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comparative discussion of immigrant
communal control in the turn-of-the-
century East End*

Article

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Control, Cohesion and Faith – a comparative discussion of immigrant communal control in the turn of the century East End, Daniel Renshaw

In March 1891 the *Beth Din*, the Anglo-Jewish ecclesiastical authorities, commissioned a report that discussed establishing a scheme for ‘alleviating the social condition of the Jewish working classes’ in the East End of London. The first draft of the internal report read ‘The social welfare of our working classes is so closely connected with, and so ultimately dependent upon their religious, moral and material conditions, that no scheme can be regarded as satisfactory which does not attempt to improve the status of our industrial population in these respects also.’¹ This concern over the moral and material well-being of the Jewish working class in the East End had troubled the leadership for over a decade. The demographics of Anglo-Jewry had been permanently altered by the great wave of migration from the Pale of Settlement following the Russian pogroms of 1881. London Jewry of the mid-nineteenth century, a small, relatively prosperous community, had been transformed into a large, poor, religiously Orthodox and Yiddish-speaking population, mainly based in East London. Over the course of the 1890s the hierarchy took it upon themselves not only to alleviate the economic causes of poverty and disconnection, but to act as a spiritual and ideological guardian for East End Jewry as well.

The spiritual leadership of the other major religious minority in the capital, the Catholic Church, had assumed this role in relation to the Irish and Italian East End immigrant communities from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The great demographic shift in London Catholicism had taken place between the 1840s and 1860s, during the Famine years and the decades following. The Church too took responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of its congregations, and like the *Beth Din* assumed the mantle of protecting these communities from forces that threatened this cohesion.

Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, in an 1891 sermon on divisions between West End and East End Jewry, warned ‘Let not your divergence of opinion lead to schisms and divisions, to discord and disruptions... At no crisis in the annals of our race was it more necessary than it is now to present a united front to the world.’² The *Beth Din* report of the same year makes clear what the causes of ‘discord and disruption’ are. ‘They [the East End Jewish community] would thus be kept from the temptations of gambling houses, from responding to anarchist and anti-religious clubs, and from attending mission halls.’³ Though a document prepared by the Jewish religious authorities, the concerns expressed over these three threats, that is the temptations of the wider East End (‘gambling houses’), radical left-wing politics (‘anarchist and anti-religious clubs’) and evangelism (‘mission halls’), preoccupied the Catholic Church of this period as well, and were as applicable to the Irish and Italian Catholic communities of East London as they were to East End Jewry.

In this article I will discuss how the Catholic and Jewish leaderships in London responded to these perceived threats both to their own communal control and to the cohesion and unity of minority religious and diasporic populations. Comparative discussion of the Jewish and Catholic communities and communal leaderships in this period is still relatively neglected by historians; as Hugh McLeod writes ‘the histories of Christianity and Judaism in London have largely been written in isolation from another.’⁴ I will examine the points of convergence in how the two hierarchies responded to ideological challenges to their communal control, to political radicalism, to Protestant evangelism and to an irreligious wider working class culture, and how the differing structures of the Jewish and Catholic leaderships shaped the ways in which they responded to perceived threats to cohesion.

Socialism and political radicalism

In the public addresses of the leading secular and ecclesiastical representatives of Anglo-Jewry and of the Catholic Church, and in conservative communal journals such as the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Catholic Herald*, anarchist and socialist activities in the East End in the period under discussion were often framed in the language of a malevolent outside force, an enemy of both minority identity and religious observance. Socialism was described and depicted by the leaderships as an essentially alien phenomenon, luring naïve and ignorant ‘greeners’ (recently-arrived immigrants) away from belief and kinship networks with pernicious doctrines. Just as the right-wing mainstream press portrayed socialism as something intrinsically ‘un-English’, a violent continental ideology, so the Jewish and Catholic minority leaderships denied that socialism had any legitimate role to play in communal political affairs. From the great wave of strikes that broke across London in 1889 to the years leading up to the First World War, when the capital again experienced an upsurge of industrial militancy, the Catholic and Jewish communal hierarchies consistently warned of the dangers that participation in radical politics could involve the unwary immigrant working class in. A religious pamphlet issued in 1910 depicted the socialist propagandist as a mixture of harlot and confidence trickster, disguising his or her true nature to attract converts: ‘When Socialists want to make proselytes, particularly when they solicit young Irishmen and Catholics, they abate their extravagances, they shut off their blasphemies...’⁵ Both the metropolitan Catholic and Jewish leaderships used the language of conversion in discussing radicalism; socialist politics could not simply be one facet of a man or woman’s identity, but instead would *supplant* ethnic kinship loyalties and religious faith. Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster from 1892 to 1903, used the language of disease, the vision of socialism as a predatory force, and as a competing rival to religious faith.

‘Bad hands and evil minds are busy amongst not inconsiderable sections of the working class... agitators poison their minds and hearts with mischievous theories and wicked proposals... The atmosphere they [the Catholic working class] are compelled to breathe is laden with infection. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to distinguish aright between the deadly errors and the truths contained in the Gospel of Socialism.’⁶

Such rhetoric uses both the imagery of infection and of religious proselytization, ‘Socialism’ as a ‘Gospel’. It also recognises the appeal, even the validity of some tenets of socialism, which contains ‘truths’ as well as ‘deadly errors’, all the more dangerous for this kernel of truth.

