

THE JEWISH SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA AND POLAND

(FROM THE 1870'S TO THE FOUNDING OF THE BUND IN 1897)

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INTRODUCTION

The Jewish socialist movement, which has played such a prominent role in Jewish life in the past fifty years, has always been more of an ideological than a political or social movement. The first attempts at socialist propaganda among Jewish workers were made in the 1870's, but the roots of Jewish socialism extend considerably beyond that date. In this respect there is great similarity between the Jewish socialist movement and Zionism, and it is no mere coincidence that the year 1897, in which the first Zionist Congress met at Basel, also saw the establishment of the Jewish Labor organization *Bund*, the first socialist party among the Jews.

Both Jewish socialism and Zionism gave expression to the age-old yearnings of the Jew for redemption. Although each was profoundly affected by the general social and national-political tendencies of the surrounding world they remained essentially Jewish movements, bound up with Jewish life and with the cherished traditions of Jewish history.

The Messianic-Utopian element in socialism appealed strongly to the Jewish intellectual and particularly to the workingman. In the course of generations the Jews had come to constitute a "proletarian nation," a people without a land or government of its own. In the socialist propaganda for a new world, built upon the foundations of truth, peace and justice, the Jewish worker heard an echo of the old Biblical prophecies of eternal peace, of the "End of Days," when, along with the redemption of the entire world, the people of Israel, too, would be redeemed.

At the same time, the Jewish socialist movement was always noted for its "realism"; it was a socialism of deed rather than of faith. This "realism" was characteristic of the Bund in Russia and Poland, and is even more characteristic of the Jewish socialist movement in Erets Yisrael today. To the members of the communal settlements in Palestine socialism has become a mode of daily life. This trait, too, Jewish socialism inherited from Jewish religious tradition, which was always a way of life rather than a doctrine of faith.

I. THE SOCIAL POSITION OF THE JEWISH WORKER

In order to understand the unique character of the Jewish socialist movement it is necessary, first of all, to have some knowledge of the particular conditions under which the workers lived and in

which they carried on their struggle for social and economic justice. For tens of generations the Jews had been an urban people. Jewish life completely lacked the feudal traditions which left their particular impress on the development of Europe in general and of Eastern Europe in particular. Up to the very end of the nineteenth century Jewish life in the cities and small towns of Eastern Europe remained comparatively simple. The age-old inherited divisions into widely separated social classes that existed in the non-Jewish world were almost entirely unknown in the Jewish community. The bulk of the non-Jewish working population in Russia and Poland at that time consisted mainly of peasants or the descendants of peasants who had but recently been liberated from serfdom. Opposed to them was a very thin layer of the gentry that had dominated the entire political and social life of the country over a number of centuries. Both these extremes were practically absent in Jewish life. "All people have classes," remarks a prominent Jewish writer of the Haskalah period, "save the Jews. All Jews are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Even so radical a Jewish writer as M. Olgin found it necessary to emphasize the fact that in the small Jewish town all the inhabitants were considered one family. Even the poorest always remained "a free man; poverty did not corrode his soul, did not break his spirit."

The regulations of the Halakah concerning the rights and duties of the worker were of the utmost importance in this regard. The relations between employer and employee were regulated in Jewish law on the basis of the ancient principle formulated in the Bible: The Jews must have no other master but God. "For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus XXV, 55). Hence, the worker must not lose his personal freedom because of his status as a wage earner. The Halakah formulated this concept of freedom into the

principle that the worker has the permanent right to abandon his employment. The right of the worker to dispose of his own labor even after having contracted to work for a specified time is thus formulated in the *Shulhan Aruk*:

If a worker begins to work, and changes his mind at noon, he may quit. Even if he was paid in advance and cannot return the money to the employer, he still may quit and the money is considered as a debt, as it is said: "For unto me the children of Israel are servants, and not servants unto servants."

The legal regulation of working hours and rest-periods undoubtedly constitutes one of the most important social achievements of modern times. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, as we know, the doctrine of *laissez faire* prevailed. Even highly developed industrial countries limited the legal regulations of working conditions to a minimum. In the light of this it is noteworthy that Jewish tradition had introduced and put into effect a system of labor regulations, a rhythm of work and rest that rouses our admiration to this day.

According to Jewish law, the normal work-day for an employee is from sunrise to sunset. In practice, however, the limits of the work-day were conditioned by the hours of daily prayer. In many communities and guilds there were regulations forbidding the opening of stores and work-shops before morning services. Thus a regulation in the minute-book (*pinkos*) of the Tailors Guild in Lutsk (eighteenth century) reads: "Every member of our *Hevrah* must attend synagogue services twice daily. He who is unable to do so must pay a fine in ransom of his soul." Twice a day, in the morning and before sunset, the beadle would summon the people to services. The workmen would quit work a little before sunset in order to come to services on time.

