

Biographies

GOLDA MEIR (1898-1978)



Golda Meir—Zionist Labor Party leader, diplomat and fourth Prime Minister of Israel; born Golda Mabovitch in Kiev (Ukraine), 1898.

When she was eight years of age, her family emigrated to the US, where she grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; she joined a Zionist youth movement, married Morris Myerson, and, in 1921, they emigrated to Palestine and were accepted as members of the Merhavia Kibbutz.

In 1924 the Myersons moved to Jerusalem, and Golda took up a series of posts at the Histadrut Labor Council. Appointed head of the Histadrut's political department, she was destined to employ that organization's growing power in promoting Zionist objectives, such as unrestricted Jewish immigration.

In 1946, Golda Meir headed the Jewish Agency's Political Department until the establishment of the State in 1948.

In June of 1948 Golda Meir was appointed the first Israeli Ambassador to the Soviet Union. She was elected a member of the Knesset in the 1949 elections and served as Minister of Labor and National Insurance between 1949 and 1956. She implemented welfare state policies, provided subsidized housing for immigrants, and orchestrated their integration into the country's work force.

During the next decade (1956-66), Golda Meir served as Foreign Minister. She initiated the Israeli policy of cooperation with the newly independent African nations, made efforts to cement relations with the US, and established bilateral relations with Latin American countries.

In 1969 Golda Meir was elected Prime Minister.

Shortly upon taking on the position, she achieved a cease-fire agreement with Egypt, which brought three years of tranquility that were only broken in October of 1973 with the Yom Kippur War.

As Prime Minister Golda Meir concentrated a great deal of her energy on the diplomatic front, dexterously combining personal diplomacy with a gifted handling of the communications media. Endowed with a will of iron; a warm personality; a grandmotherly image; simple, but very effective rhetoric; and a "shopping list," Golda Meir was successful in her solicitations for financial and military assistance in unprecedented amounts.

Golda Meir displayed herself to be a strong leader during the surprise

attack of the Yom Kippur War, securing air shipments of US arms; she stood firm with regard to negotiations over the separation of forces and the swift release of prisoners-of-war. Golda Meir resigned from her post in mid-1974. She retired from public life and began writing her memoirs but was present when the Knesset received Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on his historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977.

Golda Meir died in December of 1978; she was 80 years of age.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR (1908-1986)



Simone de Beauvoir was born in Paris on January 9th, 1908 in the bosom of a bourgeois Catholic family notable for its rebelliousness.

In 1929, while both were teaching Philosophy, she met Jean Paul Sartre at *La Sorbonne* (university in Paris) who, according to her, decisively represented the "fundamental event of my existence." They remained united intellectually and romantically until Sartre died in 1980. Together with him, she acted upon a series of principles based on her conception of woman's role in society and in the couple.

She worked as an editor for the publication *Tempes Modernes*, of which Sartre was in charge. Her philosophy, existentialism, and her commitment to leftist politics were plunged into crisis by the consequences of WWII.

Her first novel, *She Came to Stay*, dealt with the existentialist dilemmas of liberty and individual responsibility that would continue to appear in her subsequent novels like *The Blood of Others* and *The Mandarins*, for which she received the *Prix Goncourt*. Her existentialist theses also appear in her autobiographical works, of which *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* and *All Said and Done* are notable examples.

Among her essays, *The Second Sex* stands out as an analysis that has become a cornerstone of feminism, and one that examines the alienations of woman from historical, social, and philosophical perspectives; *The Coming of Age* deals with the ageing process, and, in 1981, she published *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, which offers a controversial depiction of her relations Jean Paul Sartre.

She died April 14th, 1986 in Paris.

MARIE-OLYMPE DE GOUGES (1755-1793)



Marie-Olympe de Gouges was born in Montauban, France, in 1748. Her birth name was Marie Gouze. Gouges, considered a precursor of feminism, wrote numerous plays, novels, and shorter socio-political works, and was also in charge of the publication *L'Impatient*. She founded the *Société populaire de femmes*.

