

Yiddish-Speaking Socialists in America: 1892-1905

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Toronto-born Bernard H. Bloom is presently rabbi of Temple Isaiah in Lexington, Mass. The present essay is an abbreviated version of his rabbinical thesis, "Die Zukunft: 1892-1905; a Study of the Early Jewish Socialist Movement of the U. S. A.," submitted to the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in 1957.

Rabbi Bloom's essay, as it appears in these pages, is based for the most part on material found in Die Zukunft ("The Future"), from January, 1892, to August, 1897, and from January, 1902, to December, 1905. Die Zukunft is a Yiddish-language socialist periodical which, except for irregular appearances during its first two years and a gap of four and a half years as indicated above, has been published monthly to the present day. It is a political, scientific, and literary magazine, which has provided, and continues to provide, valuable insights into the events, personalities, and concerns of the American Jewish socialist world.

A study of Die Zukunft during the years between its founding in 1892 and 1905 affords an opportunity to examine the formative period of American Jewish socialism. Where he has had occasion to deal with matters antedating Die Zukunft's appearance or requiring amplification, Rabbi Bloom has relied largely on the last two volumes of Simon Dubnow's History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, translated by Israel Friedlaender (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1920); on J. Chaikin's Yiddishe Bletter in Amerika ["The Yiddish Press in America"] (New York: Privately published, 1946); and on Jacob S. Hertz's Die Yiddishe Sozialistische Bevegung in Amerika ["The Jewish Socialist Movement in America"] (New York: "Der Wecker," 1954).

Yiddish transliterations, as Rabbi Bloom has rendered them, follow the German to a large extent. There are exceptions, of course, and, in any case, the German practice of capitalizing nouns has not been applied to the Yiddish.



Courtesy, California State Library, Sacramento

From lithograph in California Section

SACRAMENTO, THE STATE CAPITAL, IN 1850
when William W. Stow was Speaker of the House
(see p. 15)



Courtesy, New York Public Library

EAST SIDE, NEW YORK
where Jewish socialism had flourished

HYBRID IDEOLOGIES

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth witnessed the mass immigration of over 1,500,000 East European Jews into the United States.¹ In establishing themselves in their adopted homeland, the newcomers quickly evolved a pattern of Jewish life which bore scant resemblance to that of the American Jewish community which they found on their arrival. The German Jewish immigrants of the 1840's and 1850's had developed a Jewish life which was an amalgam of German Jewish attitudes, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the forms and values of the American scene. The American Jewish scene which greeted the East European immigrants on their arrival was, therefore, foreign to them on two counts. This, however, does not in itself fully explain the emergence of the new East European immigrant pattern. Two other elements were involved: first, the fact that the new immigrants overwhelmed the older, established American Jewish community numerically; and second, the tendency of the immigrants to congregate together in the larger cities — especially New York City. In these new "ghettos," the values, attitudes, and ideals of Eastern Europe were transplanted onto American soil and cross-fertilized by their American counterparts. Inevitably, hybrids developed.

One of these hybrid ideological sprouts was American Jewish socialism. This was a movement which had a significant effect on a half century of Jewish life and whose echoes are still to be heard, albeit faintly. The career and ultimate fate of this movement were almost predestined by the circumstances of its emergence, circumstances which impelled it to compromises undreamed of by its purist European spokesmen.

"CROWN SCHOOLS," UTOPIANS, AND SOCIALISTS

American Jewish socialism was almost entirely an ideological import of the East European immigrants. To comprehend fully the

¹ The total of 1,562,800 from 1881 to 1910 is based on a Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society chart, reproduced in Morris U. Schappes, *The Jews in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1958), p. 119.

nature of the American movement, it is essential to appreciate the history and nature of its antecedents.

In many ways, socialism was to the Jew of the Russian Empire what Reform Judaism was to the Jew of the Western World. Both were ideologies designed to enable the Jew to escape from the medieval world and to participate fully in Western society. In England, America, and France, where the liberal revolution had already been fought and won and where Jews were freely accepted as members of society, liberal expressions of Judaism evolved. In Eastern Europe, however, a medieval Russian despotism still held sway, and all liberal movements, political or otherwise, were suppressed.