The interval between the afternoon (*Minhah*) and the evening (*Maariv*) services was spent in the house of study and some of

the worshipers would engage in conversation with their friends during that period. Others—by far the larger number—would spend the time in study. Many artisans' guilds employed teachers to instruct their members between the *Minhah* and *Maariv* services. Thus, for example, Mendele Mocher Seforim tells us in his *Shloime Reb Hayims*: "At dusk, between the *Minhah* and *Maariv* services, artisans and other simple folk gather round the tables to listen to instruction—at one table there is a discourse on the *Midrash*, at another on *Ein Yaakob*, at a third on the Scriptures . . ." The apprentices, too, spent the interval between the *Minhah* and the *Maariv* services in the house of study.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the significance of the Sabbath for the Jewish worker. The Sabbath rest was observed to a degree almost inconceivable to the modern man. On the Sabbath everyone rested: rich and poor, artisans and merchants, housewives and servants. Except for an emergency where a human life might be at stake, a Jew would not do any manner of work on the Sabbath. Artisans as a rule quit work on Friday afternoon, several hours before sunset, sometimes even at noon, and in some Jewish communities even stores would be closed long before sunset.

The annual holidays were especially important in connection with this pattern of work and rest, particularly in the case of Passover, which lasts eight days, and the Feast of Tabernacles which lasts nine days. On the intermediate days of the holidays, *hol ha-moed*, stores would remain open, but artisans abstained from work. For the workmen and apprentices these intermediate days with their semi-holiday atmosphere, had a special appeal. "Happy days are the *hol ha-moed* days. They are neither holiday nor workday . . . The tailor lays aside his scissors, the cobbler his awl, as if God had begun again to rain down manna from the heavens . . . And when these days arrive, the young apprentice dons his new suit, takes his *hol ha-moed* cane, the young girl, too, dons her new outfit, takes her

parasol, and they betake themselves for a visit to the next town" (Sholem Asch).

A fair idea of the rhythm of work and rest in the typical Jewish town of Eastern Europe can be gained from the following excerpts from the regulations of the artisans' guild, Poale Zedek, in Czortkow, in the eighteenth century:

No artisan may engage in his occupation prior to his attendance at morning service in the synagogue . . . whoever violates this regulation shall give one zloty to charity. Similarly, before the *Minhah* service . . . when the knock of the hammer on the door is heard, we must lay aside our work and go to the synagogue . . .

On New Moon days work is forbidden till the afternoon.

On *hol ha-moed* all manner of work is forbidden. Violators of this regulation will be fined seven Polish zlotys for the benefit of the synagogue.

We have undertaken not to do any manner of work on Fridays or on the eve of holidays after midday, unless it be of great necessity for the holiday, in which case it is permitted to complete the work in the afternoon, but under no circumstances later than the summons to the synagogue. Violators of this regulation will be fined four zlotys.

Jewish tradition has also indirectly served to regulate child labor to some extent. Every town had societies for the purpose of providing poor children with an education up to the completion of their thirteenth year (Bar-Mitzvah). The more promising among the pupils were even afforded an opportunity for advanced study in the yeshivah.

Because of these practices the Jewish workman suffered little, if at all, from a feeling of inferiority in his intercourse with the other members of the community. He received an elementary education in heder. On the Sabbath and the holidays he was a free man. In the interval between *Minhah* and *Maariv* he sat with his fellow

townsmen in the house of study. He felt himself an equal partner with all other Jews in the spiritual heritage of Israel. True, in the Jewish community, too, there were marked social cleavages between the rich and the poor, the scholar and the untutored. Even in the synagogue the prosperous member of the congregation occupied a more prominent position than the poor one. But there was absent that sharp gulf which divided the classes in the non-Jewish world.

There were often a number of scholars among the artisans. Furthermore, even the poorest man could hope that his son might become a scholar. Popular tradition has apotheosized the silent, simple workman who serves God by his hard labor and honest life. The world is sustained, tradition tells us, by the merits of Thirty-six holy men (the Lamed Vav Zaddikim) who remain undisclosed to the world and even to themselves. People believed that these saints were to be found primarily among the poor artisans and the village folk. And rightly so, for an uncommon measure of devotion and self-sacrifice was required of these people to live honestly and to fulfill their religious obligations. The following excerpts from the memoirs of Reuben Brainin, the well-known Jewish writer, will serve as an illustration:

My father was a poor tailor, a simple man, God-fearing and observant of the commandments. He was also a scholar of considerable attainment . . . He would make the rounds of the villages and the estates of the noblemen in search of work. And if he only found it, he would labor day and night, labor to exhaustion and to near-blindness. All those days that he was working in non-Jewish homes he did not eat a cooked meal, and subsisted on dry bread and water . . . In my father's house, in spite of crushing poverty, there was a large case full of books, which my father treasured as the apple of his eye.

II. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS DEMOCRACY

Jewish tradition never regarded the individual as the absolute and unrestricted owner of his possessions. The sole master of all possessions of the world, in the Jewish view, was the Lord of the Universe. This idea is given expression in the Biblical legislation that forbids the Jew to sell his patrimony. "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus XXV, 23).

One's possessions are merely a trust given by God. As a trustee of God's possessions one must strictly fulfill His commandments relative to charity and the performance of good deeds. Hence, wealth was never regarded as an indication of personal achievement, just as poverty was not regarded as an indication of personal deficiencies. Jewish religious literature, beginning with the Prophets and the Psalms, frequently exalts poverty and the poor. The needy are identified with the pious and the just who fulfill the precepts of God and walk in His ways.