For acting Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, soon to succeed his father Nathan as the religious leader of Orthodox Anglo-Jewry, Jewish anarchists and revolutionaries, through their political activities, had effectively forfeited their identity as Jews. At a meeting in Manchester in early 1889, Adler referred to ‘a few noisy agitators, who wanted to propagate their pestilential opinions among the Jewish working men.... Although by birth they might be Jews, they could not be identified with Jewish congregations.’ These men held ‘opinions that are subversive of religion, of government, of the family, and all which their holy faith told them to hold dear and respect.’⁷ Adler questioned whether Gentile anarchists and socialists would receive the appellation ‘Christian’ in the popular press reports of their activities. The temper of the exchange between the Anglo-Jewish leadership and the ‘noisy agitators’ was not improved by the provocative actions by some Jewish socialist organisations, which involved breaking dietary prohibitions on Jewish holy days as well as holding ‘Yom Kippur Balls’ to which local rabbis were mockingly invited.⁸

Both the Catholic and Jewish leaderships, in framing radical left-wing politics as something fundamentally alien to their respective communities, as something unknown to migrants before settling in the East End with its intoxicating political and social distractions, ignored the heritage of activism in the immigrant populations. In fact traditions of political activity had been brought over from the Pale of Settlement, from Ireland, from Italy, that expressed itself both in radicalism and in revolutionary nationalism, and which, in the Irish case, had been apparent in London since the days of Chartism. Jewish refugees from Poland and Russia had also carried over a heritage of political involvement in groups such as the *Bund*, the Russian Jewish socialist organisation, as well as in the wider Russian social democratic movement.⁹

Comparative reactions to radical activities

The two leaderships shared a common hostility towards socialist activity within the immigrant communities of co-religionists who had settled in the East End, and both hierarchies went out of their way to denounce the temptations and dangers that the 'agitators' posed to the Irish and Jewish working class. The differing ways in which they responded to the perceived challenge from the socialist movement was shaped both by the structure of their organisations and the make-up of the communal leadership. Comparing the two communities, radical politics amongst East End Jewry appeared to contemporaries to pose a greater challenge to communal control and cohesion than parallel political developments in Catholic immigrant areas. Certainly on an international level the Catholic Church viewed socialism as a grave threat, an implacable enemy. As early as 1849 the Syllabus of Errors, drawn up by Pope Pius IX, had labelled socialism a 'plague or pestilence' designed to 'violate at last all rights divine and human'.¹⁰ Under the tenure of his successor Leo XIII the Vatican maintained this opposition towards socialist politics, and this was reflected in the attitudes of local Catholic hierarchies. However, despite the antipathy of sections of the leadership of the Catholic Church in London towards socialist politics, radicalism among the Catholic working class did not appear to threaten the secure position of the Church. By contrast the activities of the *Arbeter Fraynd* (Workers Friend) and other Jewish revolutionary groups appeared to substantially challenge the position of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (the Jewish secular leadership) and the *Beth Din* as the representatives of East End Jewry, with the right to speak on behalf of the community as a whole.

This vulnerability can be traced in part to the contrasting structures of the two hierarchies. The Catholic Church was international in nature, with a well-defined pyramid structure, from the Vatican through various gradations down to the parish priest and his congregation. As Cardinal Vaughan put it, 'The Church is governed by a hierarchy, not a House of Commons. Her constitution is divine, and not dependant like a political machine upon popular agitation and the see-saw of public opinion.'¹¹ In Charles Booth's words on the Catholic clergy in the East End, '... each priest is a member of a highly organised and powerful hierarchy.'¹² The governing bodies of the Anglo-Jewish leadership, on the other hand, were relatively recent in formation, the Board of Deputies being established in 1760, and lacking the centralised control that the Catholic Church enjoyed. Much Jewish religious worship and activity in the capital was beyond the control of the *Beth Din* and the United Synagogue, taking place in the small-scale *khevres* (places of religious worship, often in a room or a garret). The *Beth Din* and the office of the Chief Rabbi also lacked the intellectual stature enjoyed by continental Jewish ecclesiastical bodies. As part of the process of Anglicisation, the religious head of Jewry in Britain, the Chief Rabbi, had sacrificed much of the Talmudic authority to be found in Jewish

leadership on the continent and particularly in Eastern Europe. Unlike in the Pale of Settlement, there was no officially appointed head of the Jewish community who would have sole charge of dealing with the outside world.¹³ Unlike their Catholic counterparts, the Jewish leadership could not call on the final arbitration in religious or political disputes of an infallible Papal figure, either national or international. Hermann Adler was certainly not viewed as such. Class tensions and fissures within migrant and Anglo-Jewry were also more apparent than amongst Catholic immigrant communities. Economic factors played a role in this. The majority of East End Jewish workers laboured primarily in small scale sweatshops, tailoring, cabinet-making and boot-making. The line between employer and employees was an uncertain one, with sweatshop workers rising to become bosses, and employers retuning to sweated work as an ordinary worker in hard times. Economic roles in the East End Jewish community were thus more fluid and complex than amongst the Irish Catholic working class, who primarily worked for large scale employers, in the casual trades as dockers, labourers on building sites and at the gasworks, and in the case of young Catholic women, in domestic service. The complexities of sweatshop employment in the Jewish East End were furthered by kinship and family networks: many of the Jewish sweated workers were working in family concerns. However, the primary class division within London Jewry, and the one that caused the leadership such concern, was between an Anglicised middle class and an expanding immigrant proletariat. The use of Yiddish was a factor in this divide, (just as Gaelic had been for newly-arrived Irish immigrants a generation before), as was religious observance, and, as discussed, the devolved nature of much Jewish orthodox worship in East London. The *khevres* were beyond the control of the United Synagogue, as were the politics of East End rabbinical teachers. This lack of centralised control in the East End seemed to exacerbate the danger posed by 'subversive forces' within the community.

