeed for sending me the notice of The Jewish League for Woman Suffrage. It is splendid to hear of a fresh opening in our movement, but I much hope it does not mean that you will have less time to give to London Society's work. . . . I have put the notion you sent me up in the office, and I will certainly help the League in any way I can. Yours sincerely, P.S.”³³ Almost a year later, the two organizations were clearly still in contact, according to a letter in which Miss Franklin sent the LSWS a syllabus card of lectures arranged by the JLWS, and invited members to attend the lectures.³⁴

A 1974 interview with the suffragette Cicely Hale provides another example of collaboration between Jews and non-Jews. In the interview, she talks about the Schutzes of Chelsea, a Jewish couple who hosted the Information Department of the Women's Social and Political Union. Mrs. Schutz was, in Hale's words, a “very keen suffragette”.³⁵ The house

31 Ibid., 12.

32 Ibid..

33 London, LSE Women's Library, 2LSW/E/15/01/14 LSWS Correspondences with the Jewish League, 13 Nov. 1912.

34 Ibid., 22 Oct. 1913.

35 London, LSE Women's Library, 8SUF/B/021 Oral Evidence on the Suffragette and Suffragist Movements: the Brian Harrison interviews, interview of Miss Cicely Hale, 6 Nov. 1974.

was later raided and the department had to relocate, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that, for some time, a branch of the Women's Union was located in a Jewish home.

Articles in the *JC* also illuminate different ways that Jews were included and involved in secular suffrage events and societies. For years, the "For Our Women-Folk" section of the paper published invitations to suffragist rallies and meetings, and listed the various positions held by Jewish women in secular suffrage and feminist societies. On 8 June 1908, for example, an invitation appeared in "For Our Women-Folk" to a suffrage procession going from Victoria Embankment to the Albert Hall, where Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the revered suffragette and secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), was to preside. The invitation asked Jewish suffragists to join the march and bring friends. In November of that year, "For Our Women-Folk" reported that a Mrs. Gilbert Samuel was the Honorary Secretary to the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, whose object was "to form a bond of union between all Conservative and Unionist women in sympathy with the Women's Suffrage movement".³⁶

Various other sections of the *JC* also detail Jewish participation in the movement throughout the years. In May 1909, for instance, the *JC* claimed that "the number of Jewesses interested in the Women's Suffrage movement is certainly on the increase, and many coreligionists were present as visitors or helpers at the . . . Women's Exhibition held at Prince's Skating Rink".³⁷ The article went on to describe the many ways that Jews participated in the event, including the fact that Hertha Ayrton opened the exhibition on Friday, 14 May (a different woman associated with the suffrage cause was invited to open the exhibition each day), that Mrs. Saul Solomon and Mrs. Löwy helped tend the refreshment department, and that autographed books by Israel Zangwill were sold at the bookstall of the Women Writers Suffrage League.³⁸ These are just some of the examples of the ways in which Jews collaborated with non-Jewish suffragists.

An examination of the activities of various prominent Jewish suffragists reinforces the impression of an amicable relationship between Jews and non-Jews. Letters between Dora Montefiore and non-Jewish suffragists, for example, reveal interfaith friendships within the movement. In a letter of 8 January 1908 to a Miss Murby, for example, Mrs. Montefiore writes

³⁶ *JC*, 20 Nov. 1908.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1909.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

warmly, "Thanks very much dear friend for writing me", and "you are such a very good speaker [and] you are welcome here whenever you come".³⁹ In a 1974 interview, Dame Margery Corbett Ashby recalls, "Dora Montefiore was one of the new type of women that my mother's interest in suffrage was bringing into the home, and whom I found extremely stimulating and admired".⁴⁰ These are two of many examples of Dora Montefiore's amicable relationships with various non-Jewish suffragists and suffrage organizations.