At the foundation of Jewish democracy lies the concept of the sanctity of human personality. Man was created in the image of God and in His likeness; hence, his life and his dignity are sacred. Even the sinner does not lose the image of God, and, therefore, even those condemned to death must not be unduly degraded: "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day, for he that is hanged is a reproach unto God!" (Deuteronomy XXI, 22-23, translation according to Rashi). Degrading a man—Jewish tradition maintains—even if he has committed the gravest of offenses, is tantamount to blaspheming God, since man is created in God's image.

Jewish democracy was interested in spiritual rather than material values, in

the *olam ha-ba*, the world to come, rather than in *olam ha-zeh*, this world. The accepted principle was, "All Israel have a share in the world to come, as it is said, 'Thy people are all righteous.'"

The entire Jewish people is a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." All Jews are under obligation to study the Torah, and all have an equal share in the privilege of performing meritorious deeds. After the destruction of the Temple the institution of the priesthood ended, to all intents and purposes; there was no longer an intermediary between God and the people. The rabbi occupies no privileged position in Jewish ritual; he is no more than an expert. Every adult Jew is qualified for a *minyán* (ten adult Jews required, as a quorum, for public worship), and even the simplest of Jews may conduct the service. The Jewish communities, therefore, had to provide at least an elementary education for all children. In the same spirit of enabling every Jew to fulfill the Commandments of the Torah, the community saw to it that every Jew was provided with matzot for Passover. In the same spirit, too, the community regarded it a sacred duty to help every Jewish girl to get married and raise a family.

It was considered one of the greatest *mitzvot* to pay the last respects to the deceased, particularly when there were no relatives to attend the funeral rites, and to perpetuate the memory of the departed. In the statutes of the various artisans' guilds and Societies for Study we find special regulations governing cases of members who died childless. In these cases the *Hevrah* arranged the funeral and saw to it that the *Kaddish* was recited and the memorial anniversary properly observed.

One of the most striking instances in this respect is the *shetar hitkashrut* (covenant) of an association of Kabbalists in Jerusalem in the second half of the eighteenth century. The members of this commune, which had the symbolic name *Ahabat Shalom* (Love of Peace), agreed to a communal and cooperative life both in this world and in the

world to come. They designated themselves "spiritual brothers in this and in the world to come." To make possible perfect fellowship they also resolved, "not to praise each other, even though praise is deserved . . . so that we all conduct ourselves as equals, without distinction or advantage." Of special interest is the obligation of each of the members "to exert himself to the utmost in the world to come" to save, perfect, and elevate the souls of his fellows.

The institution of the covenant, that is, the voluntary agreement between individuals or groups, forms one of the cardinal elements of Jewish democracy. In the Biblical conception even the relations between man and God are regulated by covenant. The first Covenant was made by God with Noah after the flood (Genesis IX): "And I will establish my covenant with you: neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood: neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

At the same time, the sanctity of life, and especially of human life, is proclaimed. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man." The relationship between God and the Jewish people is also based on the Covenant concluded at Mount Sinai (Exodus XIX-XXIV).

The democratic institution of the Covenant was in Biblical times closely linked with the people's assembly (See *The History of the Jews in Ancient Times*, Vol. I, pp. 101-103). Important elements of these old democratic traditions survived up to the beginning of the twentieth century and influenced, as we shall see later, the social development of modern Jewish life.

It may be of interest here to mention the fact that the Biblical concept of the covenant played a very prominent role in the Protestant theology of the seventeenth century, particularly in the United States. This covenant or federal theology, as it was termed, undoubtedly gave expression to the democratic trend of the time, which could no longer be entirely satisfied with the

rigorously authoritarian ethic of Calvinist theology.

The federal theology was essentially part of a universal tendency in European thought to change social relationship from status to contract . . . There can be no doubt that these theologians inserted the federal idea into the very substance of Divinity, that they changed the relation even of God to man from necessity to contract largely because contractualism was becoming increasingly congenial to the age and in particular to Puritanism. (Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*.)

Jewish tradition never established any sharp demarcations between the worldly and the religious sphere in life. The Jewish community was a "holy community," just as every Jewish *Hevrah* was a "holy society." The constitution of Jewry, the Torah, regulated the religious as well as the social and economic life of the individual Jew. A strict religious-ethical discipline was frequently called upon in Jewish life to make up for the lack of a normal governmental apparatus. This explains the extremely significant role occupied in Jewish life by such institutions as the oath (*shvueh*), the voluntary covenant, and the *herem* (excommunication). In the history of Jewish guilds we frequently encounter instances of their members gathering in the prayer house and taking a collective oath before the Scroll of the Law. The oath is at the same time the guarantee and the symbol of unity, brotherhood and discipline. It was natural, therefore, for the prayer house, the synagogue, to become the center of Jewish community life, and it is illuminating to the highest degree that even in the early part of the present century the radical and unbelieving socialists would often go to the synagogues to carry on their propaganda, since these were the sole places where the ordinary folk of the community would gather.