The personalities and backgrounds of the leading figures of Anglo-Jewry and Anglo-Catholicism shaped the differing responses of the hierarchies towards radical politics and industrial militancy. This was most apparent in the very different ways in which Cardinal Manning and Chief Rabbi Adler responded to the strikes of 1889. Adler, whilst broadly sympathetic towards the plight of sweated East End workers, labelled the demands of the socialists as 'absurd'. 'They asked' Adler continued, 'that the hours of labour should be eight per day, and that the rate of wages should be settled by law... would any energetic man care for the right to be taken out of his hands to do as he pleased in his own time?'¹⁴ Adler, the child of immigrants himself (his father Nathan, Chief Rabbi before him, was born in Hanover), saw his position, role and responsibilities as the leading figure of religious Anglo-Jewry as analogous to that of the leadership of the Church of England, comfortably within the British establishment, conservative in outlook, and refraining from active involvement in industrial disputes. Aubrey Newman described Adler in a lecture as 'an English gentleman, externally an English clergyman... [who] had almost as much in common with the higher ranks of the Anglican clergy of his day as the Anglican clergy themselves.'¹⁵ Adler refused to involve himself in the resolution of the tailoring strikes of 1889, and in subsequent strike action involving Jewish workers over the course of the 1890s. In a June 1898 report commissioned by the United Synagogue, the Sub-Committee explicitly distanced itself from involvement in resolving industrial action, stating that 'It is not intended that the Board shall interfere in labour disputes, but simply endeavour to arrange petty quarrels between master and servant.'¹⁶ Whilst Adler remained aloof from the demands of the striking tailors, the task of brokering an agreement between employers and workers to end the 1889 strike action was undertaken by the senior secular figures in Anglo-Jewry, Lord Rothschild, very

much the *pater familias* of Anglo-Jewry, and by Samuel Montagu, Liberal MP for Whitechapel. For Rothschild and the Jewish aristocracy the tailoring disputes were very much a family affair, the outcome of which would reflect on Jewry generally. Mordechai Rozin in his study of Jewish philanthropy in the period has identified Montagu as heading an upper-middle class, 'intermediary group' between the Anglo-Jewish elite and the immigrant proletariat, aiming to forestall class conflict.¹⁷ The *Arbeter Fraynd* meanwhile cautioned its readers against the intervention of Montagu and Rothschild, 'who come to you because they are afraid of losing you completely'.¹⁸

In contrast to the determination of the Jewish religious leadership to avoid entanglements in the tailoring strikes, Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster from 1865 to 1892, took a central part in resolving the disputes taking place in the docks. Manning, a convert to Catholicism from the Anglican Church, had distinguished his tenure as Archbishop both by his sympathy for the plight of the Irish communities in the slums of Britain's inner cities, and support for both the agricultural and urban poor generally. Although Manning would not have defined himself as a socialist, he publically expressed his belief in the right of workers both to organise and to take industrial action. For Manning, 'Labour has a right, not only to its own freedom, but it has a right to protect itself... I cannot conceive anything more entirely in accordance with natural right and with the higher jurisprudence, than that those who have one common interest should unite together for the protection of that interest.'¹⁹ With a large Irish Catholic workforce in the docklands, Manning was uniquely placed to employ his religious authority as Archbishop and his establishment credentials to broker an agreement to end the dispute. His role in achieving a satisfactory settlement which met most of the strikers' demands won him an unusual degree of respect for the religious leader of a conservative institution amongst the socialist and trade union movements. Even before his death in 1892, the part Manning had taken in the dock strike had led to a form of sainthood being conferred upon him by elements of the political left. Ben Tillett, leader of the dockers union, looking back on the events of 1889, wrote of

... the tenderness and kindness of Cardinal Manning and his spiritual beauty. The sublimity of his courage helped us to win. I have the greatest reverence and gratitude for the memory of dear Cardinal Manning... After the great strike, the dockers presented an address to Cardinal Manning in which they said: "In him we seem to see a father in the midst of a loving and well-loved family rather than an ordinary mediator and benefactor in the thick of a trade dispute."²⁰

David Maxwell, a few months before Manning's death, wrote that 'No one in high place and position in England has spoken out more boldly for the rights and dignity of labour than his Eminence... There is ever in his words such a ring of heartfelt sympathy, that the working men turn to him, in their hour of difficulty, as a trusty guide, a wise counsellor, a kind and faithful friend.'²¹ After Manning's death on 14 January 1892, Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* observed that 'The funeral was the occasion of a popular demonstration such as has rarely been witnessed on the streets of London. The route of the procession was lined by vast crowds of working people, whose imaginations, in some instinctive manner, had been touched. Many who had hardly seen him declared that in Cardinal Manning they had lost their best friend.'²²

Manning's sympathy for radical causes was an exception rather than the rule. Herbert Vaughan, who became Archbishop on Manning's death, was perhaps more in the general mould of the

ecclesiastical leadership. Vaughan was from an 'old Catholic' background, conservative in political outlook, self-denying and severe in personality.²³ Vaughan was not unfavourably disposed to the poorest sections of the Catholic population, or towards Irish Catholic immigrants, but he did not possess the instinctive sympathy that Manning had for these groups, and held very different views on the desirability of unionisation and strike action. Vaughan was perhaps closer in outlook to Hermann Adler and the socially and politically conservative Jewish leadership than Manning had been, (although Manning had enjoyed warm personal relations with the Jewish religious leaders), and he certainly did not view the correct role of the Catholic Church as an institution that should be objectively pro-labour, or one that should be a mediator in disputes as Manning had been in 1889.

