

## CLAS Open Seminars - Lent Term 2026

SG1 Ground Floor, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, CB3 9DP

Monday 23 February - 5:15pm

### Yiddishkayt on the Barricades: Forging a Jewish Working Class in Buenos Aires, 1890-1930

[Walter Koppmann](#) (Freie Universität Berlin)

**Abstract:** This paper will analyse the formation of the Jewish-Argentine working class, its relationship with left-wing political cultures and transnational urban experiences in the context of capitalist modernisation. On the eve of the First World War, the Jewish working class constituted the third largest ethnic community in Buenos Aires, behind Italian and Spanish immigrants. Jewish immigration became visible between 1905 and 1906, when more than 20,000 people from Eastern Europe arrived in Buenos Aires, escaping antisemitism, pogroms, and the miserable conditions of the tsarist Pale of Settlement. Indistinctly called the “Russians”, they represented a social minority in numerical terms. All the same, their political relevance was salient as the public opinion stigmatized them as a dangerous and subversive social group, associated with terrorism, violence, and women trafficking. Transoceanic Jewish migration continued until the end of the 1920s, making the Argentine Jewish community the largest of Latin America. At the turn of the twentieth century, Jews began to settle in specific neighbourhoods along Buenos Aires (in the first years, Balvanera and Almagro; later in the 1920s, Villa Crespo, Paternal, and Caballito), gaining a growing presence in certain branches of production and working places. Within Buenos Aires’ multi-ethnic framework, a sui generis Jewish labour world was structured based on an unstable, seasonal, and ethnically split labour market, shaped both by the specific demands of the ethnic group as well as the urban development process. At the core of the identity of Jewish workers was a tension between, on the one hand, the identification along ethnic lines and, on the other, the development of a class identity forged in the daily exploitation shared with both Jewish and non-Jewish workers. Nevertheless, what was unique or peculiar about the experience of the Jewish working class in Buenos Aires? How considerable was the impact of developing urbanization among the Argentinean Jewry in the early-twentieth century? Which roles were played by left political cultures in shaping these new identities?



**Walter L. Koppmann** (Buenos Aires, 1990) holds a PhD in History from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and is currently working as Visiting Fellow at the Lateinamerika Institut – Freie Universität Berlin. He is a permanent researcher at the Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana “Dr. Emilio Ravignani”, National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) of Argentina, and has worked as a lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the UBA since 2012. His areas of interest are the history of the labour movement and left political cultures, with a special emphasis on Jewish workers. He is the author of *La madera de la clase obrera argentina. Izquierdas, etnicidad y género en una industria de Buenos Aires, 1889-1930* (Imago Mundi, 2022).