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‘L’antisémitisme est l’auxiliaire obligatoire du fascisme’: Jewish Communists, Antifascism and Antisemitism in France, 1944-1960s

Zoé Grumberg

PhD Candidate; Fellow of the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah,
Centre d’histoire de Sciences Po (CHSP), Paris, France
zoe.grumberg@sciencespo.fr

Abstract

This article studies the discursive construction by Jewish communists of the struggle against antisemitism in France between 1944 and the 1960s. It shows that after the Holocaust, without denying the racial aspect of Nazi antisemitism, Jewish communists adopted the French Communist Party and the USSR’s antifascist analysis of antisemitism according to which antisemitism was the corollary of fascism, a strategy to divide people and the working class. However, after the War, Jewish communists’ fight against antisemitism was also shaped by their experiences as Jews during the Holocaust, by their commitment to defend Jewish interests and by their desire to be (re)integrated into the French nation. The author argues that through a specific Jewish and communist antifascist fight against antisemitism, Jewish communists managed to remain faithful to their multiples allegiances – to Jews, to the PCF, and to French universalism – and to reach multiples audiences that identified, at least temporarily, with antifascism.

Keywords

France – antifascism – Jews – communists – Holocaust – memory – resistance

At the beginning of December 1944, leaders of the French Communist Party’s (PCF) Jewish organizations penned two letters to Maurice Thorez, secretary general of the PCF, who had just returned to France after he spent the war in

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the USSR.¹ One of the letters was also sent to several non-communist French political parties. In these letters, Jewish communists described the difficult and specific situation that Jews faced in France after several years of persecution. They painted German and French antisemites during the war as 'Hitler cannibals' and 'Nazis', thus associating antisemitism with a specific regime: Nazism. They made clear that the persecution they faced during the war was specific and specifically targeted Jews. At the same time, they reminded Thorez that 'racists' not only persecuted and killed Jews, 'racists' could also gain purchase from 'patriots and French'. For despite France's Liberation, 'Pro-Nazi' racism and antisemitism were still present, used by those who wanted to prevent the reconstruction of the country and divide French people. Jewish communists asked the PCF and political parties to fight racism and antisemitism, not only for Jews' sake, but for the benefit of the whole country.

These letters go against the idea that after the war, Jews chose neither to affirm the specificity of the fate they suffered nor to ask for specific recognition. According to some historians, Jews would have participated in a '*régime mémoriel d'unité nationale*' [memorial system of national unity], through two different frames of reference: the Gaullist and patriotic one, or the antifascist one. Both would have led to the repression of the memory of the Shoah in France, among Jews and non-Jews.² Recent works have challenged this idea, showing that in various countries this so-called silence of the state, society and especially Jews themselves was a 'myth'.³ Other works reevaluated Jewish

- 1 Musée de la Résistance nationale de Champigny-sur-Marne (MRN), fonds David Diamant (DD), lettre de la Direction du groupe juif à Maurice Thorez, 5 décembre 1944 ; Archives départementales de Seine-Saint-Denis (hereafter: AD 93), Fonds David Diamant (DD), 335 J 65–86 Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entraide (UJRE), 335 J 65 lettre de Charles Lederman, secrétaire général de l'UJRE, à Maurice Thorez et à plusieurs partis politiques français, 8 décembre 1944.
- 2 Pieter Lagrou, *Mémoires patriotiques et occupation nazie: Résistants, requis et déportés en Europe occidentale, 1945–1965* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 2003); Johann Michel and Esther Benbassa, *Gouverner les mémoires: Les politiques mémorielles en France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2010); Samuel Moyn, 'Intellectuals and Nazism,' in *Oxford Handbook to Postwar European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 671–691.
- 3 Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011); François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2012); Simon Perego, "'Pleurons-les, bénissons leurs noms': Les commémorations de la Shoah et de la Seconde Guerre mondiale dans le monde juif parisien entre 1944 et 1967 : rituels, mémoires et identités' (PhD diss., Sciences Po Paris, 2016).

efforts to reconstruct Jewish life after the Shoah in France.⁴ It is true, however, that Jews feared if they asked for reparation they would be met with denial by the state as well as a new upsurge of antisemitism in France. The French state based its reconstruction on universalism and the shared sufferings of all French and was reluctant to use a 'Jewish' category for reparations after Vichy.⁵ In accordance with their diverse political cultures, Jews thus constructed different discursive strategies while falling within this universalist frame of reference. Jewish communists also had to adapt to the French Communist Party's Marxist universalism and its desire to appear a national and patriotic political party in the context of French reconstruction.

Several months later, starting in April 1945, the discourse of Jewish communists on postwar antisemitism began to evolve. While still describing Nazism as 'Hitlerism', and while acknowledging the racial aspect of Nazi antisemitism, they associated postwar antisemitism with 'fascism' rather than Nazism. How can we explain such a change in only a few months? Between the autumn 1944 and the spring 1945, the PCF had time to re-organize itself and to clarify its political project. Firstly, its fear of appearing as a party of immigrants and Jews led them to encourage immigrants and minorities to integrate into French structures and to fight alongside French people, contrary to the period of the war during which immigrants and French, as well as Jews and non-Jews, were divided in different groups of resistant fighters.⁶ Secondly, the PCF feared that Jews in the party would feel closer to other Jews with whom they shared a common destiny during the Holocaust, rather than to the French and international non-Jewish working class. The party described such Jewish 'nationalist tendencies' as 'reverse racism'.⁷ These two fears explain how the PCF conceptualized antisemitism in 1945, after several months of silence on the topic. In May 1945, for instance, the party described the 'anti-Semite riots' that had just taken place in Paris as 'an aspect of fascism'.⁸ Reducing antisemitism to an aspect of fascism seemed to have one

4 Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France: Rebuilding Family and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Seán Hand and Steven T. Katz, ed., *Post-Holocaust France and the Jews, 1945–1955* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Laura Hobson Faure, *Un 'plan Marshall juif': La présence juive américaine en France après la Shoah, 1944–1954* (Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2018). For a complete bibliography, see: <https://hdja1945.hypotheses.org/>.

5 Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 53.

6 Stéphane Courtois, Denis Peschanski and Adam Rayski, *Le sang de l'étranger: Les immigrés de la MOI dans la Résistance* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

7 AD 93, PCF, 261 J 5, Secrétariat, 18 décembre 1944.

8 AD 93, PCF, 261 J 4, Bureau politique, 25 mai 1945.

main goal: it avoided any Jewish 'national' claims and encouraged Jews to fight alongside all antifascists against fascism. Jewish communists thus understood that they had to choose their words carefully when speaking about postwar antisemitism if they wanted to find an ally in the PCF. They subsequently adopted an antifascist analysis of antisemitism, as we shall see.