In 1791, as her answer to the 1789 "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen," she wrote her "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the [female] Citizen," in which she asked for equal rights for women and lay bare the contradictions inherent in the revolutionary movement for denying them in spite of proclaiming equality, liberty, and fraternity. Taking the Declarations of 1789 as her model, and applying it exhaustively to women, she wrote what was, up until that moment, the most radical argument in favor of feminist claims.

Gouges demanded the egalitarian treatment of women in comparison to men in every aspect of life, public and private: the right to vote, to hold public office, to speak publicly on political matters, to equal treatment in public distinctions, to own private property, to participate in the armed forces and in education, and to equal status in the family and in the church, even.

An adversary of Robespierre, she published her *Pronostic de Monsieur Robespierre pour un animal amphibie*, on account of which she was accused of seditious intrigue and guillotined. She died in Paris in 1793, postponing the concession of the rights she demanded (her defense of which is so contemporary

in nature) for more than two centuries. After her death, all manner of activity related to her was prohibited.

Olympe, the French revolutionary, said: "Women have the right to mount the scaffold; they should likewise have the right to mount the rostrum."

"For the services I have offered my country, the people, and freedom, it is only humane that my death sentence should immortalize me."

MARIE CURIE (1867-1934)



Marie Curie, *née* Marja Sklodowska, was born in Warsaw (Poland) November 7th, 1867. Her father was a professor of physics.

In 1891 she moved to Paris (where she changed her name to *Marie*) and attended *la Sorbonne*.

Two years later she completed her studies in physics, graduating first in of her class.

In 1894 she met Pierre Curie; they were married in 1895.

Marie Curie was interested in recent discoveries of new kinds of radiation. Wilhelm Roentgen had discovered X-rays in 1895, and, in 1896, Antoine Henri Becquerel discovered that uranium emitted similar invisible radiation.

Curie began to study uranium radiation and, using the piezoelectric technologies her husband had discovered, she meticulously measured the radiation emitted by pitchblende, a mineral containing uranium. When she saw that the radiation emitted by the mineral was more intense than that of uranium itself, she realized that there had to be undiscovered elements that were even more radioactive than uranium.

Marie Curie was the first person to use the term *radioactive* in order to describe elements that emit radiation as their nuclei decompose.

Pierre Curie finished his work on magnetism so he could join his wife in her research, and, in 1898, the couple announced their discovery of two new elements: polonium (Marie gave it this name in honor of her place of birth) and radium.

For the next four years the Curies, working under very precarious conditions, treated one ton of pitchblende, from which they were able to isolate a fraction of a gram of radium.

In 1903 they shared a Nobel Prize in Physics with Becquerel on account of having discovered radioactive elements. Marie Curie was the first woman to receive a Nobel Prize.

In 1904 Pierre Curie was appointed Professor of Physics at the University of Paris, and, in 1905, a member of the French Academy. Such positions were not normally held by women, and Marie was not afforded the same recognition.

Pierre died April 19th, 1906, run over by a horse-drawn carriage. His wife took over his courses and continued with her own research. In 1911 she received a second Nobel Prize, an unprecedented occurrence. On this occasion the prize was in Chemistry, owing to her research on radium and its compounds. She was appointed Director at the Radium Institute of the University of Paris. In 1914 the Curie Laboratory was founded. Marie Curie suffered a pernicious anemia caused by prolonged exposure to radiation. She died July 4th; 1934, in Upper Savoy.

The Curies had two daughters, one of whom also won a Nobel Prize, Irène Joliot-Curie, who together with her husband, Frédéric, received a Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1935 for the obtainment of new radioactive elements.

CLARA ZETKIN (1857-1933)



Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) was a very influential socialist German politician who fought for women's rights.

Until 1917, she was active in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, then she joined the Independent German Social Democratic Party (*USPD*), specifically its far-left wing, the Spartacist League, which later became the German Communist Party (*KPD*).

In 1874, after having studied to become a coordinator, Zetkin came into contact with labor and women movements, joining the Socialist Workers' Party (*SAP*) in 1878. In 1890 the party changed its name to the one it is known by today, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*SPD*).

