

**The Distorted  
"World Of  
Our Fathers"**

**A Critique  
of Irving Howe's Book**

**by Paul Novick**

**New York - 1977**

**\$1.00**

This book review was originally published in the Weekly English  
Section of the Morning Freiheit.

Translated from the Yiddish by Sid Resnick



Published by  
Morning Freiheit  
35 East 12th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10003

### ***The Distorted "World Of Our Fathers"***

Since "**Abie's Irish Rose**" which ran on Broadway for about seven years after the First World War and since "**Fiddler on the Roof**" which was so great a success several years ago, it seems we have not had such a sensation as Irving Howe's new book, "**World of Our Fathers.**"

The Jewish book buyer is rather important in the book market in America and here we have a book that not only deals with—or ought to deal with—the history of Jews in this country but also with the world of their fathers and mothers and there still are fathers and mothers, or grandfathers and grandmothers, who wish to remind themselves of the past and the ordeal they underwent until they became acclimatized to this country.

This is a golden theme. Irving Howe (and his collaborator or collaborators) took a broad view of the subject. The chronicle begins on the other side of the ocean and the bitter troubles the Jews endured under czarism. There are facts and statistics on their economic situation and on the discriminatory czarist regulations. It then proceeds to the emigration of almost an entire people, of two million Jews between 1880 and 1914, a vast epic, a romantic history. Following this we are told how the Jewish immigrant struggled in the sweatshops, in the wormy tenements and how the Jewish labor movement was born and how the Yiddish theatre and Yiddish culture developed in the United States.

It is a fascinating subject and a tremendous effort was put into it.

One begins to read this book with interest, the subject matter attracts

the reader. This does not mean that even in the first hundred pages no questions arise. For example, the old Jewish small town of Eastern Europe, the shtetl, is depicted altogether negatively, in all its hopelessness, persecutions and varied problems. It is almost made to appear that the shtetl began to expire with the start of the mass emigration from Russia and Eastern Europe barely a century ago, in the 1880's. This is not correct, however!

**The shtetl was destroyed in our time by Hitler.** The shtetl lived until 1939. Besides its troubles there was much creativity in the shtetl. It had workers, artisans and a definite intelligentsia. Its inhabitants studied, they built Yiddish libraries and children's schools; they brought down writers from Warsaw and Vilna, they were active in the cultural field. There was struggle in the shtetl and a revolutionary movement. It had a Zionist movement, a Labor-Zionist movement, the youthful Hashomer Hatzair, the Folkists (populists). It had the Bund and later the Communists. Strikes and demonstrations were conducted in the shtetl. It had a splendid youth.

There was always creativity in the shtetl. Almost all of the classical Yiddish writers and other great writers and poets came from the shtetl: Mendele Mocher Sforim came from Kapulieh; Sholem Aleichem came from Voronka; I. L. Peretz came from Zamosch, a somewhat larger town; Sholem Asch came from Kutna; A. M. Weissenberg came from Zhelichov; Avrom Reisin came from Koydanov, etc., etc. If Irving Howe would have taken into account Asch's novel "**Dos Shtetl**" or Weissenberg's "**A Shtetl**", or God forbid, M. J. Olgin's "**My Shtetl in the Ukraine**," he would have seen the Jewish small town with working people, in addition to people who had no definite occupations, a shtetl where there was learning, aspirations and struggle. (We say God forbid in reference to Olgin, the first editor of the **Morning Freiheit**, because his name is "trayf" in this book. Howe hardly ever mentions Olgin's name without gross insults. About this separately.)

One is therefore not at all certain that Howe really understood what the shtetl was all about despite the fact that a few years ago there was so much discussion in America on preserving the values of the shtetl. Howe's interpretation of the word Yiddishkeit (Yiddishness, Jewishness) is also puzzling. According to him Morris Winchevsky (a founder of the first Yiddish Socialist paper and later of the **Morning Freiheit**) and other Jewish Socialists were "poets of Yiddishkeit." Avrom Reisin possessed "ethnic Yiddishkeit." Moishe Leib Halpern had "traditional resources of Yiddishkeit." Who is to figure out what all this means? The author constructed a private world of his own on the word "Yiddishkeit."

## GREASE AND HONEY

There is a Yiddish saying: one spoonful of grease can spoil a barrel of honey. In the barrel of honey Irving Howe poured into the more than seven hundred pages of his book there is, regrettably, more than a spoonful of grease and perhaps something worse than grease as we shall see—just poison!

To begin with there is the persisting presence of Cahanism (the viewpoint of Abe Cahan [1860-1951], the opportunist editor and dictator of **The Jewish Daily Forward** of New York). Cahanism expresses itself in this book in varied ways.

Abraham Cahan was, of course, one of the pioneers of the massive Yiddish community in this country, an active and energetic pioneer, but one of a quite dubious character, as Irving Howe himself finally concedes, though only after one has with much effort and often with much anger read through almost five hundred pages. In the first section of the book Abe Cahan is portrayed as the spiritual father, the teacher and educator of the Jewish community. We are told that Cahan had made the first speech in Yiddish, he coined the word "all-rightnik" and he even taught Jews the use of the handkerchief!

On page 170 Irving Howe describes how **The Forward** taught manners to the Jewish immigrants, not to shove one's sleeve into someone else's soup. With evident enthusiasm Howe relates how Cahan wrote on table manners in **The Forward**. Cahan asserted:

"Not all rules are silly. You would not like my sleeve to dip into your soup as I reach over your plate to get the salt; it is more reasonable for me to ask you to 'pass the salt, please.'"

In his enthusiasm for Cahan Howe does not realize how ridiculous he makes himself. Those American Jews whose misfortune it was not to read **The Forward**, or those who remained in Warsaw, Lodz, Odessa, Lemberg or London or Paris or those who wandered off to Buenos Aires, they did not have anyone to teach them not to stick their sleeves in another's soup. Apparently they learned not to do that without the help of **The Forward**.

## CAHAN'S CONTEMPT FOR HIS READERS

Irving Howe seems unaware of the contempt Abe Cahan had for the ordinary Jewish person, that one had to talk to him as if to a child. One



does not require more telling proof of this than the manner in which Cahan "received" the great classical Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem.

In the footnote on page 442 where Howe begins to describe the real, unsympathetic Abe Cahan, the dictator, he writes that Cahan had "refused to consider (hiring) Sholem Aleichem as a contributor because a year earlier he had failed to accept **The Forward's** offer."

Not so! (Nor is this the sole inexactitude, mildly speaking, in this book.)

In connection with the 60th anniversary of Sholem Aleichem's death the **Morning Freiheit** of May 23, 1976 reprinted an article by B. Kovner that had been originally published in **The Forward** of January 21, 1967. In that article Kovner related how Sholem Aleichem, shortly after his arrival in the United States in 1914, was brought up to **The Forward** office by the well-known writer Sholem Asch and two others for the purpose of persuading Cahan to accept the famous and beloved author as a regular contributor to **The Forward**. What did Cahan do on this occasion? He had the gall and meanness to tell Sholem Aleichem in the presence of others that the average Yiddish reader had no patience for his stories. At one point Cahan singled out Kovner, who was sitting in the room and whom Cahan had especially invited, as an example of a humorist who knew how to write for the public.