Sanctions against challenges to communal cohesion

Although the position the Catholic establishment enjoyed in the wider community was perhaps not as vulnerable to the challenges of radical politics as their Jewish counterparts believed themselves, the Church was by no means complacent over ideological competition. Vaughan and his successor Cardinal Bourne acted decisively against threats to the position of the hierarchy. The case of St. George Mivart was a case in point. Mivart was not a socialist, but, along with the cleric George Tyrrell, was at the forefront of the Catholic modernist movement at the turn of the twentieth century that campaigned for a greater liberalism and social involvement in the Anglo-Catholic leadership. Mivart's conflict with the Catholic authorities became public when his letter was published in *The Times* of 17 October 1899, strongly criticising the Papal silence on the Dreyfus affair. For Mivart the attitude of both the Vatican and Anglo-Catholicism towards the scandal was symptomatic of a Catholicism in decline. This letter, and various criticisms of the structure of the Church, brought a sharp rebuke from Cardinal Vaughan. In a letter to Mivart, the Cardinal wrote that 'You have publically impugned the most sacred and fundamental doctrines of the Faith, while still professing yourself to be a Catholic. It becomes, therefore, my primary duty, as guardian of the faith, to ascertain whether I am still to treat you as a member of the Church and subject to my jurisdiction or to consider you outside the unity of the faith.'²⁴ This intervention from the Cardinal led to a bitter exchange of letters between the two men, Mivart replying that '...before I am a Catholic I am an English gentleman and in that capacity I have been... outraged.'²⁵ Mivart refused to sign a document confessing past errors, and the affair ended with his excommunication. When Mivart died a few months later, he was denied burial in consecrated ground, until a face-saving agreement was reached between Vaughan and Mivart's family, stating Mivart had been of unsound mind during the controversy, and was finally allowed Catholic burial.²⁶ George Tyrrell, who as Hilaire Bourdon had published *The Church and the Future* (1903), a call for the liberalisation of the Church hierarchy, was also ultimately excommunicated. The failure of Liberal Catholicism in the Edwardian period constituted a point of departure for Catholic socialists such as Robert Dell, who had spent the 1890s attempting to intellectually reconcile his Catholicism with his socialism. The excommunication of George Tyrrell convinced Dell that such a marriage of politics and religion was not possible in the current political climate of both international and English Catholicism, though he later wrote that he had always retained a Catholic religious faith. In 1899 Dell had discussed the Papal attitude towards socialism and how it applied to English politics.

... when the Holy Father speaks of socialists who "contend that neither honour nor respect is owed to public authority, nor any obedience to the laws", he is certainly not speaking of "socialism" as we understand it in England... The socialism which the Holy

Father denounces consists in certain moral doctrines of revolutionary communists and anarchists.²⁷

By the end of the Edwardian period, however, Dell had lost faith in the willingness of the Catholic leadership to embrace progressive forces, even that of the moderate socialism being expounded by the Labour Party. The swift and decisive response of the Catholic leadership towards the movement for greater liberalisation again invites comparisons with the response of the United Synagogue and the *Beth Din* towards Liberal Judaism. Liberal Judaism was more radical in its beliefs and message than Reform Judaism, which had split from Orthodoxy in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Jewish establishment strongly disapproved of Liberal Judaism in the Edwardian period and beyond, indeed, after the Second World War the issue of whether marriages conducted in a Liberal synagogue could be recognised by the wider Jewish community was still being discussed in the correspondence of the *Beth Din*. But again, the Jewish authorities lacked that centralising authority that bolstered the position of the Catholic Church, and allowed it to act decisively against the liberal challenge. Chief Rabbi Adler, unlike Cardinals Vaughan or Bourne, could not fall back on the final measure of excommunication, and Liberal Judaism not only survived but prospered.

If the Cardinal dealt personally with the religious and political challenges of intellectuals such as Mivart, the priest on the ground in East London was expected both to guide the political direction of his flock and keep an eye open for potential subversive activities taking place amongst them. In triennial visitation returns sent out by the Diocese of Westminster to priests of the different metropolitan parishes in 1911, among other questions on the state of the church building, marriages and deaths etc. was the query 'Have secret societies, spiritualism, or socialism obtained any footing among your people?'²⁸ already discussed, the Catholic parish priest, more so than the East End rabbi, had an explicit and defined role to play in a hierarchy. But this does not mean that priests in the East End did not exercise independent thought or action, take their own political line distinct from that of the leadership, or tailor their sermons to suit the politics of their congregations. One correspondent to the Independent Labour Party (ILP) journal *Labour Leader*, responding to what she perceived as an article in the paper displaying anti-Catholic prejudice, wrote 'I am a Catholic woman and a keen Socialist. The priest of the church I attend is also a keen Socialist. Why alienate us?'²⁹ Priests, whether of Irish extraction themselves or not, were aware of the nationalist sympathies of their Irish parishioners. Sermons in Gaelic had been cautioned against by the Church authorities following the great wave of migration after the Famine, as part of a drive to encourage the use of English over the native tongue. But East End clergymen were known to express pro-Home Rule sentiments in their addresses, one priest in Bermondsey famously 'forgetting' prayers for the monarch at the end of his sermons.³⁰ The priest, like the rabbi, was an object of great respect in the poorest areas of East London, although by the turn of the twentieth century the unofficial role of priest as both policeman and social worker in certain slum areas which the authorities were reluctant to enter had faded somewhat. Though the Jewish immigrant religious leaders were largely beyond the control of the United Synagogue, the rabbis and religious teachers from the Pale of Settlement, often politically, socially and religiously conservative, and strongly Orthodox in religious affiliation, generally showed no more partiality towards Jewish socialism than their West End counterparts.

