

THE JEW AND COMMUNISM

Errata

page 134, third paragraph, should read: 2 instead of 4.

page 188, the date of the sixth party convention, should read: March 1, 1928.

pages 152, 225, 285 and 437, should read: William Weiner.

THE JEW AND COMMUNISM

OTHER BOOKS BY MELECH EPSTEIN

JEWISH LABOR IN U.S.A.
An Industrial, Political and Cultural History
of the Jewish Labor Movement
1882-1914

JEWISH LABOR IN U.S.A.
1914-1952

THE JEW AND COMMUNISM

The Story of Early Communist Victories
and Ultimate Defeats
in the Jewish Community, U.S.A.

1919-1941

MELECH EPSTEIN

TRADE UNION SPONSORING COMMITTEE
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TO LOUIS STULBERG, of the ILGWU

Contents

Introduction	ix
1 The New Immigration	3
2 The Hopeful Years	10
3 Confusion in the War	16
4 The Left Wing	25
5 Communism's Birth Pangs	34
6 In the Underground	41
7 Moscow Takes a Hand	48
8 The New Concept	53
9 The Jewish Left	67
10 Their Road to Communism	78
11 The Second Split	86
12 The Open Party; The <i>Freiheit</i>	98
13 A Poor Beginning	105
14 New Alignments	113
15 The Expendables	121
16 Victory Among Defeats	134
17 The Contest in the Workmen's Circle	144
18 The IWO, A New Communist Arm	151
19 Relief Is Politics	156
20 Jewish Fortunes in Russia	160
21 Ambitious Projects	165
22 Birobidjan; Thriving on a Myth	173
23 Running to Moscow	180
24 Stalin Takes Over	186

25	The Postwar Youth	197
26	Branching Out	206
27	Fiasco and Success	214
28	Battling the Community	223
29	Feeding on Hunger	234
30	White Bias Show Trials	243
31	A Cultural Wasteland	252
32	Jefferson, Lincoln—and Stalin	262
33	Patriotism Pays Off	274
34	Working at Cross Purposes	281
35	Fat Years That Turned Lean	292
36	The Outstretched Hand	301
37	Birobidjan, A Lucrative Affair	309
38	Judaizing Communism	318
39	Strength and Moods	330
40	The Four Hectic Days	345
41	Excitement and Fury	361
42	The <i>Mazel Tov</i> Counterattack	371
	Portraits in Miniature	382
	Olgin, A Man of Contrasts	382
	Shachno Epstein, From a Writer to a Spy	389
	Kalmen Marmor, His Communism Was a Puzzle	394
	A. Bittelman, More Politician than Theoretician	398
	Israel Amter, A Sainly Communist	403
	Jack Stachel, The Organization Man	405
	Notes	408
	References	419
	Index	431

Introduction

This work, a study of Communist penetration in the Jewish community, must necessarily follow the sharp and contradictory turns of the Communist movement in this country, indicating at the same time the imprint left on it by various individuals, Stalinist *gleichshtaltung* notwithstanding.

The Jewish story, for its part, is sketched on a broad canvas, taking as its starting point a brief survey of the composition of the successive mass immigrations and their complex process of adjustment to the American scene. It portrays not merely the Communist contest for power in organized labor, but the major encounters with the Communists in war relief and rehabilitation, the attitude to the Soviet Union and the ties with Soviet Jewry, Palestine, the anti-fascist movement and the collision on the social and cultural areas. It attempts an objective appraisal of the disquieting impact of Communism on Jewish life during its first two decades.

Communism, like its predecessor, Socialism, found its early converts among middle-class intellectuals and skilled workers, the latter organized and relatively protected. The unorganized and unskilled, whose standard of living was notoriously lower and whose insecurity bordered on helplessness, were unresponsive to the early Communist appeals. That "those who had been naught"—to quote the *International*—hardly heeded the Call was also a phenomenon of the earlier Socialist movement in Europe.

As for Communism among Jews, a unique environment favored its spread both in America and in Europe. Here it soon managed to entrench itself behind a number of important institutions. However, its growth encountered—and this must be emphasized—clear-cut, vigorous and uncompromising resistance; resulting in a wider, longer lasting and more heated struggle than among other minority groups and native Americans.

The author acknowledges his indebtedness to J. B. S. Hardman for the many hours he spent with him discussing the background and

ix

the reasons for the 1921 split in the Socialist ranks and the formation of the Workers Party; to Dr. Louis Hendin, for interesting information on the early period of Communism; to Alexander Pomerantz, of the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, for useful suggestions; to J. S. Hertz for valuable data in his *The Jewish Socialist Movement in U.S.A.*; and to his wife Jetti for her encouragement, her patient help in gathering the material, typing the manuscript and reading the proofs.

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Melech Epstein
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THE JEW AND COMMUNISM

1 *The New Immigration*

Of the three Jewish immigration waves, the second, the one in the decade 1904-1914, was the most decisive. This immigration exceeded the first, begun in 1882, not merely in quantity, but, more significantly, in quality. The numerical difference can be summed up in two figures: about 800,000 to about 1,200,000 immigrants. The qualitative superiority can be attested to by the great upsurge in every sphere and sector of Jewish society during the second decade.

The small Jewish community before 1882 and the first mass immigration—a panicky exodus from Russia—the mental and occupational equipment of the immigrants and their harsh welcome here were dealt with thoroughly by the author in a previous work.* For the purpose of the present work it is perhaps sufficient to recapitulate very briefly the helplessness of this crude and backward mass that poured largely into the new expanding clothing industries, though they were not really people of *sher, nodel un eizen* (scissors, needle and flatiron); and the persistent but futile attempts of the handful of young intellectuals and advanced workers in the immigration to raise the low standard of living of the newcomers to the general American level. The sweatshop, a danger to themselves and a menace to others, withstood every challenge, spontaneous and semi-organized. The schisms and feuds among the radical intellectuals and their utter inexperience doubtlessly contributed to the perpetuation of industrial chaos.

* *Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 1882-1914*, chs. 3 & 16, Trade Union Sponsoring Comm., 22-24 West 38th St., New York 18, N.Y.

On the educational and political sector, the situation was less hopeless. There a small articulate minority could register advances. At the end of the century, the numerically insignificant Jewish labor movement could boast of two dailies, the *Abendblatt*, organ of the Socialist Labor Party, and the *Jewish Daily Forward*, mouthpiece of the opposition; an anarchist weekly, the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*; and the monthly *Zukunft*.

Illuminating as a cultural expression of this dismal period was the burgeoning of a Yiddish literature and, particularly, a vibrant labor poetry. America was its soil. Poetry was a powerful lever in awakening the human dignity of the hapless victims of the sweat-shop. As an organic part of the struggle for a humane and decent life this poetry was a uniqueness of Jewish labor.

SUPERIORITY OF NEW IMMIGRATION

The dangerous impasse of slums, backwardness and threatened stagnation was broken by the sudden jump in the number of arrivals that started in 1904 and lasted, with small interruptions, until World War I, termed the second mass immigration.

The beginning of the high immigration curve was a consequence of the pogrom in Kishineff, Bessarabia, April 1903, organized by the Russian authorities to siphon off popular discontent over the debacle of the war with Japan in the Far East. This pogrom, after more than two decades of physical safety, was viewed by many Jews as a warning that it was time to leave Russia behind them.

The succession of pogroms, more numerous and more horrifying than in the early 80's, that rolled over the Jewish Pale in October 1905, timed to the day after the Czar was forced by the revolutionary upheaval to grant a Duma, confirmed the worst fears of those who had left. The mass pogroms ended the short honeymoon days of the revolution and shattered the ardent hopes of the Jewish youth.

The utter defeat of the revolution in 1906 and the subsequent official anti-Semitism and reaction led to a Jewish exodus on a larger scale than that in the 80's and 90's.^{*1} (The last and largest pogrom of the period was the one in the industrial city of Bialystok, Byelorussia, June 1906, in which over 200 Jews were killed.)

The higher intellectual level and the political consciousness of the new immigration was perhaps more decisive than its sheer nu-

merical weight. Together they revitalized the entire Eastern European society. Every sector, including the Orthodoxy, was infused with new blood; every ideological trend gained new adherents.

The partial industrialization of the Pale in Russia after the turn of the century had opened the ghetto to Western influences, releasing dynamic forces that changed the centuries-old pattern of life. It produced a Jewish working class which, in turn, created a labor and Socialist movement. This new working class was well represented in the immigration. Among the arrivals were thousands of young men and women who had been active in underground revolutionary work in their home towns, had fought in the *selbstshutz* (defense units) against the pogroms, had seen the inside of Czarist prisons or been exiled to Siberia. Transplanted also was quite a sizable intelligentsia of all political groupings. People who had participated in labor Socialist affairs came from Rumania, Galicia and Hungary, too.

THE "GREAT UPHEAVAL," 1907-1914

The impact of the new immigrants was felt immediately. Industrially, they extended the occupational range of Jewish labor, winning the struggle for the right to work in trades of their skill; the rapid growth of the Jewish neighborhoods being a contributing element. But their most significant accomplishment was in the original Jewish trades, the garment and allied industries. There they formed the shock troops in the victorious assault on the evil fortress of the sweatshop. Out of their ranks came the second layer leadership in the round of great strikes that basically changed labor-employer relations. Their vigorous youthful enthusiasm swept the lethargic majority out of the shops.⁺¹

In this short but heroic period—and heroic it truly was—lasting from 1907 to 1914, all major Jewish trades were plunged into grim industrial warfare.*

By their militancy and perseverance, the cloak and suit workers in 1910 wrote a new chapter in industrial relations. Louis D. Brandeis had learned a great deal since the garment strike in Boston, 1907. The famous Protocol of Peace of 1910, of which he was the prime

* For a description of the major strikes, see Melech Epstein, *op. cit.*, chs. 21 and 22.

architect, notwithstanding its naive dependence on inherent goodwill among men, fashioned a new instrument, conciliation and arbitration, to replace what he called the "law of the jungle, strikes and lockouts." Since then conciliation and arbitration machinery—collective bargaining—have become an integral part of modern industry.

However, the Protocol of Peace and similar early collective agreements did not usher in industrial peace. It took another decade of recurring strikes and lockouts before the issue was ultimately resolved, in favor of the unions.

PROSPERITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fed by the vast human stream, the Jewish press grew and prospered. As a labor paper, the *Forward* was the greatest beneficiary, attracting the largest portion of the newcomers. In 1906 the paper could triumphantly announce a paid circulation of 60,000, the biggest in the Jewish field. In 1907, on its tenth anniversary, the circulation reached 72,000. The days of hand-to-mouth existence and dependence on *shnorrerei*—fund-raising—were over. The paper was yielding a profit, and in the early 20's it proudly announced an ABC circulation of nearly 200,000, including a separate *Forward* published in Chicago. The *Forward* building, completed in 1908, towered above all others on the Lower East Side. It housed the headquarters of the United Hebrew Trades, the delegated body of Jewish unions, the Workmen's Circle, the Jewish Socialist Federation and others. One seventy-five East Broadway became the symbol as well as the brain and nerve center of Jewish labor throughout the country.

Jews in New York, similar to most foreign-born, had always voted for the Democrats. Anticipation of Tammany's "small favors" and fear of reprisals by its office-holders were two prime factors.

The Socialist vote in the Jewish neighborhoods was negligible. For years a hundred additional votes on election day were cheerfully interpreted by stalwart Socialist writers as a sign of the "forward march" of Socialism. Conversely, a comparable loss impelled them to seek consolation in Socialist election gains in Western Europe.

The seemingly barren political field started to show green patches at the end of the first decade. And a few years later the Jewish neighborhoods on the East Side of Manhattan and in Brownsville, Brooklyn, were the first to loosen the tight political grip of Tammany

Hall. They elected and reelected a congressman and an assemblyman. Obviously, the two election victories were not achieved solely by the votes of the newest citizens. But the latter were the active campaigners, the doorbell ringers and, what was perhaps even more telling, watchers at the polls.

The Jewish Socialist Federation, formed in 1912, the Poale Zion Party of the Labor Zionists, organized in 1905, as well as the smaller groupings issued their own publications, sent out lecture tours and raised funds for various causes here and abroad.⁺² And while the Bundists, the Labor Zionists and the other tendencies were ideologically poles apart, and kept up a running fight for position and influence, they had a common denominator—a basic democratic attitude and a higher regard for cultural values, both general and Jewish. Labor Zionists worked for the election of Socialist candidates, and they, the former Bundists and the anarchists cooperated in the urgent task of Jewish relief and rehabilitation during and after World War I.

MUTUAL AID AND EMOTIONAL RADICALISM

The new immigration proved to be the greatest single factor in the rapid development of the fraternal movement, that played a conspicuous part in Jewish labor and in the community generally. The Workmen's Circle (*Arbeiter Ring*), for mutual aid and fellowship, initiated by a dozen young workers in 1892, met with a meager response. As late as 1903, the order totaled 27 branches with a membership of only 1,500. However, in 1904-1905, many of the new immigrants began flocking to the WC, finding in it the most appropriate medium for their social and cultural expression. The majority of the branches were formed on the basis of *landslide*, people from the same home towns.

Symptomatic of their radical mood, some deemed it beneath their revolutionary dignity to affiliate with a body providing life insurance, sick benefit and burial. Besides, they were too young to think of sickness and death. And, their attention still fixed on the old country, they formed *landsmanshaft* societies with the fashionable addition of "revolutionary," to support the struggle at home. Called for the most part *Revoluzionerer Untershtitzung Verein*, these so-

cieties were also valuable instruments for keeping them banded together here.

Ezekiel Lifshitz, a founder of the large Grodno Branch 74, tells of the relief activity of the *verein* and the difficulties he and a few others encountered in persuading his *landslite* to join the WC in 1906:

“. . . and when one heard of the strike in the well-known Shera-shefsky's tobacco factory in Grodno, the *verein* immediately sent \$500. And when the news arrived that the people there were preparing to resist a pogrom, \$1,500 were sent for the defense group, quite a sizable amount of money at that time when one remembers that most of the members never earned more than \$10 or \$12 a week.”

The majority of the *Grodner* were unwilling to belong to the WC. However, “after much persuasion, 28 young people agreed to form a Grodno branch of the WC. . . . The WC sent a charter with the number 69. But it soon became known that this was the number of a branch that had been dissolved by the executive for building a *shul* or for organizing a *minyán* on the Holy Days. “When we heard this, we were shocked. The idea of us radicals accepting such a *posul* number! We were ready to give up. But the committee yielded immediately and gave us the number 74.” *2

In the decade 1905-1915, inclusive, the WC was multiplied more than seven-fold. It reached nearly 50,000 in the last year, surpassing the fondest dreams of the founders. Its branches, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, became known as the Red Cross of organized labor. Through the persistence of the membership, the leaders, men of the previous immigration and pure-and-simple fraternalists, committed the order to a wide and systematic educational program that included a publishing house and a family monthly. In the smaller towns the branches were islands of radicalism in a sea of conservatism. Another decade and the WC numbered about 86,000 members.

Culturally, the second mass immigration caused an upsurge that lasted until the late 30's. New vitality flowed into every phase of cultural expansion. New magazines appeared, new literary trends emerged—the *yunge* and the *insichisten*—and many books of a new crop of American Jewish writers as well as translations of European authors were published. The Jewish theater found at last a dis-

cerning audience. Younger artists, headed by Maurice Schwartz, were given the opportunity to rise above the morass of the *shund* (trash) of Second Avenue. These were the "Golden Years" of the Yiddish Art Theater.

The cultural appetite of the youth was not limited to Jewish fare. One could see them filling the English evening classes and the local libraries, crowding the top balconies of the better plays and Carnegie Hall, the summer concerts in Lewisohn Stadium in New York and in other large cities, often foregoing their supper for the price of the ticket.

But all this animation and excitement could not hide the rising dissatisfaction, even resentment, among the more crusading young radicals with the industrial setup in the country, the relationship in the community and the spirit and practice of the trade unions and the Socialist movement. None of these fitted in with the mental image of America they had carried with them across the seas.

It might be added that though the radical sector represented numerically but a fraction of the several hundred thousand young adults in the immigration, social concern and zeal enabled them to project themselves into the center of the scene. They made history in their own small way. And, after all, history is made by such articulate minorities.

2 *The Hopeful Years*

American Socialism was much less homogeneous than the European, lacking the largely one-group structure of the latter, the industrial worker. American Socialism attracted people from various strata and for different reasons: workers, farmers, small businessmen and intellectuals. In their ranks were Marxists, humanitarians, pacifists, even religious people. This diversity in composition and approach denied the Socialist movement here the facade of Marxist "scientific Socialism." The uninterrupted discussion between the Marxist revisionists, adherents of Edward Bernstein, and the orthodox, followers of Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, was largely missing here.

The split in 1897-1898, that left the "impossibilist" Daniel De Leon and his followers in the Socialist Labor Party a mere political sect, removed but one obstacle in the path of the Socialist movement. The new body, the Socialist Party, formed in 1901, was troubled by other feuds, largely caused by the syndicalist elements of the Industrial Workers of the World and their belief in direct action. The syndicalist tail damaged party chances in the American Federation of Labor and exposed it to the accusation of condoning violence. And only in 1912 did the convention of the SP adopt a plank in the constitution closing the party on the adherents of violence as an instrument of class struggle. William (Bill) D. Haywood and his IWW friends were expelled. Significantly, a number of these syndicalists, William Z. Foster and Earl Browder among them, later turned up as leaders of the Communist Party.

A TASTE OF ELECTION VICTORIES

Paradoxically, the lack of Marxist orthodoxy proved helpful to the party's growth. In the decade between 1902 and 1912, the Socialist Party registered notable gains of a threefold nature: in membership, in votes and in the number of elected office-holders. The party reached its zenith between 1908 and 1912. It had 118,045 members in 1912, with branches in almost every state of the Union, including such agricultural states as Oklahoma, Utah and Idaho. In 1910, Milwaukee elected Victor L. Berger the first Socialist congressman and Emil Seidel the first Socialist mayor. In 1914, the East Side of New York elected a Socialist congressman, Meyer London. He was re-elected with a comfortable majority in 1916. In the same year, New York City also sent two Socialists to the State Assembly, Abraham L. Shiplacoff for the second term and Joseph Whitehorn for the first. In 1916, too, Chicago sent a Socialist, William E. Rodriguez, to the Board of Aldermen. Hillquit, running for Congress in the 20th Congressional District—Harlem—in the same year, lost by a mere 108 votes, a highly doubtful loss in the face of evidence of Tammany election frauds. A year earlier, the party had 31 representatives in 13 state legislatures, widely distributed geographically, and a greater number of local governments.*³

Eugene V. Debs, Socialist Presidential candidate, starting in 1900 with 94,768 votes, polled 402,400 votes in 1904, a somewhat larger vote in 1908, and 897,011 in 1912.

The Socialist movement was steadily penetrating the trade unions, and was able to put up an increasingly vigorous fight for Socialist demands at the conventions of the AFL. Quite an impressive number of trade unions cast their votes for these demands. In 1912, the Socialist Max S. Hayes, of the International Typographical Union, in a contest with Samuel Gompers for the presidency of the AFL, received about one-third of the total vote. However, the improved position of the craft unions after 1912 estranged them from any radical movement.

The increasing strength and the growing election appeal raised bright Socialist perspectives. SP enthusiasts saw in the near future a mass party on the scale of those of Europe.

Some of the recently arrived Socialists from Russia, hitherto disillusioned and pessimistic of the Socialist Party in this country, were

now imbued with confidence. Dr. Max Goldfarb (Lipetz), political writer on the *Jewish Daily Forward*, ventured to predict: "At last we are becoming a political power. . . . Without sensationalism, the citizens are placing their trust in the party. All agree that a truly new party has come to life in America, a party of labor, the Socialist Party. . . . It moves slowly, but it keeps advancing, and it is about to become an effective political force. . . ." *4

Another writer, Zivyon (Dr. B. Hoffman), commenting on Woodrow Wilson's victory, frankly and proudly observed: "It is no secret that many convinced Socialists voted for Woodrow Wilson. . . . Wilson was actually elected with the help of Socialist votes. . . . In California, Allan L. Benson received 30,000-odd votes less than Debs polled in 1912. And Wilson won in that state with only 4,000 votes." *5

Goldfarb and Zivyon had been leading members of the General Jewish Workers Party, the Bund.

Profound events soon intervened to frustrate the high Socialist expectations. The most decisive was the Bolshevik Revolution.

INFLUX OF FOREIGN-BORN IN THE SP

The second decade witnessed a substantial change in the party's composition. Its overwhelmingly native American stock was diminishing, and foreign-born were forming the majority. The primary reason was the social reforms that followed the end of the turbulent, soul-searching muckraking period. They siphoned off some of the restlessness that permeated many of the rural areas and much of the city population. Now it was mostly immigrants that swelled the Socialist ranks.

The published statistics of dues-paying members in 1908 showed that two-thirds were American-born. In percentages, they made up 71 per cent, while those born in Germany were eight and a half per cent; the Scandinavian countries, five per cent; Great Britain, four per cent; Finland, two per cent; and all others, nine and a half per cent. The great majority of delegates to party conventions in 1901, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1917 were native Americans of at least several generations.*6

The picture changed rapidly after 1912. In that year, out of 118,045 members, less than 16,000 belonged to foreign-language groups.

However, in 1919, out of a membership of 108,504 more than half came from these groups. (The party suffered a decline from 1912 to 1919.) The changeover from a native mass base to a foreign-born one had a direct bearing on the stormy events that rent the party apart at the end of the decade.

This influx of foreign-born differed fundamentally from the early Germans, French, Scotch, Welsh and Irish who had guided the Socialist movement in the second half of the 19th century. They had been strangers for a short period only, and both by their intellectual level and occupational skills had been quickly absorbed in the new environment. With the possible exception of the Irish, they had retained but faint ties with their home countries. In the Socialist movement they were concerned primarily with things American. This applied even to the Germans who for a long time maintained their own organizations.

But the new recruits to the SP were largely products of the great mass immigration from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe that began streaming in at the turn of the century. They were Italians, Greeks, Hungarians, Slavic groups and Balkan people, Jews and Finns. These immigrants, handicapped by their intellectual and occupational limitations—a large proportion came from the village and farm and were unskilled—had, for sheer self-preservation, to settle in compact neighborhoods of their own, creating voluntary ghettos. Industrially, they made up the greater part of the vast non-skilled labor force recruited for the expanding mass production industries.

The wide net of local associations—mutual aid, social and cultural—that mushroomed among them served to satisfy elementary social needs and, what is perhaps of greater importance, to preserve their human dignity during the painful period of acclimatization. Without a geographical concentration and organized group life these people would have felt lost, and that much poorer socially and spiritually. At the same time, this understandable early separateness tended to slow down the process of their integration in America.

FEDERATIONS FACE PROBLEMS OF THEIR OWN

Those who came from the empires of the Romanoff's and the Hapsburg's belonged, for the most part, to oppressed nationalities. Re-

sentment against foreign rule heightens national consciousness. In most of these areas a national liberation movement drew popular support. This was paralleled by labor and Socialist bodies of varying strength and scope also fighting for national independence. These movements helped to maintain a keen interest here in the fortunes of the folks at home.

Thousands of these immigrants, connected with radical groupings in the old country, joined the Socialist Party, forming, with the party's consent, their own bodies, called language federations. In 1915, there were 14 federations in the party. The federations were autonomous, their membership divided into branches. They collected party dues, held conventions, elected their own executive officers and issued their own literature. Their branches came in contact with the other units of the party only through a delegated body, a city committee where such a committee existed.

Internal autonomy was only part of the picture. Most of the federations, functioning in a closed community of their own, did not confine themselves to purely educational activity, as had been the original intention of the party. They had to face problems that were of little concern to the party. Revolutionary struggles or outbreaks among their countrymen often excited their rank and file more than political happenings in America. Moreover, the former required immediate action. The energies of the federations were also taxed in the constant fight with non-Socialist elements in their community for the minds of the people. This imposed a special approach, the nature of which was not always appreciated by the party as a whole.

The federations did strive to Americanize their people, acquainting them with the American past and present, and imbuing them with the consciousness that they were part of American labor. However, this commendable attempt at "opening" America to the recent arrivals was partly negated by the consistent policy of preserving their separate identity.

In the nature of things, no organization, not even one created for a temporary and specific purpose, is prepared to disappear after that purpose has been accomplished. Usually the accumulated vested interests within contrive to find other justifications for its existence. This was particularly true in the radical movement. As a result, the SP, never as tightly knit as the European parties, was becoming, in

the second decade, more decentralized and loose. The veteran Socialist writer, James Oneal, wryly observed that many federations "constituted small national Socialist parties attached to the American organization." *7

The changing composition of the party was also reflected in the Socialist press. In 1912, the ratio of English dailies to foreign-language papers was five to eight, while in 1916 it shrank to two to 13. English weeklies in 1912 were 262 to 36 in foreign languages, while in 1916 this ratio was 42 to 22. Monthlies were ten to two in 1912, and 12 to nine in 1916.

The language federations did not exhaust all the foreign-born Socialists; a number of them belonged to English branches. This was particularly true of Jewish Socialists.

Small wonder that when faced by the crucial test, to remain with the American Socialist movement or to follow the exciting and alluring call of the Bolshevik Revolution that was rolling over their native lands, a majority of these "small national Socialist parties" chose to answer the latter.

3 *Confusion in the War*

The outbreak of the war in Europe, August 4, 1914, had a bewildering impact on radicals here. Socialists and other opponents of capitalism nurtured the belief that wars were plotted by capitalists and hatched by munitions-makers, and should—and could—be prevented by the organized might of the class-conscious working class. The antiwar stand of European labor, proclaimed again and again at international congresses, had planted in their minds the comforting hope that the great bodies of labor in Western Europe were a bulwark against “capitalist” wars.

The ease with which Germany and Austria could embark upon the war without encountering the slightest resistance from their powerful Socialist parties and trade unions was a rude disillusionment. Particularly painful was the acquiescence of the German Social Democracy which was looked upon here as a model mass party based on Marxist teachings, a party enjoying unbroken unity with the millions in the trade unions, a party with a large and able Reichstag fraction, a wide net of newspapers, publications and co-operatives. (Few were aware of the fact that after the severe setback the party suffered in the elections of 1907, the actual policymaking had passed into the hands of the trade union leaders, who in every labor party were on the conservative side.)

The Germans and Austrians were not alone in supporting the war effort of their governments. The French and Belgian Socialists did likewise, arguing that it was a war of defense. Georgi Plekhanov, internationally known Russian Marxist, also called upon the

Russian workers to defend their country. The Italian Socialists, however, voted against Italian entrance into the war in 1915, and continued their opposition afterward. Only Benito Mussolini, previously an extreme Socialist, and a small number of his followers turned war patriots.

The radical rank and file here and elsewhere were the victims of their own wishful thinking. They had never realized that the bold antiwar resolutions, beginning with the famous one of the Congress of the Second International, in Stuttgart, 1907, were patched up affairs and full of holes. The majority yielded to the militant antiwar minority in the phrasing of the resolutions; actually, the parties were only obligated to consultations with each other on the eve of war.

President Wilson's proclamation urging neutrality even in thought was heeded by the radicals to a degree never anticipated by the President. They were utterly opposed to the war, even after American involvement in it.

THE REASONS FOR OPPOSING THE WAR

The intransigent Socialist opposition to war can be explained by the following factors:

1. Unlike the European Socialist parties, the American Socialist Party was not burdened with the responsibility for the livelihood of millions of wage earners or for thousands of civil servants. Thus it was free to preach the Marxist doctrine on war.
2. The influence of the many humanitarians and pacifists who joined the party precisely for its unequivocal denunciation of war.
3. The spell cast by German Social Democracy on leading American Socialists of the Morris Hillquit and Algernon Lee school. Some of these leaders, German by birth, also felt a lingering affection for Germany and its *kulture*. As to practical politicians such as Victor L. Berger and Emil Seidel, no public man in Wisconsin could have been expected to support America's participation in the war.

(The German language federation, consisting of the younger elements, brought over here, October 9, 1915, the Finnish Socialist, Alexandra Kollantai, a friend of Lenin, to speak against the

war. At one of her meetings to report on the Zimmerwald conference, Hillquit rose to criticize Kollantai's condemnation of the German party, saying, "We do not know all the facts." *8 [She came here again in 1916])

4. The enormous weight of the language federations, who had no reason for favoring the cause of the Allies, or, for that matter, their enemies either.

ZIMMERWALD PRO AND CON

The conference in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, September 1915, was the first sign of antiwar stirrings among European labor. Thirty-one delegates representing groupings in 11 countries were there. Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky; Karl Radek (of the Polish Left) and Julius Martov (of the Mensheviks) participated. It was followed by a second conference, in Kienthal, Switzerland, April 1916. Zimmerwald issued a manifesto against the war, but failed to come forward with any concrete program, the delegates having failed to agree on any action.

An interesting sidelight on the division—or confusion—prevailing at Zimmerwald was the appraisal of the Bundist theoretician, Vladimir Kosowski, then living in Switzerland. Kosowski was scornful of the conference—and contemptuous of Lenin. "Too many splitters were there," he wrote. "Zimmerwald was afraid to touch ideological questions because they would have blown up the conference. That is why it lacked a declaration of principles. The manifesto was merely a general call to fight for peace and a hint that the *burgfrieden* had to be severed. . . .

"There were elements that wished to create a new international. . . . However, Lenin's resolution proposing that all "social patriots" be declared traitors . . . and to begin a struggle to stop the war was not even considered." *9

Kosowski considered Lenin "a splitter on principle, who believed that an operation was a cure-all for any conflict in the labor movement."

The great majority of Jewish Socialists did not share Kosowski's disparaging attitude. Abraham Liessin, editor of the *Zukunft*, saw in Zimmerwald a "ray of light dawning on the blood-drenched earth." And Kosowski's party as well as the SP endorsed the call of

Zimmerwald. The Jewish SP federation here approved Zimmerwald with reservations.*¹⁰ But Ab. Cahan, editor of the *Forward*, opposed Zimmerwald, claiming that it did not represent the moods of the majority of the Socialists. Mockingly, he said, "It is as effective as reciting a chapter of the Psalms of King David." *¹¹

ETHNICAL GROUPS AGAINST BOTH CAMPS

None of the ethnical communities from the Russian or Austrian empires could have been suspected of harboring any sympathy for either of the warring camps. On the contrary, in common with their kin overseas, they considered the war as nothing but a disaster. Their only hope for national liberation lay in the defeat of their "mother" country. (Some Polish politicians here actively campaigned for Austria-Hungary on the vague promises from Vienna that the Hapsburg monarchy would create an independent Polish kingdom.)

The Jewish group had no reason to support the Allies' cause either. Jews had always been losers in wars and were often made the scapegoats for defeats. The outbreak of hostilities turned Eastern Europe, an area thickly inhabited by Jews, into a battleground, cutting off communications with the greatest part of the Jewish people. Plans for bringing over parents, wives, children and other relatives had to be given up.

Overwhelming hatred of the Czarist government obscured Jewish vision to the menace of victorious Germany. By and large, Jewish sympathies inclined toward the Central powers. Curiously, the affection felt for the dull monarch Franz Joseph by many of the ordinary men and women from Austria played a part in swinging Jewish sympathies. As early arrivals, the Austrians were well represented in all institutions and the daily press, doing their full share in setting the tone of public expression.

Only a small group of intellectuals from various camps withstood this current, openly declaring themselves for the Allies. They were mostly grouped around *The Day*.

THE ST. LOUIS PLATFORM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

As America was entering the war, many Socialists and radicals, the Jewish in particular, were torn by conflicting emotions. Staunch

opponents of the imperialist war, they feared arrogant German militarism and hoped for a victory of the Allies for the sake of democratic England and France. But such a victory would have strengthened Czarist Russia. On the other hand, they did not like to see Germany completely defeated, for the sake of the German Social Democracy, which was still the hope and pride of Socialism. As a leading Jewish Socialist later noted, "Our thinking and moods were not crystal clear, but who could expect clarity in a time of anxiety."

But the SP attitude remained unbending. The high mark was reached in the platform adopted at the special party convention in St. Louis, April 1917, a day after Congress declared war on Germany. It was a highly doctrinaire document, reminiscent of the Daniel De Leon era, unrestrained in language and shrill in tone. Here are two short excerpts:

We brand the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and the citizens of the world.

In all modern history there has been no war more unjustifiable than the war in which we are about to engage.*¹²

Parenthetically, it was Charles E. Ruthenberg and L. E. Katterfeld, Communist leaders three years later, who kept hammering in the resolution committee for an extreme antiwar stand.

The SP was little hurt by the defection of a small number of pro-war Socialists, that included some of the old Marxists, men like John Spargo, A. M. Simons, W. J. Ghent, W. E. Walling, Max S. Hayes, AFL Socialist; and Charles Edward Russell, a middle-class humanitarian. Together with Samuel Gompers, who threw himself enthusiastically into the war effort, this group formed the North American Alliance for Labor Democracy, which conducted propaganda in support of Wilson's war policies. A handful of prominent Jewish radicals were active in the Alliance: Dr. Nachman Syrkin, spokesman for the Labor Zionists; William Edlin, an old member of the SP and editor of *The Day*; Rose Pastor Stokes, and a few others. But they were swimming against the current and their followers were numbered.

The antiwar Socialists, for their part, joined pacifist groups and some Irish leaders in organizing the People's Council of America for Democracy and Peace, which staged demonstrations for an immedi-

ate negotiated peace. Dr. Judah L. Magnes, an outstanding humanitarian, was a guiding spirit to the People's Council; so was Morris Hillquit.

Amazingly, the downfall of the Czar, March 1917, provided both the antiwar and the pro-war camps with additional arguments. The former stressed that the new Russia had to have immediate peace to consolidate the new freedom; the latter argued, with equal fervor, that the new Russian democracy was badly in need of military support to save it from being crushed by German militarism.

However, a year later, when the German army began its advance deeper into Russia—by then Soviet Russia—many Socialists demanded a revision of the party's antiwar policy toward supporting the war effort. Wilson's famous Fourteen Points contributed greatly to that dent in the Socialist attitude. This change of spirit was noticed particularly in the Jewish community, where Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, an influential thinker, and even Sol Yanofsky, editor of the anarchist weekly, gradually came over to viewing Wilson's program as the only one that held out a democratic solution for Europe's multiple troubles and a promise for a lasting peace.

PERSECUTIONS; MEYER LONDON'S TRAVAILS

The St. Louis platform isolated the party from the trade union movement. The AFL and the independent unions, at the Conference of Labor and Management, called by Gompers on the eve of the war declaration, pledged their unreserved support in the conduct of the war, agreeing not to take advantage of the war prosperity to disturb production by strikes for higher wages; management promising not to oppose union activities in their plants.

By far the heaviest blow to the party was the persecution of its leaders, reprisals against Socialist publications, and acts of intimidation and violence by local vigilante committees. Other labor groups opposing the war suffered likewise. A special target for persecution was the IWW in the Northwest, whose strikes during the war laid them open to charges of sabotage. In the East, the two leading anarchists, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, were arrested June 15, 1917, and convicted under the Espionage Act for opposing conscription.

The most conspicuous Socialist victim of the war hysteria was

Eugene V. Debs, convicted for ten years for a speech he delivered June 16, 1918, in Canton, Ohio. Other Socialist leaders were later sentenced, too, but the Supreme Court reversed their verdicts.

The highly effective election campaigns waged by the SP in the fall of 1917, emphasizing an immediate peace, and the exciting Hillquit mayoralty campaign in New York City, which also promised cheap milk, and was dubbed the Peace and Milk campaign, gave ample evidence that the antiwar slogan had a mass appeal. For the first time, a Socialist nominee appeared to be a serious contender for the office of mayor of the largest city. Hillquit polled 145,332 votes, nearly a five-fold gain over the previous Socialist mayoralty candidates. Seven Socialist aldermen, ten assemblymen, and a justice of the Municipal Court, Jacob Panken, were elected in New York. The votes came largely from Jewish neighborhoods. The Socialists greatly improved their vote also in Chicago and in other cities.*

The sole Socialist congressman, Meyer London, was placed in an untenable position. London was deeply apprehensive of a militaristic Germany, and once America was in the war he felt it his duty not to weaken the country's armed strength. His vote against the war with Germany and his advocacy of a negotiated peace aroused the ire of his colleagues in the House of Representatives; they called him a member of a pro-Kaiser party. But his vote for Champ Clark as Speaker and his "present" on the seven billion dollar war loan called down upon him the wrath of the Socialist rank and file. His refusal to heed the repeated demands of the party's NEC to introduce a bill for the repeal of the conscription law brought numerous demands for his forced resignation and expulsion. London was a lonely man.

(London also antagonized the party chiefs by his cable, sent April 18, 1917, to N. G. Tschiedse, leading Menshevik and president of the Provisional Russian government, asking him to deny rumors that the Russian Socialists favored a separate peace with Germany. Hillquit immediately cabled Tschiedse denying that London spoke for the American party.)^{*18}

The SP leadership was caught in a crossfire of criticism. The rising sentiment for a victorious conclusion of the war based on Wilson's Fourteen Points had penetrated the party itself, requiring

* For a description of the Hillquit campaign, see Melech Epstein, *op. cit.*, 1914-1952, pp. 77-80.

a retreat from the St. Louis platform. (The New York Socialist alderman, early in 1918, endorsed the Liberty Bonds.) On the other hand, those whose rabid opposition to war led them into the budding Left Wing insisted on the full implementation of that platform. The party top, essentially cautious and moderate men who had never intended to go beyond a mere antiwar declaration, had now to steer a middle course between the two extremes.

The hedging and hesitating of the party satisfied neither side. But the antiwar Socialists were more numerous, articulate and aggressive. Encouraged by revolutionary happenings abroad, they soon constituted a new force that gravely altered the course of Socialism in the United States.

FALL OF CZARS CAUSES SMALL TREK BACK TO RUSSIA

The Jewish community felt immense relief at the fall of the Czar. The regime of pogroms was gone at last. The *Forward* ran jubilant banner headlines: JEWISH TROUBLES AT AN END, FULL RIGHTS FOR ALL OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES, NEW LIGHT RISES OVER RUSSIA.^{*14} The caption over Editor Cahan's article offered the traditional "*Mazel Tov* to our Jewish People; *Mazel Tov* to the Entire World." The joyful event was celebrated in cafe and home. Especially elated were those who had participated in the revolutionary movement in one way or another. Proud reminiscences of personal exploits in the underground brought on a nostalgia for those dangerous but thrilling days of their youth.

Celebrations were held in many cities. The one in New York took place in Madison Square Garden, May 20, 1917. Hillquit, Ab. Cahan, Baruch Charney-Vladek and Dr. Anna Ingerman were the speakers. They tried to answer the question uppermost in the minds of radicals: "Where are the Socialist parties, the backbone of the Russian Revolution; why don't they occupy a prominent place in the Provisional government?" The speakers could only reassure their perplexed listeners that the Socialist movement would reassert itself in the course of further developments.

As was to be expected, a small trek back to Russia sprang up among the radicals. A committee representing all political tendencies was formed, and those confirmed by it as political immigrants were provided with free passage by the Russian Consulate on in-

structions from home. Russians made up the largest group. The Union of Russian Workers, a quasi-syndicalist body, with branches in the Eastern and Midwestern industrial cities, numbering about 9,000, lost half of its membership in the trek. Bill Shatoff's Russian anarchist group, Bread and Freedom, in Chicago, went back to Russia almost in a body.

The movement back to Russia did not by-pass the Jewish radicals. Each grouping had its returnees. Prominent among them were Ber Borochof, Alexander Khashin, Labor Zionists; Yasha Secoder, Moishe Katz, territorialist-Socialists; A. Litwak, Max Goldfarb and Shachno Epstein, Bundists. Had the Provisional government remained in office a little longer, the trickle back to Russia might have turned into a stream. As it was, a few hundred Jews, mostly intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, returned to Russia.

4 *The Left Wing*

The American Left Wing, similar to its counterparts elsewhere, rose out of disillusionment and impatience with the pace of social change. It derived its most compelling impulse from the Bolshevik Revolution. A rebellious mood, its origins rooted in the tradition of American radicalism, that in all probability would have settled into a vague oppositional left tendency within the existing movement, was turned under the dazzling example of a "dream come true" into the carrier of Communism in the United States.

The war in Europe uprooted in the minds of many Socialists the belief in the stability of the social-economic system. Shaken also was their deep-seated trust in the internationalism of the moderates. The longer the war lasted the deeper grew their angry impatience. Hopes pinned on the Russian Provisional government to take the initiative in ending the bloodshed were dashed by the ill-fated offensive begun by Alexander Kerensky in the summer of 1917 on the Austrian front.

At the lowest ebb of radical spirit, the proclamation of a Soviet Socialist Republic in Russia came as a renewal of faith. The explosive simplicity of this act was fascinating. Most of the syndicalists and anarchists, the latter avowed enemies of any state, were also captivated by the new Soviet Republic. Some of the anarchist groups even added the word *Soviet* to their name. Particularly attractive was the Bolshevik slogan, "All power to the Soviets;" the Soviets (councils), a body of workers, peasants and soldiers, appeared as a decentralized democratic regime, based on the popular will. And when the Soviets were threatened from within and from

without, anarchist groups here loudly called for its defense against White Guards and imperialists. They went even further. In a cable to Leon Trotsky, March 2, 1918, Leonard Abbott, in behalf of the Ferrer Association, Stelton, N. J., wrote:

ARE FORMING RED GUARDS TO HELP YOU
DEFEND THE REVOLUTION

The cable was intercepted by the authorities. In a similar message, wired on the same day to Bill Shatoff, Smolny Institute, Eleanor Fitzgerald, a well-known anarchist, stated:

. . . OUR LIVES AND OUR LAST CENT ARE WITH YOU
IN YOUR FIGHT *15 +3

The widely publicized Mollie Steimer case in 1918 grew out of a leaflet published by a group of young Jewish anarchists calling themselves the American Anarchist Federated Commune Soviets. The leaflet urged the transport and marine workers not to load or carry ammunition to the imperialist enemies of the Soviets. Jacob Abrams, Mollie Steimer and five others were sentenced to 15 years in prison, and were deported to Russia after serving three years. Steimer and Abrams left Russia in 1926, implacable enemies of Communism.*16

Even the first violent clash between the Bolsheviks and the anarchists in Moscow, April 1918, did not cure the local anarchists of their utopian hopes for Lenin's Russia. Only after the sailors' uprising in Kronstadt, March 1921, bloodily suppressed by the Communists, did American anarchists finally break with Bolshevism.

Anarchist myopia to Bolshevism can be explained in part by their indiscriminate opposition to all political activities. This, as Professor Lewis Lorwin has remarked, made them unable to tell democrats from authoritarians.+4 Another reason for the acceptance by the anarchists of the Bolshevik Revolution may have been the oppressive measures applied against them following America's entrance into the war. America appeared to them like a cruel step-mother, while Soviet Russia was beckoning to them with a tender promise.

RIGHT, LEFT—AND CENTER

The sober truth that Lenin and Trotsky had not overthrown the Czars but a democratic government seemed a trifle to the enthusiastic radicals. As one observer put it: thrilled by the flames, they

overlooked the devastation of the fire. One thing was uppermost in their minds: the Bolsheviki had succeeded where others had failed. The crusading spirit of early Socialism in America, noticeably flagging in the movement's prosperous years, came miraculously to life again.

By the same token, the Bolshevik Revolution spelled the end of gradualism for many Socialists and radicals. Moreover, it dispelled the traditional belief of Marxists and non-Marxists alike that victory would be reached only after a majority of the working population would be won over. Had not Lenin demonstrated that a small but resolute and disciplined minority could, by utilizing a favorable situation, boldly seize power? Disappointment with the German Socialists, who returned the government to a coalition after the first election following the political upheaval of 1918, only heightened the enormous prestige of the uncompromising Bolsheviki.

Instead of the old division of orthodox and revisionist, or moderate and extremist, a new one appeared, the Right and Left Wing—and Center added for good measure.

The brains of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (Ulianov) was previously unknown in the American movement. The intellectuals from Russia who knew of him were repelled by the rigidity of his thought, the abusiveness of his tone and the unscrupulousness of his tactics. And the swirling political current that led to Kerensky's overthrow was incomprehensible to most of them. Only the small group of pro-Bolsheviks in the Russian Socialist Federation that followed intensely the desperate struggle between the Bolsheviki and their Socialist and democratic opponents were aware of Lenin's audacious plans.

TROTSKY AND BUKHARIN IN AMERICA

This group was strengthened in 1915 by the arrival here from Copenhagen of Nicholas Bukharin, a young Marxist theoretician, a likable personality and an old disciple of Lenin, recently escaped from exile in Siberia. Leon Trotsky (Bronstein), who came here January 14, 1917, further added to their strength. Trotsky had been deported from Austria, France and Spain, successively. And in 1917 the theoretical division between Lenin and Trotsky had narrowed down considerably, Trotsky largely accepting Lenin's views.

Bukharin became editor of the *Novy Mir*, organ of the federation,

and was later joined by Trotsky. The writings and speeches of these two talented men molded opinion in the Russian group.⁺⁵ They cemented around the paper a pro-Bolshevik circle. (The important posts the majority of them later occupied in Russia moved Hillquit to remark sarcastically, "If one wishes to become a commissar in Russia he has at least to sweep the floors in the *Novy Mir*.")

The foreign-born Socialists listened to Bukharin and Trotsky with respect. Trotsky delivered several lectures in German and Russian in the German Labor Lyceum, 81st Street and Second Avenue, and in the Harlem River Casino, 107th Street and Second Avenue. He spoke at a meeting of New York Socialists and had a public debate with Hillquit in the Forward Hall, 175 East Broadway. Trotsky and Bukharin also took an active part in the meetings called by the small group of dissident Socialists who were trying to work out plans for a more effective voice in the Socialist movement. Trotsky's last speech was on March 26th, a day before he left on a Norwegian ship for Russia. Bukharin sailed for Russia a few weeks later.⁺⁶

It was Trotsky who was instrumental in converting Ludwig Lore, editor of the Socialist *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, to Communism. He also influenced a number of Jewish Socialists, particularly Morris Winchefsky, the "grandfather" of Yiddish Socialist literature, and A. S. Sachs, educator and sociologist; the latter never became a Communist. Trotsky's and Bukharin's articles were followed intently by the Jewish immigrant youth

TROTSKY'S QUARREL WITH THE FORWARD

Trotsky's forceful personality, self-righteousness and intellectual arrogance led to a clash with Ab. Cahan, himself a domineering personality who thrived on fights.

During Trotsky's short stay in this country, the *Forward* printed a few of his articles. Aside from airing his views, they provided him with a few badly needed dollars.

On the morning of March 1, 1917, the State Department exposed a German plot to embroil Mexico and Japan in a war against this country. B. Charney-Vladek, then city editor of the *Forward*, penned a few lines to give vent to his indignation. They were printed in a box at the top of the front page.

If Germany is actually embarking on this idiotic course, . . . which smacks of medieval darkness, then every citizen and every

resident of the United States will fight to protect the great American republic against an alliance of European and Asiatic monarchies and their associates.

Barely a couple of hours after the paper was on the street, Trotsky stormed into Editor Cahan's office. A few minutes later, loud voices were heard from there, Cahan and Trotsky shouting at each other in Russian. Trotsky, flushed with anger, soon rushed out, and left without saying good-bye to anyone.*¹⁷ He later sent a letter to Cahan severing all relations with the *Forward*.* +7

The Bolshevik Revolution ushered in an idyllic unanimity in the Socialist movement, at least on the surface. Unit after unit of the SP surrendered to its spell. There was hardly any division on this score. No Right-Winger would have dared openly to speak his mind against the Bolsheviks, to say nothing of the middle-of-the-roaders, who labored not to lag too far behind the Left in professing enthusiasm for the Soviets. Men of varying temperament and attitudes—Hillquit, Algernon Lee, Eugene V. Debs, James Oneal, August Claessens—spoke warmly of the Bolsheviks and defended their use of violence as unavoidable in a revolution. Oneal approved of the Bolsheviks in his speech at the Brownsville Labor Lyceum as late as November 7, 1919.*¹⁸ Only a few hard-boiled Mensheviks such as Dr. Anna Ingerman and Joseph Shaplen, who visited Soviet Russia, had the courage to challenge the victorious Bolsheviks. So did David Schub.

This spell was not limited to New York or to the East. A mass meeting in the Chicago Coliseum, January 1919, to launch the Socialist mayoralty campaign erupted in a stormy demonstration for Soviet Russia the moment the first speaker mentioned the word "Bolsheviki," the assembled 8,000 forgetting the original purpose that had brought them together.*¹⁹

SHAPING THE LEFT WING, 1919

It took the Left Wing nearly two years to take organizational form. The pattern was laid down at the New York City conference, February 15, 1919, and at the national conference in New York, June 21st of the same year.

At the city conference, held in the Rand School, all leading local

* This incident was erroneously given in *Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 1914-1952* as occurring a day after America declared war on Germany.

Left-Wingers were present. John Reed, recently returned from Lenin's Russia full of admiration for the revolution he had witnessed, was there too.

After heated discussions, an executive committee was elected, consisting of Benjamin Gitlow, Nicholas I. Hourwich, George Lehman, James Larkin, L. Himmelfarb, Benjamin Corsor, Edward Lindgren and Maximillian Cohen. Headquarters were opened at 43 West 29th Street. (Several of the participants later disappeared from Left-Wing and Communist activities.)

The Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Section Socialist Party, Local Greater New York was published in the *Revolutionary Age* of March 22, 1919. It bore little or no relations to the actual conditions in this country. The only cognizance taken by the Left of things American was determined opposition to the AFL, resolutions for revolutionary trade unions and for a vigorous struggle to unmask bourgeois democracy. The manifesto embodied Louis C. Fraina's program article, "Problems of American Socialism," in the first issue of the *Class Struggle*, February 1919.

In April, the *New York Communist* appeared, edited by John Reed. The second issue already had an editorial board, two of its four members from the Russian Federation.

An application blank was issued for those in the party wishing to join the Left Wing. The agents of the Lusk State Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities, who raided the headquarters on June 21, 1919, took away 2,000 signed applications.

The Manifesto and Program was adopted by the Left Wing groups in most of the other cities too.

About a hundred participated in the national conference.⁺⁸ Meeting several months after the first congress of the Third (Communist) International, March 2-6, 1919, in Moscow, the conference could tread on sure ground. It had only to copy the program of the highest authority, adding a few paragraphs condemning American imperialism, American democracy, reformism, the AFL and the SP.

SPECTOR OF COMMUNISM HOVERS OVER EUROPE

To appreciate the revolutionary flamboyancy of the manifestos, one must not lose sight of the social restlessness prevailing in Europe after the end of hostilities. The challenging statement of the

Communist Manifesto, "The specter of Communism is haunting Europe," visionary in 1848, sounded prophetic and real to many eager ears in 1918-1920. The great human dislocation and the tremendous social tensions accumulated during the four war years set in motion a succession of revolutionary outbreaks, both of a national and social nature. New smaller states were rising on the wreckage of the two empires in Eastern and Central Europe, and within their still shaky structures internecine warfare raged over their social-political content.

In the defeated countries the unrest seemed to reach the boiling point. In January 1919, the Spartacus Bund held Berlin for ten days; in March, Bela Kun proclaimed a Soviet republic in Hungary; in April, Gustav Landauer and his friends, Ernest Toler among them, declared a Soviet republic in Bavaria.

The general restlessness did not by-pass American labor. Here, too, workers were clamoring for the higher goals pledged by the war President. And their pent-up energies were released after the war in a round of big strikes; the most important, in steel and coal. For the first time, this country witnessed a paralyzing general strike, in Seattle, Washington, January 21, 1919, an action in support of striking marine workers. There was also a general strike in Winnipeg, Canada, in the same year.

The ground swell of political dissatisfaction ripened in many parts into talk of a third party, a farmer and labor party. Such parties were actually organized in several states in the Northwest. Nationalization was seriously discussed by the unions in two vital industries, coal mining and railroads. The AFL could not escape this ferment either. At its convention of June 1919, in Atlantic City, the AFL adopted a program proudly claimed to be the "most complete and the most constructive proposal made in this country for the reconstruction period." *²⁰ But the only two "complete" demands were the right to organize and the cessation of immigration for at least two years.

Neither the wave of strikes nor the political agitation could, on sober reflection, be regarded as potential prerequisites for a revolutionary crisis in America. The high production and full employment, that had not stopped immediately after the war, as anticipated by many—obviously no sign of weakness in the economic system—did not dampen the revolutionary fervor of the Left. Four

thousand miles away from Europe, the Left, largely a youthful element and overwhelmingly foreign-born, was intoxicated by the revolutionary potentials there.

"GOOD FOR RUSSIA BUT UNSUITED FOR AMERICA"

The internal struggle in the SP now entered a second stage. At stake was control of the party itself. There was hardly a unit in any area that avoided the long exhausting meetings and acrimonious debates, often lasting until dawn. And these were usually preceded by caucuses to map strategy. Fist fights and rolling on the floor were not uncommon.

The Left now demanded full acceptance of the Bolshevik line. The Rights were labeled Scheidemann's and Noske's or counter-revolutionaries and Kolchaks—varying with the temperament of the accuser. And the middle-of-the-roaders were called Centrists, only a few shades less insulting than the former. As usual in inter-party strife, the initiative was with the aggressive opposition. It branched out, creating its own organization within the party.

The attitude of the leadership and their supporters could be summed up in one sentence: *The Soviet state is good for Russia but unsuited for America.* Some honestly failed to see any danger in such a view, while for others it was a mere subterfuge not to alienate the rank and file. However, this pro-Soviet sentiment threw them into a weak defensive position.

An example of this frame of mind—or tactic—was the telegram sent by the SP convention, September 1919, in Chicago, to Ludwig C. A. K. Martens, Soviet representative here. The message ended with: **THE PROLETARIAN REPUBLIC IS AN INSPIRATION TO US.**²¹

This lip service to Communism in Russia, a stratagem to check it here, continued for a few years after the split with the Communists. A famous leader of the Bund, Vladimir Medem, who arrived in this country in 1921, warned the delegates to the convention of the Socialist Federation of the same year to steer clear of the uncritical and unprincipled stand adopted by most Socialists. He said in effect: Once a Socialist accepts the premise that the Communists have created a workers' state in Russia he is helping the cause of Communism *here*. Once a Socialist surrenders to the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat for one country, he opens the

door to a discussion about the correctness of applying it to the rest of the world. There can be no compromise on the fundamental principle of democracy, a cornerstone of Socialist thought.*²²

Medem's warning was ignored. The Socialist press was practically closed on anti-Bolsheviks until 1923. This double standard was not a monopoly of the Socialists. A substantial, if not a major, section of liberal public opinion, typified by the *Nation* and *New Republic*, were wholeheartedly pro-Soviet for Russia though they were against Communism for America.

The same approach prevailed in Medem's own party in Poland—this had prompted Medem and A. Litwak to migrate to America—and in other Socialist parties. Jean Longuet, grandson of Karl Marx, reviewing in the *New York Forward* the Communist split at the convention of the French Socialist Party, in January 1921, mixed a clearcut opposition to Communism with admiration for the Soviet regime.*²³ In another article from France, October 2, 1921, Longuet wrote approvingly of the decision of the French trade unions against the Communist Profintern, at the same time continuing to favor the Soviets. And Longuet represented the Centrists.

An explanation of this strange attitude might be looked for in the internal situation of the given countries. Paris and Warsaw, for example, were foremost in the *Cordon Sanitaire* policy against Soviet Russia. The Socialist and labor movement, forced to fight their conservative governments, could ill afford unanimity with them on any major policy issue. As a leading European Socialist put it years later, "Soviet Russia appearing as a thorn in the side of our ruling reactionaries, we could do nothing else but defend it." One may add to this expediency the sentiment of many Socialists for a regime pledged to create a classless society, though its means to that end were unpalatable.

Still, this pro-Sovietism increased confusion among Socialist followers and favored Communist penetration into labor and radical bodies.

5 *Communism's Birth Pangs*

The Left, like all new creeds, was immediately torn by sharp dissensions at the top. Unbending dogmatism intermingled with an unabashed race for power split it in two. The primary reason was that the Left was no more homogeneous than the party itself. Diversity in background and tradition made it exceedingly difficult for the non-English-speaking groups to be fused with the Americans in a tight political body, though their differences were only a matter of nuance, the Americans being a degree less doctrinaire than the others.

The Left Wing was soon hopelessly at odds over its immediate objective: to take over the SP by capturing it from within or to wreck it from outside by forming a Communist Party without delay. The majority of the English-speaking held out for the former course, while the language federations impatiently insisted on a Communist Party at once.

A compromise reached at the national conference, June 1919, was soon broken by the federationists. Not one of them entered the National Council, nor did they participate in the *Revolutionary Age*. Secret maneuvering and double-dealing, chiefly on the part of the Russians, poisoned relations within the Left, and ended by cutting it in two.

NICHOLAS I. HOURWICH, THE ZEALOT

For the Russian Federation the Bolshevik Revolution was a wind-fall. From an insignificant 1,500 in 1915, it grew to 7,824 in 1919. Many Russians not at all Communists, intent upon returning home,

thought—or were led to believe—that a membership card in the federation would be useful in their native land.

Alexander Stoklitsky and Nicholas I. Hourwich were the leaders of the federation at that time. Nicholas, the oldest son of Dr. I. A. Hourwich, noted economist and writer, possessed neither the impressive appearance, the personal charm, nor the intellectual qualities of his father, inheriting only his stubbornness and belligerence. Nicholas, who had voted with the Bolsheviks at the historical convention of the Russian Social Democracy in 1907, typified the dogmatism and narrow sectarianism of the early Russian radicals. As the self-appointed guardian of Bolshevik purity, anyone who did not agree with him on a single point was no less than a traitor or, with equal dishonor, a Menshevik. His air of revolutionary superiority and his patronizing attitude to the American Left-Wingers was a constant source of irritation. Short of stature, near-sighted, with a little red beard, he could talk for hours, trembling with excitement.

Hourwich conceived the bright idea of subjecting Ludwig C. A. K. Martens to the control of his federation, insisting that only the Russian Communist group could truly represent the Soviet foreign policy in this country.⁺⁹ However, he was overruled by Moscow.

The Russians were consistently supported by the small Latvian Federation. The Letts compensated for their lack of numbers by their revolutionary ardor. In Russia the Letts had been among the most militant Socialists. And after the Bolsheviks seized power, the Latvian *strelki* (marksmen) regiments were their most trusted military unit. They accompanied the Soviet government when it moved from Petrograd to Moscow before the advancing German armies.

HILLQUIT MINIMIZES THE DANGER

The SP top were ready for certain changes in program and tactics to placate the Left. They were willing to participate in a new international that would include the Russian and German Communists. But they would not concede that the economic and political situation in America was nearing a stage that would require "revolutionary mass action." To them this slogan could only lead to the complete ruin of the Socialist movement.

The NEC of the party met the threat of the Left by a number of rapid extraconstitutional moves: reorganization of branches and

higher committees without the Left, expulsion of known Left-Wingers and of the Michigan State body, and the suspension of seven federations. Also annulled was the party referendum, whose results had been favorable to the Left.

Hillquit, who master-minded these countermeasures, was himself deeply affected by the impatient temper of that period. He was eager to reach a compromise with the Left, but he would rather have seen the party split than to lose it for the moderates.

In a letter from his sanitarium in the mountains to the *New York Call*, May 21, 1919, Hillquit outlined his views on the "old" labor movement and on the schism in the party. He called the former a privileged body within the working class, having a vested interest in capitalism. As to the split, he pleaded:

Let them (the Left) separate honestly, freely and without rancor. Let each side organize and work in its own way and make such contribution . . . as it can. Better a hundred times to have two numerically small Socialist organizations, each homogeneous and harmonious within itself, than to have one big party torn by dissensions and squabbles, an impotent Colossus on feet of clay. The time for action is near; let us clear the decks.

On the face of it, these lines were remarkable for their frankness and illusions. But Hillquit was too wise and too much of a realist to put credence in a harmonious coexistence. And his letter must have been primarily a tactical move to placate the neutrals in the party.

The countermeasures only added zeal to the insistence on an immediate Communist Party. The seven suspended federations formed a new body. They were the Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, South Slavic, Latvian and Lithuanian. (The South Slavic joined later. From the Jewish and the Finnish only small minorities were part of the Left.)

Though disdainful of the Bolshevism of most of the Americans, the federations knew only too well that any party functioning in America must have American names on its letterhead. They succeeded in winning over several of the natives, including Ruthenberg, Fraina and Ferguson. Now a majority on the National Council, they took over the *Revolutionary Age*. The other faction, Benjamin Gitlow, Ludwig E. Katterfeld, Ludwig Lore, John Reed and James Larkin, issued the *Voice of Labor*, with Reed as editor.

The split in the short-lived Left Wing was now final. The new

bloc together with the Michigan group, headed by Dennis E. Batt, set out to launch the Communist Party.

TWO COMMUNIST PARTIES ARE BORN IN CHICAGO

Two conventions opened in Chicago August 30, 1919, those of the Socialist Party and of the federations-Ruthenberg-Fraina combination. But scarcely 24 hours passed and Chicago was host to a third convention, that of the Left-Wingers who had come with the hope of taking over the SP.

Intent on preventing the Left from capturing the party, those at the helm of the SP took appropriate steps. All contested Left delegates were barred from even entering the convention hall. Only 37, whose seats were not contested, were admitted.

The barred delegates opened their own convention in the same Machinists Hall building. A day later, some of the Left seated delegates joined them.

The two conventions produced two parties, the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party. The first was formed at the original convention meeting at the "Smolny Institute," headquarters of the local branch of the Russian Federation on Blue Island Avenue; the second, at the gathering of the delegates who were barred or expelled from the SP convention.⁺¹⁰

The Communist Party convention numbered 137 delegates and claimed 58,000 members; the Communist Labor Party had 97 delegates, claiming 30,000 members, both figures well-padded for the good of the cause. The true figures must have been somewhere between 23,000 and 30,000 for the CP,^{*24} and about 8,000 for the CLP. Part of the Left rank and file and the neutrals dropped out during the internal struggle.

The CLP convention made several overtures for unity, but they were all rejected by the CP. Ruthenberg did make an attempt to have the CLP brought in, but the Russians were adamant. Pointing to Lore, who symbolized to them the despised German Social Democracy, they charged that the CLP had a "Centrist tail" dragging behind it. The Russians would make only one concession, to treat the CLP delegates as individuals, a concession that the other side could only reject.

Ruthenberg was elected secretary of the party; Fraina, international delegate and editor of the paper. The two formed an Amer-

ican facade for the new party. Besides, Ruthenberg was the most experienced organizer and Fraina was the chief theoretician and the most prolific writer in the entire setup.

The CLP elected Alfred Wagenknecht secretary and Reed international delegate. Cleveland, Ohio, was made party headquarters.

The convention of the CLP had a one-man desertion before it was over. Louis B. Boudin, an erudite lawyer from New York, an orthodox Marxist and a perennial rival of Hillquit, left the gathering in a huff after his amendments to cleanse the platform of Communism were defeated. Boudin was a genuine "Centrist."

Rather pedantic in his thinking, Boudin's Marxism was of a purely theoretical nature, having little relevance to daily experience. And because of this his influence in the movement never went beyond a limited circle. Steeped in the democratic tradition of Socialism, Boudin refused to accept the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, he remained strongly pro-Soviet for the rest of his long life. In his later years, Boudin was chairman of the American Federation of ORT.

"MASS ACTION" AND "ACTION BY THE MASSES"

To all appearances, the disparity between the platforms of the two Communist parties was largely one of emphasis. The CLP, trying to clear itself of the stigma of Centrism, vied with the CP in revolutionary formulas. Both advocated the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat; both were contemptuous of bourgeois democracy and against a labor party. And both had a touch of syndicalism, as evidenced by the importance attached to the trade unions in the future classless society. They did disagree on phrasing the relation of the political struggle to the final goal, and differed particularly in their attitude on the trade unions. The CLP was against destroying the old craft unions, while the platform of the CP stated: ". . . as against the unionism of the AFL, the Communist Party propagandizes industrial unionism. . . . It is a factor in the final mass action for the conquest of power, as it will constitute the basis for the industrial administration of the Communist commonwealth." *25

The program of the CP followed the main lines of the manifesto of the Left Wing. The negative attitude toward the existing unions remained literally the same.*26

A year later, at the second convention, July 1920, the CP, at a nod from Moscow, had a change of heart toward the trade unions. It was now for entering "the most reactionary unions for Communist propaganda and agitation." *27

The program of the CLP declared that its aim was "to create a unified revolutionary working-class movement in America."

HILLQUIT AGAIN TRIES TO BE CALM

A striking contrast to the political and personal brickbats hurled between the CP and the CLP was the calm and conciliatory tone of Hillquit's second letter in the *New York Call*, September 22, 1919:

The division was not brought about by differences on vital questions of principle. It arose over disputes on methods and policy. . . .

The separation of the Socialist Party into three organizations need not necessarily mean a weakening of the Socialist movement as such. Our newly baptized "Communists" have not ceased to be Socialists even though in a moment of destructive enthusiasm they have chosen to discard the name. . . . And when the hour of the real Socialist fight strikes . . . , we may find them again in our ranks.

It is inconceivable that Hillquit could have been so shortsighted or carried away by the illusion of revolutionary possibilities in Europe. His seeming tranquillity must have been a shrewd and hopeful move by an astute leader anxious to minimize the grave setback suffered by his party. Whatever his motive, both his prophecy and his hope fell wide of the mark.

A curious situation arose in New York as an offshot of the forming of the CP. During the nomination for public offices in August 1919, the Left, still officially a part of the SP, contested the party candidates in many districts, and in several their nominee won out. But a month later the Left was already the Communist Party, and, according to the election law, their candidates could not be taken off the ballot. Had they wished, they could have waged Communist campaigns around their candidates, and they would have had Socialist backing, too. Walter M. Cook, state secretary of the New York SP, instructed his members to support these Communist candidates. "Forget personalities and wage the strongest campaign we have ever yet put up," he said.*28 Instead, the New York County Committee

of the CP chose to boycott the elections. They issued a leaflet appealing to the voters to do likewise. The leaflet explained the new party setup, and called the SP candidates "Socialist job-holders who promise cheap rent, milk, houses, bread, fare—cheap fairy tales." The CP assured the people that:

The USA is on the verge of a revolutionary crisis. Workers, through their strikes, are challenging the state. The CP's task is to unify these strikes, develop them into political strikes aiming them at the very power of the capitalist state itself.²⁹

The SP, though seriously hit by the defection, managed to reelect five assemblymen to the State Legislature in that year.

EXIT LOUIS C. FRAINA

In that summer, the CP had a flurry of excitement. Louis C. Fraina was publicly accused of being an agent of the Department of Justice. The accuser was none other than Santeri Nuorteva, head of the Soviet Bureau in Washington, an able and clever Finn. The Socialist *Call* and other publications cheerfully printed this accusation.

The spy charge followed Fraina to Moscow, where he was sent by the CP as a delegate to the Comintern, August 1920. The American party and a committee of the ECCI (Executive Committee of the Comintern) found the charges groundless.³⁰ Nuorteva still persisted, naming Ferdinand Peterson and Jacob Nosovitsky as his informants. Later it was discovered that the two were themselves agents of the Department of Justice.

Nuorteva was then arrested in Moscow under suspicion of being an agent of the British. He was imprisoned about eight months, and was released after the Cheka discovered that the leak from Nuorteva's office in Washington had been the work of his secretary, Williams, a British subject who had been planted there by Scotland Yard. Under Lenin, Nuorteva was demoted for his negligence and sent to the Republic of Karelia, where he occupied a minor post. He was never heard of again.¹¹

As to Fraina, his name disappeared from the Communist press in the fall of 1921, and was never mentioned again. He was quietly expelled from the party in 1922.¹²

6 *In the Underground*

The political activity of the CP consisted mainly of bombarding strikers with crude, bombastic leaflets. Replete with Communist slogans, the leaflets could only repel the workers. And the young distributors were often beaten up for their unsolicited advice.

A fair example of the attempts to inject Communism into economic strikes was the appeal issued in the fall of 1919 to the striking longshoremen by the New York CP. The leaflet berated the longshoremen's union, the AFL, the bosses, the courts and the government, and warned the strikers, "Forming an industrial union will of itself not solve your problems. . . . Going to the polls on election day will not bring your victory. . . . The only way is to get rid of the present government of the bosses and establish a workers' government in its place. . . . The answer to the dictatorship of the capitalists is the dictatorship of the workers. All power to the workers!" *⁸¹

During the Russian-Polish war, the summer of 1920, the CP issued an appeal to the transport workers to refuse to load arms and ammunition for Poland. The appeal solemnly added, "For the American workers it (a victory for Soviet Russia—M.E.) will also mean that American capitalism and imperialism will be more demoralized and will bring the day of the liberating proletarian revolution nearer in this country." *⁸² It is not surprising that a plea of this kind caused not a ripple in the ports of this country. (The last of this type of leaflet was distributed among the strikers of the Brooklyn trolley car barns, in 1921. Charles S. Zimmerman remembers

how fast he had to run across the street to save himself from the angry strikers.)

MASS RAIDS AND ARRESTS

The "normal" development of both parties was abruptly interrupted by an avalanche of repression. In November and December, 1919, hundreds of raids were carried out by Federal agents and state and city police. Sixty-five Communist branches in four New York boroughs were raided on November 8th by police on orders of the Lusk Investigating Committee. Larkin and Lovestone were among the arrested. These were merely a prologue to the mass raids staged by the Federal government.

On the night of January 2, 1920, squads of Federal agents and city police descended on the headquarters and meeting places of the two parties throughout the country, seizing records and dragging away most of those who were present. Later the same night, thousands of men and women were taken out of their beds and arrested without warrants. The Department of Justice, under Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, was well prepared for these mass "visits," having had agents planted in many units of the two parties.

Almost all of the Communist leaders of both parties were indicted and sentenced under state criminal anti-syndicalist laws. However, only Ruthenberg, Larkin, Gitlow, Ferguson and Harry Winitzky, in New York, and a few more in other places had to spend time in prison. The rest had their sentences reversed by higher courts.

Another Federal agency, the Department of Labor, rushed deportation proceedings against the arrested. On December 21, 1919, 249 Russian-born were put on the old, unseaworthy SS *Buford*, built in 1885, and deported to Russia. Among the deportees were Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman. The *Buford* was nicknamed the "Soviet Ark." (On the trip, Berkman, chosen leader, took a poll of the deportees. In his *Bolshevik Myth*, published in Berlin, 1921, he tells that of the 246 men and three women, a majority belonged to the Union of Russian Workers; eleven were members of the SP. They were awakened in Ellis Island at two in the morning and led to the ship without any previous notice.)

It was estimated that in this short period no less than ten thousand persons were arrested, that 6,530 Labor Department warrants

were applied for, either before or after the arrests, and that about three thousand among those arrested were actually fitted up and held for deportation hearings.*³³

NON-CITIZENS FRIGHTENED

Both parties were driven underground, with only a fraction of their members. The rest were intimidated. The non-citizens were frightened still more after Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson declared the Communist Party illegal, in January.

A letter to the Jewish Socialist Federation from New England gloomily reported: "As a result of the raids, people were afraid to come to meetings, to write letters, to keep books, and to sell party stamps. Contact between the branches and the city committee was almost entirely severed. Only a few *genossen* met from time to time, laboring to keep the last sparks (of the movement) from being extinguished." *³⁴ And the federation was anti-Communist.

Public opinion, alarmed by Communism in Russia, Bavaria and Hungary, was incensed against the "Reds" here, creating a favorable climate for the repressions, condoned by most of the press.

Louis F. Post, Assistant Secretary of Labor, a former disciple of Henry George, the single taxer, was the sole member of the Wilson government to openly criticize the illegal mass deportations, cancelling the greater part of the warrants. He was supported by 12 outstanding members of the bar who signed a "Report Upon the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice," citing numerous violations of constitutional law.*³⁵ *³⁶

Straining to maintain a functioning organization, some of those who remained in the two Communist parties found solace in the underground existence forced upon them. Assuming different names, meeting in secret and publishing underground literature fitted in with their social romanticism, creating the illusion of going through the revolutionary rigamarole of the Bolsheviks. One of these enthusiasts remarked to the author with a chuckle, "Let the Americans learn how to carry on underground work!"

Being forced underground proved to be not entirely a romantic game. Conspiratorial activity was alien to the rank and file; they had difficulty in adjusting to it. The CP top, therefore, drawing

upon the Russian experience, published a four-page pamphlet, *Rules for Underground Behavior*.⁸⁷

THE BREAK WITH THE "TALK CONSPIRATORS"

The inner life of the CP was far from peaceful. Neither the Russians' sectarian concept of a Communist Party nor their crude schemes to keep their grip on it could be tolerated for long by the Ruthenberg-Fraina faction. The latter were accustomed to a wider political arena and a larger dose of inner democracy. Even some of the language groups resented Russian domination. The last straw was the decision by the Hourwich bloc, with a one-vote majority on the EC, to remove the organizer of the Chicago party district, and later the entire district committee. They were Ruthenberg's followers, and he was forced to act. Supported by a minority on the EC, he presented the Russians with an ultimatum.

(The Communists arrogantly ignored the political-geographical boundaries of this country. Neither the lower branches nor the higher committees were based on existing political and election units. Instead of a state committee, there was a district committee often embracing several states or based on an industrial area. And the chief local official was not called secretary but organizer.)

When the Russians and their allies refused to accept Ruthenberg's terms, he and the minority issued two spirited statements, dated April 8, 1920. The second statement expressed the exasperation with the Super-Bolsheviks:

Since the beginning of the party. . . . The majority of the CEC . . . "great theorists" . . . constantly talked about the word "principle," but never about how to relate Communist principles to the working-class movement in this country. . . . The kind of action this majority believed in was hours and days of sitting around a table, wrangling about who should go to Europe.

. . . Super-Bolsheviks . . . were quick to fling the epithet "Menshevik" at those who opposed them. . . . They have been aptly designated "talk conspirators," . . . They wished to keep the party a small sect of which they could pose as the high priests. . . . The Communist Party should not be a party of closet philosophers. . . .⁸⁸

Negotiations with the Russians proving futile, the Ruthenberg group bolted the CP and joined the CLP. The product of this

merger was named, in all seriousness, the United Communist Party. The top of the new party was made up of five men each from the CLP and the Ruthenberg camp. According to the CP, Ruthenberg took with him only about 3,500 members, the CP remaining with a membership of 8,350.*³⁰

The program of the CLP was accepted almost *in toto*, with one distinct change. Both partners in the UCP having had enough friction with the federations, they were shorn of their power and reduced to mere sections of the party.⁺¹⁸

The person who carried out the mechanics of the split and the merger with the CLP, a man on whom Ruthenberg relied, was none other than the Chicago organizer who had been removed by the Russians. He went by the name of Fischer. Only in a sunless and airtight party could such a man function. His career is worth telling.

THE ADVENTURES OF FISCHER-BELSKY

Fischer was at that time in his early 50's, nearly six feet tall, with blond hair, thick eyebrows and a thin face. He was an assimilated Jew, born in Russia. Fischer was one of the original American Communists and would boast that he knew Lenin personally. But his past was obscure.

For some unexplained reason, Fischer picked for his protégé Dr. Louis Hendin, an excitable young man, just graduated from the school of dentistry. Fischer placed Hendin on the CEC of the UCP, himself remaining outside the committee. In confidential talks with Hendin over a few drinks, Fischer kept urging the necessity for a triumvirate to rule the party, naming himself, Hendin and a young man from Philadelphia, Gershon. He argued that one could not depend on the present American leadership. "They are not well versed in revolutionary Marxism," he said.

These talks and the fact that a few months earlier Fischer and several active people had been arrested in Chicago, Fischer being the only one to be released several hours later, aroused Hendin's suspicion. When Fischer made an appointment to meet him at his home, Hendin purposely came earlier. Fischer was not yet home, and his wife innocently disclosed that she had been a city detective in the red light district. The walls of Fischer's room were decorated with swords and pistols.

Hendin did not wait for Fischer. Excitedly, he told the story at the next meeting of the CEC, demanding Fischer's expulsion. But he was only suspended. No investigation was carried out. Several months later, Hendin found out that Fischer was given permission to go to Russia to clear himself. That was where the matter stood until Hendin, after the convention of the UCP in 1921, went to Russia to air his disagreements with the party.

On Hendin's arrival, he was immediately summoned to the Secretariat of the CC of the Russian CP. There, in the presence of Molotov, he was closely questioned for several hours about Fischer's activities in Chicago. Insisting on knowing the reason for the interrogation, Hendin was informed that Fischer, in reality Belsky, had been a member of the Moscow Bolshevik Committee as early as 1903. At that time, Lenin, from his exile, had proposed that the committee plant some people in the Okhrana (security police). "But," Lenin had added, "if someone will suggest himself for this job, expel him." Belsky had volunteered and was expelled. He had then disappeared, and the Russians had not heard of him until he reappeared as Fischer in 1921.

As shooting of Communists was not yet practiced in that early period, and the evidence against Fischer was merely circumstantial, he was ordered to leave Soviet Russia. But this was not the end. A couple of years later, at the opening of the trial of the director of the state bank in Leningrad, Krasnoschekoff, a lawyer and a Socialist returnee from America, for financial irregularities, one of the public prosecutors suddenly looked at the chief witness and recognized a familiar face. It was Fischer-Belsky. He had never left Russia, and managed to work his way to the position of Krasnoschekoff's assistant. Now he was ready to testify against him. Fischer-Belsky was immediately arrested and shot without a trial in the basement of the Cheka.

Dr. Hendin, a member of the editorial staff of the *Forward* since 1929, who told the author the tale of this master adventurer, added that Fischer-Belsky's wife had been entrusted with the complicated arrangements for the underground merger convention of the UCP. And while she had ostensibly taken extraordinary precautions for the safety of the convention, bringing the delegates in busses over circuitous roads through a wood near the Illinois-Ohio border,

rumor later had it that detectives had been watching the convention from a nearby spot.

The financial setup of the UCP and the CP was not as tight as one might have expected of small underground parties requiring large outlays for defense and propaganda. The members of the CEC of the UCP were quite well paid for those years, \$84 a week plus seven dollars a day traveling expenses. Hendin never noticed any lack of money. And when the UCP moved from Chicago to New York, he learned that instead of \$84, the leaders were drawing \$133 a week. He was astonished at the explanation given him by Alfred Wagenknecht, acting secretary during Ruthenberg's term in jail, that the CEC members, though they were now living in New York, still considered it a city they had to travel to, and charged the seven dollars traveling expenses.*⁴⁰

The CP felt no financial pinch either. It freely published propaganda material. Lower party functionaries had to exist on the meagerist of budgets, but the leaders traveled in pullmans and stayed at middle class hotels. And, with the exception of a few "angels," none could put his finger on any American source for these ample party funds.+¹⁴

7 *Moscow Takes a Hand*

The CP and the CLP had hardly rounded out their first twelve months and their dependence upon Moscow became a major fact of their existence. It was understandable that the young American converts should look up to the Russians for theoretical and organizational guidance. But it is highly doubtful whether Ruthenberg, Reed, Fraina, Larkin and the others foresaw that Moscow would soon be sitting in the director's chair, intervening in every detail of the American movement.

Paradoxically, the first to rush to Moscow was John Reed, an unattached rebel who had never borne party discipline. And Reed's aim was only moral and political recognition for his CLP as a Communist body. He left for Russia immediately after the CLP convention in Chicago, remarking, "Moscow will have to take notice of us." *41 The CP, fearing that its rival might gain the approval of Moscow, presented its own case to the Comintern, thus opening a wide door for maneuvers by the latter.

Recognition was vital. Neither of the Communist parties had men of the intellectual stature of Morris Hillquit and Algernon Lee, of moral prestige approaching that of Eugene V. Debs, or practical builders of the type of Victor L. Berger. Their leading cadres, with a few exceptions, were relatively young and unknown. In the absence of a single outstanding figure, public censure by the Kremlin of an American Communist would hurt his standing, and perhaps cause his undoing. In the two-party rivalry such censure was a real threat.

The financial aspect must be considered, too. Moscow was more than willing to invest in the American movement in the certainty that this would facilitate its control.

The first direct interference in the affairs of American Communism was a letter from Gregory Zinoviev, president of the Comintern, dated January 12, 1920. Calling the split unjustified, he suggested a joint convention to form a united Communist party. Zinoviev also told the Americans to build an underground body in case of suppression. "The fewer people know of it, the better," he said.

Zinoviev was of the opinion that the language groups, due to their better theoretical training and close ties with the Russian revolutionary tradition, "may in the future have a guiding influence." (This was a nod to the Russian Federation. Later the Comintern began hammering on the Americanization of the party. M.E.) The letter was seized on a courier.*⁴²

A UNITY FORCED FROM ABOVE

The delegations from the CP and UCP that went to Moscow at the end of 1920 to plead for recognition by the Comintern were bluntly told to stop feuding and to merge into one party. Seeing the futility of an underground body in the United States, the Kremlin also instructed both delegations to form an open party on a moderate program, while for the present preserving the underground body. Nicholas Hourwich, a delegate, who, in his stubborn resistance to the merger and the open party, went so far as to rebuke Lenin, did not return. The Kremlin saw to it that he remained in Russia. Hourwich became an instructor of Marxism in a military school in Moscow, and died October 30, 1934.*⁴³

Neither of the two instructions was carried out smoothly. The UCP accepted the directives. But the Russians and their allies kept stalling off. Afraid of unity—and loss of control—and fearing open defiance of Moscow, they proposed a temporary working arrangement with the UCP instead of a merger.

The committees of both parties could not, at first, agree on anything. The CP resorted to a new subterfuge to delay unity, insisting that a common program should be the first task. This would have entailed endless discussions. The negotiations dragged on through

February, March and April 1921. And only strong pressure by Moscow led to a joint call for a unity convention. Moscow knew how to overcome resistance to its wishes. One of the methods was to send representatives—reps for short—to the given country. Being on the spot, these reps could manipulate leading men and, by arguments and threats, pressure them into accepting decisions.

The CP, claiming a larger membership, received 32 delegates to the 25 of the UCP. Watching over the convention was a Comintern committee of three, Charles E. Scott (a Lett by the name of Carl Jensen), Louis C. Fraina and the Japanese veteran, Sen Katayama. They had clear instructions to force a unity.

The unity convention, in Woodstock, N. Y., May 1921, was rent by furious fights for control. There were moments when it seemed that one of the groups would march out. The Russians tried to exploit such phrases as "forcible overthrow of the government," and "by the use of arms." "Force" was piled upon "force" as amendments to the program. There were also sharp disputes on the relation to the IWW and the AFL.*44

The final point on the agenda, elections to the CEC, split the convention in two. The majority staged a sit-down strike. While the UCP people were discussing, they sang revolutionary songs, mostly Russian. And to break up the discussions, the federationists suddenly rose and started singing the *International*, compelling the others to rise and join in the singing. This was the only moment of unison at the unity convention. In the end the deadlock was broken by the energetic action of the Comintern committee. The new body was called the Communist Party of America, and the program embodied the chief planks of the UCP.*45

As a partial adjustment to reality, the Communists were now ready to take part in the struggles of the workers for better conditions, and to "remain with the large masses of organized workers," meaning the existing unions. But they were to "carry on a . . . merciless . . . struggle against the social patriots and reactionary leaders."

". . . The Communists shall not foster artificial division in the labor movement, nor deliberately bring it about," the program admonished.*46

However, on the thorny issue of the language groups the Russians scored a partial victory. The federations were restored as units of

the party, but with the proviso that the CEC of the party could change a decision of any of the language bodies and remove an elected officer if his activities would be considered against the best interests of the party.

REVOLUTIONARY TIMETABLE UPSET; THE RETREAT

The partial retreat in America was not an isolated step by the Kremlin to save American Communism. It was but one move in a general shortening of the line and entrenchment executed by Lenin on the domestic and international fronts after the hopes for a revolution in Germany had faded. Lenin's plans for combining German technology with Russian manpower and natural resources for a Socialist economy in both countries were frustrated.

Lenin, Trotsky and their associates were not Russian nationalists in the accepted sense. Russia was primarily the laboratory for their great experiment and their base of operations. They were thinking in European—even in world—terms. And after seizing power, much of their energy and finances was devoted to prompting the workers of Germany to revolt. The Soviet Embassy in Berlin, headed by Adolf Jaffe, opened after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, March 1918, was busier promoting a Communist revolution than maintaining diplomatic relations.⁺¹⁵

However, the Soviets in Bavaria and in Hungary were crushed. Minor Communist uprisings in various parts of Germany were easily beaten down. (Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered January 15, 1919.) And the last attempt to kindle the revolutionary fires, the uprising in the Ruhr, March 1920, was short-lived, the workers in the other parts of Germany not responding.

The hope to force a revolution in Germany by a powerful stroke of the Red Army, that loomed so close at hand during the early victories of the Soviet armies in the Russian-Polish war, summer of 1920, vanished with their defeat at the gates of Warsaw in August.⁺¹⁶ And the exuberant boast of the Red Army marching toward the West, "We will set Europe afire!" gave way to desperate efforts to save its main force from being encircled by the reorganized Polish army, under the command of the French General Vigand.

Blaming the Socialist "traitors" for "obstructing the revolutionary march of the German masses" was convenient but not comforting.

Lenin must have known better. As early as the spring of 1920, he began hammering on the necessity for Communists abroad to cease being a revolutionary sect. His articles, published under the title, *Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*, became a classic in Communist literature. In one passage Lenin made this telling point: "It is necessary by every means to prevent . . . West European and American revolutionaries . . . from paying as dearly for the assimilation of the truth as did the backward Russians. . . ." ⁴⁷

The New Economic Policy in Russia—NEP—introduced in 1921, permitting limited private commerce and trade, aimed to stave off total economic collapse, was Lenin's own example in the art of flexibility. And though the party retained political rule as tightly as ever, none could predict with certainty the course in Russia were it not for Lenin's paralyzing illness at the end of 1922. He died in January 1924.

Forming an open, moderate party in America was a shrewd and timely step. Communism's only chance for survival lay in emerging from hiding. But to create such a party alone would have been utterly futile. Partners—non-Communists—were indispensable. Rising discontent within the SP, that ripened into a new division, brought such partners within reach. It was only necessary to find an appropriate formula. And, again under pressure by Moscow, such a formula was found.

An open party, with non-Communist allies, was launched January 1922. The second stage of the American Communist movement had begun.

8 *The New Concept*

Contrary to what an outsider might have expected, Jewish Socialism, in all its sectors, withstood the crusading onrush of the Left Wing. The Jewish Socialist Federation was not in the SP split of 1919, nor did incipient Communism make a noticeable dent in the unions or the Workmen's Circle.

To be sure, the ranks of the federation, the unions and the WC could not altogether escape the powerful emotional appeal of the Bolshevik Revolution. The Left was able to snatch away many youthful members, but the active cadres successfully resisted Communist penetration.

This is not to imply that the number of Jews in the Left Wing was small and their role inconsiderable. An appreciable number of Jews, including American-born, belonged to the CP. There were also Jews in the Russian and Hungarian federations.

To gain a perspective of the trends prevailing in Jewish labor in that period, one must review the enormous part radical ideas had in molding its thinking. And the roots of this phenomenon must be traced to the old country.

As described in the third chapter, the handful of intellectuals in the first mass immigration were all under the influence of Russian radical ideas—there were no neutrals among them. Spreading of rudimentary secular education was interlaced by them with a tempting vision of a classless society free from poverty and injustice. A small but lively movement was thus created.

As the Eastern European community began to settle down, many

young crusaders took advantage of the great opportunities to build careers. The personal column in the early Socialist press announcing the new professionals, doctors, dentists and lawyers grew longer as the years went by. Among the non-intellectuals, the settling down meant going into business or acquiring property—becoming landlords. Ordinarily, people moving into a higher economic bracket also acquired its values. But the peculiarity of Jewish society—its wage-earner economic base, lack of an entrenched middle class and the radiance emanating from a militant and culturally alive labor movement—worked for a continuation of the old attachment for most of them. Some even retained their old standing, lowering the buoyancy of the movement.*

The complacent voice of the new *alrightnicks* jarred and disturbed the purists among the radicals. The impulsive veteran, Michail Zametkin—watchdog of the Socialist conscience—as early as 1906, wrote a sarcastic piece about the *genossen* “burdened with a couple of *tenementlach*,” and the unhealthy air generated by them.*⁴⁸

THE ADAPTABLES AND THE PURISTS

The radical-minded segment was immeasurably greater in the second mass immigration. They carried through the Great Upheaval industrially and generated the political and cultural upsurge. They also raised fresh problems.

This segment was composed of two elements. A majority took a liking to the new country, and lost no time in sinking their roots in it. They utilized its freedom for strengthening and extending the industrial and cultural institutions that they found here. A minority, more romantic, found American reality short of their dreams.

The hard, callous phases of the American scene only spurred the majority to further social action. Through trial and error in their daily experience, they gradually shed their early unreal approach. They became Americanized, striving only for tangible results. From their midst came the second layer and the top leadership of Jewish labor. Baruch Charney-Vladek, David Dubinsky and Sidney Hillman were good examples of this majority.

The minority, mostly men and women under 20 on arriving here,

* See Melech Epstein, op. cit., 1882-1914, Ch. 20.

carried with them the thrilling excitement of the underground movement in Russia, with its glorified sacrifices. Nothing they encountered in America fitted these nostalgic memories. These youngsters came, for the most part, from middle-class parents, had attended the *gymnasia*, and were driven to emigrate not by sheer poverty but by a pall of discrimination hanging over their heads. Here most of them went to work in the garment and allied trades. The degrading experiences in the pre-union shop threw them into the front lines of the great industrial battles.

Their enthusiasm and courage were unexcelled. On the picket lines they felt the hot breath of the class struggle. But the compromise settlements, however fair, and the daily routine of a union, however inescapable, were boring to them. The young radicals were impatient with the "clumsy" arbitration machinery built into every collective agreement, considering it a wasteful brake on the initiative of the workers.

Particularly disgruntled were the girls. They were groping for a loftier goal than the union offered. Settling of prices and dickering with the boss for a cent more on a garment was "business unionism." And they were in the union not merely for "business," but for the soul as well.

Disappointment was not limited to the unions. America appeared to them completely dominated by the capitalists, and hard and cruel to the working people. Such "institutions" as the corporations' private armies, special deputies and court injunctions were shocking. The AFL, small, craft-minded, with a narrow outlook, some of its affiliates ruled by unscrupulous men, was disgusting. Even organized Socialism, toward which many of them looked hopefully, was by far unlike the one in the old country. The Socialist Party seemed flabby, the leadership smug and complacent, victims of the movement's new prosperity.

The vague longing for a collective "soul" would, in all probability, have been dispelled with the years. Time is an effective healer—or killer—of youthful restlessness. And the inexorable process of Americanization would inevitably have caught up with them, as it did with the rest of the immigration. These young people were good timber for any social cause, and from them would have emerged the top ranks. But the hot winds from the World War and Bolshevik Revolution blew them into Lenin's camp.

THE GROWING FRICTION

Relations between the higher echelons of the older generation and the active newcomers who adjusted themselves to America were not peaceful either, though they worked side by side. The former, storm-beaten veterans, had labored unremittingly for a quarter of a century, under the most trying conditions, until they reached the period of 1910-1915, when they could look around them and see solid organizations where before had been nothing but chaos. They now preferred caution and entrenchment. They were inclined to relax.

With still less equanimity did the new active people view the situation in the Socialist movement. They found a widespread Socialist sentiment, but a weak manifestation of it. In 1915, the *Naye Welt* (New World), organ of the Jewish Socialist Federation, openly complained of the decline of the SP and the inaction of all its units.*⁴⁹

The prime source of the unhappy disproportion and inaction lay, as they saw it, in the "failure of Socialist nerve." Mostly members of the Bund, they had been schooled in a cohesive and aggressive labor and Socialist body, and the "complacent and timid conservatism" of the old-timers irritated them. They repeatedly complained of the lack of political vitality in the party. The *Forward* was accused—and with reason—of diluting its Socialist content with large doses of "human interest" stories, sensational headlines and a simplified, almost crude, form of Socialist propaganda.

Indeed, it was these features, introduced by the stubborn insistence of Ab. Cahan, that lifted the *Forward* from a small Socialist organ to a large popular paper. It might be added that its Socialist critics never made it clear whether they were ready to sacrifice the mass audience to the higher Socialist and journalistic standard. One could suspect that they thought they could have both.

The former Bundists resented the fact that the *Forward* was run by the Forward Publishing Association, an independent body that stood above the party. They also complained that the *Forward* was "dictating to the Jewish unions through its labor department." As the institution which had stood with Jewish labor through all its many travails and bore an honorable place in its achievements, the *Forward* was drawn into the internal politics of the unions, and usually supported the official leadership. The faith that the people

had in their paper made the position of the labor editor powerful indeed. Without a favorable mention in the *Forward* labor columns, a union official could hardly stay in office for very long.

Toward the end of the "Great Revolt," the number of organized Jewish workers may have reached as high as 400,000, while the Jewish ranks in the SP remained practically static. As late as 1913, S. P. Kramer, a Socialist writer and *tuer* of the *Forward* staff, gloomily commented on the ephemeral Socialist spirit in the Jewish unions: "The outside world assumes that the Jewish unions are Socialist, but a closer look will show that this is far from the truth. The union member listens to a Socialist speech, reads a Socialist article, is imbued with the Socialist spirit, but what is Socialism he doesn't know. And the first reform breeze carries him away from us. . . ." *50

Kramer had deeper misgivings regarding the Socialist top of these unions: ". . . and because of that the leadership of the unions remains in the hands of a few people, among whom there are men who have one thing in mind, their own jobs. We have a central body, the United Hebrew Trades, but, just like the unions, it is ruled by a couple of people."