Antifascism is a phenomenon that developed during the interwar period as a global and transnational culture and social movement.⁹ Antifascists shared in a desire to fight any form of fascism. However, they could differ in terms of political ideologies and strategies and could be either 'revolutionary' or 'counter-revolutionary' antifascists.¹⁰ One might think that following the Allied victory, antifascism would disappear after the Second World War. However, the legacy of antifascism remained important. For Dave Renton, antifascism cannot be reduced simply to opposition to fascism, which could encompass different actors such as states and media who were more 'non-fascists' than antifascists. Antifascism implies activism and organizations.¹¹ This is the approach utilized in this article to explore Jewish communists' activism against antisemitism. However, as this article also demonstrates, after the Second World War and before the Cold War, Jewish communists also used antifascism as a rhetorical tool to address non-communist political parties who had fought against fascism and Nazism during the war and were thus 'non-fascists' or, broadly speaking, following the approach of Nigel Copsey, 'antifascists'.¹² In postwar France and before the Cold War, through their antifascism, Jewish communists reached out to not only the PCF but also to French society and non-communist political parties whose legitimacy was connected to the Resistance and Free France.

This article studies the discursive construction of Jewish communists' struggle against antisemitism after the Second World War. It analyzes different types of sources: speeches, reports of exhibitions, and political pamphlets. These sources are different in their content, nature, goals, audiences, and contexts. They reveal how Jewish communists conceptualized antisemitism differently – but always through an antifascist frame of reference – depending on the audience they wanted to reach and the goal they pursued. They also reveal the continuity in Jewish communists' antifascism before and after the

9 Hugo García et al., ed., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

10 Michael M. Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms: From the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

11 Dave Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Britain in the 1940s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

12 Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

Second World War in France. For Jewish communists, antisemitism was indeed wrapped up as part of the struggle against fascism.

However, after the war, Jewish communists' fight against antisemitism was also shaped by their experiences as Jews during the Holocaust and their commitment to defend Jewish interests, and by their strong desire to be (re) integrated into the French nation. In this regard, this article intends to nuance stereotypical approaches to Jewish communists according to which 'communist propaganda and a defense or concern with Jewish interests were mutually exclusive, even antagonistic aims'.¹³ Following Gerben Zaagsma and Renée Poznanski,¹⁴ this article shows that until the 1950s Jewish communists managed to defend Jewish interests while being communists or, should we say, antifascists. Through a specific Jewish and communist antifascist fight against antisemitism, Jewish communists managed to remain faithful to their multiple allegiances – to Jews, to the PCF and to French universalism – and to reach multiple audiences that identified, at least temporarily, with antifascism.

This antifascist frame of reference would find its limitations when the USSR, the incarnation of antifascism, was suspected of antisemitism in the beginning of the 1950s. Apart from one or two exceptions, notably in 1964, when one episode of antisemitism in the USSR was too close to Nazi racial antisemitism to be ignored, Jewish communists were incapable of confronting antisemitism in the USSR.

Particularism versus Universalism: Jewish Communists, the PCF and French Universalism after the Second World War

This article focuses on immigrant and Yiddish-speaking Jewish communists from Eastern Europe, who arrived in France during the interwar years and joined the French Communist Party and its structures for immigrants, the *Main-d'oeuvre immigrée* (MOI), created in 1926. The Jewish sub-section of the MOI was composed of approximately 250 active members at the beginning of the 1930s, approximately five hundred after the Popular Front.¹⁵ However, through several associations, newspapers, activities, its influence on immigrant

13 Gerben Zaagsma, 'The Local and the International: Jewish Communists in Paris Between the Wars,' *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 8 (2009): 345–363.

14 Renée Poznanski, 'On Jews, Frenchmen, Communists, and the Second World War,' in *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (Studies in Contemporary Jewry; 20) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 168–198; Renée Poznanski, *Propagandes et persécutions: La Résistance et le 'problème juif', 1940–1944* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).

15 Poznanski, 'On Jews, Frenchmen, Communists, and the Second World War,' 177–178.

Jews was more widespread. Communism became one of the major political forces among Yiddish-speaking Jews in the interwar period. In 1936, their newspaper, *Naye prese*, was read by more than ten thousand people.¹⁶ During the Second World War, Jewish communists fought in the clandestine Jewish groups of the PCF and also created several organizations dedicated to saving children, helping Jews and warning them about deportation.¹⁷

After the war, Jewish communists gathered around an organization born in April 1943 as a Resistance organization which aimed at uniting all Jewish Resistance movements: *L'Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entraide* [UJRE; Union of Jews for Resistance and Mutual Aid]. Composed of approximately five thousand members in 1945, the UJRE became a 'satellite organization'¹⁸ of the PCF and was itself the umbrella organization of many Jewish communist associations. There would have been at least twenty thousand Jewish communists in France after the Second World War, which represented approximately ten percent of the total of the Jewish population in France.¹⁹ Jewish communists were highly active in the reconstruction of the Jewish life. They fought to help Jews who suffered from several years of persecution and the loss of their families, goods and properties, or who had come back from deportation suffering from major trauma or illness. Jewish communists were also committed to the continued fight against antisemitism.

However, after the war, the PCF wanted to suppress most immigrant sub-sections of the MOI: the party feared immigrants' autonomy and tried not to appear as the immigrants' party in these patriotic times. Nonetheless, Jewish communists managed to maintain most of their organizations by convincing the PCF with a political argument: communism was not settled enough among

16 Poznanski, 173; About Jewish communists' press, see: Nick Underwood, 'Dressing the Modern Jewish Communist Girl in Interwar Paris,' *French Politics, Culture & Society* 34, no. 1 (2016): 86–103; Nick Underwood, 'Our Most Beautiful Children: Communist Contests and Poetry for Immigrant Jewish Youth in Popular Front France,' *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 1 (2017): 64–100.

17 Poznanski, *Propagandes et persécutions*; Annette Wiewiorka, *Ils étaient juifs, résistants, communistes* (Paris: Perrin, 2018). The two historians differ in their analysis. According to Annette Wiewiorka, Jewish communists focused mostly on the armed Resistance and on the PCF's military objectives, at the expense of the saving of Jews. Renée Poznanski shows how Jewish communists adapted their propaganda to their audience and how they were among the first to warn Jews about deportation.

18 Jacques Ion, *La fin des militants ?* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Les Éditions ouvrières, 1997).