One of the most characteristic phenomena of Jewish democracy was the custom of *Ikkuv ha-Keriah*, or interrupting

the Reading of the Torah on the Sabbath. An individual with a grievance or with some complaint against another individual or even against the community as a whole, would come to the synagogue on the Sabbath to demand his rights. In the presence of God's Torah the weak would feel a greater measure of protection; in the prayer house he had the means and the opportunity of voicing his complaints before God and man. The aggrieved man had the right to forbid the congregation to take the Scroll out of the Ark until he had been promised that justice would be done, or until the individual who had injured him agreed to place the dispute before the rabbi or before a lay arbitrator. Not infrequently the rabbi of the community would himself take advantage of the right of *Ikkuv ha-Keriah* in order to compel the prosperous householders of the community to provide for the town's needy or for urgent charities, as, for example, for winter fuel for the homes of the poor, funds to provide matzot for the Passover, etc.

The custom of *Ikkuv ha-Keriah* had an enormous educational significance, and was, in a sense, a practical application of popular democracy. It is worthy of note that women took advantage of this practice even more often than men did. The well-known Zionist leader, Shmaryahu Levin, describes in his memoirs, in the chapter entitled "Cherneh the Widow," the operation of the custom of *Ikkuv ha-Keriah* in a typical small Jewish town of Tsarist Russia:

And Cherneh the widow was a force to be reckoned with in Swislowitz. . . . She was the most daring person in the town in the matter of interrupting the Reading of the Torah during the Sabbath services in the synagogue.

This immemorial privilege of the poor and the powerless was an extraordinary institution . . . The scene must be recalled in its fullness if we are to understand the force of the action. It is a Sabbath morning in the synagogue . . . The last of the regular prayers is said . . . and

the high officials of the synagogue make ready to bring out of the Ark the Scrolls of the Torah . . . And suddenly . . . suddenly a Jew appears in the pulpit where the Scrolls are to be laid down, delivers a resounding blow with one of the heavier prayer-books, and cries out at the top of his voice:

"I forbid the Reading."

The effect is electrical . . . The Jew in the pulpit waits and when the silence is complete he voices his complaint. He knows that he is secure. He is exercising an ancient privilege which it would be blasphemy to challenge.

Cherneh the widow was the most effective "interruptress" in the whole of our town. She seldom exploited the privilege on her own behalf. She spoke for others—and the congregation knew that Cherneh was *not* a person to be intimidated, interrupted or overridden. Once she had broken up the services she would keep them suspended until she had obtained satisfaction (translation by Maurice Samuel).

III. BEGINNINGS OF THE JEWISH LABOR MOVEMENT

It was thus that the Jewish worker entered into the modern period with a substantial store of experience and tradition. There were cases when the newly-established and forward-looking proletarian organizations were the direct heirs of the older traditional artisans' guilds, which included employers as well as wage earners. At times the tendency to break away from these artisans' guilds originated among the workers; and there were cases when it was the employers who sought to abandon the general guilds, since it no longer suited them to be ranked with the workers.

How old is the modern Jewish labor movement? When were the first efforts made for the establishment of an independent labor organization? When did the Jewish workers begin their common struggle for social and economic advancement? It is

manifestly difficult to offer a precise answer to these questions. Such beginnings are lost—as is the case with all social phenomena—in the dim period of "prehistory." There can be no doubt, however, that the Jewish labor movement, along with the general labor movement, is closely bound up with the vast industrial revolution that took place in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century. In Russia the industrial revolution did not begin until the 1860's, when the abolition of serfdom (1861) and the rapid development of a net of railroads, in the course of a single generation, radically altered that nation's economy.

During the last four decades of the nineteenth century the number of workers in Russian industry increased more than threefold. There was a phenomenal increase in the production of such basic materials as iron and coal. It was this rapid industrial development which, also affecting the Jewish Pale of Settlement, created the conditions for the emergence of a proletarian class and a socialist movement among the Jews of Eastern Europe. Accurate data concerning the numbers and occupational distribution of the Jewish working class are available only from the end of the nineteenth century. According to a survey conducted by the Jewish Colonization Association in the late nineties, the proletarian element comprised approximately 35 to 40 percent of the total Jewish population. The great bulk of the Jewish workers was concentrated in the traditional Jewish crafts, while a smaller portion consisted of unskilled laborers. However, thousands of Jewish workers had already found employment in the larger industrial establishments.

The earliest strike of Jewish workers, regarding which we have fairly reliable information, occurred in November 1871 in a Wilno tobacco factory. A contemporary report of the police authorities notes that the striking workers were recent arrivals from Southern Russia, where similar strikes had already taken place earlier. For the same

period we also possess information of a strike in a Bialystok tobacco factory, where the women workers demanded to be separated from the men workers by a special partition. Records have also been preserved of strikes by Jewish textile workers, mainly in the region of Bialystok. A series of strikes broke out in that city and its surrounding district during the years 1877-78. This was the period of the Russo-Turkish war, which brought a boom in the textile industry. "The factories reaped a golden harvest at that time" (*Razsviet*, 1880, No. 49), and this caused the workers to wage a determined struggle for better working conditions.