Dissatisfaction with the *Forward* did not originate with, nor was it confined to the intellectuals who came here at the end of the first decade. The *Forward's* birth as an opposition to the official party had been a source of lingering ill will on the part of those who remained with the SLP. Veterans like Jacob Milch, Joseph Schlossberg and others had never forgotten nor forgiven the *Forward*.

Some of the older radicals were irked by the *Forward's* lack of a positive Jewish attitude. The Kishineff pogrom in 1903 had shaken much of their internationalism. As the semi-official historian Hertz Burgin gloomily put it, "This (the new mood) was a genuine nationalistic epidemic. . . . The radicalism of the *quartal* has almost melted away in the nationalistic wave." *51 However, the *Forward* had stuck to its quasi-assimilationist policy.

Cahan's domineering personality and high-handed methods in dealing with people he disliked were not conducive to maintaining good relations either.

The old guard, in and out of the Forward Association, the WC and the UHT, tried to write off the criticism of the newcomers as

the grumbling of malcontents who viewed America through their Eastern European lenses. They suspected that the real intention of their critics was to take over leadership.

FOR AN ACTIVE JEWISH POLICY

The do-nothing policy in the community, which stemmed from the superficial internationalism of the older generation, was another source of friction. Their very name, not Jewish but Yiddish-speaking Socialists, attested to their negative nationalism.⁺¹⁷ With the exception of Morris Winchefsky, Abraham Liessin, A. Litwin, Dr. Frank Rosenblatt, Dr. Ab. Kaspe and a few others, the old-timers preached a total absorption of the Jewish identity into the American nation. As a result, the Jewish Socialists and radicals generally had no Jewish policy at all, and meekly followed the lead of the wealthy of the American Jewish Committee (formed in 1906) in all Jewish affairs.

"Americanization" was the ideological reasoning behind their resistance to a Jewish group in the Socialist Party. Jews had to join the party merely as individuals. For their own political expression, the old guard reserved the Forward Publishing Association. Their spokesmen were such diverse personalities as Ab. Cahan, Meyer London, Benjamin Schlesinger, Benjamin Feigenbaum, Philip Krantz, M. Zametkin, Max Pine and Meyer Gillis.

To the former Bundists, a Jewish federation within the SP was the only way to correct the disparity between sentiment and organization, end Socialist isolation, and make it an important factor in the community. The Jewish Bureau of Agitation, that the old guard had consented to form in September 1905 as a concession to the newcomers, proved entirely inadequate.

(A Jewish Socialist Workers Federation, consisting of the Jewish branches of the SLP, had been organized in 1906; David Schub, secretary. But the SLP was generally on the decline. The Bundist writers who, on their arrival, chose for their platform the SLP weekly, *Der Arbeiter* [The Worker], edited by Joseph Schlossberg and David Pinski, were soon repelled by the dogmatism and intransigence of De Leonism.)

The controversy between the old generation and the young was becoming livelier. (It was not solely a matter of age; a small number

of Bundists and other young radicals, typified by Reuben Guskin, Harry Lang and Rudolph Block, sided with the old-timers; and quite a few of the earlier immigration allied themselves with the young oppositionists.) Meanwhile, more immigrants were landing daily, augmenting radical ranks. Caught in the process of spreading out from the big cities, a process that greatly increased the small communities in all parts of the country, the radicals had to set up their own tents in the new places. (An immediate cause of this migration was the mass unemployment resulting from the depression of 1907, that impelled many to seek a new livelihood in a smaller town.)

For the majority of radicals this change of place meant a change in economic status, but not in belief. To join either the Reformed Temple or the Orthodox Synagogue was unthinkable. The branches of the Workmen's Circle that they founded could not fully satisfy the more politically advanced. They clamored for direct contact with a Jewish Socialist movement similar to the Bund in the old home.

PARTY ADMITS A JEWISH LANGUAGE GROUP

The mounting pressure for a Jewish setup in the SP won out. Ignoring the opposition of the old guard, the party authorized a Jewish language federation in 1912. It was formed at a gathering in Paterson, New Jersey, August of the same year. J. B. Salutsky (Hardman) was elected secretary. About 2,000 joined in the first year, and at the first national convention in 1913, in New Haven, Connecticut, the membership rose to 2,500. It kept growing in the following years.

Der Yiddisher Socialist, a monthly published by the federation in August 1913, later became a bi-weekly, and, in August 1915, was replaced by the weekly *Naye Welt*; Salutsky, Goldfarb and Shachno Epstein, the board of editors. At the same time, a group of federation Socialists in Chicago issued a regional weekly, *Yiddisher Arbeiter Welt* (Jewish Labor World).

An idea of the federation's composition can be gleaned from a breakdown of the membership in 20 branches, involving about 1,100 people: citizens, 27 per cent; union members, 29 per cent; women, nine per cent; those who could speak English, about 50 per cent.⁵²

At its second convention, in Philadelphia, May 28, 1915, the aver-

age age of the delegates was from 25 to 35. There were 70 men to five women. Forty-three were shop workers; 44 were citizens, 20 had taken out their first papers, and only 14 were less than five years in the country. Thirty-three had come to the United States five to ten years previously; 16, from ten to 15 years ago; only five were here 15 years and longer.

To shake off the unpardonable charge of Jewish nationalism leveled at it by the old-timers, the declaration of the first convention stated:

. . . (It) strives to bring the Jewish worker into the general stream of American Socialism. It will adjust itself to his notions and habits, to his psychology and living conditions. It will explain to him and the right-thinking Jewish citizens the conditions in America, which is destined to be the second home of the Jewish people. It will aim to make them ripe to fight jointly with the American workers and right-thinking citizens for the liberation of mankind, . . .⁵³

This vagueness in phrasing a Jewish policy also mirrored the differences at the federation top. Liessin, Winchefskey, A. Litwak, Zivyon, Dr. Frank Rosenblatt, Dr. Carl Fornberg, A. S. Sachs and Moishe Terman felt a positive concern for Jewish values; while others, headed by J. B. Salutsky, the prime mover of the federation, Max Goldfarb, B. Charney-Vladek and M. Olgin, were first of all Socialists. As to the rank and file, they were more Jewish, at least intuitively, than the leadership—as the rank and file always were.

Nevertheless, in an obituary resolution on the death of I. L. Peretz, the federation expressed deep sorrow over the "heavy loss suffered by the *entire Jewish people*, Jewish labor and Jewish literature." (italics M.E.)⁵⁴

The forceful sequence of events soon threw the federation into the thick of Jewish affairs. It participated actively in the huge task of aiding the war victims overseas and in post-war rehabilitation. It took the initiative in forming the National Workers Committee, for the defense of Jewish rights here and abroad.*

Dr. Max Goldfarb, writing in the *Yiddisher Socialist*, June 1, 1915, went even further. He suggested the formation of a world alliance of Jewish labor groups, "to deal with the painful Jewish problem."

* More about this committee, see Melech Epstein, op. cit., 1914-1952, pp. 61-63.

REVISING ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR

From the very beginning of the war, the federation took a less tolerant view of the German Social Democracy than did Hillquit and the *Forward*. At the same time, it tried to dispel the defeatist mood of the Socialist rank and file.

As the hostilities continued, the federation moved to disassociate its antiwar stand from the pro-German sympathies of sections of the community, subtly voiced by the *Forward*. A conference called by the federation, March 11, 1917, and endorsed by the WC, the UHT and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, stated implicitly, "We are against war not because we side with this or the other camp of the belligerent countries. We are against war generally. We are not pro-German or pro-Ally. We are pro-proletarian." This was followed by a lengthy explanation of why Jews, perennial victims of rampant chauvinism, had to be against war.*⁵⁵

America's entrance into the war, the bloody battles on French soil and the march of the German Army deeper into Russia, February 1918, brought home the unmistakable danger of German militarism and gave rise to a clamor within the SP for a revision of the St. Louis antiwar platform. Most of the Jewish unions had never approved that platform. And the UHT and the ACWA, the former led by Max Pine and the latter by Sidney Hillman, adopted resolutions early in 1918 in support of President Wilson's war aims, the ACWA explaining that "the workers are interested in defeating German militarism." The *Forward* and the WC, who approved of St. Louis in 1917, were turning away from its antiwar platform and moving closer to the Allies in 1918.

In April 1918, the federation urged the parent body to revise the St. Louis stand. Its communication was quite explicit: "It is absolutely necessary for the Socialist Party to make . . . clear for the world its views . . . over the essence of the life-and-death struggle that is now raging between the horrible forces of German military imperialist despotism on one side and the united democratic countries on the other. . . . The situation demands that the party should come out with a positive stand . . . of the aims of the war or the terms of peace, which are one and the same." *⁵⁶

THE FEDERATION GAINING GROUND

The federation was making headway. In 1915, it reached a membership of 8,000 (though the sale of dues stamps was never above 6,000), with nearly 100 branches in all important cities. Contrary to the general run of the SP units, who bestirred themselves three months before election campaigns and remained half-dead for nine months afterward, the federation branches, for the most part, were active the year round, cultural and Jewish affairs occupying most of their time.

The immigrant youth on the fringe of radicalism was not neglected either. The young immigrants could not step over the barriers, linguistic and background, that stood between them and their native-born cousins. To avoid getting lost in the new environment, they concentrated in "self-educational" clubs, also largely *landsmanshaften*. The most sensitive among them veered either toward Socialism or Zionism. The federation went to these clubs for recruits. And, in 1916, its youth branches held their first convention, forming the Socialist Youth Alliance. Its second convention was held June 8-9, 1918. In that year the Alliance had 16 branches with approximately 1,000 members. For a time the Alliance published its own organ, *Freie Yugend* (Free Youth). A report from Pittsburgh speaks of the spiritual transformation of the youth:

Four years ago, some of those who are now among the most loyal and active Socialists were standing on the street corners, spending their time chewing and spitting. . . . And some of the girls who are now the finest and most beautiful dreamers and fighters for freedom at that time wasted their best hours on cheap ragtime dances, kissing games and parties with nonentities. . . .

The report added that these same youth were now interested in serious problems, and were steady readers of Yiddish literature.⁶⁷

The cessation of immigration during the war and the loss of the greater part of the youth to the Left Wing three years later finished the Alliance.

The *Naye Welt*, edited by Salutsky, was broader in scope than its usual Socialist counterpart. Its subtitle, "A Social, Political and Literary Weekly," denoted its contents. The magazine sought to acquaint its readers with basic American problems. It also tried to

develop among them a taste for better reading. The works of modern American and European authors were translated and commented upon. Yiddish poetry and literary and theater reviews were permanent features of the magazine. The reverence for literature was so deepseated that the steady theater column was conducted by an anti-Marxist, the noted poet, Zisha Landau. (One may add that the weekly publications of the large Jewish trade unions, too, were far from being mere house organs. They also carried material of a general educational character, and short stories, poems and literary reviews were printed regularly.)

The periphery of the federation was much wider than its numbers would indicate. Its lecture tours and publications reached far beyond its ranks. The federation encouraged free inquiry within the frame of Marxist thought. And, perhaps even more significant, it steadfastly kept its face toward America, thus striving for genuine Americanization of its members without adversely affecting their Jewish identity.

The notion that Jewish Socialism or radicalism remained attached to things Russian is entirely unfounded. On the contrary, the emphasis was on the new home. The issues of the *Naye Welt* for 1915 and 1916 are amazingly free from articles on Russia. A vast preponderance of the material is on political, social and labor affairs in America. This emphasis on things American was rooted in Socialist activities even before the federation. A new Yiddish Socialist quarterly, also called the *Naye Welt*, that appeared in October 1909, edited by Jacob Milch, had this to say editorially:

These two words, *Naye Welt*, express the program of the new magazine. . . . We will study the *Naye Welt*-America, its history, traditions, institutions and policies, its literature and poetry, its population and industries. In a word, everything that comprises the new world. . . .

Why only America? Columbus discovered a country destined to become the home of millions of Jews, destined to become in time the center of Judaism of the entire world. . . . America is the future country of the Jews. . . . snobs of Jewish Russia may turn up their noses at the mention of things American, but it won't be long before the Jews of America will be for the Jews of the entire world that which the Jews of Babylon and Alexandria were for the rest of the Jews of their time. . . .

The editorial concluded, "America has given the Jews everything, equality and opportunity. . . . Meanwhile, it is a shame to admit how little we know of America. . . ."

JEWISH ANTAGONISM TO BOLSHEVIKS

Jewish public opinion was sharply antagonistic to the Bolshevik seizure of power. And this antagonism was understandable. Pogroms had always followed in the wake of revolutions. Moreover, the Bolshevik regime soon began expropriating small businesses and closing houses of worship.

Of the four daily papers in New York, the Orthodox *Tageblatt* and *Morning Journal* could obviously be counted among the severe critics of the Soviets. The third paper, the liberal *The Day*, went still further, becoming the mouthpiece of the extreme anti-Bolsheviks supporting foreign military intervention. The two other dailies, one in Philadelphia and one in Chicago, were also strong opponents of Bolshevism.

As to the *Forward*, it steered a neutral course, giving wide latitude to both anti-Bolshevik and pro-Bolshevik opinion. But there was only one open pro-Bolshevik on the staff, Hertz Burgin—and he belonged to the Russian Federation. The majority of the staff were unequivocally anti-Bolshevik. Editor Cahan was reluctant to attack the Bolsheviks because of his determined opposition to the "imperialist" war. The *Forward*, like the Hillquit-Berger leadership of the SP, was against continuing the war. The SP and the *Forward* even arranged a celebration of the Brest-Litovsk treaty in Madison Square Garden.

Most vehement against the Bolsheviks was Moïssay Olgin. A week after the November Revolution, he sneered at Lenin:

Lenin's program sounds fine . . . , but is there any substance to it? . . . Even under the rule of the Romanoff's Lenin's shots were wide of the mark. Now he has forgotten that there are no more Romanoff's and there is no one at home to shoot at. . . . Lenin is a master at issuing signals to the backward masses, to the mob.⁵⁸

The old-timers on the *Forward*, especially Philip Krantz, a former disciple of Daniel De Leon, and M. Baranoff, kept hacking away at the Bolsheviks. Another valued contributor, Dr. Iser Ginsburg, a

medical doctor and a Jewish scholar, ventured, in the *Forward*, to warn against the enthusiasm for the new Russia. He was sarcastic at the Jewish "internationalists" suddenly turned Russian Soviet patriots. Still, the general tone of the discussions—except for Baranoff—was restrained and lacking in polemical fireworks, amazing for radical writers. Even the debate running in the *Forward* during the summer of 1918 between John Reed and Henry L. Slobodin, a Socialist lawyer of the old school, was carried on without name calling. The chief reason for this politeness lay in the apparent remoteness of the problem. In the early months, the high command of Jewish labor considered Bolshevism a purely Russian domestic issue, not suspecting that it would soon creep into their own backyard.

The *Naye Welt* continued to publish highly critical material on Communism, reprinting articles of Russian Bundists hostile to the Soviet government, and a piece by Isaac Don Levine.

Hardly more friendly was Zivyon's column (*feuilleton*), "Risky Thoughts on Russia." Zivyon treated the Bolshevik upheaval lightly and humorously. He anticipated that Lenin-Trotsky would soon disappear and that Milukov-Gutschkov would reappear, "exchanging places in the cells of the Petropavlovsky fortress." *69

Ironically, the first break in the *Naye Welt's* hostility toward Bolshevism was the series of articles by Karl Kautsky. The most authoritative Marxist was, for a short time, friendly to the Bolsheviks, undoubtedly swayed by their determination to end the war. However, by 1919, he became anathema to the Kremlin. Kautsky's piece was followed by a translation of Colonel William B. Thompson's article in the *Evening Post* and by articles of the English journalist, H. B. Brailsford, of the Labour Party, in the *New Republic*, all favorable to the Lenin-Trotsky regime.

Slowly and cautiously, the *Naye Welt* began to find a kind word for the Soviets, while continuing to print the anti-Communist views of the Bundists abroad. This groping for a new approach to Soviet Russia grew out of the general restlessness and the civil war in Russia.

Internal order and relative peace in Soviet Russia was shortlived. Civil war broke out early in 1918, and, repeating the tragic pattern, was accompanied by mass slaughter of Jews in the Ukraine and

Southern Russia, committed by troops of the White Armies and, particularly, by Petlura's bands. Their soldiers killed, raped and looted wherever they entered. About 75,000 people were killed, 500,000 plundered, over 2,000 pogroms were registered. The mass murder and devastation of Ukrainian Jewry during the Soviet civil war, 1918-1920, was second only to the Chmelnitzky massacre in the 17th century.

The atrocities committed against the Jewish population prompted the Soviet government to issue a decree, signed by Lenin, for "up-rooting the anti-Semitic movement." The decree also declared, ". . . the Jewish bourgeoisie are our enemies not as Jews, but as bourgeoisie. The Jewish worker is our brother. Any kind of hatred against any nation is inadmissible and shameful. . . ." *60

The decree instructed all local Soviets to apply stern measures to stop the outrages against the Jewish population.

In the same summer, an appeal by Lenin against hatred of the Jews, addressed primarily to the peasants, was made into a record to be played at village meetings and in Red Army barracks. Lenin spoke in simple language; the record itself was technically poor.*61

The Jewish press was filled with horrifying reports of pogroms. A banner headline in the *Forward* of September 7, 1919 ran, UKRAINE FLOODED WITH JEWISH BLOOD. The dispatch told of "heaps of Jewish dead strewn over the streets of Uman. Old Jews put on *takhrikkhim* and wait for death." In the same month, the paper printed a nightmare description of a pogrom in Zhitomir.

Worry over the fate of Russian Jewry was both general and personal. And no one could have overlooked the glaring fact that wherever the Red Army entered, the pillage of Jews had disappeared. +18 +19

9 *The Jewish Left*

The cohesiveness of the federation could not prevent pro-Bolshevik sentiments from penetrating its youthful element. Nevertheless, the left fermentation in the Jewish group was slower and on a smaller scale than in the other minority groups or in the SP.

Communism's little headway in the body of Jewish Socialism could be attributed largely to the left-of-the-center stand of the federation. That stand siphoned off accumulated impatience among the rank and file with the lack of militancy in the party. As events abroad showed, the more aggressive and cohesive the Socialist Party was, the less ground was left for Communism. A case in point was Austria.

The first Left group was formed early in 1919, in New York City. Only five people were present, all in their early 20's, all members of the Downtown—Lower East Side—branch, the largest in the federation. Frank Geliebter, Harry Hiltzik, Lazar Kling, William Abrams and Ben Solomon met in a basement restaurant at the corner of Jefferson and Madison Streets, nicknamed the Jewish Smolny Institute.⁺²⁰ They called their group the Left Wing of the Jewish Socialist Federation.^{*62}

The group's links with the general Left were rather weak. Strongly pro-Soviet and yearning for more militancy within the party, they had no definite program. They continued meeting regularly, rapidly gaining adherents among people of their age.

They circulated a letter to all branches accusing the *Naye Welt* of "chauvinistic social patriotism"—the paper was veering toward

Wilson's 14 Points—and demanding the removal of the editor. Acting as a unit, the Left group soon gained control of the branch. And during the election campaign of the same year, they issued leaflets in the name of the branch urging people not to vote for Meyer London, thus contributing to his defeat. For this crass breach of discipline, the branch was expelled from the federation.*⁶⁸

Other Left groups sprang up in Boston, New Haven, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit.

In the tradition of radical groupings, the first and immediate task of the Left was a paper of their own. Such a paper, *Der Kampf*, a weekly, appeared February 16, 1919, published by the Jewish Group of International Socialists and edited by Philip Geliebter and Hertz Burgin. Its subtitle was the innocent "A Review of American International Problems"; the English subtitle was simply "A Jewish Periodical." A hundred dollars was raised for the first number.*⁶⁴

The scarcity of writers could be seen from the list of contributors. Only two, M. Zipin and Lazar Kling, could write Yiddish. The others mentioned as contributors were Nicholas Hourwich, Louis Fraina and John Reed. Lazar Kling used the pseudonym of Malke Rokhel Liufman. The hour was already late for the general Left to remain in the party. Nevertheless, the program article in *Der Kampf* solemnly asserted: "We are not seeking a split in the party. We publish this paper with the most peaceful of intentions. . . ."

Our official leaders avoid entirely the discussion of the problems—left in the wake of the war—and do not permit others to discuss them either. Or they take an ambiguous stand to satisfy everyone. . . . And in our Jewish labor, things are quiet as usual. . . . The advanced Jewish workers feel as though they were in a house with closed windows and doors. . . . To 'open the door' . . . , to unite our scattered people, to create a tribune for opinions that do not carry the O.K. of the official leaders . . . these are the tasks of our review.*⁶⁵

The two editors and their Jewish contributors, none of them extremists, were quite serious in their peaceful intentions. The entire group behind *Der Kampf*, for that matter, had no thought of going any further than creating a "tribune for opinions" within the federation.*⁶⁶

Philip Geliebter was a recent arrival. Short, plump and jovial, he

depended economically on the official top, serving as assistant educational director of the WC. Lazar Kling was no extremist either. It was mainly his youthful enthusiasm that made him conspicuous in the Left Wing. He later went to Russia, but did not stay there long; he worked in the *Freiheit* for a short time, then dropped out.

Hertz Burgin, already middle-aged, had been in this country for many years. He gained his livelihood as a member of the editorial staff of the *Forward*, but in his private and social life he was Russianized. A short, thin, dry man, of studious and accurate habits, there was nothing militant or rebellious about him, though he was an orthodox Marxist. He seemed to be somewhat of a split personality, a type that one met quite often in the Communist movement. Only a few years earlier, Burgin had written a semi-official history of Jewish labor in America that represented the view of the old guard.

When the test came, Burgin left the *Forward* and was employed for many years by the AMTORG Trading Corporation. Geliebter, on the other hand, remained with the Communist movement only for a few years. He broke with it in the middle of the 20's. He died in 1936.

M. Zipin was a mild-mannered man, a philosophical anarchist, and for many years on the staff of the *Yiddisher Velt*, in Philadelphia, a paper supporting the Republican Party. He went to Russia in 1917, returning staunchly pro-Soviet. He never really accepted either Marxism or the dictatorship of the proletariat idea. He joined the staff of the *Freiheit* in 1922, and died soon afterward.

THE PEACEFUL INTENTIONS LEAD TO A SPLIT

The "open door" stayed open only temporarily. Contact with the general Left became closer, and its pressure stronger. In the third issue of *Der Kampf*, April 4th, the members of the federation were urged to discuss the manifesto and program of the SP Left Wing of New York City, and the editorial raised the question, "How to organize the Bolshevik sentiments among the masses." It also spoke of the necessity "to awaken among the proletariat a feeling and an understanding of the political strike." That issue printed the call to the First Congress of the Comintern (Lenin and Trotsky were the signers for the Russian party; B. Reinstein signed, without any

authorization, for the American SLP). An indication of the rising influence of the Nicholas Hourwich group on the Jewish Left was the article by Malke Rokhel Liufman, "A Left Party for the Left Wing."

The wheel of events in the Jewish Left began to spin very fast. As the schism in the SP widened and Bolshevik prestige was on the upswing, the Jewish group kept attracting a larger following. More active young people, Noah London, Morris Holtman (of Pittsburgh), both civil engineers graduated from Cooper Union; and Dr. Louis Hendin (of Baltimore) became converts. Alexander Bittelman, aided by his friends, Meyer Lunin, Hyman Castrell and Raskin, of the Harlem branch, pushed himself into the forefront. Bittelman's leadership and the growing rift in the party led to the Left breaking with the federation scarcely four months after the "peaceful intentions" had been proclaimed and three months prior to the birth of the two Communist parties in Chicago. On June 27th, *Der Kampf* became the weekly of an independent Left Wing, and on September 19th the paper already spoke for a Jewish Communist federation, a part of the CP; Bittelman, editor, and Geliebter, associate editor.

The young Communists, rising against all tradition, had to adhere to one, that of a labor paper devoting space to literature. The noted novelist, Lamed Shapiro, a non-political man, was invited to head the literary section of the weekly. And having no one of their own acquainted with the trade union movement, Melech Epstein, on the staff of *The Day*, a pro-Soviet but by no means a Communist, was asked to write a column on the trade unions.

The split occurred at the fourth convention of the federation, May 29-June 1, 1919, in Boston.

PARALYZING FIGHTING IN THE BRANCHES

The EC of the federation vehemently repudiated the entire Left Wing. The *Naye Welt* bristled with sharp and sarcastic pieces against them. Salutsky called *Der Kampf* an insane asylum, and expressed his antagonism to "barricade battles." He cited the nihilism of the Jewish Left on Jewish problems, their opposition to Jewish relief and to the movement against pogroms, and their repu-

diation of cultural activities. He also poked fun at their cure-all solution, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Zivyon, treasurer of their early Avant Guard Publications, now called them anarcho-socialists. Their leaders, he said, were demagogues and half-baked intellectuals who could not, because of their inability and ignorance, climb to the front in the movement. But in the mud learning and ability were not necessary.*⁶⁷

The heated pre-convention discussions in the branches clearly indicated a sizable majority for the anti-Communists. However, the youthful zeal of the Left was a factor to reckon with.

An editorial in the *Forward* on the eve of the convention described the untenable situation in the federation:

The majority of the branches are divided in two hostile camps. There are no more branch meetings because each meeting consists of hostile elements which refuse to listen or to understand each other. The only question is who can muster enough "hands" in electing a chairman or in any other vote. . . . Discussing party problems is impossible and still less possible is it to carry on constructive activity. The question then arises: "Perhaps a divided existence will be more practical than a forced coexistence? . . ."*⁶⁸

The editorial went on to say that the decision of the federation would be of great importance to the entire party, that the federation was among the largest and most effective in the SP. The struggle against the Left brought about a change in the attitude of the old-timers toward the federation. For a while they seemed to tread on common ground.

On the very eve of the convention, the federation issued a statement to all delegates, "The Call to Honor and Duty." It urged them to stand by the party and to abide by the decisions of the party convention. The federation then had on its books between 13,000 and 14,000 members; 33 new branches were organized in 1918-1919.

One hundred and thirty-six delegates, representing branches in 48 cities and 26 states, were present in Boston. Some branches sent two sets of delegates, causing numerous contests and acrimonious charges and countercharges. As the Left was determined to bolt, the debates were a mere rehashing of old arguments. J. B. Salutsky,

M. Olgin, J. B. Beilin and Dr. Jacob Mindel spoke for the majority. The Left spokesmen were Bittelman, Meyer Lunin and Harry Hiltzik. Two sets of political resolutions were voted upon, that of the Left demanding an immediate break with the SP and acceptance of the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The majority resolution received 74 votes; that of the Left, 38. Seventeen delegates abstained from voting.⁺²¹

After the vote was taken, Bittelman read a short declaration that the Left was leaving the federation. Neither his dry, monotonous reading nor its pedestrian wording fitted the dramatic moment, the first split in the ranks of Jewish Socialists since 1897.^{*69} Thirty-odd delegates followed Bittelman to another room of the Labor Lyceum. There the Left opened their own convention.

The convention over, the crucial issue in the branches was who would stay and who would leave. The federation remained intact, but the blow it suffered was greater than the mere loss of a third of its members. Many others, repelled by the internal struggle, dropped out.

Olgin, in the *Naye Welt*, wrote contemptuously of the pro-Communist youth:

The young men of this group live in a little world created in their own imagination. In this little world everything is as they like it to be. The workers are united, class-conscious, organized and armed. Moods are aroused and society is shaken to its very foundations. Only one thing remains to be done: to make the last attempt, to deliver the last blow. So said Lenin. . . . So said Lenin.

And Zivyon, in his piece, stated: ". . . A sound constructive criticism was necessary, and the Left have started it. . . . Unfortunately, they quickly left the right course. . . . Those who broke with the federation were not the genuine *linke* but the *ausgelinkte*."^{*70}

At the convention itself, Salutsky was no less vehement against the Communists than Olgin and Zivyon. "According to the Moscow prescription," he said, "the new international is to be a religious, fanatical, intolerant sect of *hasidim* of one rabbi only." He expressed himself for a middle-of-the-road international, and quoted Kautsky's opinion that he could not accept Moscow without a critical analysis.^{*71}

NO, TO PROTEST AGAINST POGROMS, AND TO WAR RELIEF

A homogeneous element, untroubled by the friction between English- and non-English-speaking people, syndicalist and Marxist, the Jewish Left could avoid the early feuds among the Communists. But it did not. Recent immigrants from Russia, a majority of them chose the CP, which made every appearance of being the closest to Moscow. Bittelman, too, now acknowledged leader of the Left, preferred the CP, in the belief that it was going to be Moscow's choice as well. The majority published *Die Funken* (The Sparks), A. Bittelman, editor. However, a small number, disliking the Hourwich-Stoklitsky domination, went to the CLP. Their organ was the *Proletarische Shtime*, edited by Noah London and Louis Hendin.

The first convention of the Jewish Federation of the CP was held October 9-12, 1919, in Philadelphia. The report gave 45 branches in 20 cities, with a membership of 3,000. (In the CP report for the end of 1919 the Jewish group had only 1,000 dues-paying members. This would mean a membership of not more than 1,500.) The program of the CP was adopted in its entirety.

The assembled Jewish Communists took a purely negative stand on the two life-and-death tasks facing European Jewry, stopping the pogroms that were rolling over Eastern Europe and aiding postwar rehabilitation. The resolution on the pogroms proposed: ". . . to fight most energetically each attempt to draw in the Jewish workers in a protest movement against pogroms that will solicit aid from the governments of the capitalist international." According to the resolution, such a protest would in effect imply a tacit recognition of the capitalist governments.*72 (The *Naye Welt* called this resolution clumsy nonsense.)

The resolution on rehabilitation was in the same vein, ". . . not to participate in the activities of the Jewish war relief agencies because of their non-proletarian nature." This referred to the People's Relief Committee, a body that represented all shades of opinion in Jewish labor, including also a large group of Zionists, headed by Louis Lipsky and Morris Rottenberg. The People's Relief Committee was affiliated with the Joint Distribution Committee, the central agency for relief work abroad; it also gave aid independently to labor bodies in those countries.

MARCHING OUT OF THE RELIEF CONFERENCES

Opposition to Jewish war relief was strictly adhered to. Two years later, Jewish Communists attempted to undermine even the work of relief and rehabilitation for the Jews uprooted by war and civil war in Soviet Russia. They bolted the special national relief conference called by the PRC for that purpose. This conference, August 18, 1921, in Kessler's Theater on Second Avenue, was prompted by the urgency for aid stressed in the reports of the PRC delegates, Max Pine, secretary of the UHT, and Dr. Frank Rosenblatt, general secretary of the WC, still in Moscow, and by the Soviet government's desperate call for relief for the Volga famine sufferers.

The Communists came prepared to resist Jewish relief as such. Their demand was two-fold: relief for all Soviet citizens, and control of all funds vested solely in the Soviet authorities. They strongly opposed turning over the money to Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration (ARA) or to the JDC. Vainly did the speakers for the majority, Sholom Asch, Jacob Panken, Alexander Kahn, reason that the Jews were the worst sufferers, their specific situation obligating the American Jews to undertake special action for them.

To bolster their position, the Communists brought in Dr. Gustav Hartman, a non-Jew and president of the Friends of Soviet Russia, who made an appeal for an international relief action for Soviet Russia.

A compromise proposal by the delegation of the Socialist Federation to have the money divided equally, half for Jewish and half for general relief, was rejected by the Communists, who demonstratively left the conference.*78

The Communist sabotage of such a vital and elementary cause made a painful impression on labor public opinion. The Communists felt the necessity for explaining their action. This task was undertaken by A. Bittelman, their spokesman on Jewish affairs. His article, under the pseudonym of Unicus, is revealing for the state of mind of the young Jewish Communists.

Unicus began with a severe condemnation of the PRC, which had "fallen into the category of a charity institution supported by the wealthy Jews. . . . The Pine's, the Gilles', the Schlesinger's and the Dr. Rosenblatt's are *aidem uf kest by die gvierem* (loosely, those

who live off their rich fathers-in-law). Unicus then reverted to characteristic Bittelman casuistry, "For the workers the issue was not to help just starving Jews or Russians; it was saving the proletarian Russia, the Communist Revolution, from counterrevolution. . . . Of course, the Communist *realpolitiker* could assume that tangible relief for Jews in Russia was, at the same time, tangible relief for Soviet Russia. But the revolutionary instinct of the working masses refuses to heed *realpolitik* when it concerns the revolution in Russia as a whole."

Unicus tried to strike an international-revolutionary pose: "The pain of the pogromized Jews, the misery and loneliness of the ruined Jews, is but a drop in the endless sea of human sufferings caused by capitalism and counterrevolution. . . . That international solidarity in the Jewish worker is stronger than his nationalist sentiment is commendable." ⁷⁴

THE CALL FROM MOSCOW; THE NEW RELIEF IMPASSE

The Communists called their own relief meeting August 24th, in Manhattan Lyceum, organized by the Jewish Division of the American Labor Alliance, the legal arm of the CP. The Left Poale Zion joined in the meeting. They had two speakers, Dr. Elye Rottenberg and R. Kenjersky. Rose Pastor Stokes, seated on the platform, tore off her jewelry. "We dare not wear jewelry," she cried, "while the Russian proletarian is without bread." Many women followed her lead. There was great enthusiasm. Aside from a small pile of jewelry, \$500 was raised in cash. However, unable to form their own committee—opposition to Jewish relief and all-out support for the Friends of Soviet Russia precluded that—Jewish Communists were greatly hampered in the relief movement.

The sentiment in the community for a Jewish relief action in Russia was overwhelming, and though the FSR was supported by many radical Jews, the efforts of the Communists, through leaflets and editorials in their organ, the *Emes*, to channel Jewish contributions solely through the FSR were a failure. The People's Relief Committee was able to develop an active campaign. And, before the campaign could unfold, a call to American Jews for immediate aid issued by the Moscow *Yidgezkom* (Jewish Public Committee), the only Jewish social body for relief and rehabilitation permitted in

Russia, put an end to Communist opposition to relief for Jews. A lame editorial in the New York *Emes* of September 14th lifted the ban. However, the "revolutionary instinct" still prevailing, the editorial stressed that the contributions should go largely to the FRS. (*Yidgezkom* was formed to head off the insistence by Max Pine and Dr. Frank Rosenblatt, Right-Wing Socialists, on a representative Jewish public agency for the distribution of American relief.)

The negotiations between the PRC and the *Yidgezkom* hit a snag. The nature of the snag can be judged by the warm send-off given by the Moscow *Emes* to Pine and Rosenblatt. Calling them a delegation of reconnoiterers, the paper charged them with "preoccupation with reviving the Jewish counterrevolution. . . . They worked behind the scenes to support all the enemies of the Soviet regime among the Jews. . . . But, fortunately, the joint communication of the Jewish Commissariat of the Soviet Government and of the Central Bureau of the Jewish Communist Sections of the Russian Communist Party to the workers of America was the first grave blow for the gentlemen of the Joint and their lackays, the so-called labor leaders of Pine's ilk. A panic broke out in their ranks, accompanied by lies and slander in the manner of American bluff. But it was of no avail. The first big act of proletarian enlightenment was done." *75

The crime of the two "reconnoiterers" lay in their desire to broaden the basis of the *Yidgezkom* by bringing in some spokesmen of the democratic strata of Russian Jewry. As it was, *Yidgezkom* had only a couple of non-Communists to give it an all-Jewish touch. The sounding of the trumpet of victory in the *Emes* was merely a device for home consumption to disguise the impending retreat. The communication of the Jewish Commissariat and the Jewish Sections was a total waste as far as public opinion here was concerned. Meanwhile, the situation of the declassed Jews was becoming so desperate that a special emissary, Michail Rashkes, had to be sent to America to placate the PRC and other groups. As for the "gentlemen of the Joint," they were given wide leeway in rehabilitation work in Russia, the Soviet government concluding a special agreement with them.

It is worth noting that the Jewish Communists in Moscow had less reason to fear the presence of the JDC in Russia than that of the PRC. Quite a number of people of the PRC had been a part

of the Jewish Socialist movement in Czarist Russia. They would naturally scan the Soviet scene, and the Jewish sector in particular, with a more critical eye than the social workers or the experts of the JDC. And Communist hostility was not without ground. Pine returned from Moscow highly skeptical of the Soviet regime, while Judge Harry Fisher, from Chicago, who went with him for the JDC, had only praise for the friendly attitude of the Soviet leaders and their readiness to facilitate Jewish rehabilitation work.

10 *Their Road to Communism*

Jewish Communists, denying as they did any community of interests with the rest of the Jews, were, at the same time, eager to make contact with the Soviet Jewish bodies. Moreover, they desired a sort of international of Jewish Communists the world over. This request, dated June 20, 1920, was printed in the first issue of the *Yedies* (bulletins) of the Jewish Section of the Russian Communist Party, October 1920.*⁷⁸

The letter, written on silk and signed for the Jewish Communist Federation by H. Funk, organizer, was brought to Moscow by courier. Far from being modest, the writers asserted that they had already succeeded "in penetrating deeply with our ideas and principles in the mass movement of the Jewish workers . . . the idea that the Social Revolution and the Proletarian Dictatorship are not Holy Scriptures to be repeated in moments of social enthusiasm, but basic principles . . . , have been brought home. . . ."

"We have fought energetically the petty bourgeoisie-nationalist movement among Jewish labor in America (war relief, protests against pogroms, Zionism, etc.). . . . The *Forward* and the *Naye Welt* are the worst enemies. They flatter Bolshevism in Russian and fight Communism here most viciously. . . ."

"We would like to be in steady contact with you, particularly to work out jointly a uniform attitude to the difficult and complicated problems. . . . Also you should take the initiative to organize an alliance of Jewish Communist bodies the world over."

The Moscow reply was comradely, but rebuffed the proposal for

a world alliance as a heresy. The Americans were informed in no unmistakable terms that the task of a Jewish Communist group was merely "to propagandize the Communist ideas in the Yiddish language. . . . This is what the Jewish problem of which you speak in your letter consists of. . . . It is a merely technical question and there is no necessity for it in a special Jewish section of the Comintern. We are resolutely against. . . ." *77

The similarity to the American old-timers' "Yiddish-speaking Socialists" is striking.

The same issue of the *Yedies* contained a joint appeal by the Jewish Section and the Jewish Commissariat to the Jewish workers of America to send clothing, food, medicine, instruments, printing materials, books, etc., but not cash. The appeal did not explain that cash was practically useless because of the severe shortage in food and commodities. It was sent through "Comrade" Benjamin Schlesinger, president of the ILGWU, who visited Moscow in the summer of the same year. The appeal for aid was preceded by the customary revolutionary-proletarian phraseology.

The official denial of any bond between the various Jewish communities was obviously not shared by all Jewish Communists in Moscow. A communication of the Jewish publishing house, Communist World, asking American Jewish writers to send their books stressed the importance of an "exchange of our spiritual treasures." *78

COMMUNISM'S MINOR PART IN THE COMMUNITY

Ruthenberg's prestige and the magic of the word "united" split the Jewish Federation of the CP, many following him into the United Communist Party. Dr. Louis Hendin was put in charge of the Jewish Section of the UCP. (The language groups were formed into sections, thus abolishing their autonomy.) Hendin visited most of the Jewish units, reorganizing them into branches of the UCP. Bittelman was a victim of his own scheming. At first he stayed with the Russians; then, seeing their decline, he proposed a drastic measure to save his leadership, an independent Jewish Communist Party. But nothing came of it, and, as a punishment, Bittelman remained for a while outside both parties.*79

After the CP and the UCP were compelled to merge, in 1921,

the Jewish Section of the CP published a weekly, the *Emes*, a translation of the Moscow *Pravda*. Bittelman and Shachno Epstein were the editors. The literary material was supplied primarily by the latter.⁺²²

The *Emes* had to call for funds in the second month of its existence. The call spoke of the need for "a clean Jewish labor paper of high integrity. . . ." *⁸⁰ The word "Communist" could not be mentioned.

Lack of funds for the weekly *Emes* did not prevent the Communists from coming out with a plan for a daily *Emes*. The quota was no less than \$50,000. Not that the Communist appeal or Communist activities had reached a level requiring a daily paper; they had not. But it was a race with the rival Salutsky-Olgin federation group, who broke with the SP in the same year and were calling for a daily *Naye Welt*.

Despite their fervor, the Communists hardly caused a ripple in the community. Their weekly and the few books they published—a volume of Lenin and one of Trotsky among them—reached a limited circle of readers. Communism's minor role was caused primarily by the youthfulness of its recruits. Their leaders were unknown. One could not find among them half a dozen men occupying responsible posts. The two exceptions were Philip Geliebter and Kalmen Marmor, the latter a professional writer. (Biographical sketch of Marmor in Chapter "Portraits in Miniature.")

By and large a romantic lot, the Communists eagerly took upon their young shoulders the staggering burden of hurrying society along the road laid out by Marx and Lenin. To them Communism stood for a vastly higher aim than the mere wiping out of economic ills. Communism's fulfilment would do away with social division and the domination of man by man, creating a new type of person, one who would cooperate fully with his fellow human being. However, at the Communist top, an awakening appetite for personal power could already be discerned. One may surmise that not all gravitated to the Left and later to Communism solely out of conviction. Awareness that for young people reaching the top in an established movement was difficult and long in coming while in a new one there were no barriers to the bold must have affected the calculations of some of them.

WHY THEY BECAME COMMUNISTS

At this juncture, it is timely to draw a thumbnail sketch of a few leading Jewish Communists who might be considered fairly representative of the idealist majority. Dr. Louis Hendin and Charles S. Zimmerman traveled to Communism via different roads. But their middle-class background, age and education—both studied in Russian schools—and emotional reaction to “dollar greedy” America were similar.

LOUIS HENDIN came to this country in his teens, at the end of the first decade. He immediately went to work, as did all the youth. His first job was in the large Sonnenborn garment factory in Baltimore. That was as yet in the pre-union period. An impressionable youngster, Hendin was profoundly hurt by the degrading conditions in the shop. There was no recourse from the arbitrary rule of the rude foreman. The individual worker did not count as a human being. This early resentment was aggravated by what Hendin saw around him and read in the radical press, of harsh treatment of workers and the callousness of the law and government.

Speaking with the soberness acquired by four decades, Hendin recalled his emotions during those years: “The sounds of the true America, its democratic past and traditions of individual liberty, had not reached my ears; the picture I carried in my mind of this country was of rugged and ruthless individualism, business success as the highest achievement, and a narrowminded, ineffectual labor movement. The unpunished Ludlow massacre of 1914 was deeply shocking. The World War shattered my other illusions. International Socialism was unable or unwilling to prevent the mass slaughter.

“In that state of utter perplexity, I chanced to lay hands on Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, in Russian. I started reading, and all the complex problems suddenly became beautifully clear. Lenin seemed to hit upon the basic weakness of the old Social Democracy, and his insistence on the dictatorship of the proletariat, which might have struck a discordant note in me, was mellowed by his premise that it would only be necessary for the transitory period, and would disappear afterwards. I read the book until I knew it by heart, and

joined the Left Wing. From there it was only a step to Communism."

CHARLES S. ZIMMERMAN, called Sasha by his friends, was born in 1897, and came here in 1913. His first job was as an operator in a boys' clothing shop in Brooklyn. The shop, employing boys mostly under 20, went on a spontaneous strike soon afterward. After winning the strike, they joined the Brooklyn Local 19 of the United Garment Workers, paying the business agent, Teitler, the initiation fee of \$7.50. A couple of weeks later, the manager of the local, Resnick, brought them the good news that the executive board had decided that, in view of their fighting spirit, they were to be admitted at a reduced fee of \$2.50. Outraged by the discovery of corruption, the boys stormed the next union meeting, and, unimpressed by the threats of the notorious Brooklyn union gang, disrupted the proceedings with shouts of "A thief in the union! A thief in the union!" Teitler had to resign.

Zimmerman participated in the general strike of the men's tailors in 1914, becoming a member of the ACWA. In 1916, he switched to the women's garment industry, and joined Local 25, waist makers, of the ILGWU.

His first encounter with a trade union official started the sensitive 17-year-old boy off as a crusader for union reforms. A likable young man, energetic and tactful, Zimmerman became a leading figure in the movement for a shop delegate system, that won the adherence of the youth in his large local union. The Bolshevik Revolution fired his imagination and added zeal to his struggle for a militant union.

"We only saw the darker side of America . . . crude and heartless . . .," he reminisced to the author. "We were excited over the MacNamara case and the Ludlow massacre. . . . Political bossism in the big city, its graft and corruption, disgusted us. And no less irritating was the state of affairs in our unions."

Reshaping the unions and reshaping society seemed inexorably to parallel each other. When the Left bolted the SP, Zimmerman broke with the latter too, without following the Left into the CP. However, he did not stay aloof long, and joined the CP a year later, in 1920. (We shall meet him later.)

DR. JOSHUA KUNITZ, the third, might be taken as a representative type of literary Communist. Never active politically, he came to Communism via literature.

Kunitz was born in a small town in Byelorussia of prosperous middle-class parents. His father belonged to the Enlightened, and young Joshua was sent to a Russian school. But circumstances in his family changed radically. His father died, and his mother migrated to America with the other children, leaving Joshua behind to graduate from the *Realshule*.

Kunitz came to America in 1912 at the age of 17. For some unexplained reason, he had a strong ambition to become a naval officer; he had never seen the ocean before crossing the Atlantic. However, on his first reunion with his family on the East Side, Joshua was bluntly informed that this was unthinkable. "This was my first disillusionment with America," he told the author with a shy grin.

His mother set her heart on having her son continue his studies. She refused to take him into the dress shop where she worked, preferring that he do odd jobs; they would not tie him down to a trade.

Kunitz' first odd job was as a hawker at a hot dog stand in Coney Island. Behind the stand was a small bordel. When his mother heard of it, she was horrified. His second job was in a lumber yard in Newark.

In a depressed mood, Kunitz started writing social poetry in English. He sent them to the *Socialist Call*, and, to his amazement, they were printed. This brought him close to the *Call*. Meanwhile, he continued diligently to study English at home, and managed to enter the Law School of Columbia University. But he dropped law after two years, taking up literature.

Kunitz was certain that he had left Russia behind him. He had no interest in the Russian revolutionary movement. Nor, for that matter, was he concerned with political events here or with Jewish affairs. His sole interest was literature. However, the Russian Revolution excited him too. His knowledge of Russian literature provided him the opportunity for literary expression—Americans were suddenly curious about the Russian people and their culture. Kunitz chose for his doctorate *A Jew in the Russian Literature*, a valuable contribution to the study of trends in Russian thought. This was followed by other essays and articles on Russian cultural and literary topics.

Kunitz made several trips to Soviet Russia for research, and went in the late 20's with John Dewey and Dr. George Counts to study the Soviet educational system. His favorable comments on Soviet Russia attracted the attention of the Communist intelligentsia. Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman brought him into the *New Masses*. And the Communist magazine led him to the Communist Party. He became a foremost Communist expert on Soviet culture and education.

Kunitz went to Moscow in the 30's for the *New Masses*. He witnessed the first two purge trials, 1936-1937. "I did not accept the fantastic charges against the former leaders of the CP and the Soviet government. But I did believe that they were engaged in a conspiracy, and I treated them in my articles as tragic personalities. However, the *New Masses* refused to print them. This was my first disappointment with the Communist movement." *81

Kunitz broke with the party in 1940, but was reluctant to make it known through a public declaration. He explains this reluctance by his sensitivity to the abuse by former friends that would inescapably follow a public statement. Whatever his reasons, he paid dearly for his silence. During the war he was ousted from Cornell, where he was teaching literature, and later from New York University.

LOUIS NELSON, never a card-carrying Communist, but one who worked closely with them during the 20's, had a proletarian origin and background. His case is of interest because it pinpoints the active part people on the periphery had in strengthening Communism without being Communists.

Nelson came to this country in 1907, at the age of 12. His father was a presser at cloaks and suits, the hardest and lowest paid craft in those days, and participated in all the strikes, including the big one in 1910. After nine months in this country, the boy had to leave public school. He went to work as an operator on raincoats. Young Nelson tasted the misery and humiliation of the sweatshop. He had to have his own sewing machine, and for ten cents hired a pushcart to carry it from shop to shop.

Nelson soon changed trades, going to work in a men's tailor's shop. He joined the Garment Workers Union, and was active in the general tailors' strike of 1914 and in the lockout of the ACWA of

1919. He was drafted in World War I, and served in the last eight months.

Nelson lived in the Jewish community of Brownsville, Brooklyn. A stubborn individualist and crusader by nature, he was drawn to the small but lively anarchist movement there. He felt that among the anarchists there was less dogmatism and more room for individual opinion.

Never a Marxist, with an aversion to conformity, Nelson was hardly good timber for the Left Wing. His path to the Left was not via revolutionary Russia, like that of the young radicals, but through the oppositional moods in the garment trade unions. As he put it, "Bureaucratism was already quite evident in those new unions. They were turning into what we contemptuously called 'business trade unions.' The opposition in the ACWA, started in 1922, had nothing whatsoever to do with Soviet Russia or Communism. It flared up when Hillman, unable to replace week-work with piece-work, proposed the inauguration of a 'standard of production,' which the skilled Jewish tailors in the New York market feared.

"There was nowhere for an oppositionist to turn. The official labor press was closed to us. And when the Amalgamated Progressive Center, the name of the united opposition, was founded, the Workers Party and the *Freiheit* were unfriendly because of their own ties with Hillman. Only in 1924, when the WP quarreled with the ACWA over the La Follette movement, did the *Freiheit* open its columns to us." *82

After the Communists split the ACWA opposition by forming a Section of the TUEL, Nelson went with the Communists. Resourceful and persistent, he did much to extend the party's influence in the needle trades.

Nelson joined the expelled Lovestonites in 1929. He, too, opposed the Communist dual unionism. He became a member of the Dress-makers' Union, Local 22, and was later sent in to organize the knit-goods workers. Since 1934 he has been manager of the Knitgoods Workers Union Local 155.

Communism among the Jews would, in all probability, have remained an insignificant trend were it not for the second split among Jewish Socialists two years later.

11 *The Second Split*

The chain of events in the Socialist movement following the Chicago convention of September 1919 and the change in sentiment among Jews toward the Soviet regime, though totally unrelated, were instrumental in providing incipient Communism with a voice in the community out of all proportion to its numerical strength.

The two Communist parties did not, by far, exhaust the Left potential in the SP. And all the efforts by the leadership to placate this as-yet vague opposition did not check their rapid alienation from the party. Nor did the unfriendly voice coming from Moscow cool their ardor for the Soviets.

The program of the SP convention was Leftist by any criteria except that of a Communist. It spoke for a reconstituted international of Socialist and Communist parties and excluded those parties which supported the World War. Echoing the general restlessness, the program noted: "Even in the United States the symptoms of a rebellious spirit in the ranks of the working classes are rapidly multiplying. . . . Recognizing this crucial situation at home and abroad, the Socialist Party . . . squarely takes its position with the uncompromising section of the international Socialist movement. . . ." The program pledged support to the Soviet government. It ended with, "Long live the International Socialist Revolution!" *83

To a minority of delegates this program did not go far enough. They desired affiliation with the Third International—preferring to call it by its original name—though admitting, in the same breath, that they did not approve its entire program nor all of its methods.

And in the referendum vote, the resolution of the minority received 3,475 votes against 1,444 for the majority. The Hillquit "Centrists" then agreed to join the Third International, but with a few reservations. . . .

The Socialist Party, already a skeleton of its former self, 26,766 members in 1920 out of 104,822 in 1919 (in 1921 that number was cut in half), was again torn between Rights, Centrists and Lefts.

That international affiliation should have become the focal point of the new struggle would seem to be an inflation of its importance—or a doctrinaire preoccupation with it. But one may surmise that beneath the conflict over affiliation simmered a deeper discontent. Believing that Europe was on the verge of new revolutionary eruptions and that the United States, too, was in for great industrial clashes, the new opposition felt keenly the inadequacy of the party top, accusing them of talking big but doing little.

As to the most disturbing question, dictatorship of the proletariat, the attitude of the new Left was voiced by the Jewish Federation, now a part of it, in the theses to their convention, July 2-5, 1920. Emphasizing that "democracy is sacred and a foundation of Socialism," the theses qualified that "sacredness" by adding that during great upheavals one should not stick to abstract principles and dogmas, and that when the working class is struggling for power, its hands should not be tied.*⁸⁴

Especially irritating to the Left was the conduct of the defense of the five New York Socialist assemblymen expelled from the State Legislature in 1920. The Left charged that the party top had failed to perceive the enormous political significance inherent in the expulsion, limiting the struggle to the legal phase. They were certain that the party was missing a rare opportunity to lead great numbers of people in a political battle under its own banner. A resolution to that effect was introduced by Salutsky at the party convention in 1920. It caused a stormy discussion, during which Morris Hillquit severely criticized the Jewish Federation. The resolution was stricken from the convention minutes on a motion by Meyer London.*⁸⁵

The failure of the legal struggle for the expelled assemblymen and the domestic political reaction, that reached its zenith in 1920, were powerful psychological factors in driving the budding Left to Sovietism. The *Naye Welt*, commenting on the expulsion, spoke for the first time of a revolutionary solution for America: "The time

has arrived when thinking people are left with but one choice . . . on the side of reaction or on the side of revolution. . . . The middle road is no longer the golden road. It is the treacherous road. . . ." *86

This was written in a moment of bitter anger. The people of the *Naye Welt*, then and later, consistently denied the possibility of a revolutionary upheaval in this country. They were still dubious of the final goal of the Soviets.

The Left formed a Committee for the Third International. Its leading people were J. Louis Engdahl, Benjamin Glassberg, Alexander Trachtenberg, the last two instructors in the Rand School of Social Science; J. B. Salutsky (Hardman), William Kruse and Juliet Stuart Poyntz. Ludwig Lore, squeezed out of the CLP, joined this group. Its members labored to convince themselves and others that they were not Communists, merely militant Marxists whose sole desire was to gather all the parties still adhering to the class struggle into one world body. This was undoubtedly their genuine approach. However, it proved a weak armor for most of them, and was soon pierced by the "enemy."

MOSCOW CLOSES THE DOOR

The issue of affiliation, though not the conflict, was decided by the famous Twenty-One Points, formulated by the Second Congress of the Comintern, July 17 to August 7, 1920, as conditions for the admission of new parties.

The Soviet leaders, anxious to avoid what they thought was the fatal weakness in the structure of the Second International—its organizational looseness—were bent on hammering the young world Communist movement into a fighting disciplined army, the Executive Committee (ECCI) in Moscow to serve as a centralized general staff exacting complete obedience. The Twenty-One Points were framed with that aim in view. *87

Point three demanded that every section—the parties would be mere sections—should create an underground apparatus parallel with the open one. Point four called for systematic propaganda in the armed forces. Point six required that it be made clear to all workers that capitalism could be destroyed solely by revolution. And in the belief that the "Centrists" were greater roadblocks to

the proletarian revolution than the open Right-Wingers, Point seven closed the gate on them. Serati and Modigliani of Italy, Kautsky and Hilferding of Germany, Longuet of France, Ramsey MacDonald of Great Britain, and Hillquit of the United States were expressly mentioned by name. Only the ECCI had the right to make an exception of individual "Centrists."

Eager to preserve what was left of the SP, Hillquit had to fight a delaying action. Point seven worked in his favor. Still, a new referendum vote approved the minority resolution instructing the NEC to apply for admission to the Comintern, despite the impossible terms. The latter could, without hesitation, comply with this directive, in the certainty that the application would be promptly rejected, as indeed it was.

The rejection, received here at the end of 1920, was a typical Zinoviev blast at the SP, which he labeled an "auxiliary organization of the American bourgeoisie." *88

The receding wave of unrest in Europe strengthened the moderates here. And at the party convention, June 1921, in Detroit, Hillquit could challenge the opposition to declare themselves openly for the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the latter refused to commit themselves. Clinging to the hope that the Third International could be reformed from within, they insisted that the party keep trying to gain admittance.

The idea of further negotiations with the Comintern was rejected by the majority. However, not being ready to affiliate with the revived Second International either, it was decided to wait for a middle-of-the-road international. Talks for such a Second-and-a-Half International had been started by the Austrian Socialists. The followers of the Committee for the Third International then broke with the party and formed the Workers Council.

Similar to the original Left Wing, the Workers Council had most of its strength in the language groups, particularly the Finnish, the Jewish and the German.

THE FEDERATION MOVING AWAY FROM THE PARTY

If the leading people of the Jewish Federation had been asked in 1920-1921 where they were headed, they could have given the reply attributed to Moses Mendelson, father of the Jewish Enlightenment

of the 18th century, when asked where he was going: "I know where I *intend* to go, but how could I know where I shall *land*." But, in all probability, that answer would not have been forthcoming. Salutsky and his associates were sure that in opposing the party policies they would go only as far as they intended to.

In the interplay of reasons and moods that drove stout opponents of Communism in 1919 to a political marriage with Communists in 1921 one must stress the long accumulating friction with the old-timers. And though a scrutiny of the polemics, written and verbal, going on between 1912 and 1919 fails to show any differences on basic principles between the two, the wide variance in outlook and tempo brought increasing ill-will. (The angry polemical exchange between Ab. Cahan and Salutsky—the former in the *Forward* and the latter in the *Yiddisher Socialist*—as early as the spring of 1914, is a fair example of the nature of the antagonism between two generations of Socialists.) *80

The federation top—and they were not the only ones—strove to draw a clear line of demarcation between the Soviet government and Communism. And, while the *Naye Welt* in this period wholeheartedly supported the former, it kept on a devastating criticism of the Communists here. Speaking about the *Funken*, the *Naye Welt* said: "The further they go, the more one can define them as a tendency of humbug, bluff and demogogy." *90

The people of the federation were not Russianized; their thoughts were of America. And their every reference to the Russian Revolution was intended largely as an argument for raising the political level of the movement here. In its first editorial on the fall of the Czar, the *Naye Welt* bemoaned the sad state of affairs here:

. . . The small and petty routine has spread itself out over the length and breadth of the labor movement. No sweep, no broad initiative, no enthusiasm. The Socialist soul is in a coma. . . . With joy and hope we greet the Revolution in Russia; with joy and hope we greet its echo in America! *91

ANTI-COMMUNISM AND ANTI-HILLQUITISM

The first indication that the federation was no longer satisfied with being to the left of the center of the party was the report of its EC to the previously mentioned CP convention, May 1920. The report complained:

The great majority of our members have stayed with us. But we have assumed a great obligation—to see . . . that the entire party should take the same Marxist and, in principle, left position. . . . Regretfully, we were put in an extremely uncomfortable position by the leadership of the party. . . .⁹²

The “in principle, left position” was still far from Communism. However, the SP convention proved highly disappointing to Salutsky. “The convention consisted of a conscious conservative majority,” he observed, “and an instinctive revolutionary minority. . . . It is Hillquit’s platform with Debs as the standard bearer. . . . A revolutionary at heart will run on a platform of conservatism. . . . The majority, . . . knew what they wanted; the minority, . . . were not clear in their aims. . . .”⁹³

Still, the federation definitely resisted the very idea of leaving the SP.

Replying to an important member, who wrote to him of his bitter disillusionment with the last party convention and hinted that the federation no longer had a place in it, Salutsky kept his promise to be brutally frank: “The CP this year is worth no more than it was last year . . . now it is entirely degenerated and rotten. The CLP is no better. . . .”

Salutsky was definitely against a split, for the following reasons:

1. The SP is not hopeless. The members will compel the leaders to take off their . . . white gloves and black frock coats, if the principled elements will take care to enlighten the rest of the members.
2. The SP is an established name. It is not in our interest to permit conservative leaders to enjoy this basic property of our movement. The members can unseat the old leaders. In this area we preach the open shop.
3. The prospects for a new party . . . are zero, . . .
4. A split is a painful operation. Operations of that kind are not carried out with a light heart. . . . We are in need more of unity than of splitting. It is better to live together for another year, even if existence is not so sweet, than to split even for one hour too soon. . . .

Salutsky finished by saying, “*America is not on the threshold of revolutionary action.*”⁹⁴

The *Naye Welt*, writing on the eve of the second congress of the

Comintern, steered a neutral-friendly, but cautious course.*⁹⁵ It was an attitude of let's-wait-and-see. And, in the public debate between Salutsky and Charney-Vladek, January 1921, Salutsky, representing the new Left, spoke against basic Communist tenets, such as their position on trade unions, their armed uprisings and underground apparatus. But he firmly opposed a new international against the Third.

THE FEDERATION BREAKS AWAY . . .

The decision of the EC of the federation to associate itself with the group that left the party after the Detroit convention, in 1921, was rather extreme in its phrasing. The editorial in the *Naye Welt* finished off the SP with this verdict:

It was 100 per cent Wisconsinism mixed with a dozen Hillquitism. No cause for further fear. . . . The convention clearly stated what it did not want, and what it did want it did not know itself. This is no bankruptcy, but an official seal on a bankruptcy which has already taken place. . . .⁹⁶

A special convention, September 1921, in New York City, was to act on the recommendation of the EC to break with the party.

This decisive issue was now shifted to the branches. A number of old and solid branches opposed the break: the one in Pittsburgh, the largest; those in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Newark and Brooklyn. However, a majority of branches voted with the EC.

The pre-convention discussions made it abundantly clear that leaving the party would automatically involve a ruinous split in the ranks, making warfare between the two parts inevitable. As the *Naye Welt* put it, "We do not fool ourselves about the future relations with these opponents. The closer we were with them yesterday, the sharper they will fight us tomorrow. And we, from our side, won't spare them either. It has to be that way. . . . The federation cannot live in a cemetery. The Socialist Party is dead. . . ." ⁹⁷

THE SPECIAL CONVENTION AND THE SPLIT, 1921

Unlike the first split in 1919, the people engaged in this battle of 1921 had until a short time before worked harmoniously, sharing the same basic approach to the problems of the movement. Prac-

tically all of them had come from the same political school, the Bund. Salutsky's leadership was accepted with grudging admiration. As Chanin later phrased it, "Though Salutsky insisted on his opinion, he was respected for his loyalty and hard work." Only two years previously, they had stood together against the Communists. And precisely because of these long and close ideological ties and warm personal relations the mutual bitterness was now more intense.

Salutsky was the brain behind the majority. Nathan Chanin, a capmaker by trade, led the minority. Among the speakers for the resolution to leave the party were Dr. Jacob Mindel and J. B. Beilin. Ironically, these two had also spoken for the majority at the convention of 1919—but against breaking with the party. Most of those who supported the majority also declared their disagreement with the Communists, while the speakers for the minority warned that this split would destroy the Jewish labor movement. The discussion lasted for many hours, converting no one.

Of the 77 delegates from 43 branches, 41 voted for the break and 33 for the SP. The minority immediately assembled in another room of the same Forward Hall, and formed the Jewish Socialist Farband of the Socialist Party. They were joined by Alexander Kahn, Max Pine, Meyer Weinstein, Sol Rifkind and other old-timers who had not belonged to the federation. Chanin was elected general secretary. A week later, the Farband started publication of a weekly, *Der Wecker* (The Awakener).

The new weekly, fighting as it did the open and half-way Communists, was friendly to the Soviet government. No doubt, the people of the Farband heartily endorsed Vladimir Medem's speech at the convention warning against this double standard—supporting the Soviet regime in Russia and resisting the Communists here. But they could not free themselves from the grip of pro-Soviet sentiment prevailing in sections of the community. It would have been a poor tactical move, to say the least.

Typical was the footnote of the editors in the very first issue of *Der Wecker* explaining that an article by Philip Krantz sharply critical of Russian Bolshevism was his personal view. But it seems that this footnote did not satisfy many of the readers. In the second issue the editors made their stand clear: "(Our) opinion on Soviet Russia is known. It is comradely, brotherly, deep, proletarian. . . ."

This sentiment was repeated with more vigor in the fifth issue:

"*Der Wecker* is not an organ for attacks on the Russian Bolsheviks. We have the greatest respect and the best of feelings for the leaders of the Soviet government. It is the first workers' government in the world, and it is the duty of every honest, genuine friend of labor to help it get on its feet, . . . Even if we don't agree with everything that they do, . . . What we oppose is that the Communists are trying to drag in the Third International right here in America, where entirely different methods have to be adopted because the conditions are different."

The "greatest respect and best feelings" lasted hardly two years.

The rift cut across the entire body of the federation. All the local business managers of the *Forward*—Julius Weisberg, Leon Arkin, Morris Polin and Herman Bernstein, leading people in Pittsburgh, Boston, Philadelphia and Detroit, respectively; and Jacob Siegel, editor of the Chicago *Forward*—went with the Farband. So did most of the union officers and the top of the WC, Joseph Baskin, Reuben Guskin, Joseph Weinberg and Ephim Jeshurin. However, all the nationally influential intellectuals, except Charney-Vladek, A. Liesin and a couple of others, remained with the federation; "Zeide" Morris Winchefskey, A. S. Sachs and M. Terman stayed too.

The majority also retained the machinery and by far the largest part of the second layer of leadership—the practical workers, among them a few old-timers, the veteran Ab. Epstein, former president of the WC, and George Wishnak, an officer of the ILGWU. Of the *Forward* staff, five sided with the majority: Zivyon, Hillel Rogoff, managing editor; Olgin, Lilliput (Kretchmar) and Paul Novick. They were immediately fired by the association. Through the intervention of the Jewish Writers Union, they received six-months severance pay.

OPPOSING COMMUNISM, BUT MOVING TOWARD IT

Throughout the excited debates, even after the convention, those who had engineered the break emphatically denied that Communism was the issue. They were not Communists and had no intention of becoming Communists. They were strongly opposed to applying the major planks of Communism to the American scene. Moreover, long tradition made the idea of subordination to Moscow

unpalatable to them. At the same time, they kept repeating that the Third International was the only living world body of militant Marxists. In a mood of wishful thinking, they tried hard to convince themselves that the International would eventually be compelled by the logic of events to resort to a more realistic and flexible course in conformity with conditions in each country.

The convention resolution on the International spoke in loopholes: "The convention recognizes that the Third International is the only logical . . . organization of the fighting world proletariat . . . the labor movement of each country has to join (it). . . . The fact that we don't agree with several details of its tactics should not serve as a reason to keep us from working under its general leadership. We know that the Third International changes and will continue to change its tactics in accordance with the changed political conditions, and we believe that all the differences have to be discussed and straightened out, not from outside but within the International itself." *98

The convention manifesto stated among others: ". . . The practice of the SP in Jewish labor has left the movement with a sense of dullness, listlessness, . . . irresponsibility, political ignorance and . . . disorganization."

Distinct and harsh in its criticism, the federation was high-sounding and ambiguous on its future course. The manifesto spoke of building jointly with similar groups "*a broad proletarian mass party in America, in line with the new view on the Socialist Revolution and the proletarian dictatorship, in accordance with the separate economic and political situation of America and the social psychological uniqueness of the American masses.*" (italics in text.) *99

The break touched off a flareup of animosities. Abraham Liessin, in an eloquent editorial, bitterly reproved the majority: "If the Jewish revolutionary would steadfastly remember his responsibility for the sufferings of his people, he would be more tactful and take better account of the conditions surrounding him; he would then not clamor for the impossible, as our Jewish revolutionaries now do." *100

For this and for a sharper editorial in the *Forward*, Liessin was called by the *Naye Welt* a "*volno-pozharnick* (volunteer firman) from Minsk, a fool that deserves to be spanked," and similar friendly epithets.

Philip Krantz denounced the majority as "a *gilgul* (transmutation) of De Leonism. . . . (They) have affiliated themselves . . . with a government of a far-away land . . . that, as everyone knows by now, does not always stick to the ideals it preaches and the slogans it formulates, that will do everything to serve its own interests and to further its own power." *101

"A DIVORCE WITHOUT REGRET"

The sound and fury of revolutionary phrases notwithstanding, one must conclude that the majority was carried away more by moods than by reason, that antipathies were deeper and more powerful than sympathies. And one could also apply Salutsky's devastating comment on the SP convention of 1921, that it "knew what it did not want, but did not know what it wanted," to himself and his associates. The resolutions were clear and definite only in their dislikes. Olgin expressed this feeling of dislike succinctly, "The marriage (with the SP) was without love, and the divorce without regret."

In a booklet, *A Proletarian Political Party*, published in 1922, Olgin gave vent to the long animosity brewing against the old-timers: ". . . Individuals who were no credit to Socialism were nominated for political office (in the Jewish community). And (they) campaigned in an ignorant manner, that could only lower the prestige of the party . . . the minds of the people were confused, twisted and deafened by all kinds of silly huckster tricks. . . .

"The Jewish labor movement . . . was rocked to sleep in a radical cradle. And the official Socialist press has surrounded it with so many love songs that it really thinks it cannot be any better . . . the masses of the people . . . have been fed for 25 years with yellow, watered-down, formless hurrah-Socialism, mixed with a large dose of ridiculous sensationalism. . . . The federation knows that there are special Jewish problems here and abroad. . . . It will strive for clean, clear, principled Socialism."

The immediate task of the federation, aside from rebuilding its shattered units, was a duofold one: to raise the necessary funds for a "genuine Socialist daily" and, in cooperation with the other dissidents, to build a "new proletarian mass party." But attacking the *Forward* was easier than starting a rival, and breaking away from

the old SP was simpler than building a new party. The campaign for the new paper, that culminated in a meeting at Lexington Opera House, brought in about \$15,000, a sizable sum in itself but insufficient for a new paper. As to the new party, the Workers Council had few followers among the English-speaking. But a new party was imperative, or the Workers Council would have withered away.

At this gloomy impasse, the proposal of the Communists to form a mass party jointly with them, one without the load of a Soviet America and the dictatorship of the proletariat, was highly attractive. The people of the Workers Council, hard pressed as they were from both camps, assured themselves that with the necessary safeguards the dreamed-of unity of all militant Marxists in this country could be a reality. But few of them could have anticipated the kind of unity it actually brought about.

12 *The Open Party; the Freiheit*

The launching of a joint party of the Workers Council and the underground CP was not a smooth affair. The negotiations were conducted with the American Labor Alliance and dragged on for several months. There were times when it seemed that they would collapse.

The opposition in the Communist ranks to an open party hampered their negotiators, headed by James P. Cannon. The people of the Workers Council, for their part, were not of one opinion either. Men like Trachtenberg, Engdahl and Kruse, almost completely without followers, were hardly in a position to insist on any conditions that would guarantee the independence of the new party. Moreover, a party backed by the Kremlin presented an added lure. And Cannon was shrewd enough to drop a hint during the discussions that by joining the Communists the men of the Workers Council would be taken care of financially and provided with sufficient "space" for their talents. On that occasion Salutsky (from now on he will be called Hardman) interrupted him to ask sarcastically, "If we are for sale, I would like to know exactly what you offer." *102

The spokesmen for the language groups were in a somewhat more favorable position. They had organizations behind them. Still, they were not all pulling in the same direction either. Some were pronounced pro-Communists, others were wavering, and some were definitely anti-Communists. Among the Jews, for example, Moishe Katz was pro-Communist; Hardman, Zivyon, A. S. Sachs, and Yuditz were anti-Communists, while Olgin kept the power of Soviet Russia

uppermost in his mind. (Once, during a walk, Hardman tried to impart to Olgin his misgivings about the negotiations. Olgin, in his capricious manner, had one reply, "But I want to go to Moscow." *108)

The long discussions in the *Naye Welt* on unity with the Communists mirrored this cleavage. And the final report by Hardman and Olgin met with a sharp division of opinion by their associates. Hardman was against approval of the agreement and Olgin was for it. It was ratified by a slender margin of two votes. The opponents went along out of loyalty to the group.*104

THE DISAGREEMENT OVER CONTROL

During and after the negotiations, the underground Communist press kept implying that the other side had yielded to placing the new party under CP control. But when a similar statement, though much diluted, of the Jewish Bureau of the American Labor Alliance appeared in the *Emes*, the *Naye Welt* reacted half threateningly and half pleadingly, a reflection of the differences within the federation. The Jewish Bureau declared that points four and five of the agreement made it "abundantly clear that the CP . . . considers itself the only revolutionary party affiliated with the Comintern. The new party will have to show, through its activities, that it deserves to stand on the same level with the CP. (A revolutionary mass party cannot be created at once.)" It added, "The CP . . . will seek to influence and to control the new party . . . until the new party will have the right to belong to the Comintern. . . ." *105

The *Naye Welt*, in a lengthy editorial, formally objected that the CP was never a party to the negotiations and reproved the Jewish Bureau for putting up unnecessary difficulties at a time when the greatest need was a "truly permanent and healthy unity." The editorial went on to express the hope that the Bureau did not voice the opinion of the entire ALA. However, if "seeking to control" was the true intention of the CP, then "certainly the unity is as though it had never happened, and the new party is split before it was born." *106

To further dispute the claim of control by the CP, the *Naye Welt* printed the essence of the main points of the agreement. They were: 1. Open existence; no control; 2. Recognition of the Third International; 3. A workers' republic as the goal; 4. A proletarian dictatorship as the means; 5. A mass movement and broad propaganda. As

additional evidence against control by the CP, the *Naye Welt* published in its next issue, November 30th, the memorandum of the EC of the federation against control by the underground.⁺²³

THE WORKERS PARTY IS BORN

The Workers Party of America was formed at a convention held December 23-26, 1921, in New York City. Ruthenberg was serving his term in prison, and Cannon spoke for the Communists. Soviet power and dictatorship of the proletariat were swept under the rug; nor was the Comintern mentioned. There was a vague phrase about "work for the establishment of a workers' republic." But the rest of the program abounded in the usual Left and Communist terminology: revolutionary elements, revolutionary consciousness, revolutionary spirit. The program also hinted at centralism, a principle dear to Communists.

The Workers Party was strongly in favor of immediate demands. On the trade unions, the program was emphatic: "The custom of seceding from the mass organization to form smaller unions, on the ground that . . . (they are) reactionary must be abandoned. . . ." ^{*107}

Headquarters were opened in New York City, and the party began publishing a weekly, *The Worker*.

There were moments at the convention when the whole scheme was on the verge of crumbling. On the very first day, some of the non-Communist delegates had the uncomfortable feeling that the underground Communists were not in earnest, that they were only, in Hardman's words, "intent on building a new vehicle to carry the old Communist ware." This misgiving moved Hardman to call a caucus of all the WC delegates. The meeting took place in Olgin's bachelor apartment in the vicinity of Central Park. Hardman spoke of his suspicion and pleaded for withdrawing from the convention.

Discussing this episode with the writer 33 years later, Hardman tried to reconstruct that meeting: "After many hours of discussion, a decision was reached to continue in the forming of the new party, and to try, by all means, to keep it from becoming another CP. The majority realized that there was no turning back. Their chief argument was that the rank and file of all the groups were anxious to end the split in the radical forces and would not view a withdrawal at that time as bona fide. Besides, to continue the loose and detached

existence seemed unthinkable. The Italians, headed by August Belancho, however, withdrew from the convention.

"As far as I remember, there were about 50-odd delegates at that caucus meeting. The total number of delegates to the convention was over 200. Under the preliminary agreement, these 50-odd delegates were to have five members on the EC of the party to be, out of a total of 17. The rest were to come from groups which claimed to be sympathetic to the general idea of Moscow, but not affiliated with the CP. In fact, however, they were pretty nearly all secretly committed to underground CP discipline. The preliminary agreement also stipulated the elimination from leadership of those who had been conspicuous in the various previous CP setups. William Z. Foster was favored above all, but that was long before it became publicly known that he had been a member of the CP. Despite this agreement, on the very first day of the convention, the old crowd was not only in evidence but in control." *108

THE NON-COMMUNIST FACADE IS GIVEN UP

Hardman's apprehension was justified all too soon. The Workers Party began rapidly veering toward open Communism. At the second convention, the end of December 1922, in New York, the year-old program was scrapped and replaced by the familiar formula of the impossibility of establishing the new social order within the framework of the existing capitalist society. "The much-talked-of American democracy is a fraud. . . ."

The Soviet state was introduced without the cardinal premise, the Social Revolution. Instead, the program spoke of "supplanting . . . the existing government with a Soviet government . . ." through propaganda.*109

The Comintern was brought in through a back door. Not affiliation but ". . . under the inspiration of the leadership of the Communist International."

Two years had scarcely passed and the fourth convention of the WP, August 21-29, 1925, in Chicago—party headquarters had been moved to Chicago—completed the Communist cycle. The name was changed to Workers (Communist) Party of America, the American Section of the Communist International. The Communist victory was absolute. In four and a half years, they had managed to disinte-

grate the non-Communist Left and absorb by far the largest part of them.

The transformation of the WP into a Communist Party, short as it was in terms of time, evoked an undiminished fight of a double nature, between the Communists and their partners and among the Communists themselves. New splits often seemed imminent. And, again, it was largely Moscow's promises and threats that managed to hold the warring factions together.

The underlying cause for the apparent ease with which the WC people were "integrated" stemmed from their vulnerability to the Communist attacks rather than to the attractiveness of the Communist doctrine. In detaching themselves from their base, the Socialist movement, and concluding a marriage of convenience with the Communists, they entered a vacuum. And unless they stepped out of it in time, as several did, Communism was bound to engulf them.

As to the Jews, not all were absorbed. Rogoff, becoming pessimistic about the prospects for a new paper, went back to the *Forward* almost immediately. Hardman began boycotting the Workers Party at the end of the first year, though he was on the NEC; he was expelled in 1923. Zivyon returned to the *Forward* the same year, publishing a booklet denouncing the Communists. (A practical man, he wrote the booklet while drawing wages, however meager, from the *Freiheit*.) He was followed by Lilliput. A. S. Sachs resigned earlier. The rest were "integrated" after a resistance lasting about three years.

Hardman was expelled on two charges: for refusing to intervene in behalf of the WP at the Conference of Progressive Political Action, in Cleveland, 1922, and for refusing to submit his magazine, the *American Labor Monthly*, to party control.

Because of his popularity and his strategic position as educational director and chief editor of the ACWA, the Comintern was not disposed to lose him. But Hardman was a stubborn man, and rejected the compromises offered by the Comintern man, H. Walecki.

FIFTY-FIFTY AMONG THE JEWS; THE FREIHEIT

The merger in the Jewish sector was concluded along different lines. Numerically, the federation was perhaps smaller than the

Jewish underground, but this disadvantage was more than balanced by their superiority in men of position and prestige. This superiority accounted for the better terms secured by the Hardman-Olgin group. The Jewish EC was to have nine members from each camp, the office of the secretary going to the Communists. Louis Hendin was elected to this post.⁺²⁴

The editorship of the paper was also divided equally. And the Hardman people won out on the name of the new paper, too. Instead of calling it *Emes*, as the Communists insisted, as a continuation of their *Emes*, it was called *Freiheit*, for the organ of the German Independent Socialist Party. Trivial as the naming of a paper may appear, in this instance the name was symbolic of its non-Communist nature.

The offices of business manager and campaign manager—fund-raiser—went to George Wishnak and Rubin Saltzman, of the Hardman group.

The *Freiheit* was published April 2, 1922. The Communist editor was Shachno Epstein; the non-Communist, Olgin. Hardman, the candidate of the non-Communists, was elbowed out by the Communists, who feared his independence and strong will. Olgin was known for his pliability. And subsequent events proved that his choice was a happy one for the Communists.

The editorial staff was a mixed one too. Olgin, Zivyon, Lilliput, Buchwald, Novick and Paul Yuditiz came from the federation. Kalmen Marmor, Melech Epstein, who joined the CP about that time, Morris Holtman, his wife, Rachel, and a few unknown young men were of the CP. Bittelman and Noah London were contributors. Because the Olgin group—except for Yuditiz—consisted of established journalists and Olgin himself was more popular and an incomparably better writer than Shachno Epstein, they carried greater weight in the paper, to the constant irritation of the other camp. This uneven strength in the staff and the factional feuds that flared up a day after the merger prompted Bittelman and his lieutenants to raise the question, in the first year, of breaking away from the *Freiheit* and publishing their own penny paper, *Der Emes*. This plan was freely discussed at several meetings of the underground Communists. But they were held back by the CP.

The *Freiheit* did not start as a dried-out political journal. Following the pattern of the Jewish press, it contained feature articles,

novels, short stories and poems, both original and in translation, and literary reviews. Distinguished writers and poets who joined the *Freiheit* as contributors greatly enriched the literary content of the paper.

From the very beginning, the *Freiheit* numbered among its contributors such writers as H. Leivick, Moishe Nadir, Moishe Leib Halperin, David Ignatoff, A. Raboi, Baruch Glazman, S. Chester, Mani Leib, and, a couple of years later, Abraham Raisin, besides a larger group of younger writers. No other paper could boast such an array of literary talent.

These poets and novelists were attracted to the *Freiheit* for its regard for Yiddish and higher literary level. The seeming resurgence of Yiddish culture in Russia, actively supported by a friendly government, helped to induce a feeling in these writers, ardent workers in the vineyard of Yiddish letters, that contributing to the *Freiheit* they were actually cooperating with the cultural efforts in Russia. They regarded their work in the *Freiheit* as a bridge to reach the isolated three million Soviet Jews.

Another irresistible attraction was the *Freiheit* audience. Incomparably smaller than the army of readers of the other three papers, this audience was young, lively and responsive. In the literary evenings and forums, held regularly by the wide net of educational and social clubs, dramatic groups and summer camps of the young postwar immigration, these poets and novelists met their readers, a contact that most writers would cherish.

Furthermore, the *Freiheit* was not Communist in the beginning. Only in 1925 did it become a full-fledged Communist mouthpiece. And even then it gave wide leeway to cultural and literary expression.

This group of noted writers broke with the paper in the fall of 1929. Of this later.

13 *A Poor Beginning*

In the Workers Party, warfare between the two partners continued. Nor did the running fight among the Communists themselves slacken. Only the issues were changed and the alignments reshuffled. The immediate source of irritation was the air of superiority shown by No. One—as the underground Communists were called—over No. Two, the “Centrists.” However, the chief cause of the conflict was the relentless efforts to turn the WP into a Communist auxiliary. Ludwig Lore emerged as the strong man of No. Two.

Fortunately for the “Centrists,” a new division in the underground relieved them temporarily from being the prime target of attacks. No. One was soon torn between those who insisted on maintaining the underground party—they were nicknamed the Goose Caucus—and the Liquidators, who wanted to dissolve it in the belief that it would soon be possible to transform the WP into a Communist party. A third and smaller group, the Conciliators, consisting of W. W. Weinstone and his followers, tried to steer a middle course. This difference reflected, in a sense, the old cleavage in the Left Wing of 1919.

The leaders of the Goose Caucus, the larger group, were L. E. Katterfeld, secretary of the CP; Alfred Wagenknecht, Abraham Jakira, secretary of the Russian Federation; Israel Amter, Edward Lindgren and, in the beginning, Benjamin Gitlow. The Liquidators were headed by Ruthenberg, secretary of the WP; Foster, Cannon, William F. Dunne, Jay Lovestone and Earl Browder. The roster of these names might indicate the motivation of some of the persons

involved. Ruthenberg and Foster, with a following of their own, fretted under the inescapable limitations and futility inherent in an underground party. An open party, they calculated, would secure the leadership for them. The Goose Caucus, aside from their sectarianism, could not measure up in stature or prestige to Ruthenberg and Foster. They had a vested interest in an underground body, where it was easier to maintain tight control through manipulations. As for the Conciliators, W. W. Weinstone, a handsome young man with a booming voice, with a special gift for indecision and for shifting responsibility in matters of policy, was, at the same time, consumed by a hunger for leadership.

THE EMISSARIES FROM MOSCOW

In 1922, the factions were again running to Moscow, pleading their cause before the Comintern. For reasons of their own, the Russian leaders failed to issue a clearcut decision; instead, their long-winded instructions were shot through with *ifs* and *buts*, which only heightened the factional strife. At the same time, Moscow, pursuing a policy of playing with both of the larger factions, sent three emissaries to steer the party convention called for the latter part of August 1922. They were: H. Walecki, a Pole; John Pepper, a Hungarian; and Boris Reinstein, an American who had returned to Russia after the first revolution.

Walecki, a mathematician, formerly the leader of the Left of the Polish Socialist Party, and one of the three founders of the Polish Communist Party, was an exile in Moscow. Those who met him—including this author—were impressed by his personal wit and charm. Pepper—real name, Josef Pogany—was a Socialist journalist who had joined Bela Kun and become a minister in the short-lived Soviet government. He was also an exile in Moscow; his wife and two children lived there. A man of broad European culture, Pepper was cut from a different cloth than Walecki. His thirst for leadership led him to engage in unscrupulous deals. Pepper had a conspicuous part in the affairs of the Communist movement here in the 20's, and we will meet him later. Reinstein, a former druggist in Buffalo, N. Y., and a disciple of Daniel De Leon, was of little consequence. In Moscow he was in charge of the archives of the Profintern (International of Red Trade Unions).

The three arrived on the eve of the convention, which was held secretly in a deserted summer place near the town of Bridgeman, Michigan.

(The curious story of the Bridgeman convention, the government raid and the arrest of Ruthenberg are told in detail by Benjamin Gitlow in his book, *I Confess*, and by Theodore Draper in *The Road to American Communism*.)

Ruthenberg's opponents in the party openly suggested that his enormous vanity had led him, in a gesture of martyrdom, to wait for his arrest. But at that time there was already a noticeable let-up in the anti-Red campaign, and the Bridgeman episode was received by the public rather as an adventure in a dime novel. The Communists failed to derive any political capital out of a grotesque situation.

The failure at Bridgeman did not tone down rising feuds. The dissolution of the underground party in March 1923, as directed by the Comintern, did not usher in a healthier atmosphere either. (Moscow concluded that underground Communism in the United States was both childish and wasteful.) Only the scene was changed. The factional fights, unabated, were transferred to the Workers Party.

THE SCHISM IN THE JEWISH UNDERGROUND

The Jewish Federation was the arena of the first schism among the underground Communists. Three of the nine on the EC, Louis Hendin, Noah London and Taubenshlag, broke away from the Communist caucus as yet in 1922, circulating a manifesto in the party advocating the liquidation of the underground. They were threatened with party discipline and brought before a special party court, headed by Ruthenberg.⁺²⁵ Their defection destroyed the 50-50 balance in the Jewish EC, tipping the scales for the "Centrists."

The Bittelman group then demanded that the balance be restored by giving them three additional seats. Rejected by the new majority, Bittelman and the other five Communists then left the EC, on November 8th, declaring that they did not recognize its legality. They brought the issue to the NEC of the party, certain that the Communist majority there would decide in their favor; at that

time, the former Workers Council minority of seven had been reduced to four.

The Communist group issued a four-page printed statement, addressed to all members of the federation. Shrewdly avoiding the conflict over representation on the EC, the statement made a last-ditch defense for the underground party and its privileged position in the WP. "In the same way," it argued, "that the WP cannot tolerate attacks on the Comintern in its ranks, so it cannot tolerate attacks on its American section." Then followed an explanation why the underground could not be abolished: "The American government is still stronger than the American Communist Party. The government feels that the working masses are not yet sufficiently interested in the Communist Party to intervene for the party and to defend it. . . ."

Most characteristic for Bittelman's mind and methods is the passage about the *Freiheit* versus the *Forward*: "The struggle against the *Forward* must be . . . on the basis of Communist principles. We fight the *Forward* not merely and mainly because it is not a decent literary paper, but because it serves the reactionary and socially treacherous leadership of the labor movement. . . ."

"Our fight is for revolutionary unions and not merely for good unions. . . . The personal character of reactionary union officers should not become the main issue of our struggle against reactionary and socially treacherous union bureaucracy." *110

THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER

Called before the NEC, the new majority, represented by Olgin and David Siegel, and strongly supported by Hardman and Kruse, argued that the 50-50 balance had been agreed upon before the WP was born, and the NEC had, therefore, no jurisdiction to dissolve the present EC. Furthermore, the original agreement did not and could not ban either side from trying to win over the other by convincing them. Such a ban on winning over converts would have been nonsensical and contrary to the very spirit of the merger.

The two also stressed the stagnation of the Jewish movement, brought about by the furious fighting of the factions. The federation and the *Freiheit*, they pointed out, were actually paralyzed. For the first time now, the federation had acquired a working

majority, and could break the impasse. As a final solution to the inner feuds, they proposed the calling of a special convention, promising not to interfere with the rights of the Communist minority and to abide by the will of the majority.^{*111}

As Bittelman and his friends had anticipated, the NEC came to their rescue. Olgin and Siegel later reported back that they were continuously interrupted. As the new majority would not yield to an arbitrary reshuffling of the EC, the NEC resorted to a maneuver which would reestablish the 50-50 balance in practice without touching the composition of the EC. A federation convention was decided upon, but—and here lay the gimmick—the preparations were to be taken out of the EC and placed in the hands of an arrangements committee consisting of an equal number from both sides.

The EC refused to accept a decision that would have spelled their actual dissolution. Warnings by the NEC and threats to have the party appoint the 50-50 convention were of no avail. In its answer, the EC pointed out that it had “not violated a single principle or tactical decision of the WP, and, therefore, the latter had no reason to mete out such a heavy punishment. . . . Such . . . punishment . . . would break the morale of the members, not only . . . the Jewish . . . but . . . the others. . . .”^{*112}

After receiving the final ultimatum of the NEC, the EC began making quiet preparations for a break-away from the WP. However, there were disagreements as to procedure. Hendin, supported by Hardman, proposed an immediate split. The others wanted to continue negotiations with the NEC, meanwhile preparing for a split in case of failure. The latter opinion prevailed. Wishnak and Olgin were elected negotiators, and Hendin was sent on a tour to prepare for the eventuality of a break.

However, Bittelman, aware of the impending break-away, managed, through the NEC, to induce the two negotiators to desert their associates. Wishnak was offered a trip to Russia; Olgin, the sole editorship of the *Freiheit*.^{*113} Olgin and Wishnak returned to the EC with a plan for a new setup in the federation that would conform to the emerging bloc in the party, headed by Foster. Their defection demoralized the rest. And, at the federation convention in December 1923, in New York, the new combination of Communists and “Centrists” were at the helm. Hendin and a few others

were left out. Bittelman was elected secretary. The federation then numbered 60 branches with 1,765 members on their books, but the monthly dues payments showed only 1,050 members, a result of the disorderly internal situation.

But the new patch did not hold for long. The basic friction remained. It flared up anew, and more vigorously, though in a different form, echoing that of the parent party.

Three groups were now struggling in the WP, two for control, the third for the right to exist. The first was headed by Ruthenberg, Pepper, Lovestone and Gitlow; the second, by Foster, Cannon and Bittelman; the third, by Lore, Olgin and Juliet Stuart Poyntz. The first two groups, with the exception of Foster and a few of his former IWW lieutenants, were of the early Communists. Only the third group, the "Centrists," had a common political ground. Their main effort was spent in resisting the encroachment of total Communism, though at that period they were already semidigested. Like a man pushed in a certain direction, resisting every step, but taking it nevertheless, this group, calling themselves only pro-Soviet, resisted Communist domination step by step while steadily yielding to it.

The strength of the Lore-Olgin group came primarily from the Jewish and German federations, and partly the Finnish. The importance of the Jewish group lay, above all, in the sizable number of Lefts active in the trade unions and in the Workmen's Circle, where the major contest between Left and Right was beginning to take shape. And, while not all of the Left belonged to the federation, they worked in the Jewish periphery, and the *Freiheit* was an indispensable weapon to them.

As to the German Federation, not strong industrially—in New York it had considerable influence only among the German bakery workers—it was a well-knit body with its own building and a daily paper that paid its way. Lore was its undisputed leader.

STAGNATION AND DEFEATISM PREVAIL

The feuds among the underground and the warfare between the realigned groupings bewildered the membership. It was impossible to find one's way through the maze of charges and countercharges.

Most of the rank and file, therefore, followed either previous links or popular individuals. (In later stages they simply followed Moscow.)

In the shuffle of the factions in the winter of 1922-1923, the two editors of the *Freiheit*, Olgin and Shachno Epstein, resigned. Benjamin Gitlow was sent in by the party as both editor and business manager; Harry Winitzky, Gitlow's Sancho Pancho, became his assistant. But, not knowing Yiddish and ignorant of Jewish problems, Gitlow's function was merely that of a commissar. The editor *de facto* was Melech Epstein.

Neither the *Freiheit* nor the federation made headway. The uneasiness and distrust that permeated the formation of the WP and the hostility that blazed into the open proved to be the greatest drawback for both. Those who dropped out during the internal struggle in 1921 did not manifest any eagerness to join the new body. And those who did were sharply divided.

The *Freiheit* was saddled with two staffs—adherents of the Ruthenberg and Foster factions—working at cross purposes. The struggle chilled the air around the federation and reduced the effectiveness of the *Freiheit* as a tribune of all the dissident elements in Jewish labor.

The financial neglect of the *Freiheit* made its existence highly precarious. The *Freiheit* was started with but a few thousand dollars cash, hardly sufficient for the first couple of weeks; the founders were confident that the very appearance of the paper would evoke the enthusiastic response of numerous followers.⁺²⁸ As there could be no question of establishing a printing shop, the operation of the paper had to be divided. The business office was at 49 Christy Street; the composition was done in the Up-to-Date Printing Company, on Canal Street; the editorial office was a room in the back of the shop. And the press work was sent to the German *Volkszeitung*.