19 Wladimir Rabinovitch dit Rabi, *Anatomie Du Judaïsme Français* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962). Rabi gives this number for the 1960s. Jewish communists being more popular in the immediate postwar period, we can legitimately deduce that they were at least twenty thousand.

Jews in France. In closing Yiddish-speaking Jewish communist organizations, it would lead Bundist and Zionist organizations to take advantage.²⁰ The PCF also acknowledged the 'special claims' Jews had after five years of persecution and realized that letting Jews reconstruct Jewish life would be a first step towards their integration in France. Jewish communists were also allowed to develop their own cultural manifestations.²¹ Their diverse associations became the 'Jewish section' of the PCF. Jewish mass organizations had to be a communication channel between the PCF and 'the masses': social and cultural activities could play a major role in transmitting communism to Jewish masses. However, the PCF condemned any Jewish 'nationalism' and reminded Jews that they also had to take part in the fight of the French working class (notably through a mandatory participation in their PCF's cells).

As other 'mass organizations' of the PCF, every Jewish communists' activity, publication, and meeting was closely monitored by the PCF. Upstream, the PCF met Jewish communists and gave them, or reminded them, of the orientations they had to follow, for instance how to talk about antisemitism to their supporters. Downstream, mass organizations also had to send reports so that the PCF could ensure that they had followed the line. Despite this '*volonté d'emprise*'²² [will to control] of the PCF, Jewish communists retained, at least for several years, some room for maneuver. They not only participated in the PCF's various antifascist struggles, they also engaged with their own battles – as long as they did not contradict the PCF's line. For instance, while fighting against antisemitism was not the PCF's priority, it was at the heart of Jewish communists' program. But they had to adopt the party line on antisemitism, whether or not they totally agreed with it.

Jewish communists also had to adapt to French universalism if they wanted to be heard by the Government. After the Liberation, Jews in France were essentially told to be discreet as French authorities insisted that they would not recognize any distinct Jewish problem that they felt might endanger French postwar unity. They warned Jews that France was coming out of a four-year period of racism so Jews should not themselves act 'racist'.²³ Universalism – which can

20 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 65, letters of Adam Rayski, autumn 1944.

21 AD 93, PCF, 261 J 5, Secrétariat, 18 décembre 1944.

22 Claude Pannetier and Bernard Pudal, 'La Volonté d'emprise: Le Référentiel Biographique Stalinién et Ses Usages Dans l'univers Stalinién (Éléments Problématiques),' in *Autobiographies, Autocritiques, Aveux Dans Le Monde Communiste* (Paris: Belin, 2002), 15–39.

23 Anne Grynberg, 'Des signes de résurgence de l'antisémitisme dans la France de l'après-guerre (1945–1953)?' *Les Cahiers de la Shoah* 1, no 5 (2001): 171–223; Poznanski, *Propagandes et persécutions*; Renée Poznanski, *Les Juifs en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018).

be defined as a notion according to which a law or a rule applies equally to all – was the frame of reference of the French State and Jews had to fall within it if they wanted to be heard. The state also feared a new rise in antisemitism if actions were taken in favor of Jews.

Did this postwar French universalism really exclude any particular claim? During the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, as Maurice Samuels has convincingly shown, French universalism did not oppose the universal and the particular as it tends to do today. Some pluralism existed.²⁴ For instance, Pierre Birnbaum has shown that during the Third Republic, French 'State Jews' did not always keep their Jewishness private.²⁵ Regarding the interwar period, Nadia Malinovich described how some Jews had developed a form of 'dualism', deciding neither to hide their Jewishness nor to retreat into their Jewish exclusivity but to combine their Frenchness and Jewishness.²⁶ These reflections also apply to immigrant Jews (even though they could not hope for the same type of integration as French 'State Jews', at least not immediately). In the interwar period, immigrant Jewish communists were encouraged by the PCF to integrate into French society and to get closer to the French working class. However, they also defended Jewish interests and Yiddish culture. They never intended to fully assimilate into France, rather, they sought to integrate. On assimilation in France, sociologist Michel Wieviorka has nuanced the so-called French model of assimilation. He explains that this model is often described as 'a construction which not only represses particular cultural identities in private space, but tends to exert pressure to dissolve it'.²⁷ Integration, on the contrary, does not repress specificities as long as these specificities do not interfere with French republicanism and universalism.

In 1944–1945, the context was of course different: the political regime was not the same as the one during the interwar period and the new Republic had followed several years of political collaboration under Vichy's non-democratic regime. Reconstructing the French nation and consolidating democracy

24 Maurice Anthony Samuels, *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016).

25 Pierre Birnbaum, 'Between Social and Political Assimilation: Remarks on the History of Jews in France', in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 94–127.

26 Nadia Malinovich, *French and Jewish: Culture and the Politics of Identity in Early Twentieth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43. 'Spire's solution, however, was not for Jews to retreat into their own cultural exclusivity but rather to affirm their Jewishness as an attempt to bring a truly universal society into being'.

27 Michel Wieviorka, 'L'intégration: Un concept en difficulté,' *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 2, no. 125 (2008): 232.

demanded more unity than ever. However, Jews did not choose to remain silent in order to facilitate their reintegration. A space existed for specific claims, as Jewish communists' discursive strategy illustrates. In their fight for their rights as well as against antisemitism, Jewish communists tried to strike the right balance between the particularism of their situation, French universalism, and the patriotic politics of the PCF in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. They did so through an antifascist analysis of antisemitism.

Finding Allies to Fight Against Antisemitism: Antisemitism as Part of Fascism

Several months after the liberation of Paris, the economic and social situation of Jews was precarious. There was antisemitism prevalent in some Parisian neighborhoods, which centered on the question of whether or not returning Jews were entitled to the return of their former apartments.²⁸ The new inhabitants, who had taken these apartments during the war, organized demonstrations during which antisemitic slogans were heard.²⁹ Some fights even occurred between Jews and non-Jews in several neighborhoods and the police had to intervene. It reinforced Jewish communists' will to act against antisemitism. They tried to mobilize their affiliates as well as non-communist Jewish organizations. They also wanted to convince the Government, political parties and the PCF to act against antisemitism. They particularly hoped for legislation. To be heard, they adopted a specific discourse about antisemitism, an antifascist discourse that they hoped would convince not only the PCF but also Jews and non-Jews, communists or not. In their meetings and congresses, as well as in their press, they communicated this discourse to their affiliates and allies.