In 1826, middle-class Warsaw Jews had opened a liberal rabbinical seminary,² which the Russian government closed in the aftermath of the abortive Polish Revolution of 1831. It is significant to note that, in later years, Jewish socialists referred contemptuously to the bourgeois "Poles of the Mosaic Persuasion" who had participated in this ill-fated rebellion as *Moishe Rabbenus Poliaken*³ — "Our Teacher Moses' Poles."

With liberal sentiment growing to alarming proportions during the 1830's, the Russian government adopted ostensibly liberal policies, whereby it could carefully control, and ultimately discredit, this threat to the autocracy. In pursuance of this policy, two liberal rabbinical seminaries were founded by the Tsar's government in 1847,⁴ and Dr. Max Lilienthal, a German Reform rabbi, later a Cincinnati colleague of Isaac Mayer Wise, was employed to establish modern "Crown schools" for the Jewish population.

In attempting to justify the denial of legal and civil rights to its Jewish subjects, the Tsar's regime insisted that the Jews were unworthy of these rights and had to earn them. Russification was the price demanded by the government, and the enlightened Jewish middle class, using Western Jewry as its model, was more than willing to comply. At first, the government's avowed "liberal"

² Dubnow, II, 103 f.

³ *Die Zukunft*, 1903, p. 276. The biting acerbity of the phrase is lost in English translation.

⁴ Dubnow, II, 59, 174 f.

policies were accepted at face value. The establishment of "Crown schools" and the founding of the two seminaries to train liberal rabbis and teachers were hailed as proofs of Tsarist sincerity. As civil and legal proscriptions continued, however, to increase rather than to decline, disillusionment was the inevitable result. Because modern education was identified with the government's anti-Semitic policies, it came to be discredited in the eyes of many Jews. In similar fashion, Tsarist sponsorship of the liberal seminaries dealt a mortal blow to the cause of liberal Judaism in Eastern Europe, whose Jews were thus impelled to seek more radical ways of entering the modern world.

For those Jews of the Russian Empire who aspired to be free citizens in a free society, there was no longer any hope of attaining emancipation through the Tsar's benevolence. The only hope rested in replacing the autocracy with a more liberal government, and disgruntled Jewish idealists were attracted to the various radical groups which sought, by either evolutionary or revolutionary means, to bring about a change in the regime. Many of the graduates of the Tsar's liberal rabbinical seminaries attached themselves to the current Populist movement which had set itself the task of carrying the message of revolution directly to the Russian peasants and workmen. The participation of these liberal Jews in the movement was, however, generally more intellectual than active as a result of the Russian nationalistic complexion which Populism had assumed.

Jewish interest, in any case, went beyond the utopian socialism of the Populists. As *Die Zukunft* later put it,

the Jewish participants in the Polish insurrection of 1831 were without a doubt fiery revolutionaries, but the majority of them — quite far removed from Socialism. . . . The Jews of the insurrection of 1863 were *all* fiery revolutionaries, and nearly all true Socialists.⁵

In the early 1870's, a revolutionary society was formed in Vilna, its membership consisting largely of students from the liberal Jewish seminary and teachers' institute. Although this group was dispersed by the Tsar's police in 1875, its influence continued to spread. A Jewish socialist labor movement started during the late 1880's

⁵ *Die Zukunft*, 1903, p. 276.

in Vilna and spread to other industrial cities during the 1890's. In this way, a socialist movement gradually developed among the East European Jews.

"SOCIAL DEMOCRACY" AND THE "KANGAROOS"

In 1881, the old American Socialist Party, a rather broad coalition of anarchists, syndicalists, and socialists, split over the question of political activity. The anarchists and syndicalists refused to participate in the capitalist political system and insisted on focussing all their energy on hastening the social revolution. The socialists emerged from this struggle as the moderate faction and organized the Socialist Labor Party (S. L. P.), which, in 1889, split, in *its* turn, over the question of union activity. The national leaders, who favored the founding of new militant unions, were opposed by Daniel DeLeon, the leader of the New York City section. The moderate DeLeonist faction insisted on using the existing unions, especially the American Federation of Labor (A. F. of L.), formed three years earlier, in 1886.