The "enthusiastic response" was drowned in the stormy internal quarrels. Contributions came in a dribble. On the fourth week neither the Up-to-Date, the *Volkszeitung*, nor the editorial staff were paid. The debt to the *Volkszeitung* was not threatening. Lore saw to it that his publishing association had patience with a sister paper. The Up-to-Date, getting more and more involved, had to

accept payment partly in advance checks. And it took the *Freiheit* many years to make good on these checks.

The high expectation of drawing away a great number of readers from the *Forward* and *The Day* was unwarranted. The *Freiheit* circulation, under 8,000 in the beginning, was negligible in comparison with the other Jewish dailies, to say nothing of its rival, the *Forward*. The paper's above-the-average literary content and its preoccupation with the class struggle were two prime reasons for its small audience. Innovators that they were, and eager to show that they could issue a more serious paper, the editors adopted the latest Yiddish orthography, making reading the paper difficult for those used to the old spelling.

Without any commercial advertising to speak of, the regular income of the *Freiheit* could cover only a fraction of the cost of its publication.

"Commissar" Gitlow, in the thick of factional strife, had to find time to run around to the CEC of the party and to the various institutions within the movement to press them for help to pay the most urgent bills. As one can imagine, salaries for the editorial and the office staff were the least urgent. Continued weeks without pay did not contribute to the maintenance of morale. The spirit of the staff was low and defeatist.

Stagnation at the top was seeping through to the lower units, and would have brought complete disintegration were it not for two decisive factors: the youthful radical element in the postwar immigration that attached themselves to the Communist periphery and the enormous opportunities opened to the Left in the largest bodies of Jewish labor. These two factors lifted the Communists and the *Freiheit* out of the morass and placed them in command of great battles involving masses of people.

14 *New Alignments*

The undertakings of the Workers Party in the 20's were largely of a hit-or-miss character. It did chalk up a few gains on the industrial field, in 1924-1928, but was completely thwarted in its unremitting efforts to enter the political arena through the movement for a labor party, 1922-1924. And, during all this time, a cancerous inner strife was devouring the party's vitals.

The major key to the changing Communist tactics in the 20's could be found, as usual, in Moscow, though one must hasten to add that a number of secondary keys could be looked for here.

In 1923, all hopes for a revolutionary crisis in Europe had disappeared. The abortive uprising in Hamburg, October 23, 1923, started expressly on instructions from Zinoviev over the objections of the German party and of the Comintern emissary, Karl Radek, had shown that the Western European workers had not the slightest desire for revolution. Moscow could draw but one lesson from this defeat.

As a consequence, the Comintern charted a new course. Communist parties were told to discard some of their doctrinaire trimmings and renew their efforts to enter the labor movement and the political life of their countries. But, and precisely because the turn toward the "right" had to be covered by left phrases, those men best qualified to contact bona fide labor groups were purged as "remnants of Social Democracy." (In Germany, they were Brandler and Thalheimer, in 1923.) Another reason was Moscow's desire to have a more submissive top in all the parties.

In the United States, the "remnants" numbered one man, Ludwig Lore. (One cause for Zinoviev's hatred for Lore was Lore's well-known admiration for Trotsky and his ill-concealed dislike for Zinoviev. And the struggle against Trotsky was already brewing in the Kremlin.)

THE MANEUVERS AROUND A LABOR PARTY

Communist maneuvers in the labor party movement is a fantastic tale of deals and double dealing, that finally ensnared them in their own shenanigans. Regretfully, only a few general observations can be given here.

The Communists took notice of the growing sentiment for a national labor party only in the fall of 1922. And the second convention of the Workers Party, December 1922, endorsed the creation of such a party.

The man most responsible for the turn toward a labor party was John Pepper. Pepper took an immense liking to this country, and made up his mind to stay here, if permitted by Moscow. He spent much time in the public library studying American history, and was impressed by the numerous attempts to form a third party. Being accustomed to the broad parliamentary activities of the European Socialists, an experience that his fellow Communists here had never had, the efforts for a labor party fascinated him. However, Pepper's knowledge of America was rather bookish, and Communist totalitarianism precluded collaboration with other groups on a basis of equality.

Pepper's stand coincided with the new Comintern maneuver for the United Front. Its major aim was the strengthening of the Soviet position at the conference of the great powers at Genoa, Italy, April 1922, to which Russia was invited; the Soviet foreign policy was then tuned to establishing trade and diplomatic relations with the outside world.

In December 1921, the ECCI asked for a United Front with all Socialist and labor bodies to work out a common labor policy toward the problems to be dealt with at Genoa. After much hesitation and bickering, the Second International and the Vienna Union (the Second-and-a-Half) met with the Comintern in Berlin. But the meetings brought no accord. One reason was the failure of the

Genoa Conference, Russia and Germany concluding the Rappallo Treaty.

Pepper had no difficulty with his comrades here either. The Ruthenberg people were also looking for a broader political field, and Foster, though distrusting Pepper, did not have to be converted to the idea of a labor party. He had helped the Fitzpatrick group to form such a party in Chicago, in 1919-1920. He also hoped that a labor party might lead to a change of policy in the AFL.

Conveniently forgetting their belittling of parliamentary activity, the WP published a booklet on October 15, 1922, *For a Labor Party*, expressing in simple language and moderate tone its program for such a party. But the WP delegation to the second meeting of the Conference for Progressive Political Action, December 1922, in Cleveland, could not even gain a hearing before the credentials committee. And the delegation of the ACWA, with whom the WP was in amicable relations, refused to support them. The SP voted against the WP, too, though for different reasons. Only the Fitzpatrick people and the delegates from Minnesota voted for them.⁺²⁷

The Communists were not discouraged, nor was Pepper's enthusiasm dimmed. To him the movement for a labor party had revolutionary significance. In an article in the party's monthly, *Liberator*, September 1923, Pepper envisaged that "America faces a third revolution. . . . It will be a revolution of well-to-do and exploited farmers; it will contain elements of the great French Revolution and the Russian Kerensky Revolution. It will not be a proletarian revolution."

THE FINAL FIASCO

The Communists began working for new farmer-labor parties: first, at a convention in Chicago, July 1923, with the aid of the Fitzpatrick-Nockles group; and, second, at a convention in St. Paul, June 1924, their allies being the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party. The entire Left, in all its auxiliaries, was mobilized for these two conventions, and they were easy prey to Communist control. But the inability to treat allies as equals, inherent in Communism, and their haste in forcing through their plans lost them the good will of the Fitzpatrick progressives and later alienated the Minnesota people. At the same time, the CPPA, on the insistence of Senator

Robert M. La Follette, put off the formation of a third party and closed the door on the Communists.

The wide sweep of the La Follette campaign impelled the Communists to support the Senator even from the outside, a realistic move. But the enlarged session of the ECCI, in Moscow April 1924, put its foot down on supporting La Follette without a labor party. Stopped in their tracks, the Communists and their creature, the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, nominated a Presidential ticket: Duncan MacDonald, a former official of the miners' union in Illinois, for President; and William Bouck, a farmer from Washington State, as his running mate.

By the time MacDonald started his campaign tour, the futility and even harmfulness of the entire venture became apparent to its authors. Their FFLP was but a duplication of the WP, and would deceive no one. A drastic shift had to be made. MacDonald's tour was stopped by a telegram, and a WP nomination convention was hastily convened in Chicago, July 10, 1924. William Z. Foster and Benjamin Gitlow were nominated for President and Vice President with the proper fanfare. Placed on the ballot in 14 states, they received 33,361 votes, a tiny fraction of the 4,822,000 cast for La Follette.

A factor in the negligible vote was the lukewarm attitude of the rank and file. Though relieved at not having to work for a bourgeois candidate, they were incapable of an active doorbell-ringing campaign even for their own candidates. Too long had they been taught that elections were of but secondary importance. This slighting attitude toward elections proved a drawback also in 1928 and 1932, when the CP was anxious to register an impressive vote.

The labor party fiasco tore away the thin thread of inner-party harmony during that short period. The old conflicts blazed up anew. Each side blamed the other, and both, taking a cue from the Comintern, assailed the Lore group for Right opportunism. (Lore and his friends, in good old Social Democratic fashion, opposed all the labor party schemes.) +28

RUTHENBERG AND FOSTER; BRIEF SKETCHES

The highly fluid inner situation in the WP was "stabilized" in 1923 into two major factions, one headed by Charles E. Ruthenberg; the

other, by William Z. Foster. The latter gained a majority in the party at the convention of the same year through an unprincipled deal with the Olgin-Lore group and their friends in the garment trade unions.

It would be hard to discern any basic differences between the two major factions. However, the Ruthenberg group shared a common approach, later evolving into the moderate wing in the party. The Foster camp was rather a hodge podge of former syndicalists and Leftist Marxists held together by the popularity of their official leader. This faction developed into the Left Wing of the party, though Foster himself could in no way be labeled a Leftist.

A thumb-nail sketch of the leaders of the factions is in place.

CHARLES E. RUTHENBERG was born in 1882 in the Midwest, of a middle-class family, and was himself a white-collar man. He was tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, though bald. Ruthenberg was not an eloquent speaker, and not well versed in theory, but a clever man and an excellent administrator. His calm bearing and poise, bordering on aloofness, and the prestige that followed him from the SP impressed the rank and file. Ruthenberg was well above his rivals in personal integrity, as this writer can testify from his own experience. Wrapped in his own importance, he was not given to group politics or maneuvers, unless compelled to. He recognized the authority of the Russian leaders, but his long training in the SP made him unwilling to go to Moscow to plead for recognition. And only in 1925, under pressure by his associates, did he go. But he did not crawl. On the contrary, he boldly resisted the efforts of the Kremlin to give the Foster group a larger representation than was due them.

Ruthenberg died in the summer of 1926, in his middle 40's. Had he lived three years longer, to see Stalin rise to power, he would undoubtedly have been purged. Ruthenberg would have been too unmanageable for Stalin.

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER, the second chief contender for leadership, was of a different background. He was born in 1881, in Philadelphia, son of a large and poor Irish-American family. Foster had a hard youth and a varied career. He was a supporter of William Jennings Bryan in 1898, a syndicalist, a member of the SP (he was

among the IWW people expelled in 1912) and a founder of the Trade Union Educational League, in 1915, to work for industrial unionism. He later joined the Chicago Federation of Labor, and, on the recommendation of John Fitzpatrick and Edward Nockles, was appointed to lead the union drives among the meat packers in Chicago, and, later, the steel workers in the Pittsburgh area.

During the war, Foster supported Gompers and spoke in behalf of the Liberty Bonds,¹¹⁴ an unforgivable "crime" that he was repeatedly reminded of, and with much relish, by the other faction. The defeat of the steel strike, 1919-1920, reemphasized for Foster the superiority of industrial unionism. He revived the TUEL, but again without success. Foster was chaffing under the enforced inactivity and lack of recognition. Fitzpatrick could do little for him after his blast against the AFL in his book on the steel strike. He was badly in need of allies, and the Communist Party was no less in need of a man with his trade union background.

One must appreciate the isolation and frustration of this hard-boiled trade unionist to understand his going to Moscow as a delegate to the first congress of the Profintern, 1921. Quiet and cautious by nature, but deeply ambitious, he had sought recognition all his life. But he was too radical for the AFL and not radical enough for anything that existed in the labor movement at that time. And after his failure in the AFL there was nowhere for him to turn. In the Communist movement he saw a chance to realize his ambition to capture the AFL or, in case of failure, to form a second labor center.

The Russians and Foster were quick to realize their mutual advantage from a close association. Anxious to penetrate the AFL, the Russians accepted his TUEL as a basis of operations, and, for that matter, also his strategy. Foster, accustomed to top level trade union politics, had a mechanistic theory for gaining control of the AFL: winning key positions—high offices—in one union after the other through well-knit, determined groups and individual deals. Believing that his policies would benefit the workers, there was no need to reckon with their opinion.

The original device to disguise Foster's Communism soon broke down, due to the Communists' inexperience in handling valuable people and the factional entanglement in the WP. Similar to all front groups, his TUEL was not permitted any semblance of inde-

pendence, and its monthly organ, *Labor Herald*, staffed by known Communists—Earl Browder, Foster's lieutenant, being in charge—defended the party line. Moreover, the affiliation of the TUEL with the Profintern in 1922 and Foster's presence at the Bridgman convention exposed his Communism. The reckless Communist performance in the labor party affair caused his final break with Fitzpatrick. This break was a severe blow to him.

Thwarted in his designs on the AFL, Foster turned his attention to the inner politics in the WP. His heart was now set on wresting the leadership from Ruthenberg.

It must be added that in Foster the Communist American labor lost a competent man. Were it not for the bait held out by Moscow, Foster, in all probability, would have found his way back to the AFL or, later, to the CIO, where his organizing ability would have been useful.

THE "ERADICATION OF LOREISM," 1925

Early in 1923, the Lore followers thought it advisable to bring their case before the Comintern. But Lore, for one reason or another, refused to go, and Olgin was sent instead. The men in the Kremlin knew Olgin from the time of their exile abroad, and Zinoviev and the other leaders took him in hand. Highly flattered by the special attention of the mighty, Olgin returned a faithful toer of the line. With his usual gusto, he began preaching the dictum that "the Comintern knows best."

Olgin's about-face was a sad disappointment to those who had sent him. The Jewish Loreites went over to Olgin. The remaining Loreites were hit still harder by Zinoviev's lashing attack on Lore at the Comintern session the summer of 1924, Foster sitting silent during the entire session.^{*115} Sensing that Lore was marked for expulsion, J. Louis Engdahl, Juliet Stuart Poyntz and the others, for their own survival in the party, deserted him. They joined the Ruthenberg faction, isolating Lore. And they were not wrong. Lore was expelled by the Comintern in April the following year.^{*116} This made the action of the American party a foregone conclusion. Lore was expelled at the fourth convention of the WP, August 21–29, 1925, in Chicago. Only his friends in the German Federation followed Lore.

Lore's expulsion, or, as it was officially called, the eradication of Loreism, was carried out with flowing oratory. The Foster people disavowed him without batting an eyelash. Condemning Loreism was the only harmonious act of the convention. Ruthenberg applied to Lore's expulsion the decorative stamp placed by the Comintern on the purging of independent-minded people, "Bolshevization of the party." *117

Another step toward "Bolshevization" was the decision to do away with the federations. They were officially named sections of the party, and their branches were dissolved. With the branches went the collection of dues. Membership in the sections was to be based only on the party fraction in ethnical mass organizations. This drastically reduced the sphere of activity and authority of the language groups. The convention also decided to reorganize the party on the basis of the shop nucleus.

Otherwise, the convention was shot with venomous factionalism. The factions were two armed camps—each side bringing its own strong-arm men. Only the presence of the cool-headed and composed Comintern rep, P. Gussev (Green), an old Bolshevik, saved the convention from physical clashes. The party emerged from this convention as the Workers (Communist) Party.

Ruthenberg had a valid reason for hailing that convention. His group had gained control, though by a bare majority and only through Gussev's skilful maneuvers. (He succeeded in prying away Cannon from the Foster caucus.) However, instead of the convention leading "toward the building of a mass Communist party," as Ruthenberg had optimistically predicted, it became a point of departure for a more intense, bitter, and ruinous inner warfare.⁺²⁹

The party, rocked by internal conflict, remained ineffectual politically, its influence confined primarily to a small strata of foreign-born. It did not grow beyond its original 16,000-odd members.

The official figures for dues-paying members in 1925 showed that out of 16,325 members only 2,282 were in the English-speaking branches. The rest belonged to 18 language groups. (The Jewish group numbered 1,447 members, and the Russian shrank to 870.) *118

15 *The Expendables*

The persistent Communist efforts in the 20's to penetrate the trade unions met almost the same fate as their intricate maneuvers to break into the general political scene. The underlying reasons were likewise similar: the irreconcilable rift between theory and practice, the internal strife, and dictation by Moscow.

From the very beginning, the Jewish Communists had selected the women's garment workers as likely to be the most receptive audience because of their known militancy. But, as their experience with trade unions was practically nil, their appeals outdid in dogmatism those of their party. A leaflet, *Cloakmakers Awake!*, of October 1920, calling upon them to form a workers council in their industry, condemned the prized gain of the last general strike, week-work instead of piece-work, a goal of all radicals in the apparel industries.

Moreover, the program of the proposed workers council did not recognize "any agreement between capital and labor. We recognize only the uncompromising class struggle with the exploiters, until the overthrow of capitalism." The leaflet finished on a Jewish note: "We, the Jewish workers, . . . cannot and must not remain idle and watch others fighting for us." A. Bittelman and M. Lunin were advertised as speakers at the conference; neither was a member of a trade union.¹¹⁹

These amateurish tactics had to be given up. The CP began seeking a more realistic approach toward the unions. In New York City, Joseph Zack (Goldfedder) became the party's industrial organizer—

his qualifications for that job were not apparent. Zack managed to unite a few straggling groups in the smaller divisions of the food and shoe industries, and in a few other trades neglected by the old craft unions, into a body with the high-sounding name of United Labor Council. Similar attempts, with still less success, were made in other large cities.

In 1921, the Jewish Federation contributed to the merger with the Communists a number of young active trade unionists, men and women who wielded influence among their fellow workers. This was primarily the case in the apparel industries, the painting trades, among the bakery workers, and some smaller trades. Foster, too, aside from his own popularity, brought with him a few experienced trade unionists in the Midwest.

TUEL—A COMMUNIST TOOL

The program of the Trade Union Educational League, after Foster's return from Moscow, formulated three major slogans: the amalgamation of craft unions into industrial unions, militant class struggle instead of class collaboration (the repudiation of various plans for cooperation between labor and management), and labor's independent political action. Of these three, the first, though not new, possessed the strongest appeal for radicals everywhere.

The program stressed that the TUEL was merely "an informal grouping of progressive and revolutionary elements . . . to develop the trade unions from their present antiquated and stagnant condition into modern, powerful labor organizations. . . ." Their goal was "abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' republic."¹²⁰

The last insertion was a political wedge forced in by the party.¹²¹

At the first convention of the TUEL, the end of August 1922, in Chicago, syndicalists, anarchists and even Socialists participated. Foster was known to them as a trade unionist. Feeling keenly the need for a directing center for all oppositional elements in the trade unions, they thought that the TUEL would be such a center. But they soon realized that the TUEL was Communist property.

The signal for the first break with the non-Communists came at the convention itself. All the committees and all the convention reporters were Communists: Jack Johnstone, H. M. Wicks, Alfred

Knudsen, Rose Wortis, Harry Canter, William F. Dunn, O. H. Wangerin. This Communist domination was clinched by the resolution to affiliate with the Profintern.

Those who were ready to overlook the Communist face of the convention had another unpleasant awakening coming. The members of the Workers Party functioned in the TUEL sections—the trade groups were called sections—as party fractions, and voted en bloc at the meetings. This gave them a tremendous advantage over the non-Communists. Most of the latter, unwilling to be pawns in a game of power, left to form their own groups. Only those on the Communist fringe—loosely labeled Left-Wingers—remained in the TUEL. As a consequence, the planned campaigns in most industries did not materialize.

At its second national convention, September 1–2, 1923, in Chicago, the TUEL was already a purely Left-Wing body. All the enormous work to tie in with the local revolts against John L. Lewis in some districts of the United Mine Workers were futile. Only in two sectors, the textile and garment industries, did the TUEL—or, to be precise, the local Communist units—stir up discontent.

THE PHENOMENON OF A MASS OPPOSITION

The trade union movement, during the "golden prosperity" under Harding, Coolidge and Hoover, was rather listless, its numerical strength low. Such a situation could not be called exactly propitious for action involving great numbers of workers, and still less under Communist leadership. Amazingly, such an action actually did take place, and on several industrial fronts. The most significant in scope and the longest in duration was that in the apparel industries, where the Communists were battling the Right Wing for hegemony, a battle that lasted from 1923 well into 1928.

Tens of thousands of workers throughout the country, overwhelmingly Jewish, participated in these battles, both sides mobilizing their resources outside of the unions involved. The issues at stake went beyond organized labor. A Communist victory in the unions in the 20's would have secured for them a foothold in the AFL and would have raised them to a strategic, perhaps even a dominating, position in Jewish society. No wonder the reverberations of this

dramatic and violent struggle echoed loudly in the community at large.

At various stages in this furious contest, the Communists captured the largest affiliates of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, in most of the garment centers. They also won the International Fur Workers' Union, held positions in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, in the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Union, in textiles, food, house painting, and in local unions of bakers, structural iron workers and a number of other trades. The Communists and the Left opposition were very near to establishing their control over the women's garment industry, were it not for the web of factional feuds in the party and its subservience to the dictates of Moscow. They did manage to take over and retain the Fur Workers' Union in New York and in other cities.

In analyzing this phenomenon, one must take account of the uniqueness of the human element and the peculiarities of the structure and development in these apparel industries. But first a few basic observations are essential:

1. The Communist-Left was not the first to stimulate discontent in these industries; oppositional groups had sprung up earlier.

2. The CP did not send in any emissaries there to stir up trouble, as they tried to do in other industries. The opposition and the fighting sprang up from inside, led by Communists and their sympathizers in the unions.

3. The masses of workers who supported the Communist-Left opposition in spectacular and turbulent fighting were not in the least affected by the Communist doctrine or propaganda; they were simple men and women unaware or uninterested in the Communism of their leaders, a considerable portion of them members of Orthodox synagogues. They sided with the opposition in the belief that it voiced their grievances and sought to protect their rights within the union and their security in the industry.

4. The grave issues over which the opposition and the administration—the Right Wing—were battling had their roots primarily in the complicated nature of the industries, the deteriorating inner life of the unions, and fear of innovations. The political slogans injected by the Communists were simply ignored.

Technological changes in methods of production, small split-up

units, dependence upon the whim of style and fashion, the extreme seasonal character of work, and the keen rivalry for the buyer, intensified a fluid situation in the apparel industries in the 20's. To this was added the delicately balanced relations between "inside" and "outside" shop, jobber and contractor, week-work and piece-work, and the out-of-town migration. Stability within the industries and sound relations between the employers' associations and the unions were a prime urgency. Only a bold and far-sighted policy could achieve this. There were a few constructive minds on both sides. But those in the associations were hamstrung by the die-hards, and those in the unions by the workers' deep distrust of the employers.

Industrial instability was paralleled by a noticeable decline in union democracy. Built by the immense suffering of many thousands of men and women in protracted strikes and bloody picket lines, these unions could well stand comparison with others for their democratic spirit, broad social horizons and wide range of activities, of which education was an organic part. But age and success often alter men. Youthful fires were beginning to burn low among the second layer of union officialdom. A number of officers were closing their eyes to industrial sore spots, and relying more and more on machine politics to maintain power. In some local unions, officers were accused of ballot-box-stuffing and corruption.

The following plaintive lines in the organ of the Right-Wing Socialist Farband, at the beginning of the Left-Right fight, are illuminating: "Many Jewish unions," wrote the editor, "are really not in the best order. Here and there . . . errors are committed and things happen that shouldn't. Not all leaders who are known as "Rights" are on the same moral level. Among the "Rights" are regretfully quite a bunch of simple careerists, ignoramuses and plain nobodies. It is only natural that among sections of the workers ill feeling has been accumulated against the union, which they confuse with this or another officer. This dissatisfaction . . . is artificially inflated and exploited by the Communists." *¹²²

In the discussion on the report on trade unions by Morris Siskind, labor editor of the *Chicago Forward*, at the fourth convention of the Farband, December-January 1926, some of the speakers complained that a number of union officers had joined the Socialist

Party in order to get its support, and not to carry out Socialist duties.*¹²³

STIRRING UP MASS DISCONTENT

The Communists and their friends of the TUEL did not have to dig far for their criticism. Workers' distrust of union officers had been the underlying reason for several "affairs" in some of the unions, notably the stormy Dr. Isaac A. Hourwich affair, in 1914, and the Moishe Rubin revolt, in 1916, among the cloak and suit workers. In the ladies' waist and dressmakers' Local 25, composed mostly of girls, the discontent was channeled through the Current Events Club, the Shop Delegate League and the Workers Council. The latter was already influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution; a paragraph in its constitution was demonstratively lifted from the Soviet constitution.

Benjamin Schlesinger, president of the ILGWU, hoped to curb the spread of this radical restiveness by dividing Local 25 in two. In the face of the active resistance of the union executive board, he separated those who worked on dresses, the hotbed of discontent, forming a new union for them, Local 22. But he could not foresee that the new local would grow rapidly with the expansion of its industry, becoming the strongest base of the Communist-Left opposition.

The great advantage of the Communist-Left lay in crystallizing these scattered and lingering oppositional moods, shaping them into a unified and effective mass opposition. Obviously, they had to sharpen and inflate the discontent. But party dictates eventually turned this advantage into a grievous disability.

To the Communists in the unions, the basic industrial difficulties stemmed from the class collaboration policy of the leaders. They agitated for a more militant course and "a return of the union to the workers, through shop committees."

THE PROGRAM AND THE LEADERS

The program for the garment trades adopted at the third conference of the Needle Trades Section of the TUEL, September 1925, in New York City, were an admixture of industrial measures and purely political and Communist slogans:

1. Amalgamation of all craft unions into industrial unions, a step in the fusing of all garment unions into one union.
2. Reorganization of the unions on the basis of shop committees (shop delegates).
3. Political action in the form of a labor party.
4. Recognition of Soviet Russia.

The Communist doctrine had to be wedged in too: "Even if all these reforms would be introduced, we would still be far from the dictatorship of the proletariat or the Communist system." *124 However, the political slogans were totally disregarded when the struggle assumed a mass scale.

The TUEL sections were headed by a group of able, energetic people: Charles S. Zimmerman, Rose Wortis, dressmakers; Joseph Boruchowitz, Isidor Stenzor, cloak and suit workers; Ben Gold and Aaron Gross, of the Furriers' Joint Board; and Louis Nelson, in the ACWA. Their contact with the party was through the needle trades committee of the TUEL, in reality a subcommittee of the CEC of the party. Zimmerman acted as the district organizer for the TUEL and the party whip in the fractions.

The Communists had the valuable support of Louis Hyman, a Left-Winger but never a Communist, who held an important position in the Tailors' and Finishers' Local 9, ILGWU. Hyman's immense popularity with the workers made him a highly useful man. When the Communists fought their ouster and the "reorganization" of their locals, in 1925, he was the chairman of the Joint Action Committee that waged the struggle for reinstatement. In 1926, he was the general manager of the Left joint board and the chairman of the general strike committee. Hyman often resisted party encroachment, but not vigorously enough.

The party erected a sort of a pyramid in the unions, called fractions, the higher superimposed on the lower. The Communists in the highest union body formed the top fraction. Those in the lower union bodies were the leading fraction, and the rank and file members were the general fraction. Party decisions were worked out in conjunction with, and sometimes against, the opinion of the top fraction; and from there it was relayed to the leading fraction, and then to the general fraction. The fractions were not denied the right to discuss decisions of the party. But the discussions over, they had automatically to submit and carry them out. Left-Wingers

disagreeing with a party decision had the choice of resigning from the TUEL. But the majority, anxious for some sort of participation in the oppositional movement, preferred Communist domination to being left outside.

THE ISSUES, REAL AND FANCIED; THE OUSTER

In common with all oppositions, the Communist-Left in the garment trades mixed fact with fancy. Visionaries in their industrial approach, justified grievances were topped with demands far advanced for that period. And, in the ILGWU, where the Communist-Left had a wider base than in the other unions, they succeeded in 1924 in winning three important local unions in New York, 1 (later 117), 9 and 22. They also won a number of locals outside New York.

The Communist-Left was no longer a mere opposition; it controlled highly strategic positions in the union, and the contest for control over the entire ILGWU was looming. An open break was inescapable, and had the Right Wing been more patient and prudent, waiting for the Left to show its Communist hand, the immediate outcome might have been quite different.

Morris Sigman, now IGLWU president, had previously been close to the Left on industrial problems. A former IWW, he was strongly for merging the craft unions into industrial bodies, and did merge a couple of them. Non-political, a man of action and integrity, he nurtured a bias against the officialdom, and would always listen attentively to complaints of ordinary members. In the beginning of his term, he hoped that his aggressive program would bring him the support of the Left. Actually, there was a moment when Sigman and the Communist-Left were ready to enter into a working arrangement. But the party's insistence on including political demands in the negotiations destroyed that chance.

His personal courage and strength of character notwithstanding, Sigman was a pathetic figure. Though having many individual followers, he belonged to no major group and was a stranger in the *Forward*. Appearing before the EC of the large Local 1, machine operators, February 27, 1923, he pleaded with the Left, "Those who rightfully insist on freedom of opinion within the union should not deny the president the same freedom. You can criticize as much as you want, but why the insults and abuse!" *125

However, in the following two years, he realized that the Com-

munist Party was masterminding the Left opposition and would step into the union with both feet if the latter won out. He then decided on a sledge-hammer blow, without giving a thought to whether it was constitutional or not, nor its impact on the membership.*¹²⁸

Sigman suddenly brought charges of anti-union activities against the three Left unions, Locals 1, 9 and 22. The charges were based on a speech delivered by M. Olgin at their joint May 1st celebration, 1925, in Carnegie Hall, which ended with "Long live a Soviet America." A special committee of the GEB found the three unions guilty, removed their officers and executive boards and reorganized them without the Left. This ill-chosen and badly timed move only rallied the majority of the workers around the ousted. They considered Sigman's official reason flimsy and the removal a violation of basic democratic rights.

Labor circles in New York were impressed by the two large affairs which the Joint Action Committee, formed by the removed administration of the three locals, was able to stage after the ouster: the Yankee Stadium meeting, May 9th, and the work stoppage, August 20th. About 30,000 workers participated in the latter. Fearful for the very existence of the ILGWU, prominent Socialists and labor men, Morris Hillquit and Ab. Cahan among them, prevailed upon Sigman to come to terms with the Left. This required the settling of a major demand of the opposition, proportional representation of the local unions to the national conventions and to the city joint boards.

The large unions had always felt that they were being discriminated against. The delegations to the conventions were not in true proportion to the size of each union, and in the joint boards there was no difference at all in representation. It was charged that the GEB favored the small locals because of their dependence on the national office for assistance. After long negotiations, a compromise was reached with the Left on this and other controversies. They had to be ratified by a special convention, in Philadelphia, November 30, 1925.

COMMUNISTS TAKE OVER; THE DISASTROUS STRIKE

This compromise, agreed to by Sigman, was not approved by the Right Wing at the convention. The Left there claimed a majority,

and accused the administration of making free use of small locals and even creating paper locals to maintain their control of the convention. At one point, the Right refusing to yield on proportional representation, the Left delegates, led by Hyman, walked out of the convention.

The Right Wing, not knowing whether the walk-out was on party instructions, felt uneasy, and might have met the Left half way. But the Left was denied any bargaining advantage they might have derived from such a bold step. Comintern policy in the 20's being opposed to dual unions, the party rep in Philadelphia, picturesque William F. Dunne, told Hyman to return, "even if you have to crawl on your belly." The Left went back, and the Right Wing breathed easier.⁺⁸⁰

After much further bickering, an uneasy peace was patched up between the two camps.

Reinstated in the three locals, the Communist-Left took over the New York Cloak and Dress Joint Board, a delegated body in these trades and the largest affiliate of the ILGWU. Six months later, all the similar bodies of the ILGWU, here and in Canada, were under Communist control. The only exception was Philadelphia. The Communists were approaching their goal, the ILGWU. But the strike called by the Left joint board in the New York cloak and suit industry, July 1926, proved their undoing.

The national officers recommended acceptance of the terms of the Governor's Commission as a basis for the negotiations with the associations for a new agreement. But to accept mediation by a governor's commission would have been tantamount to the despised class collaboration; besides, not all the terms were favorable to the union. The strike, called on July 1, 1926, involving about 50,000 people, emptied the shops, the Right Wing cooperating in the beginning. Had it been settled in a reasonable time and on reasonable terms, the prestige of the Communist leadership would have been greatly enhanced and their grip on the union strengthened.

Zimmerman, Boruchowitz, Hyman and other leading Lefts were aware of the dire necessity for a timely settlement on the eve of the working season. But they were not the sole masters of the situation. In the driver's seat was the Workers (Communist) Party, and the party was gravely disabled by factionalism. On the eighth week of the strike, the leaders were ready with a tentative and quite a

favorable agreement with the largest employers' association. But before making any further step they had to secure the party's approval. When they appeared at the New York party headquarters, 114 Second Avenue, the party committee, composed of the two warring factions, could not make up its mind, each afraid to be accused of Right-Wing opportunism. First consenting then hesitating, the party committee finally sent the strike leaders back with instructions to continue the strike until more demands would be met.

Zimmerman, Boruchowitz, Rose Wortis, Isidor Stenzor, active Communists, bowed to the party's will with a heavy heart. Their timetable for a settlement had been knocked out. The employers, seeing that the season was being lost, stiffened their resistance.

FOSTER DOES NOT FORGIVE NOR FORGET

The six-months-long turbulent strike of 12,000 furriers, that began February 16, 1926, had just ended. The Communist top of that strike had won out against the active hostility of the AFL and the intransigence of the association. (The furriers' union was taken over by the Communists in 1925.) However, the party was still embroiled in a protracted and violent strike in the textile city of Passaic, New Jersey, which sapped its strength and finances. Common sense dictated that the party should welcome the opportunity to terminate the strike of 50,000 garment workers on fair terms, and thus consolidate a strategic position in the ILGWU and, ultimately, in the AFL. But the party's lack of common sense was matched by its utter disregard for the bread and butter of the mass of strikers. The Ruthenberg-Lovestone-Gitlow-Bedacht faction was willing to back their people in the conduct of the strike. But Foster, casting aside his accumulated experience with mass strikes, kept insisting on "broadening the scope" of the strike. The garment workers were expendable to him.

Foster was motivated by animosity. The Communists in the garment unions had previously looked up to him as a man who had led great strikes. But, after he maneuvered himself into the role of titular head of a Leftist caucus, they deserted him and turned to the more moderate Ruthenberg group. Foster, desiring to punish his enemies, kept criticizing them for lack of militancy, even when they were in control of the union.*127

The other faction was not saintly either. In a relaxed moment, Jay Lovestone admitted to his inner circle that the garment trade unions were "tossed about like a football" between the factions. When the strike was clearly on the downgrade, the strike committee straining every resource to steer it to an orderly conclusion, the party, under pressure by Foster and over the signature of Ruthenberg, handed them an explosive missile, an order by the political committee to raise immediately the issue of amalgamation of all garment trade unions into one industrial union.*¹²⁸

This highly controversial and no less complicated inter-union issue, totally irrelevant to the desperate economic struggle of so many thousands of men and women, could only have further damaged the strike in the eyes of the public, weaken and confuse the strikers and encourage the Right Wing, who were already preparing to defeat the Communist leadership. Gambling with the livelihood of the strikers could only be explained by the fear of the Ruthenberg camp of appearing before Moscow as Right-Wing deviators.

This time the strike leaders refused to carry out party instructions. But Ben Gold, representing a small union and having nothing to lose, obligingly staged a march of a couple of hundred furriers to the meeting of the general strike committee, demanding amalgamation. The ILGWU top could not miss seeing the Communist Party behind this clumsy issue. They resolved to take over the strike situation.+³¹

LEFT IS FIGHTING IN A VACUUM; THE NEW LINE

The strike dragged on for six months, at a cost of more than three million dollars. The ILGWU officers, headed by Sigman and David Dubinsky, manager of the Cutters' Union Local 10, who emerged as the brain of the administration, stepped in December 13, 1926, took over the conduct of the strike, settled it as best they could, and dissolved the joint board and the Left locals. Every worker was required to register anew in the reorganized union. The same pattern was carried out in the other cities.+³²

The Communist-Left offered resistance; they were still able to rally a considerable following. But their hands were tied. They could not propose a new union to their angry and desperate adher-

ents, nor could they reinstate them collectively in the old ones. This spelled frustration. And, though they called several big meetings, they were operating in a vacuum. Meanwhile, demoralization in the shops was growing and the garment market was turned into a veritable battleground, both sides bringing in all the "strong arguments" they could master. There were many victims. But the results were predestined. The hard core of the Communist-Left in the ILGWU were thrown out.*

The void was ended for the expelled only at the end of 1929. In Moscow, the pendulum swung toward a Left course. The prognosis by the Comintern, in the summer of 1928, of the coming of the revolutionary crisis was implemented at the Fourth Congress of the Profintern, October 1929, by instructions to Communists of all lands to begin forming new unions around revolutionary trade union centers. In this country, the TUEL was to be that center.

Accordingly, the remnants of the Communist-Left in the ILGWU—and they were reduced to remnants—banded together with the furriers to form the Needle Trades Industrial Union, on New Year's Eve 1930. But this union, actually a dual union to the ILGWU, was too little and too late. It folded up in 1934. In the same period, the Communists organized a number of other independent or opposition unions: the National Maritime Union, the National Textile Union and the National Miners Union. The International Workers Order, based on the expelled Left in the Workmen's Circle, was also formed in 1930.

In summing up, one peculiar aspect of the long, costly and passionate strife in the ILGWU must be underlined. The bread and butter of the workers was not a genuine nor an immediate issue, because they were not at stake—the strike in 1926 excepted. It was primarily the lingering undercurrent of discontent with the internal affairs in the union that served the Communist-Left as a lever. That they could sway masses of people with this issue testifies to the excitability of Jewish workers, their innate skepticism of people in authority and their jealous concern for their rights.

* For a detailed study of the Left-Right contest for power in the ILGWU and the struggle in the other garment trades, men's tailoring, fur and cap and millinery, see Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A. 1914-1952*, Ch. "Civil War," and the following chapters.

16 *Victory Among Defeats*

In the second large garment union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the Communist-Left were defeated earlier. It never won the mass following of the Left in the ILGWU, nor its strategic position. As in the ILGWU, the early oppositional tendency was a unified affair of Left-Wingers, Socialists and anarchists. They were the people on whom Hillman and Schlossberg had leaned in holding the line against the former UGW elements. But the ranks of the opposition were split because of Communist control. And, as had happened elsewhere, the Communist-Left gradually assumed the sole captaincy of the opposition.

The difference in the human element—the men's tailors had always been less articulate—the absence of an able and popular leadership such as those in the ILGWU and the fur workers' union, and the stern measures adopted by Hillman prevented the Left from making any appreciable headway. Of the three young men who headed the opposition, Sam Lipzin, William Abrams and Louis Nelson, only the latter was a skilful tactician. (More about Nelson in Chapter 10.)

The strength of the Left was primarily in the two Jewish locals, 4 and 5, under their control, with a combined membership of about 8,000, and the Pressers' Union Local 3, also Jewish. But these locals were quickly reorganized, and the active Lefts expelled.

In contrast to the ILGWU, the discontent among the men's tailors flowed largely from their fear of technological innovations—new machines and production standards—that aimed to increase

output. The tailors were apprehensive of the basting machine, the pressers of the pressing machines, and the operators of the specialized operating machines. Skilled workers generally are antagonistic to machines that reduce the necessity or value of their skill. Hillman, consenting to their installation to prove to the employers that the union would not stand in the way of higher efficiency, set against him the very people who had helped him to build the union over the resistance of both the employers and the AFL. As to the Communists, they did their utmost to play up the fear of the machine and the opposition to production standards.

HILLMAN'S NEW ORIENTATION

Parenthetically, Hillman openly advocated the two-lane idea of unionism at a time when the radical one-lane approach still prevailed in the garment trade unions.⁺⁸⁸ An editorial in the ACWA paper, in 1925, during the height of the internal struggle stated this clearly:

A progressive labor union . . . does not limit itself merely to questions of workers' wages and hours. It strives to . . . solve the special problems in the industry, . . . the abolition of waste, the quality of production, the conditions of marketing. . . .

Wages and hours themselves will not lead the workers to the social paradise. . . . Steady employment is necessary. . . . The workers are vitally interested in the welfare of the industry. This is true as much for capitalist America as for Socialist Russia.^{*129}

The opposition, the ACWA Joint Action Committee, called a stoppage and tried to hit the union by urging the workers not to pay dues until the ousted and expelled would be reinstated. They did manage to inflict great harm, but were checked by Abraham Beckerman, the new general manager of the joint board. Beckerman, previously a Socialist soap-box orator, who had migrated here from England, threw into the fray what B. Charney-Vladek appropriately termed "Beckerman's knuckles."

Beckerman became the chief of the Committee to Save the Unions, set up to mobilize support for the Right Wing battling the Communists in the unions. And the opposition in the ACWA was beaten in 1926, though it did not really die until 1929.

As to the economic motives for the opposition, later experience

proved the fear of the machine groundless. The introduction of piece rates, of specialized machines and the section system—a sort of assembly line—have benefited both the market and the union in New York.⁺³⁴

STUBBORN FIGHTING IN HEADGEAR INDUSTRY

The fighting in the headgear industry was on a formidable scale. In capmaking, the oldest immigrant trade, there were strong Daniel De Leon traditions, which made the workers more susceptible to the Left talk against "class collaboration." In the millinery trade, the girls, similar to those in the dress trade, were swayed by social romanticism. The girls were the shock troops of the Communist opposition, and, for a time, took over the large Local Union 24. The Communists also controlled some cap locals in Boston, St. Paul and other cities.

The national office reorganized the millinery union, expelled the active Communists, and demanded from every worker a registration card of the new union as a condition for remaining in the shop. But a considerable number of the girls stuck to the Communist group to the very end. They fought in the shops against the registration and resisted the police with a fervor and abandon peculiar to young girls. The party emissary, a young woman who went by the name of June Crowl, a fiery and reckless speaker, contributed greatly to the stubborn fighting raging in the millinery market.

The Right Wing of the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Union was headed by a number of energetic and determined men.⁺³⁵ After a few years of division and confusion, the Right was able to eradicate Communist influence by the same old method, reorganization of locals.

COMMUNIST VICTORY AMONG FURRIERS

Only in the fur industry did the Communists defeat their Right opponents. The reasons were:

1. The smaller size and compactness of the industry, occupying a short strip of a few blocks in the upper 20's, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues.
2. A large number of young people, *landslite* from Bessarabia, who stuck together.

3. Ben Gold and Aaron Gross were a pair who complemented each other. Both entered the shop in their teens and knew the trade intimately. Gold, a fervent speaker with a hysterical tone in his voice, was a master at arousing the emotions and prejudices of his listeners, while Gross, always in the background, was the quiet, shrewd planner. Gold was excellent in frontal attacks, Gross skillfully applied the old formula of divide and rule. The latter was an expert in the art of nibbling away at an enemy while concluding peace treaties with them. Gross was behind the temporary appeasement of William Green during the strike of 1926, and the unscrupulous unity deals with individual Right-Wingers that demoralized and scattered the ranks of the adversary and saved the situation for the Left. Gold, the prima donna, would never unbend sufficiently to strike a compromise with the enemy, even for a short while.

Another factor was that the Gold-Gross team never let the party interfere in their strategy. Loyal Communists, they displayed the proper piety to all party doctrines. But they drew one borderline, the conduct of their union. Gold resisted the party's meddling adamantly; Gross did the same politely, with a friendly and knowing smile.

(Aaron Gross was seriously injured by thugs during the Left-Right fight. He joined the Lovestonites break with the party in 1929, and was vilified as a renegade by his former close comrades in the union. Gross never recovered from his injuries and died in Los Angeles in the early 30's.)

The party, anxious to fortify Gold's Communism and its own grip on the union, sent in Irving Potash, a staunch Communist, as a sort of political adviser and commissar. But, instead of exercising political supervision, the mild Potash became Gold's shadow; no one could have escaped this role if he wanted to function in Gold's union.

THE FREIHEIT PASSES THE AMMUNITION

The picture of the fighting in the unions—and, for that matter, in the Workmen's Circle—would not be complete without touching on the vital part played by the daily press. The printed word had always been a weighty factor in all the moves and struggles of Jew-

ish labor. The labor press was a trumpeter calling for action, a teacher and an organizer. These, essentially, were the roles of the organs of the two rival camps in the 20's, the *Forward* and the *Freiheit*. Their job was not merely to indulge in polemics, carrying the fight into the other camp, but to supply ammunition—arguments—and bring encouragement to their own followers. And though neither of the papers ever admitted a setback, a keen reader could penetrate the propaganda clouds and judge for himself who had the upper hand that day.

Of course, no one could for a moment compare the *Forward* with the *Freiheit*. The former in the 20's reached a circulation of nearly 200,000, while the *Freiheit* at the peak of the struggle never went beyond a paid circulation of 14,000 throughout the country, including 1,800 in Canada. Still, this circulation did not prevent it from becoming the mouthpiece of a turbulent and exciting fight involving masses of people.

(The *Freiheit* began without an ABC check, and the management, wishing to hide the deeply disappointing circulation, greatly inflated it in the first post office report. As the paper had to show a steady growth, the subsequent reports could but tell of a proportionate climb in the number of readers; standing still would have reflected badly on the entire movement.+⁸⁰)

The effectiveness of the *Freiheit*, and the Communist opposition generally, did not depend on numbers. The total strength of the Communists in all the party fractions in the needle trade unions was somewhat less than 1,500. And the TUEL sections in these unions did not exceed that figure.*¹⁸⁰ Yet, these less than three thousand people carried with them a great number of workers. The *Freiheit* was the voice of this small but highly articulate and disciplined minority and their close followers. It conveyed the daily slogans of the struggle to its few readers in every shop. It took up and answered the challenges in the *Forward*, and, in the heat of the struggle, delighted its readers—and through them the larger mass of the opposition—with indiscriminate invectives against the leading Right-Wingers. Not that the *Forward* was more restrained in its treatment of the Left, but no one could outdo the *Freiheit* in the resourcefulness of its abuse.

The scope of the mass involvement and the depth of feeling aroused can be gauged by the steady drop in the circulation of the

Forward. When the loss reached 26,000 in New York City, in the summer of 1926, a small conference of leading people was called in the *Forward* to take stock of a bad situation. About seven people were present. A few, alarmed by the loss of readers, suggested a milder tone toward the Communist-Left and the Soviet Union. Nathan Chanin opposed any change. He was strongly supported by Ab. Cahan. "The circulation of the *Forward*," the old editor said, "is not of prime importance now. The implacable struggle against Communism must take precedence." Coming from Cahan, to whom the mass circulation of the *Forward* was a crowning achievement, this refusal to retreat from a chosen position was an expression of his strength of will.¹³¹

As for *The Day*, it could not escape being affected by the passion of the struggle. It steered an officially impartial but actually a friendly course toward the opposition. As a result, the paper gained thousands of new readers. Sympathizers of the opposition who found the *Freiheit* unreadable turned to *The Day*.

HILLQUIT CAUSES ARREST OF COMMUNIST EDITORS

Two libel suits, one a civil the other a criminal, were brought against the *Freiheit* in the course of the struggle—the *Daily Worker* was involved only in the second. They are fair examples of the recklessness and the utter disregard for the truth in dealing with adversaries that had become the trade mark of the Communist press.

The civil libel case was brought by Morris Sigman, in the midst of the furious conflict, for the stories in the paper implying that his small weekend camp on a lake in Iowa, run by his wife and brother, was an immoral amusement place. Particularly offensive was the "hot mamma" cartoon. Magistrate Brodsky permitted the *Freiheit* lawyer, Joseph Brodsky, to air the entire struggle, its origin and background, in court. The hearing lasted about a week, and the courtroom was jammed with Left-Wingers. The accused were put under a token bail of \$25 each. Sigman immediately realized that at best the punishment would never fit the crime, and that the Communist-Left was taking full advantage of the publicity aroused by the hearings; the case was not pursued.

The Morris Hillquit criminal suit against the two papers grew out of the repeated accusations in the *Freiheit*—echoed in the *Daily*

Worker—that Hillquit “stole” or “cheated” shares worth \$140,000 belonging to the former Left-Wing joint board and the three Left local unions.

But Hillquit had misjudged the character of the people running the Communist press. The indictment against Robert Minor, Bill Dunn, M. Olgin and Melech Epstein—the latter had nothing to do with the editorial policy of the paper at that time—did not restrain the papers in the least. Indeed, the indictments were highly welcome to them. Pressed for exciting issues and loaded with heavy deficits, the papers saw in Hillquit’s jailing of their editors an excellent opportunity for propaganda against the Right Wing and for fund-raising among their followers. The arrest of Minor and Olgin, February 28, 1929, was carefully staged. They were allowed to address the crowds assembled in front of the papers on Union Square. The arrests were given the biggest spread; Hillquit, the SP and the ILGWU were vehemently denounced. Minor and Olgin purposely stayed overnight in the Tombs for greater dramatic effect, the ILD holding up the bail until the next day. (Epstein, out of town, was arrested four days later.)

The *Freiheit* put to good use the sensation caused by the arrests. Masterminded by Paul Novick and Paul Yuditz, it opened a new attack on Hillquit in a series of articles that appeared in the first half of March. And to prove the charges of cheating and stealing, the articles contained photostats of the shares and selected excerpts from minutes of the court proceedings. This maneuver worked. The ordinary reader found it hard to orientate himself in the barrage of questions asked by the counsel for the Left, Louis B. Budin. His opinion was formed by the screaming headlines and the “explanations” preceding and following the excerpts.

The true facts of the case could be judged from the excerpts themselves. During the big strike of 1926, the Left joint board and the three Left local unions had placed union shares worth \$140,000 of the International Union Bank with the bank as collateral for a loan. Two years after their expulsion from the ILGWU, they brought suit in the State Supreme Court demanding the return of the shares. But Hillquit, counsel for the union, had already obtained a change in the ownership of the shares, reassigning them to the new officers of the affiliates involved. This was his crime. The

court held that the shares were the property of the unions and not of individuals.

Hillquit, like Sigman before him, had no desire to make the Communist editors martyrs to their people, and the suits were dropped.

DEVASTATION IN THE WAKE OF THE INNER FIGHT

The Communists in the garment trade unions were routed. Since that time they never mustered enough strength for a like assault on the Right-Wing leadership. But the devastating fight, also raging in other unions, left the Jewish labor movement emaciated. Often reaching the fury of a civil war, it had been costly in human life—several dead and hundreds injured and maimed—workers thrown out of their shops, many hundreds of court cases and millions of dollars. The rank and file were exhausted, and apathy became widespread.

(The most brutal killings were the bombing of Morris Langer, an organizer for the Left-Wing furriers' union, and the knifing of Harry Silver, a young member of the Right-Wing Hebrew Butchers' Union, Local 234, by William Shifren, a Communist furrier strong-arm man. The latter occurred during a fight between the pickets of the Right-Wing union and the "defenders" of the Left opposition union in front of a butcher shop in the Bronx.⁺⁸⁷)

The violent struggle caused no small damage to the morale of the movement. The comment and warning by Nathan Chanin, during the height of the fighting, are illuminating: "Thanks to the fight led by the Communists during the last five years, plenty of undesirable elements have cuddled up to the Jewish labor movement and have turned it into a business for their own aims and interests. There are plenty of such persons in the fur, cloakmakers, fancy leather goods, painters and other unions. They and the Communists, without collusion, have brought the present disaster to Jewish labor. While we conduct the fight against the Communists, we must at the same time also vigorously fight the so-called Rights which have brought dishonor to the Right Wing movement." ^{*132}

Chaim Kanterowitz, a Marxist intellectual, writing on the same subject in the same weekly, stated: "Both sides use such means that will forever remain stains on the movement. An internal struggle

between tendencies has been turned into a guerrilla fight in the full sense of the word. Now, to ask who are the saints and who the villains is silly. We are convinced that all the villains are to be found among the Communists; they are convinced that all the villains are among us. It will take a long time until the objective historian will be able (if he will be able) to reveal the true history of the present struggle. However, one thing is certain, the Left are guilty for the manner in which the fight is being conducted. . . . They have imposed the guerrilla fighting. . . . They have justified it theoretically and made a principle of it." *133

There was a marked difference in most of the unions in the treatment by the victorious Right of their defeated Lefts and that meted out by Ben Gold to his defeated Rights. In the former, the Left remained in their shops, their union rights taken away for only a few years. In the furriers' union, the oppositionists were driven out of their shops.

The most important units of the ILGWU retained but a skeleton of their former strength. Benjamin Schlesinger—who again became president of the ILGWU in 1928; David Dubinsky, secretary-treasurer; Isidore Nagler, manager of the Cloak and Dress Joint Board; Julius Hochman, and a host of lesser officials and active people * had to work hard to restore the confidence of the workers and to rebuild the shattered unions. And when this essential aim was in sight, the crippling paralysis of the great depression, 1930–1933, set in.

In assessing the ceaseless Communist industrial efforts in the first decade, 1919–1929, one must, in all objectivity, draw attention to these two facts:

1. The Communists and the Left sparked organized resistance to spreading bureaucracy in many unions, clothing and coal mining in particular.

2. They were among the first to call public attention to the misery and helplessness of the unorganized and semiskilled. In the East, it was in Passaic, Fall River and New Bedford, 1926–1928; in the South, Gastonia, North Carolina, 1928–1929. The furious strikes

* To mention a few: Joseph Breslaw, George Rubin, Charles Kreindler, Jacob Halpern, Moe Falikman, Nicholas Kirtzman, Benjamin Kaplan, Rubin Zuckerman, Harry Fisher, Morris Bialis (Chicago) and Louis Stulberg (Midwest).

in textiles were at a time when union leadership, by and large, refused to take organizational risks in that "open" industry.

It must be noted, however, that in most cases the initiative came from local Communist members of their respective unions. Moved by the crusading zeal of early Communism, they seized upon any favorable opportunity to forge oppositional groups or to lead unorganized masses. Only when a local situation reached the stage requiring the decision of a party policy-maker was the national office brought in to the scene.

That in the end the CP reaped only the whirlwind has to be attributed mainly to its dogmatism. By subordinating today's needs of the workers to a nebulous tomorrow, the party could but make a mess of the former. The slight gains it did register on the industrial sector were negligible compared with the vast expenditure of men, time and money.

17 *The Contest in the Workmen's Circle*

The Communist battles in predominately Jewish unions are but one part of the story of their penetration. Battles of no less magnitude, wrapped in an ideological package, were fought in the fraternal movement, in postwar relief, on the educational and cultural sectors. There was hardly an area which the Communists did not try to infiltrate, to gain a foothold in, or to dominate. This chapter deals with the major contest for control that nearly wrecked the largest and oldest fraternal body, the Workmen's Circle (*Arbeiter Ring*).

The WC was the first mass organization in which a Communist group made itself heard. Immediately after the split in 1919, the Communists began a concerted propaganda in many WC branches. In the absence of economic issues in the order, they could not gain mass attention. Still, they did cause friction in a small number of branches.

Two years later, 1921, after the Communists were unified, a committee of 15 was formed for work in the WC. But the committee could do little to widen its sphere of influence. The Communists were hampered by the friendly attitude of the WC to the Soviet government. Like the rest of Jewish labor, the WC participated actively in the relief campaigns for the Jewish population there and for the famine-stricken on the Volga. In a congratulatory message on the fifth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, the NEC of the WC wrote: "We are happy that our greetings and fraternal best wishes to the Russian Soviet government is accompanied by a mod-

est but proper contribution from our order—the building of a hospital in Gomel (Byelorussia)” *134

No one could deny the democratic character of the WC or its value as the Red Cross of labor. Traditionally, the WC was a body of autonomous branches, each enjoying complete liberty in political affiliation and social and cultural activity. No one from above would or could prevent any branch from carry on activity or giving aid to any grouping, as long as it was not contrary to the constitution of the order. The WC had always retained its neutrality during the previous feuds in the movement. And its steady growth could be credited in a large measure to this non-interference.

The national board of directors, the highest policy-making body of the WC, tried, in the beginning, to steer a neutral course in the controversy with the Communists. As late as January 1922, it declared that in view of the fact that all Socialist tendencies were represented in the WC, “we cannot permit that the order as a whole should take this or any other position in tactical questions. . . . The WC is, was and remains neutral in all that concerns Socialist tactic. . . . We protest vigorously against the attempts of outsiders, non-members, . . . to intervene in our internal affairs and to dictate our policy.” *135

This neutral attitude lasted less than four months.

TWO RESOLUTIONS THAT TOUCHED OFF THE STRUGGLE

The struggle in the WC became more serious after the merger of the Hardman-Olgin group with the Communists. As was noted previously, this group brought into the Workers Party men and women occupying important positions in Jewish labor. In the WC they were even more numerous than in the unions. Due to the nature of the order and the geographical distribution of its several hundred branches, WP people, non-workers, were active in the WC, and even leaders of their branches. This was especially true outside the industrial centers where the Left Wing had many adherents among small business people, former workers.

The opening gun in this stage was fired by the NEC of the WC. Two resolutions were brought in at the convention in Toronto, May 1922. One was a demand for the release of the Socialists imprisoned in Soviet Russia; the second condemned the Jewish Feder-

ation of the WP and the *Freiheit* as inimical to the interests of Jewish labor. Both were passed by a big majority after stormy debates. The Left delegates marched out of the convention in protest, and formed a Committee of Action to fight the Right Wing. From Toronto the Left-Right conflict quickly spread to many branches, gaining in intensity as time went on.

The two resolutions signaled the end of the honeyed period in the relations between the top of Jewish labor and Lenin's government. It was the first deliberate step to "straighten out the line," in the direction of Medem's warning a year earlier. At the same time, it furnished the Left with a clearcut issue.

That the WC was the first to fling this challenge to its Left members can be explained in part by the political alertness of its leaders, who felt more keenly than those in the unions the grave consequences of a Communist-Left in their midst. Another reason was their closeness to the *Forward*, which was eager to deliver a crushing blow to the newly published *Freiheit* before it could grow into a rival.

After the convention, the Left called a mass meeting in Clinton Hall. Similar meetings were called in other cities. A National Committee of Action was set up to coordinate all the Left groups in the order.

The Communist-Left used a double-barreled gun in its strategy: Those who, for one reason or another, had a warm feeling toward Soviet Russia were told that the WC had joined the camp of the Soviet enemies, and that their resolution was based on false information. Those who were not exactly admirers of the *Forward* were appealed to in the name of fairness against the attack of a daily that was as yet only a month old and was not Communist but only left of the center.

The NEC warned the branches against affiliation with the Left committee. And, in 1923, it dissolved several district committees dominated by the Left, accusing them of waging a struggle against the leadership of the order.

An incident occurring in the same year helped to provoke the national office against the Communists. The delegation of two, Joseph Weinberg and Reuben Guskin, sent by the order to conclude the agreement for building a hospital in Gomel, on reaching Berlin, were refused a Soviet visa, though one had been promised.

The refusal was clearly the result of the Communists' protests here against the delegation. And, although the Russian Red Cross later attempted to pacify the WC by saying that it was a misunderstanding, no other delegation was sent, and the \$15,000 from the WC was spent by the Russian Red Cross on a clinic, without asking the approval of the order. The WC people were further incensed by the insulting remarks in the Moscow *Emes*, that the two delegates were interventionists who had come to spy.

THE STRUGGLE IS INTERDEPENDENT

The conflict in the WC ran parallel to that in the unions and was greatly affected by it. The severity of measures and countermeasures applied by the WC against the opposition were, in a subtle way, related to and dependent on the fortunes of the Communist-Left in the unions.

As the contest in the unions grew more heated, the fight in the WC took a sharper turn. The clashes in many branches and in local conferences were getting worse. At the nomination conference, February 24, 1924, the vote was 446 for the administration against 186 for the opposition, a respectable show of strength for the latter. The majority staged a political demonstration with a collection for the arrested Socialists in Russia. A Communist who protested a collection in behalf of "dogs" was chased off the platform amidst angry disorder. The conference was nearly broken up.¹³⁶

The NEC resorted to further punitive measures. A number of Left branches were divided, and most of the leading members of the Left Committee of Action were made members-at-large, among them the former president of the WC and one of its builders, Ab. Epstein. (A member-at-large is separated from his branch.)

The Communist-Left, meanwhile, took steps to tighten its ranks. A second national Left conference was held in April 1924; and a third, in December 1925. At the latter conference a closely knit opposition was formed, the Farband of Progressive Branches of the WC—Melech Epstein, chairman; Rubin Salzman, secretary. The affiliated branches had to tax themselves for the Farband.

The national office of the WC issued a warning to all branches not to join the Farband, calling it a "government within a government." But 64 branches, with a membership of about 7,000, failed

to heed the warning. They were dissolved, their members made members-at-large. The Right, sensing that the Farband was preparing for a split, hoped by this drastic action of isolating the Left to minimize the scale of their defection.

They were not mistaken. The opposition did contemplate creating a new fraternal order. And the Farband was to be its nucleus. (In a conversation years later with Nathan Chanin, he frankly stated that they would rather have seen the WC go under than to turn it over to the Left.)

THE LEFT SEIZES THE SHULES AND THE CAMP

A step toward a split was the seizure, in the summer of 1926, of about 26 out of 30-odd WC parochial schools, the WC center in Harlem, and the large summer camp, Kinderland, on Sylvan Lake, New York. The plan was executed with almost military precision, placing the considerable number of *tuers* and teachers, arden Yiddishists, before a dilemma—either to desert their lifework or continue under Communist auspices. Only a part of them sympathized with the Left. A majority, headed by the pedagog Jacob Levine stayed, hoping that neither the spirit nor the curriculum of the *shules* would be changed.

One must bear in mind that in the middle 20's Jewish Communism and its organ, the *Freiheit*, were riding high on their avowed concern for Jewish culture and education. It may be added that the Communist seizure of the *shules* spurred the order, previously lukewarm to them, to rebuild the school system in a short time. (That the Communists could, with only a minority of people in the school system, take it over, is evidence of their audacity.)

The only equity the *shules* possessed were debts. But the building in Harlem was property; and Kinderland, a going concern, a source of jobs, prestige and propaganda. Meyer London, counsel for the WC, advised the national office to sue for the recovery of the camp. But the latter, in the climate of that period, refused to go to court. The WC erected another big summer camp on the same lake.

Another preparatory step for the split was the instructions to the Left branches to hold back, as far as possible, the payment of dues and premiums and to make sure that the funds were in the names

of reliable people. This measure would bring to the proposed fraternal order a certain amount of the coveted financial assets.

OPPOSITION STOPPED IN ITS TRACKS BY THE PARTY

The Left was not its own master in the WC either. Though a fraternal body is not a trade union, and the livelihood of its members is in no way involved, the party frowned upon a final break. Foster insisted that a new fraternal body would be in sharp violation of the Comintern dictum against dual unions. And, again exactly as in the ILGWU, the Left in the WC was sacrificed to the raging factional strife in the party.

The Left in the WC was now faced by the same impasse as those in the unions. Their people of the dissolved branches saw no reason for remaining members-at-large, and were calling for decisive action. But the "comrades of the center," all of them Communists, unable to share with their followers the true reason for their stalling, had to invent a number of pretexts for their inaction. The chairman of the Farband was compelled to make a flying trip to the larger cities here and in Canada to try to calm down the growing impatience. In Canada, the local Communists, in the name of Canadian independence, insisted on forming a new fraternal body, which they did.

In a review of the situation in the *Hammer*, the Communist monthly, the chairman of the Farband tried to put a cheerful face on a bad situation. Calling the impasse a temporary retreat, he could offer no more solid reason for the abrupt change in plans for a split than the tenderly moving "We cannot leave the many thousands of the petty bourgeoisie under the sole influence of the Right Wing." *137

The Communist-Left tried desperately to open the door back to the WC. A committee of three, Melech Epstein, Benjamin Lifshitz, secretary of the Bureau, and Joseph Sultan, of the Foster caucus, appeared before the 27th convention of the order, May 1927, in Cleveland, to ask for reinstatement.

Failing in this attempt, the Left induced a few well-meaning people to try to bring peace to the order. But the WC had seen the dire results of the sham peace in the trade unions. Moreover, the Communists in the unions were already on the retreat. And the

national office was encouraged to refuse any negotiations with the opposition.

To stave off complete disintegration, the Left hastily concluded an agreement with the small Independent Workmen's Circle of Boston, a fraternal body with strong anti-175 East Broadway sentiments. A conference of 108 branches and 24 minority groups, representing 15,000 members, approved this agreement (the official report was probably an exaggeration). The Left hoped eventually to dominate this order. But, when the opposition was ready with all the necessary formalities, it was blocked at the last moment by a secret understanding between the WC and the Boston people. The Left was again isolated.

In despair, the Left was prepared to go to court to compel the Boston order to carry out the terms of the agreement. Meanwhile, its ranks were dwindling. Months dragged by and prospects for survival were growing dimmer.

18 *The IWO, a New Communist Arm*

The former Left of the Workmen's Circle was saved from complete disintegration by the removal of the taboo on dual unions by the Comintern in the middle of 1929. This removal made it possible for the Left to gather together the remnants of its followers for a new fraternal body, the International Workers Order.

At its first convention, March 1930, in New York City, the new order reported somewhat less than 3,000 members, a far cry from the size of the Left in 1925-1926. But this unimpressive number did not exhaust the WC loss. At its peak in 1925, the WC reached 84,791 members. From there on, as the Left-Right hostility became more implacable, the membership showed a steady decline. In 1928, it was 76,228, and in 1929, 71,482; another way of saying that the WC lost four times more people than those who joined the Left order.

At the same time, not all of the Left broke with the WC. Some refused to follow instructions; others were left on purpose to "bore from within." However, the Left never attained any stature in the WC, and remained a small band whose function was to echo Communist policies through appeals or protests.

The declaration of principles of the International Workers Order was a faithful copy of a Communist document of that period. Only two lines out of about 140 touched on the aim of a fraternal body, mutual aid. Otherwise, it bristled with Communist terminology. That it was a Jewish group and that its area would be Jewish was not even intimated. The emphasis was placed on the multiple

language nature of the IWO, though the merger with the other language fraternal bodies was not effected until 1933. This stepping out of their own shoes went against the better judgment of those who led the Left struggle in the WC. But party dictates were supreme.

The declaration made it implicit that "The IWO is . . . an integral part of the proletarian class struggle against capitalism. . . . (It) will support all struggles of the organizations based on the class struggle viewpoint. . . . The CP and the TUUL occupy the foremost place among them. . . . The road to the liberation of the working class lies along the Soviet road." *138

Traditionally mutual aid groups engaged in cultural work, but the IWO was going in for proletarian culture. However, the branches of the IWO could not exist on this total denial of the reality of their environment. They had to respond in one way or another to all problems and issues of the community. And the Third Period over, the high command of the order was shouting at the top of their voices of their deep concern for Jewish life and culture, and vowing that the order was not a Communist auxiliary. But they never could explain why the order loyally echoed all the shifts in the party line. Still, the party made sure that the IWO would never slip out of its orbit. Max Bedacht, a member of the party's political committee, was made general secretary of the order, despite his inexperience in fraternal affairs. This was a kick upstairs. The presidency was held for many years by another officer of the party, Philip Weiner.

DEMOCRATIC FRONT FAVORS GROWTH OF IWO

Hard work led to the expansion of the order. At the close of the first year, Salzman could announce several thousand new applicants, the majority of them in New York City. At that time, the order numbered 163 branches, 50 of them in New York. The action of the California district committee, which apparently took the class struggle outlook seriously and refused to install a new branch because of its majority of small businessmen, was called silly by the national office.*139 As practical people, they considered new members above principles.

Similar to all auxiliaries, the rapid increase in the IWO began

with the advent of the Democratic Front. As the youngest fraternal body, it could apply a more advanced system of insurance and sick benefit; the younger members did not have to pay for the older ones. This facilitated its growth.⁺⁸⁸ The IWO placed family doctors and specialists at the service of its members, and maintained a dental clinic in New York City.

The Jewish Section, occupying a second place numerically, was the most important unit of the order (Jews were a majority in the English-speaking branches, too). It had its own school system throughout the country, and operated summer camps in five or six large cities. It also published its own textbooks and a children's monthly. At its peak, the order claimed 6,000 children enrolled in its schools.

Size, financial resources and the nature of its functions made the IWO the most effective Communist bulwark in Jewish society. In many localities its branches were the only point of contact the Communists had, though the ordinary member was not aware of it. The branches carried the brunt of the fund-raising drives for the *Freiheit*. The IWO itself gave up its monthly organ, *Die Funk*, running instead two pages weekly in the *Freiheit* for its affairs. These two pages, called "Tribune," were of considerable financial aid to the deficit-laden *Freiheit*.

As a chartered fraternal body, the IWO had the edge over other Communist transmission belts in knocking at the doors of various movements asking for admission. Thus, it could spearhead the party's unity drives.

THE NEW "JEWISHNESS" AND THE REASON WHY

On the eve of World War II, the IWO had about 110,000 members, of which nearly 35,000, including members of the youth branches, belonged to the Jewish Section. In 1942, the jurisdiction of the Jewish Section was greatly widened. It was permitted—by the party, of course—to enter the native American field. This permission applied in principle to the entire IWO, but the actual purpose was to increase the effectiveness of the Jewish Section, and in practice that Section was the only beneficiary. The decision was a complete reversal of the old policy of confining the activities of the ethnical groups, in the party and outside, to those who spoke their tongue.

The reason behind this startling change was the party's and Moscow's growing belief in the weight of Jewish public opinion and their desire to make the Jewish Section a more effective instrument for influencing it.

The leaders of the Jewish Section were happy indeed. "The changeover from a multi-lingual into a multi-national" body was termed by them a "historic decision." They reported with great satisfaction, ". . . The Jewish Section then embarked upon organizing English-speaking lodges (branches were now called lodges—M.E.) in the best interests of the Jewish people. . . . In two years, membership in these lodges reached approximately 11,000. . . ." ¹⁴⁰

Three years later, at the seventh convention of the Jewish IWO, June 1947, in Camp Kinderland, George Starr, director of the English-speaking division, without going into details, reported that the membership had doubled since the last convention. ¹⁴¹

It would be a miracle—and a calamity as well—if the Communist order could recruit 11,000 native-born Jews in two short years, and double them in the following three years. Fortunately, the gain was merely a transfer and therefore a deception. Starr himself let the cat out of the bag. The vast majority of the new members were not new at all. They were merely transferred from the English order. Entire branches were thus turned over to the Jewish Section. In his report, Starr welcomed the delegates of two big lodges in New York, which until then had resisted being transferred. One had a membership of 1,500; the other, 600. And while the published minutes purposely omitted the origin of the lodges, it is clear that they were formerly part of the English IWO. Such a mass transfer could be accomplished only under instructions and even pressure by the party. People indifferent to Jewish affairs were thus compelled to become active in a Jewish organization. ¹⁴²

This transfer of entire branches was not the first step in the party's plans to greatly strengthen its Jewish order. Three years earlier, in 1944, the Jewish Section had made a bold move toward a fuller Jewish identification. It threw off "International Workers" as a useless ballast and took the innocuous name of Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order, remaining financially a part of the IWO.

In 1945, the Emma Lazarus Women's Division was formed, June Gordon, president. It began with 1,658 members and reached about 4,000 in 1947. ¹⁴³

In 1944, the general membership rose to 140,998; and in 1948, to 163,802, of which the Jewish numbered about 50,000. From then on, the order began to shrink, due to the intensified hostility toward Communism in the country.*¹⁴⁴

In 1951, the New York State Superintendent of Banking and Insurance asked the State Supreme Court to revoke the charter of the IWO on the ground that its Jewish Section had spent unwarranted sums on supporting Communist papers and institutions, singling out the *Freiheit*. Justice Steinberg granted the request of the superintendent. Rockwell Kent was then president of the order. The IWO appealed to higher courts, but lost. In the early 50's, the order was liquidated. Only a smaller group consisting of hardened Communists and Lefts were able to reform their ranks by organizing independent societies and cultural clubs, thus maintaining a modicum of existence in a few large cities.

19 *Relief Is Politics*

Stopped by organized labor on the economic and political areas, there remained one area which Communism could call its own, that of enlisting sympathy and financial aid for Soviet Russia. This du-fold activity paid off handsomely, the former in opening many a door, the latter in hard cash.

The young Soviet regime, struggling desperately against the Whites from within and economic blockade from without, aroused the sympathy of many liberals here and elsewhere. And the indiscriminate anti-Soviet campaign in the daily press, featuring such stories as the nationalization of all Russian women under the age of 35, had the effect of making thoughtful men skeptical of any unfavorable news from Soviet Russia, even when it happened to be the truth.⁺⁸⁹

Pro-Soviet interpretations, such as the book of the Englishman Arthur Williams, an eye-witness of the Bolshevik Revolution, the report of William C. Bullitt on his mission to Russia in 1920, and that of Dr. Alfonse Goldschmidt on the Soviet structure and economic plans, became semi-Bibles for liberal admirers of Lenin and Trotsky.

Russia was ravaged by war and civil war. That was no secret. And those seeking a medium to express their sympathy for the beleaguered Soviet regime turned to the Friends of Soviet Russia, organized during the underground days of the CP. The FSR was a happy idea, and it spread rapidly. Branches were opened in many

cities. A loosely knit body, people of various political shadings could participate in it on the local level. A number of middle-class people were drawn in.

Soviet Russia Today, taken over by the FSR, skilfully presented the highly ambitious Soviet plans for economic reconstruction, education, sciences and arts, making them appear feasible.

The famine on the Volga, 1921, was the great chance for the FSR. The threat of a Soviet collapse stirred Communists and Soviet sympathizers here to action. The FSR attempted—and not entirely without success—to gain a monopoly on the fund-raising for the starving Russians.

ZINOVIEV SPEAKS FROM BOTH CORNERS OF HIS MOUTH . . .

From the very start of the famine, Moscow cunningly mixed propaganda with relief. With an air of martyrdom, the inability to cope with the famine was attributed wholly to the counterrevolution and the foreign blockade, and not in the least to the Soviet internal policy.

This was the tenor of the appeal to the workers of the world, signed by G. Zinoviev, dated July 30, 1921. It was the first official confirmation of the gravity of the hunger on the Volga. (Under Stalin, the famine in the Ukraine, in the winter of 1931–1932, was carefully hidden from the outside world.)

Zinoviev claimed that Soviet Russia had “fought and suffered for the entire international proletariat. Her bleeding wounds she received in fighting the world’s capitalism.”

He complained that the “English and American governments . . . were waiting for the collapse of the Soviet regime before sending a crust of bread.”

Zinoviev did not forget to appeal to the “honest bourgeois parties whose conscience and humanity asserted themselves,” assuring them that the help would go “to all elements in distress. . . .”¹⁴⁶

The State Department had not encouraged relief work in Soviet Russia. One reason was that Americans were imprisoned there without cause. Another, that the Communists placed difficulties in the way of bona fide relief bodies. This was brought out in the exchange of letters between Dr. Judah L. Magnes, representing the Committee for Medical Aid to Soviet Russia, and Norman H.

Davies, Acting Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover and the Red Cross officials.*¹⁴⁶

However, when the magnitude of the hunger on the Volga became known, in the fall of 1921, Congress authorized the establishment of the American Relief Administration (ARA), with an appropriation of \$20 million. Lenin was more than glad to accept the proffered help, and the ARA, headed by Herbert Hoover, did magnificent work. It introduced, in October of the same year, ten-dollar food drafts for individuals in Russia. These drafts saved thousands of lives. Many writers, scientists and composers existed on the ARA packages.

Lenin or no Lenin, the American Communists could not keep silent and let a noted conservative save the Soviet regime from collapse. Their publications campaigned angrily against the ARA, trying to frighten the Soviet well-wishers with melodramatic tales of counterrevolutionary plots hatched inside Russia by Hoover's agents.*¹⁴⁷ In consequence, the FSR came in for a sizable sum of money.

CONTRASTING POLAND WITH SOVIET RUSSIA

Soviet prestige as a defender of Jews during the civil war was heightened by the flood of disturbing news from the newly created republics in Eastern Europe. The insertion in the Versailles Peace Treaty, 1919, of guaranteed minority rights in these new republics, for which an American Jewish delegation, headed by Louis Marshall and Stephen S. Wise—in conjunction with a Jewish world delegation—had labored so hopefully, proved futile as a safeguard for the unhampered development of the Jewish group.*⁴⁰

Most guilty was Poland. The joyful news of independence was celebrated in Poland by pogroms in several cities, notably Lemberg (Lvov). A meeting to protest the Polish pogroms was held in Manhattan Opera House, August 26, 1919. Dr. Judah L. Magnes, Louis Marshall, B. Zuckerman and Max Pine spoke.

Compared with the harsh discriminatory measures in Poland, the equality enjoyed by Jews in Soviet Russia seemed significant. Those who were aware that the pauperization of the Jews was, to a great extent, the direct result of Soviet policies placed their hopes on the much-publicized and far-reaching Soviet projects to rehabilitate the

declassed Jews, making them productive citizens. These projects carried a strong emotional appeal.

Most pronounced was the shift in mood among the two groups supposedly poles apart from each other: the labor circles around the *Forward* and the wealthy of the Joint Distribution Committee.

The first lines sympathetic to the Soviet government appeared in the *Forward* July 19, 1918. It spoke against blockading Russia and asked for economic aid. Editor Ab. Cahan, not given to half measures, soon had the *Forward* closed on Soviet criticism, though this did not last long. He even refused to print an article written by his friend, the noted Menshevik, Raphael Abramovitch, in answer to Olgin's glowing reports on his trip to Russia in 1920.^{*149}

Only the second Socialist split in 1921 and the consequent appearance of a rival paper caused Cahan to open the columns of the *Forward* to opponents of Soviet Russia. Still, the paper loyally continued to support the various financial drives for Russia and the Jews there, receiving official thanks of members of Lenin's cabinet.^{*149} However, in 1923, the *Forward* and its editor took an uncompromising and unflinching stand against Communism in Russia and elsewhere. The developing Communist-Left action in the unions and the Workmen's Circle doubtlessly quickened this evolution.

The unions completed the same cycle, from pro- to anti-Soviet, in about the same time. Schlesinger's project to raise funds to send sewing machines for the Russian clothing factories was dropped, though the ILGWU did send immediate aid to the hungry in 1921.

As for the JDC, it went into Russia for aid and rehabilitation work on a wide scale.

20 *Jewish Fortunes in Russia*

In Russia itself, faced by the savagery of the White and Green armies, all the young Jews could do was to join the Soviet forces to defend Jewish lives and the honor of their wives and sisters, which they did.

During the Bolshevik agitation against the Kerensky government, the Jewish community was solidly hostile to them. The three parties of Jewish labor, the Bund, the United (Sejmists-territorialists) and the Labor Zionists, were fundamentally gradualist and democratic bodies. The Bund had often called forth the bitter sarcasm of Lenin.

To be sure, there were Jews among the Bolsheviks, and leading figures too. Sufficient to mention Zinoviev, Kamenev, Litvinoff and Trotsky himself. But they were completely assimilated and had no ties with Jewish life. Nor could they talk or read Yiddish, the mother tongue of the mass of people. And when the Communists took over and had to establish their power in cities in the Ukraine and Byelorussia, thickly populated by Jews, they had practically no one to fill the local Soviet apparatus, not to speak of their local party units. Only at the end of the civil war did the Jewish youth, once compelled to take up arms on the Soviet side, enter local Soviet service.

A more involved task for the Bolsheviks was to penetrate Jewish labor. On the general Soviet pattern, their new Jewish apparatus consisted of two sets, each paralleling the other. One was the Jewish Section of the All-Soviet Communist Party—*Yevsectzia*—with branches in the larger cities. The second set was the Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs, formed in January 1918 as a special

section of the People's Commissariat for National Affairs, under Stalin, also with branches in the larger cities. And, similar to the general pattern, the leading members of the Jewish Section were also members of the Commissariat, fashioning its policies in tune with those of the party.

THE YEVECTZIA STARTS WITHOUT JEWS

At first neither the *Yevsectzia* nor the Commissariat had any line of communication with the Jewish people. They lacked even the small cadres necessary for administrative purposes or for publishing the *Warheit*, and had to hire outside writers to translate Bolshevik material into Yiddish. The head of the Commissariat, S. M. Dimandshtein, and his chief assistant, Samuel Agurski, arrived in Russia only after the first revolution. Dimandshtein was an old Bolshevik, living in Paris, and Agurski had been an active anarchist in Chicago. Only a small group of Left Poale Zion joined the Commissariat. Dimandshtein, personally a pleasant and peaceful man,⁴¹ tried vainly to negotiate with the Socialist parties for cooperation. But the latter insisted on a certain degree of autonomy for their work.

However, the ground was slipping away from under the Democratic Socialists. Victorious Bolshevism was making steady inroads among their followers. Pro-Communist groups were formed in the Bund and among the United, and the parent bodies were soon banned. The Bolsheviks at first permitted the split-off groups to exist, knowing that they would eventually be absorbed. And absorbed they were.

Only a number of leading Jewish Socialists could withstand the terrific pressure exerted on them by the ruling party; they suffered imprisonment and exile. The rest went over to the victor: Moses Rafes, Esther (Frumkin), Max Goldfarb, Shachno Epstein, among the Bundists; Moishe Litvakov, Novakovski and M. Rashkes, of the United, and the Auerbach brothers of the Left Poale Zion. Others, who did not join the party but remained pro-Soviets, worked at various levels of the Soviet apparatus, some occupying high posts. The Right Poale Zion were an exception. Their majority remained faithful to their ideal. Some were able to migrate to Palestine; the rest spent their days in Siberia.

Once the Bundists and the others were integrated, the Bolsheviks could fasten their rule over the Jewish population, through a chain of Jewish administrative, educational and propaganda institutions.

The new converts could not entirely discard their past. A part of the old luggage followed them into the *Yevsectzia*. And the latter was torn by several tendencies, each reflecting the heritage of the respective groups. The first controversy revolved around the issue of Jewish cultural autonomy. The former United and Bundists had always demanded some sort of autonomy. But the original Bolsheviks and the former anarchists were against Jewish "separatism." A second important issue was the direction of Jewish rehabilitation. The former Left Poale Zion and the United believed in settling a substantial part of the *declassed* Jews on land, but the ex-Bundists, who had always ridiculed large scale colonization plans, emphasized industrialization. The Bundists being a majority at the third conference of the *Yevsectzia*, July 1920, their viewpoint prevailed. A dispute arose also over the structure of the Jewish apparatus. The original Bolsheviks were against centralization lest it evolve into a Jewish Communist Party.*¹⁵⁰

MOSCOW TRIES TO BREAK UP POLISH BUND; ALTER'S ARREST

At this juncture, it may be opportune to touch upon the sporadic efforts of Moscow to break up the Jewish Socialist parties in the new republics, notably Poland, and thus carry away an important labor segment there.

The Jewish working youth in the new border states, poverty-stricken and disillusioned with the moderate Socialists, were lured by the still smoldering fires of the October Revolution. They had witnessed the civil war and had seen the Red Army in action. Left-Wing tendencies emerged in the Bund and the Poale Zion, and still stronger ones in their youth sections. As in other countries, the Left demanded that their parties adhere to the Third International. The Comintern and the Youth Comintern employed these groups to drive a wedge between them and their parties. The Polish Bund and the Poale Zion were invited to send fraternal delegates to the third congress of the Comintern, August 1921, and there to negotiate for affiliation.

The Bund delegates were Victor Alter, a "Centrist," and Chaim

Wasser, a leader of the Left. There was also a Poale Zion delegation. In Moscow they encountered the stiff opposition of the Polish Communist Party, its small Jewish section, and the *Yeusectzia*, who kept arguing that there was no room in the Comintern for Jewish separatists and nationalists. And though the Bund's fraternal delegates arrived in Moscow June 13th, they had little contact with the Comintern due to the latter's procrastination.

Meanwhile, an incident occurred that shook the confidence of the Bund delegates in the decency and justice of the Communist regime. Victor Alter was suddenly arrested, and placed in Butirki prison, incommunicado. All the efforts of his fellow delegate, Wasser, to contact him and to bring about his release were futile. Institution after institution gave him the run-around. After a couple of weeks, and Alter's hunger strike, Wasser was able to see him and find out the reason for his arrest.

A Russian woman whom Alter knew had given him a letter addressed to Sylvia Pankhurst, the prominent British suffragist and a leading member of the British Communist Party, who was supposed to have been a delegate to the congress but was detained for some reason. Alter did not know the contents of this letter, and innocently handed it over to a British delegate named Gray to be delivered to Pankhurst. Gray had obviously turned it over to the Soviet authorities.

The letter was a strong protest against Communist injustices made by the jailed Left Social Revolutionaries, previously partners with the Bolsheviks in the government. The Soviet security police were not interested in Alter; they were trying to "break him" to divulge the name of the woman to be able to destroy the link between the arrested and the outside world. But Alter, aware of the consequences, refused to name her. In the end, his hunger strike, the presence of many foreign delegations, and, particularly, the threat by the Bund, in a telegram to Moscow, of a public exposure, brought about Alter's release. He was ordered to leave the country immediately. (The ECCI, resisting pressure, had not approved his arrest.)

Wasser had refused to participate in any negotiations during Alter's imprisonment. He was sufficiently disillusioned to return home cured of his Leftism.*¹⁵¹

As a follow-up, the Comintern addressed two open letters, in the

spring and fall of 1922, to the members of the Bund to arouse them against the "Centrist" leadership, urging them to organize a Left Wing within the Bund to win it over. But the Bund, thanks to its long tradition of cohesiveness, avoided a split, losing only an insignificant number of members.*¹⁵²

The experience with the Youth Comintern was not happier. The young Bundists and Left Poale Zion hoped to get the Youth Comintern to recognize the specific Jewish problems. But the latter was willing to go no further than the formation of a Jewish Bureau for propaganda only. The theses of the Second Youth Congress of 1921 emphatically rejected the resolutions of the two Jewish groups. Instead, they stated, "The historically conditioned uniqueness and the abnormal situation of the Jewish working masses cannot be the basis for a special national program. The question of liberating all workers, including the Jewish, from all kinds of exploitation, national suppression and suffering, is . . . a general workers' problem. . . . The demand of the Bund for a national cultural autonomy is reformist and nationalistic. . . ."*¹⁵³

The idea of a Jewish state in Palestine was condemned more severely:

The revolutionary Jewish labor movement must categorically divorce itself from such demands which are used by the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties to becloud the minds of the workers.

The congress turned down the proposal for a world alliance of Jewish youth, and even refused the formation of Jewish sections in the youth bodies.*¹⁵⁴

But, despite this rejection, a majority of the youth groups went over to the Communists.*^{155 +42}

21 *Ambitious Projects*

Communist fuming against Jewish relief abroad, Russia included, had to stop after the Jewish-Soviet organs in Moscow sent out an urgent appeal for various forms of aid for Soviet Jewry.* But Moscow's intransigence could only hinder the flow of relief to the victims of war, revolution and civil war.

Dr. D. H. Dubrowsky, Moscow relief commissar here, a dentist from Brownsville, Brooklyn, had neither the personality nor the tact required for such a task. He was also a total stranger to the community and the labor movement. Rumor had it that his only qualification was a friend high in the commissariat in Moscow.

A wilful bureaucrat, Dubrowsky became the bottleneck for Russian-Jewish relief by his refusal to permit the People's Relief Committee or the many *landsmanshaften*, able and eager to send aid to their stricken home towns, to have a voice in relief distribution. Dubrowsky insisted that all the funds be turned over to him. He later procured a mandate from the YIDGEZKOM, in Moscow, and aid from here had to be directed to that body. Too insignificant to interfere with the ARA or the JDC, Dubrowsky became the all-powerful boss of the smaller relief groups, and all efforts to strike some sort of a compromise with him, to permit at least a minimum of supervision, came to nothing. Distrusting the Communists in Moscow, the PRC broke relations with him, October 1921, turning over its funds to the JDC, which concluded its own agreement with the Moscow authorities. The *landsmanshaften* did likewise.

* For the story of the Communist anti-relief policy, see Chapter 9.

THE NEW RELIEF EMISSARY TRIES IT WITH A SMILE

Dubrowsky's failure to get relief moving had a sobering effect on YIDGEZKOM. The mandate was taken away from him, but he still remained in the general Russian relief setup.⁺⁴³ Michail Rashkes, the new relief emissary, urbane and with a ready smile, a former territorialist, was more tractable than his predecessor. He managed to resume relations with the *landsmanshaften* and with the PRC. His drive for tools for Jewish artisans was supported by the PRC and the entire press. His second campaign, for Jewish books to satisfy the hunger of people who were denied books during the war years, met with warm cooperation from all those to whom a Yiddish book was dear. The conferences for this campaign became a united front in miniature. However, this writer had a strong suspicion that the many boxes of books never left New York harbor. Whether this campaign was mainly a goodwill tactic on the part of Rashkes or someone in Moscow put his foot down on bourgeois books is beside the point. The Soviet Jewish press never mentioned receiving books from America; on the contrary, a campaign against Jewish bourgeois literature was beginning.

Rashkes stayed here until about the end of 1923. The PRC was in the process of liquidation. It dissolved in the summer of 1924. In the *landsmanshaften*, too, the first relief rush was over. Besides, they were also veering more and more toward the JDC, whose facilities in Russia were expanding and who could, of course, be trusted more than the smiling Rashkes.

HILLMAN'S CLOTHING PROJECT FOR RUSSIA

An episode interesting for its background and lesson was Sidney Hillman's extensive plan to modernize the Soviet clothing industry, as his share in Russian rehabilitation. Behind the project lay a sincere sentiment interwoven with political expediency.

On his first visit to Russia, summer of 1921, Hillman was appalled by the misery and industrial backwardness he encountered, and impressed by the strong men in the Kremlin. Lenin was then introducing the New Economic Policy, and to Hillman, the restless planner, the NEP looked like a breather for the vast plans for Russian reconstruction.

Hillman's concept of power as the most essential ingredient for social action could be a clue to his respect for the Soviet leaders. He was contemptuous of those who could not hold on to power. On the eve of his first trip to Russia, he spent an evening at the home of J. B. S. Hardman. Hardman's wife, Hannah, was interested to know what idea he had in mind in going to Russia. Hillman's answer was frank and direct: "If I find the men in the Kremlin willing and able to maintain their power, I will support them."¹⁵⁶ This was an indirect reference to the German Social Democrats who lost the government after the first parliamentary elections.

Hillman brought his project to the fifth convention of the ACWA, in Chicago May 8, 1922. A Russian-American Industrial Corporation—RAIC—was to be formed, to operate clothing factories in Russia equipped with modern American machines and run along American production lines. RAIC was to sell shares at \$10 each to the amount of \$300,000.

The project was enthusiastically approved, the Communist and Left delegates taking the lead in the cheering. And a few of the Lefts who were reluctant to barter their opportunity to oppose Hillman's new production standards for his aid to the Soviet clothing industry were rebuked by Robert Minor, the party rep at the convention. Minor piously told them at the caucus meeting that the interests of Soviet Russia had to take precedence over their own.¹⁵⁷ And Olgin, who went to Chicago to cheer in the *Freiheit* the anticipated Left criticism of Hillman, ended by throwing literary bouquets at him.

Surrounded by the active antagonism of the AFL, which supported the rival UGW, and faced by the resistance to the ACWA in several important clothing centers, a demonstration of solid unity at the convention was imperative to Hillman. And only a friendly gesture to Soviet Russia both in words and in deeds could silence the Left-Wing opposition. His union's isolation from organized labor was a basic reason for Hillman's quiet support of Foster's TUEL in the beginning. He hoped that the TUEL would be instrumental in creating a second labor center to which the ACWA could belong. It also explains his financial contribution to the *Freiheit* on the eve of its publication. Neither the TUEL nor the *Freiheit* were then open Communist institutions. Besides, Hillman never doubted his ability to control the new movement or to disengage himself from

it when it would become necessary. The latter he did in 1924.

The agreement with the Soviet authorities was concluded in September 1922, on Hillman's second visit to Russia. The RAIC appointed George Wishnak, a former officer of the ILGWU and manager of the *Freiheit*, as Russian director. It modernized three clothing factories, in Moscow and Leningrad, and taught the Russians improved methods of production. As the response to the stock selling campaign was below expectations—it was confined largely to the Jewish members of the ACWA—the RAIC could not expand. However, its initial success brought it into friction with the proper Soviet organs. And the totalitarian bureaucracy that engulfed the Russian economy after Lenin's death could not tolerate in its midst an independent economic unit however small. The RAIC had to liquidate in 1928, and its original investment was returned in full.

HUNGRY PEOPLE STARTED THE RUSH TO THE SOIL

The much-heralded Jewish colonization did not originate in Moscow: the *Yevsectzia* was against settling Jews on the soil. Hungry and despairing people in Byelorussia occupied, in the spring of 1923, several estates deserted by their owners. With only a few rudimentary tools, they formed cooperatives to work the land. Their example was followed by groups of Jews in the Ukraine and Southern Russia. The local Soviet organs noticed these little settlements and called the attention of the higher bodies to them. The central government, knowing full well the economic misery inflicted on the Jewish community, grasped at this opportunity for a partial rehabilitation of the *declassed* Jews.

Two institutions were created for this purpose in the summer of 1924: one on a government level, the KOMERD—KOMZET in Russian—a mixed body of various commissariats, headed by P. G. Smidovich, secretary of the Soviet Central Executive Committee; and the GEZERD—OZET in Russian (abbreviation for the revived Society for the Resettlement of Toiling Jews)—a quasi-public agency tightly dominated by the Jewish Section of the Communist Party. These two institutions had to carry out the program for Jewish land settlement.

Two years later, June 15, 1926, the Presidium of the Soviet CEC approved a plan by the KOMERD "for the transfer to agriculture

of 100,000 Jewish families to take place in the course of a few years." The ultimate goal was to settle one-quarter of the entire Jewish population in agriculture in Crimea, the Ukraine and Byelorussia.^{*159}

The goal was high, but the tone of the decree was restrained. This restraint did not suit the Jewish Communists here. Their stand against Jewish nationalism did not deter them from asserting that this decree might lead to the cherished territorial concentration. Colonization became the Communists' "best seller."