During the first congress of the UJRE in April 1945, Charles Lederman, the organization's secretary general, delivered a long speech. He started with a lengthy report of Jews' heroic activities in Europe in the fight against Hitler's

28 Grynberg, 'Des signes de résurgence de l'antisémitisme dans la France de l'après-guerre (1945–1953) ?'; Leora Auslander, 'Coming Home? Jews in Postwar Paris,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 237–259; Emmanuel Debono, 'L'antisémitisme en France au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale,' *Archives Juives* 49, no. 2 (2016); Shannon Lee Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

29 Isabelle Backouche and Sarah Gensburger, 'Très Chers Voisins: Antisémitisme et Politique Du Logement, Paris 1942–1944,' *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 62, no. 2/3 (2015): 172–200.

project of extermination. He developed more specifically the case of Jewish communists in France and highlighted the help that they had given to Jews in need, their involvement in the Resistance, their fights against Nazis and members of the militia, and their sacrifices and heroic actions in the Liberation of France. He depicted Jewish communists as antifascist fighters, who managed to fight as Jews, as communists, and side by side with non-Jewish French people. He highlighted armed resistance by Jewish communists and their efforts in saving Jews from deportation. This last point was important: Lederman wanted to prove to non-communist Jewish organizations (notably Zionist organizations such as the *Fédération des sociétés juives de France* [FSJF; Federation of Jewish Societies of France] as well as American organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or Joint) that Jewish communists had their place in Jewish life, and that they had played their part in the rescue of Jews, despite their political engagement and resistance in the clandestine French Communist Party.³⁰ This was important because Jewish communists were trying to join forces with the Zionist FSJF with whom relationships were not necessarily easy, despite common organizations created during the war. Following the PCF's *Front national* strategy and the alliances made by all Resistance organizations in the *Conseil national de la Résistance* [National Council of the Resistance] in 1943, all Jewish organizations had united in the *Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France* [CRIF; Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions] in 1943–1944.³¹

Lederman then emphasized the fact that, despite the Liberation of France, the war against fascism was not over, saying 'only the definitive annihilation of Hitlerism and Fascism in all of its forms could bring true liberation'. He thus presented the UJRE's goals for the reconstruction of Jewish life. Among the eight bullets points he highlighted – all focusing on the immediate problems that Jews faced – the fight 'against fascism and antisemitism' was the first one. He said:

Given this situation, what are the tasks of the Union? The tasks of every Jew in France? First and foremost, as we have done so far and as we have urged Jews to do, and as we will not stop repeating it as long as it is useful,

³⁰ Debates about the definition of Jewish resistance already divided Jews during the War. It also divided them, as well as historians, after the War. See: Claude Lévy, 'La résistance juive en France: De l'enjeu de mémoire à l'histoire critique,' *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 22, no. 1 (1989): 117–128.

³¹ Samuel Ghiles-Meilhac, *Le CRIF: De la Résistance juive à la tentation du lobby: De 1943 à nos jours* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010).

the war against fascism and antisemitism must be continued. Fighting fascism and antisemitism by calling for the definitive abolition of all discrimination between Jews and non-Jews, by calling for war criminals to be punished in the most ruthless way. The government must not, by omission, favor the fifth column, allow antisemites to come forward freely. The government has the ability to legislate. We know it did not always do it in a happy way. It has a great opportunity to do well. A law existed before the war, the so-called Marchandau law, which repressed antisemitic activities. This law has been repealed. We must reinstate it. It must be proclaimed that antisemitism is the obligatory auxiliary of fascism. History shows that the curve of antisemitism rises or falls with the march of reaction. When the latter is in power, antisemitism flourishes. When democracy is in force, antisemitism decreases and even disappears, as it is the case, for example, in the Soviet Union.³²

In his speech, Ledeman clearly connected the fight against antisemitism with the one against fascism. This was logical since the war was not yet over in April 1945. Significantly, however, this rhetoric would be the one that Jewish communists, who followed the USSR and the PCF's line, adopted.³³ Such a discourse could reach several audiences at the same time.

Firstly, it was perfectly aligned with the PCF's analysis of antisemitism, according to which 'antisemitism manifestations . . . are an aspect of fascism'.³⁴ This postwar PCF's analysis resembled the one the party had already adopted during the Popular Front Period. In 1937, after a first period during which they seemed to ignore that Jews were particularly targeted by Nazi Germany, the Comintern and Communist parties realized that Jews were being specifically targeted by fascism as Jews.³⁵ Jews and non-Jews were however encouraged to fight 'fascism' together. Jewish communists' leaders were in charge of explaining this to their supporters. They did it in their press. While explaining the

32 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 72, premier congrès de l'UJRE, avril 1945, discours de Charles Lederman.

33 See for instance all their speeches during conferences between 1945 and 1963 (we don't have archives for later conferences), articles in their press such as *Droit et Liberté* or *Naye prese*.

34 AD 93, PCF, 261 J 4, Bureau politique, 25 mai 1945.

35 'A 'first draft of the concept resolution on the Jewish question' that circulated within the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in May/June 1937 reveals what concerns existed within the organization. Outlining the ECCI position on antisemitism (in a somewhat intriguing mix of a class-based analysis coupled with a tacit, if implicit, recognition of the racial aspect of Nazi antisemitism), the document represented fascism as the 'main enemy of the Jews' and asserted communists all over the world were obliged to take part in the 'struggle of Jews for equal rights'. Zaagsma, 'The Local and the International.'

danger of fascism for the world Jewry, they stressed that ‘the fate of Jews . . . was closely connected to that of democracy, the Popular Front and the Soviet Union’.³⁶ It meant that fighting against fascism would also help Jews, so Jews should join the antifascist battle and should not dissociate these two objectives. This analysis was used again after the Holocaust about postwar antisemitism, as Lederman’s speech illustrates. According to him, antisemitism and fascism should be fought together, because antisemitism is always the auxiliary of fascism. After the war, the main difference lay in Jewish communists’ constant mention of the death of six million Jews, which proved, if it was necessary, the dangers of Fascism and Nazism for Jews. In his closing speech, Louis Gronowski – the head of the clandestine MOI during the war and a former member of the Jewish section of the MOI – also said that modern antisemitism was a maneuver of ‘reaction’ to distract people’s attention away from real responsibility for their misery’.³⁷ Jewish communists’ goal here was to reassure the PCF that Jewish communists did not prioritize the fight against antisemitism over the French working class struggle and the fight against fascism: they indeed encouraged their members to join a more general antifascist fight.

