Three Poems from the Lodz Ghetto

By RACHMIL BRYKS

TWENTY SEVEN

TWENTY seven summers,
twenty seven winters
lie buried in a paper shroud.

Twenty seven summers,
twenty seven winters
of unending hunger.

Twenty seven summers,
twenty seven winters
and never a solid home.

A dog knows caress—
you were fled from;
your breath contaminated life.

A cat gets hugged—
but fear kept human touch from you.
you were to all a heavy burden.

Twenty seven summers,
twenty seven winters
lie buried in a paper shroud.

(1941)

WHO WILL CONSOLE YOU?

WHO will console you
My unfortunate people?
You are powerless,
orphaned, alone.
Plants die
Trees cease to blossom.
Can trees bear fruit
having no soil, no sun, no air?
Who is there to console you,
My unfortunate people?

(Summer, 1940)

WHERE TO?

NIGHT, July, 1944
The police, like predators,
are stalking their prey.
Horror lurks.
What abuse awaits?
Where? Where to?
Holed up like mice.
We are afraid to show our heads—
does not death lie in wait outside?
Breathing stops when steps are heard.
Eyes wander over household things—
soon we'll have to leave it all.
Who will precede whom in death?
Our hearts are weeping
and everything around us weeps—
the furniture, the dishes,
the floor and the ceiling
and the walls;
the sky outside weeps
and the wind sobs like a child.
The weeping moon,
wrapped in a gown of mourning,
has found a hiding place.
Everything around us weeps.
Where? Where to?

RACHMIL BRYKS. *born in Skarzysko-Kamienna, Poland, in 1918, survived the Lodz Ghetto, Auschwitz, Webelin and other concentration camps. The author of* A Cat in the Ghetto *and other books, he last appeared here in our April, 1970 issue.*

The Bund Revisited: III

From the 1905 Revolution to World War II

By LOUIS HARAP

WHEN the Bund rejoined the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party in 1906, the controverted question of national cultural autonomy was tacitly left in abeyance. The period was one of frightful pogroms, during which the Bund self-defense groups offered armed resistance to pogromists and guarded meetings and gatherings of Jewish workers, all of which were of course illegal under Tsarism. Sometimes non-Jewish workers fought at the side of Jews in self-defense units. Political strikes were carried on, illegal literature was printed on secret presses and distributed, pamphlets edited and financed by the Foreign Committee were smuggled into Russia.

Bundists were also among the thousands who emigrated, mostly to America, and swelled the ranks of labor radicals abroad. Significant financial support was received from the U.S.A. At this time, among the outstanding writers of the Bund was the "golden pen" of Moishe J. Novomaisky, who later as Moissaye Olgin, became the editor of the *Freiheit* in New York.

During this period the Socialist-Zionists in Russia became serious competitiors of the Bund among the Jewish working class, since they realized that they could not reach such Jews in these parlous times unless they dealt with imminent problems around them, defense against pogroms and the bosses. This realization led to the formation by the Socialist-Zionists of self-defense organizations and trade unions. The Bund nevertheless condemned the Zionists in the harshest terms as the enemy of the proletariat, allegedly for diverting the workers from the class struggle. In these years the Socialist-Zionist membership was about half of the 30,000-strong Bund.

The first faltering steps to reunite the Bund with the RSDWP were halted by the outbreak of the Revolution of 1905, when revolutionary action became the order of the day. The Bund worked among the Jews to mobilize them against Tsarism. They called the Jews in the towns and large cities to demonstrations and protest strikes short of armed uprising, which they judged would have been premature. In some localities, where the non-Jewish revolutionary movement was weak, the Bund assumed leadership. During that year the Bund gained immense influence and prestige among Jewish workers. The numerous meetings called by the Bund were protected by self-defense groups, who even had to erect protective barricades on occasion. The wave of economic and political strikes and demonstrations ebbed and flowed through the year, reaching a peak in Oct. with

general strikes in Vilna, Vitebsk and other towns.