The DeLeonists, who retained the Socialist Labor Party name after the schism, soon gave up hope of capturing the A. F. of L. and organized a competing union, the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance. Lack of success, in addition to dissatisfaction with DeLeon's authoritarian leadership, resulted in defections from his party. In 1897, the "Social Democracy of America" was formed in the Midwest by the erstwhile national leaders of the S. L. P., Eugene V. Debs among them, and many of the DeLeonist dissidents gravitated towards it, its strong utopian tinge notwithstanding.

A year after its founding, the "Social Democracy" itself split over the utopian question. When a majority approved a policy of founding socialist colonies instead of stressing political action, the minority formed yet another group, the Social Democratic Party of America (S. D. P.). This avowedly militant party attracted the more reticent S. L. P. dissidents, and in 1899 the Socialist Labor Party split for the last time. The "kangaroos," as DeLeon labeled the rebels, proposed a merger with the S. D. P. in 1900, and in 1901 the new Socialist Party was formed.

This was the socialist scene which greeted the East European Jewish socialists on their arrival in the United States.

YEARS OF TAKING ROOT

With the onset of a wave of pogroms in 1881, East European Jews began to flock to the United States. The vast majority of these immigrants knew nothing of radical philosophies. They were simple people, intent on making a living, and banded together in *landsmannschaften*, societies of individuals who had come from the same East European locality, or *land*.

Among these early immigrants were some radicals, generally fugitives sought by the Tsarist police. It was not an abstract philosophizing that had won them for radicalism, but their confrontation of East European Jewry's degraded position. They were consequently more concerned with the continuing struggle back home than with the American socialist scene, and formed radical clubs where they could share their exile with fellow refugees. Gradually they developed an interest in their new environment, and in place of the glorious task which they had reluctantly had to abandon in Eastern Europe, they chose that of redeeming their exploited Jewish fellow immigrants through unionization. The 1880's were years of acclimatization and of taking root. Little was accomplished beyond sporadic strikes and ever more intensive propagandizing and agitation.

Despite the *Sturm und Drang* of the American socialist world in the early 1880's, Jewish socialists continued to be concerned almost purely with their own narrow bailiwick. In 1885, they supported the formation of the *Yiddisher Arbeiter Verein* ("Jewish Workmen's Union"), which lasted only a year. The failure of this attempt may have been the major factor convincing the Jewish socialists to affiliate with the Socialist Labor Party. In 1887, two Jewish S. L. P. branches were formed, one Yiddish-speaking and the other Russian-speaking. When the party schism occurred in 1889, the Jewish branches remained with the New York moderates under DeLeon's leadership.

A SCIENTIFIC SOCIALIST MONTHLY

In Eastern Europe, although there had been Jewish socialists, it was not until the late 1880's, as we have seen, that a specifically Jewish movement began within the Vilna proletariat. Prior to that time, while Jewish socialists had participated in the struggle for the social revolution, they had done so not as Jews, but as Russian citizens, joining forces with their Gentile Russian comrades to achieve the common goal. They were cosmopolitans, and the very notion of a distinct Jewish movement would have seemed to them a repudiation of their universalist ideals.

When, however, the Jewish socialist *émigrés* began to take an interest in the American socialist movement, they found it almost impossible to adhere to their universalist principles. Especially in the larger cities, the Socialist Labor Party was organized along ethnic lines, with chapters formed by socialists of the various immigrant nationalities. This posed a serious problem to the Jewish socialists, a fellowship which staunchly denied the existence of such a thing as "Jewish nationality" and had long since rejected the Jewish "faith." Many of them had no contact with the Jewish masses and did not even speak the Yiddish language. Yet it was only as the socialist representatives of the Jewish immigrant group that they could find a place in the American movement, and only by appealing to the Jewish public could these "leaders" acquire a following. And so, as we have seen, two Jewish branches of the S. L. P. were formed in 1887 — one Yiddish-speaking, one Russian-speaking. With S. L. P. assistance, they were able, in 1888, to organize a stable labor organization, the United Hebrew Trades. Their next goal became the establishment of a socialist Yiddish press which would bring the new gospel to the people.

Yiddish journalism was now becoming a less risky venture. Several Yiddish newspapers had appeared in the 1870's, but only one weekly, *Die Yiddishe Gazetten* ("The Jewish Gazette"), succeeded in achieving a measure of permanence. In 1881, at the height of concern over the new outbreak of pogroms in Russia, it became — for two months — the world's first Yiddish daily. The 1880's saw the Jewish population of New York City expand from

100,000 to 250,000, and this increase in the reading public made possible the establishment, in 1885, of the world's first *successful* Yiddish daily, the *Tegleche Gazetten* ("The Daily Gazette").