At that time **The Forward** was publishing B. Kovner's "famous" series "**Yente Telebende**," about the non-too savory events in the life of a Jewish woman. This harsh criticism of Sholem Aleichem by Abe Cahan was not only an example of his impertinence and malice but also a mark of his contempt for the ordinary Yiddish reader.

### CAHAN VULGARIZED THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE

Cahan was the veritable prophet of the Jewish quarter according to Irving Howe in the first half of his book. Howe swallows everything about Cahan, including his vulgarization of the Yiddish language. (Cahan had deliberately eliminated many appropriate and legitimate Yiddish words from **The Forward** and in their place had introduced English words and expressions thus debasing the literary quality of the language.) Suppose, Howe notes (page 226), Dr. Haim Zhitlovsky, the outstanding Yiddish intellectual of his time, had complained that **The Forward's** Yiddish was littered with such English words as "potato," "chicken," or "kitchen" instead of their correct Yiddish equivalents? Howe decrees that Cahan was right!

One need not wonder that at the end of his book Howe pronounces the prayer for the dead over Yiddish and the entire secular Jewish culture.

We shall return to this subject again. For the present we wish to consider one basic attitude that has been so ruinous in Irving Howe's book.

### IRVING HOWE AND THE "MORNING FREIHEIT"

Cahanism never acknowledged the existence of any other Yiddish newspaper in New York and Howe, remaining faithful to this outlook, maintains there is now only one daily Yiddish newspaper in New York—**The Forward!** The **Morning Freiheit** has somehow survived greater slights and crises in its almost 55 years of existence, but does the truth have any meaning for Mr. Howe?

At the very beginning of his book, in the back of the title page, there is a listing of all the publishers of books and publications to whom Howe has expressed his gratitude for allowing him to quote excerpts of their material in his book. Such gratitude is also directed to the "**Jewish Daily Morning Freiheit** for 'Teg fun Mayne Teg' by Moische Nadir." Whom is Irving Howe thanking, if he also says that such a newspaper as the **Jewish Daily Morning Freiheit** does not exist at all?

Is this only stupidity? No, it's much worse. Read the few lines of the postcard which Irving Howe wrote to one of our readers who questioned him on the non-existence of the daily **Morning Freiheit**. Howe's answer to this reader was:

"I said in my book that **The Forward** is the only Yiddish daily. **The Freiheit** isn't a daily, or at least it wasn't when I wrote. Hence I did it no injustice—though considering its wretched record as apologist over the years for the worst aspects of Russian totalitarianism, it would be hard to do it an injustice." (Photostatic copy of this post card is to be found at the end of this chapter).

Though he thanks the **Jewish Daily Morning Freiheit** for allowing him to quote from one of its writers and he has an entire section of a chapter (pages 341-346) in which the **Morning Freiheit** is discussed at length, it has suddenly disappeared as a daily newspaper! **The Morning Freiheit** according to Howe has such a "wretched record" that no "injustice" can be done to it. This is a red-baiter speaking.

We need not consider here the issue of "Russian totalitarianism." One only needs to take into account the independent position of the **Morning**

**Freiheit** since the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, more than 20 years ago! Howe can assuredly express his own opinion, but an honest historian must first of all reckon with the facts.

Irving Howe's red-baiting attitude to the **Morning Freiheit** is the key to a number of serious falsifications made in his book, both in what he says and what he omits. Thus Howe will list various Yiddish publications including the Social Democratic **Zukunft** and **Der Veker**, the Bundist **Undzer Tzeit**, and the Labor Zionist **Yiddisher Kempfer** and others, even **Di Feder** which was published 30 years ago, but he does not list the magazine **Yiddishe Kultur** of the YKUF (Jewish Cultural Association) or the quarterly **Zamlungen** or the YKUF itself.

The book's index lists the names of people whose significance was zero, but as long as they had some connection with **The Forward** their names were included. Yet, one will not find in this book the names of such important Yiddish literary figures as Nachman Meisel, B. Z. Goldberg, or the poet Zisha Weinper, let alone many contemporary Yiddish writers and poets. Of the **Morning Freiheit** only Olgin is mentioned (and this almost always with gross insults as mentioned earlier). There is one mention of Kalman Marmor and it is unfavorable. One will not find the names of such writers for the **Morning Freiheit** as Moishe Katz, N. Buchwald or I. B. Bailin. How was it possible in an entire chapter on the Yiddish press in the United States to avoid any mention of their names and to even have omitted the name of B. Z. Goldberg who played such a significant role in **Der Tog (The Day)** and later in **The Day-Morning Journal**? (B. Z. Goldberg had become anti-Soviet many years before his death but in **The Forward** he was never forgiven for his early "sins").

#### HOW IRVING HOWE MAKES A NON-PERSON

Here is a curious story. In the chapter "The Yiddish Press" (and in the Index) the name of Paul Novick does not appear and this is an honor for him considering the way Howe has treated others. Nevertheless, the following incident had occurred: When Howe was working on his book, (seven years it is said), someone came to see me in our office (he himself or he sent someone else, I do not recall exactly), with a tape recorder and he interviewed me. I had entirely forgotten about this, but on page 668 Howe states that I was interviewed June 7, 1971. In the text of the book, on page 306, he touches on a significant subject, the role of the Jewish labor movement in the history of the Jews in America and it is here that he

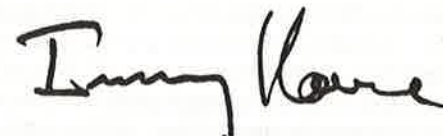
quotes my remarks. However, Howe saw to it that my name was not included in the text of the book or listed in the Index and my words are attributed to those of a "long time leftist"!

This is hardly a matter of great concern to me. Yet this trivial and ridiculous act casts a definite light on the pettiness and reliability of the historian Irving Howe who will engage in this and other calculated senseless acts and falsehoods, who will not acknowledge the existence of the daily newspaper, the **Morning Freiheit**, or of the YKUF, the Clubs and Societies, the Jewish Music Alliance, the Zhitlovsky Foundation and other progressive Jewish cultural institutions and personalities who were or are associated with them. There is a single reason for these omissions as his postcard message on the **Morning Freiheit** indicates—McCarthyism!

This being the case, what of the liberties he takes when he describes the Jewish labor movement, or the big strikes of the needle trades' workers or the strikes of the furriers and the cloakmakers in 1926, or the left-wing in the unions, or the role of the left in the Yiddish cultural field?

Thus we have grease and honey. Along with many positive aspects we have a demonstration of insincerity, some of it outrageous.