Zangwill is another remarkable example of the collaboration between Jews and non-Jews in the movement. In addition to advocating for many Jewish causes, he was actively involved in the women's suffrage movement. Several of his speeches on the subject, such as "Talked Out!" given at Exeter Hall in 1907, received such praise that they were printed and sold.⁴¹ Correspondence between Zangwill and members of non-Jewish suffrage leagues, dated as early as 1906, further illuminate how popular he was in the movement among Jews and non-Jews alike. In a letter from 10 April 1906, for example, Zangwill apologizes to the LSWS secretary for having to decline a "complimentary request", presumably to speak at an event.⁴² A similar letter from November 1906 includes an apology to Miss Bompas for being unable to speak at a suffrage meeting in Kensington,⁴³ and yet another, to Miss Palliser, dated 19 December, states, "Some time ago I wrote you a letter containing my opinion on Woman's Suffrage. . . . Unless you have lost it, it might suffice you now. . . . I must beg to be excused from furnishing any fresh material at a period when I am very busy."⁴⁴ In November 1912, he also wrote to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, apologizing for having to miss a meeting.⁴⁵

Further highlighting Zangwill's popularity in the movement, a letter

39 London, LSE Women's Library, 9/01/0380 Autograph letter collection, Dora Montefiore to Miss Murby, 8 Jan. 1908.

40 Ibid., 8SUF/B/003 Oral Evidence on the Suffragette and Suffragist Movements: the Brian Harrison interviews, interview of Dame Margery Corbett Ashby, 7 May 1974.

41 London, British Library, 08415.f.14 (1) Verbatim report of Israel Zangwill's speech, "Talked Out!", given at Exeter Hall, 8 March 1907.

42 London, LSE Women's Library, 9/01/0118 Autograph letter collection, Mr. Israel Zangwill to Miss Palliser, 10 April 1906.

43 Ibid., 9/01/0119 Autograph letter collection, Mr. Israel Zangwill to Miss Bompas, 17 Nov. 1906.

44 Ibid., 9/01/0120 Autograph letter collection, Mr. Israel Zangwill to Miss Palliser, 19 Dec. 1906.

45 Ibid., 7MGF/A/1/072 Papers of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 3 Nov. 1912.

of 10 January 1908 to the celebrated Alys Russell reads, “To accept your invitation [to speak at a Women’s Suffrage meeting in Oxford] means a deviation from all my principles. I have hitherto fobbed off the Women’s Suffrage Provincial invitations which come at the rate of at least two a week by a stereotyped excuse that like the Christie Minstrels I never perform out of London”. He adds at the end: “I am speaking into a phonograph by the way, next week for the Women’s Freedom League”.⁴⁶ It is clear from this letter that his appearance at suffrage meetings and events was in high demand. This popularity is confirmed in an interview in the *JC* of 1908 with Zangwill himself, where he acknowledges that he has taken a prominent part in the movement and, additionally, has “been asked to speak in almost every town of the United Kingdom”.⁴⁷

Earlier, in 1906, the *JC* also reported that Zangwill was one of the speakers at the Women’s Suffrage banquet at the Savoy Hotel in London.⁴⁸ Six years later, another report appeared about Zangwill’s toast at a dinner for the first Congress of Man’s International Alliance for Women’s Suffrage.⁴⁹ A seating plan for a dinner from around 1910 also includes Zangwill’s name among various distinguished suffragists.⁵⁰ These are but a few examples of Zangwill’s prominence in the suffragist community, and of the positive interfaith relations that his popularity illustrates.

Edith Zangwill, Israel’s wife and the stepdaughter of Hertha Ayrton, was also much involved in the suffrage movement. The *JC* reports, for example, that in addition to the more prevalent suffrage leagues, she was a member of the Women Writers’ Suffrage League, “which is being formed for the purpose of agitating, by means of the pen, for the suffrage”.⁵¹

In a letter dated 7 November 1908 to the NUWSS, Mrs. Zangwill requests to cease her membership, stating that, considering the attitude of the LSWS towards other suffrage societies, “I have no alternative but to cease my membership. . . . I have hitherto belonged to all Woman Suffrage Societies, for the so-called militant societies have, with an admirable toleration, never tried to prevent their members from belonging also to the so-called constitutional societies”. She adds: “I, with many others,

46 *Ibid.*, 9/01/0381 Autograph letter collection, Mr. Israel Zangwill to Mrs. Alys Russell, 10 Jan. 1908.

47 *JC*, 12 June 1908.

48 *Ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1906.

49 *Ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1912.

50 London, LSE Women’s Library, 10/54/042 Seating plan for a dinner, c. 1910.

51 *JC*, 22 May 1908.

have felt that all the woman suffrage societies were necessary, in that they were all doing important work in their own special spheres".⁵²

The following year, in July 1909, Hertha Ayrton sent a similar letter to the LSWS treasurer, Miss McKee, writing, "It is with great regret that I feel compelled to resign my membership of the London Society for Women's Suffrage", and explaining her disapproval of some of the LSWS's political decisions.⁵³ The response to her letter, sent the following week by the LSWS secretary, Philippa Strachey, reads: "It is not possible to dispute the ground of your resignation, but it is with the very greatest regret that we withdraw so distinguished a name from the lists of our members".⁵⁴ The disappointment expressed by the LSWS demonstrates the secular league's respect for Ayrton, and reinforces the probability that relations between Jewish and non-Jewish suffragists were generally friendly.