COMMUNISTS HERE TAKE OVER; THE ICOR

The first news about Jewish agricultural settlements reached here in the fall of 1924. No time was lost in calling a conference for December 21, 1924, to form the ICOR (Organization for Jewish Colonization in Russia). Despite the initial efforts to dress the new body in non-partisan garb, the conference was boycotted by all sections of the community except the small group of Left Poale Zion and a few pro-Soviet intellectuals.

Shmuel Niger, the noted man of Yiddish letters, expressed a general sentiment by suggesting in his article in *The Day*, that if the Communists were sincere they would dissolve the ICOR, stand aside and let bona fide groups engage in the colonization work. But Niger was asking too much.

In a short time the ICOR had 50 branches. The first English booklet, published in April 1925, tried to mask the pro-Communist face of the ICOR, asserting that it was strictly non-partisan and "stood between two extremes, Communism and Zionism." But a few years later the membership application card read: "I am a friend of the Soviet Union and of Jewish colonization in the USSR." The ICOR's fund-raising was quite satisfactory.⁺⁴⁴

Since the beginning of the Enlightenment, settling Jews on land had been the cherished dream of *Maskil* and philanthropist. A class of farmers seemed to them indispensable for Jewish economic and social reconstruction. Many a grandiose blueprint was discussed—one was that of the OZET, in Czarist Russia—and many a song was composed in praise of Jews tilling the soil. Eliakum Zunser's famous lyric poem, "*Die Sokhe*" (The Plow), written in 1880, was sung all over the Yiddish world. It went like this: "In the plow lies bliss and

blessedness, life's true essence. The morning comes, the tiller of the soil goes forth into God's world, full of health and cheer, breathing the clean air of freedom. Unknown to him are the worries of the city dweller, who has to engage in speculative ventures and rack his brain to eke out an unproductive livelihood." *159

The large-scale, though only semi-fulfilled, colonization plans of Baron Hirsch in the Argentine and in Palestine, in the last century, and the attempts by his fund to settle Jews on land in the United States, at the turn of the century, testify to the fond hopes placed on agriculture as the most effective "normalizer" of the Jewish group. The Zionist ideology, too, gave agriculture high priority. Tilling the soil would purify Jewish life and make it wholesome.

The chief reason for the irresistible attraction of agriculture lay in the centuries-long denial to Jews of the right to gain a livelihood from the soil and in the old idyllic concept of farming as the healthiest, the least hazardous and the most honorable of occupations.

JDC ENTERS COLONIZATION

The Soviet allotment of large tracts of land for Jewish colonization and its readiness to contribute to its financing was bound to create a stir here. As men of big affairs, leaders of the JDC, Louis Marshall and Felix M. Warburg, were fascinated by the vast potentialities of the Soviet project. Colonization work in Russia became a major part of the JDC relief activities. This new policy was adopted at the two national conferences for relief and rehabilitation, in Philadelphia and Chicago, 1925 and 1926 respectively.

Only the Zionists opposed this work. At the Philadelphia conference, the Zionists, Louis Lipsky, Morris Rottenberg and Emanuel Newman, spoke angrily against the colonization in Russia. Their chief argument was that the Jews were being settled on land illegally taken from their owners; it was, therefore, dangerous to tie them to that land. It was quite an experience to listen to Louis Marshall's booming voice defending the right of a revolutionary government to confiscate the land of its internal enemies. The Zionists broke with the JDC over this issue.*160

Throughout this heated controversy, Socialist opinion, represented by the *Forward*, continued to side with the JDC. The raging conflict with the Communist-Left all along the labor front did not

deter them from supporting colonization in Russia, which indirectly spelled giving support to the Soviet regime.

The JDC entered into an agreement with the KOMERD, formed the Agro-Joint, and spent heavily on the new colonies. Its director, Dr. Joseph Rosen, the Russian-born agriculturist, tactfully avoided collision with the KOMERD. The new Jewish colonies in the Ukraine and the larger number of colonies on the Steppes of Northern Crimea, near the Azov Sea, built with the help of the JDC, stood out in comparison with the new neighboring non-Jewish settlements. The settlers proved to be willing and adept farmers.*¹⁶¹

Concerted plans of the JDC for creating a sizable group of independent Jewish farmers were frustrated by the forced collectivization of agriculture, begun in 1929. To continue the aid program would have meant helping the government and not the colonies, which had lost their title to the land. For the same reason, the JDC and Dr. Rosen could not very well transplant their program to far-off Birobidjan either. Agro-Joint withdrew from Soviet Russia in 1930, but the JDC continued there until 1938, helping a number of technical and trade schools. (The Agro-Joint helped to build 215 colonies with 2,000 families. Altogether, the JDC spent \$27 million on aid in Russia.) *¹⁶²

JEWISH PROBLEM "SOLVED" IN RUSSIA

The seemingly comprehensive Soviet program for Jewish "economic productivization" became a major component of the Communist build-up of the glorious Soviet Russia. It compared well with their picture of the harsh and cruel America. The build-up was made easier by the extensive measures for cultural survival: four Jewish *rayons* (districts), three in the Ukraine, one in Northern Crimea; Jewish sections at scientific academies, a pedagogical institute, Jewish people's courts, a school system, theaters, dailies, magazines and publishing houses—all at the expense of the state—were parts of a pro-Jewish policy unknown and hardly feasible in another country. All these were presented to an eager audience here as a final solution to the "Jewish problem."

Jewish Communists steadily hammered the idea that only the country that had abolished the exploitation of man could do away

with national oppression. This premise was buttressed by a stream of cheerful news of steadily increasing Jewish coal miners, steel workers, railway workers, farmers, students and scientists. Not that all the news was false; part of it was true. But it was a tailored version of the truth, and, therefore, the net impression conveyed was a lie. That the Russian Jew had another face, one that cried—to paraphrase a French saying—was stoutly denied.

In the beginning, there was undeniably a genuine desire in the Kremlin to provide the numerous nationalities of that vast state ample opportunity to develop their own identity and attain a higher cultural level. The Jewish group was included in that cultural pluralism. But Stalin's later definition of Communist culture as national in form and Socialist in content, a crafty formula to disguise its shallowness, left the "Jewish culture" in Russia meaningless. The textbooks narrowed down the long and tragic Jewish past to a struggle of the poor against the rich. The children were taught that the most significant era in Jewish history had begun in October 1917. The few scholarly works published in the early 20's were later suppressed. However, few people here were in a position to appraise the barren character of the education being dispensed in the Soviet Jewish schools. Nor did they have an inkling of the unenviable position of the Jewish coal miners and railway workers who encountered the unconcealed antagonism of the local Soviets and of their fellow-workers, particularly in the Ukraine.*¹⁶³

22 *Birobidjan; Thriving on a Myth*

The ICOR was completely overshadowed by the JDC in the 20's. The *Forward* could, without trespassing on the truth, state that the ICOR was unnecessary and merely a *Communistische pushke* (a collection box). And though some tools and tractors were sent overseas, the ICOR never published a financial report.

The ICOR was rescued by Birobidjan. The projected Jewish region in the Far East, on the Amur River, was set for Jewish settlement on March 28, 1928.⁴⁶ It proved a veritable boon to Jewish Communism, opening a new and fertile field for propaganda and fund-raising. The ICOR developed an intense campaign around Birobidjan, solemnly calling upon the American Jews to fulfil their duty toward realizing the future "Jewish state." And to bring this idea closer home, a commission of experts was sent, in 1928, to study colonization possibilities in Birobidjan.

The experts were Professors Franklin S. Harris, president of Brigham Young University in Utah, chairman; J. B. Davidson and Charles Kuntz, of Rutgers University; Benjamin Brown and K. B. Sauls. Leon Talmi, a Communist, acted as their guide. Charles Kuntz was also chairman of the ICOR. Their report could be summarized in the laconic phrase of one of them, that they had not found obstacles that were unsurmountable.

The report of the commission, including their interview with Soviet Premier A. Rykov, was published by the ICOR in 1930. Asked whether Moscow planned to industrialize the region, Rykov said that they would do everything possible, but lacked sufficient funds.

KUNTZ AND BRAININ, TWO TYPES OF MASKILIM

The ICOR deemed it profitable to embroider upon the rather sober and factual report of the experts. Kuntz and Brown lent themselves to this fancy work. The two Jewish agriculturists were blissful dreamers of cooperative farming as the panacea for most social ills. Brown, a bit on the adventurous side, had been a leader of a large farmers' cooperative in the Far West, and, later on, one of the founders of the ill-fated Heightstown project, in New Jersey.

Kuntz was a rare type of an idealist. An old Russianized—and, later, Americanized—radical *Maskil*, he had previously remained aloof from Jewish public life, busy in his own work. But the revolution in Russia awakened in him a social as well as a Jewish interest. He looked at the Soviet Union through the lenses of a social utopian, believing that the voice of Moscow was identical to his own. On numerous trips to the agricultural districts of Soviet Russia, and later to Birobidjan, he would put on his high boots, march over the fields all day long, and conscientiously work out a detailed plan for highly advanced cooperative farming. The Soviet authorities would politely take his plans, and put them away to gather dust. The Communist movement knew how to attract men of standing like Kuntz; they were immensely valuable as fronts.

Another find was Reuben Brainin, an old *Maskil* but of a different stamp. A lucid Hebrew essayist, Brainin was one of those who had opened a window to Europe in the ghetto. But he was totally alien to any of the radical schools or to the labor movement. He came to America in 1910, edited a Hebrew magazine and contributed to the *Tageblatt* and, later, to *The Day*. After World War I he settled in Montreal, Canada. In 1930, at the age of 68, Brainin went to Russia to visit relatives and friends. There he met the remnants of Hebrew writers who, undoubtedly, poured out their hearts to him; Hebrew was already under an actual ban. But, to everyone's amazement, he returned favorably disposed to the Soviet regime and impressed by the plan for Jewish rehabilitation there.

Brainin was immediately grabbed up by the Communists. He became an honorary member of the ICOR. His long record as a "Lover of Zion" and a devotee of Hebrew and the respect he enjoyed on both sides of the ocean were tangible assets. Brainin, with his fine flowing white beard and dignified bearing, was a decorative

figure on the stage of Carnegie Hall and other ICOR gatherings.

Brainin seemingly never wavered through all the bloody liquidations in the 30's and through the Stalin-Hitler pact. In his later years only his secretary could understand his speech, and no outsider could be certain whether his words were accurately transcribed.

The author is at a loss to account for Brainin's puzzling backing of the Soviet regime. Hebrew writers here have ascribed it to the rather cool reception Brainin received in America. Accustomed to a leading position in Hebrew-Zionist society in Europe, Brainin was hurt by his neglect, and his vanity drove him to seek recognition elsewhere. Another possible influence might have been his son, Joseph, owner or manager of Seven Arts, an advertising agency, and a Left-Winger. In 1943, Joseph Brainin managed the well-advertised visit of the two Moscow emissaries, Solomon Michoels and Itzik Feffer.

THE SMALL TREK TO BIROBIDJAN

Running far ahead of the Soviets' actual plans, the "Jewish territory" became the most effective campaign appeal of the ICOR. And, over the stiff opposition of the Zionists and the Right-Wing Socialists, it penetrated many communities, especially the smaller ones, far from the political turmoil and the tense partisanships of the large centers. The campaign, coming in the midst of the great depression of the early 30's, was bound to meet with a response, particularly among the new *declassed*, small business people and young professionals. Many of them were ready to pack up and go to Birobidjan to start life anew through "honest labor."

Gina Medem, attractive widow of the Bundist leader, Vladimir Medem, a fiery but irresponsible speaker, who joined the Left, was the first to return from a visit to Birobidjan in 1931. In a rhapsody over the region, she told extravagant tales of budding Jewish life there, in her cross-country lecture tour for the ICOR and in her stories for the *Freiheit*. She figuratively kissed the soil of that bleak region. Her ardor started a small-scale stampede for Birobidjan. This writer, on a speaking tour a few months later, had the difficult and delicate job of dissuading many would-be colonists, obviously unsuited for Birobidjan, without dampening their enthusiasm for things Soviet. But one group of 32 families from Los Angeles did

leave for Birobidjan on January 26, 1932, turning all their property into agricultural machines. Other groups were ready to follow. However, the first group came back a year later, and the others stayed home. Individual families from other cities also went, and some, immediately giving up their American citizenship, could not return.* +46

The decree of May 1934, proclaiming Birobidjan a Jewish Autonomous Region and the hints emanating from Moscow that Jews from the neighboring countries would have a chance to settle there made Birobidjan a telling weapon in the relentless Communist struggle against Zionism. Peaceful settlement in Birobidjan, the friendliness of the natives, the Kazaks, and the wholehearted support of the government were contrasted with the Zionists in Palestine "playing the game of the British imperialists" and in daily friction with their Arab neighbors. The enormous potentials for Jewish culture in the Autonomous Region were compared with the unending difficulties that beset the work for its survival here.

SOVIET INTENTIONS FOR BIROBIDJAN

The intention to grant some form of constitutionality to its Jews was first announced in a speech by the Soviet President Michail Kalinin at the All-Soviet Congress, November 17, 1926. It was rumored among high-placed Communists that the speech was meant to check the anti-Jewish sentiments that, abetted by the struggle for power between Stalin and Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev, was spreading alarmingly, penetrating the ranks of the party. Kalinin was chosen for this delicate task because of his closeness to the people and his peasant origin.

(Several Jewish party members in Moscow confided to the author that during the height of the struggle in the party, they were met in their party cells with the derisive "Here are the Jews!" "It was painful to sit out a meeting," was the comment of a woman Communist.)

(In one of the several conversations the author had with Trotsky in Mexico City shortly before his death in the summer of 1940, Trotsky told him that during the stormy session of the Russian CC that had expelled him, he had passed a note to Bukharin calling his attention to anti-Trotsky resolutions by two party units savoring of

* For the story, see Melech Epstein, *op. cit.*, 1914-1958, pp. 256-257.

anti-Semitism. When Bukharin rose to speak—and he made a devastating attack on Trotsky—he warned, without mentioning details, that “The Black Hundreds are raising their heads in our party.”)

The decree on Birobidjan two years later had, in the opinion of the author, a duofold purpose. One was the wish to settle an industrious and dependable element at a point where military trouble with Japan was brewing, another was a genuine desire to create a compact Jewish community which would, at the same time, strengthen Soviet propaganda abroad. Moreover, there was no more free land in the Ukraine and the natives in Crimea disliked seeing land being given to others. On the other hand, Birobidjan numbered only about 10,000 people, who would welcome newcomers.

That the plan for Birobidjan also aimed at impressing popular opinion abroad can be seen by Kalinin’s speech at the second convention of the GEZERD, December 10–15, 1930. “Four years ago,” he said, “. . . the task was to save the Jewish masses from dying out. . . . Now this question is eliminated.

“It is my opinion that the task at present is the formation of a Jewish republic. . . . Let the Jewish people, who number about three million souls, have a small republic, and let all know that in our constitution they are a nationality and that they have in our territory a constitutional title, if one may thus term it.”¹⁶⁴

Jewish Communists in Russia were not in favor of Birobidjan. They preferred Northern Crimea; first, because of its large nucleus of Jewish colonies; second, because of its proximity to the old Jewish centers. However, they did not dare express their misgivings once the party had acted.⁴⁷ Still, the head of the GEZERD, Abram M. Merzhin, a pro-Crimea man, was removed in 1931, accused of sabotaging Birobidjan. Mikhail Rashkes replaced him.

FAILURE WAS INEVITABLE

Birobidjan was doomed to failure. The poor soil, heavy rains during July and August, when the crop was about to ripen, hordes of mosquitos and flies, and a very cold winter with little snow were hard on the settlers. Moreover, the choice of the human element was not the best available. As most of those with occupations refused to leave their home towns for the unknown Far East, the quotas assigned to the local committees were filled largely with *luftmenshen*,

an element least suited for colonization, to say nothing of pioneering under formidable obstacles. Clumsy bureaucratic management of the state farms and collectives added their share to the failure of each annual plan. The quality of the settlers later improved, but the production plans still lagged far behind.

There was also a crippling shortage of material for industrial development. Many a barrel of cement, box of nails or of tools rolling across the vast stretches, secured after much pleading by the local authorities, never reached Birobidjan. The Red Army was then turning the Amur shore into a fortified line against the Japanese in Manchuria, and a barrel of cement and a box of nails were too precious to be allowed to pass. Birobidjan could not, of course, stand up against the Red Army.¹⁶⁵

An overriding reason for the failure was the refusal of Jewish Communists to admit the Jewish aspect of the proposed territory. They had one slogan only: *Jews will Build Socialism in Birobidjan*. The author spent several evenings with Rashkes in Moscow, on the latter's return from Birobidjan in 1930, arguing that without a clearcut Jewish goal Birobidjan had no chance. A Jew from Minsk, Kiev or Odessa had no reason whatsoever to settle in a far-off wilderness to "build Socialism." He could do this at home, and with less sacrifice. But Rashkes obstinately clung to the "line" that purely economic needs would move Jews to settle in Birobidjan. He and his comrades knew better, but fear of being accused of Jewish nationalism tied their tongues. After all, their Communism was of post-civil war vintage.

To borrow a standard Communist phrase, the Jewish Communists were trailing far behind their party. Even after Birobidjan was declared a Jewish Autonomous Region, in 1934, S. M. Dimandshtein still resisted attaching any Jewish significance to the Region. In an article in his Russian magazine, *The Revolution and the Nationalities*, for June 1934, Dimandshtein wrote, "We must now increase our struggle against Jewish nationalism, which is trying to utilize the Jewish Autonomous Region for its own aims. . . . Our goal is not the creation of a Jewish majority in Birobidjan. . . . This would be in contradiction to internationalism." Two years later, Moscow proclaimed Birobidjan "the center of Soviet national Jewish culture for the entire Jewish population."

In the absence of any personal or Jewish incentive, Birobidjan

became for many Jews merely a stopover. They soon escaped to the neighboring city of Khabarovsk, where life was less severe.

The truth about Birobidjan had not yet reached here, and the campaign for settling Jews from abroad would have assumed national prominence were it not for the purges in the 30's. Of them later.

(Nikita Khrushchev, secretary of the Communist Party and Soviet Premier, in an interview in the Paris *Figaro*, April 9, 1958, placed the entire blame for the failure of Birobidjan on the Jews. "Jews from all over Russia," he asserted, "came to settle in Birobidjan. They came full of enthusiasm, but soon the majority left. . . ." He cited as the reasons: "Jewish individualism . . . , their inability to lead a collective life . . . , unwillingness to exist on manual labor . . . and opposition to group discipline. . . ." *166

(This is one of Khrushchev's numerous distortions of the truth. No one was "enthusiastic." The author, present at the meeting of the party fraction on the eve of the convention of the GEZIRD in Moscow, 1930, saw that the entire project was forced upon the Jewish Communists. Khrushchev was silent about the great physical hardships of the settlers. Whole families lived in single rooms in long wooden barracks, without so much as a kerosene lamp or a wood stove. In a letter received by the author from Birobidjan in the winter of 1934, an American couple named Hurwitz wrote that the ink was freezing while they were writing, and they existed largely on carrots. No wonder the majority had to run away.)

23 *Running to Moscow*

Nineteen twenty-seven to 1929 were climactic years in the internal struggle of the Workers (Communist) Party. The all-devouring fight for power, thinly concealed beneath a surface of exciting activity, now burst into the open, ending in expulsions.

As the key to the wavering fortunes of the warring factions lay safely in Moscow, one must seek the why's behind the Comintern's seemingly erratic handling of the leadership problem in the American party in the maneuvers of the big Russian leaders for control. American Communism was but a small pawn on the vast Kremlin chessboard.

The factionalism of 1924 to 1929 can be roughly divided into three parts: the first, 1924-1926, the Zinoviev rule; the second, 1927, the Bukharin period; and third, beginning in the fall of 1928, when Stalin took over.

In 1925, Zinoviev was still president of the Comintern and, what spelled more power, a member of the ruling triumvirate with Stalin and Kamenev. Neither he nor Karl Radek, both well grounded in political theory, could accept Foster, a novice to Communism and of pure trade union training, as leader of the American party. Ruthenberg, despite his independence, was more to their liking.

Foster drew the proper lesson from the convention of 1925: that his only chance lay in gaining favor with Moscow. This conviction started a succession of trips to Moscow and a barrage of cables, and caused Foster to "colonize" Moscow with students in the Lenin

School and with functionaries at the Profintern. Meanwhile, his faction dug in for a long internal war.

(The traffic in cables to and from Moscow became a major occupation for each faction. A definite routine was followed, each cabling the mistakes of its adversary, and then circulating only those lines in the usually evasive official reply favorable to its cause. The cable tolls were heavy.)

Foster, a skilful strategist on the domestic scene, had but a sketchy acquaintance with Communist doctrine. He also found it difficult to orientate himself in the maze of the rising rivalry in the Kremlin. Alexander Bittelman, who knew Russian and followed closely the maneuvers of the Kremlin, became Foster's political guide, and later his master.

Foster's colonizing efforts were unwittingly helped by Jay Lovestone, who thought that in acceding to Foster's request for more students of his group to Moscow and more functionaries to the Profintern he was following the example of the Kremlin. But his action boomeranged. It was one thing to send people *out* of Moscow and quite another to send them *to* Moscow. When Krestinsky, a Trotsky follower, was kicked upstairs as ambassador to Berlin, he became worthless to the Trotsky cause in Russia, but sending Foster followers to Moscow created there an oppositional group which steadily argued Foster's case before important people.

During the Zinoviev and Bukharin regimes, the only Foster supporter in Moscow was A. S. Lozovsky, secretary of the Profintern. And he was influential enough to block all attempts of the majority to wrest the TUEL from Foster's grip, creating an anomalous situation: the majority controlled the political apparatus of the party; the rival, its trade union arm.

BUKHARIN FAVORS LOVESTONITES

Ruthenberg's sudden death, March 1927, aggravated the leadership crisis. Zinoviev was no longer the man of power. He and his friend, Kamenev, were fighting for their political lives jointly with Trotsky, whom they had previously ousted in an alliance with Stalin. Bukharin, who replaced Zinoviev in the Comintern and was becoming the spokesman for the moderate, or Right Wing, in world Communism, felt a political kinship with the majority group, the moderate wing in the American party.

The decision of the Comintern plenum of 1927, like the previous ones, was a long-winded resolution that did not show open preference for either American group. Praise and blame were showered on both.*¹⁶⁷

But the heart of the decision lay in the practical instructions. They called for a convention late in 1927, to be organized by a committee of equal members from both sides, the Comintern man acting as chairman. In the meantime, the party was to be ruled by a secretariat of three, Lovestone, Gitlow and Foster. Stripped of the official neutrality and of the righteous appeal for unity, the bare fact stood out that the Comintern had turned over the party to the Lovestone group.

To assure the Lovestone control, the Comintern rep at the convention was a Bukharin follower, Ewert, a German, who went by the name of Brown.

Aided by the Comintern, Lovestone had a majority at the convention, in New York, August 31–September 5, 1927. His group took 25 seats to Foster's 15 on the CEC, and a safe majority of the 11 members on the political committee.*¹⁶⁸

The majority put on a good show. An outsider would have been highly impressed by the attendance as well as by the reports on the work of the intervening two years. The delegates, about 100 in number, "represented" the most important industries. Listening to their reports—prepared by the party top—one could have imagined that each delegate was backed by thousands of workers. Actually, the steel worker from Youngstown, Ohio, could speak for only a small party body that had but weak links in the huge steel mill there. The auto delegate from Ford had not many more shop workers behind him. The lumberjack from Oregon had even less. Only the few delegates from the garment and allied trades represented positions of strength.

The Foster people were furious, and held Ewert responsible for their defeat; but it was the uncommitted rank and file, who had taken the Comintern decision as an endorsement of the Lovestone leadership and voted accordingly.

Neither Foster, Bittelman, Dunne, nor Jack Johnstone considered the results of the convention as the final verdict. They began a long siege of Moscow against the majority.

The party was hopelessly split in two. John Pepper, who con-

vinced Bukharin that he could bring peace to the American party, arrived here for the second time in 1928 with a unique plan for a triumvirate consisting of Lovestone, Foster and himself. But Foster, distrusting both Pepper and Lovestone, rejected the proposal. At the same time, Foster was restive under Bittelman's steady pressure for a Leftist course for the group, but lacked the moral strength to tear himself away.

His plan a failure, Pepper returned to his original camp, the Lovestone faction. The situation in the party was now untenable. The minority formed a party within a party. And the question of expelling Foster and Bittelman was raised and seriously discussed by the majority caucus.

INNER-PARTY DEMORALIZATION

Far worse than the decaying inner-party life was the demoralization inflicted on the membership. Many of those who had entered the Communist ranks moved by sincere purpose—and they were in the overwhelming majority—were gradually infected by the running sore.

The daily practice of factional cheating and deceiving was corrupting the mind and corroding the spirit. The ordinary Communist, taught that the righteous cause grants a license for a social behavior that would be inadmissible in private life, now learned that this double code of morals could be applied within the party itself. Loyalty to the party was replaced by loyalty to the caucus. For many the damage to the human conscience was irreparable.

A rank-and-file Communist could keep from being entangled in a caucus if it was distasteful to him. But there was no escape for one occupying a post in the party or in an auxiliary body. Positions were distributed according to the strength of the factions, each protecting its man "on the job." And without at least a formal allegiance to a caucus, one could not keep any job of significance, whatever his merits. Many Communists, eager to function in the party, swallowed a great deal of nonsense from their caucus and accepted "theses" which filled them with deep misgivings.

Like a sieve, the party could not hold new members. Each annual drive brought in new recruits. But most of them, disgusted with the factional conniving, dropped out before the next drive. Only the

old core, that had passed through the mill of early splits and persecutions, remained faithful. Also steadfast were those for whom the caucuses opened a convenient ladder for rapid climbing in the party. However, the major addition to the party came from the Young Workers (Communist) League, torn by the same internal feuds. The League graduated hardened caucus combatants.

The party's daily activity revolved around exposing social injustices, here or abroad. A definite pattern was followed: first came an outburst in the party press, then a protest demonstration or a mass meeting, followed by a special committee to raise funds for the respective cause or victims. Often the committee preceded the demonstration. Outsiders who joined the special committee because of their interest in its cause became valuable contacts.

This succession of protest campaigns also had a therapeutic value for the membership. They were kept busy and made to feel a part of a world-wide libertarian cause.

CAMPAIGN OF 1928 REVEALS PARTY WEAKNESS

The majority decided to begin the Presidential campaign of 1928 ahead of the old parties, to gain time and to impress Moscow with a sizable vote. This required a nomination convention with all the trappings.

The convention was held May 26-27, in the New Star Casino, New York City. The credentials committee proudly reported 296 "regular" delegates and 155 "fraternal" delegates, from 39 states, territories and possessions of the United States. The geographical arithmetic used to arrive at these consequential figures could only be explained by Jack Stachel, Lovestone's right-hand man. Nevertheless, all the seats for delegates were filled and all the proper committees elected. To present a united party, Foster was nominated President and Gitlow Vice President.

Care was taken not to be outdone by the Republicans and Democrats in the nominations. The technique was simple. A placard with the name of each state was carried by the "delegate" who came from there; and where there were none from a given state, the placard was carried by a man or woman born there. This was particularly true of most of the South and the territories. Still, the paraders reached a high pitch of enthusiasm, shouting, blowing horns and

snake-dancing. For a moment, the excitement even infected the leaders on the platform.*189

"A Platform of Class Struggle," as it was called, contained the entire party program, but omitted the slogan for a Soviet America and dictatorship of the proletariat.

The party was determined to make the campaign a serious affair, even resorting to paying for signatures on election petitions in many counties. Gitlow made a cross-country speaking tour lasting two months. Every unit had a special election committee. The party press kept up a hard drive to spur the ranks to election work, "linking" every workers' struggle with the necessity to vote Communist. (In a discussion with the author, then editor of the *Freiheit*, on the urgency of the campaign, John Pepper feelingly exclaimed, "But I promised Moscow a quarter of a million votes.")

For all the pains taken by the party, the Foster-Gitlow ticket, on the ballot in 32 states, polled only 48,770 votes. What hurt most was revealing the party's weakness to Moscow. Several reasons for the failure were advanced inside the party, but none suggested that the Platform of Class Struggle, though moderate enough, was too remote from American reality to evoke a wider response.

The poor election showing must have hit the standing of the Lovestonites in the Kremlin. But, as events unfolded in Moscow a year later, no election result would have altered their fate. It was already sealed.

24 *Stalin Takes Over*

The American delegation which journeyed to Moscow to the fourth congress of the Profintern, March 1928, found the political atmosphere calm. Trotsky had been exiled to the Altai Mountains, his followers and allies ousted or jailed, and the Stalin-Bukharin-Rykov bloc seemed to be pulling together harmoniously.

But four months later, the much larger American delegation arriving in Moscow for the sixth world congress of the Comintern could already sense that the political calm was on its way out, and that the new victims would be Bukharin, Rykov and their friends.

The surface was as yet undisturbed. All decisions and resolutions of the congress were unanimous. But the doings in the lobbies were disquieting.

A struggle was already raging among the top of the Russian party, but Stalin, the initiator of that struggle, was biding his time, as usual, to complete the isolation of his rivals before destroying them—and with relish.

THE FIRST TROTSKY FOLLOWERS HERE

On returning home, the strategists of the Lovestone faction, hardly imagining that the Comintern would move against an impressive majority, set out to gather such a force for the forthcoming convention. Only John Pepper, knowing Stalin's ways, did not hide his pessimism. Pepper felt sure that if Stalin would succeed in ousting Bukharin, Rykov and Tomski from the Russian Politburo, their friends abroad would be next.

In the interim, a little scene of the big Trotsky drama was being enacted here, and the majority exploited it to the utmost, naively hoping to improve their case in Moscow. James P. Cannon, again ally of Foster, had contacted some of Trotsky's friends, and, on returning here, came out openly for Trotsky and his theories. He was immediately removed as secretary of the International Labor Defense and expelled from the party. His two chief aids, Martin Abern and Max Shachtman, were also expelled.

As a member of the political committee of the CEC, Cannon had to be given a chance to explain his stand. And though the Fosterites objected strenuously, the majority purposely invited him to appear at the meeting of the CEC, October 27, 1928, hoping to embarrass his former allies.

Cannon let this opportunity slip. His parting speech, in the crowded, hushed room, was formal and subdued.⁺⁴⁸ He left without waiting for an answer. But the majority oratory against Trotskyism went on long after his departure.^{*170}

Cannon took with him a small number of people. His followers in New York were of little consequence. But in the Midwest Cannon had a few influential men, notably the Dunne brothers in Minneapolis. They also had a small group in the YCL. At the convention in May 1929, in Chicago, the Trotskyites founded the Communist League of America, and published a weekly, the *Militant*. The Trotsky group did not prove to be ideologically cohesive either. They went through a number of splits and changes of name.⁺⁴⁹

To ingratiate themselves with Stalin, the Lovestonites proclaimed that *No Trotsky Meeting Shall be Held in This Country*. Party bands broke up Trotskyite meetings. A year later, they had to call the police to defend their meetings against similar attacks by party bands.

STALIN MOVES AGAINST THE MAJORITY

The Lovestone camp soon realized that their exertions in the Cannon affair had done them little good. The first blow was an order to Pepper to return to Moscow. The second was the news that the Comintern intended to call Lovestone and Bittelman, as the chief factionalists, for work in other countries. This measure against the

general secretary of the party, coupled with the recall of Pepper, was tangible proof that the Kremlin was ready to smash the majority leadership. Bukharin, Rykov and Tomski were then openly branded in the Soviet press as Right-Wingers. Pepper was confirmed in his forebodings. A Bukharin man, he knew what awaited him and had no desire to return.

Still, the top caucus continued to place its faith in amassing a large majority at the convention.

In labeling Lovestone and Bittelman the chief factionalists, the Comintern was not too wide of the mark. Of course, factionalism was not concocted by a few individuals, was not exclusively a fight for power, and not all controversial issues were artificially raised. But these two unquestionably added a large measure of spice to the stew. Still, placing both on one level was unfair to Lovestone. They differed not merely in background and character, but also in ability, Lovestone being far more constructive. Moreover, Bittelman worked in someone's shadow and his removal from the American scene would in no way hurt the party, while Lovestone was the accepted leader of the majority.

Lovestone was an indefatigable worker, driving himself and others. He had no family, and the party was his primary interest. But he lacked the stamina and steadiness of a Ruthenberg, and was not above employing tricks in the party strife. He was not a forceful speaker, but a skilful debater, and he possessed a sufficient amount of leadership quality to hold a large faction together.

Not all who worked with Lovestone could be counted among his personal admirers. But he voiced the moderate tendency in the party.⁺⁵⁰

THE FACTIONS MEET HEAD ON

The sixth party convention, February 1928, in Irving Plaza Hall, New York, was a crucial one. It was not one convention but two, perhaps even three, the last one in heated meetings with the Comintern delegation, the German Philip Dengel and the Englishman Harry Pollit. The Lovestone group did have an impressive majority, but the two Comintern men had their clearcut instructions and refused to be impressed. The Foster forces were strengthened by Earl Browder, who had returned from China.

Each faction saw to it that their delegates were cut off from any

contact with those of the opposition. Divided into groups, each one headed by a captain, the delegates were housed in special hotels, arrived at the sessions together, sat and left together, and ate under the watchful eye of a captain and his assistant. And the system worked. The air in the hall was supercharged. Most of the work was done behind the scenes, the delegates sitting restive while their leaders argued and fought in side rooms.^{*171}

In their anxiety to placate Stalin, the top caucus decided that the convention cable the Russian party a demand for the removal of Bukharin from the Comintern.⁺⁵¹ The cable was as transparent a political move as it was unprincipled. The majority were known as Bukharin adherents.

The theses of both factions, overly long and confusing, defy any simple and accurate characterization. However, the essence of a basic difference can be summed up thus:

The thesis of the majority held that though crises are inescapable in the capitalist society, the American economy possessed sufficient vitality to overcome them. As Lovestone put it in his speech at the sixth world congress, "We accept the Bukharin thesis, . . . American imperialism is . . . on the ascent." Admitting a creeping crisis, he believed that "the American economy is still healthy. . . ." ^{*172}

The minority, which criticized the Bukharin thesis, demanding "a new word on America," took their cue from the Soviet press. They branded the majority thesis "rotten American exceptionalism." Their own thesis foresaw a steady decline of the American economy and the rising class consciousness of the workers. This "cheerful" prognosis was coupled with another deadly thrust at the majority—that they had been "trailing behind the growing radicalization of the masses," thereby forming a roadblock on the path of their militancy.⁺⁵² This fascinating piece of sophistry proved to be an effective weapon in Moscow against the Lovestone group.

THE SECRET PLAN FOR A FIGHT WITH THE KREMLIN

The delegation of the majority left for Moscow ostensibly to seek a change in the Comintern's attitude, and, particularly, to cancel the decision against Lovestone. This was the theme of the farewell for Pepper and, later, for the delegation. Pepper did not believe that they would secure such a change. His position was that the majority had reached a point of no return, that now they could either

part with the Comintern or surrender and be annihilated. As for himself, he thought of going to the American authorities, fall upon their mercy and ask for asylum.⁺⁵³ But his intention was frowned upon by his associates.^{*173}

Pepper was a sad man at his farewell. He tried to console himself and those present by saying, "No one can doom Communism, not even Stalin. World Communism will survive him." These were bold words, even at a caucus meeting.^{*174} But Pepper was not leaving; he was only going into hiding to try to weather the storm. And this was known only to Lovestone and a couple of others. The subsequent disclosure of Pepper's hiding weighed heavily against the majority in Moscow.⁺⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the few at the top were secretly preparing to defy the Comintern in case they should lose. Of the delegation, only Lovestone, Gitlow and Bedacht were involved in these defiant plans.

The committee of three left in charge of party affairs here, Robert Minor, Jack Stachel and the party lawyer, Joseph Brodsky, were confidentially instructed that at a signal from Lovestone, in Moscow, they were to sell the two adjacent buildings of the *Freiheit* and of the *Daily Worker*, on the east side of Union Square, together with their printing presses and other equipment, to raise cash for the fight as well as to prevent these two key institutions from falling into the hands of the enemy. The committee was left with signed papers for the transactions.

On their arrival in Moscow, April 11, 1929, the majority delegates found the political atmosphere rather cold. Vyacheslov Molotov, Stalin's right-hand man, had taken Bukharin's place in the Comintern. He was also the chairman of the commission on the American party.

The long discussions and maneuvers at the American Commission and later at the Presidium of the Comintern, and the moves and wire-pulling of both factions are outside the scope of this work. Sufficient to say that the draft of the decision by the American Commission, called an "Open Letter to the American Party," did not go as far as Foster, Browder and Bittelman had hoped. This was typical of Stalin's cautious and long-range planning. The Open Letter only insisted on Lovestone and Bittelman being taken out of the United States.

For the majority, Lovestone's removal became the touchstone of the conflict. They finally decided not to submit to it.⁺⁵⁵

It is tempting to note that Stalin, while indulging in a devastating criticism of the maneuvers of both factions, devoted much of his attention to a sharp attack on the majority for their "glorifying of American capitalism." He berated them for believing that the "general crises of world capitalism will not affect America. . . ." "I think," he said, "that the moment is not far off when a revolutionary crisis will be unleashed in America; . . . it will mark the beginning of the end of world capitalism. The United States party . . . must be armed to be able to meet that historic moment, and to head the forthcoming class combat. . . ." ^{*176}

The majority delegation, the proletarians included, stood fast. The exceptions were Max Bedacht and Harry M. Wicks. They yielded and signed the Open Letter.⁺⁵⁶ Bedacht, a native of Germany, a former barber, and a self-taught Marxist, was a soft and good-natured man. Not much of an organizer, he liked to delve into theory and was an able speaker and lecturer. Wittacker Chambers in his book, *Witness*, revealed Bedacht's involvement with Soviet Intelligence. No one who knew Bedacht would have suspected it.

Wicks, a former typesetter and also a self-taught Marxist, had disobeyed the Comintern on the forming of a legal party in 1921 and had gone with the dissidents into the United Toilers. He was a stubborn man, and the least likely to submit to pressure.

The situation of the delegates was tragic indeed. To sign the Open Letter was equivalent to admitting that they were engaged in unprincipled factionalism, that they had deceived the Comintern and had overestimated the strength of American capitalism—it would only discredit them in the eyes of the membership. Nevertheless, one may advance the cool suggestion that the chief obstacle to submission was not so much the censure, however humiliating—for the other group was also censured, though not as sharply—but the suspicion that the Open Letter was merely a trap to destroy them and that their signatures to it would close the trap on them.

LOVESTONE GROUP GOES DOWN TO DEFEAT

Lovestone and Gitlow were summarily ousted from the Comintern. As a stopgap, Moscow decided on a secretariat for the American

party: Bedacht, Minor and Weinstone, with a Russian chairman who went by the name of Williams.

Lovestone's grand strategy for fighting the Comintern collapsed. His trusted committee of three lost their nerve, and entered into secret negotiations with Earl Browder, who had remained here for the other camp. And when the Comintern brought down the ax on Lovestone, Gitlow and Bertram D. Wolfe, the three publicly turned against them. The Open Letter was published with a great display in the party press. Lovestone, unaware of what he later called "the double cross," cabled from Berlin to sell the two press buildings. His cable was published too. The rank and file, all this time kept in the dark about what was actually happening in Moscow, was flabbergasted by the Comintern's scathing denunciations and stunned by Lovestone's scheme against the party press. Such prominent members of his faction as Dr. J. Mindel and Olgin, then again *Freiheit* editor, rushed with loyalty declarations to the Comintern.⁺⁵⁷

Lovestone, Gitlow and Wolfe lost their case before reaching New York harbor. The party press and the party units were closed to them. They were expelled for opposing the Comintern, and the party took immediate steps to ostracize them socially. All those who expressed approval of Lovestone's action were either expelled or had to resign. However, the majority of the faction accepted, though grudgingly, the Comintern's decision. Belief in the absolute supremacy of the Comintern, built up in them during a decade, took the upper hand over their factional allegiance.

By far not all of the active people belonging to the Lovestone group followed him out of the party. As much as they resented the Comintern action, they were also shocked by the plans to close the two papers and to sell the buildings and the printing presses. As to the essence of the Open Letter, their attitude can be expressed thus: "The Comintern is the expression of the collective will of world Communism. If the new Left course is proven wrong, the Comintern will have to change its course. And if it is proven right, Communists should be glad." The author was one of them.

(At a general party meeting in Webster Hall, after all the known Lovestonites were out, W. W. Weinstone delivered a long, elaborate justification for the expulsions. A vote by show of hands gave 1,375 for the Comintern and 52 against it. The proportion of the no's

may seem insignificant, but the very fact that these 52 did not refrain from expressing their frank opposition is indicative of a current of dissatisfaction among the rank and file. Many avoided being counted by staying away from the meeting.) *176

Altogether, about 250 active party people left, among them Benjamin Lifshitz, secretary of the Jewish Bureau, Bert Miller and D. Benjamin, leaders of the New York party; Herbert and Miriam Zam and Will Herberg, of the YCL. Their new outfit was called the Communist Party of the United States (Majority Group). The group published a weekly, *Revolutionary Age*. Later the name was changed to Independent Communist League, and still later, to the Independent Workers League. The name of the paper was changed to *Workers Age*.

The "Majority Group" was small indeed. But almost all of them held positions of importance in the party, in the trade unions, and in the auxiliary bodies. And their defection was keenly felt in the beginning. The party fractions in the garment trades were split. Charles S. Zimmerman, Aaron Gross, Isidor Stenzor, Samuel Seldin, George and Pearl Halpern, Herman Zukowski and others went with Lovestone; Ben Gold, Rose Wortis, Joseph Boruchowitz and Gladys Schechter (Zukowski's wife) remained with the party. So did the majority of the fractions.+58

PARTY LOSES "SEAT" ON UNION SQUARE

The two buildings, that of the *Daily Worker* and of the *Freiheit*, the pride of the movement, were sold anyway. And, in 1930, the entire party apparatus and the papers moved to a rented building on East 12th Street, with an entrance also on East 13th Street, thus giving up a much-desired "seat" on the strategic Union Square.

The explanation was that the party needed the \$20,000 gained by the sale. However, stories went around that the sale was pressed on the party by a few people who profited personally by it. The gross mismanagement of the party papers and, in the case of the *Freiheit*, the outright stealing by the business managers, amounting to dozens of thousands of dollars, that was disclosed but not published, seemed to lend credence to the stories.

Another reason put forward was the heavy debts of the two papers and the bankruptcy of the cafeteria on the ground floor. The latter

owed nearly \$100,000 for food supplies. The man who supplied the meat products, Joseph Katz, immediately brought suit to recover \$25,000 due him by the cafeteria. He claimed that the buildings had been sold to relieve the Daily Worker Association of the debts incurred by the cafeteria.*¹⁷⁷

BROWDER MOVED TO TOP; FOSTER AGAIN SIDETRACKED

The party was flanked by two oppositions. The membership, unaccustomed to a barrage of criticism from fellow-Communists, was disconcerted. From the lowest units up to the district committees, new people came to the top. Active Fosterites were at a premium. The party machinery was loose and creaky. The new triumvirate, unsure of the course hinted at in the Open Letter and fearful of making a Right opportunist slip, acted nervously, increasing the confusion. An example of this nervousness was the doctrinaire treatment of the pogroms in Palestine, 1929, which will be dealt with separately.

However, the severe depression following the financial panic at the end of October 1929 seemed to confirm the Comintern prophecy of a crisis. Before long the party had bread lines and Hoovervilles to shout about. It was making deep inroads among the angry unemployed and footloose intellectuals suffering from a keen and despairing sense of uselessness.

The minority did not have to wait long before Stalin turned the party over to them. The secretariat was replaced in 1930 by a single general secretary, Earl Browder. To everyone's surprise, Foster was sidetracked. He was elevated to a post created for him, chairman of the party. This post carried prestige but little voice in policy-making.

For a couple of years, Foster still headed the TUEL, a real job. But the TUEL was quietly buried in 1934 under the new "democratic" orientation shaping up in Moscow.

Browder had meanwhile been moved into the position of sole leader, leaving for Foster the writing of articles and making of speeches. Though a member of the political committee, Foster was a figurehead, and a pathetic one at that. After 1932 he was passed up as the party's Presidential nominee, which he had been since 1924. Browder, formerly Foster's humble lieutenant, openly slighted

him.^{*178} Only Browder's downfall in 1945 cleared the way for Foster to actual leadership. Foster then fully avenged Browder's poor treatment of him.

One can only surmise why Foster was not made the general secretary. A reasonable explanation would be that Stalin was looking for a man with less roots in American labor and more amenable to his wishes. For all his yielding, Foster could, in his own way, be stubborn. Browder, on the other hand, had little executive experience and was almost entirely unknown to the rank and file in the East, where the bulk of the party strength lay. He had been out of the United States a great deal of the time and could never have been elected general secretary on his own.

After defeating the Right opposition in Russia, 1929-1930, Stalin began to elevate to the high command in the Communist parties abroad faceless people—usually of a coarser grain—men who would be obligated to him and dependent upon his will. In France it was the young miner of shallow mind and glib tongue, Maurice Thorez, who was suddenly made general secretary; in Germany, the burly longshoreman from Hamburg, Ernest Thaelmann, was kept at the helm despite all his mistakes. In Italy, Togliatti (Ercoli) replaced Serra, a man of far greater stature; and in Britain the colorless Harry Pollitt was named secretary of the party.

"MAJORITY" STAYS SMALL; CONSPICUOUS IN AFL

The split-off groups made no headway. The reason was obvious. Neither had shed the premise of Communism, nor challenged the one-party rule. The Soviet Union was to both a workers' state. Now, on the outside looking in, they demanded democracy within the party. Their Communism disarmed them in their struggle against those who personified the Soviet Union. Power and success are fascinating. Often they are the only standards by which men measure greatness.

The Lovestone group made vigorous attempts to reenter the ranks of the Comintern. But these efforts were foredoomed. Neither Stalin nor the party here could accept their two basic demands: the reinstatement of the expelled groups as a unit and internal party democracy. The negotiations were officially broken off early in 1932. By that time Lovestone had participated, in Europe, in the forma-

tion of an international body of Right-Wing Communists, headed by August Thalheimer and Otto Brandler. (For the group's version of the negotiations, see the booklet, *Some Plain Words on Communist Unity*, by Gitlow, Workers Age Publishing Association.) Negotiations with the Comintern were resumed in 1936. But they failed too.

However, the "Majority Group" took one stand totally at a variance with official Communism, that on the trade unions. They spoke out strongly against the dual unions initiated by the party, and their followers left the new Communist-Left unions and returned to the old ones. Lovestonites were conspicuous in the great and decisive union drives in the 30's. Many of them became leading people in the old and newly formed unions. In the ILGWU alone, Charles S. Zimmerman and Louis Nelson proved to be highly competent union builders, and rose to the vice-presidency of that big union.

Whatever little political impact the Lovestone group may have had, one cannot deny them credit for the organizers and educators they contributed to the labor movement.

25 *The Postwar Youth*

Contrary to the immobility of the party, the years 1924 to 1929 were a busy and lively half decade for Jewish Communism. Neither the retreats in the unions and the WC nor the frequent scraps with the Zionists dampened the Communists' spirit or retarded their advance. Grouped around the Jewish Federation—now called Section—was a chain of institutions, social and cultural, feeding lines of Communism. The younger element of the postwar immigration bore a great share in this Communist buoyancy. They imbued it with a new youthful zeal, ending the political stagnation of the early 20's.

Notwithstanding the difference in time and experience, the immigrants of the first decade and those in the beginning of the third were both children of a twilight era, that witnessed the cracking up of the old way of life while the new one was struggling to be born. For the former it was the breakup of the ghetto, the failure of the first revolution and the accompanying massacres; for the later immigrants it was the ravages and dislocations of World War I and the disappointment with the reactionary regimes in the newly created republics. Another point of contact was the inflated picture of America carried here by the young elite of both immigrations, and their inevitable disillusionment on arrival. The America of the Prohibition days and the unexciting affairs of organized labor were equally unattractive to young men and women who had either participated in the Russian civil war or lived through anxious days of hope and despair in Poland.

THE FUSION OF ZIONISM AND LEFTISM

The postwar immigration was small numerically. But its political level was probably higher than that of the previous one, and it also ripened prematurely. Between 1920 and 1924, inclusive, the total Jewish arrivals numbered 286,560. After that, due to the quotas, it dropped to 10,292 in 1925, 10,267 in 1926, and 11,483 in 1927. The total for the decade 1920 to 1930, inclusive, was 354,246.^{*170}

A considerable section of the youth in Eastern Europe were imbued with a Zionist ideology of a radical shading, failing to see any contradiction between their emotional regard for Soviet Russia and their Zionist ideal. In the blood-drenched, devastated areas, Palestine loomed to many of the footloose youth as the Promised Land, both for physical and spiritual survival. From their ranks came the postwar exodus of *halutzim* to Palestine. However, the majority of the youth migrated to America, though some considered it merely as a stop-over until they could get their certificates for Palestine. Quite a few remained Zionists, but for others the urgency of Palestine gradually receded.

As most of them went to the shop, being young and impetuous, they followed the Communist-Left opposition in the unions. Caught between the fires of Zionism and Communism, the universalism of the latter proved more powerful than the Messianic Zionist redemption; Communism, too, had elements of Messianism. It should be emphasized that those who gravitated to Communism were only a minority. But being active and articulate, their voice was much bigger than their numbers.

A glimpse into the mood of these uprooted young men and their road to Communism is given in the following three brief sketches. They were written many years later by people who had come from Poland, from bordering Byelorussia and Russia. Although all three became writers, their experience can be termed characteristic for the rest of the same age group.

This is the first story:

"I am a son of many generations of Jewish artisans, born and raised in small-town poverty in Poland under the Czars. While in the *heder* and *yeshivah* I gleaned my first secular self-education. My father, who migrated to America and died there in a hospital, was my first severed but inseparable contact with America.

"I passed through all the horrors of the World War, hunger, fear, epidemics and forced labor under the Czars and the Germans. I experienced anti-Semitic blows in the new-born Poland, and was among the despairing youth who set out through the war-shattered countries of Europe, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and France, seeking bread and security. Stateless and without documents, we were deported from one country to another, given no chance to settle anywhere.

"In this anxious atmosphere our minds began searching for the causes of war and destruction. In this search the glow of the October Revolution seemed brighter from far away than from close by. With this mental baggage, I arrived in America in 1920, after a year and a half of trudging over Europe.

"In Paris I had learned the knitting trade from Warsaw knitters who were struggling for a livelihood there. I worked in Brooklyn. There was no union, and conditions were bad. For my participation in a lost general strike, I was put on the black list and could not find work. This was immediately after the Palmer raids on the foreign-born. Debs was still in prison and so were several young Communists. By contrast, the optimistic news from the first 'Socialist Fatherland' could not fail to impress me and my friends.

"I reread the rebellious poetry of Edelstadt, Bovshover, Rosenfeld and Winchefsky, and, with the aid of Harkavy's English-Jewish dictionary, pored over Jack London, Upton Sinclair's *Jungle* and John Reed. I started writing shop poems and social verses, which appeared in Left-Wing magazines. The *Freiheit* gave immediate and precise expression to the restiveness of my generation. And the Communist Party harnessed it to its wagon."

Benjamin Fenster, the writer of these lines, after many years on the staff of the *Freiheit*, broke with Communism and returned to his trade, occasionally writing for the *Forward* and other publications.

The second story is that of the Zionist:

"I was born in a staunch Zionist family in Grodno, Byelorussia. Before reaching the age of 20, I was chairman of the Poale Zion Youth there and a *halutz*. I helped to transport seven youth groups to Palestine, myself working on a large farm in preparation for *halutz* work in Palestine. I experienced the anti-Jewish excesses of the troops of General Haller's Polish Legion. They aroused hatred for

the Poles and sympathy for the Soviets. This feeling was shared by the entire youth of my city. As the road to Palestine was blocked, I migrated to America in 1921 with the intention of making my way later to Palestine. I joined my large WC *landslite* branch and the Poale Zion, but at that age one does not worry about sickness nor of a plot in the cemetery. There were no certificates, and my ardor as a *halutz* had cooled off by that time.

"I worked in a chandelier factory. There was no union, the work was hard and earnings low. The *greenhorns* generally were much exploited. The social scene in America and the smugness of the previous immigration repelled me. I turned to the Left, and joined a group of like-minded young people. This group published, in 1924, a literary Left magazine, *The Young Smithy*. I was editor, S. Davidman and Yosl Cohn were the chief contributors. In 1925, I became a member of the Young Workers League, which still had Jewish branches engaged in social and cultural activities. In 1926, I got my first job on the staff of the *Freiheit*."

Alexander Pomerantz, an expert on Soviet Jewish literature, left the *Freiheit* together with Fenster, and is a contributor to Yiddish publications.

The third, Abraham Tabachnick, born in Mogilev-Podolsk, Russia, was 13 years old when the World War broke out. As he put it, "The world was shaken under my feet before I became *Bar Mitzvah*, and loosened the old traditional ties." He went to a Russian high school and became Russianized. But the *Kulture-Lige* of the Bund and the Left Poale Zion revived his interest in Yiddish. The youth of the town had never heard of the Bolsheviks. Kerensky was their hero. (The name of Stalin he heard for the first time in the United States.) But the pogroms committed by Petlura's bands changed Jewish sentiment. Red troops on the whole protected Jews.

Tabachnick came here in 1921, his main concern being literature. "Even those who had run away from the civil war and the Red Army," he reminisced, "retained a lingering attachment for the Bolshevik Revolution. I was attracted to the Left because the Right and the *Forward* had little to offer me culturally. Besides, the Left was more lively and eager. Communists exploited the youth's deep yearning for cultural growth and their social impulses. . . . The same factors that attracted many young American writers to the

Communist movement in the 20's worked also on young Jewish writers. To this were added the professed concern for Jewish culture and the stories of cultural revival in Russia."

Tabachnick never became a party member, but contributed to their magazines until the end of the 30's. He is a well-known poet and essayist.

FROM EAST SIDE POVERTY TO COMMUNISM

To round out the picture of the mentality of the immediate post-war generation captivated by Communism, it might be appropriate to cite the case of at least two American-born of the same age group. Their road to Communism was different from that of the Eastern Europeans, lacking as they did the emotional regard of the latter for the Bolshevik Revolution.

This is the story of Herbert Zam, the energetic and aggressive leader of the Young Communist League in the 20's:

"I was born and raised on the Lower East Side of New York. My father was a garment worker, a passive Socialist and a reader of the *Forward*. Two gangs were operating on either side of our district, the Dry Dock and the East Side gangs. The first consisted of Irish; the other included a number of Jews.

"I entered Stuyvesant High School at the age of 13. The school was crowded, and they had morning and evening classes. I worked in the mornings at various jobs, in shops and in offices, and studied in the afternoon.

"The tremendous Socialist ferment of the early war years reached my high school in 1916. During the Presidential election campaign, a straw vote was taken in the school auditorium, the SP candidate, Benson, receiving an overwhelming majority. About 1,500 students participated; the largest group was Jewish; the next, Irish.

"While in high school I joined the YPSL's, bringing a whole gang with me. The League did not seem to be sufficiently active politically. They appeared to us more like a marriage club. Morris Novack came in at the same time with another group. Yearning for action, I joined the YPSL Circle 7, in the 6th Assembly District. That district, the biggest in the country, had their own building at 106 Avenue C.

"I entered City College in June 1920, at the age of 17. There, for the first time, I heard of Communism. There was a Social Problems Club on the campus. Sidney Hook was a member. All the club did was to have an occasional lecture, attended by about 20 students. The limited scope of the club looked ridiculous to me. I secured a list of 20 Communist students, members of both Communist parties, and brought them together. We decided to capture the club. At the next elections we ran Sidney Hook, a Left-Winger but not a party man, against Emil Schlesinger, a senior and a Socialist. The club grew, later numbering several hundred. The Communists controlled the club for a long time. It became an indoctrination center for Communism among native-born students.

"About that time I joined the CP, considering them genuine revolutionaries. The active cadres of the YPSL's also joined the CP, but the League was killed in the struggle between the two parties.

"All this time we lived on the verge of poverty. Most of us who joined the YPSL's and later the Communists came from poor families. We were all idealists, and dreamed of a romantic revolutionary movement similar to the one in Russia. But Russia itself did not evoke any special sentiment in us. The Russian revolution served rather as a trigger than as a blueprint. We thought we would do it better than in backward Russia. We didn't see only the dark side of America, nor were we shocked by anything happening here. We took America for granted. We were influenced by the early American populists, and Bellamy's *Looking Backward* had a tremendous impact on us. We firmly believed that we could have Socialism here, and not too far off.

"As a result of the raids, most of the Left-Wing YPSL's—and this meant 90 per cent of them—formed the Independent Young Socialist League. And after the CP and the UCP merged, the League decided to affiliate with the new CP.

"When I became secretary of the IYPSL, they numbered only about 500 scattered members. In 1929, when I left the CP, the YCL was quite a considerable body, with approximately 5,000 members nationally. Some 1,000 of them were in New York. There were many Finns in the New York League, but the active cadres and the leadership were mostly Jewish. Students from City College formed a large segment there. The most active students were Sy Gerson, Artie Stein and Carl Weissberg. The Lovestone group predominated." +59

RESISTING RUSSIAN DICTATION HERE AND IN MOSCOW

The idealism and revolutionary romanticism of these young Communists did not hinder them from turning the YCL into perhaps the worst faction-ridden spot in the Communist movement. Caucus battles and fights by individuals were pursued with the ardor possessed only by youth. Corrosion of character and of integrity was unavoidable.

Zam's first period in office, when the party was in Chicago, were years of starvation, the majority of the CEC being against him. They simply cut off his funds. His wife Miriam, also a devoted Communist, had to give up her college and turn over the money her parents sent her for tuition to feed the few people in the League office and pay the return fare of League delegates.

In 1925 the YCI (Young Communist International) appeared on the scene. In Russian style, the YCI representative set himself up as a dictator. Totally ignoring American conditions, he wanted to turn the League into an exact replica of the Russian league, which would have made it a caricature. It took Zam a great deal of time and effort to stop him. And this opposition to the rep's authority could not but harm Zam's reputation in the Kremlin.

In Moscow for the plenum of the YCL in the same year, Zam doggedly resisted the Russian steam-rolling tactics at sessions and committee meetings. As punishment he was detained for ten months to isolate him from the League at home. He was finally permitted to return home, but prohibited from running for office without the approval of Moscow. Unable to resume his post as national organizer, he became editor of the YCL organ, *Young Worker*.

In 1928, Zam went to Moscow again, as a delegate from the CP to the sixth Communist congress. He stayed over for the fifth congress of the YCI. The YCI rep, who had gone by the name of Bob Mazut in America in 1925 and had vigorously supported the Ruthenberg-Lovestone group then, was now intriguing with the same vigor against them. In reply to Zam's question as to what had caused this shift, Mazut blandly said, "My only concern is with the Russian corn and cabbage," implying that the internal situation in the Russian party dictated his actions.

The deteriorating fortunes of the Lovestone majority made Zam's position doubly precarious. His previous sobering experience in

Moscow caused him to fear that this time, as a leading Lovestonite, he would be detained permanently. He decided to look for an opportunity to escape. And, by means of a little plot of his own, he secured an exit visa without the knowledge of the YCI. Sneaking out of the Hotel Lux through a back door, he made for the station, and was across the border before he was missed.

Zam left the party together with his group, and a couple of years later he, Ben Gitlow and Lazar Becker went over to the Socialist Party, Zam becoming the head of the labor department. He resigned from the SP in the late 30's.

Zam was the first director of the Cloak Retirement Fund in the ILGWU. He is now in private business.

This, briefly, is the story of the second young American:

"My father was a wood-turner in Warsaw and my mother a textile worker in Lodz. Both worked at their respective trade in New York. My father was a reader of the *Forward*, but a conservative man without any interest in the labor movement.

"I was born in 1905 on Cherry and Water Streets on the Lower East Side, a poor Irish neighborhood notorious for its slums. The family later moved to Brownsville. I was sent to a *heder* for a couple of years, but I did not learn anything there. I must say, I was intellectually numb as a child.

"Our home was broken up, and the court placed me in a philanthropic children's home upstate, where I spent about three-and-a-half years, off and on. It was not a happy experience. None of the boys liked the semi-military regime. As far as I remember, I had no friends there.

My father remarried, and took me to live with him. I was then 13 years old and had completed only the sixth grade in public school. Before I reached 15, I went to work, first in a leather coats place, then on metal electrocutting. I had no intellectual interests whatsoever, nor did I ever open a book. And I still cannot explain why, living on Hopkinson at the corner of Pitkin, I was not drawn into any of the several gangs active in that neighborhood.

The exciting Socialist election campaigns of 1917-1918 somehow caught my attention, and I stopped to listen to their street-corner meetings; Brownsville was a stronghold of the Socialist movement. In the fall of 1918, there was a wave of rent strikes in Brownsville,

followed by mass evictions. The sight of sidewalks covered with furniture, including our own, jolted me out of my phlegmatism. A sign-painter living in the same tenement, noting my interest, took me to a meeting at the Brownsville Labor Lyceum. There I met the Junior YPSL's, whom I joined. From the Junior YPSL's I moved to the YPSL's, the Independent YPSL's and then to the Young Communist League. In the leagues I got my political education, and at the age of 18 I read my first book.

I was never a paid functionary of the YCL or the party. As a skilled worker, I would accumulate a little money and then go out for the party in the field to organize the unorganized, and only when the money was exhausted would my expenses be paid. I was a leading organizer in the long and turbulent textile strike in Passaic, 1926, and in the New Bedford strike, in 1928. I was arrested about 38 times, and the accumulated bail under which I was released reached nearly \$100,000. In between, I had a one-year's scholarship in Brookwood Labor College.

I left the party in 1929 with the Lovestone group. I was then the industrial organizer of the YCL. In 1934, I saw the futility of trying to reform Communism, broke with the group, and entered the Socialist Party. I left the SP in 1939."

The writer of these lines is now a prominent officer of a trade union engaged in extremely difficult organizational drives in the South. Though he has been fighting Communism for nearly three decades, the public revelation of his Communist past could be used by the southern anti-union die-hards to hurt the drives. For that reason he must remain anonymous.

26 *Branching Out*

The Jewish nucleus of the Young Workers League was composed mostly of immigrants who had belonged to the Bund youth division, the *Zukunft*, in Poland. Several of them, desiring to renew their group on the new soil, placed a notice in the *Forward*, January 1921, calling upon other former *Zukunft* members to come to a meeting. Such a meeting was held in February at 5 Ludlow Street, the headquarters of the SP and the YPSL's. About ten or twelve people were present. They formed a *Zukunft* youth branch. The following meetings attracted more young people, some of them Labor Zionists.

The question of affiliation with a similar American body was the most pressing. After several heated debates, the decision was in favor of the newly formed Young Workers League. A few joined the underground CP. The East Side branch grew quickly. Soon branches were formed in other parts of the city. In all they numbered several hundred people. (Among the founders were M. Kaufman, Issie Glass, J. Rubin, Khave Shafran, Sam Don.) Youth branches were also formed in other cities.

Due to the complicated factional situation in the League, the Jewish branches were tolerated. They were actively engaged in Jewish cultural work, a prime element in their attraction. From their ranks came quite a number of the teachers and writers grouped around the *Freiheit* and other Communist-Left publications. However, the leaders of the Young Workers League, being opposed to ethnical units, tried to limit their growth and restrict their activi-

ties. In 1924, the YWL called a conference of the Jewish youth branches and clubs. Between 60 and 70 youth groups responded. The conference elected a central body to coordinate and widen the activities of the various groups. It also decided upon a monthly magazine. But the YWL allowed neither. A year later, in 1925, the Jewish as well as the other language branches were dissolved.

Even before their dissolution, the Jewish branches were drying out because of the practice of the YWL and the party of drafting the most able for general work. The result was that many of the active people left the Jewish field, becoming Americanized, and made their way rapidly in the party or in the Left unions. The better known among them were Samson Milgrom (Mills), Sam Donchin (Don), Leon Platt and James J. Matles.⁺⁶⁰ Only a few remained in Jewish work. Prominent among them were: Alexander Pomerantz, David Flakser, Khave Shafran.

THE CLUBS, A LIVELY SOCIAL OUTLET

Scattered as they were over the big cities, the young radical immigrants banded together into clubs. In a sense, the clubs were a replica of the *selbstbildung vareinen* of the younger immigrants before the turn of the century.

The clubs sprang up spontaneously, though some of their builders were members of the dissolved Jewish YWL branches seeking an outlet for cultural activities. Only when they came knocking at the doors of the *Freiheit* asking for speakers and space did the party take notice of them.

Once the Communists found a growing organization, they landed there with both feet. Soon the clubs were in the grip of caucusing party fractions. From there it was but a short step to Communist domination.

During the 20's the party control was not too tight, partly because of the factional strife. And the clubs were relatively free to branch out along social and cultural lines, the party hardly intruding in their activities.

A club usually occupied a floor in an office or apartment building. The inner walls were taken out, and a stage built on one side. The walls were painted and decorated with posters and placards, and the ceiling was festooned with colorful crepe paper. Facing the

stage was a buffet for sandwiches and hot and cold drinks, served by the girls. Larger clubs had dramatic groups, dance groups, mandolin bands, sport sections, libraries, and the inevitable "wall newspaper," an institution brought over from Russia.

Friday night was lecture night. Saturday was given over to dancing. Sunday, to the literary evening, with invited writers or poets. During the week there were rehearsals and classes. The clubs existed on dues and on the income from the various affairs.

The clubs were more spacious and comfortable than the cramped bedrooms, where the young people lived in twos. The clubs were an outlet for native talent, and, last but not least, boys met girls there. They were *shotkhonim* (match-makers) for many a couple. During the summer months the social life of the clubs was transferred, through vacations and week-end outings, to the Communist-controlled camps. The youth was thus held together the year round.

The clubs were united into city committees, and that facilitated Communist domination. But in the late 20's, when they, in agreement with the Jewish Section, were about to create a national body, the party put its foot down, declaring that there was danger of "out-right" Jewish nationalism in such a body, and that it might develop into a parallel movement which would slip out of the party orbit. Several years later, the party did relent, and a national conference of the clubs was held in October 1933, in New York. Another conference followed a year later, but the clubs were already shrinking, and were, for all practical purposes, units of the party.

The clubs, like other transmission-belt groups, were pushed into the Leftist course of the Third Period. Party pressure became oppressive. The clubs went deeper and deeper into strict party activity, leaving no room for social and cultural outlets. Their slogan became *Each Club a Fighting Center for the Neighborhood*.¹⁸⁰ They had to participate in the hunger marches, in rent strikes, in demonstrations of the unemployed, in protests against Polish fascism, Japanese militarism, in recruiting drives for the party, and in raising funds for the party papers. They were also involved in the fight against the split-off groups, the Lovestonites and the Trotskyites. (In 1930, the club in Borough Park, Brooklyn, appealed to the other clubs against the action of the CP in bringing the struggle against the Lovestonites into the club, compelling it to expel two active people.)

The opening sentence in the semi-official review of the clubs stated the change succinctly: "The leadership is proud of the fact that (the clubs) are ideologically under the banner of the CP and participate in all the struggles and campaigns led by the party. . . . (They are) recruiting places for the revolutionary unions and for the CP." *181 The review emphasized the part the clubs had had in the anti-Zionist campaign—meaning the Palestine events in 1929.

In 1931, according to the review, the New York City committee united 24 clubs, with a membership of 3,500. The clubs had recruited 80 members into the party, and, in the same year, raised \$7,000 for the *Daily Worker*.

The active minority were gradually drawn into the YCL or the party; the rest felt weighed down by the physical and financial burden imposed upon them, and voted their disapproval by dropping out. When Communism shook off the Third Period, the clubs were mostly gone. Age was also a factor.

THE "UNIVERSITY"; DR. MINDEL, GENEROUS BUT STRICT

On the educational level, the Jewish Section of the CP, paralleling the workers' schools of the party, opened its own school in 1926. And, as was customary in the Jewish movement, it was dressed up as the Jewish Workers' University.

The school gave evening courses for adults on economics and political subjects as well as on Yiddish and Yiddish literature. The latter had by far the larger attendance. Many of the young writers who later saw their stories and poems in the *Freiheit*, the *Hammer*, and in other Left magazines completed the last two courses. The general enrollment never exceeded 200. As Stalinism had not yet been heard of, the curriculum was broad enough to satisfy the cultural and literary appetites of those who had no direct concern for such a dry subject as the history of Communism. And here, too, the student body carried the financial burden of the institution. Aside from paying tuition, they ran various affairs to cover the deficit.

The first two directors of the "University" were Kalmen Marmor and Dr. J. Mindel; when the two were no longer available, it was hard to find a loyal Communist possessing any reputation as an educator. Philip Cherner was for a long time secretary of the school. Most of the teachers came from the *Freiheit*. The school, too, at-

tracted some outsiders interested in workers' adult education. And from there the distance to the party was not far. Similar courses, but on a smaller scale, were opened in a few other large cities. The chief handicap there was the acute shortage of teachers.

Dr. Jacob Mindel merits some attention. Born in 1881 into a middle-class family, in the city of Minsk, he came to America in 1904, and became a citizen in 1915. In 1919, during the first split in the Jewish Socialist Federation, Mindel was one of the chief speakers against the Communists. But once "integrated," he became an orthodox Communist, submitting unquestioningly to all the zigzags of the line. A dentist by profession—in partnership with Dr. Louis Hendin—he later gave up his office to become a party functionary.

One of Mindel's children was born a hopeless imbecile. Mindel had a passionate concern for him. Believing that in Soviet Russia he could find the ideal place for such a child, he moved there with his family in the early 30's. But the home proved to be a wretched place. Mindel had to take his son out, and keep him in the small room in the Moscow hotel allotted to his family.

On returning to America, Mindel kept his sad experience to himself. His Communism was not shaken.

An educated Marxist, he was appointed in the 30's head of the national training school. The attitude of the students toward "Pop" Mindel was a mixture of respect and fear, the first for his personal integrity, the second because of his tricky and probing questions at examinations.*¹⁸²

Dark and handsome, Mindel gave the impression of a sensual man suppressing his passions. Generous and without personal ambitions, he steeled himself for the part of a strict disciplinarian. Later, he was made chairman of the National Control Commission, and dealt harshly with anyone charged with political heresy or violation of party rules. Mindel was among the string of second layer Communist leaders convicted in the early 50's. He was released in 1957.

THE BLOSSOMING SINGING SOCIETIES

The Freiheit Singing Societies and mandolin orchestras, that added so much color and festivity to the Communist movement were born of the fervor and labor of a few enthusiasts. They were also a release

of the creative urge inherent in young people. In the beginning, these musical efforts were completely ignored, and the initiators had to beg for a notice in the *Freiheit* and for a corner in which to rehearse. But when the New York chorus, named after the *Freiheit*, gave its first performance at the end of 1922 for a couple of thousand people, the party was not slow to recognize its significance, and took it under its protective wing.

The choruses and orchestras spread rapidly, and in 1924 a central body, the Jewish Workers Music Alliance (the word "Workers" was eliminated in the late 30's), was formed; Simon Saroff, secretary. He was followed by B. Chertkoff. A few years later, the Alliance had affiliated 16 choruses and six mandolin orchestras here and in Canada. There was hardly a city with a sizable Jewish population without a *Freiheit* Singing Society. In New York the expanded chorus had to be divided into neighborhood sections.

Completely dominated by the party—through its Jewish Section—the repertory of the societies reflected the vagaries of the party line. In the 20's it was largely based on classical Jewish poetry, workers' and folk songs, with an admixture of a few Soviet marches. The most important musical composition was the oratorio *Tzvei Brider* (two brothers), by Jacob Schaefer, written to the famous ballad by I. L. Peretz of the same name. It was performed in Mecca Temple, February 20, 1926, Lazar Weiner conducting. There were also compositions based on the poems of Abraham Liessin, Yeaosh and the Russian Alexander Block. In Chicago, the conductor of the chorus, Lefkowitz, went in for classical music. He adapted the score of Handel's *Messiah* to a modern text, and performed it with notable success. But this was an exception, and Lefkowitz had to step down for his nationalism.

In the Third Period the repertory was "proletarian" and Communist, typified by such compositions as the *October Revolution*, also by Schaefer. Under the melting rays of the Democratic Front, the music went deeper into folklore; *A Bunt Mit a Statchke*, a medley of gay humorous songs and sketches, was the most popular and repeated work. It was done by a Soviet Jewish composer.

However, the underlying theme of the Singing Societies throughout their existence was praise of the Soviet Union. Every concert had to include a few Soviet songs. These hallelujahs were in harmony with the basic concept of Jewish Communism that Soviet

Russia was the Promised Land and a taste for everything Soviet had to be cultivated here. An example—perhaps an extreme one—was the short poem of Itzik Feffer, "Very Well," written to the tune of a folk melody by Sheinin. The first few lines were:

*You ran away from your father,
Very well, very well.
You betrayed your father,
Very well, very well.
Your father is our enemy,
You will not live with him any more.
Very well, very well.*

This was one of the most popular of the Soviet songs.

JACOB SCHAEFER, AN INVOLUNTARY COMMUNIST

The pioneer of this musical movement was Jacob Schaefer, a young immigrant in Chicago, a carpenter and the son of a carpenter. Schaefer came here at the age of 13. He had always been keenly interested in music, and had gone to work with a cantor at an early age. In Chicago, too, he worked and studied with cantors. The synagogue was his musical school. Schaefer was by no means a Communist; his primary concern was music. But when he began forming a chorus to perform his compositions, in 1914, he met with nothing but apathy from the official labor bodies—partly because he lacked a formal musical education. Only the group of the Socialist Federation cooperated with him.*¹⁸⁸ And when the federation broke away from the SP and became part of the Workers Party, Schaefer became dependent on the Left Wing and on the *Freiheit*.

On moving to New York in search of a larger field, this dependence became still closer. And with every concert, the arm of the party wound tighter around him. The top fraction became the ruling power in every Singing Society and in their national body. And, repeating the pattern, the demands of the party became heavier and more insistent; inner feuds and cliques added to their difficulties. Non-party people eager to have their opinion count in an institution they cherished had to join the party. Schaefer had to do so too.

The party's emphasis on "proletarian" music during the Third Period was hard on Schaefer. He had to compose in an idiom that

was alien to him. He had also to face a group within the Singing Society that wanted a more polished conductor. A strongly built man, his heart proved too weak to stand the strain. He suffered several heart attacks, and died December 1, 1936, at the age of 48. He was given a big funeral.⁺⁶¹

The Workmen's Circle and the Labor Zionist Farband had their choruses, too. But the Freiheit Singing Societies were the first and largest. Men and women, after a hard day in the shop, spent several evenings a week at rehearsals—also hard work—learning to sing without a score for one or two appearances a year, at Carnegie Hall or the Brooklyn Academy of Music, accompanied by a symphony orchestra. In addition, they had to pay dues and to sell tickets for the concerts to maintain their organization. No *Freiheit* celebration or other affair of the movement in any large city was complete without the local Freiheit chorus. At their peak, the Music Alliance (Farband) numbered about two dozen Singing Societies. (During World War II their name was changed to Jewish People's Choruses, to conceal their Communist identity.)⁺⁶² With the enormous shrinking and emaciation of the Communist movement in late years, they too have shrunk greatly. However, the choruses were one of the very few Communist-controlled institutions that did not disappear completely in the late 50's.

27 *Fiasco and Success*

The Communist cooperative housing in the 20's, the largest in New York City, was the most daring and reckless of the Communist enterprises in that exciting decade. This ambitious scheme, too, originated from below, the party entering the situation when the project was already in full swing, and contributing to its collapse.

There had always been a trend toward cooperatives, though not a large one, among Jewish workers, influenced by the general cooperative movement. In the second decade, this trend shifted to the easier retail area, and men of varying beliefs, such as David Dubinsky, Dr. Nachman Syrkin and Yasha Secoder, were active in maintaining a few cooperative stores and a restaurant on Second Avenue—the only one on the East Side open on the Day of Atonement.

A group of young radical immigrants rented a floor and set up a collectivist household. Maintenance and kitchen expenses were shared, and domestic work was rotated. As the group increased, the whole house was taken over. Internal squabbles eventually forced them to close the house. But a small band of dedicated cooperators refused to part with the idea, and waited for another opportunity. They were led by Simon Gerson and S. K. Cohn.

Their chance came a few years later, in the middle of the 20's. The general rise in the standard of living, a result of the unionization drives in all Jewish trades, caused a movement from the crowded Lower East Side to better homes in new neighborhoods. Most of the younger people were married, had children, and were looking for fresh air and playgrounds for them. Cooperative hous-

ing projects for the better-paid workers appeared to be the only solution.

This tendency fitted in with the cherished dream of the Gerson and Cohn group. They began agitating for a large-scale cooperative housing development, winning over a few Communists and Left-Wingers temperamentally inclined to grandiose plans. Without bothering about financial details, they formed the United Workers Cooperative Colony Association and put a small payment down on a large tract of land on Allerton Avenue, facing Bronx Park. The Communist members, particularly Noah London, a charter Communist, a man capable of being carried away by his imagination, sold the plan to the party. London was made chairman of that body, assuring party control. And the *Freiheit* became their medium for big and fanciful advertising and publicity.

The project, as presented by the initiators, had a much higher goal than ordinary cooperative housing. It envisaged many blocks of large dwellings, built by workers, for workers, and financed and managed by themselves, without landlords, and without the fear of rent gauging and evictions; a model colony in architecture, comfort and social facilities. In a pamphlet written by Olgin for the project, he emphasized the anti-capitalist aspect of the enterprise and the fact that vast material means would be accumulated in workers' hands. He also pointed out that, aside from the immediate advantages, the people would be taught cooperative living.^{*184} All a member had to pay in was \$250 a room, and his rent was to be as low as \$11 a month per room.

Conditions for membership were strict. Only wage-earners, belonging to a trade union if one existed in their trade, were eligible. A cooperator could be expelled within the first two years on a decision of the members' meeting, only his original \$250 being returned. This was clearly aimed at weeding out political undesirables.

The project was to comprise three blocks of houses, with an adjacent food market and a restaurant. It was to cost four million dollars, no small amount for workers in the middle 20's. But the cost was among the last worries of the ardent founders. They were on the threshold of the fulfillment of a vision of a new type of communal living, something that capitalist, individualist America had not yet witnessed. Such prosaic matters as mortgages and maintenance costs seemed negligible details. Actually, these enthusiasts,

though they were supposed to be good Communists, saw cooperative housing as only the beginning of a developing chain of cooperative institutions, including credit unions and banks, that would ultimately replace the capitalist economy, a clear denial of the inviolable theory of class struggle.

THE PAIR OF VISIONARY FANATICS

The two prime movers, Gerson and Cohn, the first a carpenter, the second a capmaker, were a pair of proletarian Don Quixote's. Gerson, who carried the whole project on his shoulders, had never gone beyond the *heder*, knew little and cared less for arithmetic. He was of medium height, heavy-set, with a mop of dark hair and powerful arms. His closest friend, Cohn, was his exact opposite. Everything about him was thin and anemic, including his voice. He was not bad at figures, and liked to pore over estimates. Cohn was supposed to act as a check upon the fantastic schemes of Gerson. Actually, he was the same visionary and obstinate crusader. The two were also militant vegetarians, and their vegetarian zeal did not add to the health of the big enterprise.

The builder, A. Brodsky, had his head in the clouds, too. He was a frequent contributor to Communist-Left causes. The party chiefs, completely ignorant of such matters and up to their necks in the fight for power, left everything to Gerson, Cohn and Brodsky. The first two entered the party simply because they had to operate within a movement. Shrewdly, they attached themselves to the ruling caucus for protection.

The first project was a block of four five-story buildings of 339 units, surrounding a central garden. The upper story was built for bachelors. It was started in 1926 and finished in 1927. There was an auditorium, restaurant, gymnasium, library, space for a parochial school and a kindergarten. Gerson and Cohn originally conceived collective kitchens on every floor, but they had to yield to the deeply-rooted "individualistic habits" of the housewife. The rooms were spacious and well ventilated, definitely an advance over the living quarters of the average family. The only difficulty was that the actual cost and maintenance proved to be much higher than the estimates. And, because they had to raise the rentals to \$14 and \$14.50 instead of the \$11 demanded by the state law, the association

lost the 20-years tax exemption, adding a sizable tax burden to the increased rental.

As credit was easy during those years, the association obtained a million dollar mortgage from the New York Title and Mortgage Company for the first block.

THE GOLD BONDS, A RECKLESS MEASURE

A large share of the members' investment money for the second and third blocks was eaten up by the first. To produce additional funds, Gerson and Cohn hit upon a wonderful idea. They decided to float an issue of Gold Bonds on the unfinished second building and on the still-to-be-started third. They figured out—and correctly so—that the term "Gold Bonds" would have the desired psychological effect upon the prospective investors, workers completely ignorant of such matters as mortgages, bonds and security.

Again the party press became the carrier of a big and loud advertising campaign with such flaming slogans as *Don't Keep your Savings in Capitalist Banks! Capitalist Banks Aid Strikebreakers and Gunmen! Make Your Money Serve Your Own Class!* The ads, the beautifully illustrated catalogues and the solemn assurances in the party press that the bonds were "as good as gold," and the six per cent interest, had their effect. The association opened a large office at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 14th Street, equipped like an authentic bank—Fifth Avenue was chosen to impress would-be investors. The name of the new body was Consumers Finance Corporation, and the price of a bond was \$100. Money began to pour in. Communists and Left-Wingers took out their last savings from the "capitalist banks," that paid only two per cent, and brought it to "their own bank." About \$350,000 was raised.

The other two blocks were completed in 1928–1929 and totaled about 670 dwelling units. These were less elaborate than the first. Rumors of financial irregularities could not be suppressed, and the party put Elye Wottenberg in charge. He was a practical and cool-headed man, but his appointment came too late. The grievous damage was done. Gerson and Cohn had undertaken more than they could carry through. The cost of the buildings, the lavish ads and the maintenance far exceeded the rentals.

The result was inevitable. The association had fallen behind in

the payment of interests, amortization, taxes and assessments by over \$200,000. Title Insurance foreclosed the mortgage. But Felix M. Warburg, who had a controlling interest in Title Insurance, anxious to avoid clashes between the police and Jewish workers, who picketed the title company, compelled the company to agree to a compromise. A new plan was worked out aimed to save the cooperative nature of the houses and to protect those who lived there. But the plan fell short of saving the "Gold Bonds." They were worthless. The association went into bankruptcy, the food market was sold—it was a failure from the very beginning due to mismanagement—the free land was given up, but the buildings were returned by the title company to a new association of cooperator-residents under a special favorable agreement.

News of the bankruptcy spread quickly, and hundreds of bondholders, alarmed, rushed to the office on Fifth Avenue, to find it closed. They picketed the headquarters of the CP, the *Freiheit* and the *Daily Worker*. Many went to the district attorney demanding action to recover at least a part of the loss. But it seems that nothing could be done under the law. As unemployment was spreading, the loss of life savings was indeed tragic to hundreds of families.

The party and its papers tried to calm down the outraged bondholders with assurances that the new association had taken over the obligations of the defunct Consumers' Finance Corporation, and would gradually pay out the full amount of their bonds. Their collective and personal responsibility for the mess which had caused so much harm to so many was glossed over.

THE PARTY'S HEAVY HAND; THE FINAL COLLAPSE

The situation was aggravated by the depression. Many tenants could not pay their rent; others held it back to "live out" their investment and the bonds. Still, released from the debt of the bonds and having to pay only a reduced interest on the mortgage, the new association could have continued the buildings as a collective affair for a long time. But poor management coupled with heavy financial demands by the party kept the expenses above the income. By the end of 1941 there was an accumulated deficit of \$611,843, wiping out the members' equity of about \$400,000 and dimming any hope for even partial payment of the bonds. The mortgagee took over, the association

was dissolved and ordinary tenant-landlord relations were established. (The financial figures are taken from *Non-profit Housing Projects in the United States*, Bulletin No. 896, U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

Despite the grave financial reverses, the houses—still called cooperatives—remained during the 30's and the 40's a Communist fort. Many of the original residents moved out. But the Communist house committee kept its grip on the tenants. Some of those who had to move were Trotskyites and Lovestonites, whose life was made unbearable. They and their children were ostracized.

There is no doubt that the houses were hard hit by the depression. Two more cooperative housing projects, on a much smaller scale, went under, one of the Labor Zionist Farband and the other by a group of Yiddishists of the Sholom Aleichem Folks Institute. But they avoided swindling so many people with worthless gold bonds. Also, the Communist cooperatives managed to exist as a collective many years after the depression, and their final collapse had no relation with it.

As to teaching people cooperative living, the houses on Allerton Avenue were a hotbed of cliques and personal intrigues. The party had frequently to interfere to check quarrels and inflated ambitions. However, the party was never the loser. In addition to the manifold advantages of such a large "concentration of forces" in one place, the cooperatives, as long as they existed, were a good milking cow for the party.

THE FLOWERING SUMMER CAMPS

The summer camps, that widened the Communist periphery and brought much liveliness to the movement, were also initiated by the odd and inseparable pair, Gerson and Cohn. Here, too, they were the forerunners of a trend, more popular and simpler of realization than that of cooperative living.

With the doggedness of dedicated men, their small band, called Workers Cooperative Association, began, in 1921, to arrange week-end excursions to different countrysides. The *nature-freunde* character of these excursions can be seen from the way a three-day holiday trip to Belmar, New Jersey, was advertised:

"Take along a sweater, a bathing suit, a blanket, soap and a

towel. You will sleep with mother earth, with your fist for a pillow. But you will be covered (aside from your blanket) by the lovely moon and the beautiful stars. The food will be bought and prepared collectively." *185

The response to "sleeping with mother earth" was gratifying. A couple of years later, the Workers Cooperative, overcoming many obstacles, opened a small camp for weekends in the rugged hill country near Beacon on the Hudson. Gradually, improvements were introduced, a few tents and a shack for a dining room, and the camp was given the jolly name of *Nitgedeiget* (Don't Worry). It was the only such spot near the big city, and young people who did not care for comfort and had only a few dollars to spend for vacation or weekends in the country could enjoy the sunshine and bathing on the Hudson. *Nitgedeiget* was a strictly mutual-service venture. Aside from the paid cooks, the campers themselves were the waiters, by rotation, and did most of the other chores. As an inexpensive and comradely camp, it was all one could desire.

As the camp grew in popularity, it was reorganized into the Workers Colony Association and put under party control. And the party's treatment of the camp was just as heavy-handed as of other auxiliaries.

Thousands of people passed through *Nitgedeiget* during the summer season. The tents slowly gave way to bungalows, with showers and other plumbing facilities. A modern dining room and kitchen, large enough to feed a thousand people at one time, and a big social center, with a stage for concerts and plays, were erected. Gerson, Cohn and their close friends built the bungalows and social center high on the hills and the dining room and kitchen far down near the river, to avoid the hated smell of meat and fish. The campers were thus compelled to walk up and down steep hills three times a day in the hot weather for their meals. (The same separation of smells carried out in the supermarket on Allerton Avenue was an element in its failure.) No one in the party was curious enough to look over their construction plans.

The literary and entertainment programs were all Communist-tuned. *Nitgedeiget* and Kinderland, the latter seized by the Communists from the WC and enlarged by the addition of an adult section, formed two points of attraction for large numbers of people who would otherwise probably be out of reach of Communist fellowship

and propaganda. The camps were also a source of money, each camper paying 50 cents a week to a press fund, meaning the party press. This was part of the bill; not a voluntary contribution. Then came all the fund-raising campaigns for Left causes. Moreover, the party dispensed the paid jobs, and they were quite numerous.

The rapid success of *Nitgedeiget* induced the party to open a new camp for English-speaking people, Camp Unity, near Hopewell Junction. It was greatly expanded, and its clientele was largely American-born Jewish youth. At the end of the 20's, most of the larger cities had summer camps for children and adults. There were about eight of them here and in Canada. In those cities where the bulk of the Left Wing consisted of small business people, such as Washington, D. C., the camps were cooperatively owned, each family building its own bungalow.

THE GLOOMY END OF NITGEDEIGET

The camps met an acute need for rest and relaxation. The Friday night camp fires, organized sports, Saturday night concerts, Sunday night dances and the long hikes in the hills were invigorating to people living in crowded apartments in the big city. Even the weekly Communist lectures could not dispel the atmosphere of lightheartedness and gaiety. One could always escape them. (In the first years card playing and drinking were prohibited, and only wage-earners were accepted as campers.) But this relative internal freedom disappeared during the Third Period. The "monolithic" party sat down on the camp, steadily increasing its demands, until they were turned into recruiting and fund-raising agencies.

Party demands, poor management (managers were appointed solely on the basis of party merit) and the opening of *Nitgedeiget* as an all-year-round resort, requiring a big outlay, proved too heavy a burden for the camp. As a result, *Nitgedeiget* underwent several bankruptcies. "Americanizing" its name to Camp Beacon and banishing Yiddish only made things worse. The camp went under in the 40's. Camp Unity suffered too, though not so much. Kinderland also went into bankruptcy, surviving only because it was annexed by the IWO.

In all fairness, the rumor of sexual looseness in the Communist camps must be denied. No doubt, there were people who visited

them because of these rumors. But, on the whole, the moral standard in the Left camps were on about the same level as in other camps of similar type.

In surveying the multiple fronts on which Communism was battling in the 20's, it should not be implied that they were a succession of setbacks. For one, though liberal writers were aghast at the fanaticism and abusive polemics, Communists were accepted as a part of the progressive opposition to the status quo. And the status quo in that period was typified by the bigotry and provincialism of the Babbitts, the Teapot Dome Scandal, brutal suppression of strikes, dollar diplomacy and intervention in South America, and the looseness and corruption of the Prohibition era.

The Communists profited greatly by the most glaring injustice of the 20's, the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Energetically, they moved in on that internationally famous affair. The defense of the two Italian anarchists was the Communists' first united action with liberals.⁺⁶³ However, in the recriminations following the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, August 22, 1927, the Communists were rebuked for their senseless demonstrations, that had been of little help to the condemned.⁺⁶⁴ Still, they managed to retain amicable relations with important groups of liberals. But, in Jewish society, the Communists encountered uncompromising resistance from the three powerful groups, the Socialists, the trade union officialdom and the Zionists.

As to the state of mind and the mood of the party membership, it must be said that even an unorthodox Communist had moments of inner satisfaction, even joy. Despite the ugly factionalism, reverses, and occasional inner doubts, Communist alertness and initiative on so many sectors supported the belief in the dynamism and the ultimate justice of the movement.

The party was not as yet totally conformist and bureaucratized. On the Jewish area, at least, there was variety and receptiveness in matters of culture and literature. Individual expression within the general frame of the doctrine was not yet taboo. And the vigorous response to expressions of social revolt in various parts of the globe nourished the proud feeling of belonging to a world party that was fighting for oppressed mankind everywhere.

28 *Battling the Community*

A preview of the revolutionary illusions spread by the Third Period was given, with distressing clarity, to the Jewish Communists in the Palestinian situation in the fall of 1929. It proved extremely costly to them.

Jewish Socialists in their majority had always been antagonistic to Zionism, for obvious reasons. Communist antagonism was still more emphatic. As early as the summer of 1920, the Comintern congress voiced vigorous opposition to Zionism. And the third congress, in 1921, in a communication to a Labor Zionist Left group, that ultimately joined the Communist ranks, labeled Zionism "reformist and utopian."

The *Freiheit*, mouthpiece of Communists and former Bundists, was hostile to Zionism from its first issue. Zionist ideology, Zionist practice in Palestine and its "links" with the British were under steady fire. Still, the *yishuv* as such was never attacked. And the demand for Jewish minority rights was always included in any mention of the *yishuv*.

In this context, the word "pogrom" applied by the *Freiheit* to the first Arab attacks on Jewish settlements in Palestine, August 23, 1929, was logical. No other term could fit the massacre of 40 young students of an Orthodox *yeshivah* in Chevron. In fact, the first news item in the Moscow *Izvestia* was headlined POGROMS IN PALESTINE.

A front-page "box," written by Olgin, and an editorial by Melech Epstein, August 25th, fixed the final responsibility for the pogroms on British imperialists, who possessed sufficient police and military forces to prevent the massacres, had they wanted, and partly on the

Zionist leaders for their anti-Arab policy. The large dose of blame given the Zionists was not merely in conformity with the old Communist approach, but aimed, in a large measure, as a safeguard against possible criticism from the party. The new Leftist course was already visible.

Calling the attacks pogroms did not placate Jewish public opinion. It was angered at the *Freiheit* for placing any blame at all on the Zionists for the spilled Jewish blood. And the lengthy excursion into the evils of British imperialism was no safeguard with the party. Putting Arab attacks in the category of pogroms drew the party's wrath.