All of this information is of a purely incidental character, since for the most part the conflicts of that period, insofar as they affected the smaller Jewish workshops, passed unnoticed and went unrecorded. However, it is worthy of note that the first Jewish workers' strikes broke out spontaneously, uninfluenced by outside agitation. In the 1870's, the Jewish socialists had few ties with the Jewish workers, who were thus forced to rely on their own resources in finding the road toward unity and common action.

IV. THE SOCIALIST INTELLIGENTSIA

A long time passed before socialism became a movement of the masses. The earliest adherents and champions of the "new social order" were to be found not among the workers, but among the intellectuals. The internationalist and cosmopolitan aspect of socialism had a particularly strong attraction for the Jewish intellectual. Drawn rapidly into the general revolutionary movement, the Jewish socialists became gradually more estranged from Jewish life and their own people. Many of the socialist radicals even went so far as to deny the necessity for the existence of the Jewish people as a separate entity. At that time, socialism found itself in sharp opposition to everything that represented the "old

order": state, religion, family and national tradition. Hence the Jewish socialist intellectuals of the time could not even conceive the idea of a separate and independent Jewish socialist movement. In the prevailing view, such "national separatism" was in conflict with the principles of international socialism. For the revolutionary socialist the concept of double loyalty was intolerable. The Jewish socialist in particular, living and working in a non-Jewish milieu, was frequently faced with the tragic choice between loyalty to his own people and devotion to socialist principles.

There were, to be sure, some Jewish socialists who believed that the socialist idea implicitly obligated the Jew to abide by his people, sharing both its sorrows and hopes. Only in an order based on social justice, they contended, could there be a place for the Jews to live as a free people in a community of free peoples. The most important proponent of this idea was the socialist thinker Moses Hess (1812-1875), a close friend of Karl Marx, and an ideological forerunner of modern Zionism. Hess saw no contradiction between socialism and the Jewish struggle for national existence. He was, moreover, able to assess justly the great spiritual and social values inherent in Jewish tradition and religion. However, his book, *Rome and Jerusalem*, was at that time a voice in the wilderness. The socialist movement of the nineteenth century was not prepared for any such "heresy."

Even in Eastern Europe, where the Jewish masses lived under conditions of dire poverty and complete lack of civil rights, the great majority of Jewish revolutionary and socialist intellectuals cut their ties with their own people. In Russia there was an additional reason for this breach. In that country, where the urban economy was developed only to an insignificant degree, the problem of agrarian reform assumed a position of central importance. As a result, the Russian socialist movement took on the character of a peasant agrarian socialism. The radical Russian intelligentsia had before its eyes the image of the oppressed

peasant who had only recently been emancipated from serfdom, yet continued to live in want and poverty. The idealistic elements of the Russian intelligentsia were overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. Hence the rise of the remarkable *Narodnik* movement, with its slogan of "going to the people," of serving the people, of repaying the debt which the intelligentsia felt it owed the peasantry. In this way a special Russian type of socialism emerged, oriented not toward the city proletariat and the factory worker, but toward the Russian village and its primitive "commune" (*mir*). The revolution against Tsarism, contended the *Narodnik* ideologists, would lead directly to socialism in Russia, bypassing the intermediate stage of capitalism. This folk socialism remained the dominant ideology of the Russian intelligentsia over a period of two decades.

The Jewish intelligentsia, insofar as it was socialist, found itself linked by circumstances, both ideologically and practically, with the Russian revolutionary movement. "Going to the people" assumed a specific

meaning for the Jewish intellectual; it did not mean approaching the destitute Jewish masses, but establishing a link with the Russian peasant. Since, according to the *Narodnik* ideology, the Jewish community lacked the mainstay of socialism—the peasant and his "innate" primitive communism—it could not be fertile soil for socialist activity. The prevailing socialist ideology thus resulted in debarring the Jewish intellectual from working in a Jewish milieu. Nevertheless, there were some attempts even during the 1870's to conduct propaganda among the Jewish youth. Some Jewish revolutionaries, among whom Aaron S. Lieberman was the most prominent, even cherished plans of creating a widespread Jewish socialist organization.

The cradle of the modern socialist movement among Jews was Wilno. At the beginning of the 1870's Aaron Zundelevich, later a member of the famous Executive Committee of *Narodnaya Volya* (The People's Will), founded a revolutionary group, consisting almost wholly of the students of the Jewish Teachers' Institute in Wilno. One of the most active members of this group was Aaron S. Lieberman. In June 1875 the Wilno group was dissolved. The administration of the Teachers' Institute and the police authorities discovered the underground activities carried on both inside and outside the walls of the institute. Zundelevich and Lieberman were forced to flee abroad where they soon resumed their revolutionary activities.

Meanwhile, underground propaganda activity continued in Wilno. A new revolutionary group was formed in the fall of 1875 under the leadership of Leib Davidovich. This group was in contact with similar groups in Grodno, Minsk, Dvinsk and Yeletz.