All that year, when Tsarism blamed the revolution on the Jews and incited anti-Semitism and pogroms, the Bund resisted with arms. Like the RSDWP, the Bund boycotted the First Duma (Parliament) in 1906 because they regarded it as a rigged assembly with restrictive voting criteria. Again like the RSDWP, the Bund decided in 1907 that political gain could come from participation in the Second Duma, a respite of legality which proved short-lived.

A period of repression followed the failure of the revolution, and the Bund like all radical groups lost strength. Membership declined drastically, strike activity subsided and was ineffectual and propaganda activity was reduced. During this period also the Bund principles hardened: determination to make Yiddish the national language of the Jews was deepened, as was the conviction that only in national cultural autonomy could the Jews obtain their national rights. While the Bund did not side on all issues consistently with either the Bolsheviks or Mensheviks, it tended more and more toward the Menshevik side until it became formally affiliated with the Mensheviks in 1912, when that group adopted a policy of a federation of autonomous national parties. This period of subsidence of the Bund from the end of the 1905 revolution to the end of World War I has not yet received book-length treatment in English, although the material is plentiful in Yiddish.

The story of the Bund is resumed in English at book length in Bernard K. Johnpoll's *The Politics of Futility: The General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland, 1917-1943*. As such, it is informative to the English reader, although a Bund veteran, I. S. Hertz, warns that the book is full of errors. Hertz gives his review in the Bund organ, *Unzer Tsait* (Our Time—Oct., 1967, pp. 22-27), the title, "A History or a Distortion?" He points out in detail 10 errors in the book, and adds that he has noted 60 more, and that there are others of which he made no note. We should therefore do well to use Johnpoll's book with caution.

One justifiable reason for the Bund displeasure with the book was the fact that Johnpoll was not content with attempting a Bund history of the period, but presumed to impose an obtuse thesis upon that history. He adopts Edmund Burke's definition of a political party as a body whose purpose is attainment of state power. As a minority party the Bund could by itself not come to power; its only alternative was to attach itself to a party which could achieve state power, which the Bund failed to do. Consequently, argues Johnpoll, the Bund pursued a "politics of futility." He maintains that the Bund did not even exert pressure on parties in power, nor was this even possible, he says, in view of the prevailing anti-Semitism in Poland. Johnpoll's conception of a politics of futility is thus built into the criteria for effectiveness he has set up, so it is no wonder that he reached his conclusion about futility.

One cannot take Johnpoll's thesis seriously, in light of the enormous influence the Bund has exerted on the Jewish sector of the population, especially in Yiddish-speaking populations, in many places. In the U.S., for instance, Bundists exerted considerable influence on the Jewish labor and fraternal movements. Whatever one may say of the Bund's influence as an organization, "futility" would seem the least enlightening judgment.

During World War I the Bund did not accept Lenin's slogan of turning the imperialist war into a civil war but neither did it favor the "defense of the fatherland" position of the socialist parties. The Bund regarded the war as an outcome of imperialist rivalry and advocated the quickest possible end to it. During the German occupation of Poland the occupiers allowed the socialist parties and the Bund legal status of organization and press, albeit under censorship. The Bund took full advantage of legality.

In this connection, one significant error of Johnpoll was pointed out by Hertz. Johnpoll asserts that during the occupation, Vladimir Medem, Bund leader and *Lebnsfragen* editor, on one occasion wrote in justification of the German Social Democratic Party's vote in favor of war credits. Hertz explains that, in order to evade the censorship, it was decided that the war position of *all* socialist parties should be discussed by Medem. Hertz maintains that the censor had cut out of the article the views of the opponents of the war inside Germany. Further, says Hertz, Johnpoll does not call attention to the fact that the article included the arguments of the socialist parties of the Allies.