Moreover, Jewish communists wanted to convince non-communist political parties and French society to act against racism and antisemitism. They intended to show them – as well as the PCF – that they were not prioritizing their Jewishness over their French identity and the fight for democracy. During the first congress of the UJRE in 1945, Louis Gronowski said that the enemies of the Jews were also the enemies of France, the enemies of all free people. He went as far as saying: ‘Then, we can say that when we are looking for the ways to fight against antisemitism, we are in reality working in the interests of the French nation. The UJRE thus appeared as a purely national organization’.³⁸ Equally, by stating that ‘antisemitism is the corollary of Fascism’, Lederman played on the fear of a revival of fascism, even though France was now liberated. Without denying the specificity of the Holocaust, Jewish communists also often expressed the idea that other victims would have followed Jews. This is why everyone, and not only Jews, should fight antisemitism and racism. By repeating this analysis to their supporters again and again, and through various means (speeches, newspapers, leaflets), Jewish communists wanted to

36 Gerben Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 72.

37 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 72, premier congrès de l’UJRE, avril 1945, discours de clôture de Louis Gronowski.

38 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 72, premier congrès de l’UJRE, avril 1945, discours de clôture de Louis Gronowski.

convince them, and to teach them, the language they should adopt in their wider campaign.

Lastly, Jewish communists hoped to convince non-communist Jews to join forces with them in their fight against antisemitism. They followed the PCF's new popular front strategy – after the war the PCF wanted to finally implement the social and democratic dynamic that the Popular Front was unable to bring in the 1930s³⁹ – and articulated an antifascist discourse that targeted communists as well as non-communists Jews who wanted the eradication of antisemitism and fascism. It temporarily worked. For instance, in May 1945, the CRIF – an organization that Jewish communists belonged to but did not dominate – sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior regarding a case of neighborhood antisemitism. The exact same vocabulary was used: 'a recent and painful experience [the Holocaust] proves that it is often in the shadow of antisemitism that attacks against the State security are prepared'.⁴⁰ It reveals that non-communist and communist Jews shared the same analysis: fascism was a threat both for Jews and for a democratic state; antisemitism was the first step towards fascism.

Non-communist Jewish reactions to the UJRE first congress were also quite positive and after that, Jewish communists and Zionists started to work to unite their two main organizations: the *Fédération des sociétés juives de France* and the UJRE. However, it failed in 1948 because of political disagreements in the context of the Cold War. Jewish communists also managed to be part of an alliance of anti-racist Jewish organizations, the LICA, a proclaimed apolitical association created in 1927, and the *Mouvement national contre le racisme* [MNCR; National Movement Against Racism] that they founded in 1942 and which was in the PCF's orbit. They merged into the *Alliance antiraciste* in 1946, after two years of discussions.⁴¹ However, less than two years later, also during the growing conflicts of the Cold War, the *Alliance antiraciste* split. The LICA said it did not want to be affiliated with any political party, especially the PCF.

So, in 1945, different political parties and Jewish organizations found a common 'antifascist' language against antisemitism. Alliances then seemed possible. Nazism was not over yet and it was urgent to pursue and condemn every fascist still in France that had not been arrested. However, the growing tensions of the Cold War, starting in 1947, put an end to these alliances. Discourses

39 Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow, *Le Parti Rouge: Une Histoire Du PCF 1920–2020* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2020), 98.

40 Centre de documentation du Mémorial de la Shoah, Fonds David Diamant (DD), Lettre du CRIF à Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur, Paris, 11 mai 1945.

41 Cécile Amar, 'L'antiracisme dans la guerre et l'après-guerre: Exemple de la LICA, du MNCR et du MRAP' (Master's thesis, Université Paris 1, Panthéon Sorbonne, 1994).

also evolved in different directions: Jewish communists' antifascist analysis of antisemitism became more political. In the Cold War context, communists everywhere started to apply 'fascists' to all their enemies, even those who had fought against Nazism and Fascism during the war. Jewish communists also mainly targeted antisemitism that came from Western democracies – while denying antisemitism in the USSR.

Bringing the Non-Jewish and Jewish French Together: Remembering the Common Fight Against Fascism

For the PCF, the antifascist analysis of antisemitism aimed at showing Jews and non-Jews that they were fighting the same enemy: fascism. The party also depicted antisemitism as wrong because it was creating a difference that should not exist between Jews and non-Jews. Thus, the party hoped to convince its Jewish and non-Jewish members that they were alike.⁴² As early as the inter-war years, the PCF had tried to bring the French working class, immigrants and Jews closer. But after the war, the situation grew in complexity. How could Jews ask for the specific recognition that they deserved without cutting themselves off from non-Jewish people who also suffered during the war? Jewish communists were aware of this contradiction and had to find the right words to defend Jewish interests while making possible their reintegration in France. This meant getting rid of the antisemitism that was still present among French people and to fight against Jewish prejudice directed against French people: everything should be done to bring Jews and non-Jews together.

To begin with, alongside condemning Vichy and collaborators, Jewish communists tried to demonstrate to Jews that only a minority of French people were antisemites and that most of them had supported Jews during the war. To some extent, Jewish communists adopted the same strategy as most Jewish organizations such as the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine* [CDJC; Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation]. The CDJC indeed claimed that the persecution was mainly perpetrated by the Germans and a minority of French collaborators while that the majority of 'French' had helped Jews.⁴³

42 Annie Kriegel, *Communismes au miroir français: Temps, cultures et sociétés en France devant le communisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 184.

43 Laura Jockusch, 'Early Chroniclers of the Holocaust,' in Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács and Béla Rásky, ed., *Als Der Holocaust Noch Keinen Namen Hatte: Zur Frühen Aufarbeitung Des Ns-Massenmordes an Den Juden = Before the Holocaust Had Its Name: Early Confrontations of the Nazi Mass Murder of the Jews* (Wien: New Academic Press, 2016), 31.

They hoped Jews could be reintegrated in French society soon, which Jewish communists also fought for, encouraged by the PCF. However, after the tensions that sprung as the result of the return of apartments to their previous owners in Paris in 1945–1946, Jewish communists feared that Jews would blame all French people for the actions of only some of them. In his closing speech at the first congress of the UJRE in April 1945, Louis Gronowski said:

At this congress, we spoke of a certain unease, a misunderstanding that exists among Jews as a result of the non-return of their property and other difficulties that we are facing. This discontent is legitimate, but it is sometimes misguided. Some Jews blame the entire French population and say that the French are antisemites. Some others oppose the interests of Jews to those of France. Are the French antisemites? Let us remember the attitude of the French population during the time of persecution: they were risking their lives if they hid or provided identity papers to a Jew.⁴⁴

Gronowski adopted a rhetoric typical of the construction of the '*nation résistante*'⁴⁵ – the idea that most French citizens were not in favor of Vichy and had resisted. He then said that Jews were not the only ones to suffer and should mingle with the 'French' population, for instance by joining non-Jewish French 'democratic' organizations, which means antifascists organizations in communist language. Such rhetoric was already in use in the interwar period. The question of antisemitism among French workers was taboo in Jewish communists' propaganda but they recognized that antisemitism existed in France. They targeted a minority of 'fascists', notably after February 1934 and the rise of far-right or proto-fascist groups. They remained confident in the French Republic, and most French people, and insisted in the Yiddish press that their readers do the same.⁴⁶ After the war, it would be more difficult following several years of persecution and the aforementioned problems of the return of Jewish goods and apartments. Jewish communists thus insisted and repeated again and again the same ideas with the exact same words,⁴⁷ hoping

44 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335J 72, premier congrès de l'UJRE, avril 1945, discours de clôture de Louis Gronowski aka Lerman.