Aaron S. Lieberman continued to maintain close relations with the Jewish revolutionary groups in Russia. An appeal in Hebrew, which he addressed to the Jewish youth, was distributed among the *Haskalah* intelligentsia and the yeshivah students. Lieberman was also the author of a pam-



AARON S. LIEBERMAN, STANDING (1844-1880),
AND AARON ZUNDELEVICH (1854-1923)

phlet, entitled *On the Organization of a Social Revolutionary Federation Among the Jews of Russia*. On the whole, Lieberman was the heart and soul of every effort in the field of socialist propaganda and organization among the Jews during the 1870's. In Berlin, in 1875, he made an attempt to establish a "Jewish Socialist Section of the International." Shortly thereafter he departed for London where a considerable number of Jewish workers from Eastern Europe had already settled. In London Lieberman founded the first Jewish socialist organization, the *Agudat ha-Sozialistim ha-Ivrim be-London* (the Union of Jewish Socialists in London).

The statutes and rules of the *Agudat ha-Sozialistim* were drafted in both Yiddish and Hebrew. This first attempt at an independent Jewish socialist organization fell short of success. The *Agudat ha-Sozialistim* failed to evoke any marked response from the Jewish workers, but provoked the strong opposition of conservative Jewish circles in London. In addition it suffered from sharp internal friction which led to its early disintegration.

Lieberman then left London for Vienna, where, with the aid of a group of Jewish socialists, he established the first socialist paper in Hebrew, *Ha-Emet* (May 1877). Among those who collaborated with Lieberman on *Ha-Emet* were Leiser Zuckerman, Isaac Kaminer and Judah Leib Lewin. Of the three issues which appeared, the first two were permitted legal circulation by the Russian authorities, but the third was confiscated. Immediately thereafter, Morris Vinchevsky and Aaron V. Rabinovich began publishing, in October 1877, a new socialist magazine in Hebrew, *Asefat Hakamim*. Of this periodical, only eight issues were published. In October 1878, when the "Socialist Law" prohibiting socialist activities was promulgated in Germany, Vinchevsky was arrested.

V. THE EIGHTIES

Toward the end of the 70's, there came a radical change in the economic situation in

Russia that took on the form of a long-lasting depression. The economic crisis that had broken out in Western Europe a few years after the Franco-Prussian war led to a collapse in prices of agricultural products on the world market. This naturally had an immediate effect in a country, such as Russia was, where the export of grain still played a dominant role in its economic structure.

The anti-Semitic movement that swept into Russia from Western Europe, along with the economic crisis, assumed the form of bloody pogroms, and violently disturbed the Jewish community in general and the Jewish socialist intelligentsia in particular. The belief that the revolutionary movement would automatically bring a solution to the Jewish problem was shattered, and an intense national feeling seized large sections of the Jewish socialist youth.

The mood of the time found its classical expression in Leo Pinsker's *Auto-Emancipation*. The central idea of this work was indicated by the author when he chose as its motto Hillel's saying: "If I do not help myself, who will help me?" It was Pinsker's view that the Jews could no longer rely merely on the good will of the outside world. The time had come for them to take their destiny into their own hands. One section of the Jewish youth, the *Bilu* pioneers, directed their gaze to the land of their forefathers, to Erets Yisrael. Another group which symbolically designated itself *Am Olam*, The Eternal People, also sought for a solution of the Jewish problem in emigration. But these pioneers held that the Jewish people could develop a new way of life only in the New World. The *Am Olam* group, which included a considerable number of the socialist minded, set themselves yet another goal. "We Jews," stated one of the *Am Olam* founders, "gave the world its supreme moral values . . . it may be that it is our present destiny to show how to build a social order based on truth and justice."

The moral qualms in the ranks of the Jewish socialist intellectuals were particu-

larly intense because a number of leaders of the Russian revolutionary movement adopted an indulgent attitude toward the pogroms and interpreted these outbreaks as the first signs of a great peasant uprising against the entire social and political order in Russia. A substantial section of the Jewish revolutionary youth abandoned socialism and "returned to their people." But even those whose faith in socialism remained unshaken began to realize the existence of a Jewish problem. These events marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of socialist thought among the Jews. Jewish socialists were confronted with the additional task of finding a solution to the Jewish problem.

Moreover, a new external development contributed toward a change in the socialist activities among the Jews. In the late 1870's and early 1880's, the *Narodnaya Volya* had the ascendancy in the minds of the revolutionary youth of Russia. Gradually, however, the ideas of Marxian Socialism, with emphasis shifted from the peasant to the industrial worker, came strongly to the fore. This opened up new possibilities for socialist activity among the Jewish proletarian class, and resulted in the development of closer ties between the socialist intelligentsia and the Jewish worker.

Even before the pogroms, a group of Jewish socialists in Geneva had, in the summer of 1880, issued an appeal in Russian, signed by "a group of socialist Jews." This appeal pointed to the necessity of conducting propaganda in Yiddish, and criticized the attitude of many Jewish intellectuals who "try to forget the Jewish language—unnatural as that may be—and even their own origin." The signers declared: "Such an attitude on the part of the Jewish revolutionary youth can no longer be tolerated." It appears that the appeal did not reach Russia nor did it evoke the expected response in other countries.

In Russia itself, small revolutionary groups were formed in a number of localities in the Jewish Pale. Of special significance were the socialist circles in Minsk and

Wilno which comprised a considerable number of working people, both men and women.