Hugh Franklin is another important example of the friendly interfaith interactions within the suffrage movement. In a testimony given in December 1910, he describes joining the Men's Political Union (MPU) in January 1910 and attempting to strike Winston Churchill with a whip ("I was led to do this owing to righteous anger at [his] Action in treating the Women's deputation to the House of Commons", he explains).⁵⁵ Franklin's actions for the suffrage movement were often fairly aggressive (some time after his attempted attack on Churchill, he also set fire to a train), and the question of whether the violence of his strategy was helpful or harmful merits a study unto itself. While his strategy received praise from some, it was also used as an example of why Jewish involvement in the suffrage movement threatened the respect that Anglo-Jews had worked hard to gain. Furthermore, his militancy evokes questions about the participation of men in the movement, and what it means for men to employ militant strategies to fight for a cause which is not principally their own.

While he faced criticism from many (generally anti-suffrage) Jews, including his own family, numerous letters and cards suggest that his relations with non-Jewish suffragists were quite amicable. In 1910 and 1911, for example, while in prison, he received several letters from suffragettes thanking him for his actions. This includes a Christmas card

52 London, LSE Women's Library, 9/01/0682 Autograph letter collection, Mrs. Edith Zangwill to NUWSS, 7 Nov. 1908.

53 Ibid., 9/01/0584 Autograph letter collection, Mrs. Hertha Ayrton to LSWS, 7 July 1909.

54 Ibid., 9/01/0585 Autograph letter collection, Philippa Strachey to Hertha Ayrton, 14 July 1909.

55 Ibid., 7HFD/A/2/01-18 Papers of Hugh Franklin and Elsie Duval, Dec. 1910.

from Bertha Brewster, saying that he and the women in Holloway Prison would be in her thoughts during Christmas, and that “I am sure I need not say how delighted I am over your behaviour. . . . I think that all the women in this movement feel very grateful to the members of the M.P.U. for the work they have done”.⁵⁶ Many more letters and cards express similar praise, including one dated 8 March 1911 from Frederick Pethick-Lawrence to “Franklin” (indicating a certain level of familiarity), which reads: “Just a word of admiration for your splendid courage & the brave stand you are makg” (*sic*).⁵⁷ Another from Christabel Pankhurst of May 1911 reads: “I hope you have now quite recovered from your recent experience in prison”.⁵⁸ Around the same time, in February 1911, he received a card from the Young Purple White & Green Club “in grateful recognition of his services to the Woman’s Cause”. The card expresses the Club’s “sincere and hearty congratulations for your splendid protest, and subsequent imprisonment”, and states, “we all feel very proud to think that you are a member of our Club and hope that if the time ever comes, we may rise to the occasion as you did, for the good of the Cause”.⁵⁹

Thus, like the Zangwills, the Montefiores, and others, Hugh Franklin clearly maintained amicable relationships with non-Jewish suffragists, collaborating with and gaining much support from various non-Jewish activists and groups. Again, however, it is of note that he, like Montefiore, Ayrton, and the Zangwills, came from a more established, middle-class Anglo-Jewish family, and therefore came into the movement with a certain amount of privilege. One must wonder whether other Jews, such as working-class Anglo-Jews or Eastern European immigrants, were received with such openness, and whether amicable relations between prominent Jewish suffragists and non-Jewish suffrage leagues were genuine or purely diplomatic. Nevertheless, it is clear that there did exist a certain amount of friendly collaboration and interfaith support within the movement.

Indeed, there is even evidence of interfaith marriages among suffragists. Hugh Franklin married Elsie Duval, a non-Jewish suffragette, at the cost of his father disinheriting him for marrying outside the faith. In her doctoral thesis, Ruth Abrams writes that “Hugh Franklin had no intention

56 *Ibid.*, 7HFD/A/4/01/24 Papers of Hugh Franklin, Bertha Brewster to Hugh Franklin, 24 Dec. 1910.