During the occupation the Bund in Poland had to operate independently of the party in the Russian centers. In Poland it organized Jewish schools and cultural centers and promoted study of Yiddish. In the municipal elections the Bund drew close to the Polish Left Socialists, but had little electoral success. The Bund refused to ally itself with the bourgeois Jewish coalition.

During the first years of the Russian Revolution the Bund was allied to the Mensheviks, who were supporting the Bund's program of national cultural autonomy and a federation of independent national parties in a multi-national state. The Bund bitterly opposed Lenin's policy of seizure of power, calling it "Blanquism," forcible seizure and retention of power by a small group of professional revolutionaries. But the Bund was by no means unanimous in its attitude toward the Bolshevik Revolution. The right wing called it "adventurism"; the left wing, while not Bolshevik, regarded it as a world turning point toward socialism. When Poland became independent, the Bund became an exclusively Polish Jewish party, and was regarded as nationalist by Polish Communists under Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg.

In the next few years the Bund was riven by conflict of left and right wings, with a center which tried to reconcile the incompatible. The left urged a proletarian dictatorship for Poland; the right, led by Medem, believed that a democratic revolution must intervene between the anti-Semitic Endek (National Democratic) power and a democratic Soviet power. In 1919, the left and center controlled the Bund. For the next decade, bitter inner struggle revolved around proposed affiliation with the Communist International. At a special conference in 1920, after acrimonious debate, the left wing won a vote, by 41 to 30, with 15 abstentions, to join the Comintern. This vote prompted the leading Bundist and right winger, Medem, to step aside. He emigrated to the U.S. and died here in 1923. However, the Russian-Polish war broke out; repression once again set in, and the Bund had to go underground.

The Comintern refused to receive the Bund unless all conditions of membership were met. But the Bund refused to comply with the conditions that it expel its right and center wings or surrender its position on national cultural autonomy. A stubborn left wing continued to press for

acceptance of all Comintern conditions, and about 10% of the Bund formed "Combund" locals to bring the Bund around. But by 1922, these had to admit defeat; the Combunds dissolved and joined the Communist Party, and from that time the Bund moved away from the Comintern.

In Russia itself, the Bund was likewise divided. For a few years after the revolution the Bund survived, but in 1921 a conference of the Russian Bund voted 47 to 29 to dissolve. Some Bundists joined the Communist Party, some were imprisoned by the regime and others emigrated, while any local efforts to maintain the Bund were suppressed. Thereafter the Polish Bund became the focus of the movement.

Until Pilsudski seized power in 1926, the Bund was under attack both from the left and from the rightist government. In socialist politics, caught between the Comintern on the left and the Second International on the right, the Bund, which agreed with neither, in 1923 joined the small "Two-and-a-half International," called the "Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Parties."

After Pilsudski's coming to power, the Bund entered its period of maximum mass influence within the Jewish community. The former socialist Pilsudski turned out to be a right wing autocrat. In 1928 the Bund joined forces with the Polish Socialist Party and achieved a vote of 100,000, as against a vote of 500,000 for the bourgeois Jewish parties. Leader of the Bund in this inter-war period was Henryk Erlich, who was intensely anti-Bolshevik from 1917 onward, and led the Bund in a severe anti-Communist policy. From the high point of 100,000 votes the Bund declined in the 1930 elections to 71,000 when it was allied with the small Independent Socialist Party. By 1934, the vote was down to 50,000. In 1928, the Bund had won 187 municipal council seats; by 1934, it held only 90. Its membership continued to decline into the mid-thirties.

By 1931 the Bund decided to leave the small international to which it was affiliated and which had no influence. The Bund had drawn closer to the Polish Socialist Party, which was a member of the Second International. After intense debate a majority of the sharply divided Bund voted to join the Labor and Socialist [Second] International. As always, the Bund followed an independent policy that was sometimes to the left of the majority in the International.