45 Claire Andrieu, 'Le programme du CNR dans la dynamique de la construction de la nation résistante,' *Histoire@Politique: Politique, Culture, Société*, no. 24 (2014): 5–23.

46 Audrey Kichelewski, 'La Naïe Presse, quotidien juif et communiste, Paris 1934–1939' (Master's thesis, Université Paris 1, Panthéon Sorbonne, 2000), 104–121.

47 See for instance *Naye prese* in 1945 about the questions of apartments, speeches of Louis Gronowski during the same Congress, or the one of Michel Monikowski one year later at the national conference of the UJRE.

that rank-and-files activists would understand and then have the right 'language elements' to convince Jews who might not immediately share the same opinions.

At the same time, Jewish communists knew the importance of fighting against antisemitism among French people. Even though they said that most French were not antisemites, they realized that remnants of antisemitism and misconceptions about Jews in French society were still vivid. In several speeches during congresses, conferences or councils, the UJRE thus stressed its will to 'de-toxify' French people who might have been convinced by five years of antisemitic propaganda. They wanted to deny the idea according to which there would be 'no Jewish resistance fighters, no Jews among the disaster victims, not any Jews among deportees, not any poor Jew, not any human Jews, not any generous Jew'.⁴⁸ Jewish communists consequently came up with a strategy. Firstly, they wanted to show French people Jews' suffering during the war. Secondly, they wanted to show non-Jews that Jews had fought fascism during the war and participated in the same fight as the French people. Antifascism was seen as a bridge between Jews and non-Jews.

This is why, after having had a first exhibition about the life of Jews in the ghettos in Poland, the UJRE decided to organize another public exhibition entitled 'Jews in the Resistance'. The first exhibition was clearly made for a Jewish public: it was held in the UJRE's headquarters, 14 rue de Paradis, in a Yiddish-speaking immigrant arrondissement, and, as the press reported, most visitors were Jews hoping to see pictures of their loved ones in the ghettos.⁴⁹ The second exhibition, held in Paris between 1 March and 13 April 1947, had a different goal, which was to show that Jews had fought fascism and that they deserve their place in French society. A poster directly encouraged 'French' people to come: 'French! Honor the memory of the thousands of Jews who have fallen for the liberation of the country. While the Fascist gangs are reorganizing, when we hear in the heart of Paris "Jews belongs in Crematory oven", come see this exhibit that will show you the authentic documentation of Jewish resistance.'⁵⁰ Interestingly, Jewish communists chose to describe postwar antisemite groups as 'fascists gangs' while they used different terms to describe Nazis and collaborators during the

48 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 72, premier congrès national de l'UJRE, avril 1945, rapport de Charles Lederman.

49 Centre de documentation du Mémorial de la Shoah, DD, UJRE, CMXXV/6/1, David Diamant, 'La première et deuxième exposition'.

50 Centre de documentation du Mémorial de la Shoah, DD, UJRE, CMXXV/6/3, exposition sous le patronage de l'UJRE, page de présentation en français.

war (for instance 'barbarians', 'Nazis', 'Pro-Nazis').⁵¹ Conceptualizing Nazi antisemitism and postwar antisemitism differently was a deliberate choice. This invitation, as well as the location of the exhibition in a more neutral place (a gallery of the 8th district) than the headquarters of the Communist Jews located on rue de Paradis, illustrates UJRE's concern to attract French people in order to show them that the Jews of France participated in the fight against fascism.

Jewish communists also managed to gather a number of Jewish and non-Jewish personalities in the honorary Committee, notably several former Resistance fighters against fascism, both communists and non-communists, Jewish and non-Jewish: figures from the communist and trade union world (Marcel Cachin, Léon Jouhaux, Benoît Frachon); ministers (Charles Tillon, André Philip) or former ministers (Laurent Casanova, Yves Farge, Pierre Cot); artists (Francis Jourdain, Paul Éluard, Roger Desormière); representatives of the Jewish world (Léon Meiss, president of the CRIF and the Central Consistory of the Israelites of France); and personalities like Justin Godart or Robert Debré. This committee aimed at giving the exhibition a legitimacy and a resonance beyond both the communist world and Jewish circles. It could, in the context of the construction of the *nation résistante*, reunite Jews and non-Jews around the fight against fascism. Symbolically, it illustrated Jewish communists' attachment to France and was a way to show that Jews were now reintegrated into French society. They indeed had the support of figures of the political, social, economic and cultural life in France, a life they aspired to be a part of after five years of exclusion.

It should be noted, however, that even though the exhibition was supposed to be on Jewish resistance, it almost exclusively highlighted Jewish communist resistance. This is not surprising given the fact that Jewish communists were one of the few Jewish resistance groups in France who took up arms and did not focus exclusively on rescuing Jews. In an exhibition that tried to reach French-speaking audiences, it was fundamental: Jewish communists could show French people that their Jewish concerns never impacted on their involvement against fascism and for French liberation. They tried to eradicate stereotypes according to which Jews would have been people who always took advantage of the system, who would have been cowards who hid during the war instead of fighting for France.⁵²

51 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 72, premier congrès national de l'UJRE, avril 1945, rapports, discours résolutions, propagande et presse.

52 On Jewish cowardice and the memory of Jews involvement against fascism, see: Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War*.