The success of the pietistic *Tegleche Gazetten* encouraged the liberals and radicals to establish their own sounding boards. After several failures between 1885 and 1890, two successful radical weeklies were founded in 1891: the anarchist *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* ("The Workmen's Free Voice") and the socialist *Arbeiter Zeitung* ("Workmen's Newspaper"). Since the socialist weekly was primarily a journal of current events, the S. L. P. decided to publish a monthly periodical on a higher intellectual level, a periodical which would present literary, scientific, and political articles to the Jewish public. And so *Die Zukunft* ("The Future") was born, a journal which, except for the period 1897 to 1902, has enjoyed an uninterrupted career and continues even today to express the views of American Jewish socialists.

The cosmopolitan character of the Jewish socialists was clearly evident in the contents of *Die Zukunft's* first issue, published in January, 1892:

- Facing page 1: A photograph of Karl Marx
- page 1: Editorial: Our "Zukunft"
- page 2: Biography of Karl Marx
- page 7: God, Religion and Morality
- page 14: The Evolution of a Proletariat in America
- page 17: Did the Reichstag Elections Achieve Anything in Germany?
- page 21: Brief quotations from Victor Hugo and others
- page 22: Darwinism
- page 38: Malthusianism and Capitalism
- page 44: The Floating Coffin (a literary sketch)
- page 48: From the Moon (satirical comments on current events)

The literary sketch, "The Floating Coffin," is of particular interest to us. It is a description of the typical radical Jewish *émigré* who had devoted his whole life to the pursuit of the universal social revolution, only to find himself reviled and hounded as a Jew, and driven from his beloved Russian "motherland," by the Russian "little brother" whom he had sought to help.

Of equal interest to us is the magazine's cover, on which *Die*

Zukunft is described as "a scientific Socialist monthly published by the Yiddish-speaking sections, S. L. P. of America." Here the *Tendenz* of the Jewish socialists emerges with clarity. No longer able to serve as missionaries of socialism to the benighted Russian peasants, they had now turned to the Jewish masses. Especially noteworthy is the significant phrase "Yiddish-speaking sections." Clearly, they preferred to consider themselves as "scientific Socialists of the *Yiddish-speaking persuasion*" rather than as "*Jewish Socialists*."

This missionary approach to their union activities was revealed in an early article:

We are not the patriots of a separate "Jewish Labor Movement." We want Jews to be members of American unions. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that, under the present circumstances, Yiddish-speaking labor unions are a necessity; that without them, the Jewish workers will not begin to enter the American organizations.⁶

The same article went on to bemoan the contemporary union situation. It pointed out that the Jewish masses were not a genuine proletariat and lacked the class consciousness of other immigrant groups. The Jewish worker persisted in regarding his laboring status as a temporary steppingstone leading to some respectable bourgeois position. When working conditions were bad, he turned to the unions. After the strikes were won, and the benefits achieved, the unions were deserted. Such had been the union picture from 1888 and the founding of the United Hebrew Trades to 1892.

Ideological battles between socialists and anarchists within the unions during this time were an additional cause of Jewish disinterest. Even more damaging to the United Hebrew Trades was the ideological conflict being waged by the Socialist Labor Party under DeLeon in the general union arena. The newly-formed A. F. of L. was in conflict with the older, more conservative Knights of Labor union organization. When the A. F. of L. spurned DeLeon's attempts to infiltrate and capture it, he urged the S. L. P. supporters to join the Knights of Labor unions and to work for the destruction of the A. F. of L. Thereupon the anarchists came out in support of the

⁶ *Ibid.*, April, 1892, p. 18.

A. F. of L. unions. Is it to be wondered that the generality of Jewish workers, urged to join several conflicting unions simultaneously, confused by claims and accusations, and unable to see any immediate benefit in unionization, should have avoided such entanglements?

PERSONALITIES

Although we have referred to the Jewish socialist immigrants as a group, it is unwise to regard them in the light of a stereotype. Each of them, although a product of the same general conditions, was a unique product. By briefly examining the early careers of some of the leaders of the "Yiddish-speaking Socialists," we can better understand the complexities of the movement and also become familiar with its leading figures.