Dear M -- I said in my book that the Forward is the only Yiddish daily. The Freiheit isn't a daily, or at least it wasn't when I wrote. Hence I did it no injustice -- though considering its wretched record as an apologist over the years for the worst aspects of Russian totalitarianism, it would be hard to do it an injustice.



This is a photostat of a card sent to one of our readers who questioned Irving Howe on his statement in his book that there is only one Yiddish daily newspaper in the United States.

## **What The Labor Movement Meant For the Jewish Community**

The period of the mass strikes in the needle trades, beginning in 1909 and extending to 1916 and beyond, occupies a significant place in the history of the Jews in America. This was a period of historic transformation, a dramatic and romantic period. Perhaps what was most important in this period was that a Jewish people came into being in America.

In his chapter, "**Jewish Labor, Jewish Socialism,**" Irving Howe cites this observation of a "long-time leftist":

"It's my idea that the Jewish community in the United States was not really a Jewish community, it was something in fermentation until the labor movement came along. That gave the Jewish community its character, its face."

To this Howe comments, "An exaggeration, but a useful one" (page 306). Actually, he himself proves that this "long-time leftist," (he means me), did not exaggerate at all. Irving Howe unfolds the beginning of this romantic and dramatic period, he describes the enormous impression produced by these strikes and how they really endowed the Jewish community with its character and image. America perceived a new Jew and the Jews started to view themselves in an entirely different light.

As I noted above, Irving Howe's book contains negative and positive features, honey and grease. These chapters on the Jewish labor movement during this historic transformation belong to the better ones in the book.

Earlier and in preparation for it Howe examines the important role played by that element among the immigrants who arrived here immediately following the defeat of the Revolution of 1905 in Russia. There came members of the Jewish Socialist Bund and others who went through a school of struggle. They infused the local Jewish labor and Socialist movements with a goodly amount of power, impetus and consciousness. They helped strengthen the attack on the cosmopolitan-assimilationist Jewish members of the Socialist movement who disdained Yiddish; regarded it as a medium for political agitation only and refused to recognize Yiddish culture or Jewish ethnic interests.

Undoubtedly, the newly arrived Bundists were an important force. Howe overlooks other groups in the Jewish community, however, who had engaged in a struggle against the assimilators and their negation of Yiddish culture.

## **MORRIS WINCHEVSKY and DR. HAIM ZHITLOVSKY**

Howe completely overlooks the role of Dr. Haim Zhitlovsky, who settled in America in 1906. Zhitlovsky, a former leader of the underground Socialist-Revolutionary Party in czarist Russia, had initiated the struggle for recognition of the Yiddish language and helped organize the conference for Yiddish in Chernovitz (at that time part of Austria) in 1908. The Zhitlovskyians exerted a singular influence in the immigrant Jewish community.

More important yet, Howe ignores the role of Morris Winchevsky—one hardly meets him in the book! Here we touch on another of the book's flaws. Howe ought to have examined the origins of Jewish labor and Socialist movements in London in the 1880's. It was there that Winchevsky gained influence and through his poetry and other writings quickly acquired a following both in this country as well as in the revolutionary movement in Russia.

Had Howe paid some attention to Winchevsky, and this is a requisite when one writes on the history of the American Jewish labor and socialist movements, he might not have erred so badly as to state that the poem, "**In die gassn tzu die massn**" ("On the streets to the masses") was a "popular Vilna song of the 1890's" (page 21), one of many such errors in this book. This was Winchevsky's poem which he wrote in London in 1890 and it immediately became a hymn of the worker's struggle, first in London and other cities in England and it was soon carried over to Vilna and New York as well.



It is interesting to note how Winchevsky is mentioned in Howe's book. When the general strike of the cloakmakers began in New York in 1910, Morris Winchevsky was selected to head the campaign to collect financial support for the strikers. Here Howe succumbs to the melodramatic, as frequently occurs in his book as he, at times, chases after "human interest" of a dubious sort. Howe exclaims: "Where but in the Yiddish world could a poet have been the chief fund raiser for a general strike?" (page 301).

Yet, had Howe known or wanted to know (that is, if Morris Winchevsky had not been "trayf" to him because of the struggle he conducted against Abe Cahan or because of his later pioneer role as a founder of **The Freiheit-Morning Freiheit**), it would have been obvious to him that Winchevsky was not only the first among the pleiad of Yiddish labor poets, but was also "**the grandfather of Jewish Socialism,**" "the conscience of the Jewish quarter," the inspirer and builder of the Yiddish Socialist press and movement! (Let it be noted here that Irving Howe together with Eliezer Greenberg were the editors of an anthology of Yiddish poetry in English some years ago. Of course, they ignored the progressive Yiddish poets of the **Morning Freiheit, Yiddische Kultur, Zamlungen**, etc., and even omitted the name of Morris Winchevsky!)

#### CLARA LEMLICH AT COOPER UNION

But the chapter in Howe's book on the general strikes of the shirtwaist makers in 1909 and of the cloakmakers in 1910 is important and at times engrossing. With an eye for the dramatic events, Howe dealt at some length with the historic meeting in Cooper Union Hall of November 22, 1909. Samuel Gompers, the president of the AFL, and Jacob Panken and others had finished speaking and the issue was at an impasse until a young woman, Clara Lemlich, rose up from the audience and said simply in Yiddish: "I am tired of listening to speakers who talk in generalities. I offer a resolution that a general strike be declared—now!"

Howe relates the contagion which swept the hall at her words, the pandemonium that broke out as the workers demanded a general strike and how the chairman of the meeting, Benjamin Feigenbaum, finally asked everyone to rise, raise their right hand and repeat the pledge after him: "If I turn traitor to the cause I now pledge, may this hand wither from the arm I raise."

Howe then describes the clashes on the picket lines, the fight of the young women with the same Clara Lemlich in the foremost ranks against scabs and thugs.

Further on, in connection with the general strike of the cloakmakers in 1910, Howe relates how at the call of the union (ILGWU) the workers quit the shops en masse and jammed into all the streets of the garment district. One of the leaders of the Cloakmakers Local, Abraham Rosenberg, said of that mass exodus from the shops: "I could only picture to myself such a scene taking place when the Jews were led out of Egypt."

This chapter also contains an account of the terrible tragedy: the fire at



Clara Lemlich

the Triangle Shirtwaist Company near Washington Square in 1911 where 146 workers, mostly young Jewish and also Italian women were burned to death.

The Jewish workers, their victories and tragedies, are presented in an impressive manner . . . The big strike of the fur workers in 1912 is not mentioned but Howe apparently includes it in the strike wave of that period.

#### INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN SCENE OVERLOOKED

At this point the author would have done well to have more carefully observed the general American labor movement of that period which also influenced the immigrant Jewish workers. This was a period of upsurge among the American workers. The Socialist movement was rapidly advancing. As early as the presidential election of 1908, when he ran for

the first time, Debs made an admirable showing. This was a rehearsal for the 1912 election when Debs, running for president again, received almost a million votes out of the total 15 million votes cast that year. (A million votes for a Socialist candidate now when there are 80 million voters would be quite an achievement.)

The fact that Irving Howe almost completely ignores the general political scene of that period led him into an error when he wrote of the Jewish Socialist Federation, which had, supposedly, due to the efforts of the Bundist elements, gained an autonomous status within the Socialist Party. He should have known that in the Socialist Party the Finns, Hungarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Germans and others were also organized along federation lines. These language federations, which had their own newspapers and other cultural institutions, constituted the overwhelming majority of the membership of the Socialist Party.

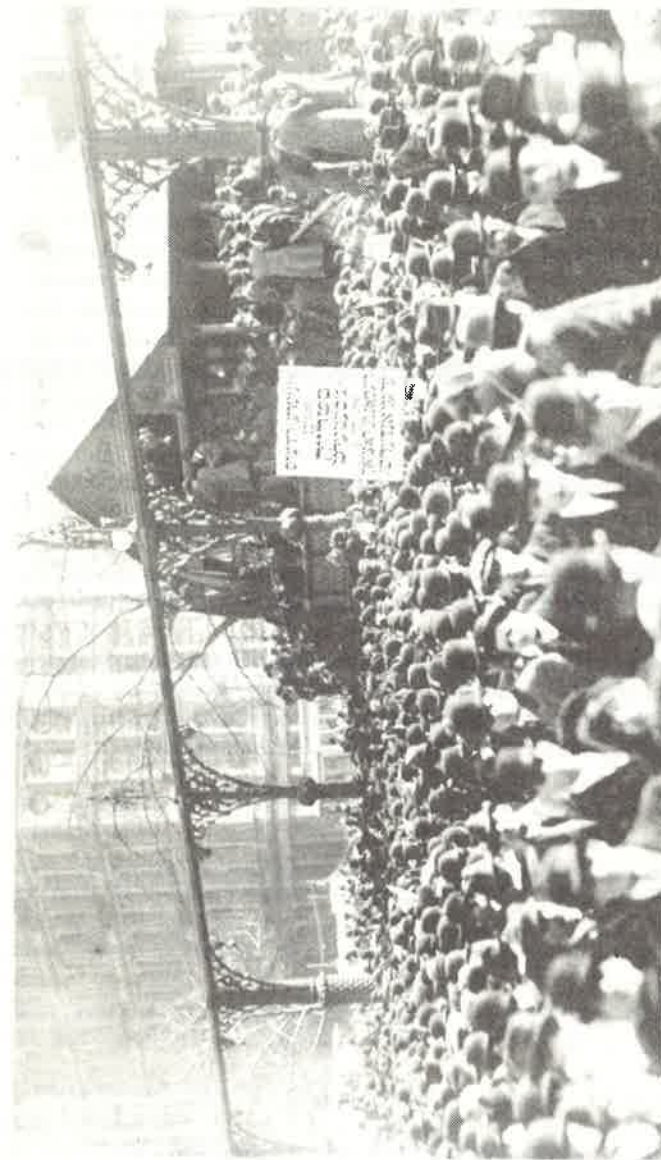
The cosmopolitan-assimilationist Jewish Socialists who fought against the Jewish Socialist Federation on the grounds that it was supposedly "nationalistic" were really the sad exception in the movement then.

It would have been too much to expect of Howe to indicate who it was who fought against the Jewish Socialist Federation. He surely saw the many statements of J. B. Salutsky (Hardman), the general-secretary of the Federation, denouncing **The Forward** and especially Abe Cahan. Salutsky declared in an editorial in the Federation's organ, **Yiddisher Sotzialist** (March 15, 1914), that Cahan was "the highest degree of pollution" in the Jewish labor movement.

Irving Howe is persistent in his reverence for Abe Cahan (though later in the book he takes the correct measure of him—it is as if another person had written the concluding chapters and not Irving Howe). The book therefore ignores those who prompted by the principles of assimilationism, fought against the Jewish Socialist Federation. Perhaps this may be overlooked, perhaps not. However, the following matter cannot be ignored.

### THE TAILOR'S STRIKE OF 1912-13

After the mass strikes of the shirtwaist workers and cloakmakers, a general strike of the men's clothing workers was declared in the latter part of 1912. **This was the largest of all the general strikes in the garment trades and involved 60 to 70 thousand workers.** A revolution also occurred at the same time. These strikers not only rejected the agreement which the leaders of the conservative United Garment Workers had concluded for them, but they also broke away from the old union and



A photo of the striking tailors at the "Forward" building in January, 1913. They were demonstrating against the inadequate agreement their discredited union leaders had made and against the "Forward" which supported those leaders. The sign in the middle reads: "Our leaders say this strike is settled, but this demonstration shows otherwise."



established a new one, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America! It is this strike which almost disappears from Irving Howe's book. He devotes to this strike and Union exactly 18 lines (page 304).

Astounding! Incredible! There is a method to this madness, however. Again, it is Irving Howe's faithfulness to **The Forward**.

The striking tailors opposed both the agreement which the discredited leaders of the older union had made and also **The Forward** which then, as always, had supported the union bureaucracy. In January, 1913, thousands of strikers rallied in front of **The Forward** building on East Broadway and smashed its windows. They established the new Amalgamated Union against the wishes of Samuel Gompers and **The Forward!**

The leaders of the new union were Sidney Hillman, president, and Joseph Schlossberg, secretary-treasurer. Hillman thus became "an unwelcome person" to **The Forward** and his name was not printed in that paper for many years. Schlossberg, along with Winchevsky and Zhitlovsky, were never mentioned in **The Forward** years before.

The hostility between the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and **The Forward** lingered on for many years. For the conscientious historian, this conflict can be no reason to ignore the huge strike of the men's clothing workers, or to almost ignore it, or to gloss over the revolution they accomplished by breaking with the old established union and founding a new one which developed into one of the most prominent in the American labor movement.

If Howe could have done this in this case, what may he not be expected to do when he deals with the upsurge in the needle trades in the 1920's, the strikes of the furriers and the cloakmakers in 1926 which were led by the lefts and Communists?

## **HISTORY IN THE GUISE OF LIBELS AND TRASH**

Make an effort to read the following lines which appear on page 333 of Irving Howe's book:

"At first the violence was mainly symbolic. Left-wing women would form what their opponents called "fainting brigades"—when a right-wing leader opened a local meeting, these women would pretend to faint, perhaps out of sheer incredulity at what they were hearing, and the result would be a brilliantly contrived chaos. Then there were the "spit brigades," groups of women ostentatiously spitting into the gutter whenever a right-wing union official passed them in the garment center. Childish as all this may seem, it often managed to unnerve its victims, especially those still inclined to think of themselves as socialists who had given their lives to building unions. And in their disdain for civility, the Communists moved from the symbolism of disruption to the actuality of violence. Both sides began using *shtarke* (strong-arm men), first amateurs and then professionals. In the headquarters of the furriers' union, Room C became known as a place where opponents could be roughed up a little. Rarely, if ever, had such methods been seen in the earlier years of Jewish radicalism, and the fact that they were now on the way to becoming commonplace signified a shared moral decline."