Through an exhibition, Jewish communists were constructing their collective identity as much as they tried to eradicate antisemitism among French people. Their commitment to the struggle against fascism during the war seemed to be a good argument in that regard; fascism being a common enemy of Jews as well as non-Jews in the context of long-term French reconstruction.⁵³

Facing an 'Antifascist Antisemitism' in the USSR

In the fight against antisemitism, one rhetorical tool of Jewish communists was to portray the USSR as a paradise for Jews; the Soviet Union having supposedly overcome antisemitism. They mentioned it in the two letters sent to the French Communist Party in December 1944, hoping that the PCF would follow the example of the USSR. To convince fellow Jews to join them, they also mentioned it in the majority of their speeches and in their press. In the context of the Cold War when many non-communist Jews became very suspicious toward the USSR – most Jewish organizations were financially helped by anti-communist American Jewish organizations⁵⁴ – Jewish communists reminded Jews that it was the USSR that had made the most sacrifices in the fight against fascism. The UJRE also underlined that the USSR punished antisemitism whilst France did not. For instance, in 1947, in a speech at the *Conseil national* de l'UJRE, a speaker said:

Today, when we see the development of a vast anti-Soviet campaign, in which even Jewish organization and newspapers participate, we think it is our duty to recall that it was the USSR that made the greatest sacrifices in the fight against our greatest enemy, and that it had no purpose of war other than the extirpation of fascism, a danger to people and culture. We will never forget that the Soviet Union gave equal rights to the Jews who were oppressed in Tsarist Russia. We also do not forget that in this country antisemitic propaganda is severely punished.⁵⁵

53 Herrick Chapman, *France's Long Reconstruction: In Search of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

54 Hobson Faure, *Un 'plan Marshall juif'*; Constance Pâris de Bollardire, "La prennit de notre peuple": Une aide socialiste juive amricaine dans la diaspora yiddish, *le Jewish Labor Committee en France (1944–1948)* (PhD diss., Paris, cole des hautes tudes en sciences sociales, 2017).

55 AD 93, DD, UJRE, 335 J 71, Conseil national de l'UJRE, 1947, rapport.

This speech aimed at convincing other Jews that during the war the USSR 'had no other war goals than the elimination of fascism, a danger for peoples and cultures'. To convince their own ranks as well as to criticize their opponents, Jewish communists described 'imperialist' countries as being far less engaged in the fight against antisemitism and racism. They blamed Americans for not doing anything against the remnants of antisemitism in the American zone in Germany ('Could we believe, two years ago, that a German would allow itself, two and a half years after the victory, to utter this scandalous phrase at the Munich Theater '6 million Jews have passed into the crematoria, but this is not enough'? And the worst is that the public applauds and that the US authorities do not find necessary to stop such antisemitism!').⁵⁶ They condemned the British because of the Exodus. De Gaulle's government was denounced because many antisemites were said to be members of the Gaullist party, the RPF.⁵⁷ Later, Jewish communists also associated 'imperialist' countries such as the United States with racism. According to them, only one country was fighting against racism, and more particularly antisemitism: the USSR. Consequently, every Jew should support the Soviet Union.

However, things became more complicated in 1952–1953, following the Slánský Trial and the Doctor's Plot.⁵⁸ The Slánský trial took place in Czechoslovakia at the end of 1952. Major Communist Party figures were accused of being disloyal toward the USSR by adopting Tito's position. It took place in the context of Stalin's growing paranoia toward Communist parties of Central Europe and Jews. Most of the thirteen accused at the Slánský trial were indeed Jewish. Several months later, at the beginning of 1953, several doctors from Moscow were accused of having planned the assassination of several Soviet leaders. Again, most of the doctors were Jewish. However, Stalin's death interrupted the arrests and the doctors were released and cleared, while most of the accused at the Slánský trial had been killed. In France, non-communist Jews asked Jewish communists to condemn the USSR and acknowledge the antisemitism in these affairs, which Jewish communists refused to do.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Jean-Jacques Marie, 1953, *les derniers complots de Staline: L'affaire des Blouses blanches* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1993); Si'm'on Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic, 1995); Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir Pavlovich Naumov, ed., *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Pavlovič Naumov, *Le dernier crime de Staline: Retour sur le complot des blouses blanches* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2006).

Officially, following the PCF's orders, Jewish communists denied the idea of antisemitism in the USSR.⁵⁹ In their newspapers, they wrote that the accused of the Slánský trial were traitors, that their punishment was well-deserved. They also decided to publish a brochure to counter what they fought was an anti-Soviet campaign. This pamphlet was also published in extracts in *Naïe prese*. They wrote:

Jews have suddenly found surprising friends. 'Antisemitism in the Soviet Union and in the countries of People's Democracy' seems to be 'very worrying', to the point of becoming one of their major concerns: Jean-Paul David, 'L'Aurore', 'Le Figaro', 'Rivarol', 'Aspect de la France' and other zealous defenders of the National Socialists and their collaborators, suppliers of gas chambers and crematorium ovens. In the United States, outgoing president Truman, his successor Eisenhower and defeated presidential candidate Stevenson compete against who will most solemnly express their 'outrage' against 'the racism sweeping beyond the Iron curtain'. Never had Tartuffe been more hypocritical! This is not the first time, however, that the promoters of an anti-Soviet crusade, who are otherwise always racist and anti-Semitic, have 'felt sorry' for the 'sad fate of the Jews under socialist rule'.⁶⁰

In this diatribe, the UJRE went as far as comparing racist newspapers such as *Rivarol* with *Le Figaro*. The UJRE described them all as defenders of Nazis and of the gas chambers and cremation ovens. According to them, the most racist antisemites were 'Tartuffes' (the name of the main character of a famous play by French playwright Molière, Tartuffe was a hypocrite and fake devout) who accused the USSR of something fake. They also denied that the accused in the Soviet Union could be innocent, writing that the 'Prague trial against Slánský and its thirteen accomplices, the discovery of the spy activity of the Zionist organization and the denunciation in Moscow of a group of doctors who tried to assassinate Soviet leaders have given rise to a campaign orchestrated with such vigor that every man concerned with truth and justice wishes to pierce the motives, the hidden motives and the goals'.⁶¹ Consequently, in 1953, Jewish

59 Jacques Frémontier, 'Naïe Presse et L'Humanité: Procès Slansky et "Complot Des Blouses Blanches"', *Communisme*, no. 76–77 (2003): 47–68.

60 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Sioniste, antisémitisme et la grande conspiration contre la paix, pamphlet published by l'Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entraide, UJRE, Paris, 16 janvier 1953.

61 Ibid.

communists were excluded from the last Jewish spaces of cooperation: they lost their representative seat in the CRIF, an organization they helped found in 1943–1944.