Despite bruising internal debate and continuing differences in view, the Bund survived, as it had in the past, with the minority allowed a voice. As an example of its independence on the international scene, a majority led by Erlich believed that German Social Democratic support in 1932 for Hindenberg as the "lesser evil" was mistaken and would lead to the old general's alliance with Hitler. But the Bund's disillusionment with the Soviet Union deepened even further as a consequence of the purge following Kirov's assassination in 1934.

After Pilsudski's death in 1935, a cabal of reactionary, anti-Semitic Polish colonels, called "Ozon," came to power in an election boycotted by 50% of the eligible voters. An overt, violent, official anti-Semitic campaign ensued, and Ozon agitated for mass emigration of the Jews—and the Bund was not slow to point out that this was also the solution of its Zionist antagonists. Jews were subjected to extreme discrimination. Under these conditions the Bund came forward in the Jewish community as the most militant, effective defender of the Jews. In March, 1936 a one-day strike called by the Bund to protest anti-Jewish measures was so effective as to paralyze Jewish areas of many cities, with cooperation also from non-Jewish workers.

With fascism closing in upon them, the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party drew closer. The PPS joined the Bund in a two-day protest strike in 1937 against segregated seating of Jewish students in universities. In that year the two groups published a joint daily paper, held a united May Day parade, had joint self-defense units and even trade union conventions. Soon it became evident to the majority of Polish workers and peasants that the target of the anti-Semites was the majority of the people.

Bund strength within the Jewish community grew to its maximum. In many large cities the Bund emerged from the 1936 Kehilla elections as the largest Jewish party and even a majority Jewish party in Warsaw. Harmony with the PPS had been complete since 1936, when the PPS adopted national cultural autonomy as its policy. By the 1939 elections, the PPS showed increased strength, and the Bund achieved the peak of its influence in the Jewish community. In Warsaw, the Bund won 17 of the 20 Jewish municipal council seats, and in Lodz, 11 of 17. It was now the largest Jewish party in Poland. Perhaps the Bund was on the verge of realizing its goal as the ruling party within the Jewish community. Hitler's tanks ended that prospect.

After Poland fell to the Nazis, the Bund rapidly organized an underground resistance, and continued the cooperation with the Polish Socialist Party established a few years before the outbreak of war. Besides aid to the Jewish sick and needy and hunted Bund leaders, the Bund published clandestine weekly and monthly journals in Yiddish and Polish; it maintained illegal Jewish schools and youth clubs, activities which were continued after the Jews were herded into ghettos. The relations of the Bund with other Polish and Jewish groups were not easy. Underground Polish parties were either anti-Semitic or indifferent to or largely ignored the plight of the Jews. The Bund chided the Zionists for looking only to mass emigration to Palestine and ignoring the future of Poland itself.

In 1941, one of the most traumatic events in Bund history occurred when the two top Bund leaders, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, were murdered under Stalin's orders. At the outbreak of war they had been ordered to the East of the country by the Bund Central Committee. They were there recognized by the Soviet occupiers of Eastern Poland and arrested, for both had a long history of anti-Sovietism. After they were sentenced to death in July, 1941 on the trumped-up charge that they were Polish spies, their sentences were commuted, and they were freed in a general amnesty in Sept.

During this difficult period in the Soviet war situation, the Soviet Union asked the Bund leaders to form an international Jewish anti-fascist committee. When they refused to form a committee under Soviet control, insisting on an international membership, sponsorship and non-Soviet leadership, the negotiations lapsed. After a few months the two men were once again arrested, and, as later learned, executed by the Soviet military in Dec., 1941. The uncompromising anti-Sovietism of the Bund was more deeply embittered by this unjust and ill-considered political murder, and Erlich-Alter are now enshrined in Bund martyrology with Hirsh Lekert.

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The Bund . . .