"Fainting brigades" and "spit brigades," etc., etc. It is to this that Irving Howe could descend. No wonder M. J. Granite in his review of this book in the **Canadian Jewish Outlook** (May-June, 1976) defines it

as "a banal soap opera." In addition to trashy and spicy tales which the author chased after to garnish his book, we basically have here the work of a red-baiter. We saw evidence of this earlier in Irving Howe's attempted justification of his verdict that the **Morning Freiheit** is not a daily newspaper (as he informed one of our readers) and because of our position on what he terms "Russian totalitarianism, it would be hard to do it (the **Morning Freiheit**) an injustice"! Therefore anything may be said of the **Morning Freiheit** and those who support it. He demonstrates this most blatantly in Chapter 10, "**The Breakup of the Left.**"

On the same page 333 he states:

"That the left wing commanded enormous influence among the garment workers in the mid-twenties was admitted even by its enemies; it succeeded, for example, in calling a mass demonstration at Yankee Stadium in July 1925 to which forty thousand cloakmakers and dressmakers came, and it then organized a work stoppage in which thirty thousand workers left the shops and filled seventeen halls to listen to its speakers. A majority of the New York garment workers, certainly a majority of the active ILGWU members, supported the left wing, not necessarily because of its Communist leadership but because they felt—with some reason—that the suspension of the left-wing locals had been undemocratic."

It is very good, indeed, that Howe concedes these points about the Left. Yet, if this is so, and the author has not exaggerated in the least—on the contrary, his figure of those who had attended the Yankee Stadium meeting, for example, is lower by ten thousand of what it actually was—why then did the Lefts need "fainting brigades" and "spit brigades"? (And why only women? Perhaps men can't faint, but they can spit.)

The answer to this is that Irving Howe simply swallowed all the drivel he read in **The Forward**, all its vulgar inanities such as the "brigades," all its libels about this fictional "Room C" where opponents were supposedly roughed up.

## SOME ACTUAL HISTORY

It is, indeed, deplorable that Irving Howe sank so low. He is considered a left-liberal, almost a Socialist; he is the editor of the magazine

**Dissent** which defines itself as a publication "devoted to radical ideas and the values of Socialism and democracy." How could the author have descended so?

What is important here is not only what red-baiting does to a person. At issue here is history—what actually occurred and how Irving Howe "fixed" the record.

We will briefly touch on two issues: 1) The enormous dissatisfaction among the needle trades workers with their work conditions and wages and 2) the subject of gangsters, the shtarke.

In regard to the first point Howe himself quotes excerpts of an address of the then prominent Socialist leader Morris Hillquit to the convention of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) in 1924 (page 336) before the uprising of the left-led unions affiliated to the Joint Action Committee and the giant meeting at the Yankee Stadium. Hillquit then declared that "people have become cynical" (meaning the right-wing union leaders) and that "the union should not be a purely business organization which discards all questions of theory, philosophy or idealism." Irving Howe who did so much research for this book should surely have known that the curse of cynicism, the "purely business" attitude in the unions was already an old one. Of course, Hillquit put it as mildly as possible.

Is it conceivable that Irving Howe in his seven years of work preparing this book did not hear of the struggles, uprisings actually, in the ILGWU led years before by Dr. Isaac Hourwich, M. Rubin and Abraham Bisno? How did the union bureaucracy, and this is what Hillquit spoke about, handle these rebels? Perhaps Howe might have related the piquant story of how the walls of Bisno's office in the union were simply removed so that the bureaucracy could be rid of this "nuisance" who persistently took the side of the workers? How can one write of the uprisings in the 1920's and fail to take into account what had occurred earlier?

There were the justified grievances of the workers which had accumulated over the years, bitter grievances against bureaucratic methods, against the "supplementary agreements"—the secretive arrangements between union leaders and bosses about which the workers knew nothing when an agreement was presented to them to end a strike. "Thanks" to these supplementary agreements the gains won by the strikers evaporated and they were again unable to make a living. It was due to these accumulated grievances and the fact that the left-wing leadership fought in behalf of the workers' interests that the workers rallied to the left-wing leadership, not because of "fainting brigades" or "spit brigades."

Irving Howe searches with binoculars for the errors of the left leadership during the Cloakmakers' strike of 1926 (and the mild Joseph Boruchowitz, a left-wing leader, emerges in his pages as an ogre, whereas the right-wing leaders were apparently all angels.)

We are not prepared to guarantee that no errors were made by the left-wing. The sectarianism, the factional strife within the Communist Party helped no one. However, the important thing was that the strike leaders fought selflessly for the workers' interests. There were errors made by the right-wing leaders during the strike, but these were of an entirely different order, such as their "supplementary agreements" with the bosses. We saw how the men's tailors' strike (of 1912-1913) was conducted and how hastily Howe skipped over the striking tailors' rejection of a very poor agreement made by their discredited leaders (which **The Forward** had backed) and how they then went on to establish a new union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

Of course, there were errors, but the left-leadership based itself on the workers and mobilized them. Howe himself admits that "**almost the entire Jewish community**" supported the 1926 Cloakmakers' Strike. The left leadership of the New York cloakmakers was not only opposed by the employers, the police and the gangsters. The right-wing national leadership of the ILGWU was not at all inclined to see the local left leadership win the strike. Can Irving Howe really place his hand over his heart and swear that the right-wing leaders were no more than observers in that situation, that they made no mistakes?

### GANGSTERS IN THE GARMENT TRADES

It is obvious from the quotation we cited from Howe's book at the beginning of this section that the author dares to blame the Left for introducing gangsterism in the unions. It was the Left which supposedly broke the moral standards of long years standing. In passing he does say that "both sides" began using strong arm men, but the main blame is placed on the Left.

He further dares to claim that the Furriers Strike in 1926 was "fought with gorillas and shtarke" (page 339). In fact, it was the left leadership which had mobilized the workers and through mass picketing drove out the gangsters. Howe states that Aaron Gross, one of the outstanding strike leaders of the furriers, was "beaten up by thugs after the 1926 strike" (page 340). No, he was not merely "beaten up." He was murderously knifed and this practically finished his life. Who had at-

tacked Gross? Whose gangsters had cut him up? This is passed over in silence.