Did Jewish communists know what was happening in the USSR but turned a blind eye to it because their faith in a state which embodied the ideal of antifascism was stronger? Were they forced to toe the party line? Pamphlets, articles in newspapers and speeches must be seen for what they were: propaganda, most likely written under the watch of the Communist Party, aiming at convincing Jews that this campaign against USSR was a lie. They do not say anything about Jewish communists' personal beliefs or doubts. A look at the PCF archives gives a more nuanced picture. At the end of the 1950s, following Khrushchev's report at the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of USSR in February 1956, Stalin's crimes were revealed. Even though the report was supposed to be secret, it was quickly leaked, notably in the press (extracts were published in June 1956 in *Le Monde*). Khrushchev mentioned the fact that Jews had been victims of plots in 1952–53 and that several members of the Jewish Antifascist Committee had been arrested in 1948 and executed in 1952 (during what is called 'the night of the murdered poets'). Jews in Paris were already suspicious, notably after the report by the journalist Léon Crystal who had spent several weeks in USSR in 1956 for the New York-based Yiddish daily newspaper *Forverts*. Léon Crystal had given a talk in Paris in March 1956, stating that he was now certain that the Yiddish writers who had disappeared in 1948 had been executed following a speedy trial on Stalin's order in 1952.⁶² Under fire, Jewish communists responded to the attacks of their opponents through their press. They also had to reassure their supporters and clarify their position, displaying real confidence in the USSR and attacking the enemies of the Soviet Union.

However, lingering doubts weakened the Jewish section of the PCF and it faced a major crisis. The PCF noted with concerns that Jewish communists were 'obsessed with specifically Jewish questions. A great disarray reigns among them', about the question of Jews in USSR and problems in Israel.⁶³ In October 1956 the PCF thus decided to reorganize the party's Jewish section in order to reach a better control of the 'Jewish masses'. The PCF also explained that Jewish communists had to follow the general party line and to focus on four

62 Perego, 'Pleurons-les, bénissons leurs noms', 334. 'En 1952, Staline fit exécuter 26 écrivains yiddish', *Journal des Communautés*, no. 146, 23 mars 1956, 12.

63 Siège national du PCF, fonds des questionnaires biographiques et de la CCCP, dossier Haïm Slovès, note de Fernand Dupuy au Secrétariat du Parti sur l'activité du secteur juif, 30 octobre 1956.

topics: 'Peace in Algeria, the fight against fascism, the fight against Germany rearmament, defense of claims [without details]'.⁶⁴ At the end of the 1950s, the PCF's 'fight against fascism' voluntarily excluded antisemitism in the USSR as part of 'fascism'. This reveals the incapacity of the party to even theorize a Soviet antisemitism.

Unfortunately for the PCF, problems in the Jewish section continued. An intellectual and playwright of the Jewish section, Haim Sloves, repeatedly asked to meet Maurice Thorez, secretary general of the PCF, to discuss his concerns about Yiddish culture in USSR.⁶⁵ Between 1955 and 1965 he sent several memos to the PCF and even managed to organize a visit in the USSR with other members of the party's Jewish section. Not convinced by what he saw, and disappointed by his colleagues – the Jewish section chose to remain silent about the problem of Yiddish culture in the USSR – Sloves decided to go public and to write about it in a Yiddish journal of New York.

Does that mean that Jewish communists never openly denounced antisemitism in the USSR? In March and April 1964, several Jewish and non-Jewish communist organizations expressed anger at the publication by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences of a brochure deemed antisemitic.⁶⁶ Non-communist Jewish organizations were also outraged. As an American report put it in 1965: 'For the first time in their history, the Jewish communists of France joined in the general condemnation of Soviet antisemitism, charges of which had hitherto been dismissed by Jewish and non-Jewish Communists as anti-Soviet slander'.⁶⁷ In March, the PCF's newspaper *L'Humanité* republished without comments an article by Jewish communists in their Yiddish press (*Naye prese*). Facing criticism from western Communist parties, Moscow condemned the pamphlet, recognizing that graphic depictions could be interpreted as antisemitic and reprimanded its author.

Why did Jewish communists react this time? Did they stop defending USSR after this? The answer is no. Several years later, in 1968, they only timidly condemned Poland for its antisemitism but their criticism did not call into question their political commitment.⁶⁸ But in 1964, the form of antisemitism the Ukrainian pamphlet displayed had been too close to Nazi and racial

64 Ibid.

65 Annette Aronowicz, 'Haim Sloves, the Jewish People, and a Jewish Communist's Allegiances,' *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 1 (2002): 95–142.

66 About antisemitism in the USSR in the post-Staline era: Sarah Fainberg, *Les discriminés: L'antisémitisme soviétique après Staline* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

67 Arnold Mandel, 'France,' *American Jewish Year Book* 66 (1965): 367–374.

68 About the events of 1968 in Poland, see: Audrey Kichelewski, *Les survivants: Les juifs de Pologne depuis la Shoah* (Paris: Belin, 2018).

antisemitism and left no doubts. As Elie Wiesel wrote: 'by its content, its tone and its caricatures, the pseudo-scientific work recalled the pamphlets of sad memory edited by Goebbels and Streicher'.⁶⁹ But Soviet antisemitism in 1952 and 1953 had been hidden behind anti-Zionism, an ideology Communists and Jewish communists condemned. There was thus still room for doubt. And in the context of the Cold War, Jewish communists prioritized the defense of USSR. In 1964, this antisemitism was different but since the PCF and the USSR themselves condemned the pamphlet, Jewish communists could legitimately be reassured and continue to deny that antisemitism existed in the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

These examples illustrate how difficult it was to combine Jewishness and communism in the fight against antisemitism in the 1950s. In the Popular Front period, during the war and in the immediate postwar period, Jewish communists managed to fight against antisemitism as Jewish antifascists and resistant fighters. The USSR was their role-model, the country that defeated fascism, and had proscribed antisemitism. By way of antifascism, they could participate in the PCF's struggles, in the Jewish ones as well as in the defense of democracy in France, their country of adoption. However, when Jewish communists faced the USSR's failures and crimes against Jews in the 1950s, most of them proved incapable of publicly condemning the USSR as a country that fostered antifascism after the Second World War. Officially, and in their cultural manifestations, they chose to follow the PCF's line, which was to deny everything. However, this led to their definitive exclusion from Jewish life in France: they could no longer convince non-communist Jews that they were also defending Jewish interests. Some Jewish communists like Sloves took a stand and decided to speak and/or to leave the Communist Party. They did not stop believing in the ideology of communism, but, when it came to the struggle against antisemitism, they chose to prioritize their Jewishness over a communist antifascism. They were followed by other Jewish communists in 1968, after the anti-Jewish campaign in Poland. In the history of Jewish communists in France, 1964 thus appears as an exception rather than a rule: Jewish communists could condemn what resembled a Nazi antisemitism, but chose to ignore what we could call an 'antifascist antisemitism'.

69 Elie Wiesel, *Les Juifs du silence* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).