The activities of the revolutionary group in Minsk, in 1883, comprising about 150 men and women workers, were directed by Yefim (Moshe) Churgin. In the summer of 1884, independently of Churgin, revolutionary propaganda was conducted among the Jewish workers by the student Emil Abramovich, one of the noblest figures among the pioneers of Jewish socialism. Others among those who took a leading part in Minsk revolutionary activities were Isaac A. Hourwich and his sister Zhenya. By the end of the 1880's, however, the groups in Minsk had practically disintegrated. Arrests took away a number of the active workers, and the most important leaders, Emil Abramovich and Isaac A. Hourwich, were forced to leave Minsk.

There are also records of revolutionary activities in Wilno during the 1880's. Among the revolutionary workers during that time were several who had already participated in the first socialist groups in Wilno during the seventies. The leading role, however, was assumed by a group of younger people, which included such subsequently well known socialist leaders as Leo Jogiches (Tishko) and Charles Rapoport. The revolutionists in Wilno occupied themselves principally with organizing the transport of revolutionary literature printed abroad. Ever since the time of Zundelevich Wilno had played an important role as a transmission center for illegal literature, and the Wilno socialist intelligentsia was, therefore, in close contact with the leading Russian revolutionists abroad, as well as with various groups within Russia. From the very beginning the Wilno Jewish socialists were notable for their larger outlook and far-reaching aspirations. The great cultural tradition of Wilno, the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," contributed significantly to the leading role which the Wilno revolutionists played in the development of the Jewish socialist and revolutionary movement.

VI. THE EVE OF THE FOUNDING OF THE BUND

The decade 1887-1897 constitutes quite a distinct period. The socialist propaganda activities of that time in Wilno and other cities were notable both for their scope and continuity. Up to the late eighties these activities had been of a sporadic character; later, however, there began a period of sustained, organic development. This period, which we may designate as the "eve of the founding of the Bund," witnessed the transformation of the revolutionary propaganda activity of limited socialist circles into a mass movement among the Jewish proletariat.

The clouds of the prolonged economic depression which had darkened the eighties were now gradually lifting. In 1888 there was a slight improvement. In 1891 the depression became acute again, but in 1893 a sharp upswing in the Russian economy began. It became clear to everyone that Russia, too, was following the path of capitalistic development. As a result, the basis for a socialist movement in Russia along Western European lines was laid, and the spiritual as well as the material foundations for an independent Jewish socialist movement were now firmly established.

At the end of the 1880's a number of Jewish socialists had arrived at the conclusion that there was little that could be done for the Jewish workers in Russia itself. Isaac A. Hourwich said at the time: "The only solution for the Jewish worker lies in emigration to America." But later the situation was radically changed. The Jewish proletariat grew in numbers and the economic upsurge opened up new perspectives for the individual worker as well as for the Jewish working class as a whole. Beginning in 1893 a successful strike movement swept over a number of towns within the Jewish Pale. The Jewish proletariat developed greater faith and confidence in its own powers. Optimism became the prevailing mood among the Jewish socialists in the 1890's.

The central group which directed the

revolutionary work in Wilno during that time, known as the group of Jewish Social Democrats, consisted of Z. Kopelson (Timofei), I. Aisenstadt (Yudin), A. Kremer (Arkady), Pati Srednitsky (Kremer's wife), Liuba Aisenstadt Levinson, J. Mill (John), S. Gozhansky, Nahum Levinson (V. Kosovsky) and Abram Mutnik (Gleb). From the very beginning the founders of the Group of Jewish Social Democrats assumed the responsibilities of their "historic mission." Wilno became the center of socialist activity for the entire Jewish region. It organized the activities in Warsaw, Minsk, Smorgon, Bialystok and other localities. In addition, it established contacts with the revolutionary groups in several important Russian centers such as Odessa, Kiev, Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The "turning point," as it was called, in the history of the Jewish labor movement, occurred in the years 1893-1895. The propaganda work of the revolutionary circles was conducted at the time in Russian. General education and socialist propaganda went hand in hand. The propaganda in Russian, however, had a serious drawback. The workers who had managed to achieve a higher level of education and culture were for that very reason estranged from the Jewish masses. The leaders clearly realized that the old propaganda methods inherited from the Haskalah period could no longer be applied, and that in order to evoke the interest of the average worker it was necessary to go over to socialist agitation on the basis of everyday needs. The economic revival made possible a systematic struggle for practical demands, that is, for a shorter working day and higher wages. These new tactics were the result of the changed economic situation. It was greatly to the credit of the Wilno leadership that they so early recognized the new situation and incorporated the necessary changes in their socialist activities.

With the adoption of the new tactics a widespread strike movement was initiated among the Jewish workers of Wilno and other centers for a twelve-hour day (in-

cluding two hours for breakfast and lunch). The workers based these demands on an old, long forgotten Russian decree of 1785 that limited the working day in the artisans' shops to twelve hours.