THE PARTY BLAST AGAINST FREIHEIT AND YISHUV

The reaction of the party would have been perhaps less vehement were it not for a leaflet distributed by the expelled Lovestonites immediately after the *Freiheit* appeared on the streets. The leaflet labeled the attitude of the *Freiheit* a "crass Right-Wing deviation" committed by a party paper "under a so-called Leftist leadership." The party secretariat, new, insecure, and in the midst of internal confusion, could not remain silent at the accusation of Right-Wing opportunism by "Right-Wingers." A lengthy and severe criticism of the *Freiheit*, in the form of a declaration of principles on the Palestinian situation, was hastily composed. Its very beginning set the pace for the battle with the community:

The war in Palestine is not a race war. It is a class war, carried on by the expropriated Arabian peasants against British imperialism and their Zionist agents. . . .

Then came the ominous phrase: "We sharply condemn the position of our Communist Jewish daily, the *Morning Freiheit*, as absolute opportunist and *hardly, if at all, different from the stand of the Jewish nationalist, Zionist and the capitalist press. . . .*" (italics M.E.) The party was particularly incensed at the argument advanced in the *Freiheit* editorial that the British could have, had they wanted, stopped the pogroms: "These views are counterrevolutionary Zionist views, characteristic of the Social Democrats and the bourgeoisie. The line is sharply condemned by the political committee of the CP, and all responsible for such articles . . . will be taken to task by the party.

"The roots of the revolt of the Arabian masses are to be found in

the economic exploitation of the Arab peasantry, whose land has been expropriated by British imperialism through the reactionary Jewish Zionism. . . . The establishment of a Jewish country in Palestine is the fig leaf of British imperialism in its land-grabbing aggression in this part of Asia. And the Zionist movement is willingly and knowingly lending itself to this mission. . . . The colonial policy of Great Britain was to use Jewish immigrants as a tool in expropriating the land of the poor Arabs, which was turned into orange groves and fruit plantations controlled by a parasitic group of Jewish financiers, where Arabian and Jewish workers are mercilessly exploited." *186

This document was brought to the *Freiheit* in the evening of August 29th for publication in the next issue. Olgin and Philip Weiner, the new secretary of the Section, meekly agreed. But the objection by Melech Epstein that the party's sharp censure at a time when the Jewish press was condemning the *Freiheit* would be an unwarranted double blow to the paper caused Petersen, the party's representative, to waver. But, while he gave up his insistence on immediate publication of the statement, Petersen did not inform the three that it had also been given to the *Daily Worker*, and would appear there the next morning. The statement, also carried by the *Freiheit* a couple of days later, burst like a bombshell, driving the *Freiheit* into a pro-Arab position, stirring up more anger in the community.

FREIHEIT APPROVES ARAB TERRORISM

The new setup in the Jewish Section—Philip Weiner, Joseph Sultan, Hyman Castrell, Max Steinberg and George Hochberg—staunch Bittelman men and the end products of the poisonous factionalism—eager to vindicate their Leftist reputation, did their bit in rushing the *Freiheit* into a policy with clear anti-Jewish overtones. In but a couple of days, the paper's news stories, editorials, articles and cartoons were fighting the battle of fanatical Arab nationalism. One big headline announced: THE ARAB UPRISING IS SPREADING THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE MIDDLE EAST (in the imagination of the news editor), and a subtitle asserted, "The Zionist-Fascists have Provoked the Arab Uprising." *187

To round out the pro-Arab case, the paper dragged the Socialists into the crimes against the Arabs. "The Imperialist Zionists and the Labor Fakers of the Second International Continuously Organ-

ize Pogroms on the Arabs in Palestine," screamed one of the sub-headlines.

Olgin tried to do penance for his grave Right deviation. In a furious article, he blamed the Zionists for all the trouble: They were colonizers and exploiters of Arab labor. The expression "pogrom" was a bitter mistake and a result of nationalistic influences. And, to show that these influences were still strong among the Left and had to be rooted out, he quoted a letter from a reader, B. Wachtfogel, 2039 Washington Avenue, Bronx, saying, "Everything that you write about the Zionists is true. But, for Heaven sake, it is Jews who are being beaten. . . . Zionist colonies, why not say Jewish colonies. . . . Jewish blood is being shed. . . . I beg of you, don't justify the shedding of Jewish blood."

"You (the Zionists) are playing with the blood of misled people . . .," Olgin's article went on. "You are out to satisfy your nationalistic robbery instincts at the expense of an alien people on an alien land. . . . The blood will fall on you. . . . You are murderers. . . ." *188

To justify calling Jewish blood Zionist blood, Olgin cited the "example" of Nicaragua. "American blood was spilled in Nicaragua," he argued, "and still it was imperialist blood."

To counteract the effect of the street march, August 27th, in protest against the murder of Jews in Palestine, the *Freiheit* appeared with a banner headline, ENGLISH TROOPS AND JEWISH LEGIONNAIRES IN BLOODY MASSACRES ON ARABS; THOUSANDS DEAD AND WOUNDED; HAIFA IN FLAMES. The subtitle was just as inflammatory, "Weitzman is Sure that the Blood Baths in Palestine will Bring 'Yeshuah' (salvation) for the Jews." *189

The Section did not limit the fight to the *Freiheit*. It called a protest meeting in Irving Plaza Hall, August 28th. The hall was crowded and the air tense. W. W. Weinstone, of the secretariat, was there to express the party's sharp disapproval of the earlier stand of the *Freiheit*. His mission alone exerted pressure on the speakers—Olgin, Melech Epstein and Sultan—and influenced the wording of the resolution adopted by the meeting. The resolution opened with, "The assembled Jewish workers send their brotherly greetings to the rebellious masses in Palestine." It ended with several LONG LIVE'S: LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTIONARY UPRISING OF THE ARAB MASSES IN PALESTINE, . . . LONG LIVE THE INDEPENDENT ARAB REPUBLIC WITH FULL RIGHTS FOR THE JEWISH AND OTHER MINORITIES. . . . *190 The last,

designed as a cover for the close political embrace of the Arab terrorists, was too transparent to have any meaning.

The greetings to the Arabs were followed by such provocative banner headlines as ZIONISTS SLAUGHTER ARAB MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN. . . . The *Daily Worker* lent a hand to the new crusade.

COMMUNITY OUTRAGED; FREIHEIT BOYCOTTED

The greetings to the Arabs and the first LONG LIVE of the resolution were interpreted—and not without justification—as a direct encouragement for the Jewish massacres. The community recoiled in anger. A rising tide of denunciations poured down upon the *Freiheit* and the CP. Spearheaded by the *Forward* and the Zionists, a cry went up for a boycott of the Jewish Communists and their paper. Many leading personalities joined in. News dealers in New York refused to handle the *Freiheit* for five days in succession. That this boycott did not last longer was due to the energetic efforts of the wholesale distributor and the paper's loyal readers and sympathizers. As the *Freiheit* was read almost exclusively by Communists and Lefts, the loss of readers was negligible.

But a different sort of boycott, quietly carried out, proved nearly catastrophic. The *Freiheit* had labored for years, through petitions by its readers and primarily by sympathetic grocers throughout the country, to get a share of the national advertising. To the big advertisers, the *Freiheit* was just another foreign-language paper, and the revenue helped to cover the large deficit. Now, various committees called upon the advertising agencies and conveyed to them the deep Jewish resentment against the *Freiheit*. In two short weeks all national advertising was lost. Local ads followed. Even the Yiddish theaters, eleven in number, always careful to avoid offending a newspaper, had to yield to the general indignation, and withdrew their daily ads.

Meanwhile, the anti-*yishuv* campaign was running away with the *Freiheit*. One headline cried out: THE BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS, ZIONISTS AND ZIONIST FELLOW TRAVELERS.^{*191} An editorial the same week stated it more pointedly, "It is not innocent blood; it is the blood of people who went to war against another people on alien land."^{*192}

In its fight against the *yishuv* in Palestine and the community here, the *Freiheit* could call upon the powerful media of Bill Gropper's cartoons. Gropper came to the *Freiheit* in the early 20's and

remained for many years, working at a low salary. Had he chosen, Gropper could have been one of the highest paid cartoonists in the country; he left the *New York Tribune* because of his opposition to the war. A quiet, good looking fellow, with a charming smile, Gropper could achieve a devastating effect with a few bold strokes.

A poor East Side boy—his father came from Rumania—Gropper drifted to the syndicalists during World War I, and later into the Left Wing. He never belonged to the party, but was drawn into the inner politics and maneuvering of the John Reed clubs and the *New Masses*. He only scanned the daily papers, and was poorly oriented in political events. But it was sufficient to give him an inkling of the idea of what the paper considered the proper cartoon for the day, and Gropper, with his keen artistic intuition, would soon come up with a drawing to delight the readers and infuriate the adversaries.

By no means a cynic, Gropper was still easily egged on to ridicule cruelly any person, whatever his standing, as long as he was on the other side of the fence. During the great and violent contest for power in the garment trades, his cartoons were perhaps more telling than the editorials or the news articles. When Morris Sigman, president of the ILGWU, turned up as the target, Gropper obliged the labor editor, Paul Yudit, and his pal, Paul Novick, with a cartoon depicting Sigman's small weekend resort in Iowa as a shady amusement place with a "hot mamma." And Sigman was a scrupulously honest man. Men of diverse standing and prestige, such as Ab. Cahan, the poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, Dr. Chaim Weitzman and Dr. Stephen S. Wise were treated by him with a brusque disregard for their individual merits.

In the Palestinian situation, Gropper strikingly illustrated the shrieking banner headlines, filling the community's cup of anger to the brim.

DISTINGUISHED WRITERS BREAK WITH FREIHEIT

The wrath against the Communists had its repercussions on the Left periphery too. Hardest hit was the Left furriers' union. About 200 shops demonstratively went over to its rival, the Right-Wing Joint Council, and the union nearly went under. Only lack of a competent leadership handicapped the Right Wing in utilizing the

situation to full advantage. Many workers in other trades, too, deserted the struggling Left groups, going over to the "enemy."

The anti-Communist boycott spread to other cities. In many places, Communists could not hire a hall for the meeting to explain the party stand on Palestine. And such meetings were indispensable to dispel the uneasiness that was permeating the Communist-Left.

In the midst of this explosive situation, the group of prominent contributors publicly severed relations with the *Freiheit* in protest against its anti-Jewish position. The very presence of the names of Abraham Raisin, H. Leivick, Menachem Boraisha, David Ignatoff and a few others had secured for the *Freiheit* a place of significance in the Yiddish-speaking community. Their pieces had served as a seal of approval on the genuineness of the concern of Jewish Communists for the cultural values of their people. And their resignation was a blow from inside inasmuch as it was a clear endorsement of the grave charges against the *Freiheit*.⁺⁶⁵

The *Freiheit* would not allow these writers to leave with their reputations intact. Replies to their charges were few, but abuse was plentiful. Gifted poets were called nonentities, and their motives were impugned. They were accused of being "attracted by the fat roast," meaning the capitalist papers. (Moisha Nadir, who coined this phrase, was a decade later himself a victim of it.)

About a week later, the staff of the *Freiheit* was expelled from the Yiddish Writers' Union for anti-Jewish activities.

The tight corner into which Jewish Communism was pushed did not soften the new party top. They kept hammering at the nationalist, opportunist mistakes committed by the *Freiheit*. Two more statements were issued, September 3rd and 7th: the first, a thesis by the Agit-Prop department on the Palestinian situation; the second, a declaration by the political committee. The latter was largely a sharp reaction to the steady sniping of the Lovestonites, who continued to embarrass the new leadership by turning the tables on them and charging them with Right-Wing deviation.^{*198}

NO LET-UP IN PARTY PRESSURE; FREIHEIT IN DANGER

The party continued to whip the *Freiheit*. Its September 7th statement reminded the membership that the position of the *Freiheit* "in the first days . . . was correctly condemned . . . as a Social-

Democratic belittling and underestimating of the political significance of the revolt of the expropriated Arabian masses. . . . However, the mistakes of the *Freiheit* have a basis, and the party . . . must mobilize . . . against the national-bourgeoisie tendencies and the Right Wing." *194

The statement denounced the distinguished writers who broke with the *Freiheit*: "The resignations . . . prove conclusively that in a period of direct struggle with the enemies of the working class all petty bourgeois elements who formerly posed . . . as supporters of the CP joined the camp of the enemy. These . . . poets and literary writers first saw the great influence of the *Freiheit*, they saw the Jewish proletarian masses following the CP, and . . . proclaimed their support of the Communist movement and the Soviet Union. However, . . . when they had to choose between counter-revolutionary Zionism and the national liberation movement . . . and the struggle of the exploited Jewish masses, they became open supporters of imperialism and reactionary Zionism. . . ." *195

This gratuitous solicitude for the "exploited Jewish masses" was an attempt to legitimize the pro-Arab utterances, and to soothe the feeling of pain and confusion permeating the auxiliaries.

The party statements were not the last words. For a number of days, the *Daily Worker* kept printing news items extremely hostile to the *yishuv*. One news item told of a statement by the newly formed World Anti-Imperialist League bitterly denouncing Jewish policies in Palestine. The full statement was promised for the next issue of the paper, but it never appeared.

Surrounded by such implacable antagonism and facing a huge financial loss, it appeared that the *Morning Freiheit* would have to put a padlock on its door. (Only a short while ago, the paper had undergone a reorganization, e.g., a bankruptcy, and its name was changed to *Morning Freiheit*.) But by then it became clear to the Communist-Left hard core that the true design of the campaign was to silence the paper forever, and that the old adversaries were behind it. The frantic appeal of the *Freiheit* (for reasons of economy, the paper will be called by its original name) for \$30,000 in 30 days to save it from "the conspiracy of Zionist-fascists, wealthy reactionaries and social-fascists" brought in the amount necessary to prevent its closing. Disturbed as many of the Left were by the extreme pro-Arabism, they hurried to the aid of their paper.

EVEN PARTY FUNCTIONARIES ARE BEWILDERED

Melech Epstein, at the convention of the TUEL in Cleveland, the end of August, was hurriedly dispatched on a tour throughout the Middle West to help the local people. In Cleveland itself, it was impossible to obtain a hall for a meeting. In Chicago, Detroit and other cities, the meetings had to be held in the halls of friendly organizations and under the protection of picked non-Jewish Communists. In Chicago, the *Freiheit* headquarters were besieged that Saturday night, September 12th, by a crowd of hooting and jeering men and women. Rumor had it that the notorious Levine gang was there, and only the narrow stairway leading to the second-story *Freiheit* office and the appearance of police saved the assembled Communists from a little pogrom. Several who were careless enough to leave in the early hours had their heads split. But the *Freiheit* was evicted and had difficulty in finding an office in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood.

(An incident characteristic of the anti-Communist feeling of the ordinary men and women is the experience the author had in Chicago, Wednesday, September 9th, the day the Orthodox rabbis declared a *taunis* [day of fasting] to mourn the victims in Palestine. He asked the middle-aged woman at the corner news stand for a *Freiheit*. Her reply was, "I am too weak to fast, so the least I can do is not to sell the *Freiheit* today.")

Not merely rank and file but local party functionaries as well were perplexed by these crazy-quilt happenings. The new party secretary in Detroit, a Bulgar called Antonov, a tall, strapping automobile worker—appointed in tune with the proletarianization of the party—could not hide his bewilderment. "I read the party statement," he told the author, "condemning you people of the *Freiheit* for behaving like any other bourgeois nationalist paper, and here I see the Jewish population bitterly against you, and you coming to ask me for protection for your meeting. How is that?" The author, knowing that any true explanation would be too complicated for Antonov's simple mind, shrugged his shoulders in answer.

The first storm over, the Jewish Section replied to the "Zion orgy"—their favorite term—with a counteroffensive. Conferences and meetings against the "imperialist Zionists" and "Jewish reactionaries" were held in all parts of the country. In Communist fashion,

“public trials” were arranged in the large cities to condemn Zionism. The “trial” in New York, September 22nd, brought over 3,000 people. The speeches by the prosecution—Melech Epstein and Olgin—and the “verdict” were received with cheers. This meeting greatly heartened the beleaguered Jewish Section. It did not matter that the warm response was not necessarily a sign of approval of the *Freiheit* position, but rather reflected the determination to keep the enemy from crushing the paper. What counted was that the bulk of the followers had remained loyal and could be depended on. With a sigh of relief, mixed with a tone of triumph, the *Daily Worker*, in a front page editorial devoted to that meeting, called it unmistakable evidence that the “Jewish masses were not misled by nationalistic hysteria, but were firmly behind the correct Communist line on Palestine.” *196

Every auxiliary body of the movement was involved in this campaign. The ICOR was made to forget colonization in Birobidjan. Anti-Zionist propaganda became its new major task. (The first reaction of the non-party people in the ICOR was a resolution by its management committee condemning the party’s anti-Jewish stand in Palestine. The vote was eight to four. The *Freiheit*, embarrassed, tried to minimize the resolution by saying that it was a “casual majority.” The ICOR was soon forced back into line, but some of the non-Communists had to resign.)

A special Jewish Labor Anti-Zion Committee was formed. But it remained on paper. As late as 1931, a primary slogan in the appeal for funds for the *Freiheit* was *In the Struggle Against Zionism We Must Have the Freiheit*.*197

COMINTERN ABETS VIOLENT ARABISM

The Weiner-Sultan-Steinberg-Castrell combination was victorious over those few who cautioned the party against the plunge into the camp of violent Arabism. As usual, the decision was Moscow’s. It seems that the Kremlin, too, was “confused” in the beginning. The *Pravda*, as late as August 29th, headlined the events as “Pogroms in Palestine Continue; Murder and Arson by the Arabs.” But two days later, August 31st, the chief Communist organ called the pogroms an “Uprising by the Arabs; People’s Revolutionary Movement in Asia.” This drastic reversal in definition was immediately

taken up by the Comintern. In a long statement issued by the West European Communist Parties, the anti-Jewish excesses were viewed as an expression of a national liberation movement. It was indiscriminate Communist courtship of Arab nationalism.*¹⁹⁸ (Each time the Kremlin wanted to avoid friction with the Western powers, Comintern declarations were issued by a fictitious committee outside the borders of the USSR.) The outbreak in Palestine coincided with the Comintern policy to "Arabize" the small Communist Party there. The Third Period was not for the West alone; it extended also to the Middle East.

The Palestinian events were the first major collision the community had with the Communists outside the labor arena. That fall Communism was rounding out its first decade. The ultimate consequences would have been much more serious had not the anti-Communist-anti-*Freiheit* campaign been drowned in the reverberations of the financial crash, October 29th of the same year. The happenings in Palestine were relegated to the background. The rapid fall in prices, the closing of channels of credit and the spreading unemployment occupied men's minds. As the first victims were the small businesses and the semi-essential garment trades, the Jewish people felt its impact quite early. The number of bankruptcies mounted alarmingly.

The depression that followed brought misery and despair. But the suffering of the many provided Communism with its first opportunity to gain the ear of a multitude previously closed to it. That Jewish Communism could not derive full advantage of this rare chance can be attributed to the isolation into which it had been driven by its untenable stand on the *yishuv*. No single group had ever met such a solid demonstration of animosity. The harm done was irreparable.

29 *Feeding on Hunger*

The great depression did not arrive a moment too soon for the Communist Party. The rank and file had not yet overcome its bewilderment over the latest expulsions. The loss of a few hundred active people was keenly felt. The new command, committed to a Leftist course, was searching for issues to fit the new line. The depression appeared to be made to order.

On a world scale, the depression did not arrive a moment too soon for Stalin either. And, for that matter, for world Communism generally. There was confusion in the ranks of the Russian party and in the parties abroad over the ouster and arrests of the Trotskyites and the removal of the Bukharin Right Wing. Stalin trapped the Bukharin faction internationally on the "revolutionary appraisal" of the capitalist economy. A crisis in the capitalist world seemed to bear him out. The depression was also an effective argument against the Trotskyite denial of "building Socialism in one country." The Kremlin played up the comparison between the shrinking economy of Europe and the tremendous building program in the Soviet Union to confirm Stalin's thesis that the Soviet Union was independent of the capitalist economy.

As it turned out, Trotsky was not entirely wrong. The world's economic interdependence was proven during the depression. Prices on the world market of the raw materials exported by Moscow to pay for the huge orders for tools and machinery required by the first Five-Year Plan sank considerably, while the prices for the tools and machinery declined less. As a result, Moscow had to

export much larger quantities of grain than it had anticipated, bringing the Russian people semi-starvation. The serious results of this discrepancy were concealed.

THE PREPOSTEROUS PROGRAM FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

The tumultuous Communist activities here during 1930-1934 can be summed up under these titles: The Campaign Among the Unemployed; The Formation of "Revolutionary Unions"; The Concentration on Negroes; The Election Campaign of 1932; The "Social-Fascist" Era; The Stifling Inner-Party Life; The Tightened Cultural Front. Regretfully, they can be treated only sketchily.

Five months had elapsed since the financial crash, and the CP was already forming unemployed councils and calling for demonstrations on March 6, 1930, under the ambiguous slogan, *Work or Wages*. The response to the call exceeded expectations, especially in New York and Detroit. For the latter it was the first outpouring of workers of any sort. City and state officials were alerted on that day to a new problem that had every indication of becoming acute.

Work or Wages was soon replaced by "concrete" demands. The Communist program called for a seven-hour day and a five-day week, a social security law providing a minimum of \$15 for a single unemployed and \$20-25 for a family man. This would have compared quite favorably with the average earnings of a worker's family in 1928, \$24 a week or less. However, the heart of the program was in the demand that the millions that Congress would have to appropriate for unemployed relief should be taken out of the funds for the armed forces, and that these vast sums should be turned over to the unemployed councils for distribution.

As no one could believe that Congress would disband the Army and Navy and turn over their funds to the Communist councils, the only deduction was that the CP was only interested in aggravating internal tensions. The revolutionary illusions of the Third Period required that the American party recklessly disregard the feasible for the impossible. These illusions also imposed upon the party a paralyzing incapacity to achieve lasting results from its initiative among the unemployed. This was the reason why the party could not accept credit that rightly belonged to it for the first dent in official indifference to widespread want. It was afraid

to concede—to itself and to the millions out of work—that the “capitalist” state institutions could feed the hungry.

An example was the negative reaction of the party to the first million dollars granted by New York City for unemployed relief, following a march by the Unemployed Council to City Hall, October 16, 1930. The *Daily Worker* dismissed it as “another million dollars for graft.”¹⁹⁹ It was inadequate, but not graft, and the idle felt it.

(The same editorial accused Norman Thomas of approving the beating of Sam Nessin, one of the delegates, for insulting Mayor James J. Walker. Thomas, present at the hearing, categorically denied it. But Harry Gannes repeated the accusation.)

The author, in Moscow at that time, called the attention of a few leading men in the Comintern to the absurdity of the last two relief demands, that could only defeat the purpose of the unemployed campaign. They nodded in agreement. But their inaction showed that the American party acted in harmony with the Comintern policy. Only eight months later, in November, did the plenum of the CEC realize that these two demands were “sowing suspicion among the unemployed,” and decided on a saner policy. However, the councils were instructed to “politicize” their struggle, tying their program in with political slogans, including the defense of the Soviet Union. Still, the New York demonstration, February 25, 1931, had among its slogans *All War Funds for the Unemployed*.²⁰⁰

The party, refusing to acknowledge the relief grants, was quick to recognize the *institution*—the relief agency. Notified by a friendly high-placed social worker that the city was about to establish a Home Relief Bureau, the New York party sent telegrams to about 50 of its bright young men and women to apply for the job of relief investigator. As they were the first, most of them were hired.²⁰¹ And for a few years the party group there was able, through the usual caucusing and maneuvers, to control the relief outfit. The Communists also controlled the Writers Project and the Federal Theater Project.

THE TWO HUNGER MARCHES ON WASHINGTON

The peak of the unemployed action was the two hunger marches on Washington, December 6, 1931 and December 6, 1932, climaxing

similar marches on state and city governments. The first possessed the fervor of a genuine outburst of idle men and women demanding that the state assume responsibility for their plight. And the grave silence of the crowds that lined the streets on the route was eloquent testimony of the serious impression made on them by the march. The second, carefully prepared and organized, had a stronger Communist imprint—and for that reason was less impressive.

The Communist Party had a monopoly on this work in the first period. The Socialist Party did not enter into it until much later, with the exception of Chicago. And the AFL, in the spirit of Gospels' dictum, "Keep the government away from organized labor," at its conventions in 1930 and 1931, rejected unemployment insurance.*²⁰² A year later, however, the AFL took a positive stand.

These enormous opportunities were frittered away by blind adherence to a doctrine imposed by Moscow. Of course, the overriding reason for the failure was the relief and work program inaugurated by the New Deal. But the unemployed councils lost their hold earlier; they were never allowed any semblance of independence. Policies, tactics and personnel were decided for them by the respective party committees, although the party repeatedly warned them that the councils should be permitted to conduct their affairs free of interference, the party only exercising "political guidance." The councils gradually shrank, and the merger with the Socialist-led Workers Alliance could not keep them alive.

One must not assume that the party top was blind to the harm implicit in openly bossing the auxiliaries. A four-page circular letter to all units, signed by Max Bedacht for the party secretariat, and dated September 9, 1930, spoke sharply on this subject: ". . . So-called auxiliaries . . . must be genuine non-party mass organizations . . . with definite aims . . . distinct from the party. . . . At present, the usual conception of these organizations is that of side shows for the party, which have to improve its income. . . . In some instances they are merely names under which a few functionaries collect money to pay rent and their own wages. . . . The leading non-party people see new faces every day in the offices. . . ." *²⁰³

These fine-sounding instructions remained dead letters for the party top itself. In the midst of the second hunger march in Washington, D.C., Herbert Benjamin was summarily removed as national

secretary of the unemployed councils, and replaced by Amter. It was a decision by the CEC of the party, without the formality of bringing it to the councils. This practice was applied to all auxiliaries. It could not be otherwise. The very nature of a Communist Party precluded any degree of internal autonomy for auxiliaries. The only "freedom from interference" the councils had was in putting back furniture of evicted families.

Jewish Communists, in their own narrow field, seized upon the general discontent in 1931 to lead bread and meat strikes in Jewish neighborhoods in several cities. The strikes were organized through the women's councils. It was not difficult to unite irate housewives in a demand for lower prices on such essentials. They picketed the stores, clashed with the police and caused a turmoil in the community. But the Communists in control of the women's councils followed the party line of "spreading the struggle." And they kept spreading it until the housewives were tired. The largest and longest were the bread strike in Chicago, that began February 1931, and the meat strike in St. Louis, in the same year. The women's councils were more successful in stopping rent evictions.

THE NEW REVOLUTIONARY UNIONS: DUAL UNIONS

The hunger marches, dramatic and violent, were not intended to be the major task of the party. High priority was given to those employed in the mass industries. A cursory reading of the *Thesis and Resolutions* of the plenum of the CEC, March 31st-April 4th, 1930, will bear this out. The *Thesis* emphasized:

The most fundamental task of our party in mass work is the building of the revolutionary unions of the TUUL into broad mass organs of struggle. The recent communications of the Comintern and Profintern have again laid stress upon this elementary necessity. . . .²⁰⁴

This "most fundamental task" was never fulfilled. The party had to shift into high gear on the unemployment sector; to march hungry and disgruntled people was incomparably easier than building revolutionary unions in strategic industries.

The party's new line in trade union work preceded the depression. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the fourth congress of the Profintern, summer of 1929, implemented the resolution of the

Comintern, a year earlier. The top of the old unions were branded reactionaries and incapable of defending the workers' interests. New unions were to be built around a revolutionary center in each country.

The Lovestonites had to bow to this new directive. And the plenum of the CEC, May 1929, decided to form new unions in the unorganized industries.

The Fosterites threw overboard the reservation specifying the unorganized, and hastened to form unions wherever any contact remained from previous Left-Wing strikes. In a short while, eight "national" and "industrial" unions were organized: in coal mining, textiles, marine, the garment trades, in the auto industry, food, shoes and grocery clerks. It proved a thankless task. Only among the miners and the garment workers did the Left have any following. As only two industries, food and auto, could be called practically unorganized, the rest of the new unions were simply dual unions.

Of the eight unions, only the National Textile and the National Miners succeeded in moving to action considerable numbers of dissatisfied people. The first conducted the strike in Gastonia, N.C., 1929; the second, the miners' strike in Illinois, 1930, and in Kentucky, 1931-1932. Gastonia and Kentucky were bloody affairs, attracting national attention, and all three were lost.⁺⁶⁶

The party had nothing to show for all its strenuous efforts either in Gastonia or Kentucky. Gastonia remained for Communism a burned-out shell, and the one unit that was left in Bell County, Kentucky, soon died out. Still, if one could discount the waste in human life, the strikes were illuminative of the explosive industrial relations in the South and brought into sharp focus the part played by local and state authorities in these relations.⁺⁶⁷

MOSCOW WANTS A STRIKE; DRESS TRADE CHOSEN

If numbers were the only criteria, the convention of the TUEL, in Cleveland, Labor Day 1929, was a spectacular affair; there were 690 delegates. Actually, the delegates came from the party periphery—the eight new unions plus opposition groups in the old unions. With the exception of a few Lovestonites present, no one challenged the sweeping decision to push vigorously the campaign for new

industrial unions. The word "Educational" was dropped from the name of the League and replaced by the word "Unity."

To cover the abrupt change, a clause was inserted in the program that work in the old unions must not be given up. But the epithets "corrupt" and "impotent" applied to them left the door open for opposition unions everywhere. And this was the actual intent.*²⁰⁵

A revolutionary trade union center needs strikes, and with maximum demands. As the depression spread, the workers were on the defensive and reluctant to strike. But Moscow was apparently anxious for strikes in the United States for its own purposes, and Foster had to shop around for strike openings. He chose the dress-makers in New York.

The Needle Trades Industrial Union strongly resisted the idea of a strike in the dress trade, for two reasons: 1, Its position there was too weak; 2, The industry was already in the grip of a crippling unemployment. Nevertheless, Foster insisted, and the top of the union, Communists and Lefts, had to obey.*²⁰⁶

The strike in the dress industry was called February 17, 1931. The major demand was a basic change in the system of work, week-work instead of piece rates. The *Daily Worker* devoted almost the entire front page to the start of the strike. A cable of greetings from the Profintern was printed in big fat letters. It said in part, "ALL COUNTRIES ARE SENDING YOU EXPRESSIONS OF OUR CLOSE SOLIDARITY. . . . YOUR SUCCESS LIES IN SPREADING STRUGGLE TO MAXIMUM. . . ." *²⁰⁷

In a front page editorial the paper added its own blessings:

"The needle industry is especially the field for the loot of Lieutenant Governor Lehman's banking company, and Lehman is closely connected with the fake "Socialist" leaders of the corrupt union, the ILGWU. . . . The ILGWU has long ceased to be a labor union, to become an auxiliary to the employers." *²⁰⁸

From the space lavished by the *Daily Worker* and the *Freiheit* on that strike, one could have imagined that a stoppage in the New York dress industry posed a threat to the American economy. Moscow knew the insignificance of the dress strike. But it needed a chance to spread stories about workers' unrest in America at a time when consumers' goods and food were fast disappearing from the state stores.

The dress strike was lost before it was fairly begun, and it never

involved more than a few thousand workers in an industry of more than 50,000.

PARTY BLAMES STRIKE LEADERS

In true Stalinist style, the party blamed the strike leaders for the failure, accusing them of "lagging behind the militant masses in the strike" and of Right-Wing opportunism. The miners in Illinois were also charged with—of all things—"undemocratic conduct of the strike." The same charge was leveled at the Communist food workers.

It is worth noting that among the enumerated Right-Wing errors and weaknesses—and this applied to all TUUL unions—was the "failure to put forward political slogans in the economic struggles . . . persistence in trade union legalism and craft practices . . . and gross underestimation of the radicalization of the workers." To correct another weakness, the 13th party plenum decided that "building the party must not wait until after the strike is over, but must proceed before and during the strike." *209

A fair example of what the party demanded of its people in a strike led by an AFL union is Israel Amter's denunciation of the TUUL section of the pocketbook workers' union for their behavior in the strike of 4,000 Jewish workers in New York City, in the same summer of 1931.

Amter, the chief officer of the New York District, deemed it his duty to call the party's attention to "some major lessons from a minor strike," which was "shamelessly betrayed" by the union leadership. Such a betrayal on the part of "reactionary social fascist" officials was no surprise to Amter. It fitted snugly into the party's concept of the AFL. What pained him was the opportunism of the Pocketbook Makers Industrial League.

"A complete misconception of a revolutionary strike strategy and an opportunist collapse before the situation," he wrote, "was recently manifested. . . . It was the first instance during the life of the TUUL that the revolutionary opposition had the opportunity and duty of assuming independent leadership in a sold-out strike. In this task (it) . . . failed, and the lesson of this failure must be drawn and learned for the benefit of the entire American working class." *210

Amter saw two other opportunist weaknesses of the Communist-Left in that union: 1, "A complete underestimation of the workers' strength, militancy and willingness to struggle against the bosses, reactionary leaders and government (the government was added to round out the party program—M.E.)"; 2, "The failure to see the possibility of *spreading the strike* (italics M.E.)."

The "sold-out" strike was actually a favorable compromise in a great depression. And the Communists had participated in the settlement, as they should. But, his only guide the doctrine of the revolutionary crisis, saintly Amter had to censure his comrades for not breaking up the union during the strike.

The "revolutionary" unions failed, and the first stirrings among the unorganized under the New Deal passed them by almost completely. The TUUL was quietly buried at the end of 1934, and with it most of the unions. Only the national marine union, the fur workers and the longshoremen on the Pacific survived.

30 *White Bias Show Trials*

In appraising the world situation in the early 30's—the Third Period—each Comintern gathering took a higher revolutionary tone. And at each stage the Comintern diagnosis was faithfully accepted here.

The keynote was sounded by the tenth plenum of the ECCI in 1930: "The accentuated external and internal contradictions of capitalism are at present accelerating the shattering of capitalist stabilization and are deepening and widening the revolutionary tide of the international labor movement." *211

The eleventh plenum, March–April 1931, went further. It found that the prerequisites for revolution were already maturing in two countries, Germany and Poland, that the rest seemed unable to avoid the imminence of an economic catastrophe, and that even in the United States the prospect was for "a steady deepening of the crisis." +68

The twelfth plenum, December 1932, proclaimed that capitalism "cannot overcome its deepening and sharpening contradictions, and that it is approaching a new period of wars and revolutions." The Socialists and the fascists were put on an equal footing.

The same plenum instructed the Communist parties to initiate the "struggle for proletarian dictatorship." *212

In the *Thesis and Resolutions of 1930* and in the call to the August 1st Antiwar Day of 1931, the American party emphasized the imperialist war preparations, and reserved for the American imperialism the leading and directing part.*213

A year later, that leading role was handed over to Japan. Browder returned from the twelfth plenum with a new slogan, *Drive Out the Japanese Ambassador from Washington*. This demand implied the threat of war between the two countries. Carried on exclusively in America—Moscow itself not daring to antagonize Japan—the campaign would obviously put the American Communists in the exposed position of asking Americans to be ready to shed their blood to save a region for Russia.

This slogan was discussed at a staff meeting of the *Freiheit*, but only a couple dared to speak against it. However, there seems to have been a hesitation in starting the campaign. The Japanese armies' march from Manchuria into North China allayed Moscow's fear. And Browder, at a conference, claimed that the slogan had been his mistake. Those present knew better.*²¹⁴

THE DISAPPOINTING PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, 1932

The American Communists did not require instructions to vilify the Socialists. Their election literature in 1932 abounded in abuse of the SP, its Presidential candidate, Norman Thomas, and other nominees. The leaders of the garment unions were singled out for special treatment.

The party entered the Presidential elections with high optimism. The creeping paralysis of industry seemed to be operating in favor of Communism. The nominating convention was held early, May 28–29, in Chicago. Nearly a thousand people from all 48 states were brought in. Great pains were taken to make it appear that Negroes played a conspicuous part in the proceedings.

It was a typical Communist mass gathering, the only novelty being that Foster's running mate was James W. Ford, a Negro. The election platform was rather moderate in tone, but the campaign hardly touched the immediate demands. The final goal, a Soviet America, was its heart. Hoover was rarely mentioned. All the attacks were directed at Franklin D. Roosevelt and, still more, at Norman Thomas. An anti-Roosevelt pamphlet, *Who is F. D. Roosevelt?* by Grace Hutchins, was widely distributed. A "public trial" of Norman Thomas, one of many, was staged in New Star Casino. And, to no one's surprise, the "jury" found him guilty of betraying the working class. (In a Communist public trial the defense counsel

admits the guilt of the accused, but stresses extenuating circumstances that actually add weight to his guilt.)

Foster and Ford set out on a long tour. A League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford was organized. The caliber of the men and women who joined the League were a barometer of the new mood among the intelligentsia produced by the depression. The League's manifesto was signed by a number of well-known writers and educators, among them: Elliott C. Cohen, James Rorty, Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank, Frederick Schuman, Malcolm Cawley, Lincoln Steffens, Sidney Hook, Sidney Howard, H. W. L. Dana and Theodore Dreiser.*²¹⁵

The election returns were disheartening. A count of 90 per cent of all election districts gave Foster and Ford 69,104 votes. (According to the *World Almanac* of 1933, Foster received over 55,000. In New York City, the vote was close to 24,068; the second best was in Cook County, Illinois, with 11,976 votes.) *²¹⁶ Compared with the 800,000-odd votes received by Thomas, the results were all the more embarrassing. The only consolation was that Foster had doubled his vote over 1928.

The meeting called by the League in Irving Plaza Hall to hear the election returns was a gloomy affair. The chairman, Joseph Freeman, bravely but vainly tried to strike a cheerful note. No one could hide his disappointment.*²¹⁷

STRAINING TO PENETRATE NEGRO MASSES

Extraordinary energy was spent by the CP during the Third Period to gain a mass following among the Negro People. The emphasis on Negroes originated in Moscow. The Comintern kept insisting that the 13 million Negroes, oppressed and discriminated against, would be the most vulnerable to Communist infiltration. As an extra bait, some brilliant mind in the Kremlin, confusing the American Negro with colonial peoples, hit upon the slogan of *Self-Determination for the Black Belt in the South*. This spurious and dangerous slogan was one of the four political targets given to the American party by the twelfth plenum of the ECCI.*⁶⁹

As in all the mechanical applications of issues handed down by Moscow, the Communists here went all-out to battle for this one too. The South was flooded with literature and speakers explaining

and agitating for the slogan of Self-Determination in those sections where the Negroes formed a majority.

The Negro community, looking upon itself as a part of the American nation, and not as a colonial people, spurned this Black Belt idea. Many Negro Communists would not have accepted it either could they freely voice their opinion.

The number of Negro party organizers and officers was out of all proportion to the small number of Negro members. It became an unwritten rule that every committee must include a certain proportion of Negroes. More Negroes were sent to the party school in Moscow and here. Harlem and the South Side in Chicago were "concentration points," with special headquarters. The South, where the party was practically non-existent, was dotted with Negro organizers. Contrary to the high white and Negro party functionaries, these organizers were poorly paid and often had to depend upon the white middle-class sympathizers for their meals.

Negroes were coddled in the party, which did neither them nor the party any good. It created an unhealthy atmosphere and led to demoralization. Parenthetically, few Negro women joined the party.

HOW THE PARTY FOUGHT WHITE CHAUVINISM

The party spared no effort in combating race prejudice within its ranks. The slightest suspicion of white chauvinism was dealt with severely. But, as in everything else in that rigid period, the race issue was treated piously, noisily, and dogmatically. The favorite medium was the "public trial."

In one such "trial," February 7, 1932, in Harlem Casino, Joe Burns, a member of the Needle Trades Industrial Union, was charged with expressing his doubts regarding the intellectual equality of Negroes and whites. Ben Gold, leader of the union, was prosecutor, and Charles Alexander (an assumed name), a Negro intellectual, was the counsel for the defense. Burns admitted his guilt and was put on probation for six months to work for Negro rights.

Some of the "trials" involved parents who objected to their daughter's marrying a Negro. A "trial" of this kind was held in Brownsville, Brooklyn, timed to the eve of the Presidential elections

of 1932. Israel Amter was himself the prosecutor; Alexander was again counsel for the defense.

The *Freiheit* proudly reported, "Comrade Amter presented a splendid Marxist analysis of the various methods with which the bourgeoisie is striving to maintain its influence over the workers, to restrain them from fighting for a better life . . . and from organizing against an attack on the Soviet Union." Amter was particularly indignant that "The defendant, a Jew, who had suffered in Czarist Russia, should be the bearer of ideas that helped the capitalists of America to enslave a people which constituted a majority of the population of the Black Belt." *218

Alexander, a tall and handsome man, made an eloquent defense. He pleaded with the jury not to expel the defendant from the party. Dramatically, he exclaimed, "I would prefer to have my body riddled with thousands of bullets than to be expelled from the Communist Party." He found an "extenuating circumstance" in the fact that Misky, the defendant, "does not know English well and is not acquainted with Marxist-Leninist literature." Misky, too, pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to be suspended from the party for three months in addition to working with a Negro group.

In Philadelphia, a Communist old-timer, Ida Tabachnick, was tried "for avoiding to carry on party work with a Negro."

Another "trial" was held in Detroit against non-party middle-class people, active in the ICOR, who disapproved of their daughter, a public school teacher, going out with a Negro. They, too, recognized their guilt. Olgin reacted to the Detroit affair with a series of thundering sermons in the *Freiheit*.

The party's inroads among the Negroes was far from commensurate with the enormous exertions on that sector. However, it would be erroneous to gauge the Communist Negro periphery merely by the card-carrying members. The candidacy of James Ford and the energetic intervention of the International Labor Defense in many Negro court cases—notably that of the nine Scottsboro boys, that began in 1931 in Alabama—created a favorable climate among Negroes.⁺⁷⁰ Only later did thoughtful Negroes realize that the Scottsboro boys and others were only pawns in Communist maneuvers.

The efforts to Americanize the party during the Third Period led to relegating work among the minority groups other than the

Negroes to secondary place. But one phase was not neglected, that of acquiring a standing among foreign-born. The initiative in this field was taken by one man, Alpi, known here as F. Brown, an Italian from Macedonia. Alpi had been involved in inter-party feuds there, and the Comintern had taken him out and sent him to America as an instructor. The party here, not knowing what to do with him, created for Alpi the job of head of a language department. He took the job seriously.

In the late 20's, the Federal government began deporting "undesirable aliens," mostly Communists active in strikes in the coal mines and in textiles. More were cited for deportation in the beginning of the depression. Foreign-born radicals were alarmed. The party reaction was confined to protest meetings, until Alpi suggested forming a new auxiliary body.

A Committee for the Protection of Foreign-Born was formally launched in February 1931.^{*219} Presented as a non-partisan agency, its first conference attracted many foreign-born groups, unions, liberal clergymen, Catholics and Protestants. The committee appeared before Congressional hearings, and was helpful in preventing several deportations and in carrying other cases to court.

But the Communist control of the committee soon became apparent, and a number of unions and others withdrew. However, some liberals and clergymen remained even after the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact, thus providing a Communist front with a respectable letterhead.

Again Communist alertness to a social issue gave them a monopoly in that field. And they reaped all the benefits.

A COMMUNIST'S LIFE WAS BUSY AND HARD

The anti-intellectualism, that started in Moscow in 1930 with the defeat of Bukharin, was ruthlessly carried out in Europe under the pretentious label of "proletarianizing" the parties. Intellectuals were demoted from policy-shaping to interpreting policies.

In this country Stalin's campaign to sow distrust of intellectuals found a feeble echo. The secret of this American "exceptionalism" was that, unlike the European parties, the strength of the American party at that time rested largely on white-collar workers and middle-class people. Still, without any surface prejudice, intellectu-

als on the whole were kept down and were expected to be louder in pledging loyalty to changing party lines than the proletarians.

To belong to the party in the depression, endurance and a readiness to be knocked about were indispensable. Ceaseless demands were made on a man's time, energy and purse. The party sought to instil in the minds of its members the idea that they were shock troops of the potential army of the revolution and that they ought to be in a steady state of mobilization.

A party man had to spend a great amount of time on all sorts of mass actions—demonstrations—for and against, as the given issue required. He had to attend all official anniversaries and participate in the various Days—First of May, Antiwar Day, Youth Day, Women's Day—he had to do his full share in the fund-raising campaigns for the party papers and for special purposes, as well as collecting from others. Then there was selling the *Daily Worker* once a week and belonging to at least one mass organization. His life was indeed a hard one. (On going over the Communist press of that period, the author found a week in which Communists were called to five demonstrations.)

Constant droning on a state of readiness and mobilization was more than some could bear. One day the *Freiheit* received a letter saying in effect:

"I am a sympathizer of the Communist Party and follow the line of your paper closely. However, my wife and I are perplexed. You keep advising us to be constantly on guard and in a state of mobilization. What does this spell for us in practice? Shall we stop visiting friends and going to the movies? We are particularly uncertain about the nights. Shall we and our two children go to sleep in our clothes?"

It was signed "A Reader."

Olgin took the matter seriously. He published the letter and lambasted the writer for his doubts on the oncoming revolutionary crisis.

The celebrations in the big halls were the only festive moments. Organizing rent strikes in the neighborhoods and putting back evicted furniture were exciting too. But the countless protests at Union Square and Madison Square and similar places in other cities soon became tiresome and were attended only by the very devoted Communists and Left-Wingers.

THE DRAB AND BORING UNIT MEETINGS

Most tedious was the weekly unit or branch meeting. The party was now monolithic. There was no room for discussion. At the shop nucleus the people could at least talk about shop problems. But these nuclei were few in number. Only about four per cent of the membership belonged to shop nuclei in 1930, and this number remained almost stationary during the depression. Most of them were in small shops.*²²⁰ The majority were in neighborhood branches, and their meetings were mere rubber stamps for decisions handed down by the higher committees. Even the agenda for the meeting was sent in ready-made. The EC of the branch could only add a few points of local interest.

The heart of the agenda was the political discussion. A member of the branch, previously assigned, had to lead it off. Actually, all he had to do was to read a mimeographed outline given to him by the educational director of the branch and add a few stereotyped words of his own. He and the others knew well that the less they said the less danger of committing a deviation. The discussion was prefatory. And those who were prodded by the branch organizer—the most important man—to take the floor, quickly said their piece in support of the report and sat down. The entire meeting was a deadening routine, felt most keenly by the white-collar Communists.

The meetings were also bombarded by appeals for financial aid for the numerous causes the movement was engaged in. The collections were a drain on the party members as well as on those belonging to the auxiliary bodies. Only later did the party try to regulate the stream of appeals.

As to the *Daily Worker*, every branch had a weekly quota of copies to sell on street corners in its area, and there were no returns from the "bundle." Many were ingenious enough to escape the watchful eye of the branch *Daily Worker* agent, paying for the papers rather than shouting on the street corners, "Buy a *Daily Worker*!" But those assigned to conspicuous corners could not very well shirk their job. The branch paid for the copies left unsold. They were left in the basements or burned.

The bundle sales to the branches were a sizable part of the paper's revenue from circulation. The entire paid circulation of

the *Daily Worker* in that period was not more than 17,000 copies daily. Broken down, the figures were roughly: 5,000 subscribers, 3,000 copies sold through the Metropolitan News Agency, in New York, 6,000 copies sold throughout the country to party branches and through newsstands, and 3,000 copies taken by party branches in Greater New York.^{*221} Like all small papers, the income from the newsstands was insignificant. The paper distributors charged proportionately more for the returned copies than they paid for the sold ones.

PARTY RECRUITING RESEMBLES A SIEVE

The physical, mental and financial strain drove new members out of the party. Keeping them was a major dilemma. At the end of the factional strife, the party had only about 15,000 members, a loss of approximately 1,600 over 1928. The 6,000 new members, "85 per cent . . . industrial workers and 15 per cent Negroes," brought in by the first vigorous recruiting drive in 1930, looked like an accomplishment. But it was largely on paper. The resolution on keeping new members plaintively admitted that "there is a great disproportion between the reported new members and the number of initiation stamps purchased from the central office during the drive." Similarly, the sale of dues stamps had not increased in the same ratio with the recruiting.^{*222}

The elaborate program for "keeping and developing the new members" overlooked a basic element, their disillusionment after attending a few meetings of the branch. The hollow content of the meetings and the tedious proceedings were tiresome. The old members were not averse to loading the new ones with part of their own duties. The latter had also to attend special classes. The new converts soon realized that the inner life of the CP was by far not as attractive as it had appeared from the outside. Only the new recruits from the campus, drawn into the apparatus of the party in one capacity or another, thus avoiding the drudgery of the party routine, stayed, some of them rising to second layer leadership.

The party really began to grow only in the middle 30's, when it gave up its revolutionary frame of mind, embraced democracy, and relaxed. And even then the problem of retaining the new members remained very much in the forefront.

31 *A Cultural Wasteland*

The unbending dogmatism of the Third Period, hindering the growth of the party as it did, placed Jewish Communism in a strait-jacket.

Throughout the 20's, Jewish Communism had more links with its environment than the party had. It exploited to the utmost the rising prestige of the Soviet Union and its own concern for the Jewish group. Jewish Communists were forging positions of strength on several fronts, confidently looking ahead to further expansion. However, their stand on the Palestinian outbreaks alienated them from the community. And the Third Period completed their isolation.

When the *Daily Worker* and *The Communist*, in conformity with the Leftist line, were maligning the American democratic heritage, the effect did not go beyond their small circle of readers. Party members bought the paper largely as a duty, depending on the "capitalist" papers for their information. But when the *Freiheit* and the monthly *Hammer* began to sneer at Jewish cultural values, the repercussions were almost disastrous. For all its limitations, the Yiddish Left periphery was relatively larger and more varied. The contents of the *Freiheit* and the *Hammer* were also more diversified than mere party mouthpieces. The sudden narrowing down of their scope and their intolerant, shrill tone repelled many of their readers.

Several factors entered into the rapid process of isolation. The first was of a purely inner-party nature.

In the early 30's, the language groups were still further cut down.

For the Jewish Section, with its wider ramifications, this spelled steady shrinkage. The National Bureau of Jewish Fractions—as it was now called—was a party agency solely of Communists active in Yiddish work. “Jewish” trade unions and Jews working in other areas were excluded. The Bureau had no way of approaching them though they may have been interested in Jewish affairs.

Reducing the function of the language bodies was followed by a lowering of their status within the party. Once the entire program was switched to mass production industries and to Negroes, little attention could be paid to foreign-born and still less to Jews. Jews were not in the former and on the wrong side of the color line. The outcry for Americanization meant only that one could not speak his native tongue in the party; otherwise, America was vilified from every street corner.

THE ANTAGONISM TO JEWISH “ENCROACHMENT”

The Jewish Communists suffered most from the new “Americanization” policy. The local party leaders treated them almost as rivals, claiming that many Jews could be employed to better advantage in general party work. The consumers’ goods industries, white-collar workers and small businessmen were relegated to the background. However, they were remembered—and quite well—during fund-raising campaigns.

Freiheit leaflets were banned at big anniversary affairs in New York because they were Yiddish, although the audiences were largely Jewish.

Local party functionaries, sensing the change in attitude, resisted the “encroachment” of the *Freiheit*, the ICOR and other fund-raising in their areas. They argued that the Jews from New York drained the financial resources to which only they were entitled. And they were right inasmuch as it was easier to approach the Jewish middle class for contributions than the non-Jewish. Among the former, the ground had been cultivated by a decade of activity of the Jewish Communist-Left and by the money-giving tradition of the Jews.

However, the national office, taking a longer view, had to impose a compromise to save the *Freiheit* and the other Jewish auxiliary bodies. It stipulated that before the Jews enter an area for a

money campaign, they were to have the specific permission of the national office and that 15 per cent of the gross income was to go to the local party. This arrangement did not hinder the latter from going after the Jewish members and sympathizers and persuading them that the *Freiheit* and Jewish causes were less important than the *Daily Worker* and the general party. Many could not resist this pressure, and either curtailed their donations to the Jewish work or stopped giving altogether.

Moishe Katz, returning from a speaking tour in 1933, after several years in Russia, complained in the *Freiheit* that non-Jewish Communists spoke disparagingly of the paper and of Jewish work, and that one functionary in Detroit had called the Jewish movement a liability to the party.

The reduced status of the Jewish fraction paralleled a sizable increase in the number of Jewish white-collar people, students and professionals, American-born, who either joined the party or moved in its periphery during the depression. Some of them were Jewish-conscious, and the Jewish Bureau could have contacted them fruitfully were it not for the ban imposed by the party. Moreover, there were instances where the party took active people out of the Jewish field for general work.

THE ANTI-RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN

The leading Jewish Communists were too timid to stand up to this new course. Their own activity contributed in no small measure to the shrinkage of Jewish Communism. As mentioned in Chapter 28, fighting Zionism was given high priority. Soon the range was widened, taking in anti-Jewishness and anti-religion.

Jewish Communism reverted to the anti-religious drives of the early radicals at the turn of the century. The latter indulged in it in stiff competition with an aggressive orthodoxy over the minds of the immigrants. No such orthodoxy existed in the 30's, but there were Comintern instructions to fight "the church and reaction." In the absence of institutional political reaction among the Jews, the Communists' best target was the institutional religion. (The Catholic Church was at that time waging an energetic campaign against suppression of religion in the Soviet Union, which prompted Moscow to answer with atheist campaigns by the world parties.)

Widespread Communist anti-religious propaganda was conducted on the eve of the Jewish holidays, with Mock *Seders* on Passover and anti-religious affairs and lectures on the Day of Atonement, the Bureau preparing the "theses" and supplying the cities with speakers. The *Freiheit* appeared on the Holy Days with special anti-religious material—the Jewish press was not published on *Rosh Hashonah* and *Yom Kippur*. The only feature of the campaign of the early radicals omitted by the Jewish Communists were the *Yom Kippur* balls. Dancing was taboo for Communists during that "revolutionary" period.

Fighting religion was but one ingredient in the anti-Jewish brew stirred up by Communism. The cultural heritage previously claimed as its own was now contemptuously refuted. The Yiddish classics, Sholom Aleichem excepted, disappeared from Communist publications here and abroad. And the great humorist was seen only as an artist who took up the cudgels for the poor against the rich.

THE STIFLING PROLET CULT ERA

The stage was set for the proletarian culture—Proletcult—handed down by the Kremlin. Stalin's "building Socialism in one country" had to be accompanied by sweeping away the remnants of "bourgeois culture and art," and replacing them by the new cultural values of the victorious proletariat—whatever this term may have meant.

The American delegation at the Congress of Revolutionary Writers, that met in Kharkov at the end of 1930, returned home with the thesis, *Art Is a Weapon in the Class Struggle*. Consequently, the creative artist with a high social conscience had no choice but to commit his art to the cause of the revolutionary proletariat. And, of course, the Communist Party was the sole expression of that cause.

A brigade of self-appointed literary commissars turned up here, armed with party cards and the latest quotations from Soviet Proletcult. They kept a strict vigil over the literary output of fellow traveling writers, rebuking them for "insufficient clarity on the role of the proletariat" and similar offenses. Among the group of prole-

tarian writers were a few talented people. Max Eastman dubbed them "Artists in Uniform." Among the promising younger men was V. J. Jerome, Polish-born, a well-read man, with a pedantic concern for language, but also scrupulously conformist. Jerome later made his career as a cultural commissar. But the chief cultural commissar in the 30's was Alexander Trachtenberg, head of the International Publishers, an efficient bureaucrat. Trachtenberg was agile enough to make the jump from a Centrist of the Workers Council to a loyal and valuable man of the majority camp, and to maintain his position after the minority won out, without being hurt in any way.

The *New Masses* was the house organ of American Proletcult; the John Reed clubs, its organizational outlet. Michael Gold, Harry Freeman, A. B. Magil, Joseph North and Bill Gropper were among the leading people in New York. The clubs were constantly torn by internal squabbles. On the Left theater front was the League of Workers Theaters, founded in April 1932. In 1934, the League branched out, taking in the Workers Dance League and the National Film and Photo League. Its magazine, *Workers' Theater*, was renamed *New Theater*. An array of Broadway and Hollywood luminaries were contributors.

THE "PROLETARIANS"

It would be tedious to go into the details of the havoc wrought by Proletcult. Only one yardstick was applied to a literary piece, whether it would help to bolster a hunger march or a strike. The cultural area of Jewish Communism was turned into a wasteland.

A little army of worker-poets and novelists sprang up, anxious to take the place of the distinguished writers who had left the *Freiheit* in 1929. There were but a few gifted people among them.⁺⁷¹ And their growth was largely stunted by the demands made upon them for immediate response to current political happenings. Even the older and non-political Isaac Raboi had to write party and class-struggle stories. Creative writing was reduced to the level of the Arbcom-workers' correspondence. No one was supposed to smile, to be gay or humorous. Only one cheerful note was permitted, that of the Soviet poems eulogizing the Great Stalin and the achievements of the industrialization; these became a regular feature of the *Freiheit*. All the other printed material was rigidly uniform, as if

written by one man. Original expressions were snuffed out. The dried-out *Freiheit* lost readers.

The Proletpen, formed by the *Freiheit* staff after their expulsion from the Yiddish Writers' Union, in 1929, published a few anthologies of the new proletarian literature. The first one, symbolically called *Union Square*, appeared December 1930. In 1933, a monthly, *Signal*, made its appearance. But the magazine, a rigid Proletcult affair, had few readers even among the Left. After struggling for a time, it disappeared without leaving a mark on current Jewish literature.

The Proletcult dogma extended to secular Judaism. Outstanding workers in the field of Jewish science here and abroad, all of them Socialists of various shadings—Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, Dr. J. N. Steinberg, Dr. A. Menes, Dr. Joseph Shipper, Dr. Max Weinreich and others—were sneered at, their work tagged a “fascist-Yiddishist science.” *223 In a booklet by P. Shprach, published by the *Emes* in Moscow and distributed by the *Freiheit* here in 1933, men like Zhitlowsky, Zivyon, S. Niger, Chief Rabbi Kuk of Palestine, Sholom Asch, Ab. Cahan, Chief Rabbi Hertz of England were lumped together under the scare title of “The Fascist Counterrevolution and the Jewish Bourgeoisie.”

The *Freiheit* itself was more discriminating. It applied the Comintern distinction. Bourgeois reformers and writers were simply fascists, while labor and Socialist leaders were placed in a more subtle and complicated category, social fascists. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise got off easier. For signing a call with two other public men in support of the La Guardia-Fusion ticket in 1933, he was called “one of the three grenadiers of bourgeois reaction.” Four years later La Guardia was hailed as the standard bearer of the progressive forces of New York, and Wise was flattered as the leader of progressive Jewry.

Albert Einstein did not escape insulting epithets either. For saying “The joy of life is here (in America) harmonized with joy of work,” N. Buchwald called him a “great *khnyuk*.” *224

THE ARTEF; THE HEAVY COST OF THE PROLETULT

The “revolutionizing” and the “proletarianizing” pauperized the Communist-led cultural groups. The major victims were the Frei-

heit Singing Societies, the ARTEF—Jewish Workers Theater—and the *shules*.

The ARTEF, originally a group of amateurs, all of them shop-workers struggling for theatrical expression, was begun in 1924 on a small scale as the Freiheit Dramatic Section, and later became known as the Freiheit Dramatic Studio. In 1927, it became a permanent theater, and was given the name of ARTEF at a Left-Wing conference in 1928.

Hard work and the competent direction of Benno Schneider, formerly of the *Habima*, raised the artistic level of the ARTEF and made it a conspicuous cultural factor of the Left, imparting to the movement dramatic color and a sense of pride as the only theater of its kind in the country. Schneider was particularly adept at presenting stylized versions of Sholom Aleichem and other classical plays. These ARTEF performances were memorable. The ARTEF also produced a play by H. Leivick, *Chains*, treating the conflict between the exigencies of the revolution and the moral values of the individual, a dramatization of Samuel Ornitz' *Haunch, Paunch and Jowls*, and a play by Gorky. The plays drew favorable comment in the general press, but not in the Jewish, where the ARTEF was boycotted.

The hostility to anything remotely savoring of Communism, that grew out of the struggle in the unions and ripened during the Palestinian events, surrounded the ARTEF like a Chinese wall. Still, the moral success—the theater could not boast of a financial one—gave a large measure of satisfaction to the members of the cast, to compensate for their hardships and material sacrifices. (Jacob Mestel, Joseph Buloff and Benjamin Zemach were the other directors of the ARTEF; M. Zolotaroff did the decorations.)

But the meddling of the Jewish Bureau, through its unofficial commissar, Nathaniel Buchwald, a capricious and vain intellectual, and the maneuvering of the party fraction there kept the cast in a steady turmoil. The heaviest blow was the party's insistence on a revolutionary repertory to dramatize the workers' struggles and "serve the revolutionary labor movement." The ARTEF was compelled to stage a couple of *agitkas*—cheap propaganda plays—one by Philip Cherner, *By the Noise of the Machines*, dealing with a garment strike, another a translation from a piece called *Drought*,

about the tenant farmers in the Southwest. Both were miserable failures.

Only with the passing of the Proletcult could the ARTEF revert to its original repertory, dramatizing Jewish and general classical works of a social orientation.*²²⁵

JEWISH SHULES WITHOUT JEWISH EDUCATION

The textbooks of the parochial schools of the IWO, which in the beginning boasted of their progressive Jewish education, were cleansed of anything resembling the Jewish past or present. Jewish history disappeared from their pages. The schools were Sovietized, celebrating only the 1st of May and November 7th. All they taught was Communism in Yiddish.

They were originally formed as the Non-Partisan Yiddish Workers Shules, the Left and those of the Right who believed in secular education cooperating. They retained their name and much of their character in 1926, after the Left seized the majority of the *shules* and Camp Kinderland. However, in 1929, the approaching Leftist course caused a split. Jacob Levine, director of the *shules*, and a group of his followers, opposing the new curriculum, broke with the *shules* to join those of the WC.

A year later, the new IWO took over the *shules* and the camp. The word "Non-Partisan" was dropped from their name. The convention of the *shules*, May 1930, in Philadelphia, approved an entirely new curriculum, called the project system, strictly adapted to the mood of the Leftist course.

The very first program article by Kalmen Marmor, educational director of the IWO, stressed that the aim of the Jewish proletarian *shule* was to "raise the children in the spirit of the class struggle, in Yiddish. . . ." And the resolution in Philadelphia explained that through the projects the "children will investigate the class struggle . . . what is industrial unionism, the TUUL, strikes, picket lines, mass demonstrations, ILD, WIR, ICOR, Friends of Soviet Russia, etc. . . . They will acquaint themselves with the October Revolution, the Paris Commune, the Luxemburg-Liebknicht murder, Sacco-Vanzetti, the Communist press, the Communist mass action." *²²⁶

The project *America*, of the fourth school year, concentrated on

all the shady spots of the American scene: Negro lynching, anti-labor laws, Mooney and Billings, Sacco-Vanzetti, the graft scandals, frameups of radicals, speedup in factories, child and woman labor, crises, unemployment—and the treacherous role of the Socialist Party. On the other hand, the project *Russian Revolution* was full of fascinating heroism and the climactic glorious victory of Soviet power.

One of the projects for the children in the summer camp Kinderland was to organize the 36 bungalows into "36 little Soviet republics." All the games and discussions were to revolve around revolutionary heroes, Russian revolutionary struggles, oppressed Negroes and the TUUL.*²²⁷ Jewish revolutionary heroes and the Jewish labor movement were non-existent.

A book of children's stories by Olgin for the IWO *shules*, published in 1932, was filled with tales of the Bolshevik Revolution and the negative side of America. There was not a single Jewish story in the book.

The total elimination of Jewish subjects from the curriculum was completed at the convention of the IWO *shules*, in December 1933. Heavy Communist fire was brought to bear on those *tuers* and teachers who refused to part with the original aim of the *shules*. Olgin led the assault.*²²⁸

It is not surprising that Jewish Communism in the early 30's made enemies and lost friends. The unwritten motto, *Those Who Differ With Us in Anything are Our Enemies*, and the reckless demolition of every creative aspect of Jewish life, however forward-looking, could only drive people away.

The closing of the Bank of the United States in New York City, in the summer of 1931, hit several thousand Jewish families at a time when earnings were dropping to a new low or entirely disappearing. A few active Left-Wingers among the indignant victims turned the newly organized Depositors' Association over to the *Freiheit*. Max Levine, a friendly and tactful man, not widely known as a fellow traveler, became their counsel. He managed to keep the Tammany politicians out of this movement.

The *Freiheit* became the organ of the depositors, and would have gained a boost in its circulation were it not for the long and boring statements by Comintern and party plenums and the paper's gen-

eral approach and tone, which the new readers found indigestible. They quickly returned to the *Forward*, the *Morning Journal* and *The Day*.

The isolation which the Jewish Communists so successfully achieved would in all probability have crushed them were it not for the advent of Hitler in Germany and the flexible, all-inclusive Democratic Front that followed.

32 *Jefferson, Lincoln—and Stalin*

Communism's appraisal of such mutually exclusive doctrines as fascism abroad and the New Deal at home could not have been less simple or crude, and this appraisal stuck for quite some time. Nearly a full year after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, January 1933, the 13th Comintern plenum, in December, had this startling analysis to offer: "Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of the reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist element of finance capital. . . . Social Democracy is the main prop of the bourgeoisie among the working class." *229

(Though the Communists were chagrined by the total lack of resistance by the militant German Communists to the Nazi seizure of power, their reaction was less hopeless than that of the Social Democrats, partly because of the flood of assurances from Moscow that Nazism would be unable to solve the grave difficulties facing Germany, and that "today's Nazism, however catastrophic, was just a stepping stone to tomorrow's Communism.")

The plenum was still certain of the "maturing of the revolutionary crisis." The spreading strike movement in the United States, encouraged by the new voice in the White House, and the resistance of farmers to mass foreclosures, was interpreted by the Comintern as a definite sign that the masses were "against the bourgeois program for overcoming the crisis," meaning, of course, the New Deal. And Otto Kuusinen, who replaced the purged Ossip Piatnitsky, in his concluding speech, attacked the AFL and the Socialists for helping Roosevelt to carry out "semi-fascist measures."

The old slogans were still in force: *For a Revolutionary Way Out of the Crisis, For the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasants.*^{*230}

THE NEW DEAL, A "ROAD TO FASCISM AND WAR"

To Moscow the New Deal was a bourgeois program for overcoming the crisis. To the American Communists it was a "road to fascism," linked with war preparedness. Robert Minor, appearing before General Hugh Johnson, NRA Administrator, February 28, 1934, flatly rejected Johnson's suggestion for the Communist Party's "getting together with the NRA." "There is no common ground," he said. "The NRA is an offensive against the working class. . . . It seeks to beat down their standard of living. Its trade codes are slave codes. . . ." Minor repeated the Communist charge that the NRA was a disguise for war plans. . . . He again insisted that all "war funds" be transferred to the relief of the unemployed and administered by a national unemployed council.^{*231}

The party did not hesitate to attack the purpose of the Wagner Labor Dispute Bill (later known as the Wagner Labor Act) as late as the spring of 1935. William F. Dunne, speaking for the party before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, March 28th, vehemently denounced the bill: ". . . The present form of the Wagner Bill is more dangerous to the economic and social interests of the working people than it was before. . . . Green, Woll, Lewis, Hillman and other official leaders of the AFL made with Richberg and Roosevelt a *Pax Romana*—a peace of death for labor. . . ." Dunne quoted at length from Marx and Engels to prove that the lot of the workers cannot be improved under capitalism.^{*232}

The manifesto of the eighth convention of the party, in Cleveland, April 1, 1934, directly associated Roosevelt with fascism: "All the steps carried out . . . are substantially the same as the steps made by the open fascist governments. . . ." ^{*233}

The categorical denial that the New Deal could better the lot of millions of workers hid a deep fear that it might. The new spirit aroused among the workers by the National Industrial Recovery Act and its Section 7a, passed into law July 1933, made the party apprehensive lest Roosevelt's reforms snatch away the longed-for and believed-in "revolutionary crisis." And to round out the charges

of "Roosevelt's war preparation plans," the Communist press cited the Civilian Conservation Corps camps, built to "militarize the American youth."

The few Communists in the thick of trade union work thought differently. They did not argue publicly against the party, but when their turn came at the code authority hearings, they tried hard to squeeze out of the NRA every ounce of advantage for their unions, just as the reformists and "labor fakers" did. Ben Gold, who acquired in the Lenin School in Moscow the proper quotations from Lenin and Stalin and the skill for tactical maneuvering, astonished the code authority for the fur industry and the employers. His judicious and incisive analysis of the fur situation at the hearing, in the fall of 1933, and his appeal for cooperation between management and labor could have done any anti-Communist union leader proud.*²³⁴

RECOGNITION OF SOVIET UNION CHANGES NOTHING

Roosevelt's recognition of the Soviet Union, November 17, 1933, did not mollify the party a bit, though it cheered the rank and file. The party acted as though it had been cheated of a hard-hitting issue for which it had campaigned for many years.

Parenthetically, Maxim Litvinoff, the Soviet Foreign Commissar who negotiated the recognition, caused the Communists here no little embarrassment. At a time when they were often called to demonstrate in front of the Italian Consulate, Litvinoff, after a farewell banquet in the Waldorf Astoria, November 24th, attended by industrialists and bankers, took the boat to Italy to keep an appointment with the fascist dictator. Litvinoff's visit to Mussolini was not the only unpleasant incident. The Kremlin operated with both arms at the same time, one as the state of Russia, the other as the fountainhead of the Communist world movement, the former often exposing the Communists to ridicule and scorn.

Communist antagonism to the New Deal was rivaled only by that of the National Association of Manufacturers, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce and, later, the Liberty League. It was not uncommon to find both Communist spokesmen and big business leaders opposing the New Deal at Congressional hearings.

The utter failure of the grandiose tasks so hopefully set for the party in 1930 could not be glossed over in 1933. The Open Letter issued by the extraordinary party conference in New York City, July 7–10 of the same year, confessed the failures frankly: The party did not “root itself in the decisive strata of the proletariat,” the new unions were dying out, the unemployed movement was shrinking and the circulation of the *Daily Worker* had fallen off. The Open Letter went the whole gamut of criticism, including a condemnation of the lack of democracy and the bureaucratization of the party. . . . In the same breath, it strongly warned against “factional methods of work,” meaning criticism of the party top. However, the Open Letter carefully avoided any soul-searching; the validity of the line itself was not questioned. Its correctness was duly confirmed, and the poor performance blamed on errors in application and wrong tactics. The remedies offered by the Open Letter amounted to a shifting of the chairs around.*²³⁵

ELEMENTS AND PEOPLE AIDING COMMUNISM

The party’s obsession with winning the “decisive strata of the proletariat” blotted out of the Open Letter the one area where it could boast of an advance, that among the intellectuals and white-collar workers. There, Communist isolation was over. The reasons were not only economic. A mixture of despair and hope were at work. The depression brought on a reexamination of values among the intelligentsia. Many a young brain worker, his confidence in the stability of the system shaken, was lending an ear to the high promise of Communism.

Communism was synonymous with the Soviet Union. The early 30’s witnessed quite a pilgrimage of intellectuals to Soviet Russia. Most of them returned home greatly impressed with what they saw, or, to be exact, what they thought they saw. Even the incredible hardships of the people did not dampen their enthusiasm. Typical was the reply given to the author by a woman physician, a non-Communist, on her return from Russia in the famine year of 1933: “The people are starving but the idea is marvelous.”

Skilled workers, particularly foreign-born, young technicians, and white-collar people, chaffing under enforced idleness, were eager to go to Russia to participate in “building Socialism.” Quite a number

went, and many more would have gone if they could. All of them, even the Communists, with the exception of those who gave up their citizenship, came back, unable to stand the low living standard and lack of freedom.

On the international level, Communism was enhanced by the support given to it by Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland of France and John Strachey of England. The latter joined the party, and his book, *The Struggle for Power*, published in 1934, avoiding Marxian-Communist terminology, supplied to many doubting minds the most comprehensive reasoning for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Communism's case was also strengthened by the incredible ease with which democracy in Germany had crumbled.

In this country, Communist influence and prestige was heightened by Lincoln Steffens, Theodore Dreiser, Waldo Frank, Dr. George Counts, James T. Farrell, Granville Hicks and Newton Arvin. And this list is far from complete. (Lincoln Steffens' complete identification with Communism was stated by him in 1934, "Communism can solve our problem. Communism does solve our problem in Soviet Russia. . . . The American Communist Party program meets our American capitalist situation precisely, and it is the only American party that meets it head on; all of it. . . .")²⁸⁶

THE FORCED ISSUE OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN 1934

The election campaign of 1934 indicated a somewhat larger party periphery resulting from the depression. It also reflected a perceptible change in the party's political approach. The Comintern had not as yet signaled any retreat from the main goal, a Soviet America, but the cold shoulder given by the workers to this slogan could not be discounted. The party now emphasized immediate demands.

For the first time, the issue of anti-Semitism was brought into the campaign in the Jewish neighborhoods. Jewish Communism had not yet divested itself of its Third Period negation of Jewish problems. But Hitlerism in Germany made Jews more sensitive to signs of prejudice, and the Communists utilized this sensitivity as a wedge to reenter the community. Communist candidates insinuated that their non-Jewish opponents were anti-Jewish in one way or another.

The Jewish press protested vainly against this dragging in of anti-Semitism where it did not exist.

For the Jewish Communists in New York the "concentration point" was Israel Amter, candidate for Governor; Olgin, for Congress in the 23rd District, and Ben Gold, in the 7th Assembly District, both in the Bronx. All three kept harping on the struggle against anti-Semitism and racial discrimination. If one were to judge by the party press, the campaign was vigorous and down-to-earth. But the results were disappointing, Amter receiving 41,239 votes. The reason was the popularity of Governor Herbert H. Lehman. Olgin's 7,423 votes were nearly half of those of his Socialist opponent, Samuel Orr. None of the other Communist candidates for Congress or for Assembly received above 7,000. Some got less. The party press was heartened by comparing these figures with the much smaller ones in 1932. They were also cheered by the smaller vote of the Socialist candidate.

THE GREAT RETREAT, THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT

The official disengagement from the Third Period began slowly and awkwardly in January 1935. But once the retreat was under way, it proceeded at a rapid pace and on all sectors. The first inkling of a new course shaping up in the Kremlin was a speech by Browder, in Washington, January 6th, before the National Congress for Social and Unemployed Insurance,²³⁷ after a hasty trip to Moscow, December 1934, and a resolution of the CEC, January 1935. Political unity of workers and farmers through a labor or a farmer-labor party, rejected as an "appendage to the existing bourgeois parties," was again openly advanced.²³⁸ This about-face was motivated by the "new relation of forces" in America. It proved to be the forerunner of the United Front, or, as it became known, the Democratic Front.

Stalin needed more than two years, from the advent of Hitler until the middle of 1935, to fully comprehend the grave implications of German Nazism for the security of the Soviet Union, and to translate this conclusion into a new course for world Communism—the People's Front. His new foreign policy was keyed to courting the friendship of the democratic nations; Litvinoff, in the League of Nations, proclaiming "collective security," and "peace is

indivisible." (The first People's Front was formed in France, March 1935, as a result of the attempt of the *Croix de Feu* [fascists] to seize parliament in February 6, 1934.)

The People's Front course was formalized at the seventh world congress, July-August 1935. The congress pronounced that "The united fighting front of the working class is the main task at present. . . . The unification of all trade unions is an important step in forging complete unity of the proletariat . . . building a Democratic Front of workers, farmers and middle-class elements against reaction, fascism and war." *239

These were strange phrases for world Communism, dictated largely by the requirements of Stalin's new foreign policy. A complete change in tactics followed immediately.

The change was elaborately camouflaged. Under Stalin, a new course was never prefaced by a simple admission that the old one had been a mistake. All resolutions began with the calm assurance that the past years had confirmed the correctness of the party line. Only in the middle of the lengthy text could the reader stumble upon a complete new course. As the reader was usually a party functionary, a man of experience—the rank and file could not wade through these casuistic and repetitious documents—he was not at all deceived by the flood of words, nor by the optimistic end of the resolution.

Only one reason advanced by the seventh congress, the danger of world fascism, was a valid one. The rest was mere subterfuge.+72

Browder began his speech at the congress with a ceremonial praise of Dimitrov's report. This was followed by the admission that the American party had been guilty of a narrow Leftist approach. This was counterbalanced by heaps of abuse on the union bureaucracy and the Socialist old guard—Browder was a master in this art. He then suggested a strong coalition of workers and farmers. Still unsure of his ground, he only hinted at including the liberals.*240

TACIT HELP FOR ROOSEVELT IN 1936

Having brought in the middle class through the back door without being reprimanded, Browder could give free rein to his cherished ambition to inherit for the Communist movement the mantle of the American revolutionary past. He deemed it a prerequisite for

placing the party "in the mainstream of American political life."

A year later, in the Presidential elections of 1936, Browder, the party's nominee, as yet hesitatingly, gave indirect aid to Franklin D. Roosevelt. Touring the country, he kept assailing Alf Landon, Wall Street and the Liberty League, hardly asking his audience to vote for himself or James Ford. And the editorial in the *Freiheit* on the very last day of the elections echoed this tactic by urging its readers to vote Communist, but omitting to mention Browder. The other party papers did likewise. A day later, they hailed Roosevelt's landslide victory. "Toilers voted for Roosevelt to save the country from the Landon's" was their theme.

Previously, the *Freiheit* had done its part by printing an article by Moishe Bacall, of Chicago, hinting that Landon was tainted with anti-Semitism.*²⁴¹ The entire Jewish press condemned this slur. Still, the *Freiheit* and the *Daily Worker* repeated the charge on the front page.*²⁴² However, it must be noted that the attacks by the Liberty League in New York on three of Roosevelt's electors, Hillman, Dubinsky and Zaritsky, did carry anti-foreigner and anti-Jewish insinuations.*²⁴³

The Browder-Ford national vote was 80,159. Browder's small vote was out of step with the party's growth in size, strength and periphery. Many Communists and Lefts had voted for Roosevelt via the American Labor Party, originally formed to campaign for Roosevelt in New York State. It was no secret, and no one was rebuked for it. This is confirmed by the wide discrepancy between the Browder vote in New York City and that for Israel Amter, candidate for president of the City Council: Browder—32,172, Amter—62,414. The same discrepancy could be found in all large cities. The party claimed that the combined vote of its local candidates reached several hundred thousand.

SUPPORT DEWEY AND KELLY; INFILTRATING THE ALP

Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, 1935, and the rebellion of the Spanish fascists and monarchists, July 1936, was viewed in the Kremlin as a curtain raiser for World War II. Stalin felt a greater need to play the good neighbor to Western Europe and to the United States. As a consequence, criticism of Roosevelt disappeared from the Communist press. The President was lauded for his domes-

tic measures, the increased budgets for the armed forces included, and was steadily urged to "lead progressive mankind to check fascist aggression."

In 1937, the Democratic Front course was already in full swing and the CP was openly campaigning for "capitalist" candidates alongside the unions and Right-Wing Socialists. In the New York municipal elections of the same year, the party, uninvited, was in the thick of the campaign for the La Guardia-Morris-Dewey ticket. Party candidates, previously nominated, were obligingly withdrawn. Only one nominee, Israel Amter, running for congressman-at-large, was retained for political-demonstrative purposes.

Communists helped to pack the election rally in Madison Square Garden, October 29th, and rose in a tumultuous cheer for Thomas E. Dewey, running for district attorney. The enlarged plenum of the CEC of the party, in session at that time, was recessed, and all participants came to the meeting.*²⁴⁴

Support to Democrats was given unstintingly. In Chicago, Communists worked for the election of Mayor Kelly on the ground that he supported Roosevelt on national policies. Radical elements there were incensed at this backing of a corrupt machine. Mayor Hague, boss of Jersey City, received underhand Communist support, and for the same reason.

In California, the Communist Democratic Front operated effectively through the Democratic Party itself. By colonizing the Young Democratic clubs, the Communists, in 1938, actually took over the direction of their central body. William Schneiderman was the state party secretary; Paul Kline, secretary of the Los Angeles County Committee.*²⁴⁵

The unusually accommodating behavior in New York and in those cities where Labor's Non-Partisan League functioned was ostensibly a desire to dispel the deep distrust of the high command of the garment trade unions, the backbone of the ALP and the LNPL, who, led by David Dubinsky, steadfastly rejected all overtures for a United Front with the Communists. Actually, it was a disguise for a planned infiltration of the clubs of the ALP. Blocked at the front door, the Communists began a systematic individual invasion through the back, joining the ALP clubs and capturing one after the other. This enabled them to put through a number of their own people as candidates of the ALP in 1938. They found

an ally in Vito Marcantonio, congressman from the 20th Congressional District in Harlem. Marcantonio, a Republican, became the foremost Communist collaborator on the New York political scene.

Here too the *Forward* was the first to sound the alarm. On the eve of the elections in 1938, it ran a front page box with the names of 18 ALP local candidates. "They are not our candidates," the paper warned. "They are Communists or their friends. Don't vote for them!" The *Freiheit* and the *Daily Worker* replied by calling the *Forward* a traitor to the ALP.

However, any illusion of a peaceful coexistence with the Communists in the ALP was dashed in the fall of 1939. Dubinsky and his associates, Isidore Nagler, Luigi Antonini, Charles S. Zimmerman and Louis Stulberg, of the ILGWU, and Alex Rose, of the HCMWU, always skeptical of the sincerity of Communist overtures, were now faced with the serious threat of the Communists capturing the ALP for their own purposes. The Stalin-Hitler pact made a showdown inevitable. The first Communist move was to call a conference of their adherents in the Hotel Brevoort, December 28th of the same year. Morris Watson, vice-president of the American Newspaper Guild, then under Communist control, was chairman. Its aim was "to rebuild the ALP on a democratic basis," and a "progressive committee" was elected for that purpose. This committee put up a list of candidates in the ALP primaries of August 1940. They won a majority in New York City, but the Right Wing maintained control of the state committee.

At that time the Communists again found an ally in John L. Lewis, who also turned against Roosevelt. His first blast against the President and his policies was made at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the miners' union, January 1940, in Columbus, Ohio. His main charge was that Roosevelt had "not fulfilled his promises to the people," and that he had not consulted with the representatives of labor. The Communist press warmly applauded his speech.

The Right Wing began in earnest mobilizing to stop the Communist grab of the ALP, but it was too late to save the party. After a series of skirmishes, the Right Wing left the ALP in 1944, forming the Liberal Party. Their defeat in the ALP referendum of that year was in a great measure due to Sidney Hillman's refusal to associate himself with them in ridding the ALP of the Communists and the Lefts. (La Guardia sided with him.) Hillman, head of the Politi-

cal Action Committee of the CIO, of which the Communist-controlled unions were a part, could not see his way clear to banning them in the ALP; this would have run up against a major CIO policy.⁺⁷³ Besides, Hillman, confident that he could always keep the Communists and their friends under control, believed that a split should be avoided. But the Communists could not be controlled. Nor was a split avoided in 1948.^{*246 +74}

JEFFERSON, JACKSON, LINCOLN—AND STALIN

Inheriting the American revolutionary traditions became the well-spring of the new line. Men who had been repeatedly labeled social fascists and lackays of Wall Street were now entreated to join the Communists in a common front for the "unity of all democratic forces against reaction, against the offensive of monopoly capital, and for the defense of civil liberties and democratic rights"—the American counterpart of the French People's Front.

Browder, trying to obliterate the recent past, blandly stated before the Massachusetts State Legislative Investigating Committee, headed by Representative Sherman, "The Communist Party does not seek the overthrow of the government. On the contrary, the party is helping to carry on the democratic system of government according to the best traditions of the United States."^{*247} Paine, Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln were recognized as builders of American democracy. And, on February 22, 1937, George Washington was included too. From there it was but one step to Browder's famous slogan of 1937, *Communism Is 20th Century Americanism*. For the first time American flags hung prominently from Communist platforms alongside the Red flag of the party.

Soon the capitalist class disappeared altogether from the Communist lexicon. The enemy was now located only in "some Wall Street sections of big business." They and they alone were accused of nursing fascism in the United States, assisting Hitler, planning a world war and aggression against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Fatherland was quietly shelved, and replaced by allegiance to America. This new allegiance was officially sanctioned by the tenth national convention of May 1938, in New York City.

This convention struck a high pitch in patriotism. Without the pretense of a pre-convention discussion, the old class struggle theory

was discarded. The preamble incorporated in the new party constitution, printed in the membership books, stated in part:

The Communist Party of the United States . . . carrying forward today the traditions of Jefferson, Paine, Jackson and Lincoln, and of the Declaration of Independence; it upholds . . . democracy, the right of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and defends the United States Constitution against its reactionary enemies who would destroy democracy and all popular liberties.

True, in the same breath—to be exact, in the second paragraph—the preamble spoke of the "establishment of Socialism according to the scientific principles enunciated by the greatest teachers of mankind, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, embodied in the Communist International. . . ." But this hodge-podge of a platform was a deliberate move to leave an exit for a possible return to the old line. It was also meant to placate the old Communists who could not bring themselves to take the leap from revolutionary Marxism into outright social reformism blended with American patriotism.

Strict adherence to American democracy was aggressively repeated in Article four of the party constitution. Section one read: ". . . The Communist Party . . . , standing unqualified for the rights of the majority to direct the destinies of our countries, will fight with all its strength against any and every effort, whether it comes from abroad or from within, to impose upon our people the arbitrary will of any selfish group or party or clique or conspiracy." The pledge that a new member had to take, in Article three, Section three, also omitted the phrase, "I agree to submit to the discipline of the party." Instead, he had to pledge "to work actively. . . ."

Parenthetically, the Americanization of the party brought a recognition of the country's political divisions. The previous arbitrary geographical lines were abolished; the section and district committees were abolished in favor of the regular state, county and city organizations, and the neighborhood branches were reorganized into assembly and congressional districts. In 1938, the party had 40 state organizations and units in all 48 states.

The Communist Party had gone far since the early 30's.

33 *Patriotism Pays Off*

Communism's advance among the intellectuals and white-collar people, impressive as it was, was less significant than its deep inroads on the industrial sector. For the first time the CP could boast, without undue exaggeration, of being "rooted in the decisive strata of the proletariat." And these unprecedented gains were realized in two or three years.

The Committee for Industrial Organization, formed by John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, David Dubinsky and Charles P. Howard, in Atlantic City, November 1935, that changed the entire industry-labor setup, was the Communists' first big chance. The CIO, encountering the hostility of the old craft unions and the die-hard resistance of management, was in no position to refuse help from any quarter willing to give it. Lewis, Dubinsky and Hillman could provide the financial sinews for the vast drives in the mass production industries, but they could hardly spare the great number of field organizers needed for such a tremendous job. The Communist movement was more than willing to fill this shortage.

Lewis, his mind set on organizing the steel industry, which directly affected his coal mining, welcomed the young Communists supplied by the party as organizers in the steel centers. In the Youngstown area alone the party sent in nearly 50 young people.^{*248} Energetic and determined, and accustomed to rough treatment by the police on picket lines, they proved to be the right men for the job. The party also made excellent use of its contacts in factories and mills in various industries. These contacts became part of the

base of operations for the CIO. The Communist group in Ford's suddenly found itself leading a wide and genuinely spontaneous movement for unionization. In other big auto plants they shared leadership with various elements, all the time maneuvering for domination.

CIO, COMMUNISM'S BIG CHANCE

From steel and auto the Communists spilled over into electrical appliances, oil, marine, city transportation, lumber, chemicals, communication, furniture and others. Before long Communists were in control of about eight important affiliates of the CIO and had a foot in many others, including the auto workers' union.

The goal that the party missed through strenuous concentration and revolutionary go-it-alone methods in the early 30's was now reached through close cooperation with established labor groups and through support of the New Deal.

The rapidity with which the CP gained control in these new unions can be attributed in part to the duofold task of a Communist trade union officer. He was not merely a union builder but a party builder as well. The party never made a secret of its motto, *Build the Party in Your Union*. And in the beginning the party trade union officer gladly did party recruiting; a strong party fraction was the guarantee of his power in the union. Only in 1938 did the Communist union leaders, being entrenched in their positions, consider the party fractions as something of a nuisance that interfered with their authority. It was primarily because of them that the fractions were abolished by the party convention of the same year.

To state that the party was little interested in the essential function of a trade union, improvement of the daily lot of the workers, would be an understatement. That the party did not think at all in these terms would be closer to the truth. Gaining positions of strength in industry was its prime motivation, a goal the Comintern kept urging. And such strength was indispensable for two immediate reasons: one, to be able to speak politically, through its top union officialdom, for millions of wage-earners, without having to consider their opinion; two, and this was of deeper consequence—to gain the coveted position of being able to shut down key industries for political purposes—political strikes—as was so often prac-

ticed in later times by the Communist parties in France and Italy, when they obtained control of the trade unions.

However, the eager young men thrust into the role of union builders could not prosper on Communist theories. Their power had to rest on practical results for their members, not merely on machine politics. Behind the surface of total unanimity, resistance to party dictates by Communist union leaders was not infrequent. But in most cases the will of the party prevailed.

The CP, loudly advocating labor unity, was actually frightened by the prospect of peace between the AFL and the CIO. Unity would have robbed the party of the strategic balance of power in the CIO; the launching of a permanent CIO, in 1938, immensely strengthened the Communist position in the latter.

The ILGWU was out of the CIO, and only Lewis and Hillman were left to stand up against the Communists. And these two had to tolerate them while keeping them from taking over.

THE RAPID GROWTH IN SIZE AND INFLUENCE

In the field of literature and art the party extended its influence through the Writers' League, the Artists' League, the Screen Actors' Guild, the Script Writers' Union, and the Theater Arts Committee.²⁴⁹ The stirrings on the campus were channeled through the American Students Union, launched by the YCL, and, later, through the American Youth Congress, for all practical purposes an auxiliary body of the CP.

Among the middle class, the party had at its disposal a colorful variety of local and national bodies formed for specific purposes. They were a source of valuable contacts, prestige and contributions. The most outstanding was the League for Peace and Democracy, formerly the League Against War and Fascism, Dr. Harry F. Ward, chairman. The first league was created September 1933. J. B. Matthews, an official of the SP but a secret member of the CP, was made chairman; Donald Henderson, secretary. It was a division of the Communist-inspired World Congress Against War, August 27-29, 1932, in Amsterdam—a reflection of the Kremlin's fear of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.

Of the local groups, the most useful was the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, comprising middle-class elements and a sizable display

of Hollywood talent. A statement in support of a cause, or in protest, bearing the names of Hollywood stars had a wide resonance here and even abroad.

The vigorous anti-fascist appeal by Moscow and by the party here and all-out support for the New Deal paid high dividends in more ways than one. Government offices on a local and national level became accessible to Communists. These openings enabled the party to start a concerted drive to "colonize" Washington.

The incessant recruiting in the CIO unions and in the various transmission belt bodies multiplied the party ranks nearly four-fold. However, the party's boast in 1938 of a membership of 75,000 was an exaggeration. A more exact table was given in the confidential report to the tenth party convention. The total figure for dues-paying membership for January 1936 stood at 30,836; in 1937, 37,685; and 1938, 54,012.²⁵⁰

The impressive industrial inroads notwithstanding, only 50 per cent belonged to unions and to the Workers Alliance, the unemployed group. The increase in membership was proportionately much higher in what the party report called light industries, professionals and white-collar workers than in the mass production industries. And though the fluctuations were normalized from the disheartening 70 per cent in 1936 to about 40 per cent in the latter part of 1937, the problem of keeping the new members still weighed heavily on the party.²⁵¹ The official figure also indicated the new and changing structure of the party. Over 20,000 members were in the party two years and longer; nearly 34,000, less than two years; and 27,000, only one year or less.

A closer insight into the composition of the party is given by the report to the convention of the New York State party, May 20-25, 1938. This was the only detailed analysis of the membership ever published. And New York contained about 40 per cent of the party strength.

THE DECLINE IN NEEDLE TRADES

Max Steinberg, organizational secretary, reported a rapid growth. In two years, the party "grew from 15,814 to about 30,000, and 10,000 in the YCL . . . dues-payers number about 22,000. The state party now counts 860 branches instead of 650 two years earlier.

. . . Two hundred and forty-four industrial branches as compared with 92 in 1935, and they cover 171 local unions in 15 industries. . . . They number 6,377 members instead of the previous 1,827. . . . The number of women have increased from 5,142 to 7,883 . . . native born, from 6,849 to 14,059. . . . The 11,149 industrial workers represent 42.2 per cent of this membership. This is unsatisfactory. . . . Here growth is indispensable for building the Democratic Front" (Socialism or conquest of power was not mentioned at all. M.E.).²⁵²

The party in New York had doubled in size. But only 6,377 belonged to industrial branches. The largest proportion of the recruits obviously came from white-collar workers and the middle class.

Dwelling on the unsatisfactory features of the recruiting, Steinberg pointed to the situation in the needle trades:

"Noted for their militancy and progressiveness, where our party during many years of bitter struggle and victories gave the best forces . . . we find the situation even worse. . . . The recruiting tempo shows a marked decrease compared to the last years. In the building trades in spite of all these favorable conditions (Communist victories in Painters' District 9—M.E.), the membership decreased from 95 in 1936 to 66 now. . . . In all the light industries, our membership has proportionately decreased by 7.1 per cent, while in the heavy industries . . . the proportion compared to the entire membership has decreased from almost ten per cent to 7.1 per cent."

In summing up, Steinberg posed a cardinal and touchy question:

"Would it be correct to say that the progressive people in our city are to be found only among the white-collar and professional workers, . . . and the food and needle trades workers have suddenly become conservative? Ridiculous!"

Neither Steinberg nor Stachel, who spoke for the CEC, could offer a rational answer to this question. They were satisfied to blame the local Communists and, in the needle and allied trades, the Lovestonites.