The hierarchies and trade unionism

The metropolitan Catholic and Jewish leaderships, resolutely opposed to revolutionary socialism in the East End, were not opposed to unionisation as such. Indeed, the organisation of immigrant workers was on one level highly desirable, a means of strengthening both communal cohesion and Anglicisation. But this organisation had to be guided by responsible hands, if workers were not to fall into the clutches of subversive socialist or anarchist groups. Hermann Adler concluded his February 1889 Sabbath address to Jewish workers by recommending 'to the sweated tailors and bootmakers, not wild and impracticable combination, but union under the advice and direction of those true friends of the working classes who had devoted their lives to a consideration of this question... join a good trades union.'³¹ in his *East End Jewish Radicals* described the emasculated ideal:

A union's image must be kept respectable, free of... dangerous socialist influences, which might focus unwanted attention on Jews. Unions would be better constructed along the lines of self-help, as 'Friendly Societies' covering sick and death benefits and the like. Such limited functions would serve the interests of the entrepreneur...³²

Crucially, these combinations advocated by the leadership would be shorn of the power to undertake strike action. As early as 1881, Samuel Montagu had formed a Jewish Tailor's Machinist Society in East London, which forfeited the right to strike, a 'respectable' alternative to the transient Jewish socialist organisations established over the course of the 1870s, by Louis Smith and later Aaron Lieberman. These combinations were radical in character, ambitious in rhetoric, and short-lived in duration. Montagu viewed the role of the Tailor's Machinist Society and the controlled unionisation of Jewish workers as accelerating 'their [the Jewish workers] acculturation and Anglicisation and [to] steer them away from attitudes and actions likely to inflame an increasingly anti-alien society.'³³ For the Jewish establishment, then, the desire for 'respectable' combination was at least partly motivated by an awareness of how the community was viewed by the wider society, in particular the widely-held prejudice that non-unionised Jewish labour in the sweatshops was undercutting the native workforce. The events of 1889, and the rise of new trade unions organising unskilled, casual workers, acted against the attempts of the communal leaderships to maintain control over immigrant unionisation, but if the hierarchies could not control combination, they could at least steer it into more respectable channels.

The Catholic writer Henry C. Day, writing in 1914, reflected on the 'correct' Catholic attitude towards unionisation:

Trade Unions, or organisations of workmen, to secure mutual insurance and better conditions of employment, are examples of associations which the State may rightly be called upon to tolerate and approve. These societies, as a rule, are wholly unobjectionable in their aims and constitutions... There are, however, certain methods and practices of Trades Unionism which are open to question on moral grounds. Of these the "strike" is the most important. The exercise of this method is sometimes associated with breaking of contracts, acts of violence, terrorism, and various attempts against public and private security. As far as the strike adopts these abuses, it ceases to have moral justification.³⁴

Day was writing after the violence and turmoil of 1911-1912. Again, as with the attitude of the Jewish leadership, Day envisaged ideal trade unionism as essentially toothless, shorn of radical politics and the ability to take militant action. The trade unionism envisaged in fact was closer to the

various ‘friendly societies’ that were formed in the communities, some conservative, some religious and some radical in character. Some of these organisations, such as the Catholic Social Union, inaugurated by Cardinal Vaughan in December 1893, with the aim to ‘unite all Catholics on the Christian basis of friendly interests and of mutual good will [and] to save great numbers of Catholics in danger of being lost to their religion...’ were established and organised by the hierarchies.³⁵ The Jewish friendly societies often grew out of kinship networks from the Pale of Settlement, named after the area or town in Eastern Europe from where the founders originated, or from the attendance of a certain synagogue in the East End. The *Jewish Chronicle* commented on the role of these friendly societies in an optimistic 1905 article, comparing them favourably to trade unions. ‘Provident societies... appeal to, and embrace, all classes of society, from the humblest workman to the most successful tradesman or manufacturer. The necessity for conflict being thus entirely eliminated, the friendly societies acquire a more permanent and stable equilibrium.’³⁶ For the Catholic and Jewish leaderships, these friendly societies, many of which explicitly cut across class lines, appeared preferable to the class conflict that seemed implicit in militant trade unionism.

Evangelism and Secularism

Socialism and the unionisation of unskilled workers over the course of the 1890s formed one challenge to the hegemony of the religious and secular leaderships in the East End. As we have seen, the hierarchies responded in different ways, from condemnatory sermons and unfavourable articles, the establishment of non-political organisations for Irish and Jewish workers, to the ultimate step in the Catholic Church of excommunication. But socialism was not the only ‘outside’ force seen to be threatening the cohesion of the community. The activities of Protestant evangelistic groups and the temptations of the irreligious culture of the wider East End both presented rival loyalties to minority faith. This section will examine how fears of missionary activities and the lures of the public house and the card table were interconnected with fears over social radicalism.

As with the socialist movement, missionaries working within the East End were perceived by the communal leaderships, and by many working class co-religionists, as outsiders intruding on communal affairs. Groups such as the Salvation Army, with their marching bands and military regalia were initially a target for vocal and physical abuse, pelted with stones and rubbish, although this initial hostility was soon replaced with support or indifference.³⁷ Smartly dressed gentlemen, and even West-End Jewish rabbis venturing into the East End in the fashionable Anglican apparel, were occasionally mistaken for missionaries and jeered at or even physically attacked. In Israel Zangwill’s fictional *Children of the Ghetto*, one unfortunate Jewish minister had the bad luck to be ‘mistaken for such a *Meshumad* [missionary], and pelted with gratuitous vegetables and eleemosynary eggs.’³⁸ One Protestant missionary, working in the docks, made a perhaps tongue-in-cheek entry into his diary on St. Patrick’s Day: ‘The Irish dock labourer is rampant today, and anyone who wishes to be involved in a serious row could not do better than broach the subject of evangelical religion. I wisely refrain today and confine my efforts to railway men in Millwall.’³⁹ However, the depiction of Protestant evangelism as an outside force is not wholly correct. For instance, within the missions working amongst East End Jewry a number of the men and women taking an active role were Jews who had converted to Christianity. The East London Mission to the Jews, established in 1877, was founded by the Rev. M. Rosenthal, himself a convert, who eventually took on the role of vicar in the parish of St. Marks in Whitechapel.⁴⁰