On page 546 Irving Howe relates what a fine reporter Joel Slonim of **Der Tog (The Day)** had been, that he was at home with "Irish gangsters" and Hasidim, that he wrote the account of a rich young woman in Chicago, "Jewish, of course," who married a baron of the underworld, etc. Howe chased after such spicy tales. Was it for this reason that Howe "overlooked" Slonim's series of articles on the gangsters who terrorized the furriers and knifed Gross? (If memory serves, Slonim's series was entitled "**The Forward and the Gangsters.**")

Howe examined **The Freiheit** beginning with the 1920's. Did he not see in the issue of February 28, 1923 the editorial, "**Furriers Are Being Assaulted**"? This editorial dealt with the attack on Ben Gold by the shtarke, the gangsters in the employ of the bureaucracy.

It is strange that Howe does not notice certain things. He refers to J. Chaiken's book, "**Yiddische Bleter in Amerike**" ("**Yiddish Newspapers in America**") published in 1946. Yet, he overlooked the information given on pages 187-188 of Chaiken's book that as far back as 12 years before the Furriers Strike of 1926 certain union leaders on the East Side already had connections with such underworld characters as the then widely known Dopey Benny, Kid Twist, Little Augie, etc.

Of course, it was the employers who brought the gangsters into the needle trades (and one ought to write of the "mistakes" of Jewish bosses, too). Union leaders who did not wish to, or were unable to rally the workers to fight against the gangsters, lost the confidence of the workers and they then attempted to use the gangsters "to help" the strikers (and then sought to rule over the workers with the help of the shtarke). This curse lasted for years even if many of the right-wing leaders were opposed to it. To now come and say that it was the Lefts who violated the long-standing moral standards of Jewish radicalism, as Irving Howe does, is impermissible!

There were many reasons for the terrible bitterness in the needle trades struggles. Irving Howe writes sympathetically of Louis Hyman—not for his loyal leadership of the Cloakmakers' Strike of 1926 and later of the Industrial Union, but because he departed from the Left in 1939. One wonders whether Howe looked into Hyman's book, "**Oif die vegn fun kamf**" ("**On the Paths of Struggle**") in which he told a good deal about the "mistakes" of the rightwing bureaucracy and of the actions of the gangsters and the shtarke. Hyman wrote (page 149):



“On June 9, 1927 when the Furriers Union had been leading a strike, gangsters hired by the International attacked Gross on the picket line and cut his throat. He hovered between life and death for a long time. He was forced to remain in bed for several months. That the gangsters were hired by the right-wing clique was proved with documents. **Der Tog** of June 25, 1927 published photographic copies of documents which showed that the Furriers International provided bail for the gangsters. They were defended in court by the International’s attorney. These gangsters were also freed.”

Louis Hyman, to be sure, revealed the harsh truth about the gangsters. Compare his account with Irving Howe’s that Gross was just “beaten up.”

At any rate, the honest historian will record that the left-wing leaders, especially those of the Furriers, fought selflessly, they rallied the workers who had confidence in them and drove out the gangsters. Later, after the victory over the Lefts the gangsters returned and Howe does take note of that.

### **PIONEER ROLE OF THE LEFT LEADERS**

It is interesting to observe the way Howe describes the results of the 1926 Furriers’ Strike. Though he spends pages repeating libels about the furriers’ leaders, he devotes only a **line and a half to the gains won by that union** (page 339): “. . . it (the strike) ended with the first 40 hour week in the garment trades as well as a 10% wage increase.” No more!

Here again a proper historian is required who would explain the significance of this historic gain at that time, that the furriers played a pioneer role in achieving the 40-hour week for the first time in the needle trades and perhaps in the American labor movement! It was Jewish workers (together with Greek workers), with Jewish union leaders who gained this, “even” if they were left-wingers (and perhaps because they were left-wingers; apparently certain other leaders were more solicitous of the employers.) The author of “**World of Our Fathers**” could not bring himself to devote more than a line and a half to this significant pioneering act. Usually Irving Howe is quite verbose, however he knows where to write more sparingly.

Howe was also sparing in what he wrote about other union leaders, of the leaders of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, for example. We noted earlier why this was so. If they are mentioned occasionally, it is not favorable. Sidney Hillman, one of the principal founders and the long-

time president of the Amalgamated is described by Howe as a “master Machiavellian” (page 338), a master of immoral, crafty maneuvers! Why? After the October Revolution the Amalgamated sought to assist the young Soviet state. Yet, Howe forgives Abe Cahan who for five years, until 1922, shouted (in his fashion), “Three cheers for the Bolsheviks!”

It is important to recall here that Sidney Hillman, that is, the Amalgamated leadership forced **The Forward** on July 4, 1938 to print a resolution the union adopted which stated:

**“Ab. Cahan as editor of The Forward joins hands with and appears as a helper of the open and concealed fascists, open-shoppers and red-baiters.”**

No more and no less! It was Hillman who was able to compel **The Forward** (that is, Cahan himself) to print this resolution, Hillman who in those years was among the close advisors of President Roosevelt. These harsh words expressed the accumulated rage of the Amalgamated leaders against **The Forward** which had been building up since the union was founded in 1913.

If the Furriers Union after its strike in 1926 would have commanded the power that Hillman had in 1938 it, too could have had some harsh things to say about those libels of a “Room C”, and the left-wing leaders of the cloakmakers and the dressmakers could have had some sharp words about **The Forward’s** tales of the “fainting brigades” and the “spit brigades” that Irving Howe seized upon.

It may easily be imagined how “impartial” Irving Howe is when he discusses in Chapter 10 and elsewhere **The Freiheit—Morning Freiheit**.

## The "New Journalism"

### Howe's Spiteful Denigration of Olgin

Moissaye J. Olgin (1878-1939) is a beloved and honored name which lives to this day in the hearts of Jewish working people in this and other countries. Olgin is remembered by them as the author of the novel, "*Gelebt-Gekemft*" ("Lived-Struggled"), the first fictional account of Jewish revolutionaries who fought czarism. Olgin was the "Golden Pen" of the Jewish Socialist party, the Bund, and he wrote most of its official statements and leaflets during the Russian Revolution of 1905. Olgin wrote one of the very first Yiddish language textbooks. Olgin's English work, "*The Soul of the Russian Revolution*," his doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, was the first introduction to the Russian revolutionary movement to many American readers. Olgin was a most distinguished Yiddish literary critic and essayist and he later helped compose the *Manifesto* of the First World Yiddish Cultural Congress in Paris in 1937.

There is so much to be said of Olgin whose writings and addresses inspired multitudes. As a Communist he wrote many political commentaries, pamphlets and books. One may have a different point of view than he had or even strongly disagree with his, but who would have imagined that someone would dare assert, "Moissaye Olgin wielded the most vitriolic pen in the immigrant quarter," which Irving Howe does on page 342 of his book! Olgin? Why, this is madness.

With this irresponsible statement Howe reveals ever more sharply his role of a bitterly partisan red-baiter and not that of an objective historian.

Elsewhere Howe coarsely writes of "the loose-tongued Moissaye Olgin" (page 332). It is as if Howe was possessed by a dybbuk, so hateful is he of Olgin.