Since the dissolution of the Left union, the needle trades workers, because of their radical tradition, again became a Communist concentration point, the foremost target being those unions where Socialists and former Communists were in the leadership. The Communists and Lefts there were prompted by the party to conclude

election alliances with other dissident groups to wrest the union from the control of the former Communists. An example is the letter sent by Amter to every party member in the large dress-makers' union, Local 22, dated March 22, 1935. It said in part:

"Our party considers the present election in Local 22 of major political importance. The objective conditions for sweeping out the remnants of renegade Lovestonites from positions of leadership . . . is very favorable." *253 +76

The struggle against other former Communists in the trade unions was also of "major political importance." A particular target was Louis Nelson, manager of the Knitgoods Workers Union, Local 155, ILGWU. A third Lovestonite, Sam Freeman, was unseated as the district secretary of the Brooklyn painters' union by an election alliance of Communists with the notorious Jacob Welner and his gang.

RECRUITING AMONG JEW'S A FAILURE

Recruiting among foreign-born Jews was steadily declining. The report to the tenth national convention, 1938, speaking of partial gains among foreign-born, omitted the Jews entirely. And Stachel, in an article in the *Freiheit* on recruiting, pointed to the gloomy fact that party "fractions in the IWO and in the *shules* took in only 11 new recruits during the year," despite the seemingly energetic campaigns with quotas for every branch and *shule*. *254

The Jewish Bureau made a determined effort in 1938 to impress the party with a successful recruiting. Special meetings were called and a detailed quota was worked out for the entire country. For a couple of months, the *Freiheit* kept hammering on the vital significance of this recruiting. An application blank was printed on the front page of the paper with a line across it, "Recruited through the Jewish Bureau." But when the campaign was over, no report appeared on its results. (The reasons for this failure appear in a later chapter.)

Steinberg's report showed the strenuous efforts made to assimilate the newcomers politically. During 1936-1937, 7,000 went through section training schools, nearly 1,000 enrolled in the district training schools and about 450 studied in the national schools. George Siskind was director of the latter. These did not include the many

thousands who received their indoctrination in the workers' schools functioning in the large cities.

No less significant than the size was the party's new role as the dispenser and protector of thousands of jobs, in unions, in government and in social agencies. (In the spring of 1939, the author and a few friends calculated that the number of paid jobs controlled by the party, including those in the party itself, reached between eight and ten thousand. This meant that approximately 16 per cent of the membership depended on the party for their livelihood and status.)

A marked undercurrent of resentment ran through the old-guard Communists against the turn to liberalism and patriotism. Trained as they were in party discipline, the suddenness of the change in line and the absence of any discussion was irritating. This feeling was shared by those who joined the party during the depression years. The switch was too abrupt for them. However, this discontent never came to the surface. A consolation was found in the tacit understanding that the new line was a mere expedient forced on Communism by a passing necessity. Besides, as a Russian saying has it, "The victor is not brought to trial," and the Communist Party was victorious indeed.

34 *Working at Cross Purposes*

Jewish Communism was sustained during the trying period of isolation by two elements: one, its small but well-disciplined "proletarian army" in the big city; two, the loyal cadres of sympathizers—small businessmen scattered throughout the country. A brief recapitulation of the curious background of the latter is in place.

Importance economic changes that became noticeable after World War I continued at a more rapid pace as time went on. It was a duofold process: wage-earners leaving the insecurity of seasonal work in the big urban areas for a chance at economic independence in smaller towns, and skilled workers sparing no effort to see their children through college, a combination of the traditional reverence for learning and the inherent striving for a *takhlis*.

Many a tailor, painter or carpenter, in New York, Philadelphia or Chicago, settling in a smaller town, became an independent custom tailor, a painter or carpenter contractor. A cabinetmaker opened a small furniture store; ladies' tailors ran dress stores and dry cleaning shops; shoe workers, shoe repair shops. Where business opportunities in their own trade were lacking, they opened stationery or grocery stores. The ultimate choice lay with the relative or friend who helped the newcomer to settle. After a few years of struggle, those who did well brought over more relatives, and the majority did well; small businesses thrived in the 20's.

A picture of this transition to small business is given in a letter from the industrial city of Detroit to the Right-Wing Socialist *Wecker*, May 2, 1925: "The element from which Socialists are

recruited is simply not to be found in Detroit. The few trade unions . . . are composed of workers and bosses. When a worker pays his dues in the union and speaks about exploitation and better working conditions, he thinks at the same time about laying hands on a little contract, a little order, and himself to become a boss, an exploiter. It is a general affliction; every one is rushing around chasing something."

A letter to the *Wecker* from the textile city of Paterson, New Jersey, tells of those weavers who became semi-contractors: "One manages somehow to raise a few dollars and buys a couple of looms to operate himself. For the moment it is helpful. The earnings are much larger. This is the reason why you can find many people between the hammer and the forge. . . . They are neither genuine bosses nor proletarians."²⁵⁵

From a local *tuer* in a midwest town comes this sharply drawn picture of the new *alrightnick*: "There are no workers in our town. The *genossen* or the Friends of the WC are all has-beens, has-been workers and has-been Socialists. Today they are, thank Heaven, parents of adult children of marriageable age, owners of stores, satiated and tired of plenty. To find a suitable marriage for the daughter one goes to the Jewish center. . . . Nothing is left of the previous Socialist faith. One has become a solid, respectable citizen."²⁵⁶

Discussing the social mobility of the Jewish workers in New York City, Dr. H. Frank, a sociologist, observed: "The great changes in Jewish occupation are the most important basic tendencies in Jewish life for the last ten years. Jews are leaving the old trades, such as the needle trades, and go to . . . small business and to new occupations that go under the name of service industries: hotels, restaurants, laundries, entertainment; and quite a number of young Jews have taken to an old Jewish trade, *balagoles*, but instead of a horse, they use a motor. Perhaps a majority of all the taxi drivers in New York are Jews."²⁵⁷

This trend was accelerated by the great depression. And only in the second half of the 30's did the old trades—overwhelmingly Jewish—begin to notice the steady reduction of Jewish workers—Italians, Spanish-speaking and Negroes filling the vacuum.

THE RADICAL BUSINESSMAN

For the majority of the new business people the change in economic status was accompanied by a change in outlook. They joined the congregation, the B'nai Brith and the Masons, and took pride in the sport achievements of their children. The usual parent-children relationship was being reversed; the parents, in most instances, doing their utmost to adopt the values of their American-born children. However, there remained a minority who clung to their radical ideas. Not that they differed from the rest in their business methods or manner of living—they did not. But they were still under the sway of their radical youth in Eastern Europe. This minority too were entrenching themselves, building labor lyceums, opening radical schools and forming branches of the political groupings in the big city. But their primary function was *giving*. The ideological differences were also reflected socially.

This minority was torn in two by the split in the Socialist movement in 1919 and 1921. That the Communist-Left caught the fancy of many small business people in New Haven, Norfolk, Atlanta and San Antonio, making them accept Lenin's regime as the fulfilment of the 1905 revolution in which they had participated, and to adhere to the Communist movement, in one degree or another, through all the vagaries of the party line appears anomalous. This phenomenon can be partly explained by the mystic spell cast by revolution. Emotionally ex-patriots, their eyes were turned upon the happy society forged in the Russia of the Soviets. The least they could do, they felt, was to support it, though its methods were often too harsh for their liking. The belief that the Soviet Union was reinvigorating Jewish life and culture played no small part in their unwavering loyalty.

By and large not party people, they had a great share in the growth and spread of all auxiliary bodies and the various anti-Nazi formations. Wherever they could, they started their own parochial schools and Freiheit Singing Societies, but here too their primary function was *giving*.

HIS NOT TO CRITICIZE, BUT TO GIVE

Looking upon his business dealings as a moral transgression, the more sensitive Left businessman had a guilty conscience. And be-

longing to a world-wide revolutionary movement was a sort of atonement to ease his conscience. This "moral" approach denied him the right to criticize. That is why the extreme anti-*yishuv* stand of the party and the *Freiheit*, unpalatable as it might have been to him, did not pry him away from the movement. He consoled himself with the thought that Moscow and New York were better qualified to judge the situation.

On the whole, both groups practiced ideological non-interference with their children. Though the Left was less passive in the indoctrination of their offspring, still it was uncommon to find a boy or girl interested in the beliefs of his Left parents.

The philanthropic nature of this sort of belonging was a common denominator of the Left and Right. A. Litwak, a keen observer, who toured this country for the Socialist Farband after his return from Russia in the early 20's, noted that the movement still resembled more a colony of the old country than a new metropolis. Disparagingly, he wrote: "They are Hebraists for Palestine, Yiddishists for Poland, Bolsheviks for Russia; and for America they are assimilationists, opportunists and generally nonentities. Everything that is being done here has, to a certain extent, the character of charity: charity Bundism, charity Communism, charity Zionism. . . ." *258

Litwak could have been more charitable to the Left. For many of them the movement was of genuine concern. Still, their part in it was necessarily confined to contributions. With the exception of the Deep South, where to receive a Negro in one's house could be injurious to business, the Left businessman hardly ran any personal risk.

TRYING TO REENTER COMMUNITY VIA MENACE OF HITLER

The transition from the frozen position of the Third Period to the fast-moving Democratic Front was not easy for Jewish Communists, nor was it smooth. The only issue they could raise to bridge the chasm separating them from the rest of the Jews was the threat of triumphant Nazism. But, though recognizing the threat, the community refused to forget or forgive the Communists' recent past. They were distrusted.

With Communist agility, the *Freiheit*, the *Hammer* and the other magazines executed an about-face in their attitude toward the rest

of labor and, later, to Jewish society. Again and again, they appealed for unity of purpose against Nazism, but they were never included in the broad anti-Nazi actions carried out by Jewish bodies in the 30's. Only once, after the Nazi burning of books in 1934, was the Communist-led anti-Nazi committee permitted to march in the last column of the great Jewish demonstration in New York City, May 10th of the same year. And this permission was wrested out by the threat of an independent march at the same time and on the same route—with a clash inevitable.*²⁵⁹

The first Communist attempt to employ the menace of Hitlerism as a means to end their aloofness from Jewish life was the conference in Irving Plaza Hall, February 25, 1934. The inept Jewish Bureau had been caught off guard. The Right Wing having seized the initiative with a similar conference, the Bureau had to act in a hurry. The signers of the Communist call, Louis Hyman, chairman, and Melech Epstein, secretary, were not even consulted. They were chosen because of their reputation. Hyman was a labor leader and known as a non-party member; Epstein had tried to steer clear of the firing line of the Third Period. The Left conference was purposely scheduled for the same day as the Right-Wing affair not to be outdone by them as well as to exert pressure. But the delegation of the Left that went to appeal for unity was barred from entering the Forward Hall.

On that Sunday two anti-Nazi labor bodies came into being: the Right-Wing Jewish Labor Committee, headed by B. Charney-Vladek, and the Left-Wing Jewish People's Committee Against Fascism and War; Philip Weiner, chairman, and Ephraim Schwartzman, secretary.

In the very early stage of the anti-Nazi protests, the Communists tried to gain advantage from the timidity shown by a number of Jewish leaders. The first anti-Hitler rally by the American Jewish Congress, March 1933, in Madison Square Garden, was a pale affair. Only the militant speech of old Reverend Dr. John Hayes Holmes aroused the large audience.*^{260 +76}

IN THE NAZI BOYCOTT AND OUT OF IT

As the anti-Nazi protests developed, Jewish Communists were greatly embarrassed. The Louis Untermeyer Committee for the Boycott of Nazi Goods received popular support. Branches were

organized in various trades to campaign against the sale of German products in this country in protest against the persecution of "Jews, workers, Protestants, and Catholics." The boycott required action, and action had always been a Communist strong point. The Communist-Left was permitted to affiliate, and they picketed businesses that refused to give up German goods.

No sooner had the boycott been fairly started than the Kremlin voiced its opposition to it. True to its usual practice, a non-Russian and one with a revolutionary prestige, Bela Kun, was put forward to argue against this boycott. In his article in the *RUNA*—which replaced the *IMPREGORR*—Kun advanced the opinion that the "reformists are for the German boycott because it serves the interests of their bourgeoisie," meaning it was just a scheme to capture the German market abroad. He also hinted broadly that the reformists generally could not be trusted in the struggle against fascism.*²⁶¹ (It is quite possible that this piece was written by someone else. The author knows of several occasions when the supposed writers of articles saw them for the first time in print.)

Quickly and quietly, the Left disassociated itself from the boycott. And the Jewish Communists and their organ were hard put to explain it, convincing no outsider. The new huge credit extended by the Hitler government a year earlier for Soviet orders in Germany was the Kremlin's true motive. Denying the validity of the anti-Nazi boycott, the Communists conducted in the same year, 1934, an energetic whispering campaign for the boycott of hosiery made of silk imported from Japan. Behind this boycott was the Kremlin fear of Japanese militarism.

(The Kremlin caused the Communists abroad further embarrassment and confusion a year later. The International Federation of Trade Unions had reacted to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in September 1935 with a boycott against the transport of goods to Italy. Both Socialists and Communists eagerly took steps to carry out the boycott in the ports of Europe. But, to the consternation of European labor, Soviet ships disregarded the boycott and sailed to and from Italy. This Soviet "crossing of the picket line" was the end of the boycott, and European and American Communists could dig up only limp excuses for the Soviet behavior.)

THE DOLLAR INQUISITION

Jewish public opinion had been greatly disturbed in 1933 by the news that the GPU was applying inquisitorial methods to Jews in Southern Russia to make them give up their hidden gold coins, jewelry and foreign currency, and forcing them to write to their relatives in America to send them drafts in dollars. This became known as the Dollar Inquisition. Chaim Nachman Bialik, the famous poet, issued a flaming call from Palestine to world Jewry to protest this atrocity. Bialik's call was followed by the proclamation by 200 Palestinian rabbis of a *tahnis* (day of fasting) on March 27th to pray for Soviet Jewry.

Communists flatly denied the entire story. The poet was denounced as a liar and an enemy of the Jewish people. He, the rabbis, and the prominent people here and abroad who took part in the protest were accused of joining the anti-Soviet conspiracy plotted by international fascism and reaction.⁺⁷⁷

The Communist denial was punctured by letters from Russia imploring relatives here to send as many dollar drafts as they could afford, and quickly. Readers of the *Freiheit* received such letters too, and, greatly perplexed, they brought them to the paper for an explanation, which no one could give them. This went on for several months. In the end, the protests from several countries had their effect. The practice stopped. The Communists lamely blamed local GPU officials for the Dollar Inquisition.

Later it was learned that some commissar had hit upon the clever idea of increasing the dollar reserves of the government in the famine year of 1933 by searching for jewels and foreign currency that some might have hidden, and by forcing people with relatives in America to ask them for dollar remittances. As most of those in the last category were Jews, they became the victims. One of the methods was to keep the prisoners for many hours in a hot room, refusing them water, until they collapsed. Another was to feed them salted food, also denying them anything to drink.

The Soviet organs in the Ukraine provided the *Freiheit* an opportunity to recoup part of the lost good will. A Jewish language conference in Kiev, May 1934, was such a happy occasion. The conference, called by the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture, was greeted by Soviet leaders. The well-known Ukrainian poet

Khvilya, Assistant Commissar of Education, read a paper on Jewish literature. One hundred and nineteen delegates participated, among them 29 editors of Jewish publications.*²⁶² (Khvilya was among those who perished during the purges.)

The Ukrainian authorities utilized this conference as a tribune from which to check the rising anti-Jewish sentiment, largely a by-product of the grave tension generated by the famine. All evidence pointed to that. But to Jewish Communism here, the conference was another massive sign of the blossoming Jewish culture and of the keen interest of the Soviets in all phases of Jewish life.

THE AUSTRIAN UPRISING; THE RIGHT DOES IT BETTER

The tragic February 1934 events in Austria—the crushing of Austrian labor by the Dollfuss fascist government—came as a second shock to Socialists and liberals. This shock was felt perhaps more keenly than the collapse of democracy in Germany. The Austrian Social Democracy, led by Otto Bauer, had succeeded in fusing orthodox Marxism with a wide range of practical reforms. The party had governed Vienna for a number of years, and its big housing program was a shining example of Socialist achievement. The cohesiveness of the movement did not leave any appreciable ground for Communism in Austria. And the Communist Party there, despite all efforts by the Comintern, remained but an inconsequential group.

When the news of the workers' uprising reached this country, the Communist press was featuring a general strike in Paris led by Communists against the *Croix de Feu*. And the uprising was treated in the routine manner—a call for a protest in front of the Austrian Consulate. Two days later, the party deemed the uprising significant enough to hire Bronx Coliseum for a meeting on February 15th. However, the needle trades unions, with David Dubinsky in the lead, jointly with the Socialist Party, called for a protest work stoppage at three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, February 16th, to be followed by a meeting in Madison Square Garden. Matthew Woll, for the AFL, and Mayor La Guardia were to speak.

This bold gesture by "reformists" was to the CP both a surprise and an affront. "Mass action" was its exclusive preserve. The only thing the party could do was to approve the stoppage and the mass meeting, and join them without being invited. But when the Right

refused to include a Communist speaker, the *Daily Worker* ran an extra edition, a few hours before the meeting, vehemently attacking the initiators for denying the CP a voice while inviting the "notorious reactionaries," Matthew Woll and the Mayor. The paper's call to all Communists and Lefts to come to the Garden implied a threat that without a Communist speaker the meeting would not proceed.

The Garden was packed, and the Communists were seated in groups on the top balcony. The unions took precautionary measures, and had their people stationed in strategic aisles. The speakers were continuously being interrupted, and as the noise increased Clarence Hathaway, *Daily Worker* editor, started walking slowly toward the platform, while Dubinsky was speaking. Upon reaching the stairs, those on the platform, believing that he aimed to take over the meeting, unceremoniously pushed him down, hitting him on the head. Communists, shouting that Hathaway was being beaten up, rushed to the center of the Garden. The ushers tried to stop them. Fights broke out, and the big demonstration in behalf of Austrian workers fighting fascism ended in blows between Left and Right.

The repercussions of the disrupted Garden meeting were highly injurious to the CP. Its emphatic assertion that Hathaway's sole aim had been to ask the Left to stop interrupting was not taken seriously by labor and public opinion. The Socialists contended that Hathaway could have sent a note to the chairman, Algernon Lee, asking for permission to address his fellow-Communists; and they were right. Hathaway, a former machinist from Minneapolis and a graduate of the Lenin School in Moscow, was no fool. And it is unreasonable to assume that his measured walk toward the platform was not a calculated attempt to alert the Left to break up the meeting in case he would be denied the floor. Irving Potash, close to the party hierarchy, walking to the Garden with the author, had told him bluntly, "They are not going to hold that meeting!" And 500 furriers were in the Garden to back him up.

WHY FATHER DIVINE AND NOT WOLL AND LA GUARDIA?

To save face, the New York party staged a "public trial" of the "Socialist sluggers" of Hathaway. The "trial" may have been helpful in soothing the uneasiness of many Communists, but not the

public. In the party itself there were quite a few who were ashamed of this act of unabashed vengeance. The reasoning in the party press as to why Woll and the Mayor should not be permitted to speak in behalf of a workers' uprising seem to them ridiculous.

As the leadership of the needle trades unions and the audience in the Garden were predominately Jewish, the anger and resentment among Jewish labor against the CP precluded any chance for a joint labor anti-Nazi campaign, for which the Jewish Communists kept appealing.

Friday evening is the meeting time for many organizations. Communist and Left members were subjected to biting criticism that night, and their speakers were shouted down. At their Anti-War Day, September 1, 1933, the Communists had had their first "United Front" with Father Divine, his army marching behind the Communist column chanting in unison, "Father Divine is God!" And many a Communist at the Friday meetings was nettled by the reminder of the double moral yardstick the party applied, one to Father Divine, the other to La Guardia and Matthew Woll.

The *Forward* and the other Jewish papers again and again referred to the Garden meeting as irrefutable evidence of Communist irresponsibility.

The investigation by the American Civil Liberties Union into the Garden incident found that "responsibility for breaking up the meeting, . . . falls on the leadership of the Communist Party." At the same time, the ACLU criticized the Socialists for "sharpening the conflict. . . . The physical attack on Hathaway was infamous and entirely unnecessary. He could have been led away without violence." *263

Both the Communist and Socialist press sought to draw comfort from the verdict of the ACLU. The *Forward*, in an editorial, could say that a reputable non-partisan body had placed the blame for the break-up of the meeting squarely on the Communist Party, proving that the Communists were a disruptive force in the labor movement.*264 The *Freiheit* reply glossed over the denunciation of the Communists, but dwelt on the criticism by the ACLU of the Socialists for "sharpening the conflict." *265

(Moscow, in a publicity gesture, invited 400 of the Red Front fighters who escaped Austria, all skilled workers and militant Socialists, to settle in the Soviet Union. They were received with

banners and music. But their experience in the Socialist Fatherland was short and tragic. The majority were never heard from again.)

BREAKING UP MEETINGS HAS A HISTORY BEHIND IT

The easy conscience with which hundreds of Communists could break up an important anti-fascist affair can be attributed to similar acts in the past. Breaking up meetings disliked by the party was becoming a habit. A decade earlier, in the spring of 1924, the party had organized a systematic disruption of the tour by Raphael Abramovich, brought over here by the Socialist Farband. His first meeting in Hunt's Point Palace, in the Bronx, until his last on the West Coast were one continuous battle with Communists. The Farband being unaware of the Communists' designs in the beginning, the meeting in the Bronx was broken up. The others were protected by police and watched over by local Socialists. In Pittsburgh, Greek Communists, knives in hand, tried to break through the police lines.

Abramovich's meetings, conducted in Yiddish, would not have attracted national attention were it not for the violent clashes with the Communists. Because of them, Abramovich held press interviews in various cities against Soviet Russia, and the lectures netted more than \$20,000 profit for the Farband.*²⁶⁶

This senseless disruption, unheard of in radical America, was ordered by Zinoviev in a cable to the party. The Kremlin had somehow received "information" that the Menshevik leader's trip to America was linked with a sinister counterrevolutionary plot, and the tour had to be stopped. The Foster-Cannon-Bittelman bloc, in control, knew full well that it would hurt the party. But they obediently carried out instructions. And Bittelman was the one who came to New York from Chicago to organize the job.

Four years later, Cannon's meetings were smashed by the Lovestonites. And the following year, 1929, police protected the Lovestonites' meetings against the Fosterites.

35 *Fat Years That Turned Lean*

Marching with a forced tempo toward democracy and unity, Jewish Communism had more than its share of the ups and downs of the parent body. But, unlike the latter, the downs outstripped the ups.

All Communist exertions to appear as loyal Jews and good Americans and all the "fronts" in the area of resisting fascism and anti-Semitism or strengthening cultural positions, created with so much fanfare, failed to break their perilous isolation. At a time when the party could justly claim a wide net of auxiliaries, thousands of non-Communists on their membership rolls, the Jewish counterparts, despite their busy air, were, with but few exceptions, products of the Left periphery. To paraphrase an old Communist shibboleth: Jewish Communists were badly lagging behind the general advance of the party.

This is not to minimize the Communist inroads among Jews, especially among the youth and middle class, during the Democratic Front era. Jews were in the active elements of the numerous leagues and aid committees, and in some instances formed a sizable part of their ranks.

No one would dispute that in the fear-soaked 30's there were understandable reasons for a rise in Soviet prestige. Western Europe's meekness and lack of direction in the face of increasing Nazi impudence were disappointing. The Spanish Civil War could only heighten this sentiment. Father Coughlin, the Christian Fronters, Christian Mobilizers, Gerald L. K. Smith, and their like, that infested the domestic scene, fostered the nagging thought, not easily

suppressed, that it could happen here too. Against this gloom the Soviet Union seemed to many to be a tower of anti-fascist strength.

However, by and large, people deeply concerned for Jewish spiritual well-being as well as their safety remained unreceptive to Communist overtures. They shunned Moscow and its movement here. And when anxiety for Jews abroad impelled them to consider a rapprochement with Moscow, the latter, or its columns abroad, with one rash brutal move rolled them back to their previous hostility.

RIDING THE ISSUE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

In the short period of 1936-1939, Jewish fortunes in Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe underwent a steady and swift deterioration. Less than two and a half years separated the Nuremberg Nazi congress, in the summer of 1936, that passed the anti-Jewish laws, from the Nazi pogroms on Jews in Germany and Austria on Black Thursday and Friday, November 10-11, 1938. The economic war against Jews in Poland and Rumania became more pronounced, and pogroms and physical attacks on individual Jews more numerous. Goebbles was financing and promoting anti-Semitism in Europe and in North and South America.

Jewish Communists were furnished with ample opportunity to knock on the doors of public bodies. The sprouting of hate-mongers here was their most potent weapon. Oversimplification and plain exaggeration of anti-Semitic instances was a daily Communist practice. A perusal of the Communist press of that period is astonishing. A policeman and a school teacher in New York City were accused of passing derogatory remarks about Jews. Both denied the charge, and were investigated by the city authorities. But the *Freiheit* would not calm down. These two cases were magnified out of all proportion, and City Hall and Jewish defense groups were accused of squashing the news and white-washing the guilty ones.

Neither the American Jewish Congress nor the Jewish Labor Committee would have the Communists in the movement against the pogroms in Poland, 1937. Only in Chicago and Los Angeles did they meet with partial success. In the former some liberals persuaded the local AJC to admit the Communist order, the IWO,

and in the latter the WC did likewise, disregarding the instructions of the national office.

However, in 1938, the Communist Jewish People's Committee was the only one to call for street demonstrations against the Nazi November pogroms. The Council for Jewish Rights, comprising the four large bodies, influenced by the American Jewish Committee and the B'nai Brith, held that public opinion had already voiced its protest, and there was no need for a Jewish demonstration. "Let America speak for us," they argued. Instead, a Day of Prayer in the synagogues was proclaimed, as a "more dignified form of protest."

This inactivity—or rather, timidity—left the JPC the only outlet for the accumulated anger and apprehension. The Madison Square Garden meeting, called in cooperation with a few other Left foreign-language groups, November 21st, was overcrowded, thousands being turned away. Michael Quill and Vito Marcantonio were among the speakers. The only non-Left speaker was H. V. Kaltenborn. The press gave little space to that meeting. But the JPC gained prestige.

The Communists benefited from their initiative and alertness in Cleveland and Los Angeles, too. In Cleveland, stores were closed on the Protest Day proclaimed by the JPC. In Los Angeles, a number of societies and congregations joined the JPC in the street march. About 15,000 participated.*²⁸⁷ It was the only march of its kind in the country.

Moscow, too, responded in a vigorous manner to the November pogroms, to take the edge off the horror of the purges and to arouse world opinion against Germany. Many cables of protest resolutions by Soviet writers and scientists were sent to the *Freiheit*. One was a fervent article by the noted writer, Alexie Tolstoi. An editorial in the *Pravda*, November 17th, also cabled, stated, "World opinion has expressed its deepest revulsion at the pogroms on Jews organized by the Nazis. . . . They can be compared only with medieval darkness. . . . They will not save the Nazi regime from going under." *²⁸⁸ But none of the Soviet leaders followed the example of President Roosevelt, who voiced his horror at the pogroms.

Speaking of Los Angeles, the Deutche Folk House was the hotbed of arrogant Nazism on the Pacific Coast. And solid rumor had it that a majority of the local motorcycle police belonged to the

Christian Fronters. No wonder the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League found a sympathetic response among the Jewish middle class. Insofar as the author was able to establish, the biggest portion of the 4,000 members on the League rolls were Jews. Belonging to the League did not necessarily imply any sympathy toward Communism. The Hollywood League was the only active group in the area, and its letterhead, with so many glittering movie names, was reassuring to uneasy people.

(The one person most effective in convincing some of the influential Jews in Hollywood in 1938 that Moscow and the German Communists were the most reliable fighters against Hitlerism was August Katz, a Comintern emissary. Short, nervous and dynamic, Katz was the editor of the *Brown Book*, the first work exposing Nazi cruelty. Born in Czechoslovakia of a well-to-do family, Katz joined the Communist movement in his youth. On the strength of resisting Nazism, he was successful in raising money even from conservative people. Under the name of Andre Simone, Katz occupied a leading position in Communist Czechoslovakia, and was among those hanged in the Slansky trial, 1952, a trial where world Jewry was charged with fantastic crimes. This indefatigable worker for Communism was accused of joining the Communist Party 23 years earlier for the express purpose of spying and sabotage.)

THE PARIS CONFERENCES AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

Communists were short on candor but not on initiative. In most cases they were the first in anti-fascist action. The International Conference Against Anti-Semitism and Racial Hatred, in Paris, September 19-20, 1936, originated by the French League for Human Rights and by the Jewish Cultural Front, in France, was planned and financed by Moscow as part of its campaign against Nazi Germany. About 100 delegates from 20 countries came to the conference. The local Poale Zion and Bund groups, Histadrut from Palestine and the French synagogues were represented, as well as a few Negroes and hand-picked Arabs for better effect. It was greeted by Romain Rolland, Eduard Herriot, President Eduard Benes, Leon Jouhaux, Roger Baldwin, Vandervelde, Henri Mann, Camille Houseman and S. Branting from Sweden. J. Gershman, secretary of the Jewish Communists in Canada, was the only delegate from

North America. The conference, held one week after the Nuremberg Nazi congress, could base its appeal to the conscience of the world on the Aryan anti-Jewish laws.*²⁶⁹

The second conference—now called congress—a year later in the same month, in Paris, had 300 delegates from 22 countries. The American delegation of 12 was headed by Philip Weiner and Max Bedacht. Several Negroes were included. The Communist face of the congress was now clear, and most of its non-Communist supporters withdrew. Greetings were received from Louis Untermeyer, Emil Ludwig and Thomas Mann, also from the French government. The motto of the congress was *Our Answer to Nuremberg*. Far-reaching plans were made for combating racism and anti-Semitism.*²⁷⁰ However, Moscow lost interest in that venture, and the congress organs withered away almost overnight. (The *Forward*, on July 4th, warned against this congress, calling it a “new Communist trick to capture Jewish souls.”)

THE EFFECT OF THE FIGHTING IN PALESTINE, 1936

Jewish Communists had their hearts set on the Jewish World Congress in Geneva, opening August 4, 1936. This would automatically have lowered the bars set up against them by a large segment of Jewish society. Losing hope of reaching an understanding with organized Jewish labor, due to insurmountable Right-Wing Socialist and trade union opposition, the Communists turned to the middle class as the easier to penetrate. The IWO and the ICOR entered into negotiations with the American Jewish Congress. But they could reach no agreement; the roadblock was again Palestine. The preparatory conference, June 14th, in Washington, refused to admit them. However, the Communist press did not publish the real reasons until much later. They spoke merely of “Zionist party interests preventing Jewish unity.”

The wave of fighting that shook Palestine the summer of 1936 was more widespread and of longer duration than that in the fall of 1929. Accumulated intergroup tension erupted into Arab violence against Jews, Jewish extremists immediately retaliating. It began on April 17th when crowds in Jaffe, incited by groundless rumors of Arabs murdered in nearby Tel Aviv, attacked and killed Jewish passers-by.

An Arab high committee was immediately formed, headed by the Mufti in Jerusalem, Hajj Amin el-Husseini, notorious for his hatred of the *yishuv*. (During the World War he was in Berlin cooperating with the Nazis.) The high committee assumed command of these sporadic outbreaks and proclaimed a boycott against the Jewish population. The sniping and the bomb-throwing were now planned, organized and financed by the committee. The fighting turned the two national groups into intensely hostile communities, all communications between them broken.

As the British could not for long remain neutral, as it wanted to, and had to maintain a minimum of public order, the Arab wrath later turned against the British too. Many pitched battles were fought between Arab guerrilla bands and British troops in the sandy hills and barren mountains of Northern Palestine. The fighting went on until October, when the Arab high committee called off the fighting to save the citrus export, a mainstay of the Arab economy.

Reports of killed and wounded in Palestine again hit the reader in the summer of 1936. Among the victims were people who had escaped Nazi persecution and Polish discrimination. Jewish society here was deeply grieved and angered.

This time the Jewish Communists were hard put to find the right approach to the bloody happenings. Irrevocably committed to an anti-homeland position—the Comintern line—the task of winning Jewish “unity” forbade reverting to the pro-Arab stand of 1929 (see Chapter 28). What they did was to separate the wolves from the sheep. The Zionist leadership was criticized for their ties with British imperialism, utopian plans and anti-Arab attitude, but the *yishuv* itself was showered with tender regard for its rights and growth. “The interests of the Jews and Arabs are mutual, and they could and should live in harmony,” was the theme of Communist comments.

Conditioned by long practice to sharp and abusive polemics against Zionism, the civilized tenor of the present discussion and the professed anxiety for Palestinian Jewry was not executed with ease nor with grace. But the change in tone and in emphasis could hardly satisfy the Zionists. However, the absence of the shrieking anti-Jewish headlines of seven years ago blocked a repetition of the anti-Communist boycott.

... FOR THE SINS OF THEIR COMRADES ...

This calmer atmosphere was soon dispelled by the Palestinian Communist party, whose leadership had been Arabized in 1929-1930. A dispatch at the end of April told of a Communist leaflet calling upon the Arab masses to unite "to fight Jewish settlement." A few days later, another dispatch told of the Communist party's openly supporting the war against the Jewish population.

The *Freiheit*, caught off guard, vehemently denied the authenticity of the dispatches. Olgin, replying to a reader, Yehudah Weinstein, who wrote that his blood ran cold on reading about the doings of the Palestinian Communists, stated emphatically that the dispatches were a fabrication.^{*271} The lengthy articles from Palestine by the *Freiheit* correspondent, B. Lerner (an assumed name), virulent against the leaders of the *yishuv*, omitted any mention of the attitude of the Palestinian Communist party.

Public opinion was incensed by the news of the Communists being in league with the hated Mufti. The press, without exception, held the Jewish Communists here responsible and branded them traitors to their people. Voices were again heard calling for their ostracism.

The heightening attacks in the press made the *Freiheit* more belligerent too. "How long will the Ben Gurion's play with Jewish lives?" wrote Olgin on May 14th. A headline over another article warned, "Again They are Inciting!" Belligerency was fused with fright. Nineteen twenty-nine was still fresh in Communist memories.

Jewish Communists vigorously fought back the new wave of attacks. The *Freiheit* sought to divert attention from the Palestinian Communists by a great show of moral indignation against the *Forward* after Hearst's *New York American* reprinted two *Forward* editorials on Communist anti-Jewish activities in Palestine.^{*272} The reprints were used to confirm the chief argument that *Forward* Red-baiting was leading straight into the arms of William Randolph Hearst.^{*273}

The Jewish Bureau called to their aid the big party guns. A mass meeting was held on May 13th, with Clarence Hathaway and Olgin as the main speakers. The slogan of that meeting was *Brotherhood Between Jews and Arabs*.^{*274} As the anti-Communist campaign was growing in volume, a big meeting was held in the Hippodrome,

June 8th, with Browder and Olgin as the speakers. Both speakers assured their listeners that the "Communist party in Palestine is striving to throw a bridge between the Jewish and the Arab peoples. . . . It is striving to unite the two peoples against their common enemy, British imperialism." Browder also drew a line of demarcation between the Zionist masses and their leaders.*275 Similar meetings were held in all larger cities.

In all fairness, it must be said that the party here was completely in the dark as to the actual attitude of the Communists in Palestine. The daily arrests of members of the Comintern staff, a prologue to the great purge, also unknown here, hindered communications with Moscow on the subject of Palestine. For that reason, Melech Epstein was secretly dispatched to Palestine for a confidential investigation, early in May. His amazing findings are outside the scope of this book. However, the news dispatches had not lied. Furthermore, the Palestinian party was proud to be admitted into the Arab high committee and participated in all its plans and decisions. It, too, was out of contact with the Comintern, and for the same reasons.

The anti-British turn in the Arab fighting relieved somewhat the pressure on the Communists here. And Jewish Communism was saved the distressing consequence of 1929. Still, it did not avoid being hurt. Communist policies in Palestine adversely affected the negotiations with the American Jewish Congress and similar moves for "unity."

BARRED FROM JEWISH WORLD CONGRESS

Their rejection by the Washington conference of the AJC, disappointing as it was, did not deter the Communists. Audaciously, they began forming a new body for the same World Congress, hoping to exert pressure on Geneva. An initiative committee was formed in Chicago. In its "anxiety for the interests of the Jewish people," the committee called a national conference for July 12th in Hotel Astor, New York. A great deal of hard work went into drawing in outside groups.*276

The gathering in Hotel Astor was a huge success—so wrote the *Freiheit*—over 700 delegates representing "a quarter of a million people." Actually, the entire Left was there, plus a couple of opportunist rabbis, a few innocent Zionists from far-away places and sev-

eral societies where Left-Wingers had contact. The resolution regretted "that the Zionists' party interests were placed above the general Jewish interests. . . ." A delegation of five was sent to Geneva: Dr. Charles Kuntz, H. Opoichinsky, of the furriers' union, Reuben Salzman, Philip Weiner, and, to add credence to the non-partisan character of the new body, an Orthodox rabbi, Dr. Jacob Greenfeld of the Congregation Athereth Israel, Brownsville.

In Geneva, the Left delegation received some support from Canada. J. L. Fine, from the London furniture workers' union, was the only English delegate to back them. But the Congress leaders, an overwhelming majority behind them, would not have the Left because of the Communists' antagonism to the *yishuv*. Louis Lipsky, American Zionist leader, stated this bluntly.

Following the barring of the five delegates in Geneva, the NEC of the IWO published the reason for the breakdown of the negotiations with the AJC in June.

The two Left bodies, the IWO and ICOR, had received a cable from the executive of the World Congress in Geneva stating, "AJC demands that you disassociate yourself from the stand of the Jewish Communists in Palestine which supports the barbarian attacks of the Arabs on the Jews. Our committee supports this demand. It would not imply your agreeing with the Zionist program." *277

The cable confronted the Communists with a serious dilemma. They were anxious to enter the ranks of the Jewish Congress, but could not make a public declaration against the Communist party in Palestine. Only Moscow could permit them such a bold move. The IWO and the ICOR attempted to extricate themselves by a subterfuge. In their answer, they declared, "We have not taken any position on the events in Palestine . . . ,⁺⁷⁸ but we are ready to support all Jewish elements in the struggle against fascism and anti-Semitism. . . ." *278 Neither New York nor Geneva found this statement satisfactory.

The Jewish People's Committee also failed to be admitted into the Joint Boycott Council against Nazi goods, of the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee.

36 *The Outstretched Hand*

Saving the Jews in Europe, fighting anti-Semitism here and fortifying Jewish culture: these three tasks formed the pattern of Communist behavior in their ceaseless efforts for Jewish "unity." And as the situation of the European Jews steadily worsened in the late 30's, saving them became the paramount lever by which Jewish Communists hoped to break their isolation.

Failing to be admitted into the bona fide Jewish bodies, the Communists' Jewish People's Committee decided on a bold move, a "united Jewry" of their own. The committee called a "unity convention" for March 12-13, 1938, "to save the Jews in Eastern Europe." It was preceded by local conferences and a great deal of publicity. "The representatives of the Jewish people will gather here tomorrow," wrote the secretary of the committee, E. Schwartzman. Among those who spoke at the convention were Congressman Sirovich, City Councilman Michael Quill, Vito Marcantonio and Dr. Greenfeld. Reuben Brainin was elected honorary chairman.

Commenting on the convention, which ostensibly spoke for a quarter of a million Jews in 14 states, the *Freiheit* boasted and pleaded: "We (Jewish Communists) are now in the mainstream of Jewish life. . . . We are ready to cooperate with anyone who is willing to support the struggle for Jewish rights. . . ." But few seemed ready to accept the outstretched hand. Excepting a couple of unions which had become involved in a United Front, several societies, the B'nai Brith from Pittsburgh and from several small towns, the convention "united" only the Left Wing.²⁷⁹

The unity convention, like similar ventures, could not hide its Left face. Its manifesto asserted that "The Soviet Union has abolished anti-Semitism." *280

(A week earlier, March 6th, the Jewish Labor Committee had held its convention. Its resolution stipulated that the JLC would enter into United Front deals "only with those Jewish and non-Jewish bodies who adhered to the viewpoint of broad state liberty and democracy in all countries." This excluded the Communist-led Jewish People's groups.)

Angered at being left out of the Council for Jewish Rights, formed August 15, 1938, by the Big Four—American Jewish Committee, Jewish Congress, Jewish Labor Committee and the B'nai Brith—the *Freiheit* charged that the founders had followed an undemocratic procedure, that "the will of the people had not been taken into account. . . ." *281

THE BEST SONS—WITH RESERVATIONS

Stepping into the "midstream of Jewish life" was not without complications. Back of the Communists' minds lurked the fear that a change in line might find them caught up in the current, and a return would prove neither easy nor comfortable. Every document relating to Jewish life, therefore, was hedged in with qualifications. An example was the paper read by Olgin for the Jewish Bureau at the tenth state convention of the New York party, May 1938. Olgin usually went the whole hog, and with a margin. But in Jewish affairs the memory of yesterday's nihilism was too fresh not to put him on guard against the chance that it might reemerge tomorrow. The tenor of his speech was fully for unity. Yet reservation was piled on reservation.

"The other day I had a personal compliment," he began. "I attended a conference . . . as a delegate from the ICOR. A delegate from a religious congregation said, 'Why, he is talking like a real Jew, and I was told he was a Communist.'

"Comrades," Olgin sorrowfully admitted, "We . . . managed to alienate the Jewish masses. More than that, we managed to convey . . . that the Communists are hostile to the Jewish national aspirations. We fought Zionism, which was correct, but . . . we forgot that many progressive elements . . . were Zionistically inclined.

We forgot also that the craving, the desire, for nationhood is not in itself reactionary. We conveyed the impression that the Jewish people . . . in Palestine are our enemies and we are theirs. . . .

"We state that the Communists are the best leaders of the Jews. . . . The party must know what is going on in the life of every national group. . . . We have traveled far from those days in 1935. . . ." *282

Touching on the cultural field, Olgin continued his reservations, "However, as Communists, we must distinguish between the broader aspects of the people's culture . . . and that which is an actual proletarian contribution. . . . Therefore, it is necessary that we, Communists, should create Communist culture within the framework of the people's culture. . . .

"But there are two dangers. The danger of nationalism is one. . . . The other danger is national nihilism. . . . We must remember what Lenin said about this and also Stalin and Dimitrov." *283

Philip David, secretary of the Bronx County committee, did not march back and forth like Olgin. Reporting on the party task in his territory, he stated, ". . . a major problem in the building of the Democratic Front is the winning of the Jewish people. . . . The most important factor (is) the popularization of the revolutionary, progressive and democratic tradition of the Jewish people. Our party must begin to make a thorough study of the history of the Jewish people." David followed this with a glorified thumbnail sketch of Jewish participation in the struggles for liberty, including the American Revolution and the Civil War.*284

THE CHANGED ATTITUDE TOWARD UNION LEADERSHIP

The Democratic Front caused a notable change in Communist behavior toward the AFL trade unions. Leaders of the garment trades unions, hitherto the object of a flood of abuse, were now spoken of with respect. The party press volunteered to advise them, but in a friendly tone.

Communist noisy conduct at union meetings, insulting speeches and points of order stopped as if by magic.

But all the party's courting of the higher command in these unions could not batter down or weaken their old distrust of Communism. Dubinsky and most of his associates as well as the leaders

in the other unions were waiting for more tangible evidence than mere words of Communist conversion to democracy. However, in a few places, the Communists did succeed in entering the leadership on the local level. Such was the case in the Cloak and Suit Operators' Union Local 117, in the Ladies' Tailors' and Finishers' Union Local 9, and the Dressmakers' Union Local 22, of the ILGWU, and in the Pocketbook Workers' Union. (In the ILGWU, this experiment with the Communists was of short duration.)⁺⁷⁹ They also made headway in the Painters' District Council 9 and in the shoe workers' and the grocery clerks' unions.

The general reason behind these local Communist advances was brought out by Zivyon. "It is difficult to fight someone," he remarked, "who keeps professing his love for you."

Some of the people who entered into agreement with the Communists were allied with the Militants in the Socialist Party, who then sincerely believed in the desirability of common action with the Communists; others had personal reasons. The support of the Communists enabled them to hold power, the Communists being satisfied with minor posts.

The new harmony was not always healthy. L. Finklestein, an old-timer and labor editor of *The Day*, was impelled to complain that "Only in those unions without a United Front can one still hear criticism of the leadership; in the others the criticism . . . is heard only from the Right."^{*285}

JEWISH REACTION TO THE CIVIL WAR IN SPAIN

The Spanish Civil War, July 1936 to the spring of 1939, involved no immediate or direct issue bearing on Jewish destiny. Except for a small group of refugees from Germany and a still smaller one from Poland, there were no Jews in Spain to speak of. Still, it is not an understatement to say that no other ethnical group outside the Spanish was so deeply touched by the fighting in Spain. With a keen intuition, the Jews, by and large, accepted the premise that the struggle among the barren hills of North and Central Spain was a proving ground for Hitler and Mussolini, and that a fascist victory in Spain would reinforce fascism in Europe. Jews watched closely the course of the battles and many responded generously to appeals for aid for Loyalist Spain.

Eastern European Jews, living under a darkening cloud of discriminations and physical threats, were greatly concerned over the fortunes of the belligerents in Spain. Jacob Pat, secretary of the JLC, then in Poland, related: "Jews in Poland listened anxiously to the 6 PM radio broadcast. News favorable to the Loyalists heartened them; reverses encouraged anti-Jewish assaults on the streets." *286

There were Jews whose concerns took a different direction. The French Consistory, the central body of the synagogues, ordered a prayer for the Spanish and Mexican clergy on the Day of Atonement in 1936. (President Calles was then waging his drive against the Church in Mexico.) The prayer finished with "because Israel must always stand with the persecuted and not with the persecutors." David Einhorn, poet and essayist, who told this story from Paris in his article in the *Forward*, added, "Rumor has it that when the Paris Bishop Verdier heard of the Jewish prayer, he sighed, 'It is not a happy omen for us when the Jews pray for us. . . . How can their God help us when he is unable to help them?'" *287

The Civil War caused a peculiar international smuggling. Young Jewish workers from Eastern Europe, living in semi-legality in France and Belgium, hurried to Spain to enlist in the Loyalist militia. One month after the outbreak of the fascist rebellion, there were about 150 Jewish militia men on the Aragon front alone. When the author left Spain, at the end of 1936, the number of Jewish militia men from Eastern and Central Europe was well above 500, and they were still coming.⁺⁸⁰ Young Polish Jews, without passports or money, overcoming innumerable obstacles, smuggled across four borders, including that of Nazi Germany, walking over the Pyrenees Mountains, to reach Spain.*288

Jewish volunteers formed a sizable part of the Communist-controlled German Ernest Thaelmann and the Polish Dumbrowsky battalions. The same was true of young Jews exiled from Nazi Germany. Because they spoke several languages, they were entrusted with most of the communication lines at the front.

In later months, a Jewish company, mostly of Polish Jews, was organized in the name of Naftali Botwin.⁺⁸¹ It carried through a successful attack on the Ebro River. (A description of the battle, by one of the soldiers, appeared in the *Freiheit* September 5, 1938.)

The company participated in the battles of Madrid, Guadalajara, Huesca, Brunete and Saragosa. It was a part of the 13th International Brigade. The commander of the company was Karl G., from Poland. The political commissar was Micha Reger (an assumed name). In a letter to a friend, Reger described "the warm friendship between the various nationalities in the International Brigade. Even the Poles see the truth that Jews are not cowards, and the news of a pogrom in their homeland outrages them. . . ." *289

The company published the *Botwin Front Paper* (a photostat of the masthead appeared in the *Freiheit* February 24, 1938). It was later changed to the illustrated *Freiheit Kemsfer*, subtitled "For Your and Our Liberty." Aware of the moral prestige of the fighters in the trenches, the *Freiheit Kemsfer* issued fiery appeals to the Jews in Europe and America to forge common action against fascism. They appeared only in the Communist press. The *Freiheit* also printed many letters from Jewish volunteers, American and European.

Sympathy for Spain and enlistment in the Spanish militia crossed party lines. However, international Communism, the first to act, was able to impose a semi-monopoly on fund-raising and enlistment, deriving great advantage from both. Moscow's part was of incalculable help. After several days of hesitation, the Kremlin began clandestinely sending armed aid to Spain. Contrasted with the "neutral" attitude of Western Europe and the United States, which placed a legitimate republican government and a fascist rebel force on the same legal scale, Moscow's action appeared a bold anti-fascist move. The glory gained by its arms shipments and through Litvinoff's thundering in the League of Nations against Hitler's and Mussolini's intervention reflected on Communism generally. The Comintern and its parties did not fail to dwell on the differences in attitude between the Socialist Fatherland and the capitalist democracies.

The initiative in recruiting gave the CP here the edge over all anti-fascist groups. Moscow sent a special man here for the recruiting, and the campaign was carried out with quiet efficiency. More than 2,000 young Americans were sent over to Spain by the party.⁺⁸² They were organized in the Abraham Lincoln and the George Washington battalions. Socialist recruits and others began coming

in later. But before they could realize their plans for their own units, the foreign volunteers were evacuated from Spain.

The CP set up several agencies combining propaganda and collections: the North American Committee to Aid the Spanish Democracy, Spanish Aid Committee, Medical Aid to Spain, and similar bodies among the ethnical groups—all their letterheads displaying a battery of prominent liberals. No one will ever know the sums these agencies collected and what part ever reached Spain. But, again, they widened the party's sphere of influence and were also a vehicle for party recruiting.

JEWISH LABOR REFUSES "UNITY" ON SPAIN

American Jews were conspicuous in the Spanish relief campaigns, Jewish doctors and nurses volunteered for work in Spain, and Jewish boys were among the dead and wounded of the Abraham Lincoln brigade—Ben Laider, a pilot, was killed in Spain. But the separate action for Spain started by the Jewish Bureau, to be used as additional pressure to force acceptance, fizzled out.

Jewish labor, strongly for the Loyalists, refused common action with the Communists. On the contrary, in the first months the Trade Union Red Cross for Spain, unofficially initiated by the ILGWU, outmaneuvered the CP, compelling it to hand over the funds collected by the party for the Loyalists. All the money was sent to Walter Citrine, head of the Spanish Relief Committee of the International Trade Union Congress. David Dubinsky's cable informing Citrine that he was sending him \$20,000 plus \$8,000 raised by the CP appeared in the *Freiheit* August 22, 1936.⁺⁸⁸

Early in 1937, the first reports of GPU terror in Spain began to reach this country. The *Forward* immediately pointed out that by these acts Moscow was gravely undermining the strength of the Loyalists. The kidnaping and disappearance of Mark Rein, son of Raphael Abramovich, in Barcelona, in the early hours of April 9, 1937, was a crime that could be motivated solely by revenge against his father. Young Rein, politically to the left of his father, came to Spain to affect unity among the German anti-fascists, Socialists and Communists. No clue was ever found of him.

Several Communists, disgusted with their experience in Spain,

broke with the party. Yet, Spain remained for a time a source of prestige and revenue for the CP. However, hostility to Moscow and to Communism spread as the full story of Moscow's violence in Spain was unfolded. Stalin was blamed for the defeat of the Spanish Republic. But, in the opinion of the author, Stalin's high-handed and brutal methods were only one of the causes.

37 *Birobidjan, a Lucrative Affair*

Birobidjan was played by the Communists as a trump card to gain three objectives: one, to raise Soviet standing among Jews; two, to combat the old foe, Zionism; three, to strengthen their position here. It was no fault of theirs that the winnings were snatched out of their hands when they seemed so assured.

The political and emotional climate was becoming favorable for placing Birobidjan on the agenda of Jewish discussion. On the heels of the persecutions and discriminations in Europe came the ominous news of a resurgent, virulent Arab nationalism. At this very moment, the Presidium of the Soviet CEC issued a decree, August 29, 1936, which, if taken at face value, would justify the grandiose title given to it by the *Freiheit*—the Magna Carta of the National Liberation of Soviet Jewry.

The decree began with the hallowed theme that the wisdom of the Stalinist national policy had been fully confirmed by the experience of the last years. It went on to proclaim:

"In the course of centuries of persecution, the Jewish people fought . . . for the right to create their own national culture and for the right to live freely. For the first time in Jewish history, the burning desire for the creation of a homeland, . . . has found fulfilment . . . the Jewish toiling masses are developing and strengthening in their own home the Soviet system in all its forms, as they fit the national mode of life of their people. . . .

"They possess their own agriculture, and are learning farming, industrialization, etc. The Jewish Autonomous Region is being turned into a center of Soviet national Jewish culture for the entire

Jewish toiling population. *Not merely among the Soviet Jews, but among the Jews abroad, is the tendency growing to settle in the Jewish Autonomous Region.*" (italics M.E.) *200

The decree also enlarged the area of land for cultivation and emphasized the necessity for more vigorous efforts at industrialization.

In the light of Stalin's repressive measures against Jewish institutional life and culture—begun as yet in the late 30's—one may presume that this "historic" decree was designed chiefly for foreign consumption, to win the good will of the Jewish people abroad. Perhaps the only one who meant it seriously was Kalinin, who was well disposed to the Jews. For one thing, the document concealed the general failure of Jewish settlement in Birobidjan.

This decree became the prized media for Communist activity. The *Freiheit* editorial, "A Statehood Title for the Jewish Nation," waxed enthusiastic, "(It) . . . is a lighthouse for the Jewish masses the world over . . . compared to the growing fascism in Europe and anti-Semitism here. . . ." *201

Nailebn, the ICOR magazine, did not lag behind the *Freiheit*. The ICOR was prospering and its magazine was an illustrated two-language publication—Yiddish and English—with a colored cover for each. It later introduced a youth section for the youth branches of the ICOR. Its pro-Sovietism was no more restrained than that of the party papers. In its issue devoted to the 20th anniversary of the November Revolution—1937—the Soviet Union was characterized as "the most beautiful dream of humanity being realized."

THE FAILURE OF THE LITHUANIAN SETTLEMENT

The potentials of Birobidjan attracted the people of the World ORT Federation, devoted to training young Jews in useful trades. All of them known anti-Communists, they were ready to take a chance on Moscow's promise to settle Jews from neighboring countries in Birobidjan. Adolf Held, chairman of the Labor Committee of the American ORT and president of the Forward Association, went there in May 1936.

An agreement concluded by Held with the KOMZET stipulated that the ORT was to select about a thousand Lithuanian and Latvian Jews to send to the Soviet border, where the KOMZET would

take over. They were promised jobs and housing. Had this agreement been carried out, Birobidjan would have garnered an abundant harvest. But the Soviet authorities dropped the whole affair without a formal notice.

A year earlier, 1935, J. M. Budish had gone to Russia for the Left on the same mission. As a result of the unofficial promises given to him, Budish, Max Levine and a few others organized, in 1936, the Ambidjan, a middle-class counterpart of the ICOR, William W. Cohen, chairman. (On his return from Russia in 1937, Cohen stated that "No vestige of anti-Semitism [remains] in the USSR.")^{*292}

In their negotiations with Moscow through Ambassador Alexander A. Troyanofsky, it was agreed that every eligible family from a neighboring state ready to migrate would be supplied by the Ambidjan with \$200 cash and passage to the Soviet border. From there on the KOMZET would take charge, and provide the family with transportation, housing and equipment for agriculture. However, the initiators omitted to mention that the future farmers were not to be independent but members of *kolkhozes* and, what is worse, some were to land in *sovkhoses* (state farms).

As the plan could not get started without stirring up public opinion, the Ambidjan and ICOR began a campaign for a Jewish delegation of 50, from all parts of the country, to investigate the possibilities of this project. The idea caught on despite the vigorous opposition of the *Forward*, the Socialist Farband and the Zionists.

In the same year, Michail Rashkes, for the GEZERD, opened an office in Kovno, Lithuania, for such recruiting, the Polish government refusing to permit a similar office. In a short while, about a thousand families had registered for migration, and 108 actually arrived in Birobidjan in 1936. In the approved manner, they were received by deputations and music. But only a few remained as settlers.

The majority returned to Lithuania in rags, and a smaller number drifted to Khabarovsk and other Siberian cities. An extreme shortage of housing and food and other hardships were the reasons. The Lithuanians were amazed to find that the standard of living in the Jewish Region was much lower than in their homeland, which was low enough.

The Jewish Soviet press and the Communist papers abroad were silent about the exodus of the Lithuanian Jews. But Moscow could

not entirely disregard the stories about the plight of the Lithuanians. An article in the *Tribuna*, monthly bulletin of the GEZIRD, attempted to belittle the whole affair. The *Tribuna* admitted "some errors and difficulties in the settlement . . ." Still, "the settlement from abroad was basically justified." *293

The statement in the *Tribuna* that "A few thousand people, mostly from Poland, could be brought over in 1936" facilitated the campaign for a delegation from the United States.

A PEOPLE'S DELEGATION CATCHES ON

The call for a delegation to Birobidjan was issued by a special committee in January 1936. Jewish interests were heavily interlaced with high praise for the Soviets. In New York it was difficult to find prominent outsiders for the committee. Leon Kobrin, the writer, became chairman, and Dr. I. Fisher, secretary. As the presence of a rabbi on a committee of this kind was practically a must, a Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein was among the signers of the call. In Chicago, the Ambidjan-ICOR was able to enlist the names of Judge Harry Fisher, Judge Heller, Dean Abbott of the Chicago University, Professor Carlson and Rabbi Nathan Goodnitsky.

"Four thousand such settlers," the call asserted, "will be received from other countries. At a time when fascism and anti-Semitism are raging . . . it is gratifying to learn that in the Soviet Union, . . . the Jewish question has been completely solved . . . he (the Jew) is today the builder of his autonomous territory. . . . The possibility which has now been given to Jews from other lands . . . has caused Jewish people everywhere to become even more interested in the building of the first Jewish autonomous territory in the world. . . ." *294

(The idea of a delegation was gaining friends even among non-Jews, who were beginning to look upon the Jewish Autonomous Region as a potential place of refuge for many persecuted Jews in Eastern Europe. Norman Thomas, John Dewey, George Gordon Battle were among those who sent greetings to the ICOR.) *295

The method of electing the people's delegation was rather complicated. In order to involve as many groups as possible while providing Moscow with tangible proof of Jewish good will and appreciation for Birobidjan, every group participating in one of

the local conferences had also to collect signatures if they wished to put up a candidate for the delegation, the winner of the contest being the one to receive the largest number of signatures. The slogan was *250,000 Signatures*. As every signer had to pay a nominal sum, the *People's Book*, with a quarter of a million names, would, in addition to its demonstrative value, be a generous financial gift to the ICOR and Ambidjan.

As the tempo of the campaign for the delegation quickened, the propaganda became more bombastic. No less a person than Ambassador Troyanofsky, in his greeting to the New York conference, May 24th, at Hotel Astor, spoke of Birobidjan as having become "the symbol of the struggle against anti-Semitism and against the entire medieval darkness." *296

Sixteen local conferences were held. Those in Chicago, Cincinnati, Los Angeles and San Francisco were well attended. Many of the local groups there disobeyed the instructions of their national offices to stay out of the affair. In Cincinnati a few important groups as well as several professors of the Hebrew Union College joined the conference. The noted scholar, Jacob R. Marcus, was elected a delegate, and the *Nailebn* boasted that the college, aware of the significance of the delegation, had granted Marcus a leave of absence of two months.*297 (But Professor Marcus later withdrew, as did many other supporters.)

The Communists were jubilant. They now had reason to hope that the community, a solid iceberg since 1929, would begin to thaw out toward them. The *Nailebn* exulted: "It is a real joy to know that Birobidjan has become the center which can unite Jews of various opinions. . . . We may anticipate that the national conference will represent at least half a million organized Jews. . . ."

And after the national conference, the *Nailebn*, repeating the boast about "half a million organized Jews," observed that the "incitement lately against the Left movement in connection with the events in Palestine has confused the minds of many. . . . In view of this, the success is still greater." *298

DR. ROSEN'S CRITICAL COMMENTS

Communist jubilation was premature. Dr. Rosen's interview with the Jewish Telegraph Agency, on his return from Birobidjan in the

same summer, hit the delegation plan in its most vulnerable spot. The director of the Agro-Joint spoke favorably of the colonies in the Ukraine and Crimea, which he had helped to build. But he was cautious about Birobidjan. The gist of his opinion was:

1. Despite difficulties, there were possibilities for further Jewish settlement there;
2. Due to the complicated international situation, he did not see any chance of settling Jews from abroad in the coming years;
3. The Soviet government did not need outside aid in settling Russian Jews in Birobidjan.*²⁹⁹

Dr. Rosen's remarks cut the heart out of the delegation plan. Those opposing Birobidjan, the entire press and most of the public men, now demanded that the whole venture be given up. Many adherents of the delegation began to waver. The initiators of the People's Delegation were thrown on the defensive. But, as had happened in the past, the anti-Communist zeal of the *Forward* editor caused him to ascribe to Dr. Rosen words that he had not said. And again as in the past, the Communists seized upon this inaccurate detail to becloud the real meaning of Dr. Rosen's critical statement.

Accuracy was not a Communist virtue either. To add fervor to the campaign, an expression of welcome sent to the ICOR by Professor Joseph Lieberberg, head of the government of Birobidjan, "The arrival of your People's Delegation will be for us a great holiday," was transformed in the *Nailebn* to "The coming of the delegation will be a holiday not merely to Birobidjan, but for all the nationalities in the Soviet Union, and will resound throughout Poland and Germany and all the lands of the world. . . ." *³⁰⁰

In the midst of the campaign, someone in the ICOR conceived the idea of American painters and sculptors sending an art collection to the museum in Birobidjan. Nearly 150 artists contributed about 500 pictures and other art objects. Exhibitions were arranged in New York and Boston. The collection, accompanied by Frank Kirk, arrived in Russia March 1937. "Soviet artists showed a keen interest in the exhibits," wrote Kirk.+⁸⁴

When the final tabulations were in, the catastrophic effect of Dr. Rosen's statement became evident. Instead of a quarter of a million signatures, barely 50,000 were collected. Moreover, the 28 delegates elected by the conferences could in no way be taken to represent varied social groups. The majority were active in the

ICOR and the IWO. Others, such as James Waterman Wise, were people friendly to Communism or to Soviet Russia. The delegation had only a sprinkling of known non-Communists: Congressman William L. Sirovich, New York; Abraham W. Katofsky, vice president of the ILGWU in Cleveland; and a couple of others.

THE DELEGATION DOES NOT SAIL

The delegation was to leave the middle of September 1936. But when the out-of-town delegates were ready to entrain for New York, passport and luggage in hand, they were informed that the trip had been postponed until December. The reason given was that the "situation in Europe is now severely strained. The fascist forces are working feverishly to ignite a world war. . . . We believe that this is not the opportune time. . . . Therefore, we have decided to wait a couple of months." *301

Actually, no one here knew the cause of the postponement. All the ICOR had was a laconic cable from Moscow to stop the delegation.

To cover up their embarrassment, the ICOR spoke of "large scale preparations for a great people's holiday throughout the country as a send-off for the delegates, and a special extraordinary farewell in New York on the eve of the sailing of the delegation." *302

The reason for the postponement became clear with the arrival of *Der Shtern*, the Birobidjan paper. It printed a resolution of the party convention in the Jewish Region, October 23rd, expelling from the party the "scoundrel-counterrevolutionary Lieberberg." *303 The purge that began in Russia in the spring of 1936 had reached Birobidjan in the fall.

(The man from the GEZERD in Kiev who came to see Adolf Held off at the station looked pale and frightened. "I have just received news that Lieberberg is arrested," he whispered. "It looks bad." This was in October.) *304

Professor Lieberberg, one of the most outstanding young Jewish-Soviet scholars and leaders, a member of the Ukrainian Academy of Science and Art, and the head of its Jewish Section, drafted in 1934 for Birobidjan, was arrested in the fall of 1936 on the charge of protecting Trotskyite bandits and spying for Japan. Some months later, the secretary of the party, M. P. Khavkin, an old and promi-

ment party worker, also drafted for Birobidjan, was arrested with his associates on the same charges. The proximity to Japan made the latter charge more convenient than spying for Hitler. They were shot without trial. Their execution left affairs in the Jewish Region in utter confusion. Obviously, Americans could not be permitted to visit Birobidjan at that time.

Moishe Litvakov, editor of the *Emes*, was impelled to write that the liquidation of the Lieberberg-Khavkin administration was an "abcess cut out from the body of the Jewish Region. Now Birobidjan will grow." *305 By that time he must have been well aware that the long arm of the GPU was stretching out to him too. He, Alexander Khashin, editorial writer, and others on the staff were arrested in the summer of 1937. Litvakov died in prison.⁺⁸⁵

Cutting out the Lieberberg-Khavkin "abcess" was only the first operation on the Jewish Region. B. A. Trotsky, who was sent to take Lieberberg's place, and some of his coworkers were the victims of the second operation. And Professor M. Kotel, who followed Trotsky, was the third. From the fall of 1936 to the end of the Yezhov-Stalin blood purge, in 1938, three successive administrations in Birobidjan were decimated.

The American delegation never sailed.

In the absence of show trials in Birobidjan, Communists could steadfastly deny the purges. Still, they could not be completely hidden. And to counteract the "slander by the enemies," who interpreted the purges as an indication of Birobidjan's bankruptcy, the *Freiheit* and the *Nailebn* printed a photostat of court proceedings in Birobidjan in Russian and Yiddish, November 1, 1936, and played up a Yiddish language conference there, February 9, 1937, attributing to it "historical significance." *306

The purge, the cancellation of the delegation and of the settlement from abroad had their damaging consequences. Grave doubts of the entire plan were publicly raised. Particularly embarrassing were the articles by Rabbi Chaim L. Solomon, editor of the *American Jewish World*, Minneapolis, demanding an accounting of the money raised at the farewell dinner, September 23, 1936, in Hotel Astor, for Lord Marley, honorary chairman of Ambidjan, who was touring the country in behalf of Birobidjan.*307

Commenting on the 10th jubilee of the Jewish Region, celebrated by the ICOR in Manhattan Opera House, April 17, 1938, Zivyon

wrote in the *Forward*, "The drummers of Birobidjan should have made a funeral instead of a jubilee." S. Dingol, an editor of *The Day*, expressed similar thoughts.

However, the ICOR and Ambidjan were not discouraged. They kept presenting Birobidjan as the solution to the Jewish problem and a potential refuge for masses of Jews in Eastern Europe. William W. Cohen sent a letter to the *Forward* categorically denying that the plan for settling Polish and Lithuanian Jews in Birobidjan had been given up. "(It) will be carried out completely and generously," he wrote. "J. M. Budish and George Siegel will soon leave for Birobidjan for that purpose." *308

The purges and the failure to settle Jews from abroad hurt the Birobidjan campaigns here. Still, it remained a lucrative commodity for Communism until the ICOR-Ambidjan had to cease operations in 1949-1950.

38 *Judaizing Communism*

Unity and democracy led to a changed attitude in the party to Jewish work. Belittling and sneering was replaced by an awareness of the vital part that Jewish Communism had in the party's ambitious schemes.

Gaining control in several important new unions and a foothold in others, significant as it was for the ultimate aims of Communism, did not meet the urgent need for an immediate rise in the political stature of the CP. This required masses of articulate followers concentrated in large cities, to fill the Madison Square Gardens and the Coliseums and march in political demonstrations that would reverberate around the country and the world. The Jewish group fitted that requirement; 65 percent of the Jewish population were living in metropolitan New York and Chicago. And fascism abroad and anti-Jewish sentiment here made sections of this group vulnerable to Communism's tender and reassuring voice.

Moscow, too, anxious for closer contact with Washington and under the exaggerated notion—that the Nazis helped to foster—of Jewish influence in America, was interested in courting Jewish good will. Birobidjan, language conferences, theaters and international gatherings against anti-Semitism were demonstrative steps in that direction. Jewish Communists were now given a new task, to win over important segments of the community on Jewish issues. And because the Kremlin was led to believe that the top of the garment trade unions were a major obstacle to amicable relations with the AFL, the Jewish Communists had the added job of wooing the Dubinsky's and the Hillman's.

The new interest in Jewish affairs took various guises: the sudden awareness of many Communists, Jews by birth only, of their Jewishness; the entrance of Jewish Communists in the field of American-born Jews; the attention shown by the party to signs of anti-Semitism here; and the Jewish Communists parading as the "best friends of the Jewish people."

Azoi vi es Cristelt zich azoi Yidelt zich (as the Christians do so do the Jews). The party Americanized its election campaigns, and the Jews Judaized them, shifting the emphasis to the struggle against anti-Semitism and the defense of Jewish rights.

The angle to trap Jewish votes was first employed on a large scale in the Presidential campaign of 1936. The Jewish Bureau published a Yiddish booklet by Olgin—35,000 copies—*Jews Must Resist Anti-Semitism*. The subtitle read, "Communist Party Demands that Anti-Semitism in the United States Should be Considered a Crime." The entire booklet was devoted to the growing menace of fascism and the dire necessity "for a United Front of the Jewish people's masses." The subject was treated as if the Jews were already denied their civil rights.*³⁰⁹

Jewish voters were treated to a rare experience. Communist candidates, entirely alien to Jewish life, running in Jewish districts, were taking pride in their Jewish origin. And though all their Jewishness was contained in the capsule of fighting anti-Semitism, their appeal was not without response. Israel Amter, running in 1937 and 1938 for president of the City Council and congressman-at-large respectively, emerged as a proud Jew whose primary concern was the defense of Jewish rights and Jewish unity. This theme he kept repeating in the campaign. The *Freiheit* introduced him as a "dignified representative of the Jewish masses." And a report of an Amter election meeting was headlined "Vote for Amter and Beat Anti-Semitism." *³¹⁰

PENETRATING THE AMERICAN-BORN

The Jewish Bureau was given the green light to approach the American-born on Jewish issues. Hitherto, the language groups in the party were confined to immigrants speaking their mother tongue. The monthly *Jewish Life*, published by the Jewish Bureau of New York State, August 1937, was the immediate consequence.

(A Jewish state bureau in itself was something new.) Its editorial board was made up of John Arnold, Hyman L. Castrell, Paul Novick and Henry Sand. Castrell and Novick were old hands. Arnold and Sand (both assumed names) were native-born. The chief topic of the new monthly was Jewish unity; the anti-Semitic menace was the favorite argument.

As the party now directed the language groups to "go to the people," Jewish Communism was voicing a gentle solicitude for its people. Castrell, in the first issue, harping on the growth of anti-Jewish sentiment, expressed the gloomy thought that "These . . . tend to make the Jews an oppressed minority in the United States. . . ."

Jewish Life carried warm greetings from Browder and Amter. Browder, touching upon the failure that summer of the British plan for the partition of Palestine, generously offered "our hand of fellowship to all disillusioned Zionist workers for a common approach to all problems." He also admitted "overzealousness on the part of the Communists" in their attitude and reaction toward the *yishuv* in Palestine (meaning 1929-1930). The Communists "are ready for a reexamination," he added.*³¹¹

Jewish Life devoted much space to Palestine. Though the old antagonism was still alive, a new slant in orientation among the American-born was becoming noticeable, the latter being free of the anti-Zionist heritage of the early radicals. To fortify the idea that the Jewish Communist must not ignore his people, John Arnold, editor, quoted from Molotov's speech at the eighth Soviet congress, highly praising the Jewish people and dwelling on their greatness.

A naive question by a reader as to why the party was suddenly so interested in Jewish affairs elicited from Arnold a most revealing answer, "The Democratic Front in New York is not possible without the Jewish people."*³¹²

Philip Schatz, educational director of the New York State YCL, in his piece in the same issue, did not quibble either. To him unity was necessitated solely by the struggle against discrimination—not a word about positive Jewish values. The YCL secretary blamed the Trotskyites for blocking unity of Jewish youth groups. This was the heyday of the Trotsky sentiment in the United States, as a

reverberation of the trials in Moscow, and Schatz thought it clever to hit the enemy on a "Jewish issue."

TROTSKY ON STALIN'S ANTI-SEMITISM

Trotsky also came in for severe condemnation for stating in an interview with the JTA that "Since 1925, and particularly since 1926, there has been (in Soviet Russia) in progress a well-camouflaged anti-Semitic demagogy, hand in hand with symbolic trials against open pogromists. . . ."

"The recent trial in Moscow (the Radek-Sokolnikov trial), for instance, was prepared with the almost open object of making the internationalists appear as Jews without ideals and law, capable of selling themselves to the German Gestapo." *813

In an article, "Trotsky and the Jews," Samuel Golden ascribed Trotsky's "sudden interest in the Jewish question . . . (to) a conscious political maneuver by his general policy of counterrevolution. . . ." *814

Parenthetically, the belief that the Soviet Union was perhaps the most formidable bastion against anti-Semitism was shared by many distinguished non-Communists. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, refusing to join the Committee for the Defense of Trotsky, in 1937, wrote to Dr. Sidney Hook: ". . . Moreover, to invite me to join your committee on that ground savors of Trotsky's own disingenuousness in introducing the Jewish issue in the present situation. If his other charges against the Soviet government are as unsubstantiated as his complaints on the score of anti-Semitism he has no case at all." *815

It may be interesting at this point to quote the opinion of an old rabbi who lived several years under the Bolshevik regime in a large Jewish city. A writer on *The Day*, S. Erdberg, went to see this rabbi about the Trotsky interview. The rabbi was bitter against both Stalin and Trotsky. When asked about Trotsky's charge that Stalin was anti-Semitic, he answered unhesitatingly, "It is true."

"Still, there are no pogroms in Russia," Erdberg insisted.

"Of course, there are no pogroms there," countered the rabbi. "Private initiative . . . (has) been abolished in Russia. No one can do anything without the state. Stalin says, 'If it will be necessary to make pogroms, the state will do it.'"

"Anti-Semitism is banned," continued the old man, "because

the professional anti-Semites, the Black Hundred, are also anti-Soviets." *316

He had four children in Russia. All occupied good positions. But he had to send them a few dollars from time to time.

The rise in anti-Jewish sentiment, an aftermath of the merciless struggle for power raging in the Russian Communist Party in the 20's—the three most important opposition leaders were Jews—prompted the JTA to request Stalin, at the end of 1930, to repudiate "the stories in the foreign press that he is an anti-Semite and that the Soviet press is conducting for the first time an agitation for pogroms." Stalin's written reply was a sharp denunciation of anti-Semitism: ". . . Anti-Semitism is a dangerous survival of cannibalism . . . it is a false road (for the toilers) and leads them into the jungle. Hence, Communists, as consistent internationalists, cannot but be irreconcilable and bitter enemies of anti-Semitism. . . . According to the laws of the USSR, active anti-Semites are punished by death." *317

(Stalin's statement was obviously meant only for foreign consumption. It did not appear in the Soviet press until the end of 1936, when the *Pravda* quoted it from a speech by Molotov on the new Soviet constitution.) *318

Less than two decades later, Stalin was to order the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia, the "doctors' plot" in Moscow, and the cultural and national genocide of the Jews in Soviet Russia.

The first steps among the native-born were shy and halting. *Jewish Life* reflected this hesitancy. Lacking experienced men, Jewish Communism was also unsure of its footing. A big handicap was the absence of an apparatus, a prerequisite for penetration. The *Freiheit* did its share in this new field by starting a daily column in English devoted to Jewish affairs, written by Olgin. The new target was the social workers and professionals.

(Rabbi Moses Miller, a young ordained rabbi without a congregation, who entered the Communist movement in the 30's, was a notable asset to *Jewish Life* and the work among the native-born. In September 1938, he became editor of the magazine. Ambitious and able, he grew more influential in the years that followed.)

The publication of *Jewish Life* was interrupted by the Stalin-Hitler pact. After the World War, the party's recognition of its

Jewish movement was still further extended. *Jewish Life* was renewed on a larger scale. The Jewish angle as a means of widening the Communist foothold among the second and third generations of Jews was applied in earnest.

A major beneficiary of Communism's new Jewishness was the parochial schools. Relenting in their negative treatment of Jewish education, the schools recognized three Jewish holidays, Passover, Chanukah and Purim, for their national-liberation symbols. They now taught Jewish history, but were greatly handicapped by the lack of qualified teachers, the majority of whom were themselves not too familiar with that subject.

During their peak, in the late 30's, the *shules* claimed an enrollment of over 6,000 children in approximately 100 schools and three secondary schools. The teaching staff numbered between 65 and 70.

THE PASSION FOR JEWISH CULTURE

Once Jewish Communism became "anxious for Jewish life and rights," a surging concern for Jewish culture was inevitable. The reasons were duofold: one, the deep sentiment for the language and its cultural manifestations rooted in the secular strata; two, building a cultural position does not necessarily require being accepted by rival groups; initiative and hard work are sufficient.

The cultural field was little cultivated. But the people of the Bureau were not exactly the ones to make a bold move—nor a sincere one either.

The National Conference of Jewish Communists, September 25-27, 1936, heard professions of loyalty to the Jewish people and love for their culture. Papers were read on projects for deepening and enriching that culture. But this new concern was negated by the old devotion to proletarian culture—or, as it was beginning to be called, the culture of the toilers—"that is developing alongside the bourgeois degeneration." *319

This program, contradictory and unreal, evoked little response, even in Communist ranks. It was too confusing.

However, Jewish Communists did not have to wait long for a full-scale drive on the cultural front. A committee for a Jewish World Cultural Congress appeared in Paris in September 1936. It was the same old device, a long letterhead with a few non-Communist

nist men of letters covering a number of known and camouflaged party workers. The chairman was Nahum Aaronson, the sculptor; the vice presidents were non-Communists, but the secretary, Dr. H. Sloves, was a party man. In its call the committee repeated the traditional appeal for building cultural positions at a time when the enemy—fascism this time—was attacking the Jewish civil and economic positions.

THE PLAN FOR A WORLD CULTURAL CONGRESS

The directives were received here early in 1937, and the Communists immediately went to work. The very boldness of the idea of a world gathering, the first of its kind, was bound to focus attention on it. And, despite the vigorous opposition of the entire Yiddish-speaking non-Communist sector, a group of distinguished writers and intellectuals were won over, and cooperated with the Communists in preparing the congress. A convincing argument for participation was the promise that the congress would pierce the thick wall that separated Soviet Jewry from the rest of the Jewish world. The desire for a face-to-face meeting in Paris with Jewish Soviet writers proved too great for a number of writers who had been steadily maligned in Russia. Some of them nursed the hope that once the movement was under way, they would be able to take over and pour it into a genuine cultural mold.*³²⁰ A few of them also retained a lingering sentiment for the Soviet Union. Moreover, they were assured that the Communists would be kept in the background.+⁸⁶

The congress was immediately labeled another Communist scheme to trap the innocent. The *Forward* took the lead in the attack. A statement denouncing the American conference in preparation for the Paris congress was signed by 26 writers.*³²¹ The burden of the statement was contained in the following lines: "We view with horror local Jewish Communists justifying all the charges—unproven and unfounded—against Jewish writers and leading cultural workers in Soviet Russia. . . ." Observing that "Culture is decency, culture is truth," the statement went on to say that the Communists were shamelessly trampling on both. They were also reminded of their anti-Jewish stand during the Palestinian events and their total negation of Jewish values just a few years earlier.+⁸⁷

Jacob Gladstein wrote a vitriolic column on the eve of the conference. Referring to the Jewish Communist writers, he said, "Nowhere in Jewish history has such an organized group of scoundrels made so many attempts to throw themselves on Jewish life in order to corrode and blacken it." *322 Dr. S. Margoshes, on the same subject, ended his English column in *The Day* of August 22nd with, "No truck with the enemy!"

The warnings against the congress were effective. Not a single non-Left group came to the conference for the election of delegates, August 28, 1937. Still, the opening in Town Hall was an enthusiastic affair. Strengthening and expanding Jewish culture went straight to the heart of the Left rank and file. It was not the kind of activity one carried out in the name of party discipline. In the midst of the cruel news from Russia—the purges—it was comforting to be engaged in something peaceful and constructive in company with well-known creative writers. Branches of the IWO throughout the country and similar bodies made strenuous efforts to be represented.

The conference adopted a resolution for the building of a cultural center in this country. The idea of a center was merely Communist big talk to hold on to the new friends and to scare the enemies.

A delegation of 11 was elected to the congress in Paris, only three Communists among them, and a committee was formed for the work here. The entire expense for the trip to Paris and back was paid by the Communists—to be exact, by the IWO and the *Freiheit*.

THE CONGRESS IN PARIS; NO ONE FROM MOSCOW

The congress in Paris opened September 7, 1937, in the presence of about 100 delegates from 18 countries. More than 4,000 people crowded the opening session. Dr. Schatz-Anin, a fellow traveler from Latvia, was chairman. On the face of it, such a gathering of writers was highly impressive.

Paris was then already a center of Eastern European Jews, particularly from Poland. Some estimated their number at not much under a quarter of a million. The immigrant youth had to struggle hard for a livelihood, and a considerable section were in the orbit of the Left. The French Communist Party stubbornly refused to

give the Jewish Communists any organizational form, insisting on total integration. Only after ceaseless pleas were they permitted a weekly paper, *Naie Presse*, which later appeared three times a week. But they were denied a daily paper.*³²³ The Communists rivaled the other two groups, Labor Zionists and Bundists.

After listening to a number of reports and papers, the congress issued a manifesto on September 17th calling upon all the *yishuvim* to redouble their efforts to expand and fortify Jewish cultural institutions. The gathering was described as a "shining page and a great day in Jewish history." *³²⁴

The congress launched the World Alliance of Jewish Culture (IKUF), composed of territorial sections, and elected an international committee. Dr. Sloves was made general secretary. The Alliance was to publish a central magazine and, generally, to help in and coordinate the activities in the various countries. All the ambitious plans were built on the financial promises of the American delegation—its Communist part.

A great disappointment was the absence of the Soviet delegation. No one came. Again, as in the case of the delegation to Birobidjan, the Communists were at a loss to offer an explanation. The reason was the same too. Quite a number of Jewish writers were in the purge or slated for purging, and the Kremlin reneged on its promise to let a Jewish delegation go to Paris.

IKUF, A VALUABLE ASSET

The report of the American delegation, November 6th, in Mecca Temple, was a festive affair. The enthusiasm was as yet undampened. All the Communist cultural groups and Maurice Schwartz and Ben Ami participated in the program. Dr. A. Mukdoni, a noted writer and a non-Communist, became the chairman of the American IKUF; Zeinwell Weinper, a poet and a new secret member of the CP, was made secretary. The IKUF began publishing a monthly, *Yiddishe Kulture*. Between the sizable contributions of the IWO and Weinper's skill in raising money through tearful appeals for Jewish culture, the IKUF was well supplied with funds.

The IKUF gained an active worker with the arrival, in 1938, of Nachman Meisel, who had published a literary magazine in Warsaw. Meisel had had no previous contact with Communism, but

being unable to find a place in the existing literary groupings in America, he accepted the proffered hand of the Communists, who needed him for the IKUF precisely because of his non-political past. Meisel served them well, and never wavered in his loyalty.

The IKUF published the works of Jewish Soviet writers and of Americans who were affiliated with it. It formed a number of reading circles in several cities. Alongside the ICOR, it became one of the most valuable transmission belts for Communism. During the Stalin-Hitler pact, the IKUF lost almost all its non-Left writers. But the resurgence of Soviet popularity here during World War II caused some people to overlook the IKUF's toeing the party line. In the years 1948-1955, the IKUF magazine brazenly denied the destruction of Jewish culture and the decimation of Jewish writers. At the same time, the names and the works of those who had perished disappeared from its pages. The *Freiheit* underwent the same mysterious process. The paper spared no abuse for those who "invented" the liquidation of Jewish men of culture, while taking pains not to mention any of them or to reprint their works in the special issues devoted to the Soviet Union.

The IKUF was still functioning, its magazine appearing, in the late 50's, when Ambidjan-ICOR, ARTEF and the IWO were a thing of the past. The devastating shrinkage of the Jewish Communist movement severely curtailed the activities of the IKUF, but it did not shut it down.

Incidentally, the Right answered the challenge of the IKUF in the 30's with its own cultural body, the CYCO (Central Yiddish Cultural Organization). The CYCO worked along the same lines, publishing books, offering annual prizes for outstanding literary works. The CYCO, too, called a world congress in 1948.

As to the world body of the IKUF, it fared rather badly in the very beginning. Moscow was no longer interested in its existence. Nor were the American Communists willing to support a world cultural group after deriving all possible advantage from the Paris congress. The glowing promises of financial aid made by them were never carried out. And the desperate reminder by Dr. Sloves was not even answered.⁺⁸⁸ In a year or so the World Alliance quietly died, and nobody cared enough to bury it.

THE FIGHT IN THE PARTY OVER PALESTINE

The recommendation of the British Royal Commission on partitioning Palestine into two autonomous states, Jewish and Arab, announced on July 7, 1937, and motivated by the "inability to reconcile the interests of the Jews and the Arabs," was condemned by world Zionist opinion. The Chaim Weitzman followers showed a willingness to negotiate with the British, but the Labor Zionist and the Dr. Wise group here were decidedly against it. Still, Britain's readiness to recognize a Jewish State added enormously to the *yishuv's* prestige.

Melech Epstein, mindful of the tangible achievements of the *yishuv*, that he had seen in 1936, thought that this was the opportune moment for a shift in the party's policy. He argued that it was childish, even harmful, to ignore the needs of a lively and active Jewish group of well over half a million souls. He reminded his comrades of the many headaches the movement had suffered because of its pro-Arabism.

The only active opposition to this view came from Paul Novick. The struggle against the *yishuv* was his province. Olgin, unsure of any change in the Comintern line on Palestine, straddled the fence. The Bureau, fearful even of discussing this question, referred it to the political committee of the party.

One afternoon in late July 1937, the political committee took up the Palestinian problem, Stachel presiding. Epstein reviewed the party's attitude toward Palestine, stressing its sectarian and unreal approach. And by way of making the new orientation palatable, he suggested that a more sympathetic regard for the *yishuv* would remove many obstacles to the Democratic Front in the Jewish community.

Before Epstein had a chance to sit down, Bittelman was on his feet. Quoting earlier decisions of the Comintern on Palestine, he categorically rejected any change in policy. "The Communist Party does not bargain away its basic principles for any immediate advantage," he rebuffed Epstein with righteous finality. It was odd to hear Bittelman speak of basic principles. But his pious waving of Comintern quotations blocked the way for Browder and the others to adopt a more sympathetic attitude, even had they been inclined to do so. And this was precisely Bittelman's intention. Browder,

who followed him, did try to soften down Bittelman's unbending stand. In a conciliatory speech, he cited Dr. Wise's opposition to the British plan, and pleaded with the Jewish Communists to approach Dr. Wise and his friends on the common ground of defending the *yishuv* against the British colonial policy. But the bare fact remained—Novick could continue the calumny against the *yishuv*. Epstein, who was working on the advance proofs of his book on Palestine, to be published by the *Freiheit*, withheld the manuscript rather than change it.

Still, the struggle for a new approach to Palestinian Jewry was not entirely lost. Witness Olgin's speech in 1938, at the tenth convention of the New York State party, quoted in Chapter 36.

In the fall of the same year, the CP of Palestine, in a memorandum to the Royal Commission, demanded autonomous rights for the Jewish group, but "to maintain the existing numerical relationship between the Jewish and the Arab populations," thus openly supporting a total ban on Jewish immigration.*³²⁵

In summing up the attempts of Jewish Communists to acquire respectability, it is well to point out that the two largest segments of the community, the middle class and labor—the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee—persistently refused any kind of cooperation with any of the Communist-dominated bodies. Neither the perils hanging over European Jewry nor the uneasiness on the domestic scene could bridge the gap that separated the Communists from the bulk of their fellow Jews.

39 *Strength and Moods*

In the beginning, the Communist rank and file relaxed under the Democratic Front. The individual Communist was told to resemble the ordinary American in dress, manner and custom. The girls threw off their leather jackets and began taking care of their appearance. Communist couples went through the formality of legal marriage. The wife was no longer introduced as a comrade, and spending time at home with the family was not looked upon as an idle indulgence unbecoming a Communist.

On the whole, the party membership accepted the new orientation, some unreservedly, others—the majority—as a new expediency.

But the relaxation was of short duration. The world was drifting steadily toward a new war, and Communists all over were again being called upon to “assemble in protest” or to “march in protest.” (The serious border clashes in 1938 between Japanese and Soviet troops greatly increased Moscow’s fear of war, and the Communist parties redoubled their antiwar activities.) Still, these protests were different in character and form from the similar ones in the early 30’s. The Communists no longer had to sneak under the windows of consulates with their placards and then run away, or to be surrounded on a square by a cordon of police. Now they were not alone; all the protests, and, for that matter, the May 1st parades, were carried out jointly with non-Communists. And marching in company with good Americans for righteous causes—and they were clearly righteous—gave them emotional gratification.⁺⁸⁹

By the way, Americanized as the May 1st parades became, the

party could not desist from aping the Russians in carrying icon-like pictures of the leaders. Pictures of the members of the political committee, swaying like banners in the breeze, were perhaps the most ludicrous of all the decidedly Russian traditions taken over by the American party; Lenin, at the second Comintern congress, had warned foreign Communists against precisely such blind imitation.

THE MOOD FOR RAPPROCHEMENT

Uncensored news trickling out of Russia after 1934 showed a gradual economic improvement and a steadying of the popular mood. The country was registering notable advances in the sciences. The new constitution, affirming personal security under the law, adopted with great jubilation in 1936, was heralded in this country as an indication that the regime was moving away from dictatorship. Many liberals wishfully looked away from the ominous provision of the constitution banning any other party but the Communist.

The new constitution, paralleling Litvinoff's sharp blast against the Hitler regime and Soviet aid to Loyalist Spain, was beginning to fix in the minds of some Jewish intellectuals the belief that the Kremlin was the only true foe of fascism, the mortal enemy of the Jewish people and of civilization. Filled with foreboding for the future of the Jews under the fascist darkness descending on Europe, they began losing confidence in Western Europe, and wavering in their anti-Sovietism.

This new mood was feelingly expressed by Dr. Abraham Koralnick, a learned Hebraist and one of the most educated essayists in Yiddish letters, formerly the Berlin correspondent of Professor Milukov's paper, *Retch*. Dr. Koralnick, an unflinching and consistent anti-Marxist and anti-Communist, voiced his irritation over the intellectual and political shabbiness of Western Europe. "The old friends of Western Europe feel disheartened and disappointed," he wrote in *The Day*. And commenting on the formation of the fascist Axis of Germany, Italy and Japan, announced in Tokyo November 15, 1936, with the avowed aim of forging a ring around Soviet Russia, he sounded a new approach to the Soviet Union:

"The question before us, . . . is entirely different; I say for us but I mean not only Jews, but especially the intellectuals of all countries, and particularly of America. . . . We also must forge a chain around Russia, a chain of defense. . . . For Russia was for

some of us physically the cradle, as it . . . has now reason to be the intellectual home for intellectuals the world over, a home that is gray and unfriendly, a home that is still to be built. . . . It is the only land in the world that is alive . . . for an ideal that concerns every human being. . . . On Russia one can still hope; that the first storm will pass, the waves will subside, the gray edges will be smoothed down—and Communism in a purified form can become the foundation and the goal of a new world order.

“. . . Between Communism in its purified form and the democracy in its last stages there is a bridge. But between democracy and fascism there is an iron wall—and against this wall we can all break our heads. . . .” *326

It was the brooding thought of a wise, sensitive man trying to brush away his deep skepticism with a new hope.

This inner crisis was not Dr. Koralnick's alone. These doubts and hopes were floating around, affecting other Jewish intellectuals.

There were, however, influential journalists, aside from those in the *Forward*, who did not succumb either to the anti-fascist thundering of Moscow or the sweet appeals for unity of the local Communists. They firmly resisted the United Front. One of them, Shmuel Rosenfeld, in *The Day*, January 3, 1936, put it succinctly, “The Communists offer us the choice of pogroms or Communism; we cannot accept either.”

Dr. Koralnick himself was the first to shake off the new illusions. The continuing purge did it. “Poor Russia, poor Europe,” he lamented after the execution of the Red Army generals. “Russia is tragic not merely because people died from bullets, but because the last spark of truth and reason is extinguished in a country which had so much promise. It is impossible that all the army leaders were traitors.” *327

Dr. Koralnick did not see the end of the bloody drama. He died a month after this article appeared. But most of those who collaborated with the Communists in the IKUF and ICOR were not swerved by the executions. For this break they had to wait for another hard blow from the Kremlin. And not all broke away then.

EARLY PURGE TRIALS BEWILDERING

The sudden staging of the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial, the summer of 1936, in which the former President of the Comintern, the former

Soviet Premier and other outstanding figures were accused of entering into a bloc with the "Trotskyite wreckers" to conspire with foreign powers to "bring back the rule of the capitalists and the landowners," bewildered and confused a hitherto friendly public opinion. It was sharply out of focus with the hopes for tranquillity raised by the new constitution.

Accustomed to fair trials and ignorant of the physical and psychological torment inflicted in Soviet prisons, the West accepted the confessions of the accused, though reluctantly, as evidence of their plotting, ascribing them to inexplicable traits in the Russian nature. Only the Socialists, former Communists, and a few others, saw the trial as a bloody liquidation of Stalin's opponents. Quite a number of Communists, too, shook their heads in utter disbelief, confiding their doubts only to intimates.