As with Jews or Catholics who had embraced political radicalism, the moral character of those who had been successfully converted was called into question. The *Jewish Chronicle* described the missionaries' efforts as 'The mischievous conversion of bad Jews into worse Christians'.⁴¹ Both hierarchies were particularly concerned with the religious health of youth within the community. In Vaughan's *A Crusade of Rescue for the Orphans*, the Cardinal writes: '... Thousands and thousands of Catholic children have been robbed of their faith in past years... they have been cut off from all Catholic influence; their very names have been changed; and they have been sent into the world aliens to the religion of their baptism.'⁴² Of particular concern to the Catholic leadership was the practice alleged to take place in Barnardo's institutions of placing Catholic orphans in Protestant homes. The Catholic journal *The Tablet* condemned the perceived bias of Barnardo in the strongest terms. In covering the case of George Murphy, a child of East End Irish Catholic heritage orphaned at an early age, taken into a Barnardo's home and then placed with Protestant foster parents, *The Tablet* wrote 'It is not easy work unclutching Dr Barnardo's fingers from the necks of Catholic children, but it is work that had got to be done.'⁴³ The Board of Deputies Mission Committee, convened to discuss evangelism in the East End, suggested that a League of Jewish Children be established, 'the members of which would pledge themselves to abstain from visiting the [Christian] Missions, to restrain others from doing so, and generally to promote Jewish observance.' Recognising the influence of religious leaders from the Pale of Settlement, the report concluded by recommending that 'the services of foreign Rabbis be more extensively utilised in the East End' to counter evangelism.⁴⁴

Perhaps a more insidious threat for the leaderships than either socialism or the evangelism of another faith was the wider secular culture of East London, of members of the minority communities lapsing or abandoning faith and culture through indifference. The case of one Mr Cohen, interviewed by the social investigator F.A McKenzie, whilst queuing for charitable relief, is an example of what the hierarchies feared:

One processionist, however, boasted the name of Cohen, most highly-ranked of Jewish names, "Why don't you go the Jewish charities?" he was asked. The man looked puzzled. "Jew? I'm no Jew, sir. I'm a Stepney man, and have lived there all my life. I believe there was something about my father being a Jew, but he didn't keep up any of those kind of things".⁴⁵

Again, as with socialism and evangelism, Catholic and Jewish youth were perceived as being particularly at risk of being lured away from the community by the pleasures and distractions of secular East End life. Thirteen, the age at which youth left elementary education and entered the adult world, was seen as the crucial danger period:

We have admirable provision for the education of the school children; but we have practically no provisions for continuing their training afterwards... It is no reproach to religion that Catholic boys and girls, flung at a tender age into the vortex of such a life as London life, cannot, unaided, resist the strength of the current. To speak truth, the reproach must be addressed to those who, looking down on them as coarse and vulgar, let them sink as they may under the wastes of wickedness.⁴⁶

Both the Jewish and Catholic leaderships established organisations designed to prevent youth from 'sinking' into the 'wickedness' of London life. In response, faith-based youth organisations for young

men and women were established, notably the Jewish Lads Brigade under Colonel A.E.W Goldsmid, founded in Whitechapel in 1895. These groups served a dual purpose, to bolster and preserve minority religious faith, as well serving as a vehicle for Anglicisation and integration, what Sharman Kadish describes as an attempt to 'graft' 'English public school ideals onto 'a population which came from an entirely different tradition.'⁴⁷ This 'public school' ethos of patriotism, hard physical exercise and 'fair play' proved in fact to be enormously popular amongst the immigrant communities, as did the excursions organised that took inner city youth on trips to the country and the seaside.

Campaign groups established by the religious establishments also worked to inure Catholic and Jewish youth against the vices of the wider society. The Catholic League of the Cross in particular campaigned against drunkenness in the community. Catholic girls were encouraged by the League to 'Never marry a drunkard... never to marry a man who had not been strictly temperate for at least eighteen months.'⁴⁸ Both Catholic and Jewish young women were encouraged to enter domestic service at the end of their elementary education at age thirteen, the Jewish authorities in particular viewing an increased Jewish presence among the servant class as evidence of successful working class Jewish integration into wider society.⁴⁹ Both hierarchies looked upon domestic service as both more 'suitable' and morally 'safer' than factory work for young women, unaware of or choosing to ignore the widespread sexual exploitation and abuse that young female domestic servants suffered in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. Jewish youths, meanwhile, were encouraged to abstain from gambling, seen in this period as a particularly Jewish vice. Members of the Stepney Lads Club signed a pledge committing themselves, 'as a Jew and an Englishman, and as a straight-forward and honest lad, not to enter into any horseracing, betting, or gambling, and to use his endeavours in preventing and dissuading others...'⁵⁰ The various minority youth organisations were very successful, but attracted a degree of criticism as well. Some on the political Left saw the youth organisations as a form of benign class control, whilst Irish nationalists remained suspicious of the patriotic agenda of the Catholic Working Lads Club, with its tales of empire and heroic English historical figures, even that the Lads Club formed an unofficial recruiting agency for the British Army.⁵¹