These new tactics, successfully tested in Wilno, had a great influence on the development of the socialist movement in all of Russia. For the Russian socialist groups, however, the question was solely one of tactics, whereas for the Jewish socialists it was an issue of fundamental and far-reaching significance. With the switch from propaganda to agitation came the transition from Russian to Yiddish as the language of revolutionary work. This transition spelled the birth of an independent Jewish labor movement, because the change obviously necessitated the formation of special Jewish organizations, the development of a Yiddish revolutionary literature and, in connection therewith, a cultural movement in Yiddish.

The transition from Russian to Yiddish aroused strong opposition among many of the active workers for whom participation in revolutionary circles was also often the road to individual advancement. Disregarding this opposition, which at times took on acute forms, the new strategy demonstrated its efficacy by the end of 1895. The period of mere propaganda work among small groups was ended. The number of organized workers increased greatly, and with the new arrivals a fresh spirit permeated socialist activity. The movement assumed more of a folk quality and became more distinctly Jewish in character.

On the day following the May First celebration, in 1895, a meeting of the most active members of the revolutionary movement listened to a report on "The Theoretical and Practical Achievements of the Movement During the Past Year." The report, delivered by Julius Martov, stressed three important consequences of the tactics—the movement had become more democratic, more practical, and more Jewish-minded. The necessity for an independent Jewish labor party was unequivocally

voiced for the first time at this historic meeting.

The Jewish labor movement expanded rapidly. By the end of 1895 there were already in Wilno 27 organized trades. In 1897 there were underground revolutionary groups and labor organizations in all the larger Jewish towns in Lithuania and White Russia. In Poland, too, the Jewish labor organizations that were founded in Warsaw and Lodz established contact with the group in Wilno.

The growth of the Jewish labor movement in the years 1893-1897 strongly stimulated the output of Jewish revolutionary literature. Socialist and revolutionary pamphlets had previously been smuggled in from abroad and distributed among the Jewish workers. However, with the new emphasis on agitation, the need was felt for literature better adapted to the requirements of the Jewish workers in Russia. This was begun with the distribution of handwritten pamphlets which were passed on from hand to hand. Later on the handwritten pamphlets were supplemented by the output of a small hectograph. Also many revolutionary pamphlets were printed abroad and smuggled into Russia.

The Wilno leaders supported all efforts which were being made to create a suitable literature of enlightenment in Yiddish. Special mention should be made of Y. L. Peretz's *Yomtev Bletlech* which found a quick response in Jewish radical circles. The first number, *Lekoved Pesah*, was issued in 1894. In addition to Peretz, David Pinski, Mordecai Spector and others contributed to the *Yomtev Bletlech*.

In December 1896 there appeared the first number of *Der Yidisher Arbeter*, a Socialist periodical written in Yiddish and printed abroad, which played a significant role in the history of Jewish socialist thought. An even greater accomplishment was the publication of the *Arbeter Shtime*, forty numbers of which were published between August 1897 and September 1905. The first numbers of the *Arbeter Shtime* were privately issued by several active mem-

bers of the "Group of Jewish Social Democrats" and printed illegally in Wilno itself. With the founding of the Bund, the *Arbeter Shtime* became the central organ of the Bundist party.

An important element in socialist cultural activity was the revolutionary song. The authors of the socialist songs were closer to the folk life and to Jewish tradition than most of the ideological leaders. In the nineties there were popular in Russia songs composed by Jewish revolutionary writers in America (such as David Edelstadt, Morris Vinchevsky, Morris Rosenfeld) as well as songs composed on the spot, often by unknown authors. The poems of the young Abraham Walt (A. Liesin) enjoyed great popularity, and were distributed in handwritten copies in many towns. It was in these songs that the Jewish worker's life and aspirations were mirrored, as a rule, more faithfully than in the propaganda literature. The anthem of the Bund *Di Shvueh* ("Oath"), was particularly characteristic in this respect. We have already indicated the prominent role that the voluntary covenant and the oath played in Jewish life. Among Jewish associations there was an old custom of confirming important decisions by taking a collective oath. And it is highly instructive that in the history of the Jewish labor movement from its very inception the oath occupies a prominent place. A report from Krinki

(1897) contains the following account of a clandestine meeting of 300 striking workers outside of the city: "Rain began to fall, and they stood in the downpour for more than two hours. Each swore by a pair of *tefillin* (phylacteries) that he would stand firmly by what had been agreed upon. All chanted the 'Oath.' Some threw themselves to the ground and wept—whether for joy or sorrow I do not know; to strike is no light matter for such oppressed people."

The older variant of *Di Shvueh* began with the words: "Sacred is Nature." This was a concession to the anti-religious revolutionists who replaced God with Nature. The meetings used to open with the singing of the "Oath", and frequently it was also sung at the close. The workers would join hands and form a circle around the red flag of revolution. In 1902 the well-known Yiddish writer S. An-ski wrote a new text for the "Oath" which more clearly expressed the folk-sentiment, the melody was also changed. The custom of singing *Di Shvueh* has remained deeply rooted in the Jewish labor movement.

By degrees the Jewish socialist intelligentsia found its way to the Jewish people. Owing to the amalgamation of these two elements, the intelligentsia and the working people, the foundation was laid for the establishment of the first independent Jewish socialist party, the General Jewish Workers' Union—the Bund.

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