Here the question arises: If Howe "knows" so well who Olgin was, what else does he "know" which was just the opposite of what he states?

### HOWE'S TREATMENT OF "THE FREIHEIT"

After his disgraceful characterization of Olgin Howe asserts that Olgin "delighted in polemics against his old friends in **The Forward**." This is the crux of the matter so far as Howe is concerned! His loyalty to Abe Cahan and **The Forward** is simply slavish.

Olgin had indeed written a series of articles on Abe Cahan which was also issued as a pamphlet. This was a serious social and political analysis with which one may or may not agree, but it was light years away from the insults and vulgar slanders aimed at Olgin that were printed in **The Forward** and were written in one case by a government stool pigeon and in another by Haim Lieberman who had also attacked Sholem Asch, Dr. Haim Zhitlovsky and others. If the term "most vitriolic pen" can be applied to anyone, then Haim Lieberman is a candidate for the title and so, indeed, is Cahan himself. Cahan engaged in caustic polemics with Louis Miller ("Miller With the Little Red Cheeks"), with the noted playwright Jacob Gordin, with Dr. Zhitlovsky and many others. For example, Cahan wrote in **The Forward** (February 5, 1944): "Dr. Zhitlovsky's thoughts had no more substance than the foolish chatter of a confused, obtuse mind, of a person who lacked sincerity . . ." Zhitlovsky was, Cahan continued, "a Jewish patriot who preached suicide to the Jewish people and justified pogroms and Hitler . . ." No more and no less! (Zhitlovsky was dead for more than a year when this was written.)

After Howe concludes his insults of Olgin he proceeds to an analysis of **The Freiheit**. Yes, he writes, **The Freiheit** immediately attracted writers and poets whose work was "more experimental" than Abe Cahan tolerated in **The Forward**. These included Moisse Nadir, A. Raboy, Moisse Leib Halpern, H. Leivick, Lamed Shapiro, Mani Leib, Menakhem Boraisha, David Bergelson, Avrom Reisin and other such "experimenters." All of them (and later they were joined by Leon Kobrin, Jacob Milch, Nachman Meisel) came to this editor who "wielded the most vitriolic pen"!

## DEFAMING "THE FREIHEIT"

**The Freiheit**, as is known, underwent a number of serious crises. In its earliest period there was the factional conflict in the Communist Party and the positions of the editors Olgin and Shakhno Epstein were for a few years occupied by men whose names it will be best not to mention here. In 1929 an unforgivable mistake was committed, almost a crime, when a pogrom in Hebron, Palestine was wrongly defined as an expression of the Arab national liberation struggle. A self-critical analysis of this error was made as far back as January, 1957 at the National **Morning Freiheit** Conference. Irving Howe does not find it necessary to state that the **Morning Freiheit** had for many years been critical of its position in 1929 and that learning from this error it did not repeat it in June, 1967 when it stood firmly at Israel's side. Irving Howe does not acknowledge the fact that the **Morning Freiheit** has for the past 20 years been an independent progressive Jewish labor and people's newspaper. Is it not the duty of an objective historian to note this fact?

At every turn Irving Howe has his specific calculations. He is ready to concede that **The Morning Freiheit** built a great Jewish cultural front—Workers' Clubs, choruses, orchestras, the Artef Theatre and much else. Yet he feels no shame in repeating **The Forward's** tale (page 344) about "Communist **pushkes**" (collection boxes)—the ICOR (Association for Jewish Colonization in the Soviet Union), for example. The ICOR is followed by a listing of other organizations such as the International Workers' Order, the YKUF, the former Jewish Workers' University, dance groups, as if all these, too, were "Communist **pushkes**." (This is similar to Howe's repeating **The Forward's** tales of "fainting brigades" and "spit brigades" as noted earlier.)

Though Howe records that a broad cultural front was built through **The Freiheit** he does not fail to note that at certain times one or another person made statements in which the "theory" emerged that the Yiddish language was only a means for promoting (left) propaganda. This misfortune did, indeed, exist, but not only was a marvelous Yiddish cultural front created, as Howe himself admits, **but this "theory" itself was overcome**. This effort to build and sustain Yiddish culture in the United States continued through the 1937 Yiddish Cultural Congress in Paris up to the present day. More than 40 years of consistent struggle and effort for Yiddish! This, too, ought to have been remembered by an objective historian.

## THE YIDDISH PRESS

Yet, look who's talking, who is searching for defects of the Left in regard to Yiddish? Irving Howe sings the praises of Abe Cahan who was determined to bury Yiddish in the United States! Howe admits this was Cahan's goal: "... he worked mightily to undermine" the foundations of Yiddish, of "the immigrant Jewish culture" (page 525). Nevertheless, Howe supports him, almost reveres him.

Howe reviews the Yiddish press in America (pages 518-551) from the seventies of the last century to the present. Here there is something of positive value in his description of what the Yiddish newspaper meant for the lonely Jewish immigrant. However, in his chase after spicy tales (taken from J. Chaiken's book, "**Yiddishe Bleter in Amerike**") Howe presents a not at all admirable picture of this press, especially in its first years. Howe devotes considerable space to the conservative **Tageblatt** and little to the Socialist papers, the **Arbeiter Tseitung** (founded in 1890) and the later daily **Abendblatt**, and relatively little space to the orthodox **Morgn Zhurnal** (Morning Journal), the **Vahrheit** and **Der Tog** (The Day). Howe's "achievement" here was to write on **Der Tog** without ever mentioning the name of B. Z. Goldberg, one of its best known staff members!

It is not our task to explain this irrational "achievement"—let Howe attempt to do this. B. Z. Goldberg was a main pillar of **Der Tog** and later of the combined **Der Tog-Morgn Zhurnal**. We can only surmise two reasons for Howe's omission of his name: 1) B. Z. Goldberg's years' long sympathetic attitude to the Soviet Union even though he became an outspoken opponent of the Soviets 15 years before his passing, and 2) the pointed and correct evaluation B. Z. Goldberg made of Abe Cahan. For Irving Howe these are two sins he cannot forgive. That is why he so coarsely insults Olgin and ignores B. Z. Goldberg. This is in accord with Cahan's own methods.

## ABE CAHAN'S "NEW JOURNALISM"

In the first section of this pamphlet we wrote that Howe approved Abe Cahan's potato version of Yiddish, that is, his "theory" of eliminating apt Yiddish words and phrases from the Yiddish language and replacing them with English words (potato instead of kartofl, etc.). He returns to this subject in the chapter on the Yiddish press. Howe writes (page 530):



“ . . . But Cahan held that Yiddish was whatever the Yiddish-speaking masses actually spoke. If **Forward** readers were absorbing into their speech a large number of English words, then the paper would have to absorb them too. Why should the German word for window, **fenster**, be considered acceptable Yiddish while **vinde** was not, even though more and more people on the East Side used **vinde** in their daily Yiddish speech?”