Conclusion

Socialism, secularism and outsider evangelism were not viewed as separate dangers by the communal hierarchies but as interconnecting pieces in a wider conflict over the direction of minority communities in the East End and in other urban areas, and in the case of radical politics, who had the right to speak on behalf of the community. The different dangers were linked and fed into each other. An initial benign 'harmless' involvement in the wider secular culture of pub and racetrack could expose vulnerable youth to either moral dissolution or radical socialism and atheistic anarchism. In Vaughan's *A Key to the Social Problem*, the Cardinal wrote of 'a danger lest they [Catholic youth] should prepare, by a life of indifference and neglect of religion, to drift eventually into the ranks of those societies which are the active organisations of unbelief and disorder.'⁵² In other words, initial passive neglect of faith and identity, followed perhaps by the establishment of unsuitable friendships, would in the end result in active rejection and the embracing of socialism. Conversely, political involvement, again perhaps through benign membership of a trade union, was seen as leading rapidly to general sexual and social immorality under the banner of socialist 'free love' (a term much used if little understood in the 1890s) and the destruction of the family unit, that which the *Jewish Chronicle* described as 'moral debasement', being even worse than the 'socialist tempter.'⁵³ Socialism itself was portrayed by sections of the Anglo-Jewish hierarchy as a potential

'Trojan horse' for Christian evangelism, a remarkable assertion considering that the socialist movement was simultaneously portrayed as atheistic and ungodly. As early as the 1870s, the *Jewish Chronicle* had condemned the short-lived Hebrew Socialist Union as a 'conversionist trick' to 'lure [Jews] from adherence to the ancestral faith'.⁵⁴ To be trapped by any one of these snares was to potentially fall a victim to all of them.

The Catholic and Jewish leaderships were largely successful in their attempts to maintain communal cohesion and their own control over these minority communities in the decades before the First World War. The parallel and sometimes conflicting agendas of the leaderships, to preserve religious faith amongst the immigrant communities whilst promoting integration and Anglicisation, were partially achieved. The hierarchies were attempting to forge a particular Catholic or Jewish identity, and the challenges from radical left wing politics, from the evangelism of other confessions, and from East End secular culture, seemed to threaten this identity.

But how concrete were these threats? Socialism and anarchism caused the leaderships great anxiety, and much time, money and ink were spent countering socialist propaganda and activity in the East End. But numerically, the socialist movement was weak amongst the diasporic communities in this period, although many of the most active members and theoreticians were drawn from the minority communities. At times of intense industrial conflict, such as 1889 and 1911-12, involvement increased, only to fall back again when the crisis had subsided. The hierarchies also over-estimated the challenge that socialism as it manifested itself in London in this period posed to their own authority. Some of the Jewish anarchist and socialist groups, and organisations such as the Socialist League (SL), were revolutionary in intent, with the stated aim of challenging the hegemony of the Jewish establishment. But the more powerful trade unions of the 1890s and 1900s, and the increasingly respectable Labour Party, rapidly eclipsing the SL and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), had no ambitions to overturn the position of the Jewish leadership or the Catholic Church. It was clear that there need be no contradiction in maintaining Jewish or Catholic faith and Labour Party membership. The 'synagogue socialists' referred to so dismissively by the *Arbeter Fraynd* in the early 1890s, in fact pointed the way to the future.⁵⁵ After the Great War Jewish and Irish involvement in left wing politics and trade unionism grew significantly, and in the 1930s the comparative strength of the Communist Party caused renewed anxieties amongst the Jewish leadership, but the fears the hierarchies held in the 1880s and 1890s, of a mass atheistic movement in the East End drawing away the faithful did not come to pass. Socialism, as it most successfully manifested itself, in the Labour Party, was too respectable, too politically moderate and too grounded for many of its members in religious faith, for this to happen. Socialism was no chimera, but both its influence and intentions were misunderstood by the communal establishments.

Conversions occasioned by religious evangelistic activity were again a matter of great concern for the hierarchies, but were numerically insignificant. The communal leaderships underestimated the number of converts, the missionary societies exaggerated them, but numbers were small. Harder to quantify were the number of young Jews or Irish Catholics who simply lapsed in their faith, who embraced the secular culture of the East End without adopting another religion. But again, the hierarchies to an extent misunderstood the threat which embracing wider East End culture presented. Rather than a complete repudiation of faith and ethnic identity, the generation growing up in the Edwardian period reached a position that both maintained religious observance and embraced elements of wider East End life and the cultural exchanges taking place at school, at work,

on the streets and in trade unions. The 'cockney' identities actually being forged by these interactions in the diasporic East End were perhaps not the ones the hierarchies would have chosen, but they did not significantly lessen the authority or challenge the position of the communal leaderships.

The leaderships, whose concerns over the attractions of socialism, evangelism and secularism in the East End had been initially prompted by the demographic changes, were in the end shaped by themselves. By the Second World War it was the children of the immigrant of the 1880s and 1890s who were assuming positions of leadership in the Board and the *Beth Din*. From the Edwardian period onwards the hierarchy of the Catholic Church was also beginning to reflect the ethnic make-up of Catholicism in urban Britain, with Irish Catholics assuming positions of power. The communal authorities, attempting with some success to maintain control over communities in the midst of rapid demographic change, were in the end fundamentally and permanently changed by this cultural and social transition themselves. By the end of the twentieth century, the immigrant East End heritage, including in the Jewish case both socialism and the Yiddish language, had become a source of pride and a cause for celebration rather than a cause of concern or embarrassment for the communal leaderships.

¹ London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/2712/GTS/366 Beth Din rough draft of report: A scheme for alleviating the social condition of the Jewish working classes.

² Hermann Adler, *The Ideal Jewish Pastor, A Sermon preached at the Great Synagogue*, (London, 1891), p.17.

³ LMA ACC/2712/GTS/366 Beth Din rough draft of report: A scheme for alleviating the social condition of the Jewish working classes.

⁴ Hugh McLeod, 'Working-class religion in late Victorian London: Booth's 'Religious Influences' revisited' in David Englander and Rosemary O'Day (editors), *Retrieved Riches: Social Investigation in Britain 1840-1914*, (Aldershot, 1995), p.282.