As a consequence of the ban on socialist activity in Germany placed by Otto von Bismarck in 1878, Zetkin initially sought refuge in Zurich in 1882, subsequently going into exile in Paris. During her sojourn in Paris she played an important role in the foundation of the Socialist International. She adopted the

name of her first husband, the Russian revolutionary Ossip Zetkin, with whom she had two sons.

Zetkin was very concerned with women's politics, the fight for equal rights and women's suffrage, giving impetus to the German social-democratic feminist movement; it was she who decided that, starting March 8th, 1911, that date should be considered "International Women's Day" or "Women's Labor Day," thus paying tribute to the female workers at Sirtwood Cotton of New York, who, after having locked themselves in at their workplace with a view to obtaining dignified wages and the reduction of the working day to ten hours, were burnt to a crisp at that facility after an arson attack against their peaceful strike.

During WWI Clara Zetkin, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and other influential members of the SPD, rejected the party's pacts with the government, which effected the suppression of labor strikes for the duration of the armed conflict. Together with other anti-war activists, Zetkin organized an international socialist conference of women against the war in Berlin in 1915. She was arrested several times in the course of the war, on account of her opinions.

When Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist Party came to power, the German Communist Party was banned from the Reichstag, and Zetkin went into exile for the last time, this time to the Soviet Union, where she died at the age of 76. She was buried by the wall of the Kremlin in Moscow.

NELLY SACHS (1891-1970)



Nelly Sachs was born into an art-loving Jewish German family in Berlin. Her parents were William and Margaret Karger Sachs. Her birth name was "Leone," though from a very young age on, people called her "Nelly," the name by which she was known ever since. As a child she studied music and dance, with literature also occupying a very important place the home.

As the Nazi government came to power, already at the age of sixteen, she published romantic poems displaying extraordinary literary gifts. She became immersed in the language of the Psalms, Hasidic interpretations, and the Zohar (the fundamental text of the Kabbalah).

In 1940 Nelly and her mother managed to escape Nazi persecution and put down roots in Stockholm, Sweden, thanks to the help of the writer Selma Lagerlöf. There she took up translating Swedish poetry, as she continued to write

in German. Nelly Sachs' literary *oeuvre* is the greatest confirmation that the henchmen of Auschwitz and other extermination camps might have killed millions of Jews but could do nothing to the spirit and sensitivity of the Jewish people. The *Shoah* not only changed her life, it also inspired her art. She later claimed "had I not been able to write (about the *Shoah*) [. . .] I would not have been able to survive."

For this reason she was known as "the poet of Jewish destiny." Her *oeuvre* is that of an artist committed to Jewish spirituality and uprooted by the *Shoah*. Even in the face of pain, death, and ruin, she remained a creative woman.

Outstanding among her numerous works are *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (*In the Habitations of Death*) (1947), *Eli - Die Leiden Israels* (*Eli—the Sufferings of Israel*) (1951), and *Späte Gedichte* (*Late Poems*) (1964).

Nelly Sachs was the recipient of numerous prizes such as the Prize of the Swedish Poets Association (1957), and an Honorary Distinction from the Federal Association of German Industry. In Meesburg she was awarded the Droste-Hülshoff Prize (1960). In 1961 she was the first winner of an eponymous award established in her honor by the City of Dortmund. In 1965 she received her first award in recognition of her career, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. The following year, 1966, she further consolidated her career upon receiving together with the Israeli writer Yosef Agnon, the Nobel Prize in Literature. Sachs was the first Jewish women to receive this award.

RIGOBERTA MENCHU TUM (1959 - present)



An indigenous Mayan, Rigoberta Menchu Tum was born in Quiché in the land of corn, Guatemala. Rigoberta grew up in the mountains of Quiché and on the farms on the county's southern coast, an area to which, year after year, thousands of indigenous people migrate in order to work the rich lands of plantation owners for miserly wages, producing, coffee, sugar, cotton, and other materials for exportation.