Hardly had the heated controversy over the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial and execution died down when a second trial was suddenly announced, in January 1937. The accusation against the new defendants, Radek, Piatakov, Sokolnikov, Rakovsky and Krestinsky among them, were a repetition of those in the first trial, the only novelty being that the former followers of Trotsky had to confess that in all their long years of plotting crimes and treason they had acted under the direct instructions of Leon Trotsky, who was aiming to take over power in Russia and to form a triumvirate with Nazi Germany and militarist Japan to rule the world.

Several weeks later, and again without warning, came the terse announcement that eight of the leaders of the Red Army, most of them members of the general staff and some of them the most popular heroes of the civil war—Marshals Tukhachevsky and Yakir—were secretly tried on charges of high treason by a military court—lasting one day—and executed the following day. By this time the appalling scope of the purges was becoming unmistakable. Stalin was destroying the élite of the Communist Party and of the Red Army and all their friends and followers, many of whom had been the closest collaborators of Lenin. The barrage of scare spy stories that filled the Soviet press was clear evidence that the purges had extended far beyond the immediate active cadres of the party and the Red Army.

The Bukharin-Rykov trial, opened February 28, 1938, was the last of the staged trials. The spokesmen of the moderate Commu-

nist tendency were accused of entering into an alliance with Trotsky and committing all the frightful crimes enumerated in the previous trials. However, the center of the conspiracy was shifted from Western Europe to Japan and Nazi Germany; Stalin was still hoping for a military alliance with England and France. Bukharin was singled out, in addition, for the fantastic charge that he, jointly with Trotsky, had plotted the assassination of Lenin as yet in 1918, and that since then he had continued his plotting against the Soviet state.

" . . . AND HIS NAME MUST BE AN ATHEMA AMONG JEWS "

As the trials and mass executions kept on, belief in the validity of the charges was fading. People who accepted the proceedings of the first trial were now openly voicing their disbelief and horror. The public hearing held in Mexico City, April 17, 1937, by the Committee for the Defense of Trotsky—John Dewey, chairman—entangled as it was in an airing of the doctrinaire differences between Stalin and Trotsky, was also instrumental in exposing the sham of the trials.

(Trotsky, who requested the hearings, was primarily interested in a platform from which to expound his own road to Communism, rather than to arouse public opinion against Stalin.⁺⁹⁰ As Dewey and John F. Finerty, counsel of the committee, did not put any limit on the scope of the hearings, Trotsky's ideological discussions greatly diminished the public interest originally focussed on the proceedings in Mexico City.^{*328} Incidentally, Trotsky was evasive on the questions put to him by the counsel as to his stand on political democracy.

(Two months earlier, Trotsky had lost his first opportunity for a wide appeal against Stalin. He was scheduled to deliver a speech over the telephone from Mexico City to the mass meeting in the old Hippodrome in New York City, February 9th, called by his followers to exonerate him and his executed friends from the absurd accusations. Mexican Communists cut the telephone wires as he entered the telephone booth to begin his speech. However, Trotsky had mailed a copy to be read in case of such an eventuality. The speech, a discourse on the aims of his Fourth International, lacked the old Trotsky fervor, and failed to impress the capacity audience.

Moreover, they were bewildered by the other Trotskyite speakers who condemned Stalinism but praised the Socialist achievements in the Soviet Union.)

The CP had no difficulty, in 1937, in lining up a large number of writers, artists and others to sign a statement to discredit the Committee for the Defense of Trotsky. The document and the list of 88 signers were printed in *Soviet Russia Today* March 1937.⁺⁹¹

The growing disgust in the Jewish community penetrated the Communist periphery. The printed word was not sufficient to calm down the doubts nagging at the minds of many followers. To meet this emergency, the entire *Freiheit* staff as well as the functionaries of the auxiliary bodies were mobilized during March and April to deliver talks at friendly organizations justifying the executions of the Trotskyites. Their instructions were to tie in the Trotsky menace to the Soviet Union with its danger to the Jewish people. Olgin, the "authority" on Trotskyism, with his usual lack of restraint, concluded an article in English, "Trotsky is an Enemy of the Jewish People," with ". . . and his name must be anathema among Jews."^{*329}

THE PARTY FEELS EFFECT OF CHILL AIR

The atmosphere around the party after the Bukharin-Rykov trial was becoming chilly. Many of those whose names decorated the letterheads of auxiliary agencies dropped out. Others publicly expressed their bewilderment and disgust. H. Leivick was moved to write, "My brain cannot receive or encompass all this. . . . I feel shame and revulsion at it all, and for the crimes they have confessed." He ended with the despairing plea, "Spare lives; don't kill!"^{*330}

(Upton Sinclair was one of the very few writers to defend the validity of that trial. Replying to an open letter by Eugene Lyons, Sinclair admitted that the thing which had happened in Russia had caused him "many a heartache," but he still believed that "the Soviet regime [was] the best hope for the workers of Russia. . . .")^{*331}

The party felt the urgency for arresting the mounting disillusionment, and Browder and Foster made coast to coast speaking tours in the summer of 1938 to explain the trials. The local party units were told that these meetings were their greatest "concentration

point," and that they had to bring the largest number of non-party people.

In Los Angeles, the Olympic Auditorium was hired for that meeting. Posters were plastered throughout the city. Nearly 8,000 people came. Browder's entire speech was a leaf out of early American history, dealing with the treachery of Benedict Arnold and Aaron Burr. His labored attempt to place the entire Bolshevik old guard on the same level with Arnold and Burr left the audience cold.*³³² Even stalwart party comrades were unmoved by Browder's far-fetched analogy. And reports from the Browder meetings in other cities did not show much difference in audience reaction.

CONFUSION AND APPREHENSION IN PARTY RANKS

It is exceedingly difficult to gauge the depth of a feeling among Communists running contrary to the party stand. Hardly anyone would volunteer an opinion critical of a basic policy. It was especially risky to question the veracity of the staged trials. If one were to judge solely by the party press, the party orators and the resolutions of party units, one would conclude that the membership to a man was solidly behind the purges. But they were not. Many Communists were inwardly shaken, and quite a number flatly refused to believe in the guilt of the accused.

Zinoviev-Kamenev were hardly known to party comrades in the 30's. But Radek was. This short and homely man, born in Austrian Galicia, had a sarcastic and incisive pen. He was the most popular commentator on international affairs, and editors of party papers the world over were always glad to reprint his articles. Radek was a steady "contributor" to the *Freiheit*; readers waited for his opinion. Bukharin was known here, too. Many Communists were aware of the tremendous popularity Bukharin enjoyed in the Russian party. And while Tukhachevsky, Yakir and the other marshals and generals never cut great figures as Communists, their execution as saboteurs and foreign agents was no less disturbing than that of Radek and Bukharin. Yakir, the only Jew to rise from the ranks during the civil war to a marshal of the Red Army, was a hero to the Jewish Communists and their friends. The *Freiheit* had reprinted many Soviet poems eulogizing him.

After the execution of the generals, the *Freiheit* was bombarded

with letters from rank-and-file men and women asking despairingly, "Whom can we now trust?" They were ready to accept the trials at face value, but having been indoctrinated in the belief that the Communist Revolution had created a new man, a happy builder of Socialism, they were now deeply worried by the discovery of such gigantic and far-flung treachery at the very top of the Soviet command. To all these worried people the *Freiheit* had but one stereotyped answer: The class struggle was not over in the Soviet Union; and the country, not living in a vacuum, was subjected to the corrupting influence of the surrounding capitalist world. The paper also tried a more "humane" explanation, that these former leaders were weakened by the difficulties of industrialization and collectivization and lost faith in the party's policies.

Those Communists who sensed a frame-up behind the trials tried to impute them to the purely Russian "features" of Communism and not to Communism itself. What these Communists said to console themselves or their close friends was said publicly by John Strachey in his debate on Communism with Dr. William J. Durant, the philosopher, in New York City, 1937. The essence of Strachey's argument was that the executions in Russia should not be attributed to the nature of Communism, but to the violent expression of a country that had lived for 300 years under the despotic rule of the Romanoff's. Internal tension among the Russian people, he said, had always flared up in bloodshed. But in the West, with its democratic tradition and local self-government, internal disagreement, however deep-going, would never, under Communism, assume a violent form.*³³³

PARTY WRITERS DID NOT BELIEVE THEMSELVES . . .

The laudatory pieces on Stalin's vigilance in exterminating the traitors and saboteurs did not, in most cases, reflect the sincere beliefs of those who wrote them. The author can confirm this statement with a few instances of his own experience on the *Freiheit*. He was greatly surprised to find out later that the news editor, a man in his early 30's, a devout Communist given to bombastic phrases, would, in the company of trusted members of his news staff, bitterly exclaim over a cup of coffee in the cafeteria, "When will the butcher stop his killings!" But at this desk he would write

the most inciting pro-Stalin headlines over the news of the trials. And this dual morality did not seem to disturb this young man, nor his coworkers who agreed with him. For this loyalty he was promoted to managing editor of the paper. His name was Irving Freed.*³³⁴

On his return from Spain at the end of 1936, the author went to visit an old friend, an important member of the staff, then ill in bed. He found him reading the *Pravda*. Suddenly the sick man burst out, "They shoot them in bunches!" He was immediately frightened by his own words. But his visitor was quick to reassure him. The same man was among the loudest and meanest in the party press in denouncing the accused old Bolsheviks and in praising the watchfulness of the Soviet security organs. Only a few years earlier he had lived in Russia, he knew the situation there well, and was himself involved in Right deviations. Had he remained in Russia, he would surely have been among the first to be liquidated, as many of his friends were. His name was Moishe Katz. Like his younger colleague, Freed, he continues his loyal service to the cause to this day.

Come to think of it, there may have been only two people on the entire *Freiheit* staff who were gullible enough to believe in the guilt of the executed. And there is no reason to assume that their number was larger in the *Daily Worker*.

There were always a few devoted souls who delighted in eavesdropping and reporting on their comrades. The Control Commission of the party was kept busy during those tense years with cases of Communists reported to have expressed disbelief, even disgust, with Stalin's doings. The author was hailed before the Commission twice in one year, 1937. As a rule, the Commission was not eager to delve deeply into such cases. It was content with a formal denial by the defendant. Charles A. Dirba, the chairman, a Lett, was too clever not to know that if he had followed up complaints based on what Communists said in private, he could have lost a great part of the membership.

FREIHEIT MUM ON DISAPPEARANCE OF WRITERS

The Jewish Communists had, in addition, to face the disappearance without a clue of a number of leading Jewish writers and public

men in Russia, Communists and non-Communists. Among the former were Moishe Litvakov, editor of the *Emes*, Alexander Khashin, chief editorial writer, Issie Kharik, the most talented young poet, Max Erick, the essayist and historian, Professor Yasha Bronshtein, a critic, Esther Frumkin, head of the Jewish division of the Communist University, S. M. Dimandshtein, formerly chief of the Jewish Section of the party, and many more. Among the non-Communists who suddenly ceased to exist were the noted historian, Dr. J. Zinberg, the novelist, Moishe Kulback, and Professor Zvi Friedland.

The Jewish press demanded an explanation of their whereabouts. But without the formality of a trial and without any official mention of their arrest, to say nothing of their execution, the *Freiheit* could not rush to the defense of Stalin's justice by calling them spys and saboteurs. Nor could it deny their liquidation. It had to keep mum. For the same reason, the *Freiheit* had to maintain silence when the *Emes* in Moscow and the monthly *Der Shtern*, in Khar-kov, had ceased publication in 1938; no official word of their closing appeared anywhere.

The *Freiheit* and the other publications did fight back the "calumnies," but by devious means. To distract attention from the purges, stories of anti-Semitism here and in Eastern Europe were handled in a manner to scare the readers. And to bolster the ebbing confidence in the Soviet Union, they featured reports of a blossoming Jewish culture there, even inventing the story that "Jewish operas are being written there." Above all, criticism of Moscow was labeled Red-baiting, and Red-baiting was tied in with Jew-baiting. Anyone who attacked Moscow or the Communists was thus an ally of Gerald L. K. Smith and his like. "Anti-Communist lies," wrote M. Katz, "are water to the mill of anti-Semitism." *335

This playing upon Jewish sensitivity was not too helpful. The damaging impact of the purges on Jewish Communism and its agencies was greater than on the party. A few quietly left the party; more moved out of the periphery altogether. However, the greatest harm was done to the spirit of the rank and file. This was immediately reflected on the money-raising campaigns of the *Freiheit*. The financial drives in 1937-1938 were unsuccessful; 1938 was worse than 1937. A few days before the close of the 1938 campaign, only \$32,272 had been raised out of a quota of \$70,000. This despite two

months of heartrending appeals to keep the paper alive.*³³⁶ The *Freiheit* was late in appearing many times, held up by stoppages in the composition room for non-payment of wages. Stoppages of this sort had always plagued the *Freiheit*, and each time the paper was saved by advance checks secured from other party institutions. But in the spring of 1938 they were more frequent and longer lasting. A personal appeal by Browder and other party leaders to the readers of the *Freiheit*, on March 12th, failed to improve the response. And the vigorous campaign for monthly trial subscriptions was admittedly a failure. Only 107 such subscriptions were taken.

THE CONFERENCE OF JEWISH COMMUNISTS, 1938

Acutely apprehensive over the sagging buoyancy of the movement, the Bureau carefully staged the 1938 National Conference of Jewish Communists. No effort was spared to turn this usually insignificant gathering into an imposing affair to encourage its followers and attract attention in the community.

The conference opened September 24th in—of all places—Carnegie Hall. The hall was not filled despite the widely advertised musical program. Joseph Sultan, secretary of the National Council of Jewish Communists, the new name of the Bureau, in his long and dull report, reiterated that the Communists were “the best sons of the Jewish people.” The chief task was to fight anti-Semitism, which was growing everywhere except in the Soviet Union. His lame and repetitious arguments—and every paragraph was anchored to a quotation from Browder—lost their last ounce of conviction when he warned: “The Trotskyite and Lovestonite agents of fascism in the United States are seeking to infiltrate Jewish life with their disruptive and destructive activities. The struggle against these agents . . . is an integral part of the successful struggle against anti-Semitism.”*³³⁷

The constant reference to the Trotskyite and Lovestonite agents was wearing thin even for ordinary Communists. Many of them faced these “agents” daily across the work table in their shop, or as neighbors in their apartment houses. The insincerity of Sultan’s “warning” was barefaced.

Perhaps the only fresh note sounded by Sultan was the one on

the native-born. “. . . One of the great tasks of building the People’s Front is the problem of the English-speaking who are now beginning to play a significant role in the life of the Jewish people. . . . There were times when the Jewish youth had its back turned on Jewish life . . . growing reaction and fascism have taught them otherwise, and today we observe a return of the Jewish youth to their people. . . . The first task . . . is to create a journal of opinion which would address itself to the English-speaking. It should not and cannot be a Communist magazine . . . but a wide democratic front.” *338

For the first time, the delegates heard a report and a discussion of the work among the native-born. And to underline the value of this activity, three young native-born Communists were elected to the National Council, all three under assumed names.

Jack Stachel’s speech reflected the efforts of the party to convince the Jewish people of their community of interests with the CP. “A good Communist can also be a good Jew loyal to his people,” he asserted. “. . . The program of the CP is providing clarity and hope to the Jewish masses in their present dark times. . . .” *339

(The same Stachel, during his short stay in Detroit as party organizer in 1927, was maneuvering to close the three Left Wing Jewish *shules* as “nests of nationalism.” “The only place for the children,” he said, “are the party’s Pioneer clubs.” The Jewish Communists and sympathizers resisted his efforts, and Stachel had to resort to a trumped-up charge of white chauvinism against the teacher, David Flakser, and his wife. Both were expelled from the party, and only then were the *shules* and a cultural club closed. Flakser’s appeal against his expulsion remained unanswered. But two years later, Stachel met him on the street in New York, and said, “Now you can rejoin the party.”) *340

The conference was impressive only in its numbers. There were 439 delegates and 34 fraternal delegates, from 32 cities, also from Canada and Cuba. Only 43 delegates were charter members of the party. It was the last attempt at such a grand gathering.

LOW SPIRITS; THE DEFEAT IN A BIG UNION

The confusion created by the purges, the helplessness in the face of the Nazi occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia and the

armed fighting in Madrid, March 1939, between the Communist troops and those of the Republican Commander-in-Chief, General Miaja, previously portrayed in the Communist press as a dependable friend, was leaving a residue of gloom in many a heart; the Communist periphery was shrinking. The response to the frequent calls for "action" was smaller, and the turnover in the party units alarmingly greater.

(On returning to New York from his "exile" in California in the spring of 1939, the author was informed by the girl in charge of changing party books, whom he knew, that the turnover in the last membership drive in New York had reached an all-time high of 67 per cent.)

A meaningful indicator of the slackening Communist impetus was the defeat of the administration ticket in Local 117, an important Jewish affiliate of the ILGWU, composed of Communists and Right-Wingers, the latter known as the Tolerance Group. In March 1937, this group, headed by Louis Levy and Rubin Zuckerman, had entered into a working agreement with the Communists in the belief that the complexities of the industry required unity of all active elements, and that the changed Communist attitude made this unity desirable. The Communists were more than willing to become a part of the leadership. Their greatest asset was Joseph Boruchowitz, a man with considerable influence among the workers.

A number of Right-Wingers were opposed to cooperation with the Communists. But they had no alternative; to split their ranks was unthinkable at that time. The lowering of Soviet prestige and the weakening of Communist morale encouraged these Right-Wingers, in the spring of 1939, to put up their own list of candidates against the Tolerance-Communist bloc, thus causing a rift among the Right. And to the amazement of many, they unseated the administration. This defeat was an irreparable loss to the Communists. They were never given another chance. Benjamin Kaplan, who led the revolt against the Tolerance Group and their Communist allies, was elected manager of the union. He is now a vice president of the ILGWU.

Another sign of the emotional exhaustion was the poor showing at the *Freiheit* anniversary celebration, May 1939, arranged in Madison Square Garden with the express purpose of creating an air of festivity to dispel the spreading apathy.

HOPES ON MOSCOW AND WARNINGS AGAINST THEM

Not all Jewish public men were cured by the purges of their credibility in the Soviet regime as a trustworthy foe of anti-Semitism and fascism. As the tragic Jewish reality in Central and Eastern Europe became more apparent, they clung in despair to the Soviet Union as a potential life saver.

As yet in 1937, the *Forward*, replying to a letter signed by 12 readers, stated, "In case of a war between Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union, we and all our *genossen* will support Russia with all our heart. There can be no difference of opinion and no different sentiment." *341 And, in the fall of 1938, Ab. Cahan, commenting on the proposed trip of Chamberlain and Daladier to Hitler, paused to consider the possibility that Hitler might prove to be intractable, thus making a war inescapable.

"In the event that Soviet Russia should fight on the side of Czechoslovakia, England and France," he went on, "what would the attitude of our *Forward* people be? There is only one answer—we have expressed this view several times before—stern enemies of Bolshevism that we are . . . in the flame of the bloody clashes between the Allies and Nazi Germany, our criticism of Stalin's bloody dictatorship would have to be postponed. . . . We would probably be asked, 'And what if after such a war Stalinism would gain in prestige and power?' Our answer would be, 'Yes, this is possible, and we would regret it. However, the immediate problem today is how to crush the Hitler power, which menaces not only us Jews . . . but the entire civilized world and civilization itself. And if Soviet Russia will enter the war on the side of the Allies in a sincere manner and with the energy that its huge size and resources provide it, without any ulterior thoughts, it will be an enormous power and all our objections to Stalin's blood-stained hands will have to be postponed until after the war.'" *342

The old fighting editor was careful to add that this possible moratorium did not extend to the domestic Communists. Utterly destructive, they had to be fought to the very end.

Jacob Gladstein, who never wavered in his condemnation of Communism, posed the question, in 1938, of revising the anti-Soviet position exclusively from a Jewish viewpoint. He reasoned: ". . . Still, there is no anti-Semitism in Russia. . . . In the present awful

times this is a consolation. . . . The question is not whether to accept the Soviet misdeeds in good coin. It is a matter of establishing a mental diplomatic contact with an existing government which is, despite its misdeeds, a part of our Jewish map. We have there more than three million Jews, and they are still better off than those in Poland, and incomparably better off than those in Nazi Germany." *343

The "mental diplomatic contact" did not include the Jewish Communists. They, wrote Gladstein, were "manufacturing Jewish issues to suit their party needs."

Another voice was heard, too, firmly warning against any illusions regarding a reformed Communism or a changed Kremlin. Dr. Iser Ginsberg, a respected publicist, observed that the "so-called struggle against anti-Semitism can lead to the strengthening of Communist influence." He was fearful lest "the impression will be created among non-Jews that Communism and Judaism are synonymous. . . . The Communists are shouting and making noise about anti-Semitism, but really they don't care; they are only out to gain a few dozen followers." *344

Another popular commentator, Jacob Fishman, editor of the *Morning Journal*, contradicted the reasoning that the struggle against Communism now was tantamount to aiding reaction and anti-Semitism.

"There are a number of well-meaning people," he wrote, "among them Jewish writers, who accept each manifestation among Americans against Communism as a sign of reaction. According to them, the democracies should confine their fight to fascism and Nazism. . . . I believe that this opinion is false and harmful. Communism today is no less a menace for the world than it was at the beginning." *345

The test came in the same year. Ginsberg and Fishman were fully borne out.

40 *The Four Hectic Days*

Summer of 1939. The disquieting news from abroad is creating tension here. The fruit of the Munich agreement, September 1938, is ripening. Austria and Czechoslovakia are firmly in the grip of the Nazis. Hitler is now pressing his claims on Poland. Even Chamberlain is alarmed. *Peace in Our Time* is clearly leading to war. London is now frankly trying to unite Europe against the Nazis. Eden is visiting the European capitals and avoiding Moscow. Second-rate French and English generals are in Moscow for military negotiations.

The Spanish Republic has gone down ingloriously. Thousands of stateless volunteers, many of them Jews, neglected, are undergoing hardships and indignities in French camps, and Paris is going out of its way to win the favor of Franco, the victor.

The famous ship *St. Louis*, hundreds of refugees aboard, their destination Palestine, vainly sailing around for weeks from port to port, is finally permitted to land in France. Other boats wander with their human cargo over the Mediterranean, highlighting the untenable situation of Eastern European Jewry.

The political climate in this country is not conducive to optimism either. There is little comprehension of what is brewing in Europe. Roosevelt's speech in Chicago a year earlier, October 1938, calling for the quarantine of an aggressor was received coldly if not with hostility, the CP being the most vociferous among the small groups lauding his stand. The Congressional elections in the same year showed a rising conservative tendency. The New Deal reforms are

stopped. The economic situation is not too good either. The quiet but painful recession, that began in that year, is still felt in the summer of 1939. In the semi-luxury industries, such as the garment and allied trades, conditions are most unfavorable.

The scheduled parade of the Christian Fronters through the heart of Manhattan, ostensibly against the Communists but really against the Jews, is stopped under the strong protest of Jewish bodies. But Jewish uneasiness is growing.

The CP and its press are still busy trying to erase the damaging effect of the purges in Russia. Spain has given them a new job, slandering all those exposing Stalin's meddling in Spanish affairs and the terror of his GPU there. But the major task is still the "forging of the unity of all democratic forces against fascist aggression," support of Roosevelt's progressive policies and his plan for strengthening American arms.

A 250-page collection of Browder's speeches for collective security and domestic unity, called *Fighting for Peace*, is widely distributed. In it Norman Thomas is severely criticized for his neutrality stand. In another booklet by Browder, *Social and National Security*, Chamberlain is indicted for the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. Russia is called "the front-line trench in defense of world peace," and Roosevelt, "the chief figure in the progressive or liberal camp."³⁴⁶

The booklet closes on a note of optimism: "The spirit of Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln has not departed from the American people. . . ."

On the Jewish sector, the Communists continue to insist on *Unity to Save European Jewry*, fighting anti-Semitism here, and buttressing and extending Jewish culture. The Soviet Union is faithfully presented as solving all intricate economic, social and national problems, the Jewish included. Appeasement of Hitler is condemned and neutrality decried as next to it.

Olgin has already begun Judaizing the Presidential elections of 1940. His first article labors to find a specific role for the Jews in the elections.³⁴⁷

RUMORS AND DENIALS; OMINOUS SIGNS FROM MOSCOW

As yet in early May, rumors were circulating of an impending rapprochement between Moscow and Berlin. As most of them ema-

nated from Berlin, the Communist press could, with righteous indignation, call them blatant Nazi propaganda.

In a front-page editorial, the *Freiheit* wrote: "We are not going to ask the *Forward* how long it is going to continue chewing the dirty lie of an "agreement" with Hitler when the facts have always shown that this is a lie. . . . It hurts them that the Soviet Union is for collective action against the fascists and Hitler." *348

A similar press story the same month brought this acid comment from the *Freiheit*: "Their stubborn prophecy about an agreement between Moscow and Berlin did not come true . . . and it could not come true. . . . The whole world realizes now that the Soviet government is the best, most consistent and truest fighter against Hitler. . . . There is mourning on Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin and mourning on East Broadway *strasse* in New York." *349

The first discordant note in the fiery anti-fascist barrage from Moscow was the article in the *Pravda*, June 29th, by Zhdanov. A member of the Politburo and Stalin's favorite, Zhdanov accused England and France of "not being serious" in their negotiations with Russia for an alliance against aggression. "They want others to take the chestnuts out of the fire for them," he said. But he was careful to add, "This is my personal opinion, though my friends do not agree with me."

Zhdanov had obviously not acted without Stalin's permission. His doubts were aired in public as a trial balloon for a possible alliance with Hitler. (Stalin was then negotiating with both sides, with the Allies openly and with Hitler secretly.) Still, European public opinion was lulled by semi-official statements in London that Zhdanov's piece aimed only to bring England and France "closer to the Russian viewpoint," to wrest from them more favorable terms for Moscow. *350

More dismaying news followed Zhdanov's article. Negotiations had been started in Berlin for the extension of Soviet-German trade. But Harold Denny cabled from Moscow that it was unlikely that the Soviets intended to go any further than the possibility of extending trade with Germany. *351

Whether these negotiations were a part of a normal trade policy or were meaningful politically was a question troubling even Communists. Still, the anti-fascist tenor of the Soviet press was reassuring.

THE BLOWS COME ONE AFTER THE OTHER

Events were spinning fast that August. The free city of Danzig was seized by Hitler. A general Nazi attack on Poland was imminent. Uppermost in everyone's mind was the question, "Who will come to the aid of Poland?" The Communists here were convinced that the Red Army would be the first, followed in all likelihood by a French attack on Germany from the West.

Olgin was ill, and the managing editor was on vacation. Melech Epstein, though politically distrusted, was in editorial charge of the paper. Directly involved, he may be permitted to inject his own part in the four hectic days that followed, retracing each successive step.

In a feature article on Poland, Epstein stated that it was "impossible to believe that Paris and Moscow will stand idly by, just as it is impossible to imagine that London will be able to remain neutral when France and the Soviet Union come to the aid of Poland." *352

But 24 hours later, Monday, August 21st, the wires carried the news that a trade agreement had been concluded between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Amidst the rumors of secret negotiations between the two capitals, the timing of this agreement could only cause grave foreboding. The *Pravda* editorial, cabled the day before, about the strict business character of the negotiations, was not entirely convincing.

Doubts were creeping into the *Freiheit* editorial rooms, affecting even those who until now had been serenely confident that the rumors were Nazi fabrications. Having to write the editorial, Epstein phoned Sam Don, the political commissar of the *Daily Worker*, to find out what his paper was going to say. His answer was typical for this unimaginative bureaucrat, "Let's keep quiet and wait until we hear from Moscow." As Epstein insisted upon an immediate explanation for the readers, a conference was hastily called for 3 PM of the same day, at the office of Jack Stachel, executive secretary of the CEC of the party.

Browder was on vacation, Foster and Bittelman were out of town too. About seven or eight members of the political committee, Don and Harry Gannes, foreign editor of the *Daily Worker*, and Epstein were there. No draft of a statement had been prepared for the meet-

ing, only an article by Gannes, who was quick to sense a shift in the political wind from Moscow.

After Gannes had finished, there was hesitancy in the room, everyone waiting for the other to speak. Epstein broke the silence. Opposing Gannes, he expressed the belief—shattered the next day—that the trade agreement did not affect the general anti-fascist position of the Soviet Union, and that the Red Army would certainly come to the aid of Poland when attacked by Hitler. Stachel immediately responded by saying that Epstein's viewpoint was "fundamentally rejected." This was the signal for the rest to assail his position; by this time more people had come in. Frankest among them was the Comintern man, a slightly built man in his middle 40's with a pale face and a scholarly bearing. "Why must the Soviet Union keep fighting the Nazis all the time," he said. "Let England and France do it from now on." His remark ended the meeting. On the way out, he approached Epstein, put a hand on his shoulder, and said apologetically, "I fully understand the difficulties of you comrades of the *Freiheit*, but what can we do?" Epstein went back to his office with a heavy heart.

The conference left things hanging in the air. The *Daily Worker*, in the next issue, handled the embarrassing news by printing Gannes' piece on the front page instead of the straight story. His subtitle read: "Plot of Anglo-French-Rome-Berlin Munichmen Hit by Soviet Trade Pact." The Associated Press was called the chief news spokesman of American reaction for writing that the pact came like a bombshell. The Trotskyites came in for their share of blame.

The *Freiheit* had a small news item in a corner, and the editorial was a sort of last ditch marshalling of evidence to show that Moscow could be counted on to play its role in defense of Polish independence, that the trade agreement was just what the *Pravda* said it was, and that Poland itself, by recalling its troops from the Russian border, understood this too. But Epstein was no longer convinced of his own words. This was the last piece he did in the *Freiheit*.

THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENED; THE SHOCK

The big blow fell the same day, Tuesday, August 23rd. The morning papers flashed the sensational news from Moscow and Berlin

that Von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister, was coming to Moscow on Wednesday to conclude a non-aggression pact. The *Daily Worker* gave the news a single column headline, dated London. Underneath followed a Tass cable stating, "After the . . . Soviet-German trade and credit agreement, there arose the problem of improving the political relations between Germany and the Soviet Union. . . . An exchange of views . . . showed that both parties desire to relieve the tension . . . to eliminate the war menace and to conclude a non-aggression pact. . . . Consequently, Von Ribbentrop will arrive in Moscow . . . for the corresponding negotiations."

The Tass cable, couched in a matter-of-fact tone, hid more than it revealed. Ribbentrop had come not to *negotiate* but to *conclude* negotiations, imparting a sinister design to the deal. The *Daily Worker* tried to cushion the shock by "covering" the news with a piece by Gannes. Like a man on a trapeze, Gannes swung from one position to the other. Piling all the blame on the "Munichmen," he predicted with feigned smugness that in the pact "the camp of peace and democracy will become strengthened. . . . The Polish people will be further encouraged to resist both the threats of fascist aggression and the underhand conspiracy of the Munichers. . . ." *853

The party building on 12th and 13th streets was hushed. Party functionaries avoided talking to each other. The worst sufferers were the switchboard operators. They were swamped with telephone calls all day long by worried Communists unable to credit their own eyes. The day was hot, but inside the building was hotter. Groups of harassed people kept coming to the two party papers, on their lips the same insistent question, "Is it possible?"

The political committee was again hurriedly called in, and the word was passed around that a non-aggression pact did not really mean any change in the position of the Soviet Union as a bulwark against fascism. Browder, recalled from his vacation, came back the same day. Reporters kept clamoring for an interview. He had to agree at last. The interview was set for 3 PM.

At the appointed time, Browder's room on the ninth floor was jammed with reporters and party officers. The latter came to give him a sympathetic audience. Browder tried to assume an air of confidence. Uneasily, he rocked back and forth in his swivel chair, smoking cigarette after cigarette.

Browder denied that anything unusual had occurred. Pressed in-

cessantly by Joseph Shaplen of the *New York Times*, he told the press that the non-aggression pact would contain the usual escape clause, and that the Red Army would definitely enter the situation if Poland was invaded by Hitler. Browder ended the interview with the promise to meet the press a week later to prove that events would bear him out. But when the week had passed he refused to see them.

It was obvious that Browder was stalling for time. The Ribbentrop mission was a complete surprise to him. His vacillation only heightened the uncertainty and the excitement among the party people present.

The non-aggression and friendship pact, the most consequential document since the Versailles Peace Treaty, was signed the same Wednesday in Moscow by Ribbentrop and V. Molotov; Stalin, pipe in mouth, benevolently looking on. The papers that carried Browder's interview had on the front page the text of the pact—with no mention of an escape clause. The *Daily Worker* suppressed the dispatch of the United Press entirely, and the *Freiheit* reduced it to a small news item in a corner. But the Communists read the official communiques in other papers; so did everybody else.

The reaction was volcanic. Jewish Communists were met by their shopmates with the Nazi salute and a "Heil Hitler!" There were fist fights in the garment center. Many people had their relatives in Poland and in the Baltic states threatened by Hitler; they felt that Stalin had let them down. Hundreds of Communists again came running to the party offices, on every face a look of shock and simple disbelief. They begged for some explanation, and not getting any drifted off like shadows. .

To check the mounting horror and confusion in the party offices, a meeting was called of party editors and heads of auxiliaries for the next day, Thursday. Not Browder, but Bittelman was put forward for the delicate job of justifying the pact. Browder needed time to regain his composure. He also wanted to wait for a clear cue from Moscow. About 40 people were present. Stachel presided. Everyone was supplied with pencil and paper to jot down Bittelman's ideas. He spoke for two full hours, recounting the past and present sins of British imperialism. Clearly, the British could not be trusted. Entirely omitting the defense of Poland, Bittelman's

most significant directive was *The Main Fire Against the Chamberlain's*. It was a shrewd move to veil the real issue.

The mood in the room varied. The majority used their pencils diligently. Only a few, too upset to hide their disgust, did not touch them.*³⁵⁴

DEFENSE OF POLAND STILL ON PARTY'S LIST

As the true plans of Moscow were revealed only piecemeal, the party, disregarding Bittelman's "main fire," moved cautiously, groping its way to a course not as yet fully charted. At a special national conference in Chicago, September 1-4, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the party, Poland was not yet deserted; indeed, the conference advanced the slogans, *Help Those who Help Poland* and *Embargo Japan and Germany*.^{*355} The Nazi armies were already in the fourth day of their invasion of Poland. The conference also addressed an open letter to Roosevelt urging upon him the further unity of American progressives, and calling him "the expression of the progressive trend in American life." The letter was given a big spread on the front page of the *Daily Worker*.^{*356}

The party papers participated in the enormous sympathy felt in America for Poland. The *Daily Worker* paid glowing tribute to the heroic Polish people, demanded that England and France give more military aid to Poland, and even called, though lamely, for American assistance to Poland. As late as September 11th, a front page editorial stated, "The heroic resistance in Warsaw calls forth the deepest admiration and warm heartfelt sympathy of humanity everywhere. . . . The American people should be increasing every support to the Polish people. . . . Above all, the trade unions should speak out condemning this wanton fascist attack on Poland. . . ."

The *Freiheit*, trying to appease an infuriated Jewish opinion, was particularly outspoken in its denunciation of the Nazi invasion, sharing in the general Jewish apprehension over the fate of three million Polish Jews. "It is a war similar to the previous ones in Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain and China," its editorial said, "in the sense that it is not difficult to point a finger to the aggressor. . . . Still, the American people, because of their stubborn pro-fascists and isolationists, their Hoover people, Hamilton Fish's and Norman Thomas', have to remain passive onlookers. The heart of the

American people goes out to the attacked and heroic Polish people. . . ." ³⁵⁷ The paper hinted that Nazi money was behind the efforts of the isolationists.

Browder's long speech at the Madison Square Garden meeting, September 11th, reflected this careful waiting-to-hear-from-Moscow attitude. Calling London and Paris "so-called democratic governments," who failed "to rise above their conflicting imperialist ambitions," a bow to Bittelman's *Main Fire Against the Chamberlain's*, his "main fire" was actually leveled against the fascists, the "immediate instigators and perpetrators of war. . . ." ³⁵⁸

Unhappily for Browder, the following afternoon, September 12th, new directives arrived from Moscow. They were contained in a cable to the party press quoting a piece that was to appear in the *Pravda*. This was the usual device by which Moscow issued political instructions. The quoted opinion placed the Allies and Nazi Germany on the same level, and was in fact an order to treat them as two imperialist camps fighting for a redivision of the world.

Browder's Garden speech was already set up in the *Daily Worker*, and it was too late for drastic changes. It was also unthinkable to let the speech pass once the Kremlin's voice had been heard. The serious dilemma was resolved by a hurried interview between Browder and Harry Gannes, both the interview and the speech appearing in the same issue, September 13th, the former on the front page, the latter on an inside page-and-a-half. ³² The interview was a remarkable exercise in mental acrobatics. Gannes began with the remark that "Browder contributed some highly important clarifications of significant positions in his now-famous speech." The "important clarifications" were that Browder had now put the Allies and the fascists on the same footing, and had severely censured Roosevelt and his policies.

The *Freiheit*, having to translate the long speech, had the advantage of time and opportunity to change its contents.

MOLOTOV SIGNALS THE NEW COURSE

The tenderness for Polish independence did not last long. On September 18th, a cable from Moscow transmitted the full text of Molotov's radio address announcing to the world that "The Red Army (in Poland) will cover itself with new deeds of heroism and

glory," and that it was "liberating our brother Byelorussian and our brother Ukrainian." In the same issue, the headline of another Moscow cable read: "Oppressed Peoples Greet Red Army as Liberators from Menace of Fascist Invasion." "The Red Army," it announced, "is being met with joy by Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians and other minorities." The *Freiheit* added the word "Jews."

This opened a new Communist offensive. The previous blushing for and inept defense of the Stalin-Hitler pact gave way to a new strategy: the pact was not an alliance with Hitler, but a mighty step to stop him; the Red Army's occupation of Poland was not a betrayal, but an act of liberation, bringing freedom to all oppressed nationalities, including the Polish masses themselves. Overnight, Poland became a decayed country which had no right to exist.*³⁵⁹ This new motif became the be-all and end-all of the Communist counterattack.

In a few weeks, and without any discussion in its press or ranks, the party reverted to a neo-Third Period course. The first move was a declaration by the political committee stretching out a friendly hand to all isolationist and pacifist groups: "(Our) task is to overcome all artificial division among the peace forces . . . and to bring them together in a United Front." *³⁶⁰

Next came the new thesis in Browder's lengthy speech in Philadelphia, September 29th: "It is an imperialist war, and both sides are equally guilty. The Soviet Union acts for peace, and the pact with Germany stopped Nazi advance." The American monopoly capital was trying "to get the maximum profits out of the European war," and "when profits can no longer be made from Europe (it) will have to be squeezed out of the blood of American boys. . . ." *³⁶¹

As to the measures against the Communist Party—Browder and several other key Communists were indicted for passport violations—he wound up with this admonition: "But we warn these gentlemen that if they think they can outlaw the CP and then proceed with their planned attacks against the labor movement and the dragging of America into this imperialist war . . . they are making a great historical mistake." Nevertheless, a year later, the party announced its formal withdrawal from the Communist International, a precautionary measure against prosecution under the Voorhis Act.

Stop the Imperialist War, became the Communist cry.

"HITLERISM IS A MATTER OF TASTE"—IZVESTIA

It was becoming manifestly clear that the non-aggression pact contained secret clauses for a division of the spoils, and that as a part of the bargain Moscow was involving its parties abroad in a campaign to weaken the Allies by denying them any anti-fascist motive and demanding an immediate "people's peace." Such a peace would secure for Stalin his new conquests without involvement in a world war.

This part of the bargain was revealed in the cynical editorial of the *Izvestia*, October 9th, attacking England and France for refusing to accept Hitler's new terms (after the partition of Poland—M.E.) "as a real and practical basis . . . for an earlier conclusion of peace." Remarking that the struggle against Hitlerism had been advanced by the Allies as the chief aim of the war, the *Izvestia* declared, "Everyone is entitled to express his attitude toward one or another ideology, defend it or reject it, but extermination of a people for the reason that someone does not like certain views of an ideology is senseless and an absurd cruelty. It throws back to the dark medieval age of devastating religious wars. . . ."

"One may respect or hate Hitlerism just as any other system of political views. This is a matter of *taste* (italics M.E.). But to undertake war for the 'annihilation' of Hitlerism means to commit criminal folly in politics." *362

Neither the *Freiheit* nor the *Daily Worker* dared to print the full *Izvestia* editorial. The phrase "Hitlerism is a matter of taste" was omitted by both papers. It was too dangerous.

(Three weeks later, Molotov, addressing the Supreme Soviet, also dwelt on the senselessness and cruelty of an ideological war against Nazi Germany. Molotov repeated the two paragraphs in the *Izvestia* word for word, but he was careful to change "a matter of taste" to "a matter of political views.") *363

A short while later, another embarrassing cable arrived from Moscow, Stalin's reply to Ribbentrop's congratulations on his 60th birthday. Stalin wrote, "The friendship of the German and Soviet Russian people is cemented by blood . . . and has every reason to be lasting." *364

The voice of the Great Stalin could not be suppressed. So these words were lumped together with his other acknowledgments under

a neutral title, at the lower end of the page. But the general press was not so reticent; it commented widely on Stalin's phrase.

DEMOCRATIC FRONT AND LABOR UNITY DISCARDED

By the middle of October, the break with the Democratic era was nearly complete. The resolution of the political committee on October 13th bristled with the familiar revolutionary vocabulary of the early 30's, dressed up to suit the new situation. "The working class . . . must at all cost prevent the British and French ruling classes, aided by the reactionary monopolists of all countries, from transforming the present war . . . into a counterrevolutionary imperialist war against the Soviet Union." *365

Democratic unity was thrown overboard in its entirety, though not in so many words: "The present war between two imperialist groups has *basically altered all international relations and is profoundly changing the class and political alignments within each capitalist nation.* . . . (italics in text) It is imperative for the American working class and toiling people to pursue an independent policy. . . .

"The slogans of anti-fascism no longer give the main direction to the struggle of the working class . . . as they formerly did. . . .

"United fronts are impossible with these tendencies and groups in the labor movement which follow the treacherous policy of Social Democracy, support the imperialist war, seek to drag America into it, incite against the Soviet Union and hamper the struggle of the working class against imperialism, capitalism and intensified capitalist reaction and exploitation. . . ." *366

The resolution ended with "under the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. . . ." Jefferson, Paine and Lincoln were dropped, casualties of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

COMMUNISTS FIGHT ROOSEVELT IN 1940

To complete the cycle of its new isolation, the party furiously opposed Roosevelt's nomination for a third term in 1940. All the sinister plotting hitherto ascribed to the Republican candidates were now laid at Roosevelt's door. He was now the chief war-monger, and in conspiracy with Wall Street against the workers.

In a joint statement by Browder and Foster, headlined "Communist Party Places Roosevelt and Wilkie in the Same Reactionary Camp," the President was accused of "busily dismantling the New Deal, . . . bidding energetically for the support of the economic royalists . . . to prove to them that he can carry out their program much more effectively than their own direct representatives. . . ." *367

Trying to divert labor votes from Roosevelt, the CP nominated its own ticket, Browder for President and James Ford as his running mate. It was an act of near-suicide, bound to cause ill feeling toward the party among sections of labor and liberals, who had been wooed so persistently. Moreover, as the election campaign grew in intensity, it became unmistakable that most of the Communist brickbats were reserved for Roosevelt. (The party at that time had another daily at its disposal, though not an official one, the *People's World*, in San Francisco, with a circulation of five to six thousand.) "The Fascist Axis in Roosevelt's Foreign Policy," was the title of an article by Foster.*368 And because the Communist ticket was taken off the ballot in several states, the party press kept repeating the insulting question, "Does Roosevelt want a Hitler election?" *369

In this campaign, as throughout its drive for neutrality and a People's Peace, the Communist press spoke in the name of the people: "The masses will not permit . . ." "The masses will express their anger . . ." "The people demand . . ." And the more isolated the CP became from the masses of the people, the louder its papers spoke in their name.

This method was copied from the Soviet press. But there no one could challenge them on "the will of the people." Here, for a small party to have the masses in the vest pocket on every issue was ridiculous. Nevertheless, their press clung to it; it was comforting to believe that Communists were genuine spokesmen for the people, regardless of the latter's lack of understanding. At the same time, the Soviet press was provided with a chance to quote an American paper as evidence that the masses were against the policies of the "ruling circles."

ROOSEVELT IS ANTI-JEWISH, INVEIGHS FREIHEIT

P. Novick, an expert in the technique of the spill-over, by which decent people are arbitrarily linked with one or two bad characters

to stain them, strung together the names of Chamberlain and Daladier, the "Munichmen," with that of Roosevelt. Secretary of State Cordell Hull approved the Munich pact—so said Novick—and Roosevelt was Hull's boss. As one who helped to bring about the Munich pact was an enemy of the Jewish people, it followed that Roosevelt, as a "Munichman," was anti-Jewish. Things equal to the same things are equal to each other. He cited another example: The Department of Justice did not proceed against the Coughlin's, and Roosevelt was boss of the Attorney General. . . .³⁷⁰

The Jewish Communists were fighting Roosevelt's third term with predictions of the dire consequences to the Jews of American participation in the war. This was the burden of the arguments directed at the Jews by the *Freiheit*, in its Yiddish and English columns, in special pamphlets, over the radio, and in a brochure by Rabbi Moses Miller. The Jews were extolled as a peace-loving people, and the war was pictured as a boon to anti-Semitism and racial discrimination.

The new Communist tactics did not go unchallenged. The Jewish press was quick to charge that the attacks against Roosevelt were aimed to help Wendel Wilkie, supported by the isolationists. Roosevelt held the affection of the majority of the Jews, and this charge hit the Jewish Communists in a vulnerable spot, compelling them to divert a part of their ammunition against the Republican nominee. The press also resented the Communist scare campaign. Nevertheless, the Communist Party had its Presidential candidate make a special radio appeal to the Jewish voters over WOR, on November 3rd.

Roosevelt was hurt but little by the Communist campaign against him. Their own vote—the Communist ticket was not on the ballot in all states—was too negligible to be published.

The *Freiheit* was sullen. Its weekly review of the Jewish press was headlined, "The Meanest Press in the Meanest Campaign."³⁷¹

The party conducted an intensive drive to have John L. Lewis, anti-Roosevelt and isolationist, renominated as president of the CIO in 1940. The entire Left in the CIO was mobilized for that purpose. Michael Quill led the Communist-Left forces at the CIO convention in Atlantic City, October of that year. Sidney Hillman was the strategist for the pro-Roosevelt delegates. His blunt speech

against the Communists decided the outcome.*³⁷² Lewis was compelled to honor his promise not to run, and Philip Murray, who favored Roosevelt, was elected president.

The party was defeated in its efforts to block Roosevelt's endorsement by the American Labor Party in New York, despite its hold on many of the ALP clubs. It also lost its fight against Roosevelt in the non-Partisan League in New Jersey and in similar places. The pro-Roosevelt sentiment among organized workers proved overwhelming.

THE ELECTION FAILURE; THE PEACE VIGIL

Browder's trial, January 1940, and his four-year prison term, a rather stiff sentence for a passport violation, gave the CP a martyr of its own. The special campaign in the 14th Congressional District, on the East Side, coming up at that time, seemed to the party a rare opportunity to rally masses of people behind Browder, thus to demonstrate their opposition to the "warmongering monopolists." The district had a majority of foreign-born, including many Jews. Browder's candidacy for Congress was declared high priority, and the campaign was cast as a significant action to keep America out of the war and preserve democratic rights. The party papers were almost entirely given over to the anti-war issues and to extolling Browder's virtues, the *Freiheit* adding a Jewish angle: why Jews should note for Browder.

The returns were sadly disappointing, though the *Freiheit* cheerfully pointed to Browder's two per cent gain over the Communist percentage in a previous election.*³⁷³ The rest of the Jewish papers punctured this claim by showing that Browder's 3,000 votes compared very poorly with the 7,000 votes of the Communist candidate for City Council in the same district in 1938. And though the total vote in the special election was far below that of 1938, still the bare fact that the vote for the Communist leader about to go to jail was cut over 56 per cent was a significant barometer of the sentiment of the people.

The party tried hard to link its drive for America's neutrality with the pacifist and neutralist tendencies prevailing among sections of the population. And to give these tendencies organizational expression, a new front body was created, the American Peace Mobi-

lization, an offshoot of the League for Peace and Democracy. It was formed at a "congress" in Chicago at the end of August 1940, and, true to form, a few non-Communists were placed at its head. Though its slogan was *Keep America Out of the Imperialist War*, the new body actively intervened in behalf of Earl Browder and Harry Bridges, the Pacific Coast longshoreman leader on trial for deportation. As the country was steadily moving toward increasing aid to the Allies, the APM, at a conference in Washington, January 25, 1941, set up a Peace Vigil—mass picketing—in front of the White House to protest the proposed Lend-Lease and the program of national defense. The pickets were not molested by the police, to the chagrin of the Communists, and whatever nuisance value they possessed was offset by the clear imprint of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

By mere coincidence, the Peace Vigil was stopped a day before Hitler's attack on Russia. The *Daily Worker*, in announcing this decision, called it "a job well done. . . . After a thousand hours of continuous day and night picketing, the Perpetual Peace Vigil will end today in a great sidewalk demonstration before the White House." Frederick N. Field, national secretary of the APM, gave the following reason: "The objective of dramatically presenting to the national administration the people's loathing of war and their opposition to Roosevelt's thrust to the shooting stage has been brilliantly attained. . . . The APM plans new action." *374

The "new action" never came off.

41 *Excitement and Fury*

Jewish anger at the Stalin-Hitler pact was understandably more profound and more widespread. *The Day*, not too hard on the Soviet Union in the recent past, spoke out sharply: "A horrible treason. The worst has come . . . an infamous document for a country which in the last few years has pressed the democratic countries to its bosom, . . . which moved heaven and earth for collective security . . . a country which claims to be Socialist . . . is bringing on a world catastrophe with open eyes. . . . Millions of Jews in the center of world fire . . . are now in the hands of Hitler." *375

And the *Morning Journal*, in an indignant editorial on the justification of the pact by the *Freiheit*, called for the annihilation of Jewish Communism: "The Jewish enemy of the Jewish people raises his head, and it is our duty to hit him with an iron bar on the head, as one would a snake." *376

A reporter, sent by *The Day* to the garment center on Seventh Avenue during the lunch hour to hear the comments of the people, found the workers standing around in circles talking excitedly; the Communists prudently avoided mingling with the crowd.

"Who could have believed it?" one exclaimed. "If someone had told me that a month ago, I would have scratched his eyes out," a younger man said in agitation. A third said wistfully, "If I could force my way into the *Morning Freiheit*, I would make a little pogrom there for the few dollars I gave them a couple of weeks ago. . . ." "The *Freiheit* tells me now that condemning Moscow means siding with Chamberlain. But Chamberlain is not going to

help Hitler . . .," remarked another bitterly. "I bought all the five papers today, one can go crazy reading them . . .," someone else broke in.^{*377}

The small group of outstanding men of letters, lured by a cause dear to them—Yiddish culture—to collaborate with the Communists in the IKUF, immediately severed relations with that body. For some this was not the first, but the second break with the Communist movement. They had left the *Freiheit* in 1929 in protest against its anti-Jewish position. The most prominent of them were: Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, H. Leivick, Joseph Opatoshu, Peretz Hirshbein, David Ignatoff, Menachem Boraisha, Dr. A. Mukdoni and Ben Zion Goldberg. Zhitlowsky was not anxious to resign from the IKUF. He tried to influence the others to wait and see what would happen to Poland. But the group's insistence on leaving immediately impelled him to join them.^{*378}

The Communists on the IKUF executive pleaded with them to withdraw their resignation, arguing that the work for Jewish culture should not be disrupted by political factors. And they had weighty reasons for their efforts to avoid a break. The continued collaboration of outstanding writers in an important auxiliary at that trying moment would have been a sort of protecting shield for Jewish Communism. Besides, none of the leading Communists had any clear idea of where Stalin was heading, and they were stalling for time. But the signers of the letter of resignation refused to be dissuaded, pointing to the Declaration of Principles adopted at the IKUF congress in Paris, which included the struggle against fascism as part of its cultural program.

There were a few, the veteran Jacob Milch and Reuben Brainin among them, who remained with the Communists throughout the crisis, finding extenuating circumstances for the pact with Hitler.⁺⁹⁸

Menachem Boraisha, a sensitive poet-essayist, wrote a piece, really a confession, which seemed to express the distress of the entire group:

"Thanks be to Stalin. He has cut open the abscess and the 'pus' will run off and the blood will stop, and the patient will open his eyes and be cured. . . . How much pain and strain were required in the last ten years . . . to maintain at least a shred of faith that everything going on in Moscow meant redemption! Iron dictatorship, concentration camps, the slaughter of comrades and builders of the

Revolution, espionage, informers, servility, dehumanization. . . . All the shedding of innocent blood was forgotten. . . . Workers, liberals, intellectuals, Socialists labored to find a vindication for all this, stifling their own conscience, explaining away through rationalization and casuistry, and with tooth and nail clinging to the consolation. . . . Still, Socialism is being built there. . . ." *379

H. Leivick, one of the foremost poets and playwrights, writing on his resignation from the IKUF, acknowledged that he had been disillusioned for a long time. He had realized that the Communist concern for Jewish culture was insincere, but it had been hard for him to leave a work which he loved.*380

POLISH JEWS FLEE EASTWARD

Hitler began his war on Poland with an air bombardment of Warsaw on September 1st. England and France answered with a war declaration on September 3rd. The Nazi invasion caused a panicky flight of Polish Jews. Hundreds of thousands, men, women and children, taking what belongings they could, were fleeing before the Nazis toward the East, heading for Soviet Byelorussia, Lithuania and Rumania. (The gates of the latter were totally closed to them.) It was a flight unprecedented in modern Jewish history. In the chaos, many families were separated never to see each other again. The fleeing masses of people met Red Army units marching toward the West; they stopped the refugees from going further.

The Stalin-Hitler partnership pointed up the gravity of the situation of nine million Jews in Eastern Europe. A spontaneous social and individual boycott of Communists and their institutions, reminiscent of the boycott exactly a decade earlier, spread quickly. The label *Communazis* taunted Communists in the shop, the street and at meetings. The *Freiheit* was torn to shreds at newstands. Its loss of readers was rather small, but the loss of advertisements was considerable.

Like a beleaguered fort, the *Freiheit* fought back desperately, one day shrilly denouncing a published fact as a "conscious lie" of the enemy press, the next day having to defend it. One day the paper displayed a cabled statement by the French Communist Party saying that Moscow would aid Poland if Paris did likewise.*381 A couple of days later, the Communist paper was hard put to approve Molotov's

dictum that Poland was ruled by a fascist-military *schliakhta*, and had no right to exist. Issue after issue, in front-page pieces, editorials, articles, and in the English columns, Olgin, Novick, Katz and the rest were straining to turn black into white.

INNER PARTY DEMORALIZATION CHECKED

The mood among Jewish Communists on Wednesday, August 23rd, and the days immediately afterward was a mixture of embarrassment, bewilderment and pain. They seemed to be hanging in suspense. Hardest hit was the small minority who, like the author, had been for a long time Marxists heretics and Communists with misgivings. No longer harboring any illusions on the nature of the Soviet regime, they still believed implicitly in its anti-fascism. This belief and the movement's democratic orientation were the only threads holding them to the party. Now these threads were about to be torn.

As one who led the small secession from the party in the Jewish area, the author may again be permitted to describe his experience in the momentous days that followed. It will reflect the ebb and flow of emotional reactions that swayed active Communists.

The news of Epstein's refusal to write anything in defense of the pact and the accompanying rumor that he was breaking with the party spread rapidly around Union Square. People close to him and many rank-and-filers came running to ascertain that they were groundless. No one hid his revulsion with the pact. All they did was to plead for patience, in the faint hope that nothing basic had changed in the Soviet foreign policy. All agreed that the behavior of the Red Army in Poland would provide the key to the grim enigma.

Epstein had to decide quickly. He agreed to put off his resignation from the party on the promise of a number of people to leave with him once the Red Army would join the Nazi army in Poland.

The hostile air outside and the demoralization within prevented the party hierarchy from challenging those few who were loud in their denunciation of the pact. On the contrary, they were treated with patience and simulated understanding, the party anxious not to aggravate a threatening crisis.

The first break in the suspense came at the Madison Square Gar-

den meeting on September 11th, called to raise the spirit in the party and to solidify its ranks. It was a demonstration of the party's amazing resilience. At that huge gathering the party succeeded in turning the tide of disorganization and rallying the membership behind the old standard. No adequate reasons have been advanced to explain the victory of the party at that meeting. The speeches by Browder and Foster were certainly not distinguished by their eloquence or genuine pathos. But they did rouse the crowd against the "Chamberlain-Munichmen" and the American monopolists, reactionaries, and Socialists, and hatred is often more powerful than love.

Listening to the familiar voices of their leaders renewed the crowd's sense of allegiance. This sentiment, coupled with the antagonism and ridicule they met individually wherever they went, created a feeling of solidarity and righteousness powerful enough to overcome all wavering. The hesitancy was over. And when the treacherous character of the pact was revealed in deeds, about a week later, the spiritual crisis within the party was largely past, at least on the surface. Of course, the special measures applied after that meeting were factors in holding the ranks intact; but of them later.

The party and Communism generally lost heavily in public confidence, but the internal loss was insignificant; only crumbs fell off. Men of consequence who left the party could almost be counted on the fingers. Granville Hicks and George Powers, the latter a vice president of the IWO, were among them. There was a larger defection of ordinary members, but they could not be counted since practically all of them refused to be identified, sitting in their corners, silently nursing their wounds.

THE BREAK WITH THE PARTY

Epstein's decision to wait was not justified. All calculations went wrong. All his moves to take a sizable group with him out of the party were blocked. The friends who had cried on his shoulder, promising to leave with him if the worst came to pass, nervously shied away from him.

Ready for a break were only Ephraim Schwartzman, secretary of the important Jewish Committee Against Anti-Semitism and Fas-

cism, and George Wishnak, formerly manager of the *Freiheit* and *Daily Worker* and then an officer of the ILGWU, Moishe Nadir and Louis Hyman, of the *Freiheit*. The last two were fellow travelers.⁺⁹⁴

In the beginning the party held out both a big carrot and a big stick. The business manager of the *Freiheit*, George Hochberg, offered Epstein six months vacation in the mountains to cool off. "Have trust in Stalin," he counseled. In the same breath, he threatened to crush him.

The five letters of resignation, from the party and the *Freiheit*, were sent to the press spaced in time so as to achieve the maximum effect. The *Freiheit* replied with a shower of epithets: degenerates, decadents, agents-provocateur, yellow leaves that fall off a healthy tree. . . . And to deny the signers of the letters any motive of honest differences, Moishe Katz charged, "They were tempted by the fleshpots of the bourgeois press."³⁸² In another piece, on October 1st, he called them "rats who smelled a fat roast." This at a time when four of them were without any work at all.

Olgin applied a more civilized method. He introduced to the readers of his English column the type of man who broke with the party. Picking on the weaknesses of each of them, he drew a composite picture of a "renegade" so unflattering that his readers must have felt relieved that they were outside the movement.

INTIMIDATION AND SOCIAL OSTRACISM

The campaign of intimidation took on a two-pronged character after the handful of "renegades" formed the League Against Fascism and Dictatorship, at the end of September, and began calling anti-Stalin meetings in the neighborhoods. These meetings were packed with ordinary men and women, outside of any movement, indicating how deeply disturbed the people were. (Hyman and Epstein also toured the Midwest and Eastern Canada.)

One morning, Epstein found Communist goon squads waiting for him in the lobby of the house where he lived. They were still there when he returned late in the evening. As he wasn't certain whether the intention was to terrorize him or to cripple him, he telephoned the business manager of the *Freiheit*, whom he suspected of having something to do with these strong-arm boys, and warned him that if the "watch" was not called off, he would see the district attorney.

As the Communist Party was losing out in Washington, the threat was effective. (The "watch" appeared again later on, a couple of GPU agents among them.)

Another sort of intimidation was applied to the party membership. In public and in private, they were sternly warned against the slightest association with the "traitors." Good Communists were instructed to report anyone seen with any of them. The favorite method for imposing a social ostracism was via manufactured questions of readers. One such question read: "Is it permissible for a progressive worker to maintain relations with a renegade?" The verdict of the *Freiheit*, replete with invectives, was: "You have to fight him like an enemy." *³⁸³ Party committees stood at the doors of the mass meetings of the new League to watch that no Communist or Left-Winger entered. At the same time, trusted people were sent in to try to disrupt the meetings from inside. But they were shouted down by the angry crowd.

At the height of the activity of the League, when the *Freiheit* was beginning to feel the impact of the protest meetings, P. Novick, dubbed the "little Red Goebbles," in a vitriolic column, indirectly called for physical attacks on the founders of the League. However, the printed epithets were the lesser part of the campaign of incitement. Most vicious were the speakers mobilized to visit all the units and branches of the party and its mass auxiliaries, especially the Jewish. There, without the restraint of appearing ridiculous or the fear of libel, the slander could be pumped out without restraint. Communists and their sympathizers were assured that the party had evidence that Epstein and Schwartzman, particularly the former, were secret agents of the Dies Committee, that they had sold party secrets to the committee, and that the two would soon appear in public with many more lies against the party. For greater effect, former friends were harnessed for that job. These secret-Dies-agent stories were conveyed to Epstein's children to turn them against their father.

The calumnies followed Epstein on his lecture tours in Mexico and in Havana, in 1940. *El Popular*, Lombardo Toledano's paper—and Toledano was close to the government—demanded his immediate deportation as an undesirable, a demand meant largely to frighten the Jewish community into canceling his lectures. In Havana, *Hoy*, the Communist daily—the party there was still co-

operating with the government—ran an article repeating the secret-agent tale and adding new ones. "Epstein," said *Hoy*, "is a Trotskyite counterrevolutionary whose mission is to drag Cuba into the imperialist war." But in neither country were the meetings called off. The Jewish communities there were deeply stirred by Stalin's alliance with Hitler. All Jewish groups in Havana adopted a resolution condemning the lies and the anti-Jewish insinuations spread by *Hoy*.⁺⁹⁶

LEAGUE NO MENACE TO THE PARTY

On the whole, the incitement was effective. Passions were inflamed against the group fighting the party, and even those who disapproved of the calumny did not dare to meet any of them. The party succeeded in erecting a thick wall to quarantine the membership against being infected by the League.

Some unfriendly voices were raised against the men of the League in the anti-Communist press too. Shmuel Rosenfeld, of *The Day*, reproved them for "spitting in the well from which they had recently drunk."^{*384} They should have remained silent in view of their past sins, exactly what the party wanted them to do. Only Jacob Fishman and Abraham Goldberg, in the *Morning Journal*, asked for understanding and tolerance for the little group. The *Forward* was friendly throughout.

The League made little headway. It gathered only a couple of dozen people. Jewish radicalism had been reduced to Communism and anti-Communism. The League, too small for independent existence, could not offer the wavering Communists any alternative. Long-built-in hostility to the Right Wing made affiliation with that camp unthinkable. Even the little help the League received from national Right-Wing bodies, halls for the meetings and their protection, and some financial aid for its magazine, *Hoffnung* (Hope)—issued in Yiddish and English—was seized upon by the party as proof that they had sold out to the *Forward*, Dubinsky and Chanin.

As should have been anticipated, people long active in such a closely knit movement were afraid to remain alone. And having to give up their positions—becoming nobodies politically—was a factor not to be discarded either. As for the rank and file, aside from the hatred of the enemies, effectively invoked by the party, a weighty

deterrent must have been the dread of admitting to their shopmates and neighbors, with whom they had argued for many years, that they had been wrong all along. The party top, aware of the uneasiness below, discreetly circulated the hoped for hint, "Have faith. Things will turn out alright yet," meaning that the Moscow-Berlin ties were only temporary. It was a comforting thought.

In this crisis, a tacit acceptance or even complete silence was sufficient for the party, as long as the individual did not come out publicly against the pact. And, in the nature of things, those who stayed with the party despite their dissent eventually swallowed their objections and made peace with their conscience.

The women proved to be more emotionally attached to the party, though quite a few were shaken by the pact. Philip Weiner's wife was sick in bed for two weeks. Still, the author does not know of a single defection of a woman Communist at that time. Indeed, there were instances where they prevented their men from leaving.

Another loyal group were the leading Communist trade unionists. Engrossed in extending their positions and careers—and successfully too—and absorbed in the daily chores of the union, these Communists had no time nor inclination to care about happenings thousands of miles away. They remained as undisturbed by the pact as they had by the purges. They were the only happy lot in the party. This was true of the older people, former immigrants, and of the younger, native-born. Joseph Boruchowitz sent word to Epstein in the very first days. "What is he excited about? He should be satisfied; the business is growing." John Brophy, a CIO leader, expressed to the author his dismay at the young Jewish union organizers—many of them former students who had joined the YCL during the depression—for their lack of regard for their fellow Jews in Eastern Europe.

It would be inaccurate to assume that the Communist movement avoided any repercussions. There were spontaneous stirrings in the IWO, the ICOR and the IKUF in the beginning. A group of the IWO Branch 98 issued a call to a protest mass meeting. Letters of protest from individual members of these auxiliaries appeared in the papers, asking others of similar views to contact them. The League had not yet been formed, and there was no one to follow up this agitation organizationally. The hail of abuse in the party press

and at meetings and fear of ostracism squashed these incipient oppositions.

COMMUNIST OFFICERS OF LOCAL 22 LEAVE PARTY

In the trade union area, a costly blow to the Communists was the breakup of the United Front in the Dressmakers' Union Local 22. As mentioned in Chapter 36, Local 22, similar to 117 and 9, concluded a United Front with the Communist-Left in the elections of 1937, and for similar reasons: a difficult and complex situation in the trade and solemn Communist promises of constructive cooperation. The Lovestonite leadership of the union, with Charles S. Zimmerman at its head, had previously been a "concentration point" for Communist attacks. The Communist group in the union was not too numerous, but highly vocal and numbering several able men. The real intention of the CP was not genuine cooperation, but to undermine the existing leadership. But its followers in the union, by and large, regarded the new undertaking seriously.

Jews were a majority of the 23 to 24 thousand members of the union, and the link between the Communists and the non-Communists snapped under the weight of their resentment against the Stalin-Hitler pact.⁺⁰⁶ Some of the more sensitive Communist union officers were repelled by the pact and openly voiced their disagreement. The party, veering again to a neo-revolutionary course, began to exert pressure on its people in the union to engage again in oppositional activity detrimental to the union. The duofold reaction, revulsion against the pact and resistance to the new party pressure, reached a climax on December 13th. On that day, the New York State committee of the CP announced in the *Daily Worker* the expulsion of seven active Communists of Local 22, calling them weaklings, cowards and opportunists.⁺⁰⁷ The dress and other garment markets were flooded with Communist leaflets praising the peace policy of Moscow and condemning the "Red-baiters who split the ranks of labor."

The defection of these well-known Communists spelled the end of Communist hopes to gain control of the union. Their ticket was defeated in the next election, and since then not a single Communist has been elected to any office in the union.

42 *The Mazel Tov Counterattack*

The Red Army “liberating millions of Ukrainians, Byelorussians and other nationalities,” was transmuted on the Jewish area into “saving many Jewish lives.” This became the daily leitmotif of the *Freiheit*, the ICOR and the IKUF magazines, at meetings and at lectures, growing louder and bolder as the Russian occupation was extended.

A day after the first “liberation” cable from Moscow, Olgin rubbed his hands in glee and proclaimed in a front page piece:

“A big day in Jewish life. . . . For 20 years the Jews have been deprived of their rights, they suffered pogroms and shameful treatment in the newly created Polish state. . . . The war came. Chamberlain and Daladier betrayed Poland. The life of the Jews became a thousand times worse. A cry of anguish and pain issued from millions of Jewish hearts. . . . Suddenly big news shot like a bolt of lightning around the world. The Red Army is marching!!! The army of Bolsheviks! . . . Happiness overflowed the hearts of masses of Jews all over. Hundreds of thousands of Jews in America repeated *Mazel Tov*. Jewish hearts are overflowing with thanks to the Soviet government. . . .” *385

Olgin’s saccharine jubilation set the pattern. The “liberation” of the home town of a member of the *Freiheit* staff became the occasion for a celebration, with *Mazel Tov*’s all around. Communists everywhere took up the cue, and liberation celebrations rolled over the country.

Moscow’s efforts to sooth outraged opinion abroad went on at a

faster pace. The Communist press, in North and South America, was flooded daily with cables describing the joy with which the inhabitants of each town greeted the "liberators," and the profound thanks they offered to the Great Stalin. And to add a ring of authenticity, each cable mentioned individuals by name, always seeing to it that the various national groups were equally quoted among those who welcomed the Red Army.

The practice of supplying the Communist press with canned propaganda by cable was not new. It seems that at crucial moments Moscow was unwilling to depend entirely upon the foreign Communist press. And since the purges an extensive one-way cable service, costing many hundreds of dollars a week, was inaugurated. The whole proceedings of the trials, each report by Stalin to a party conference—and he usually spoke five or six hours—every editorial of the *Pravda* bearing on a topic important to Moscow, and similar material was immediately cabled verbatim to the Communist press abroad. As no one would dare disregard them, the *Daily Worker* and the *Freiheit* had to print them in series like novels. Often two or three cables were running alongside for several days. The cables dominated the papers.

One of the early enthusiastic cables of the Russian occupation appeared in the *Freiheit* under the banner headline: THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT HAS BROUGHT US HAPPINESS AND JOY, SAY LIBERATED JEWS IN POLAND. The cable read:

"To us has come the happiness from quarters from which we expected it all the years. . . . Our brothers in the land of the Soviets, the sons of the greatest man in the world, Josef Stalin, have brought us happiness and freedom. These are the words of the Jew Heller, the White Russian Golovitz and the Ukrainian Marchuk. With these words they express the deep joyous feeling of 15 million human beings, the people the Red Army has now liberated from the yoke of the Polish grandees." *386

Soon another flood began, that of letters from the "liberated" to relatives here, giving heartfelt thanks to the Red Army and to the Great and Beloved Leader Stalin. The *Freiheit* printed excerpts daily. In the beginning these letters were authentic, though the fulsome praise of Stalin robbed the sentiments expressed of much of their credibility. Later, a number of them became suspiciously identical. The reason was that the genuine letters were thinning

out, and the *Freiheit* deemed it profitable to produce them in New York. The "letter writer" was Sol Hertz, of the *Freiheit* staff. In many of the auxiliary bodies, special meetings were called to read these letters, and the waverers were given the honor of reading them publicly. The *Mazel Tov* celebrations and the letters served as tranquilizers for depressed spirits.

The news that Lithuania, Latvia and Esthonia were officially annexed by Russia, in August 1940, was headlined by the *Freiheit* AS ANOTHER HALF A MILLION JEWS ARE FREE. This was followed by more cables and letters from relatives telling of their happiness.

One could detect a note of bitter irony in some of the letters. One such letter, from Lithuania, addressed to a sister in Los Angeles, was dated February 7, 1940. It began with "Long live comrade and friend, teacher and educator, Comrade Stalin. . . . We now live in a palace. . . . I work in a match factory. . . ." *387 Another letter to be read between the lines came from Bessarabia, also overrun by the Red Army: "I have to work for seven children (presumably seven days) and my feet are sick. But I am happy that the children will have it good later." One letter-writer found an ingenious way to smuggle through a denial of his own lines. His letter, in Russian, profuse in its adulation of Stalin and everything Soviet, had stuck in a far corner a Yiddish word of three letters, "*Nit*" (not). *388

Many of these letters were published by the Communists in a special edition in the format of a small daily paper.

Some of the best known Soviet Jewish writers were harnessed in the drive to sell the Stalin-Hitler pact abroad as an act that saved millions of Jews. In one issue, the *Freiheit* featured a big article by Itzik Feffer, "The Yesterday and Today in Bessarabia," and another one by M. Razumni, "A New Life in Latvia." *389 Feffer arrived in Kishineff a few days after the Russian occupation. What he had to say about Jewish uneasiness under Rumanian rule—and this took up the largest part of the article—was authentic; his "We are happy and gay" of *today* had all the marks of a Kremlin assignment loyally carried out. The letter from Riga bore the same seal. Feffer carried out the same task in two well known cities of Byelorussia, Brest-Litovsk and Byalestok. *390

The local Jewish papers were taken over by the Communists immediately after the occupation, without changing their names.

Their first job was to sound a note of joy over the new regime. The *Freiheit* diligently reprinted these on-the-spot "reports" as the genuine feelings of the Jewish population there. An example was the review of the happenings in occupied Lithuania, lyrically headlined, "News of Broken Chains," taken from the Communist *Jewish Voice* in Kovno.*³⁹¹

The cables and letters rejoicing in the liberation of so many Jews were accompanied by other cables and articles telling of ambitious Soviet plans for the rehabilitation of the Jewish refugees and the resurgence of Jewish culture throughout the Soviet Union, especially in Birobidjan. Shachno Epstein cabled a fantastic tale of "three million Jewish books planned for the coming years." *³⁹² In another cable, he gave a glowing description of conditions in Birobidjan, where he had never been. And his was not the only piece assuring the readers in America that the Jews in Birobidjan were satisfied and happy.

HARSH TREATMENT OF REFUGEES LEAKS OUT

There is no denying that those who came under the occupation of the Red Army had a much better chance of survival than those under the Nazis. And the Communists' chief argument that Stalin saved many Jews—the *Freiheit* began with a modest half million and soon arbitrarily increased it to three million—was not entirely groundless. What they chose to overlook was: one, that Stalin actively helped to place many more millions of Jews under Hitler, to their ultimate destruction; two, the harsh and brutal treatment of the "rescued" Jews by the Soviet authorities, which resulted in numerous deaths.

About 400,000 Jews were packed into box cars and shipped to labor camps in Siberia and the Far East. And no one knows exactly how many perished there. Books and articles by those who survived are vivid testimony to their horrifying experiences.⁺⁹⁸ And those who for some reason were not shipped away were not permitted to travel deeper into Russia, subsequently falling into Nazi hands.

Jewish public opinion generally did not succumb to the honeyed assurances that the Jews were finding a haven under the Red Army. (The historian Simon Dubnov, in an interview with the JTA, in Riga, Latvia, before the Red Army occupation of that city, ex-

pressed the opinion that the Jews in Russian-occupied Poland are lost to the Jewish people." Dubnov's statement made a deep impression here.) *398

The true situation in the freed territories was slowly seeping through the heavy censorship. Some letters from Siberia conveyed a hint of the pitiable plight of the refugees. (The poet, Reuben Iceland, showed the author a postcard from a Galician rabbi, 74 years old, compelled to clear forests in Siberia, hinting by means of Talmudic sayings that only death could save him.) The Jewish community in Palestine, much nearer to the scene, began sending out, in 1940, reports of the inhuman treatment of the refugees. The *Freiheit* tried to brush them off as "lies from Jerusalem," calling the Jewish papers which printed them "Red-baiters, criminals and reactionaries." But the reports persisted, and the *Freiheit* had to take note of them.

Forgetful of the innumerable cables and letters full of happiness and joy, and not admitting the truth either, the *Freiheit* clumsily tried to improvise extenuating circumstances for the Soviet acts. "Honest people realize," it reasoned, "that refugees are a problem. . . . Refugees coming from the middle classes are certainly a problem in a country where they have to adjust to a new economy, a Socialist one. . . . This is a difficult problem. *Though not so difficult and not of such long duration as that of the refugees in America or in Palestine.*" (italics M.E.) *394

How the people in the smaller towns here felt about the Soviet Union and the Communists can be gleaned from the article in the *Freiheit* by the poet M. A. (Yuri) Suhl about a lecture in a town in Connecticut. He was forced to hold it in a private home because no one would rent them a hall, though the topic was a literary one. "An orgy of hatred on the Jewish streets," was his comment.*395

Reporting on the sixth convention of the IWO *shules* in Philadelphia, Deborah Tarant labeled the current sentiment among Jews reactionary. ". . . Jewish reaction is more repulsive than the general one, . . ." she said. "Together with its press, it has set out to poison the air against the entire Jewish progressive movement, around our own order, and our *shules.*" *396

The fight over *The Day* was indicative of the growing Jewish hostility to everything smacking of Communism.

Financial difficulties aggravated by sharp differences of opinion between the majority of the staff and several Left-Wingers necessitated a reorganization in *The Day*. The Left-Wingers induced the New York Newspaper Guild, then under tight Communist control, to call a strike against the paper. The Yiddish Writers Union, to which all the writers of *The Day* belonged, declared the strike illegal; first, because the majority of the staff was against the strike; second, the Newspaper Guild had no jurisdiction in the Yiddish field. And this stand was warmly upheld by public opinion, which resented outside Communist interference in a national Jewish organ.

The strikers had the active backing of the Communist movement. The *Freiheit* became their mouthpiece. Communist women from the former cooperative houses on Allerton Avenue, in the Bronx, descended on East Broadway in hundreds for mass picketing. Jewish Communists and their sympathizers outside New York were mobilized to visit subscribers and advertisers of *The Day*, appealing to them to drop their subscriptions and advertisements. The Jewish neighborhoods were bombarded with leaflets calling the majority of *The Day*, some of the most distinguished writers among them, scabs.

The suspicion was dawning in responsible circles that the concentrated Communist efforts against *The Day* were not merely to save the jobs of a few of their friends, but a well calculated design to profit by the financial crisis of the paper, made worse by the "strike," to take it over. As the sphere of influence of the *Freiheit* had greatly shrunk, it would have been a godsend to obtain control, though unofficially, of the highly regarded independent *The Day*.

To thwart the Communist plans, the Yiddish Writers Union, jointly with other labor bodies, called a conference for April 6th to present the entire case to the public. The response was above expectations. More than 1,700 delegates from about a thousand local groups, representing every strata of the Yiddish-speaking community, came to the conference. Resolutions condemning the Communists and promising support to the staff of *The Day* were passed unanimously. The conference marked a turn in favor of the majority writers and their union.+⁰⁰

JUDAIZING THE CAMPAIGN FOR A "PEOPLE'S PEACE"

In the campaign for American non-involvement in the war, the Jewish Communists applied the same Judaizing approach they had during their drive for collective security and democratic unity. Opposition to American preparedness and aid to the Allies could be anything but popular among Jews. Nor could they take calmly the new Communist *A People's Peace*, a dangerously ambiguous slogan that could only lead to freezing Hitler's victories in Europe. But the Jewish Communists had no choice in the matter.

The *Freiheit* spread the alarm that the National Defense Bill, calling among others for the registration of aliens, would place the foreign-born under multiple restrictions.

The freeing by a jury in Brooklyn of a group of Christian Fronters, accused of anti-Jewish incidents, provided the *Freiheit* with fresh material for its scare campaign. To the Communist paper it was a definite sign that "it could happen here too"; that the nearer America approached the war, the greater the menace of fascism and anti-Semitism.*³⁹⁷

A 32-page pamphlet in English, *A Jew Looks at the War*, by Rabbi Moses Miller, the new chairman of the Jewish People's Committee, was distributed "in hundreds of thousands of copies." "The peace-loving Jewish people are against war," Miller wrote. He went to great lengths to "unmask the Jewish misleaders, the Wise's and the Cahan's. . . . The Jewish people have to join the 'progressive section' of the American people, with the advance ranks of the world's peace movement. . . ."

The Communists also published a Yiddish pamphlet, *Should America Enter the War*. Numerous open air meetings were held in all the larger cities as a part of a special campaign "to bring the program of the Communist Party to the Jews."*³⁹⁸

The Russian attack on Finland, begun December 1, 1940, evoked deep sympathy for the little republic among the Jews. The talk of collecting aid for the Finnish people made the *Freiheit* furious. "Aid for the Finnish White Guardists is a menace to American Jews," the paper warned.*³⁹⁹ And an article by Paul Yuditiz called the papers and the persons responsible for this talk "Hitler's comrades."*⁴⁰⁰ This was followed a few days later by an editorial outburst "against the reactionary papers . . . the Wise's, Cahan's and

Dubinsky's for marching together with the Coughlin's and Hearst's to collect aid for the Czarist pogrom-maker, General Mannerheim." *401 Jewish labor's campaign for aid to Britain also called forth angry comments by the *Freiheit*.

Posing the question, "Where Does the Fifth Column Reside?" the *Freiheit* editorial answered, "In the highest circles, beginning from generals and admirals to the Socialists here and the Bloom's in France." *402 Another editorial accused the Jewish press of conducting "the most vicious of pro-war campaigns. . . ." "The Jewish press is treacherous, criminal and reactionary," cried Paul Novick, who became editor after Olgin's death. This outburst was his reply to the highly embarrassing news that the Nazi radios in Stuttgart and Munich had complimented the Jewish Communists in New York, calling them "honest people." The news was cabled from London, which monitored the Nazi radio, to the *Forward* and the *Morning Journal*. *403

The Communists kept playing upon the deepset fear of war among women. "Mothers and Wives Weep Bitterly When a New York Division Leaves for Military Duty; Heartrending Scenes!" Thus ran a headline in the *Freiheit* over the report that the 27th Division of the National Guard had left for active training in Fort McClellan, Alabama. *404

The auxiliaries, as usual, performed their part in all the party's campaigns. The fifth convention of the IWO decided to participate in the Peace Congress in Chicago. *405 The others either endorsed it or conducted vigorous drives in behalf of the *People's Peace*. However, the attempts to form a Jewish facade for the *People's Peace* were abortive. A gathering of Communist and Left youth groups was presented as "the convention of Jewish youth." But its resolutions carried the clear Communist ring: "For the defense of Jewish rights, for democracy and immediate peace." *406

VILIFYING GENUINE RESCUE WORK

The successful efforts of the Jewish Labor Committee, aided by William Green, in 1940, 1941 and 1942, to bring over here hundreds of prominent trade unionists, Socialists, writers and scientists, fleeing Hitler and Stalin occupations—a genuine rescue mission—aroused Communist ire. The JLC was branded in the *Freiheit* mis-

leaders and cheaters. "They collected money for relief work abroad, and spent it on *upgeshmisene hosheines* (has-beens) of the Second International . . . (on) professional conspirators against the Soviet Union and against the revolutionary labor movement throughout the world." *407 (On July 21, 1941, the Vichy government adopted the Nuremberg Laws, which sent thousands of Jews to the gas chambers, making escape from France a matter of life and death.)

And, resentful at a decision of the ILGWU for a day's work for the war victims abroad, a part of which would be distributed through the JLC, the *Freiheit*, in an editorial above its masthead, shouted, "Not one cent for the bloody enemies of the working class!" The JLC was called a nest of "brought-over counterrevolutionary, Kolchakist and White Guardist . . . remnants of the anti-Soviet conspiracy and espionage." *408

Scolding the enemy and inventing tales of rescue and rehabilitation of Jews in Soviet Russia was only one phase, though a vital one, in the Communist efforts to keep from being dislodged from their positions. They also had their hands full trying to arouse sympathy for those Communists in trouble with the law. School boards in various parts of the country were initiating proceedings against Communist teachers. In New York, the most prominent case involved Morris Schappes, a teacher and an admitted Communist, whose trial began July 18, 1941. As a diversionary move to protect their people, the Communists called a conference "against fascist and anti-Semitic activities in the New York public school system," on June 10th, in the Heckscher Auditorium.*409

The conference used the phrase "anti-Semitism" merely as a shield. It was preoccupied with resolutions against the Coudert Bill, which aimed to drive Communist teachers out of the schools.

Another diversionary move, on a larger scale, was the sudden campaign by the Jewish People's Committee to collect signatures for a petition to Congress to outlaw anti-Semitism.*410 It met the active resistance of all Jewish groups.

Ill feeling in the community adversely affected the annual fund-raising drives of the *Freiheit* of 1940 and 1941. The quota for 1940, \$100,000, was not raised, despite the daily threats that the paper's very survival was at stake. The quota for 1941 was much smaller, \$75,000, and the campaign dragged on for six months.

The Communist press did not hesitate to label the repeated stories of Nazi plans for a war on Russia as outright lies manufactured by the enemies of the Soviets for a specific purpose. Less than 24 hours before the Nazi planes started their bombardment of Soviet positions, the *Daily Worker* editorialized: "Reports of a 'break' between the Soviet Union and Germany (not Nazi Germany—M.E.), with rumors of war, continue to flare up in the capitalist press. What is immediately noticeable about this whole press campaign is the lying character of the stories, which are being published as though they were gospel truth." *411

On the same day, the Communist press printed a denial by the official Tass of the "so-called concentration of Nazi armies on the Soviet border." And the following day, June 21st, when the Nazi tanks were already driving into Soviet Russia, the *Daily Worker* was still calling: "Stop the imperialist war," and the cartoon lampooned the "stories in the capitalist papers about Hitler's attacking the Soviet Union." *412

AGAIN DEMOCRATS AND AMERICAN PATRIOTS

The outcry against America's involvement in the war came to an abrupt end. In one day the World War lost its imperialist character, and the *People's Peace* was thrown into oblivion. The next day Roosevelt ceased to be the leading war-monger and was again called the true leader of the American people. Soon the revolutionary class struggle was quietly buried, and democracy and patriotism were again hung up as a decorative design. Strengthening of American defenses and rushing military aid to the countries battling Nazi Germany became major objectives. *Keep America Out of the War*, the central theme for nearly two years, gave way in December 1941 to the welcoming of America's entrance in the war. Browder, released from Atlanta Penitentiary, called upon the people to rally around the Commander-in-Chief. Sabotage in the defense plants ceased, and strikes in defense industries were decried as a crime against the vital interests of America and of the democratic world. The Declaration of Teheran, issued at the first meeting of the Allied leaders, in 1943, became a Communist second Bible.

This complete Communist about-face, similar to the previous both-camps-are-imperialist stand, was not motivated by any change

in the domestic scene. Its sole reason was Hitler's treacherous attack on his partner-in-loot, Stalin. A day after June 21, 1941, the party, its press and its auxiliaries were unrecognizable. The party thus again demonstrated that of all its early allegiances, it had retained but one, subservience to the Soviet Union. This was the tragedy of American Communism.

Jewish society, caught up in the wave of American-Soviet friendship-in-war, bore its full share in the aid to Russia drives. For a time, Jewish Communists were basking in the rising pro-Soviet sentiment, encouraged by official Washington. But, even then, by far not all forgot Communist betrayal of both democracy and world Jewry in the fateful years 1939 to 1941.

Portraits in Miniature

OLGIN, A MAN OF CONTRASTS

Moissay Olgin, the most influential Jewish Communist in the 20's and 30's, was born Moishe Yosef Novomisky, March 27, 1878, in a village in the province of Kiev. His father, a *Maskil*, was an overseer of lumber cutting for a Polish squire. The boy studied the Bible and Talmud as well as secular subjects.

After the family moved to Rogochov in the province of Volinia, Moishe, 15 years of age, tutored children to support himself. He graduated the local *gymnasia*, and enrolled in the law faculty of the University of Kiev. There, in 1900, he joined the revolutionary student movement. A year later, as a punishment for demonstrations, he and several hundred other students were drafted as "volunteers" into the army—a volunteer enjoyed a higher rank and a shorter term of service than an ordinary soldier.

Out of the army, Olgin joined a Jewish student group, Liberty, which later evolved as the Kiev group of the Bund. In 1904, caught in the surging revolutionary tide, Olgin left the university and became a "professional revolutionary" for the Bund. He participated in all the publications of the Bund and wrote on a variety of topics, including literary reviews, under several names. In 1906, Olgin was the Duma correspondent for the Bund's daily, *Der Wecker*, in Vilno.

After the defeat of the revolution, in 1907, Olgin went to Heidelberg to study philosophy and social science. He returned to Russia in 1909. In the defeatist mood of that period, Olgin, similar to most

of the radical intelligentsia, took to literature, the only media of communication open to them. His literary output was prolific. He wrote Yiddish readers for adults and anthologies of poetry and short stories as well as articles and essays on social topics. He also wrote poetry under the name of Yosef Neiman. Olgin's anthologies were highly popular. They satisfied a fundamental need of people denied an elementary acquaintance with literature. He also translated a few classical works from Russian and Polish. Not a theoretician nor a leader, he was rated one of the best pamphleteers of the Bund. He settled in Vienna in 1913, editing a Bund weekly, *Die Zeit*, and sending articles to the *Forward* in New York.

At the outbreak of World War I, Olgin came to America and worked as a feature writer for the *Forward*. He studied economics and sociology at Columbia University, and was one of Professor Zeligman's favorite students. He received his Ph.D. in 1918. A year later he lectured on the Russian Socialist movement at the New School of Social Science. He wrote two books in English on Russia, *The Soul of the Russian Revolution*, in 1917, and *A Guide to the Russian Literature*, in 1919. In his Communist period, he wrote *Maxim Gorky, Writer and Revolutionist*, in 1933, and *Trotskyism, Counterrevolution in Disguise*, and translated eight volumes of *Lenin* in English for International Publishers.*413

Olgin was a hostile critic of the Bolshevik Revolution. So insulting were his remarks about the Soviet leaders that editor Cahan had to doctor them. He was one of the few radicals to accept in good faith the Sisson documents, published by the State Department in December 1918, that purported to show that Lenin and Trotsky were paid German agents. (Some of Olgin's anti-Bolshevik pieces in the *Forward* and *Naye Welt* are quoted in Chapters 9 and 11.)

However, in 1920, Olgin went to Soviet Russia and returned an admirer of the Soviets though not a Bolshevik. As he himself told friends, Tchicherin, then foreign commissar, said to him, "You are returning to America. Describe what you have seen here, don't eulogize, don't embellish. Tell the truth as you found it. Let them understand us; it will be better for all concerned." But Olgin did not heed Tchicherin's sober advice. His articles in the *Forward*—a couple appeared in the *New Republic*—and his lectures, all in his sugary pamphleteer style, did much to enhance pro-Bolshevik feel-

ing among the young immigrants. In his admiration for the Soviets, Olgin went into a minute description of the new customs and dress in Russia.

In the Workers Party, Olgin was fighting alongside Lore against the control-greedy Communists. Sent to Moscow by the Lore and trade union groups in the spring of 1923 to argue their case, he returned a steadfast defender of the Kremlin. (For the effect of his conversion, see Chapter 14.)

Twice editor of the *Freiheit* and of the monthly *Hammer*, Olgin had a style of his own, and he could be eloquent when left free. He was the first to bring Negro works into Yiddish literature. Among his translations—and he did them exceptionally well—was the *Creation*, by James Weldon Johnson.

BRIMMING WITH ENTHUSIASM FOR EACH PARTY LINE

A man of erudition, an avid reader and a hard worker, Olgin was not genuine on the political battle front. He gave the impression of walking on stilts. His easy sliding into each party line, his brimming enthusiasm for it, and his self-effacement before party authority could only arouse doubts as to his sincerity. To be fair to him, it was not a defect of his intellect but of his character. His spinelessness was proverbial.

While in the *Forward*, to please the strong-willed Ab. Cahan, he wrote in praise of the "*Bint'l Briev*," a feature despised by all his friends. In the *Freiheit*, he was in love with every thesis and decision of the party. On his return from the fourth convention, in Chicago, 1925, a convention distinguished by physical clashes between the Foster and Ruthenberg factions, the author asked him rather gloomily, "How was the convention?" His reply was a cheerful "We are forging a true Bolshevik party."

Olgin not merely made virtues of party or Soviet exigencies, but took pride in them. A close friend of J. B. S. Hardman, accepting his leadership in the Socialist Federation, Olgin reserved for himself the attack on Hardman when he was expelled from the WP in 1923. He did the same when another good friend of his, Zivyon, left the *Freiheit*. In the fall of 1929, when the Kremlin ordered the expulsion of the Lovestonites, Olgin, an active Lovestonite, rushed to express his wholehearted approval of the expulsion. Like most of

the Russian-born intellectuals, he had great respect for Trotsky. Yet, he was the first in America to vilify him after his exile. An admirer of Bukharin, he was again first to applaud his execution, in a series of articles "proving" that Bukharin had been a traitor for many years. And when Prosecutor Vishinsky, in summing up the case against Bukharin, Rykov and the others, said, "This is not America where the Al Capone's go free," Olgin "respectfully disagreed" with him. "They are worse than Al Capone," he piously exclaimed in his daily review of the trial.^{*414} Two weeks later, faced by increasing protests and ill will over the executions, Olgin came out with an article, "We Hold our Heads High."^{*415}

Abusing old associates and people he admired did not seem to weigh heavily on Olgin; he would rub his hands in glee before sitting down to write—perhaps this gesture was his way of steeling himself for the attack.

In a situation where the dearth of argument was too obvious, Olgin resorted either to rabble-rousing or to lofty moralizing. In a public debate with Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, in 1936, over the new Soviet constitution, Olgin, unable to muster a convincing defense of the one-party provision, switched over to assailing the enemies of the Soviet Union. And immediately after the first purge trial, he came out with a moralizing piece about the new man forged by Bolshevism, called "The Man in Us." "A new man is being born . . .," he wrote. "The Communist absorbs the sorrow, the bitterness, the indignities, and melts it down in an iron will to rebuild the world."^{*416} This high-sounding but seemingly irrelevant article was intended to implant in the mind of the reader a sense of being a part of a world elite, with a superior morality that entitled it to commit deeds forbidden to ordinary mortals.

An intellectual to the core, well dressed, with gentlemanly manners, and preferring the company of the literati, his "going to the people" was definitely a condescension. He tried to hide it, but not always successfully.