⁵ Joseph Rickaby, *The Creed of Socialism*, (London, 1910), p.7.

⁶ Herbert (Cardinal) Vaughan, *A Key to the Social Problem: An Appeal to the Laity*, (London, undated), p.4 and p.16.

⁷ *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 March 1889.

⁸ Chaim Bermant, *Point of Arrival: A Study of London's East End*, (London, 1975), p. 212. See also W.J Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914*, (London, 1975), for discussion of the anti-religious activities of Jewish socialist and anarchist groups.

⁹ See Nora Levin, *Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917: While Messiah Tarried*, (London, 1978), for discussion of the relationship between Jewish socialism in the Pale of Settlement and the East End.

¹⁰ Kenelm Digby Best, *Why No Good Catholic Can Be A Socialist*, (London, 1890), pp.5-7.

¹¹ Herbert (Cardinal) Vaughan, *A Call on the Laity for Christian Work*, (London, 1900), p.14.

¹² Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London, Third Series: Religious Influences, Vol.VII, Summary*, pp.252-253.

¹³ Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*,(Oxford, 1992), p.38.

¹⁴ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 22 February 1889.

¹⁵ Benjamin J. Elton, *Britain's Chief Rabbis and the religious character of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1970*, (Manchester, 2009), p.13.

¹⁶ Parkes Library, Southampton, M147 Papers of D. Mellows, Report of the Sub-Committee appointed by resolutions of the Special Committee of the United Synagogue, 14th April, 1897.

¹⁷ Mordechai Rozin, *The Rich and the Poor: Jewish Philanthropy and Social Control in Nineteenth-Century London*, (Brighton, 1999), p.225.

¹⁸ Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, p.178.

¹⁹ Vincent Alan McClland, *Cardinal Manning: His Public Life and Influence 1865-1892*, (London, 1962), p.135.

²⁰ University of Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS 74/4/1/5 Ben Tillett, *Fighter and Pioneer*, p.7.

²¹ David Maxwell, *Stepping Stones to Socialism*, (Hull, 1891), p.84.

²² Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, (London, 1948), p.127.

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- ²³ Dennis Sewell, *Catholics: Britain's Largest Minority*, (London, 2001), p.42.
- ²⁴ Westminster Diocesan Archives, AAW /V.1/2/3, Letter to Dr. Mivart from Cardinal Vaughan, 9 January 1900.
- ²⁵ Westminster Diocesan Archives, AAW V/.1/2/4, Letter to Cardinal Vaughan from Dr. Mivart, 11 January 1900.
- ²⁶ Sewell, *Catholics*, p.43.
- ²⁷ Robert Dell, *The Catholic Church and the Social Question*, (London, 1899), p.37.
- ²⁸ See 1911 visitation returns to London parishes held in the Westminster Diocesan Archives.
- ²⁹ *Labour Leader*, 31 January 1908.
- ³⁰ Steven Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1939*, (Buckingham, 1993), p.41. See also Donald M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain 1750-1922*, (Basingstoke, 1999), pp.86-89 for discussion of the political influence of the priest in working class parishes and Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor – The East End of London 1885-1914*, (Oxford, 2004), pp.194-195, detailing the limitations of priestly influence in Wapping and Millwall in this period.
- ³¹ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 22 February 1889.
- ³² Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, pp.137-138.
- ³³ Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting The Tailors: Trade Unionism Amongst the Tailors of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, (Ilford, 1995), p.132.
- ³⁴ Henry C. Day, *Catholic Democracy: Individualism and Socialism*, (London, 1914), pp.253-254.
- ³⁵ Georgiana Putnam McEntee, *The Social Catholic Movement in Great Britain*, (New York, 1927), p.157, and Hubert (Cardinal) Vaughan, *The Trinity Fund and the Material Condition of the Diocese*, (London, 1894), p.11.
- ³⁶ David Englander (ed.), *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920*, (London, 1994), pp.77-78.
- ³⁷ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London, Third Series: Religious Influences, Vol.I, London North of the Thames: The Outer Ring*, (London, 1902), p.145.
- ³⁸ Israel Zangwill, *The Children of the Ghetto*, (London, 1909), p.10.
- ³⁹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London, Third Series: Religious Influences, Vol.IV, Inner South London*, (London, 1902), pp.197-198.
- ⁴⁰ W.T Gidney, *The Jews and their Evangelization*, (London, 1899), p.97.
- ⁴¹ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 10 March, 1899.
- ⁴² Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London, Third Series: Religious Influences, Vol.VII, Summary*, p.268.
- ⁴³ *The Tablet*, 09 September 1890.
- ⁴⁴ LMA, ACC/3121/E/03/028, Missionary activities: counter action to attempted conversions, report of the Mission Committee.
- ⁴⁵ F.A McKenzie, *Famishing London – a study of the unemployed and unemployable*, (London, 1903), p.14.
- ⁴⁶ Herbert (Cardinal) Vaughan, *A Call on the Laity for Christian Work*, p.6.
- ⁴⁷ Sharman Kadish, 'A Good Jew and a Good Englishman': *The Jewish Lads' & Girls' Brigade, 1895-1995*, (London, 1995), p.44.
- ⁴⁸ *The Catholic Herald*, February 1902.
- ⁴⁹ W.J Fishman, *East End 1888: A year in a London borough among the labouring poor*, (London, 1988), pp.140-141.
- ⁵⁰ *The Jewish World*, 31 March 1905
- ⁵¹ See *The Catholic Herald*, 18 April, 1902.
- ⁵² Vaughan, *A Key to the Social Problem*, p.16.
- ⁵³ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 22 March 1889.
- ⁵⁴ Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, pp.118-119.
- ⁵⁵ Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, p.195.