57 *Ibid.*, 7HFD/A/4/02/20 Papers of Hugh Franklin, F. Pethick Lawrence to Hugh Franklin, 8 March 1911.

58 *Ibid.*, 7HFD/A/4/02/32 Papers of Hugh Franklin, Christabel Pankhurst to Hugh Franklin, 11 May 1911.

59 *Ibid.*, 7HFD/A/2/14 Papers of Hugh Franklin, Letter and card from YPW&GC, Feb. 1911.

of getting married in a synagogue, and asked militant suffrage leader Christabel Pankhurst to be one of his witnesses at the registry office".⁶⁰ In addition to the romantic relationship between Hugh and Elsie, this example provides further evidence of the interfaith friendships within the movement, as Hugh was evidently close enough with the renowned Christabel Pankhurst to include her in the wedding ceremony. Nor was Edith Zangwill Jewish. Although her stepmother was Jewish, neither of Edith's biological parents were.

Despite these clearly amicable (and sometimes even romantic) relationships, there is also, unsurprisingly, some documentation of hostility between Jews and non-Jews. In *Woman's Cause*, for example, Linda Gordon Kuzmack introduces the idea that Sylvia Pankhurst expressed antisemitic sentiments, discouraging Jews from joining her East End Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies.⁶¹ Additionally, in a letter of 9 January 1907, a Mrs. Rowe writes to a Mrs. McIlquham criticizing Dora Montefiore. She explains that she distrusts Mrs. Montefiore and dislikes her "personal character" which she feels lacks "sincerity [and] delicacy of heart". She adds that "she has been able to influence people in Hammersmith, & I fear as all enemy [sic] she is not to be trusted".⁶² This is one of several letters in which Mrs. Rowe criticizes Dora Montefiore. The scarcity of other criticisms of Mrs. Montefiore's participation in the suffrage movement, as well as the language used by Mrs. Rowe ("personal character", "distrust", "enemy", "not to be trusted"), suggest that antisemitism may have fuelled her distrust. It is also interesting that, according to Kuzmack, Dora Montefiore had previously protested against Sylvia Pankhurst's antisemitism,⁶³ and one must wonder whether this further incited Mrs. Rowe's virulence.

Aside from a few isolated letters, however, it is difficult to find evidence that antisemitism or hostility were prevalent in the movement. It seems more likely, considering the evidence examined earlier in the chapter, that relations were primarily amicable. These positive interactions, though especially evident with wealthier Jews, nevertheless illustrate the rising acceptance of Jews in England, and highlight the increasingly stable social position of British Jews. (Working-class Jewish and non-Jewish women sometimes collaborated in other settings, especially around issues of

60 Ruth Abrams, "Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1899–1926" (doctoral thesis, Brandeis University, 1996), 65.

61 Kuzmack, *Woman's Cause*, 139.

62 London, LSE Women's Library, 9/13/40 Autograph letter collection, Mrs. Rowe to Mrs. Harriet McIlquham, 9 Jan. 1907.

63 Kuzmack, *Woman's Cause*, 139.

workers' rights. It is unfortunately beyond my scope here, but the question of whether they collaborated within the suffrage movement merits further research.) Further examination of relations between Jewish and non-Jewish suffragists, and particularly how working-class Jewish suffragists were received in the movement, would be fascinating.

Conclusion

The women's suffrage movement in Britain reached its peak at a time of great change for the Anglo-Jewish population. Jews, and particularly Jewish men, had recently been emancipated, and were becoming increasingly assimilated. At the same time, nearly 150,000 Jewish immigrants were arriving from Eastern Europe, offsetting the social acceptance that more established Anglo-Jewish families had worked hard to gain. In reaction to the various social and political issues that this mass immigration provoked, and influenced by a growing feminist discourse in Britain, Jewish women began forming their own social reform and welfare groups.

In the context of these many developments, Jewish involvement in the women's suffrage movement, and the relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish suffragists, evoked many impassioned debates among British Jews about how to negotiate boundaries between Jewish and secular life. While interfaith relations among suffragists seem to have been generally respectful and amicable, the heated disagreements within the Jewish community reveal larger anxieties about how to assimilate successfully into British culture while remaining distinctly Jewish. The complexity of becoming integrated members of society while maintaining a Jewish identity, and the intricate interplay between social inclusion and exclusion (whether self-imposed or because of antisemitism), are dynamics which Jews in the Diaspora continue to navigate today.

*Note on contributor

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