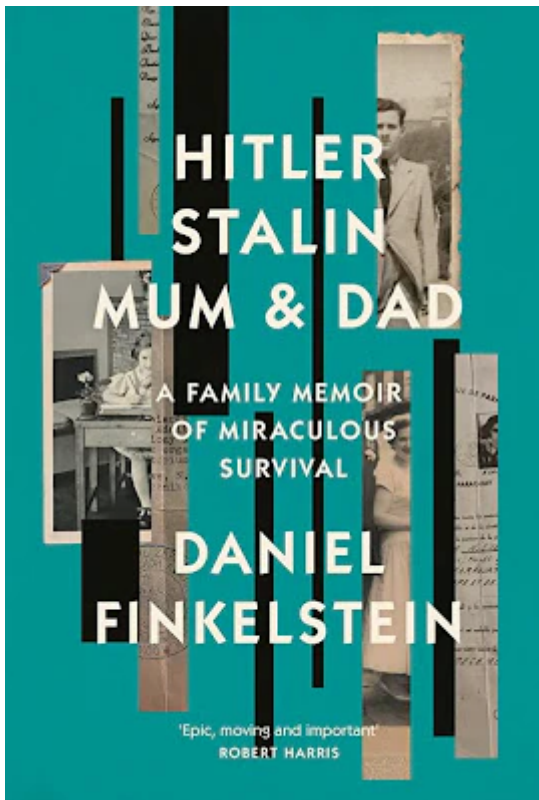


History to be heeded



a review by James Stevens Curl

This marvellous, humane and superbly researched book should be required reading for self-satisfied anti-Semites on the so-called “liberal left”, politicians who praise Mao’s *Little Red Book* in the House of Commons, and those “useful idiots” harbouring delusions about the benign nature of Soviet Communism under “Uncle Joe” Stalin.

Finkelstein’s paternal family were prosperous Jews living in the fine city of Lwów before 1939. Then in the Republic of Poland, the city was within the Austro-Hungarian Empire and called Lemberg until 1918. It and its inhabitants suffered terrible damage inflicted by the Russians in the 1914–18 war. In the hideous aftermath of that catastrophe, fighting continued between Poles and Ukrainians, with pogroms adding to the general mayhem. As the Ukrainian city of Lviv, it is today being bashed again by the Russians. When Poland was attacked by Germany and the USSR in 1939, Lwów fell to the Soviets. The

cream of the Polish army became captive to Stalin, murdered in a massacre collectively known as Katyń, which was cynically denied by the Kremlin for many years.

Very soon the Soviet political command arrived, ready for plans to dismember Poland and implement arrests and deportations under the direction of Nikita Krushchev. He was not the cuddly, chubby, joker fondly imagined by the contemptible British media, but a cruel *apparatchik* who rose in influence and power over the dead and broken bodies of innumerable individuals. Almost every person of standing in Eastern Poland faced the prospect of imprisonment or deportation, amongst them, naturally, philatelists and speakers of Esperanto. In April 1940, as part of the avowed intention of destroying the Polish nation, the NKVD seized Finkelstein's family. His grandmother and her only son, then a mere boy, were forced with over 60 others into a dark, almost airless cattle-truck, already foul with excrement. For over three ghastly weeks, those unfortunates were conveyed in unspeakable conditions to the Siberian borderlands, where they were forced to work on a Soviet state farm, which was claimed to be the highest form of Socialist agriculture but was in fact a model of incompetence.

Finkelstein's grandfather had been sent separately to a Gulag, to do backbreaking manual work like a pack-animal, in a barely imaginable, punishing environment. Gulags, essentially slave-labour camps, were hellish places where "political enemies" were "liquidated" and criminals detained. Each prisoner of the Soviets passed under slogans over the entrances proclaiming "Through Labour – Freedom", virtually identical to the signs over the gates of hell-holes like Auschwitz that informed "*Arbeit macht Frei*" to those who passed under them. After *Barbarossa*, when in 1941 the Germans attacked the USSR, a deal was done with Stalin. Enslaved and imprisoned Poles would leave the country and, under General Władysław Anders, form a new Polish army. This enabled Finkelstein's reunited

father and grandparents to travel to Iran, with tens of thousands of others in 1942.