(Continued from page 23)

Another Bund martyr of the war period was Shmuel Zygelboym, a Bund leader who was sent abroad as a Bund representative early in the war. In 1942 he represented the Bund in the London Polish Government-in-Exile. When word was smuggled out to him in 1942 of the extermination program under way in Poland, he appealed to the Allied governments and to the London Polish regime for help, to no avail. The only alternative left to him to awaken the world to the Holocaust of his people, he thought, was to scandalize it by his own suicide. On May 11, 1943, he took his own life, leaving a farewell letter which read, in part, "With my death I hope to express the sharpest protest against the passivity with which the world looks on and permits the extermination of the Jewish people." Even this desperate appeal was unanswered and his martyrdom remains as a symbol of how callous governments can be.

So the flourishing three million and more East European Jewish community was driven to its death in a few years. In the ghettos the Bund continued its underground activity, as did the several other Jewish groups, Zionist, Socialist, Communist, religious. Antagonisms among the groups persisted, and the Bund, especially, resisted united action on ideological grounds. The Bund refused to participate in a first attempt to form a united front in Warsaw early in 1942. Another attempt was made in July, when the ghetto was being emptied and the knowledge of the extermination program became certain, but the Bund again declined to join a united fighting front of all Jews. By Oct., 1942, the issue had become all too clear that the alternative for all the Jews was either to be led to slaughter or to die resisting. The Bund finally joined the Fighting Organization of all Jewish groups in the uprising of April 19, 1943. Few fighters survived the battle, among them a few Bundists.

(To be continued)

APPEAL FOR CHILEAN REFUGEES

IN Mexico City there are some 500 refugees from the terror loosed by the ruling military junta after its overthrow of the legally and democratically elected government headed by the Marxist, Pres. Salvador Allende. The refugees are in great economic and physical distress after escaping the terror that has slaughtered tens of thousands. Funds to aid the refugees may be sent to Mr. Charles Small, Niza 47, Mexico 6, D.F., Mexico. (Mr. Small initiated our Life Subscribers plan and himself became Life Subscriber No. 1.)

BOOK REVIEWS

Uncle Misha Fights Back

By TESS SWERDLOW

Uncle Misha's Partisans, by Yuri Suhl. Four Winds Press, N.Y., 1973, 211 pages, $5.75.

THIS is an outstanding children's book in which Yuri Suhl brings us the story of Jewish resistance during the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe and the time of the concentration camps. With the same skills of the novelist he displayed in his books, *One Foot in America* and *Cowboy on a Wooden Horse*, and that he utilized in *They Fought Back* to chronicle the heroic struggles of the Jews in the concentration camps and occupied lands, he now tells this story, which is based on some stirring chapters in the latter book. This is a story for all seasons that calls for a tribute to truth, beauty and courage. And what time is a better one than now? We are indeed fortunate to have this book to enable us to pass on this never to be forgotten part of Jewish history. His work will win awards and, most of all, our appreciation and deep gratitude.

The Holocaust in this book becomes real, an every day fact of life to survive, *iberlebn.*

Twelve-year-old Motele has lost his parents and his sister, who were murdered by the Nazis, and he is alone in the dangerous Nazi-infested Ukraine. He is wandering around, eking out a living with his violin. Not having been a ghetto dweller, he has certain advantages that enable him to pursue this course.

Meeting up with some Jewish partisans, he becomes involved in the life of the hidden camp in the forest, and the many expeditions carried out by them to strike back at the fascist enemy, who feels these blows but cannot stop them.

Everyone in the camp has lost parents or children. Several incidents skillfully reveal the past and the deep mark on each person that has led to his or her actions to strike back at the enemy with cool, accurate and well-planned retaliation, which make for great suspense as you identify with these humanly, warmly portrayed people.

Motele's conversations with Basha, his beloved sister, are a comfort to him, and meeting the sympathetic Chaele, who is so like his sister, helps him. All the bustling activities of the partisan camp come through to give that authentic picture of a place where there is no time for tears or sorrow, but only for caring for one another

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TESS SWERDLOW, *a teacher especially interested in children's literature, is apppearing in print for the first time.*