Capricious and humorless, Olgin was inwardly unsure of himself, and felt a basic need for compliments. He seemed to thrive on them. Throughout all the trying years of factional warfare and executions in Moscow, he never uttered a doubt. If one nagged at him, nobody was aware of it. Always defending or attacking, he never permitted himself the luxury of silence.

Only once, at the celebration of his 50th birthday, in Carnegie Hall, did he unbutton to tell his comrades of a moment of hesitation. That was about 1919, after his two books on Russia had been published. Professor Simkhovitch, of Columbia University, proposed that they work jointly on a series of books about Russia. He assured Olgin of immediate success—the public being highly interested in Russia at that time. “When I came to his house,” Olgin reminisced, “a butler opened the door, and ushered me into a large beautiful salon. For a second the thought hit me that this comfort could be mine, and that I, too, could gain a reputation in the academic world. But immediately I realized that I would have to choose between this sort of life and the working class movement, and I rejected his proposal.”

A FRUSTRATED NOVELIST

There was a definite sadistic streak in Olgin. A frustrated novelist, he wrote a pseudo-psychological play and a novel on the Bolshevik civil war. In both, sexual sadism was wrapped in ostentatious piety to the Revolution. The premiere of *Her Crime*, put on at Maurice Schwartz' theater in the 20's, caused a howl in the press. All reviewers agreed that it was a discredit to the Revolution. It had to be taken off. The novel, *Joel and Gavrila*, printed in the *Freiheit*, involved the rape of Joel's sweetheart by Gavrila, a peasant boy, during a pogrom, and their subsequent meeting as Communists. It had the same literary merit as the play.

During the Third Period, Olgin wrote a Communist science fiction horror story: Capitalism is collapsing and a civil war on a world scale is breaking out. The Comintern General Staff is directing the battles from somewhere in the air above South America, and Communist scientists have invented a new weapon, a mysterious ray that disintegrates anything it touches. Millions are killed, but the revolution triumphs. This “vision” of the future world civil war was the topic of his speech at—of all places—a convention banquet of the IWO.

Olgin was not satisfied with his role as *melamed* (teacher) and propagandist. All his life—his Bund period included—he longed for a place among policy-makers. And the Communists were shrewd enough to play upon this ambition of his. They made him a mem-

ber of the CEC, but his voice was never heard there—he remained a pamphleteer. However, standing on the platform and addressing large audiences gave him the feeling of a leader. And he loved the platform dearly.

Olgin's stand on Jewish problems swung on the pendulum of the party line. A Jewish writer for more than two decades, he joined the assimilationists during the revolutionary rigidity of the early 30's. An editor of a Jewish daily and a monthly, he insisted on giving his summer course in Camp *Nitgediget* only in English. But when tolerance of ethnical groups was revived in the middle 30's, Olgin displayed a profound knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew literature and was exuberant in his affection for the Jewish people and their culture.

Olgin became the perennial nightingale of the Soviet Union and of Communism. He went to Russia in 1934. In a series of articles in the *Freiheit* in the fall of the same year, Olgin undertook the herculean task of repudiating the reports of mass semi-starvation. In one article he copied in detail a rather enticing menu, implying that he had seen this in an ordinary Soviet eating place. A group of tourists, *Freiheit* readers, who came to Moscow a few months later, were dismayed to find that Olgin's excellent restaurant was behind the locked gates of the Kremlin. Another deceptive method was to portray a young Soviet worker or peasant who had advanced rapidly, pretending that he was typical of all young workers and peasants.

Olgin read freely the major European languages, and wrote in several of them. How this erudite and gifted man could so light-heartedly and so long submit to a strict and degrading discipline, perhaps only a psychologist could tell. The only explanation that this author can suggest is that his inner weakness drove him to seek strength from crusading causes and from people stronger than he. The Bund was a crusading body and its leaders were men of strength. The Socialist movement in America, loose and complacent, had little of either. In Communism Olgin found both.

As an editor, Olgin strove to emulate the self-assured editor of the *Forward*, Ab. Cahan. But he was too weak.

Olgin's long involvement in an affair with a married woman must have been a part of his inner need to be humored by a person of a

stronger will than his. His gratitude was amazing. A member of the CEC of the party, one who kept preaching Communist ethics and discipline, he secretly contacted the editor of a "bourgeois enemy" paper, *The Day*, Dr. Samuel Margoshes, requesting him to publish a review of his friend's first art exhibition, that he would write under a pseudonym. This was the middle of the 20's. Dr. Margoshes agreed as a personal favor, and the piece appeared. However, the *Freiheit*, engaged in a running fight with the rest of the Jewish press, received a hint a few months later that *The Day* might come out with a story highly damaging to Olgin if Dr. Margoshes would be attacked. A discreet inquiry disclosed this story.*⁴¹⁷ His readiness to commit a transgression for his woman was perhaps the only human weakness shown by Olgin in his life as a Communist.

For quite some time in the same period, Olgin brought in each week a short story signed by the husband of his friend, but written entirely in his fine precise handwriting. The stories stopped when he became ill.*⁴¹⁸ They reappeared when Olgin recovered. All three lived together, the husband nursing Olgin devotedly.

Olgin was for a number of years the American correspondent of the *Pravda*, his cables being censored here by a Soviet official. For this he received \$22 a week, and could never get a raise. Like the rest, he was meagerly paid in the *Freiheit* and for his translations, and was always in debt.

In 1938, during the Democratic Front, Olgin started working on a book, *America*. It was autobiographical. The unfinished manuscript was found after his death. Some chapters were printed in the *Freiheit* only in 1942, when Stalin became a war ally and Communists were again American patriots. Olgin appeared there to have been strongly affected by America, its freedom, opportunities, and its institutions. One chapter was titled, "I Love America." A year earlier, at the 20th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, the same man poured out his love for Russia, his only fatherland.

Olgin was seriously sick in the last years of his life. His relations with the Jewish Bureau had greatly deteriorated; he was completely ignored. The managing editor permitted himself to eavesdrop on Olgin's conversations with visitors and to censor his articles already on the pages. But when he died, of a heart attack, November 22, 1939, at the age of 64, the loss to the Communist movement was not without its benefits. The *Freiheit* squeezed out every drop of pres-

tige from his name. He was given an elaborate funeral, many thousands of people marching in the procession. Thirty days later, at a memorial in Madison Square Garden, Olgin was canonized. His picture was placed on the masthead of the *Freiheit* as a symbol, and all fund-raising campaigns were conducted "to keep alive Olgin's heritage." His picture is still on the paper's masthead.

SHACHNO EPSTEIN, FROM A WRITER TO A SPY

Shachno Epstein, who had a considerable part in the Socialist and Communist movement here and in Russia—no relation whatsoever to the author—was born in 1883 near Vilno. His father was a businessman. Shachno studied the Talmud as well as secular subjects. His ambition was to be a painter, but his sister dissuaded him, arguing that there was no *takhlis* in it. In 1903, he joined the Bund, was arrested in Warsaw and exiled to the Far East; he escaped after three months and continued his activity in the Bund. He came to America at the end of 1909, and was one of the founders of the Socialist Federation.

Shachno was not satisfied with political writing; he felt a calling for literary criticism. The pulsating Jewish labor movement in the second decade needed intellectuals—writers, editors, educational directors. Shachno Epstein became the editor of the weekly *Die Gleichheit*, of the large Dressmakers' Union, Local 25. He also wrote for the Socialist magazines.

Epstein joined the Russian-born radicals in their trek to Russia in 1917, hoping for more elbow room in the new Russia. He rejoined the Bund, and was active in the struggle against Lenin. And, like the majority of his fellow Socialists, he went over to the Bolsheviks during the Civil War.

Early in 1921, Shachno Epstein returned to America as an "instructor" to the Jewish Communists (the reason for his choice is given in Note 22). He was co-editor with A. Bittelmann of the weekly *Emes*, writing under the name of Yosef Berson. When the *Freiheit* was published, he was co-editor for the Communist group.

Shachno Epstein's ambition exceeded by far his limited talent. Neither by ability nor by aptitude did he fit the part of a leader in a Communist Party, however much he wanted to be one. But he

was extraordinarily industrious, and would spend a whole night working on an article. His experience in the revolutionary movement in Russia did little to harden his character. Dr. Iser Ginsberg, reviewing Epstein's two-volume *Memoirs of the Civil War in the Ukraine*, ironically observed that the only impression the book left with a thoughtful reader was the agonizing fear felt by the author during moments of danger.

ESSAY ON STALIN BRINGS HIM TROUBLE

The hard knocks of the factional struggle were too much for him. And, deeply hurt by losing his co-editorship—he was a member of the Foster faction—he took his wife and American-born boy back to Russia in the late 20's, counting on his connections there.*⁴¹⁹

Epstein was made editor of a new monthly magazine, *Der Shtern*, in Kharkov, capital of the Ukraine. Though the magazine never appeared on time, the editor's chair combined with the chance to write literary essays gratified his vanity. He introduced American advertising methods, to the consternation of other editors.

The precarious existence of a Soviet editor under Stalin soon caught up with him. On the occasion of Stalin's 50th birthday, in 1930, Epstein wrote a lengthy essay on Stalin. It was a painstaking job, and it took a couple of months. He bestowed on Stalin the leadership of the October Revolution, the building of the Soviet state and the greatest wisdom of the ages. Epstein was certain that it was fool-proof. And it would have been. But comradely relations among the Jewish Communist top were fast disappearing after Bukharin's ouster; he had been their protector. It was now dog-eat-dog among the little groups and cliques. Litvakov, in his *Emes*, harnessed a couple of students from the Jewish Section of the Communist Western University for the attack—that was his method. Examining the essay through a magnifying glass, the two students uncovered some flaws in Shachno's fulsome praise of Stalin as the father of Soviet nationalities.*⁴²⁰

Even a speck in the picture of Stalin's greatness could have been a source of much trouble, and Epstein was badly frightened. He wrote to Lavrenti Beria, then head of the GPU in Georgia. He had become friendly with Beria during the days of the Civil War, and the latter had protected him on several occasions. It seems that

Beria suggested that, to extricate himself, Shachno should offer to do intelligence work abroad. Because of his stay in America, his offer was accepted. In the opinion of the author, Shachno took the dangerous assignment also to prove to his critics that he was a better Communist than they.

He arrived here in the winter of 1932-1933, under the name of Sam Stone. But he committed an indiscretion. After a couple of drinks with a casual acquaintance in Greenwich Village, he boasted to her of his mysterious mission (he could never keep his liquor). The girl told it to a reporter friend, and a front page story forced him to flee. How he succeeded in avoiding punishment in Moscow is not known.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JULIET STUART POYNTZ

In the winter of 1933-1934, a letter from Shachno in Paris was brought to the author, whom Shachno had avoided on his first visit. In it he hinted that he was doing anti-Nazi work, and needed a credential from a non-Communist paper as a correspondent, which he thought only the author could obtain for him. Believing this story, Melech Epstein secured for him such a credential from the managing editor of *The Day*. And Shachno's articles from abroad were printed in that paper under an assumed name. Later the author found out that his "anti-Nazi" activity consisted of snooping around the correspondents accredited to the League of Nations in Geneva.

Shachno Epstein came here again in 1937, and the author met him several times. In their conversations, it trickled out that he was here for Soviet Intelligence. Of course, the particulars of his work were never mentioned. And the author was amazed that such a boastful weakling should be selected for espionage.

The name of Juliet Stuart Poyntz was never brought up. Nor did the author know that she was back in New York. She had disappeared from the scene here several years previously. And in the Communist Party one does not ask embarrassing questions on the whereabouts of a known comrade. If that person has not been denounced publicly it is assumed that he has been sent somewhere for confidential work.

Shachno suddenly left New York in the middle of summer of

the same year. About two months later, Carlo Tresca accused him in the *New York Times* of luring Juliet Stuart Poyntz to her death. The author began making discreet inquiries into the matter. He found that Epstein had often met Miss Poyntz in New York, and had taken her several times for weekend trips to the Catskill Mountains. He knew that the two had been very friendly as yet in 1916-1917; Miss Poyntz, a pretty and vivacious young Irish woman from Wisconsin, was educational director of the same union where Shachno was editor. Their friendship had been renewed when both were leading members of the Workers (Communist) Party.

As the story later unfolded, Miss Poyntz, a Lovestonite, found herself footloose after the party was turned over to the Fosterites in 1929. She was kicked upstairs, sent to Moscow attached to the Comintern. There her personality and academic background—she was a graduate of Barnard College—brought her to the attention of the GPU. And, probably for similar reasons to those of Shachno, she accepted their offer to mingle among German professors in an effort to gain recruits for Soviet espionage. Her previous marriage to a German, Glazer, would facilitate her mission.

After working in Germany a couple of years, Miss Poyntz became disillusioned with Communism and returned to this country early in 1937 without permission from her "organization," a deadly crime. Moreover, she told her friends that she was planning to write a book exposing the espionage net.

Poyntz' disappearance was discovered at the end of August. Her friend, Mary MacDonald, telephoned Elias Lieberman, the noted labor lawyer and Miss Poyntz' counsel—Lieberman had been chief officer of Local 25 during the time Epstein and Poyntz were there—that she had not seen her friend for a long time, and feared for her safety. Both went to the American Women's Hotel, on West 57th Street. When the manager opened Poyntz' door, they found the room in good order. There were crumbs of bread on the table and a sales slip from Macy's, dated June 6th. The hotel management had not seen her since then, nor had they looked into the room. And the telephone operator recalled that on that day, in the afternoon, someone with a foreign accent and a gutteral voice had called her.

Apparently, Shachno Epstein, because of his old friendship with Miss Poyntz, had been sent here to regain her confidence by pre-

tending to be a disillusioned Communist, and thus lure her to her death.

Lieberman, who made a thorough investigation of her disappearance, could find no evidence linking Shachno to the crime. Nor did he find among her notes any sign that she intended to write an exposé of Soviet spying. But he knew that she was apprehensive. She came to him several weeks before June 6th and told him that she needed money urgently to leave New York, and asked him to speed up her case against the estate of her former husband in Germany.*⁴²¹

A couple of months after Carlo Tresca's story appeared, a young man in his early 20's presented himself at Lieberman's office, saying that he was Arnold, son of Shachno Epstein. "I have a message for you from my father," he said. "He wants you to know that Carlo Tresca's story was not true, that he had nothing to do with that affair."

Lieberman, thinking in terms of evidence and being a scrupulously fair man, was inclined to accept Shachno's denial. But the few former Communists interested in that case, piecing together the bits of information available to them, were convinced—though they lacked clearcut facts—that Shachno was the decoy. They knew that the weaklings were often more reliable than the strong in the hands of Stalin's security police.

Shachno Epstein found time to get married here without divorcing his wife in Russia. Upon his return to Russia, his jealous wife, an old Bolshevik, had him jailed. But he was released. He was doing obscure jobs, occasionally sending articles to the *Freiheit*.

Shachno's star rose after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war in 1941. The Kremlin then created the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, an agency to speak to the Jews abroad, particularly in the United States, in the name of Soviet Jewry, to gain their support for Stalin's purposes. All prominent Jewish intellectuals were placed on the committee. But the actual leadership was in the hands of two Communist commissars, Shachno Epstein and the poet Itzik Feffer. The former was secretary. The committee published a bi-weekly, *Einigkeit*, to symbolize the unity of Jews the world over. It had at its disposal the Soviet radio, and even a special Jewish news agency. The committee issued flaming appeals to American Jews to support

the Red Army fighting the common enemy. Ilya Ehrenburg, who discovered his Jewishness during the war—or, rather, someone in authority told him of it—was on the committee.

In June 1943, the committee sent over a delegation of two, the well-known director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater, Solomon Michoels (Wofsi) and Itzik Feffer.⁺¹⁰⁰ Their task was to counteract the indignation aroused here by the executions of the two eminent leaders of the Polish Bund, Henryk Ehrlich and Viktor Alter. Their tour was highly beneficial for Moscow. They issued statements and gave interviews assuring public opinion here of the Soviet's genuine cooperation in the war and, later, in the making of peace. To the Jews they spoke of the unbroken bond with Soviet Jewry and of the common aim of reconstructing shattered Jewish life in Europe after the victory over Hitler. This was also the theme of the *Einigkeit*.

Shachno Epstein died a natural death in the summer of 1945. He was given a state funeral. Had he lived a few years longer, he would certainly have followed Itzik Feffer and dozens of other Jewish men of letters to their degrading death.

KALMEN MARMOR, HIS COMMUNISM WAS A PUZZLE

Kalmen Marmor had neither Olgin's craving for leadership nor Shachno Epstein's all-consuming aspiration for literary criticism. Marmor would have shrunk in fear had he been offered a seat among policy-makers, and would have politely declined any suggestion of writing essays on contemporary literature. His corner was bibliography; it was his avocation.

Marmor was well acquainted with the classical Hebrew literature and had a deep regard for the Jewish heritage. At heart a non-Marxist, he was an admirer of Henri Bergson, a serious "deviation" which he kept to himself. This small, quiet, and timid man had a rather checkered ideological career, shifting with notable speed from one political position to another. He was a Socialist, a religious Orthodox, a Labor Zionist, and again a Socialist, ending as a Communist.

Marmor was born in 1879 in a little town near Vilno. His father was a *Maskil* (Enlightener), and Kalmen was given a Jewish and

secular education. In Vilno, he studied in the famous Strashune Library. He joined a Socialist circle, and, thinking it was his duty to become a proletarian, learned the metal turning trade. However, at the age of 20 he suddenly turned extremely religious, putting on phylacteries every day. But his religious impulse did not last more than a year. In 1898, Marmor went abroad, studied literature and political economy in the University of Berlin, and, afterward, took three years of natural sciences in the University of Freiburg. He also studied Judaica, and became a Zionist. Marmor was a delegate to several of the early Zionist congresses in Basel, Switzerland. He migrated to London, joined the Labor Zionists there. For a short time he lived in Palestine.

In 1906, Marmor came to the United States, and was the first editor of the Poale Zion weekly in Chicago. He was also one of the founders of the Poale Zion World Alliance, in 1907. But in 1914 he broke with Labor Zionism and joined the Socialist Federation and the staff of the *Forward* in Chicago. At the Jewish Labor Congress, January 1919, Marmor voted against the resolution endorsing the Balfour Zion Declaration. In 1920, he left the Socialists and became a member of the underground Communist Party.*422

In the first years of the *Freiheit*, Marmor conducted a daily column of biographies of outstanding men and women. His was an assorted choice: Spartacus, Karl Marx, Abraham Lincoln, Bakunin, Prudhon, Rosa Luxemburg, Uriel De Acosta, Spinoza, Moses Hess, Leo Tolstoi, John Stuart Mills, and—David Belasco. (The actor-impresario sent him a letter of appreciation, saying that he regretted that his old mother was not alive to read the kind words about her son. He added that he would keep the article among his treasured mementos. Marmor passed this letter around with a shy smile.)

The author does not presume to account for the inner motives that drew this modern *Maskil* to the theory of proletarian dictatorship. He cannot accept as a full explanation the reason advanced by some Right-Wingers that Marmor became a Communist out of resentment at what he thought was his unfair treatment by the *Forward*—he was not made editor of the Chicago paper. Perhaps his very timidity was the clue. Timid souls are often captivated by the audacity of a dynamic idea.

In the early days of the Communist movement, Marmor's service

to the party was almost nil. Only after the CP came out of the underground was his prestige an asset. And in the dark days in the fall of 1929, 1939, the late 40's and 50's, his name served as a sort of *mezuzele*, a sign of Jewishness and respectability on the door of Communism.

Political writing was not his genre. Moreover, he gave the appearance of a man too pure to soil his hands in muddy political waters. Nevertheless, the party was able to "mobilize" him when he was needed, though not without some resistance on his part. During the battle with the community over the events in Palestine, Marmor contributed his share by comparing Zionism with fascism. "What fascism is for other people Zionism is for the Jews," he wrote. And in the months of the Stalin-Hitler pact, he celebrated the "liberation" of his city by the Red Army.^{*423}

A BIBLIOGRAPHER OF MERIT, HE LACKED COURAGE

Marmor did pioneering work on the field of the early Jewish literature in this country, particularly labor poetry. Highly methodical and painstaking in his research, his biographies of the early poets—David Edelstadt (two books), Joseph Bovshover, Morris Rosenfeld and Morris Winchefskey—are valuable sources for students of Yiddish literature. He also published a book on the playwright Jacob Gordin and a monograph on the origin of the Jewish press in America. His scholarly book on Aaron Lieberman is the only work in Yiddish on this veteran Enlightener-Socialist of Europe.

Marmor spent a few years in the early part of the 30's in Kiev, working at the Jewish Section of the Ukrainian Academy of Science. When the time was nearing for his return, his wife, a simple housewife, deeply saddened by what she saw around her, warned her husband, "Kalmen, if you will praise the Soviet Union on a lecture tour at home—as I expect you to—I will follow you from city to city, and from every platform call you a liar."^{*424} Marmor was saved from having to make a crucial decision. His wife took ill and died in Kiev. He returned in July 1936. As she had foreseen, he was lavish in his praise of the Soviet Union in his lectures and articles, though among friends he told his true observations with tears in his eyes.

Marmor's timidity was both pathetic and disgusting. In his book

on Morris Rosenfeld, published by the Kiev Academy, the editors injected the prevailing Proletcult theory, turning the poet who lamented the misery of the sweatshop into a revolutionary artist. This theory was totally alien to the spirit and letter of the manuscript. But Marmor did not object. When questioned in private, he replied helplessly, "They did it."

Friday, December 1, 1939, the day the news arrived of the unprovoked Russian attack on Finland, the author called Marmor and made an appointment to meet him at the entrance to Central Park on 59th Street and Broadway.

"How can you tolerate all this!" he asked Marmor feelingly. "Give me your statement of resignation from the party for the *Hoffnung*."

Marmor began pleading, "Melech, I admire your courage. I look up to you. You are my ideal. But I must confess, when I picture myself as the target of so much abuse and mud-slinging as you are, I shrink in fear." "Please give me three days time," he begged. "I will give you a statement then."

Marmor was pitiable. The author felt that firm insistence would probably have produced his resignation. But Marmor's cowardice, though candidly admitted, was becoming repulsive. He said goodbye and went away. Marmor never resigned.

In the last years of his life, Marmor published his memoirs in the *Freiheit*. There was quite a kaleidoscope of personalities in review. But Marmor, a lifelong member of the CP, had no bad word for any of them. He was not the man to hurt anyone of his own free will.

Marmor had an engaging manner that attracted people to him. Despite his unflinching obedience to the party, he had hardly any personal enemies. Even anti-Communists were disarmed by his humaneness and valuable pioneering work.

Marmor was paralyzed for quite some time. He died in Los Angeles in 1956, at the age of 75. The Communists were then in urgent need of an imposing funeral of a man of Marmor's reputation. Stalin's downgrading and the news of the destruction of Jewish writers and scientists was lowering the spirit of even the most faithful. And the *Freiheit* did its utmost to hold up Marmor's life as a shining example of a devoted Communist. But while the local Communists

were hastily making their preparations for a mass funeral, Marmor's son, an anti-Communist, spirited the body away and gave his father a quiet Jewish burial.

It was the only time Marmor ever failed his party comrades.

A. BITTELMAN, MORE POLITICIAN THAN THEORETICIAN

The story of Alexander Bittelman, however brief, cannot be told outside the Communist Party. Unlike Olgin, Shachno Epstein and Marmor, his rise began only with the Left Wing. He was young and unknown before that.

Osher (Alexander) Bittelman was born in 1890 in Odessa, on the shores of the Black Sea. His parents later moved to Berditchev, the classical Jewish city in the Ukraine. He was sent to the *heder* and later to the government school. Bittelman joined the Bund while quite young, and was exiled for two years to the Province of Archangel. He came to this country in 1912. Unwilling to remain a shop worker, he, similar to other semi-educated immigrants, studied civil engineering in the evening classes of Cooper Union. But he never worked in that capacity. He left the shop to work in the Harlem section of the People's Relief Committee during World War I. He was then active in the large Harlem branch of the Jewish Socialist Federation. Harlem was considered a center of the advanced immigrant youth.

The federation top was studded with more than a dozen luminous figures—Vladek, Hardman, Olgin, Zivyon, to mention but a few—and a dry unimaginative man like Bittelman had to remain obscure. Neither a forceful speaker nor a lucid writer, his influence was confined to a group of branch comrades. He would have had to wait many years, meanwhile performing routine tasks, before he could hope to climb to leadership. However, the ferment in the Socialist ranks evoked by the Bolshevik Revolution moved to the front a number of younger people who were agitating for a sharp turn to the left. These people formed the Left Wing. Bittelman was one of them, though not among the very first.

Shrewd and calculating, with cold eyes and an impassive face, Bittelman had a hard doctrinaire approach to life and a limited emotional range. He was the right man for the shabby maneuvers

and double dealing that tore the Left Wing from its very inception.

His advance was rapid: secretary and editor of the Jewish Federation of the CP and secretary of the Jewish Federation of the Workers Party. In 1923, Foster, in control of the party, needing an associate better versed than he in Communist terminology and one who knew Russian, brought Bittelman to the national party office in Chicago. He soon became the theoretician of the Foster caucus. It was Bittelman who astutely led the inexperienced Foster through the maze of inner-Kremlin politics, finally hitching his wagon to the Stalin star. In 1928, when Foster was reluctant to accept the Leftist platform, formulated largely by Bittelman to gain Stalin's favor, Bittelman was the one to browbeat Foster to remain loyal to the faction that bore his name.

Bittelman's strength lay in his singleness of purpose and his self control. He was bent on reaching the summit of party authority, and employed devious moves to gain that end, manufacturing issues and manipulating weaker people. A Leftist by inclination, with a flair for hair-splitting discussion—Bittelman was the one to advance the reasoning, in 1920, that "action by the masses," in the platform of the CLP, was quite different and less revolutionary than the "mass action" of the CP. But he was elastic enough to bend quickly before a "Right" Comintern course. It is not an understatement to say that Bittelman and the Communist Party were made for each other.

HE WANTED TO BE ON THE GROUND FLOOR

These harsh words are not meant to imply that insatiable ambition was the sole motive that brought Bittelman to the Left Wing. Undeniably, he was affected by the lure of the Bolshevik Revolution. But those who followed him closely throughout the factional warfare in the party, for which, by the way, he bore more than a single man's share, will not dispute the opinion that his overriding principle was power. A chance remark often reveals the man. In the early stage of the movement, his friend, Hendin, once asked him why he did not return to Russia as others did. Bittelman, in a moment of rare candor, replied, "In Russia they will never forget that I was not there during the revolution. Here I am on the ground floor."

During that period, some of Bittelman's articles in the *Funken* were signed, for greater piety, Lentrov—for Lenin and Trotsky.

Bittelman's massive concentration on party affairs was doubtlessly made easier by his singular—for the time and environment—family life. He was perhaps the sole Communist leader in the 20's about whom there was no gossip in the party ranks. His devotion to his wife, Khave, was exemplary. And they had no children.

In a casual conversation on the beach in the summer of 1923, Bittelman remarked to the author that he hoped to write the history of the American Left Wing while the records were still clear and his impressions fresh. And it seems that he did start this work. A couple of articles—fragments—were printed by him in the party's monthly. But no book appeared during the 20's. In a letter to Kalmen Marmor in Russia, in the early 30's, Bittelman mentioned that he was working continuously on his history, had already completed 500 pages, and had only the last chapter to do. But no book of his was ever published. The only plausible reason that could be suggested for his failure was the numerous shifts in the party's course and in Soviet policy, which robbed him of a dependable guiding line for his treatment of the period and its characters.*⁴²⁵

Another of Bittelman's disappointments, though less significant, had to do with his ambition to become an authority on the history of Russian Bolshevism. After the Ruthenberg people took over the party in 1925, Bittelman, having enough time on his hands, began a diligent study of Zinoviev's history of the Russian party, taking copious notes. He was also searching for weapons in the factional struggle. But when he was ready to take advantage of his studies, Zinoviev was thrown out and his name and opinions were taboo for Communists.

THE LEADERSHIP HE CRAVED ELUDED HIM

Bittelman did not avoid ultimate frustration. It seems that Stalin, disliking Lovestone, felt no liking for Bittelman either. For all his unremitting activity in Stalin's service during the factional struggle, Bittelman's reward was to be sent to India—his stay there was futile—while the new leader, Browder, was creating his own apparatus. Only when this task was achieved was he permitted to return to

America. And then Bittelman, the brain of the Foster-Browder caucus, was not even first in Browder's team. But he was a member of the political committee and, for a time, editor of the *Communist*.

During World War II and immediately afterward, winning over the Jews assumed great importance, and Bittelman was made boss of the Jewish movement. The Jewish party fractions were abolished, and the Freiheit Publishing Association, reorganized on a wider basis, became the center of Jewish Communism. Ben Gold was president, and Bittelman secretary, actually the leader. This was his first taste of power, and, commissarlike, he dictated to the *Freiheit*, *Jewish Life*, and all other institutions.*⁴²⁶

Wooing American Jewry required a positive attitude toward Jewish life. Bittelman, a semi-assimilationist, immediately blossomed forth a man deeply concerned with Jewish problems.

At the annual conventions of the Freiheit Association, he read long papers on the urgency of Jewish unity and the task of building Jewish culture. His papers were published in Yiddish and English booklets. Bittelman was so immersed in his new Jewish role that, shrewd as he was, he at first failed to grasp the full meaning of the famous Ilya Ehrenburg article in the *Izvestia* of October 21, 1948, that signaled the oncoming destruction of what was left of Jewish culture and social life in Russia. But when the ominous significance of the Ehrenburg article was brought home to the party here, Bittelman executed a sharp turn. He immediately suppressed any reference to the Jewish people and Jewish culture as such. Under his watchful eye, the IWO *shules* moved back to their earlier Leftist "internationalist" curriculum, to the deep dismay of the Jewish-minded teachers. Still, the initial mistake cost Bittelman his power over the Jewish movement. He was again kicked upstairs.

Bittelman was among the second layer of party leaders to be sentenced under the Smith Act in the early 50's, and was released from Federal prison in the summer of 1957. He was also brought up on deportation charges; politically active in this country for more than four decades, he was not a citizen, and admitted that he had never applied for citizenship. He was ordered deported, but the verdict was appealed.

It might be interesting to add that during his interrogation by the immigration officers, August 17-18, 1949, Bittelman referred to anti-Semitism as a major factor in his conversion to Communism.

"Jews," he said, "were rarely employed, if at all, by railroads, steamship companies, gas, electric and telephone companies. . . . (They) were in the position of second or third class citizens, politically, economically and socially. . . ." *427

Needless to say, neither the subject nor the reason came anywhere near the truth. No more genuine was his charge at the hearing that anti-Semitism was behind his prosecution. The party line in that dismal period demanded throwing at the American "ruling circles" the accusation of anti-Semitism in addition to reaction and war-mongering. Communists of Jewish birth dragged in the issue of anti-Semitism before congressional hearings and in court proceedings.

BITTELMAN A REVISIONIST

As yet before entering prison in 1952, Bittelman wrote a book on the party's prospects; the book was suppressed by Foster. Out of prison, his voice was not heard in public in the intense controversy in the party between the Stalinist die-hards and the revisionists, set off by the explosive Khrushchev speech to the 20th party congress in Moscow, February 1956. No outsider could tell whether he sided with the Foster-Dennis-Thompson faction or with the oppositionists, led by John Gates and Joseph Clark.

But in the fall of 1957, Bittelman, in a series of articles in the *Daily Worker*, set a new major task for the CP, to take the initiative in building a "party of leading Marxists." It was an ambiguous task, and Bittelman was using his old technique of raising a dust cloud to hide his real meaning. And his meaning became clear a few months later from his reply to Foster's accusation that he was a revisionist of Marxism-Leninism. *428

Revisionism as a weapon against adversaries was fashioned by Khrushchev in the late 50's in his struggle for absolute power. It became an offense more serious than deviation from the party line. Tito of Yugoslavia was called a revisionist when the break between him and the Kremlin became official in 1958. (The term "revisionism" was not invented by Khrushchev. He took it from the old Social Democratic controversy in the first decade between Edward Bernstein, the father of revisionism, and Karl Kautsky and his friends, orthodox Marxists.)

Bittelman a revisionist was news indeed. And his reply was that

of a confirmed revisionist. Fortifying himself with Marxism-Leninism—Bittelman would not budge without Marx and Lenin—he arrived at the glaring heresy that American capitalism “is displaying a number of distinct and important national peculiarities and characteristics. . . . As a result, capitalism in the United States was developing in width and strength at the same time, and *still continues to do so* (italics his).”^{*429}

What is more, Bittelman now embraces the Welfare State: “. . . Only the struggle for the Welfare State will create the conditions and realize the objective possibility for the peaceful transition to Socialism,” he wrote. And in this struggle “the middle classes and sections of the non-monopoly bourgeoisie” are fit to be partners.

In 1928, Bittelman was the brain behind the Leftist caucus, whose chief weapon against the majority group was the accusation of believing in the vitality of the American economy—American exceptionalism—and “lagging behind the radicalization of the masses.” It took him precisely three decades and three-and-a-half years in prison to recognize the validity of this American exceptionalism.

For this heresy, Bittelman was dropped from the party payroll in the fall of 1958.^{*430}

ISRAEL AMTER, A SAINTLY COMMUNIST

Of all the curious types that gravitated to Communism, Israel Amter was perhaps the most unusual. Amter was born in Denver, Colorado, March 1878, of Jewish-Hungarian parents. His father was a prosperous farmer, one of the pioneers of the West. As he told it in his autobiography, he never mingled with the children of the Eastern European immigrants, who lived on the other side of the tracks. Nor does he mention receiving any sort of Jewish education. His friends in school were mostly gentiles.^{*431} Israel showed musical promise, he studied piano, and was given a good musical education. But he became interested in the radical movement and joined the first SP branch, formed in 1901.

His parents sent him to Germany to prepare for a career as a concert pianist. He stayed there 11 years, dividing his time between his musical studies and activity in the Social Democratic Party. On returning to America, Amter rejoined the SP, became a Left-Winger in 1919 and a Communist in 1920.

Amter never touched the piano again, nor did he show any sign of missing it. He was never heard to speak of music nor of going to a concert, so completely was he swallowed up in Communist politics, for which he was wholly unsuited. The only evidence of his student days in Europe was his Bohemian dress and string tie.

As if to bury his "frivolous" musical youth, Amter became a dedicated ascetic Communist. One morning in the 20's, the author found him sweeping the floor at party headquarters in Cleveland; he was party secretary there. The story was that he was existing on fifteen cents a day. His task was to build up a revolutionary movement in that industrial city, but his office was without a telephone. He had so little practical sense that he could not raise the few dollars for a telephone—or perhaps he deemed it a bourgeois luxury.

Israel Amter was one of the speechmaking Communists, and every speech had to include a review of the entire world situation, full of ponderous platitudes. His party comrades listened to his boring talks only out of deference to his honesty and modesty. He was perhaps the only one in the party hierarchy without personal ambitions. He held many important executive positions, like that of secretary of the New York State party, but there always had to be a second man with him to manage the organization. All his life on the CEC of the party, he was never heard to utter a fresh thought, even within the framework of the doctrine. However, the little group of bureaucrats in his office did occasionally manipulate him for their own petty aims.

Amter's devotion to the cause was fabulous. Every change of line was accepted by him with deep reverence. During the Third Period, in the early 30's, Amter happened to be at Camp *Nitgedeiget* during the weekend of the Day of Atonement. The three musicians who came to give a concert innocently included Baruch's *Kol Nidre* in their repertory, thinking it appropriate for the occasion. The solemn chant was warmly applauded. But the secretary of the New York party was outraged. He denounced the playing of *Kol Nidre* on the night of *Yom Kippur* as evidence of a lingering bourgeois-nationalist-religious sentiment. As a countermove, Amter compelled the camp management to organize an anti-religious lecture for the next day. A few years later, in 1936, 1937 and 1938, during the Democratic Front era, running for various offices on the CP ticket, Amter, never identified as a Jew, was now proud to be one, and

kept appealing as such to the Jewish voters. . . . The man had not changed, the line had.

Like many saintly men, Amter could be cruel and revengeful to people holding different views. In 1942, with Russia and America in the war, he denounced Norman Thomas as a "Fifth Columnist and a Spearhead of Fascism," and demanded that the government take measures against him and other Fifth Columnists.*⁴³²

Amter died in 1954.

JACK STACHEL, THE ORGANIZATION MAN

The organizational key-man of the party in the late 20's and 30's was Jack Stachel. He has come out rather badly in some of the writings of former Communists who dealt with him in the factional struggle. But the full measure of the man could not be taken in the 20's.

Of all those who entered the Communist movement as foot soldiers, Stachel's way to leadership was the most rapid. He did not inch his way to power in the party; he grabbed it with both hands.

Stachel was born in Austrian Poland in 1900, of a poor family. He came to this country at the age of nine. After finishing public school, he supported himself by peddling in the daytime, while continuing his studies in evening high school, which he graduated.

Stachel joined the CP in 1924. The functionary who made out his application remembered a little episode: Immediately after signing the form, Stachel asked to be assigned as a speaker on one of the street corners. The functionary, amazed at his eagerness, replied, "Wait a little while, until you get acclimated in the party." But Stachel impatiently insisted on speaking the same evening.*⁴³³

Young, unknown, without any outward sign of being above the average, Stachel could not gain attention in the party. He begged to be attached to the Young Workers League. There his talent for organizational maneuvering and his shrewd judgment of men were quickly revealed. He joined the Ruthenberg faction, and helped to line up a majority of the YWL for the faction. A couple of years later, he wound up a representative of the YCL in that faction. From there his rise in the party was rapid. He soon emerged as the right-hand man of Jay Lovestone. The latter planned the factional

strategy and Stachel was the chief executor, which involved much shady work.

Stachel's real opportunity came after the Lovestone people were out, in 1929. He knew the party more intimately than the members of the triumvirate, and was a more skilful politician by far. And when the reins of the party were handed over to Browder, who was still less acquainted with the party membership—and the latter with him—Stachel became indispensable in all inner-party matters.

Intimate knowledge of the party does not explain entirely Stachel's speedy climb. No one, even in his most generous impulse, would credit the Communist leadership with brilliancy or originality. Compared with other radical groups in the recent past, the CP lacked men of distinction at its top. By and large, Communism had no need for men of fresh thought.

However, the ramification of the party's activities in the 30's taxed the ability of the leadership beyond the normal requirements of the past. Within the frame of the general directives from Moscow there was wide scope for strategy and daily decision. And here Stachel's balanced mind and keen insight came to the fore. One might add that while the Robert Minor's and Roy Hudson's at the top were largely valueless, the party possessed quite a number of competent people in the second layer of leadership, men like William Schneiderman, Johnny Williamson, Sam Darcy, Carl Winters, Jacques Steuben and others.

As the party grew and began a massive penetration of labor, government offices and the middle classes, the organizational apparatus of the party gained tremendous importance. The situation demanded not merely keeping abreast of the expansion, but staying one step ahead of it. One contact brought another; one position led to another. Holding together the threads of the multiple phases of the movement was largely the job of Jack Stachel. Browder was preoccupied with brushing and polishing the CP to make it presentable to the American people, and Stachel was the keeper of the organizational keys. At various times, he was head of the trade union and the organization departments of the party and its executive secretary.

Stachel successfully conducted the behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Militants, in 1936, which actually amounted to boring from within the SP. And it was not his fault that the purges in Russia, begun in the same year, had their sobering effect on the

more aggressive Socialists and undermined the chances of a United Front between the two parties.

The party was a natural vehicle for Stachel's acute intelligence. He would behave on all occasions as a good Communist ought to, but he was not belligerent or arrogant; rather a conciliator, and a crafty one at that. And persons having trouble in the party would often come to him for advice and help. Not one for a mass appeal, or a party front man, Stachel was in no way a menace to Browder. This goes far to explain why the two could work together closely for so long a time.

Stachel's power in the party shrank greatly when Foster assumed the leadership, after Browder's ouster in 1945. Stachel, who had opposed Foster's policies for some time, was removed by him as the head of the important trade union department of the party.

Stachel was among the first string of Communist leaders to be tried and sentenced in 1949-1950. He was released with the others the summer of 1956. He has been heard of very little since then.

Notes

- +1 The top leadership consisted of the old veterans: Abraham Rosenberg, John Dyche, Benjamin Schlesinger, Morris Sigman, George Wishnak, Abraham Bisno (Chicago), Sol Polakoff and others in the women's garment industries; Max Zuckerman in the headgear workers'; Max Pine, Ike Goldstein in men's clothing; J. Goldstein in the bakery trade. In the smaller trades, the young arrivals were the initiators. In the men's clothing strike, younger people had a greater part in leadership.
- +2 Sol Yanofsky and Rudolf Rocker were two representative anarchist writers and lecturers. The latter was a German non-Jew who spoke and wrote Yiddish fluently. Rocker was active in England and the United States. He died in September 1958.
- +3 Anarchist illusions on the nature of Bolshevism can be seen from the article in the anarchist magazine, *Freedom*, edited by Harry Kelly. Restating the anarchist thesis that the state is the enemy of liberty and human progress, the article went on: "The Left Wing Socialists now advocate the same thing. So our differences are merely on the tactics pursued." (It might be well to add that the anarchists here had already disavowed the use of terror as a weapon. The Jewish anarchist groups declared themselves against terror and sabotage at their conference in 1910.)
- +4 This author recollects vividly one afternoon in the middle of 1919 at Sholem's Cafe, Canal Street and East Broadway, the rendezvous of the Jewish literati. Alexander Berkman, the most prominent anarchist, was sitting with a group of people, speaking softly. "Now that the civil war is over," he said, "it is time for us to begin hitting the Soviet government to keep it from becoming entrenched and gaining undue power. Otherwise, it has all the earmarks of degenerating into an oppressive state apparatus." But his listeners, elated by the victories of the Red Army, were in no mood to be impressed by the warning of an anarchist. On the contrary, they wished the Soviet government more power.
- +5 The group was led by Volodarsky, Gregory Weinstein, writer and politician,

who came here with the first mass immigration; A. Stoklitsky, A. Chudnovsky, Gregory Melichansky, who became the head of the Soviet trade unions; C. Zorin, the first chairman of the revolutionary tribunal; and Nicholas I. Hourwich, who arrived in this country in 1909. (Volodarsky later became the head of the Cheka in Leningrad and was shot by a Social Revolutionary.)

- David Schub, who knew the inner workings in the Russian Federation, believes that there was hardly any rivalry between Trotsky and Bukharin. For one, Trotsky was older and by far more conspicuous and popular—he had been the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in 1905—and the younger Bukharin could be no competitor to him. (Schub to M.E., summer 1957)
- +6 For more on the activities of Trotsky and Bukharin, see Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, Viking Press.
- +7 David Schub, then present in the *Forward* editorial rooms, was convinced that Trotsky's outburst stemmed partially from his pro-German leanings. Relating this incident at the *Novy Mir* the same day, Schub repeated his opinion of Trotsky's sympathies, to which Bukharin replied, "But you cannot say this about Ilyich."
- +8 Among them were: Charles E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, Louis C. Katterfeld, from Kansas City, Missouri; the wealthy William Bross Lloyd, from Chicago, and his secretary, Isaac E. Ferguson; James P. Cannon, a former IWW from Kansas City; Dennis E. Batt, who headed the delegation from the Michigan State SP; and the most outstanding New York Left-Wingers, Louis C. Fraina, James Larkin, Benjamin Gitlow and Harry Waton, a one-man Socialist educational institution from Brownsville.
- +9 Martens opened a Soviet commercial bureau, headed by A. A. Heller, and launched the weekly *Soviet Russia*, edited by Kenneth Durant, a young socialite from Philadelphia. Martens was expelled from the United States during the anti-Red raids of 1920.
- +10 A third party was added nine months later, when the Dennis Batt Michigan group broke away from the CP, forming their own Proletarian Party, primarily a Marxist propaganda body, confined mostly to Michigan.
- +11 Olgin met Nuorteva on the streets of Moscow in 1923. He related Nuorteva's gloomy tale, thinly camouflaging him, in an article in the *Freiheit*. Olgin said that Nuorteva had had no complaint against the revolutionary justice.
- +12 The reasons for Fraina's expulsion have never been made public. The story circulating in intimate party circles was that Fraina misused in Mexico a part of a considerable sum of money given to him by the Comintern to organize a party there. Others claim that he was framed. However, from information available to the author, he is inclined to believe that Fraina could not account for all the money given to him by Moscow for the task in Mexico.

Outside the party, Fraina, later known as Lewis Corey, noted economist, remained a fellow traveler until the purges in the 30's. After that he wrote and spoke against Communism and the dictatorship in Russia. He died September 16, 1953, at the age of 59.

- +13 For the program on union activity, see *The Communist*, No. 13, 1920.

- +14 The only possible American financial source was the campaign of the Friends of Soviet Russia for the famine-stricken Volga region, 1921-1922.
- +15 The order by the Supreme Soviet calling upon the Russian people to assist the Socialist revolution in Germany, issued October 4, 1918, at the first sign of revolutionary stirrings in that country, was reprinted in the *Class Struggle*, February 1919.
- +16 Trotsky later blamed Stalin for the military debacle in Poland.
- +17 In a debate in the *Forward* on nationalism, M. Baranoff condemned all adherents of Jewish nationalism. Zionists, Bundists, members of the Jewish Federation, Dr. Syrkin, Dr. Zhitlowsky, the ancient Pharisees in Palestine and others were all lumped together. The *Naye Welt* was angered by such a total lack of differentiation. (*Naye Welt*, Aug. 20, 1915)
- +18 There were a couple of incidents where Ukrainian Red troops had also committed anti-Jewish pogroms.
- +19 The leaders of the American Jewish Committee, Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall and Oscar Straus, anxious to save Jewish lives, were induced by H. Zack, an agent of the Kolchak government here, to enter into negotiations with the Metropolitan Platon to help Kolchak in the United States. When the affair was exposed, the *Forward* mildly reproved the *Yahudim*, saying, "They are not speaking for the Jewish people of America." (Editorial *Forward*, Sept. 7, 1919)
- +20 Hiltzik died a couple of years later; the other four broke with Communism at different stages.
- +21 The delegates from two branches in New York, Downtown and Harlem, and of Philadelphia cast their votes with the Left.
- +22 Shachno Epstein was sent to America by the Communist International early in 1921 as an "instructor" to the Jewish Communists. His choice was due in part to Dr. Louis Hendin. When Hendin was in Moscow, he had been asked which of the two, Dr. Max Goldfarb or Shachno Epstein, both having lived in America, should be sent back to help the Jewish Communists. Hendin, though mindful of Goldfarb's superior ability, still did not hesitate to recommend Epstein. "We might lose Goldfarb on the road," was his comment. In the few years he had been here, Goldfarb had made a career in the *Forward*—he had been labor editor of the paper, and young Hendin distrusted him. (Hendin to M.E.)

The Comintern did send Goldfarb abroad a year or two later, to help create a Communist mass party in England. He worked there under the name of D. Bennett. He failed in his mission, but he was not "lost on the road." Goldfarb later occupied important posts in Moscow, and was executed during the purges in the 30's.

- +23 Theodore Draper, in his valuable study, *The Roots of American Communism*, N. 23, p. 449, accepts *in toto* the opinion given by Cannon that "The Workers Council was fully forewarned that the new legal party was to be controlled by the illegal Communist party." Admittedly, the author was mistaken in stating that the Communists agreed to disband their underground party (*Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 1914-1952*, p. 112). But he cannot accept the other extreme view. The statement by the Jewish Bureau of the

ALA speaks of "seeking to control," and not that the Workers Council agreed to such control. And the immediate reply in the *Naye Welt* is a definite indication that such consent was never given.

Knowing the top people of the federation, it seems highly unlikely that the majority of them would have submitted beforehand to CP control. Talks with a few leading Jewish Communists of that period confirms this view. J. B. S. Hardman also denies categorically such an agreement. As to the Communist underground publications, which hinted during the negotiations that the WC had consented to control, Hardman states that he never read them.

Nevertheless, it is plausible to believe that some members of the WC may have secretly joined the CP during the protracted negotiations, and privately consented to Communist control.

- +24 The nine representing the former federation were: Hardman, Olgin, Zivyon, Yuditz, J. Mindel, R. Salzman, Ab. Epstein, D. Siegel, A. Wiener; the nine others were: Shachno Epstein (J. Berson), A. Bittelman, K. Marmor, L. Hendin, Morris Holtman, M. Lunin, Hyman Castrell, Noah London and Taubenschlag.
- +25 Hendin, knowing that Ruthenberg also favored the liquidation of the underground, asked him why he agreed to a party court for the three, to which Ruthenberg replied with a wink, "It is better that I sit in judgment on you than the others." (Hendin to M.E.)
- +26 On the eve of the publication of the *Freiheit*, George Wishnak approached Jay Lovestone for a contribution from the Workers Party. Lovestone took out a bankroll, counted out \$1,500, and handed it to Wishnak. No receipt was requested. (Wishnak to M.E., summer 1954)
- +27 Otto Braunstetter, national secretary of the SP, a member of the credentials committee, asked Ruthenberg ironically, "What brings Communists to such a gathering?" to which Ruthenberg could have replied, "What brings the Socialists here, the SP being traditionally against such a movement?" Instead, he answered piously, "The Communists go wherever the working masses go." (Hardman to M.E., summer 1955)
- +28 In Foster's book, *History of the Communist Party in the United States*, written after more than a quarter of a century, he blames the Fitzpatrick-Nockles break with the Communists on Gompers' threats to withdraw the subsidy to the Chicago Federation of Labor. He also blames Pepper for his overenthusiasm. But he finds no word of criticism for himself or his friends.
- +29 For a detailed, though one-sided, account of that convention, see Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess*, 1939.
- +30 For the official party view on the strategy of the Left Wing, see William F. Dunne, *Workers Monthly*, Feb. 1926.
- +31 Communism was a new element in the trade unions, and the majority of the AFL were hardly aware of its possible implications. Only William Green had had a brief encounter with the Communists in the furriers' union, in 1926. It fell to Isidore Nagler, the only ILGWU delegate to the AFL convention in Los Angeles, October 1927, to discuss the nature of Com-

munist penetration in the unions in the light of the decisive struggle raging in his union.

Nagler introduced a resolution condemning the CP's interference in internal union affairs, and asking for the moral aid of the AFL. He warned the delegates against the "disguise with which the Communists present themselves to the workers, and their readiness to adopt any method in order to penetrate the labor movement. . . ." (Report & Proceedings, AFL Conv., 1927, pp. 370-4)

- +32 David Dubinsky was in Europe when Sigman moved against the three Left locals. He considered it a tactical error. However, in the special Philadelphia convention, Dubinsky played a major part in preventing the Communists from taking over, while, at the same time, avoiding a premature break with them.
- +33 On a local level, Hillman was preceded by Meyer Perlstein, of the ILGWU, author of the Cleveland Plan Agreement, signed December 1919 in the women's garment industry in that city. This agreement, known as the Cleveland Experiment, combined a "fair and accurate standard of production, . . . based on time studies," with the idea of a "living minimum wage." (For details see Melech Epstein, op. cit., 1914-1952, pp. 38-39.)
- +34 Among the leading Right-Wingers were Joseph Gold, Louis Hollander, Abraham Miller, Jacob S. Potofsky, Peter Monat, Charles Weinstein (Philadelphia), Frank Rosenblum and Joseph Dorfman.
- +35 They were Max Zaritsky, Alex Rose, Abraham Mendelowitz, I H. Goldberg and Nathaniel Spector. The leaders of the millinery Left were Herman Zukowski and his wife, Gladys Schechter; of the capmakers, Isidore Feingold, of Chicago.
- +36 The author, aside from being the responsible editor during the second half of the 20's, was also a member of the *Freiheit* management committee and of the leading committees of the federation. He knew the circulation figures.
- +37 For a detailed description of the Silver murder, see *I, The Union*, by Joseph Belsky, secy-treas., Hebrew Butchers' Union. Belsky recognized that the rank and file in the union had reasons for grievances in the 20's, which the Communists utilized. (Belsky to M.E., 1957)
- +38 The salaried officers in the national office of the Jewish Section of the order, aside from Salzman, were Gedaliah Sandler, H. Schiller, Itche Goldberg and Arnold Grossman.
- +39 The editors of the *New Republic* issued a 42-page booklet, August 4, 1920, reprinting all the headlines on the Bolsheviks that had appeared in the *New York Times* until that date. It made an interesting study in biased news reporting.
- +40 The representatives of labor on the American delegation were Dr. Nachman Syrkin and Morris Winchefskey.
- +41 The writer had several occasions to deal with Dimandshtein.
- +42 J. S. Hertz, a leading member of the Zukunft, the Bund youth group, and a delegate to the Communist Youth Congress, witnessing the steam-roller methods of the Russian delegation and their double-dealing, returned to Poland an enemy of Communism.

- +43 Dr. Dubrowsky, in his testimony before the Dies Committee, September 23-27, 1939, stated that "the famine was made a sort of a racket by the American Communists," and that about 90 per cent of the funds remained in this country. Gitlow testified before the same committee that about half of the funds were diverted to this country. Dubrowsky also said that he broke with Communism in May 1935. (Dies Comm. Report, Vol. 8, 1939)
- +44 The first ICOR secretary was Dr. Elye Wattenberg, a Left Poale Zion. Later, S. Almazoff and Ab. Epstein, both active members of the Workers (Communist) Party, became secretary and national organizer respectively.
- +45 For documentary material on Birobidjan, see Solomon M. Schwarz, *The Jew in Soviet Russia*, 1951.
- +46 P. Novick, who visited Birobidjan in 1936, tried unsuccessfully to stir up new interest in the Jewish Region among skilled workers here. He had to explain why the Americans in the early 30's had had to leave Birobidjan. Unwilling to give the true reason, he merely said, "The coming of the Americans did not justify itself." (*Freiheit*, Nov. 1, 1936)
- +47 Rumor in Moscow had it that the selection of Birobidjan was the brain-child of Yuri Larin, an assimilated Jew close to Stalin. Larin had a fame for thinking up the most unworkable plans. He was the author of the "continuous work week," rotating the rest days of the workers, that nearly wrecked Soviet industry.
- +48 A statement by Cannon, Abern and Shachtman on their differences with the Comintern and the party appeared in the *Daily Worker*, November 15, 1928. The CEC explanation of their ouster was printed in the *Daily Worker*, October 27, 1928.
- +49 Trotsky's most influential writer in this country in the late 20's was Max Eastman, former editor of the *Masses* and of the *Liberator*. Eastman later turned against Trotsky and Communism generally.
- +50 The top caucus knew of Stalin's dislike for Lovestone. Lovestone himself told a group of friends—in the author's presence—that at a party in the Kremlin, Stalin, drunk, drew his gun and insisted on shooting Lovestone in the backside. Stalin's entourage tactfully tried to keep him from following Lovestone around the large room. Suddenly, Stalin, in a gesture of bravado, bared his chest and, offering his gun to Lovestone, exclaimed, "Here, shoot me! I am not afraid."
- +51 The cable was useless and badly timed. A sharp exchange between the Stalinites and the Bukharinites was taking place at the session of the Russian CEC. When Bukharin saw the cable, he rushed up to the platform, and, waving it indignantly at Stalin, cried, "The American comrades have nothing against me. Why should they suddenly demand my removal?—It is you who engineered this." Stalin, greatly annoyed, denied any knowledge of the cable. This was probably one of the rare occasions when Stalin was telling the truth. (Told to the author by Gershon Dua [A. Ged], present at the session as a fraternal delegate from the Polish CP.)
- +52 The pre-convention discussion opened with a statement by the minority—*Daily Worker*, December 3rd. The majority statement appeared December 7th. Then, on December 11th, followed the minority thesis to the sixth

world congress. The next theses of the minority appeared December 25th and occupied over four full pages. Among others, the majority was charged with "reformism and pacifism." The theses of the majority occupied three full pages and was printed the following day. All this immense outpouring of words was not intended for the party people here, who would not trouble to spend long hours reading them; they were meant for the Kremlin.

- +53 As a diversion from the enervating party politics, Pepper liked to visit "little Hungary's." There he would eat goulash, wash it down with good Hungarian wine, and, relaxed, join in singing Hungarian folk songs. On these jaunts he was usually accompanied by Yechiel Ravitch. (Ravitch to M.E., 1955)
- +54 One version of Pepper's adventure is given in Ben Gitlow's *I Confess*.
- +55 For some of the speeches of the majority at the Presidium, see Ben Gitlow's *I Confess*. Stalin's three speeches were published later by the Lovestonites.
- +56 At a caucus meeting of the last convention, Bedacht had suggested that it might be necessary to "form a fourth international" if Moscow should insist on its demands against the majority. Later, it was declared that Bedacht had made a mistake. The top was frightened by the consequences of such a suggestion becoming known.
- +57 Melech Epstein, to disengage himself from the exasperating caucus maneuvers, resigned as editor of the *Freiheit* after the sixth party convention.
- +58 For more about this, see Melech Epstein, op. cit., 1914-1952, p. 182.
- +59 The leading members were Will Herberg, Max Shachtman, Gil Green, Johnnie Williamson, Martin Abern, William Schneiderman, John Rijak (Steuben), Nat Kaplan, J. Jampolsky, Sam Don, Sam Darcy, Harry Gannes and Oliver Carlson.
- +60 Unlike the party, the League had only a sprinkling of non-Jews at the top.
- +61 Schaefer went to Russia in the fall of 1932, and conducted his oratorio *October* in Kharkov. He was given a group of young workers to rehearse with. One day, in the middle of rehearsals, the singers started a stampede to the door. Schaefer was left alone. He was later told that somebody had whispered that something was being sold at a nearby store, and the chorus had rushed to get in line. Schaefer did not like what he saw in Russia. But he could not express it publicly.
- +62 Among the leading conductors were: Schaefer, Lazar Weiner, Vladimir Heifetz, Henry Lefkowitz, Michel Gelbart, Misha Zevkin, Dr. Paul Held, Nathan Samaroff, Mendie Shein and Max Helfman.
- +63 The Communists also had a working arrangement earlier with Roger Baldwin on the defense of the political prisoners. But this was broken up when Baldwin publicly demanded the release of Socialist prisoners in Soviet Russia.
- +64 The party's steering committee in Boston on the eve of the execution were Max Bedacht and Bertram D. Wolfe. It was evident to the author, in Boston for the *Freiheit*, that the primary reason for the committee's insistence on continuous demonstrations in front of the State House was the

publicity value of arrests. But the authorities seemed to sense this too; the demonstrations were merely blocked and dispersed.

- +65 Baruch Glazman was then abroad and Moishe Nadir was wavering. Leonid Feinberg, a younger poet, also left with the group, but returned to the *Freiheit* a couple of years later.
- +66 Harry Sims (Hirsch), a Jewish boy from Baltimore, a youth organizer of the NMU and a member of the YCL, was shot and killed, while walking to a mine in Brush Creek, by his trusted companion, a young native miner named Miller, secretly hired by the coal companies. Sims had been the only organizer left in the coal area. He showed an amazing adaptability to local conditions. He was given a big funeral on February 17th in New York. Miller was released by Judge Baker in Barbersville.
- +67 For the Communist side of the Gastonia strike, see *Call Home the Heart*, a novel by Fielding Burke; Longman, Green & Co. As for Kentucky, the author can testify from personal experience that the strike was mercilessly and disastrously hinged to the "revolutionary" conception of the Third Period.
- +68 A confidential copy of this resolution was circulated among leading party people. The published text omitted reference to the maturing prerequisites for a revolution in Germany and Poland.
- +69 To the author's knowledge, the first to toy with this idea was John Pepper, in the late 20's.
- +70 Ben Gold, jailed in Maryland for a clash with police during the second hunger march, was put, on the first day—and not by chance—to scrubbing the big stairs in the old penitentiary. Unaccustomed to such labor, Gold tried to enlist the aid of a Negro prisoner working with him, who did not seem to be tired. At first the Negro was not responsive, but when Gold mentioned the ILD his indifference disappeared, and most of Gold's share of the work was done by him.
- +71 The group of proletarian writers consisted of Moishe Blechman, Yuri Suhl, Martin Birnbaum, L. Prince, Leib Sobrin, Malke Lee, J. A. Runch, Ben Fenster, Alexander Pomerantz, Meinke Katz, Moishe Shifres, A. Meisel, S. Chester (the last two were not beginners and not "proletarians"), Nachum Weisman, L. Chanukov, Joseph Greenspan and Aaron Kurtz. Some of them were on the staff of the *Freiheit*.
- +72 Georgi Dimitrov, then secretary of the Comintern, was a popular figure among Communists. His courageous behavior as a defendant at the burning-of-the-Reichstag trial in 1934, in Berlin, was a source of pride to Communists everywhere.
- +73 Hillman, at the crucial conference at Hotel Pennsylvania, never gave Dubinsky and his associates any assurance that he would keep Communists and known Left-Wingers out of conspicuous posts in the ALP, as was erroneously stated in Melech Epstein's *Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 1914-1952*, pp. 227-37. No minutes were taken at that conference, but subsequent interviews with many of those who were present confirm this fact.
- +74 Several months before his death, July 10, 1946, Hillman called in Louis Hollander. "A final clash with the Communists is approaching in the ALP,"

he said. "Can you take over the situation in Brooklyn?" (Hollander to M.E., summer 1952)

- +75 In that election, the Communists united with a group of the extreme Right Wing, against the wishes of the Socialist Farband, to whom they belonged. However, their joint ticket lost.
- +76 The Communist attitude was expressed in two booklets by Paul Novick, both published by the *Freiheit* in 1934. One blamed the Socialists for Hitler's victory; the second held the wealthy Jews responsible for the spread of anti-Semitism here.
- +77 In 1924, at Bialik's 50th birthday, Olgin had published an article in the *Freiheit*, "My Bialik," quoting from his Hebrew poems. The co-editor, Shachno Epstein, not to be outdone, wrote an article, "Our Bialik," with quotations from his Yiddish poems. But when Bialik died, July 7, 1934, Moishe Katz called him "the poet of philistine impotence."
- +78 There was hardly a grain of truth in this statement. The ICOR had been active in the anti-Palestine campaign of 1929. The IWO had not been in existence.
- +79 The manager of Local 117 was Louis Levy; of Local 9, Isidore Sorkin; and of the Pocketbook Workers', Ossip Walinsky.
- +80 The author arrived in Spain from Palestine on the ninth day of the uprising.
- +81 Botwin was executed in 1922 for assassinating a highly placed Polish Communist agent provocateur.
- +82 Enroute to Spain, their passports were taken away on the pretext that they would fight as Spaniards with Spanish documents. Actually, they fought as Americans. And when their evacuation began hastily in October 1938, no one appeared to know anything about their passports. They would have been stranded had not Ambassador Claude J. Bowers interceded for them and obtained Washington's permission to provide each one who could prove in any way that he came from America, including non-citizens, with entry documents. Privately, it was explained that Washington was kind to the volunteers to make amends for its neutrality toward the Spanish government. Many of the passports floating around were undoubtedly being used by Soviet agents.
- +83 The officers of the Trade Union Red Cross for Spain were Charles S. Zimmerman, chairman; Alex Rose, secretary; and David Dubinsky, treasurer.
- +84 The committee in charge included Minna Harkavy, Aaron Gudelman, Adolf Wolf, Bill Gropper and Frank Kirk. Among the artists were: Minna Harkavy, Max Weber, Moses and R. Soyer, Peggy Bacon, A. Walkowitz, Y. Runiyoshe, L. Losowick, Todres Geller and William Zorach. (*ICOR Almanac*, May 1943)
- +85 In 1934, Litvakov, in an outburst of uncontrolled anger, told Yosl Cohn, a Left poet from America, "This ignoramus—Stalin—will devour us all yet." (Cohn to M.E.)
- +86 The cooperating group consisted of Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, H. Leivick, Menachem Boraisha, David Ignatoff, Alexander Mukdoni, B. Z. Goldberg, managing editor of *The Day*, Leon Kobrin, Joseph Opatoshu, Alexander

Harkavi, D. L. Meckler, of the *Morning Journal*, Jacob Milch, Baruch Glazman, Peretz Hirshbein, Joel Slonim, Jacob Ben Ami, Lamed Shapiro, Z. Weinper, B. Lapin, S. Erdberg, B. Rivkin, and Abraham Maneiwich, the painter. The Communists had only five in the committee: Olgin, Salzman, Marmor, Melech Epstein and Sultan. (Sultan and his associates in the Bureau were despised in the community, and Epstein and Marmor had to conduct the negotiations with the non-Communist writers.) Dr. Zhitlowsky was chairman; Marmor, secretary.

- +87 Among the signers were: the well-known novelist, J. J. Singer; the playwright, David Pinski; the poets, Jacob Gladstein, A. Glantz-Leyeless, Ephraim Auerbach and R. Iceland; Dr. S. Margoshes, David Schub, Hillel Rogoff and Nathan Chanin.
- +88 A letter from Dr. Sloves to the author in 1938 complained bitterly of the broken promises.
- +89 The first time Socialists (the Militants) and some AFL unions joined the Communists in a May 1st parade in New York City was in 1936. The largest "United" May 1st parade was in 1937. In the ranks were also a group of students of the Protestant Theological Seminary in their vestments. However, the 1938 parade was a purely Communist affair, the non-Communist groups having dropped out as a result of the purges in Russia.
- +90 His long exile did not in the least shake Trotsky's belief in his own theory. He was the same old unwavering doctrinaire warrior. In a long interview in Mexico City two months before his assassination—printed in the *Forward*—Trotsky remarked to the author that "Stalin did worse things than the pact with Hitler." The interviewer did not press the point. Nazi armies had just invaded France; and, to the author's anxious question as to the future of Europe, Trotsky serenely sent him to the Manifesto of his Fourth International, composed in 1934. "There," he said, "you will find the answer." . . .

Trotsky was still an impressive figure. His thick mane and goatee were white. He was then 64 years old. His speech was animated and he kept his arms crossed over his chest in the manner of a teacher explaining a lesson to his pupil. He appeared to the author like a cold fire. Trotsky was practically without friends in Mexico City. His house was closed to those of his followers—and they came from various countries—who happened to disagree with him on a minor point of theory.

Trotsky was killed with an icepick August 20, 1940. The assassin was an agent of the Soviet security police masquerading as a Belgian. His real name was Turkov. He was given 21 years in prison.

The Trotsky's were very poor in Mexico. When he died, a few friends had to raise 300 pesos to move his body from the hospital to the funeral parlor. More than a million people passed his bier.

Trotsky's assassination caused great indignation among Jews. For days the *Freiheit* railed at the "reactionary Jewish press" for blaming Stalin for the cowardly murder, shrieking that the *Forward*, in particular, was spreading "blood libels" against Moscow and engaging in a lynch campaign. The Communist papers could cite only one "fact," the prepared letter

found on Turkov that he was a disciple of Trotsky and that the latter had wanted him to go to Moscow to kill Stalin.

- +91 Newton D. Baker was one of the few liberals who thought that "The trial is not a Hollywood drama." He said this in a speech before a women's organization in Chicago, March 12, 1937, after reading the voluminous proceedings of the Radek trial, published in book form in Russia. (*Soviet Russia Today*, April 1937)
- +92 Harry Gannes died in 1941.
- +93 Dr. Zhitlowsky and Ben Zion Goldberg later returned to the IKUF via its magazine. Moishe Blechman, who had resigned from the *Freiheit* quietly about two and a half years previously, and Leonid Feinberg, who broke away a short time after Epstein, joined the group. Simon Weber, who left the *Freiheit* and the party about the same time as Blechman, became a member of the Socialist Farband.
- +94 Epstein was chairman of the League; Schwartzman, secretary.
- +95 An article from Havana telling of the Communist anti-Jewish and anti-Epstein campaign appeared in the *Forward* October 7, 1940.
- +96 At a meeting of the executive board, October 3rd, manager Zimmerman vigorously denounced the pact, over the objections of the Communists, saying that "the whole labor movement is angered and shocked," and that the local would "take its place together with the entire labor movement." (Minutes of the executive board meeting of October 3, 1939)
- A resolution condemning the pact was adopted by the 24th convention of the ILGWU at the end of May 1940, in New York City. (Report & Proc. of ILGWU, 1940, p. 525)
- +97 The expelled were six officers: Ben Gerjoy, Meyer Krawetz, Sol Lipnack, Hyman Grossman, Isidore Gross, Ab. Feil; and a member of the executive board, Morris Rosenberg. They issued a leaflet explaining their action. It seems that after the first few resignations the party decided to minimize the bad effect of other resignations by announcing their expulsion first. A spy planted in this group notified the party of their decision to resign, thus giving it a chance to expel them first. (Lipnack to M.E.)
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Index

- Abbott, Dean, 312
Abbott, Leonard, 25
Abern, Martin, 187
Abramovich, Rafael, 159, 291
Abrams, Jacob, 25
AFL, 10, 11, 31, 55, 114, 118, 119, 123, 135, 276, 318
Agurski, Samuel, 161
Alter, Viktor, 162; arrested in Moscow, 163; 394
Ambidjan, 311
Amer. Jewish Comm., 58, 294
Amer. Jewish Congress, 295-96, 300, 329
Amer. Labor Alliance, 75
Amer. Labor Party, 269-70, 271
Amer. Peace Mobilization, 359-60
Amter, Israel, 105, 238, 241-42, 247; a proud Jew, 319
Anderson, Sherwood, 245
Anti-Nazi Boycott, 285-86
Anti-Semitism, as an election issue, 268-67; conf. Paris, 295-96
Antonini, Luigi, 271
Arkin, Leon, 94
Arnoll, John (A. Chapman), 320
Aronson, Nahum, 324
Art Collection, 314; artists, 416
ARTEF, 257-59
Asch, Sholom, 75, 257

Bacal, Moishe, 269
Baker, Newton D., 418
Baldwin, Roger, 414
Baranoff, M., 64, 65, 410
Barbusse, Henri, 266
Baskin, Joseph, 94
Batt, Dennis E., 37
Battle, George Gordon, 312
Bauer, Otto, 288
Becker, Lazar, 204
Beckerman, Abraham, 135

Bedacht, Max, 131, 152, 191
Beilin, J. B., 72, 93
Bellamy, Edward, 202
Belaky, Joseph, 412
Benjamin, D., 191
Benjamin, Herbert, 257
Berger, Victor L., 11, 17, 48
Beria, Lavrenti, 390
Berkman, Alexander, 21, 24, 408
Bernstein, Edward, 10
Bialik, Chaim Nachman, 416
Bialis, Morris, 142
Bittelman, Alexander, 70, 72, 73, 107-08, 110, 121, 181-83, 187, 188, 291, 328; in defense of pact, 351-52
Blechman, Morris, 418
Block, Rudolph, 59
B'nai Brith, 301
Boraisha, Menachem, 228, 362
Borochov, Ber, 24
Boruchowitz, Joseph, 127, 130, 131, 191, 369
Boudin, Louis B., 38, 140
Bowers, Claude J., 416
Brailsford, H. B., 65
Brainin, Joseph, 175
Brainin, Reuben, 174-75, 362
Brandeis, Louis D., 5
Brandler, Ernest, 113
Bread Strikes, 238
Breslaw, Joseph, 142
Bridges, Harry, 360
Brodsky, A., 216
Brodsky, Joseph, 139, 192
Bronshstein, Prof. Yaasha, 339
Browder, Earl, 244, 267; at Comintern, cong., 268; 1936 vote, 269; 272, 279, 289, 320, 335, 350-51, 354; spec. election, 359
Brown, Benjamin, 174
Bryan, William Jennings, 117

- Buchwald, Nathaniel, 258
 Budish, J. M., 311
 Bukharin, Nicholas, on anti-Jewish tendencies, 176-77; 180-81, 186, 188, 336, 385
 Bullitt, William C., 156
 Bund, 56, 65, 93; and Moscow, 162-63; 164
 Burgin, Hertz, 57, 64, 68, 69
 Caban, Ab., 19, 28-29, 58, 90, 129, 139, 159; on Hitler vs. Stalin, 343
 Camp *Nitgedaget*, 220; Kinderland and Unity, 221
 Cannon, James P., 98, 100, 187, 291
 Castrel, Hyman, 70, 225
 Chanin, Nathan, 93, 157, 141
 Charney-Vladek, 23, 28, 54, 94, 285
 CIO, and the CP, 274-76
 Civil Liberties Union, 290
 Claessens, August, 29
 Clark, Joseph, 402
 Cohen, Elliot C., 245
 Cohen, William W., 311
 Cohn, S. K., 214, 216-17, 219
 Cohn, Yoel, 200
 Commissariat, Jewish (Moscow), 76, 79, 161
 Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, 248
 Communist Dress Strike, 240
 Communist Party, Communist Labor Party, 37-38; CP inner life, 51; membership, 78; 248, 277
 Communists, Palestine, 298-99
 Cook, Walter M., 39
 Cooperative Housing, 214; and Felix Warburg, 217; bankruptcy, 218; 219
 Coughlin, Father, 292
 Counts, Dr. George, 266
 Crawl, June, 136
 Cultural Congress, 324-26
 CYCO, 327

Daily Worker, circulation, 250-51
 Dana, H. W. L., 245
 Darcy, Sam, 406
 Debs, Eugene V., 11-12, 22, 29, 48
 De Leon, Daniel, 10, 24, 64, 136
 Democratic Front, 153, 267-68, 270, 284, 303
 Dewey, John, 312, 334
 Dimandshtein, S. M., 161, 178, 339
 Dimitrov, Georgi, 415
 Dingol, S., 317
 Dirba, Charles A., 338
 Dollar Inquisition, 278
 Don, Sam, 348, 406-07
 Dorfman, Joseph, 412
 Draper, Theodore, 107, 409-10
 Dreiser, Theodore, 245
 Dubinsky, David, 54, 132, 142, 269-70; fight with Comm. in ALP, 271-72; CIO, 274; 303, 307, 411, 415
 Dubnov, Simon, 375
 Dubrowsky, Dr. D. H., 165
 Dunne, brothers, 187
 Dunne, Wm. P., 105, 123, 130
 Durant, Wm. J., 337

 Eastman, Max, 256, 413
 Edlin, William, 20
 Ehrenburg, Ilya, 399, 401
 Ehrlich, Henryk, 394
 Einstein, Albert, 257
Emes (Moscow), 76, 147, 399
Emes (New York), 75, 76
 Engdahl, J. Louis, 88, 98
 Engels, Friedrich, 273
 Epstein, Ab., 94, 147
 Epstein, Melech, 70, 103, 111, 147, 149; on Palestine, 223-26; 231, 285, 299, 328; break with CP, 348-49; 364-65, 366-67, 391, 414
 Epstein, Shachno, 24, 59, 80; editor *Freiheit*, 103; 111, 374
 Erdberg, S., 321
 Eric, Max, 339

 Falikman, Moe, 142
 Farband (Labor Zionist), 213, 219
 Farband (Left in WC), 147, 149
 Farband (Socialist), 93
 Farrell, James T., 266

- Father Divine, 290
 Feffer, Itzik, 175, 212, 373, 393-94
 Feigenbaum, Benjamin, 58
 Fenster, Benjamin, 198-99
 Ferguson, I., 56, 42
 Feinberg, Leonid, 415, 418
 Field, Frederick N., 360
 Flnerly, John, 334
 Finkelstein, Leon, 304
 Fischer, Judge Harry, 77, 312
 Fischer-Belsky, 45-46
 Fisher, Dr. I., 312
 Fishman, Jacob, 344
 Fitzgerald, Eleanor, 25
 Fitzpatrick, John, 115, 118, 119
 Flakser, David, 207, 341
 Ford, James W., 244, 269
 Fornberg, Dr. Carl, 60
 Foster, Wm. Z., 105, 106, 110, 114, 116;
 gains control, 117; 119, 122; takes re-
 venge on needle traders, 131; opposes
 new WC, 149; colonizing Moscow,
 180-81; 184, 194
 Fraina, Louis C., 30, 36, 37, 40, 48, 50,
 409
 Frank, Dr. H., 282
 Frank, Waldo, 245
 Freed, Irving, 338
 Freeman, Joseph, 256
 Freeman, Sam, 278
Freiheit, precarious existence, 111-12;
 circulation, 138
 Friends of Soviet Russia, 75, 76, 156, 157
 Friedland, Prof. Zvi, 339
 Frumkin, Esther, 339

 Gannes, Harry, 236, 273, 348-50, 353
 Gates, John, 402
 Geliebter, Philip, 67-70, 80
 Genoa Conference, 114
 Gerson, Simon, 19, 214-17
 GEZERD, 311-12
 Ghent, W. J., 20
 Gillis, Meyer, 58
 Ginsberg, Dr. Isac, 64, 344, 390
 Gitlow, Ben, 30, 42, 105, 107, 110, 111,
 131, 182, 191, 204

 Gladstein, Jacob, 325, 343
 Glassberg, Benjamin, 88
 Glazman, Baruch, 104
 Goebbles, 293
 Gold, Ben, 127, 132, 137, 193, 246; at
 code hearing, 264
 Gold, Michael, 256
 Goldberg, Abraham, 268
 Goldberg, B. Z., 326
 Golden, Samuel, 321
 Goldfarb, Dr. Max, 12, 24, 60, 410
 Goldman, Emma, 21, 42
 Goldschmidt, Dr. Alfonse, 156
 Goldstein, Rabbi Benjamin, 312
 Gompers, Samuel, 11, 20, 21, 117
 Gordon, June, 154
 Green, William, 137
 Greenfeld, Rabbi Jacob, 300
 Gropper, Bill, 227-28
 Gross, Aaron, 127, 137, 191
 Gusev, P., 120
 Guakin, Reuben, 59, 146

 Halpern, George and Pearl, 191
 Halpern, Jacob, 142
 Halperin, Moishe Leib, 104
 Hardman, Anna, 107
 Hardman, J. B. (Salutsky), 59, 60, 62,
 70-72, 87-88, 90-92; against unity
 with Comm., 100-01; expelled from
 WP, 102; 103, 108, 109, 384
 Hathaway, Clarence, 289, 298
 Hays, Max S., 11, 20
 Haywood, Bill, 10
 Hearst, Wm. R., 298
 Held, Adolf, 310
 Heller, A. A., 409
 Hendin, Dr. Louis, 45-47, 70, 73, 79;
 road to Comm., 81-82, 103, 107, 109
 Henderson, Donald, 276
 Herberg, Will, 193
 Hertz, J. S., 412
 Hertz, Sol, 373
 Hicks, Granville, 365, 366
 Hillman, Sidney, 54, 134, 135; and
 TUEL, 167-68; 264; ALP, 271-72;
 274, 358, 415

- Hillquit, Morris, 10, 11, 17, 18, 21-23, 28; on the Left, 35; on the split, 39; 48, 61, 87, 89, 129; suit against Comm. editors, 139-41
- Hiltzik, Harry, 67, 72
- Hirsch, Baron, 170
- Hirshbein, Peretz, 362
- Hitler, 262, 267, 304
- Hochberg, George, 225
- Hochman, Julius, 142
- Hollander, Louis, 412, 415
- Holmes, Dr. John Hayes, 285
- Holtman, Morris, 70, 103
- Hook, Sidney, 202, 245, 321
- Hoover, Herbert, 74
- Hourwich, Dr. I. A., 35, 126
- Hourwich, Nicholas I., 30, 34, 35, 49
- Howard, Sidney, 245
- Hunger Marches, 237
- Hyman, Louis, 127, 129, 130, 285, 366
- ICOR, 169, 173-74, 232, 310, 311-15
- Ignatoff, David, 104, 228, 362
- IKUF, 326-27, 362
- Ind. Workmen's Circle, 150
- Ingerman, Dr. Anna, 23, 29
- IWO, 133, 151-52; among English-speaking, 153-54; new name, 154; liquidation, 155; 293, 300, 325
- IWW, 10, 21
- Jaffe, Adolf, 51
- Jakira, Abraham, 105
- Joint Distribution Comm., 74, 76, 77, 159, 165, 166
- Jerome, V. J., 256
- Jeshurin, Ephim, 94
- Jewish Labor Comm., 285, 293, 300-02, 329, 378-79
- Jewish Life*, 319-20
- Jewish People's Comm., 285, 300-01
- Jewish Soc. Fed., 7-19, 56, 59, 62; first split, 70-72; second split, 87; 93, 95
- Jewish World Congress, 299-300
- Johnson, Hugh, 263
- Johnstone, Jack, 123
- Kahn, Alexander, 74
- Kalinin, Michail, 176, 177, 310
- Kamenev, Lev, 160
- Kanterowitz, Chaim, 141
- Kaplan, Benjamin, 142, 342
- Kasowski, Vl., on Lenin, 18
- Katofsky, Abraham W., 314
- Katz, August (Simone), 295
- Katz, Moishe, 24, 98, 338, 366
- Kautsky, Karl, 10, 65, 89
- Kelly Harry, 408
- Kharik, Issic, 339
- Khashin, Alexander, 24, 316, 399
- Khavkin, M. P., 315
- Khrushchev, Nikita, 179
- Kirtzman, Nicholas, 142
- Kline, Paul, 270
- Kling, Lazar, 67, 68, 69
- Knudsen, Alfred, 123
- Kobrin, Leon, 312
- Koralnick, Dr. Abraham, 331-32
- Kotel, Prof. M., 316
- Kramer, S. P., 57
- Krantz, Philip, 58, 64, 96
- Kreindler, Charles, 142
- Kruse, Wm., 88, 98, 108
- Kuk, Rabbi, 257
- Kulback, Moishe, 339
- Kun, Bela, 31, 286
- Kunitz, Dr. Joshua, 83-84
- Kuntz, Dr. Charles, 174
- La Follette, Robert M., 116
- La Guardia, Fiorello, 271, 288, 290
- Landon, Alf, 269
- Lang, Harry, 59
- Larkin, James, 30, 36, 42, 48
- Lee, Algernon, 29, 48
- Lehman, Herbert, 240
- Leivick, H., 104, 228, 362, 363
- Lenin, 17-18, 25-27, 49, 51, 52; speech against pogroms, 66; 69, 72, 158, 160, 166, 331
- Levine, Jacob, 148, 259
- Levine, Max, 261, 311
- Levy, Louis, 342
- Lewis, John L., 123, 274-76, 358-59

- Liberal Party, 271
 Liberty League, 269
 Lieberberg, Prof. Joseph, 314-16
 Lieberman, Elias, 392-93
 Liessin, Abraham, 60, 94, 95
 Lifshitz, Benjamin, 149, 191
 Lipaky, Louis, 73, 170, 300
 Litvakov, Moishe, 316, 338, 416
 Litvinoff, Maxim, 160, 264, 267
 Litwak, A., 24, 33, 60, 282
 London, Meyer, 11, 22, 58, 66, 148
 London, Noah, 70, 73, 107, 214
 Longuet, Jean, 33, 89
 Lorc, Ludwig, 28, 36, 38, 39, 88, 110,
 111, 114, 116, 119-20
 Lorwin, Louis, 26
 Lovestone, Jay, 42, 105, 110, 131, 132,
 181-82, 187-88; secret plans, 190; 195,
 405, 411, 413
 Lozovsky, A., 181
 Lusk Comm., 30, 42
 Luxemburg, Rosa, 10, 51
 Lyons, Eugene, 335

 MacDonald, Duncan, 116
 Magil, A. B., 256
 Magnes, Dr. Judah L., 21, 157, 158
 Mani Leib, 104
 Mann, Thomas, 296
 Marcantonio, Vito, 271, 301
 Marcus, Dr. Jacob R., 313
 Margoshes, Dr. Samuel, 325, 388
 Marley, Lord, 316
 Marmor, Kalmen, 80, 103, 394-98
 Marshall, Louis, 158, 410
 Martens, Ludwig, 32, 35
 Martov, Julius, 18
 Marx, Karl, 33, 273
 Matles, James, 207
 Matthews, J. B., 276
 Medem, Gina, 175
 Medem, Vladimir, 32, 33
 Meisel, Nachman, 226
 Menes, Dr. A., 257
 Merezhin, Abram, 177
 Miaja, General, 342
 Michoels, Solomon, 175, 394

 Milch, Jacob, 37, 362
 Milgrom, S. (Mills), 207
 Militants, The, 304
 Miller, Abraham, 412
 Miller, Bert, 193
 Miller, Rabbi Moses, 322, 358
 Mindel, Dr. Jacob, 72, 93, 192, 209-10
 Minor, Robert, 140, 162, 252
 Molotov, 46, 190, 320, 353
 Mufti, The, 98, 297
 Mukdoni, Dr. A., 326, 362
 Murray, Philip, 359
 Mussolini, Benito, 16, 269, 304

 Nadir, Moishe, 104, 366
 Nagler, Lidore, 142, 191, 411-12
Naye Welt, 1919, "America is home,"
 63-64
 Nelson, Louis, joins Left, 84-85; 127,
 133, 190, 196, 278
 New Deal, 262, 264, 275
 Newman, Emanuel, 170
 Niger, Shmuel, 169, 257
 North, Joseph, 256
 Novack, Morris, 201
 Novick, Paul, 150, 228, 238, 358
 NRA, CP opposition, 263-64
 Nuremberg Laws, 293

 Olgin, M., 60; ridicules Lenin, 64; 72,
 96, 98, 103, 108-11, 119, 129, 140, 167,
 223-26; in Third Period, 249; 298;
 a good Jew, 302; 335, 371
 Oneal, James, 14, 29
 Opatoshu, Joseph, 326
 ORT Federation, 310

 Panken, Jacob, 22, 174
 Pat, Jacob, 305
 People's Front (France), 269
 People's Peace, A. 377-78
 Peoples Relief Comm., 73-76, 165
 Pepper, John, 106, 110, 114, 115, 196
 Peretz, I. L., 60
 Perlstein, Meyer, 411
 Pine, Max, 58, 74, 76, 77, 94, 158
 Pinski, David, 58

- Platon, Metropolitan, 410
 Platt, Leon, 207
 Plekhanov, Georgi, 16
 Poale Zion, 75; Right, 160-61; Left, 162-63; 164
 Pointz, Juliet Stuart, 88, 110, 391
 Pollin, Morris, 94
 Pollitt, Harry, 195
 Pomerantz, Alexander, 199-200
 Post, Louis F., 43
 Potash, Irving, 197, 289
 Potofsky, Jacob S., 412
 Powers, George, 365
 Proletcult, 255-58
- Quill, Michael, 294, 301, 358
- Raboi, A., 104
 Radek, Karl, 18, 113, 186, 333, 336
 Raisin, Abraham, 104, 228
 Rappalo Treaty, 114
 Rashkes, Michael, 76, 166, 177-78
 Reed, John, 36, 48, 65, 68, 130
 Reinstein, Boris, 69, 106
 Rifkind, Sol, 93
 Rockwell, Kent, 154
 Rogoff, Hillel, 94, 102
 Rolland, Romain, 266
 Roosevelt, F. D., 244; accused of fascism, 263-64; 269, 294, 345; anti-Jewish to *Freiheit*, 356-58
 Rose, Alex, 271, 416
 Rosen, Dr. Joseph, 313-14
 Rosenblatt, Dr. Frank, 60, 74, 76
 Rosenfeld, Shmuel, 332
 Rubin, George, 122
 Russell, Charles E., 60
 Russian-Polish War, 41
 Rottenberg, Morris, 73, 170
 Ruthenberg, Charles E., 20, 36, 37, 38, 42, 44, 45, 105, 106, 117, 120, 180, 188
 Rykov, Alexie, 173, 180, 188
- Sacco-Vanzetti, 222
 Sachs, A. S., 28, 60
 Salzman, Rubin, 103, 147, 152
 Shachtman, Max, 187
- Schaefer, Jacob, 211, 212-13; in Khar-kov, 414
 Schappes, Morris, 379
 Schatz, Philip, 320
 Schatz-Anin, Dr., 325
 Schiff, Jacob, 410
 Schlesinger, Benjamin, in Moscow, 57; 79, 126, 142, 159
 Schlesinger, Emil, 202
 Schlonsberg, Joseph, 57, 58
 Schneiderman, William, 270
 Scottsboro Boys, 247
 Schub, David, 58, 409
 Schuman, Frederick, 245
 Schwartz, Maurice, 9
 Schwartzman, E., 284, 301, 365
 Secoder, Yasha, 20
 Seidel, Emil, 17
 Shafran, Khave, 207
 Shaplen, Joseph, 29, 351
 Shatoff, Bill, 26
 Shiplacoff, Abraham L., 11
 Shop Delegate System, 126
 Shules, The, seized by the Left, 148; 153, 259, 260, 323
 Siegel, David, 108, 109
 Sigman, Morris, 128, 129, 130, 132; suit against *Freiheit*, 139
 Sims, Harry, 415
 Sinclair, Upton, 335-36
 Singing Societies, The, 210-13
 Sirovich, Dr. William, 301
 Sisson Documents, 389
 Slobodin, Henry L., 65
 Sloves, Dr. H., 324, 327
 Smith, Gerald, L. K., 292
 Socialist Party, 10-14, 17, 19, 32, 55, 57, 59, 61, 89
 Socialist Labor Party, 11, 57, 58, 70
 Socialist Youth Alliance, 62
 Solomon, Ben, 67
 Solomon, Rabbi Chaim L., 316
 Spanish Civil War, 305-07; Botwin Co., 305-06, 416
 Spector, Nathaniel, 412
 Stachel, Jack, 184, 278, 341, 348-49

- Stalin, 161; on crisis USA, 191; 195, 241, 267-69, 308; on anti-Semitism, 321; 325, 333, 334: "cemented in blood," 355
 Starr, George, 154
 Steffens, Lincoln, 245, 266
 Steimer, Mollie, 25
 Steinberg, Max, 277
 Stenzor, Isidor, 127, 131, 191
 Stokes, Rose Pastor, 21, 75
 Stoklitaky, Alexander, 35
 Strachey, John, 266, 337
 Straus, Oscar, 410
 Suhl, Yuri, 375
 Stulberg, Louis, 142
 Sultan, Joseph, 14, 25, 340
 Syrkin, Dr. Nachman, 20, 214

 Tabachnick, Abraham, 200-01, 207
 Talmi, Leon, 173
 Tammany Hall, 6-11
 Tarant, Deborah, 375
 Terman, Moishe, 60
 Thalheimer, Ernest, 113
 Thomas, Norman, 236, 244-45, 252, 312, 404
 Thorez, Maurice, 195
 Togliatti, 195
 Toledano, Lombardo, 367
 Toler, Ernest, 31
 Tolstol, Alexie, 294
 Trachtenberg, Alexander, 88, 98, 256
 Trade Union Educ. League, 118, 119, 122-23, 126-27; membership, 133; 138, 195, 238-40
 Treca, Carlo, 332
 Trotaky, B. A., 316
 Trotaky, Leon, 18, 25; quarrel with *Forward*, 28-29; 176-77, 181, 186; on Soviet anti-Semitism, 321; 333, 334, 385; interview in Mexico, 1940, 417
 Troyanofsky, Ambassador, 313
 Tukhachevsky, Marshal, 333, 336

 Unemployed Councils, 235-38
 United Communist Party, 45
 United Hebrew Trades, 57, 61
 Untermeyer, Louis, 281, 296

 Volga Famine, 157, 158
 Von Ribbentrop, 350

 Wagenknecht, Alfred, 36, 47, 105
 Wagner Labor Act, and the CP, 263
 Walecki, H., 106
 Ward, Dr. Harry F., 276
 Wasser, Chaim, 163
 Watson, Morris, 271
 Wattenberg, Dr. Elye, 75
 Weber, Simon, 418
 Weinberg, Joseph, 94, 146
 Weiner, Lazar, 211
 Weiner, Philip, 152, 225, 285
 Weinper, Zeinwell, 326
 Weinreich, Dr. Max, 257
 Weinstein, Meyer, 93
 Weinstein, W. W., 105, 106
 Wicks, Harry W., 123, 171
 Wilkie, Wendel, 358
 Wilson, Woodrow, 12, 17, 21
 Winchefsky, Morris, 28, 58, 60, 94, 103
 Winitzky, Harry, 42, 111
 Winters, Carl, 406
 Wise, James Waterman, 315
 Wise, Rabbi Stephen S., 158, 228-29, 257, 314, 321
 Wisahnak, George, 94, 109, 168, 366
 Wolfe, Bertram D., 192, 414
 Woll, Matthew, 288-90
 Workmen's Circle, 7-8, 133, 137, 144-48, 151, 213
 Workers Party, 100-01, 114-16, 145
 Wortis, Rose, 123, 127

 Yanofsky, Sol, 21
 Yakir, Marshal, 333, 336
Yeusectzia, 160, 162, 163, 168
 YIDGEZKOM (Moscow), 75, 76, 165-66
 Yuditz, Paul, 98, 140, 228, 377

 Zak, Joseph, 121, 122
 Zam, Herbert, 191, 201-04
 Zam, Miriam, 191, 203
 Zametkin, M., 58
 Zaritsky, Max, 267

- Zeligman, Prof., 283
Zhdanov, 347
Zhitlowaky, Dr. Chaim, 21, 257, 362
Zinoviev, Gregory, 18, 49, 89, 113, 114,
157, 180-81
Zimmerman, Charles E., 41; road to
Comm., 81; 82, 127, 130, 131, 191, 196,
271, 370, 416, 418
Zimmerwald (conf.), 18
Zinberg, Dr. J., 339
Zipin, M., 68, 69
Zivyon, 12, 65, 71, 72, 94, 102, 103
Zuckerman, Baruch, 158
Zuckerman, Rubin, 142, 342
Zukowski, Herman, 191
Zunser, Eliakum, 169