What is one to make of such an explanation in the 76th year of the 20th century? A hundred years ago one heard the witticism that Yiddish is not a language, that it is a kind of German, a jargon! But now we hear that **fenster** is “German” and Irving Howe, a literary critic and what have you, insists that Abe Cahan was right, that one must say **vinde** and write as the public speaks. Which public?

Howe writes that Cahan’s practice of dragging ever more Anglicisms into Yiddish “outraged not only some of his comrades but also many Yiddish intellectuals” (page 529). But, Howe claims, this helped transform **The Forward** into a “wonderfully readable paper.” He is overcome with delight. “A New Journalism” is the proud title over the section of the chapter which recounts Cahan’s accomplishments since he returned to **The Forward** in March 1902 . . .

Howe describes Cahan as a dictator, a “Bonapartist,” “often irritable and cranky, inordinately vain . . .” Another associate noted he was “intolerant and imperious” (page 526). Nevertheless, Howe is enraptured with Cahan’s “new journalism.”

Yes, Cahan did transform **The Forward** into a **shund** (trashy) newspaper, but it was “shund and literature” according to Howe; Cahan printed articles by Karl Kautsky, Leon Blum, Abramovitch, etc. Howe surely should have known that this was also the way Hearst ran his papers. Hearst’s papers published articles by George Bernard Shaw, but this did not make them any less the trash papers that they were.

Another merit of **The Forward**, according to Howe, was that the newspaper served the unions during a strike and served the Socialist movement. This is true, of course. There was no other Socialist daily newspaper. The question is: how did **The Forward**, the personal instrument of the dictator Cahan who was cranky and intolerant, imperious and vain, serve labor’s cause?

We saw how it behaved during the Tailors’ Strike in 1913. As for its Socialism, Howe himself admits it “was a loose, unfolding creed, with many virtues, many sins” (page 537). Gradually, its “Socialism faded into Sunday ceremonials” (page 542), whatever that means.

## CAHAN WAS DESPISED BY MOST YIDDISH WRITERS

That the Socialist and literary critic Howe can so relish **The Forward** despite all that he himself must say of it is truly puzzling. But let others solve this puzzle, though it is obvious that Irving Howe misleads people with this book.

We shall conclude by placing before the public a serious question.

Irving Howe asserts in a footnote (page 529): “A thick volume could be put together of denunciations of Cahan by Yiddish writers and intellectuals.” He himself quotes denunciations of Cahan by Leon Kobrin, Dr. Isaac Hourwich, Menakhem Boraisha and others. Here is what Zhitlovsky (1865-1943) wrote and which Howe quotes: “Cahan has made **The Forward** into a savage newspaper with the mind of a small child and the lusts of a grown scoundrel.” No small rebuke.

Into this thick volume there might be included the views on **The Forward** and Abe Cahan which were held by Morris Winchevsky, David Pinski, Joseph Schlossberg, Sidney Hillman, J. B. Salutsky (Hardman), Jacob Gordin, L. B. Boudin, Joseph Opatoshu, Lamed Shapiro, Sholem Asch, Shmuel Niger, Jacob Milch, Nachman Meisel, Vladimir Medem, Henrikh Erlich and many other labor and literary figures and also Olgin, of course.

Howe notes that even the mild mannered Shmuel Niger, “the dean of Yiddish literary critics” had written “a memorable excoriation of Cahan” in the magazine **Di Feder** in 1928. Howe does not quote what Shmuel Niger had actually written then. Let us do it for him, it is that important. Niger wrote:

“In a newspaper whose entire essence, its blood, can be said to be yellow, everything in it must be yellowed, even its literary criticism . . . You understand, the true concept of beauty is in danger and who should rise to defend art if not the redeeming angel of the Yiddish trash journalism and the Yiddish trash theatre. He comes forth, this knight of literary purity, this person who turned more than one talented Yiddish writer into a trash correspondent, this old conspirator against the Yiddish word—this unclean spirit of the Yiddish street—and he declares with his rolled up eyes that his only aim is to liberate the Yiddish literature from the ‘superstition’ which supposedly is linked to the idolization of (the classical author) Mendele . . .

“Abe Cahan who after years of being the editor of a Yiddish newspaper has not learned to properly write a Yiddish sentence, he becomes the

guardian of literary taste among Jews'' (**Di Feder**, May-July, 1928).

Shmuel Niger wrote these words shortly after Cahan had published in **The Forward** his own series of articles to "prove" that Mendele Moicher Sforim "did not know how to write." According to Cahan neither could Morris Winchevsky who possessed a distinguished style and even Sholem Aleichem did not know how to write . . . This "unclean spirit of the Jewish street" commanded great power at that time and in various ways he inflicted much damage on the Yiddish language and the Yiddish culture in America.

Niger's opinion of Cahan, and the novelist Joseph Opatoshu wrote in a similar vein of Cahan's role in Yiddish literature and J. B. Salutsky (Hardman) wrote similarly of Cahan's role in regard to Socialism in the Jewish community, are all indicative of the antagonism and indignation which had accumulated against him among the overwhelming majority of the prominent personalities in Yiddish life in the United States. All of them deplored the enormous damage Cahan and **The Forward** inflicted on the Jewish community in America through his "undermining the foundations" of Yiddish, through his consistent assimilatory attitude, through his unflinching support of the trade union bureaucracy and his burying of Socialism.

By what right does the literary critic and Socialist Irving Howe dismiss the judgment of all those who spent decades struggling for a healthy Jewish life in America, for the Yiddish language and culture and for Socialism? By what right does he insist on upholding this "unclean spirit of the Yiddish street" as if he were a saviour and prophet? We believe the views on Abe Cahan of all the above cited personalities constitute an indictment of Irving Howe.

His book, "**World of Our Fathers**" is harmful and this must be regretted. His subject was a golden one and certain chapters of the book are good and important. We indicated a few of these though we could not touch on everything, of course. However, as noted earlier, a spoonful of grease can spoil a barrel of honey. Howe's book contains quite a few such heavy spoonfuls in addition to doses of red-baiting and defamations.

At the very end of his book Howe speaks of the self-dissolution of the Yiddish language and the decline of secular Jewishness. With his singing the praises of Abe Cahan's "potato" Yiddish Howe made his own contribution to this end. This contribution needs to be rejected.

## *You don't have to know Yiddish to read the Morning Freiheit*

The "Morning Freiheit" contains a weekly two-page English section for the non-Yiddish reader. This section is designed for those who are concerned with Jewish problems, with the activities and policies of the important Jewish movements and organizations in the United States and abroad. Important editorial statements of the Morning Freiheit and significant articles by our own writers and by writers in progressive Yiddish publications in other countries are regularly featured in this English section.

The weekly two-page English supplement may be obtained for \$8.00 a year, student rate \$5.00. Subscribe today.

Morning Freiheit  
35 East 12th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10003