The daughter of two respected persons in their community, Vicente Menchú Pérez, an activist for the land and rights of his indigenous brothers; and Juana Tum K'otoja', an indigenous expert on the art of childbirth, from whom she has learned since childhood to love and respect nature, the sacredness of the surroundings and collective life in the indigenous communities.

Since childhood she also has known the injustice, discrimination, racism, and exploitation that keep thousands of indigenous Guatemalans in poverty. It was poverty forced her to look for sustenance in the county's capital, in order to

assist her parents and siblings, but it was in the indigenous communities that she learned to fight back by organizing.

Between 1979 and 1983 she lost her siblings, her father and mother in defending the land and workers.

These circumstances constitute the main thrust of the quest for Universal Justice and struggle against impunity undertaken by Rigoberta, who managed to escape the horrendous policies of terror implemented in Guatemala and to continue, to the extent that circumstances have permitted, working and organizing her people in order to resist the extermination practiced by the state.

She went into exile in Mexico in 1981, from where she has persisted in her tireless efforts at denouncing rampant genocide in Guatemala, and from where she has also initiated an in-depth knowledge and struggle within the international community for the rights of the indigenous peoples of the world.

Since 1982 she has taken part in the annual meetings of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's Sub-commission for the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, as well as in the General Assembly since 1993.

Her trajectory, work, and struggle for human rights, in particular those of indigenous peoples, led to her being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, and, since then, Rigoberta Menchu Tum has pressed on with her universal mission, since, in her own words, "As long as I am alive, the Nobel Prize I received will mean something."

CHAIKE GROSSMAN (1919- 1996)



Chaike Grossman was born in the year 1919 in Bialystok, Poland, where she completed her secondary education at the local Hebrew school in 1938. In 1940 she furthered her studies in Vilna, and then later at the University of Tel Aviv.

At the age of nine she joined the ranks of the *Hashomer Hatza'ir*. When she was eighteen, instead of making concrete plans for her *aliyah* to study at the Hebrew University, she was selected to implement the emergency measures of the *Hashomer Hatza'ir*, which was forced underground, and she decided to remain in Europe, rather than making use of the *aliyah* certificate she had been granted. From the early days of the German invasion on, Chaike Grossman acted as an emissary in the ghettos of Poland, Lithuania, and other places. Her appearance, along with the forged "Aryan" documents she had obtained, were of great use to her in carrying out this mission. Her tasks consisted of things like obtaining armaments for the denizens of the ghetto, establishing liaisons between

clandestine groups on the Aryan side of the city, and organizing the resistance in Bialystok. The uprising broke out in August of 1943, and Chaïke Grossman took part in the street battles alongside the other members of Jewish commando units. Later, she left the ghetto to organize from the outside such assistance as was possible, the rescue of survivors, and their safe delivery into the hands of Jewish and Soviet partisans hiding in the nearby woodlands.

After the War she worked for some years on the Jewish committee that tried to help the hundreds of thousands of refugees and survivors. In 1948 she went ahead with her *aliyah* to Israel, which she reached on the ship *Providence* together with 2000 other *olim*, in the main, young survivors of the Holocaust. It was on the ship's deck that she heard the declaration of the creation of the Jewish state.

Chaïke Grossman reached Israel as one who returns home after a long journey towards her death, which passed her by. Her knowledge of the Hebrew language and the country's geography enabled her to adapt without difficulty.

In 1949 she published her book *People of the Underground* and married Meir Orkin at the Evron Kibbutz. In the same year her first daughter was born.

She was designated to carry out functions at the Hartzi and Mapam *kibbutzim* institutions, as an instructor, coordinator, and secretary.

She was the secretary of the affiliated *Haifa Mapam* party and subsequently coordinated the World Union of Mapam. In 1969 she was elected to the seventh *Knesset* (Israeli parliament).

From her seat she was able to adopt some of the more radical positions with regard to social and national discrimination. In the seventh and eighth *Knesset* she presided over the Public Services Commission, promoting laws that produced strong opposition from the religious sectors (the Abortion Law, equal rights for women, laws relating to at-risk youth, etc.)

She was vice-president at the ninth and eleventh *Knesset* and head of the Mapam legislative body.