Meanwhile, the author's maternal grandfather, Alfred Wiener, a German Jew who had served with distinction in the Imperial German Army during the 1914–18 war, became extremely concerned by what was happening in post-war Germany. The country had rapidly begun to look like, and indeed was, a basket-case. As early as 1919 he perceived that a mighty anti-Semitic storm was gathering, and he published his important and "uncannily farsighted" tract *Prelude to Pogroms?* – one of the very first soundings of alarms about the descent into barbarity then apparent to all not asleep. This was one of Wiener's earliest attempts to dispel lies, seek the truth and remove the dangers for decent people who only wished to live in peace with their families, books and possessions. He was soon challenging the distortions and downright lies being published in the poisonously anti-Semitic *Der Stürmer*, eventually managing to get Julius Streicher, the editor of that filthy rag, jailed for two months. He had a greater triumph when he was involved in the successful trial in Bern, Switzerland, which led to the judgment in 1935 that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was not only fraudulent, but obscene. That foul Russo-French libel on the Jews has done immeasurable damage, influencing many including Hitler and Henry Ford, yet today it is still widely believed and read, available across large swathes of the globe.

By that time Wiener realised that his beloved native land no longer regarded him as a real German, so he took his family, including baby Miryam, born in Charlottenburg, Berlin, in 1933, to the neutral Netherlands. The family settled in Amsterdam. Miryam was to become Daniel Finkelstein's mother. Wiener, a great scholar and bibliophile, was building up a huge collection of National Socialist publications to use as ammunition to warn the world about the dangers posed by that collection of gangsters. Here I part company with Finkelstein,

for he refers to the Nazis as “right”: how on earth can a party calling itself the National *Socialist* German *Workers’* Party ever be considered “right-wing”? He himself admits the similarities between Soviet Communism and National Socialism: both held that the “Will” of “The People” was being thwarted by “élites”, and that those “élites” needed to be “liquidated” by force. Both opposed the capitalist democracies and were determined to finish them off. Both wished to destroy the Polish Republic (and indeed soon set about “liquidating” its most eminent citizens); and the cynical hypocrisy of *Arbeit macht Frei* at the entrances to what were actually extermination camps was shared by both murderous *régimes*. At the Nuremberg Trials after the 1939–45 war, the Nazi defendants were charged with crimes against peace (was not the Soviet invasion of Poland a crime against peace?), crimes against humanity (were not the mass-deportations and enslavement of deportees by the Soviets crimes against humanity?), war-crimes (were not the murders of over 20,000 Polish officers in the so-called Katyń massacre war-crimes?), and conspiracy to commit those crimes. Were not the secret appendix to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, and the memorandum on Katyń by Lavrentiy Beria – a monster, affectionately referred to by Stalin as “my Himmler” – evidences of conspiracy?

Wiener established his important library in London. He was tireless in his efforts to inform an ignorant and naïve British government about the true nature of National Socialism and its genocidal programmes, and he eventually carried his efforts across the Atlantic to convince the Americans. However, he left his wife and three children in Amsterdam, so when the Germans invaded in 1940, they were trapped. Finkelstein chronicles the hair-raising lives they lived, leading to their incarceration in the camp at Westerbork, which was in fact just a holding facility for inmates destined for death in the gas-chambers of Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Their departures were delayed thanks to the acquisition of fake Paraguayan papers, through an organisation in Switzerland (in which, again, Poles played a major part). Due to the fantasies of Heinrich Himmler, who attempted to swap Jewish prisoners for Germans incarcerated abroad, the Wieners were moved to Bergen-Belsen where they endured a sadistic régime of pointless roll-calls in all sorts of weathers, dreadful muck to eat, daily cruelties and much else. Eventually they were taken by a Red Cross train to Switzerland in exchange for Germans, but Alfred Wiener's wife, Grete, having got her brood safely to Switzerland, succumbed to what she had been through and died there. The three girls were reunited with their father in America. After the war, the family settled in London, as did the Finkelsteins. Ludwik Finkelstein, with his mother Lusia, had survived the delights of deportation in a filthy overcrowded cattle-truck, shambolic Soviet "farming", and the long trek to Iran as part of the establishment of General Anders's army. He was to marry Miryam Wiener. Unfortunately, Ludwik's father (Adolf, known as Dolu) died in 1950 in Hendon, weakened by what he had had to endure at the hands of the Soviets.

The author ends on a sobering note: "The idea that the value of liberal democracy, and law, and liberty, and tolerance, is a lesson that has been learned and can't be unlearned seems hopelessly overoptimistic". What happened to his parents, he declares, is not about to happen to his family. But could it? Given the filth on social media, the hatred spewing forth on all sides, the clearly rampant anti-Semitism that emerged within the British Labour Party and even in the rancid halls of what passes nowadays as Academe, he reckons it could indeed.

Here I am with him, absolutely: we are in grave danger, and few realise or admit how very dangerous it all is. Amongst my own tutors were distinguished German Jewish academics who had managed to get out in time, and I knew many gallant Poles who

had fought during the war (and felt badly betrayed when Roosevelt and Churchill handed their wrecked country to Stalin). In Oxford, many years ago, I knew a young woman from the Netherlands who had been in Bergen-Belsen for some months in 1945: her experiences still haunt me. I know something horrible could well happen again.

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