The first editor of the weekly *Arbeiter Zeitung* was Jacob Rombro, better known by his *nom de guerre* of Philip Krantz. An alumnus of the Zhitomir Yeshiva, one of the two "reform" seminaries founded by the Russian government, Krantz attended also the St. Petersburg Institute of Technology, where he became a radical. He spent 1877 in prison, and in 1881, following the assassination of Alexander II by a terrorist group with which he had been associated, he fled to Paris. There he wrote for Russian *émigré* publications and did some propagandizing among Jewish workers. Krantz went to London in 1883, mastered Yiddish there, and in 1885 became the editor of *Der Arbeiter Freund* ("The Workmen's Friend"), the world's first Yiddish socialist newspaper. When the S. L. P. leaders decided, in 1890, to publish the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, they invited Krantz to come to New York and offered him its editorship. He edited also *Die Zukunft* during its first two years. Krantz represented the ultraradical, assimilationist, Russified Jew, whose only interest in the Jews was that they constituted an oppressed class.

Another prominent figure was Abraham Cahan. He was a graduate of the Russian government-sponsored Teachers' Institute at Vilna, but his teaching career lasted only one year. In 1882 he was forced to flee because of his revolutionary activities, and escaped to New York as part of an *Am Olom* group. *Am Olom* ("Eternal

People'') was an organization of enthusiastic and idealistic university students, which, like the contemporary proto-Zionist *Bilu* organization, sought to establish Jewish agricultural colonies. The *Am Olom'niks* differed from Palestine's *Bilu* pioneers in their staunch cosmopolitan and anti-Zionist views. Although Cahan shared most of their views, their utopian program was not for him. Remaining in New York City, he developed his talents as a Yiddish journalist, and came to play a prominent part in the organization of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* and *Die Zukunft*.

Louis Bandes, whose pseudonym was Louis E. Miller, was another Vilna native forced to emigrate to America because of his revolutionary activities. He arrived in 1886, just in time to become associated with Cahan in organizing the *Arbeiter Zeitung*. A factory worker by day and a law student by night, Miller was able, nevertheless, to rise to a position of leadership in the labor movement.

The third member of the triumvirate which founded the *Arbeiter Zeitung* was Morris Hilkovitz, soon to gain fame in non-Jewish political circles as Morris Hillquit. A *Kurlander*, born in Riga, Latvia, into a German-speaking family and educated in a Russian *Gymnasium*, Hillquit had had to learn Yiddish in America. Seventeen years of age when his family immigrated in 1887, he was converted to socialism in the tenement roof-top academies of New York City. As a charter member of the Russian-speaking Jewish S. L. P. branch, Hillquit worked with Cahan in 1888 to form the United Hebrew Trades, and in 1890 they both worked with Miller to found the *Arbeiter Zeitung*.

An outstanding veteran in socialist journalism was Benjamin Feigenbaum. He had left his native Poland around 1880 at the age of twenty, and participated in socialist journalism in Belgium, in England, and, from 1891 on, in America. In England, he had also developed a talent for organizing the immigrant Jewish workers, a talent which he was to pursue even further in the United States, in the founding of *Der Arbeiter Ring* ("The Workmen's Circle"), the great Jewish socialist fraternal organization.

A literary figure who played an important role in Jewish radical cultural endeavors was Jacob Gordin. In 1881 he had sought to

establish, in the Ukrainian city of Yelisavetgrad, a group called "The Spiritual Biblical Brotherhood." The "Brotherhood" rejected the doctrinal and ceremonial elements of Judaism and acknowledged only the moral teachings of the Bible. Condemning Jewish concentration in mercantile pursuits, the "Brotherhood" urged Jews to live by the labor of their hands, especially agriculture. Its strictures so closely paralleled the accusations of the anti-Semites who instituted a pogrom two weeks after the founding of the "Brotherhood" that the group aroused deep resentment among its outraged Jewish brethren. The silence of the Russian intelligentsia during the ensuing wave of pogroms utterly disillusioned Gordin, among others, and he came to America. He later expressed his disenchantment graphically in the literary sketch called "The Floating Coffin," which appeared in the first issue of *Die Zukunft*. In the United States, he fell in with the Jewish radicals and, under Philip Krantz's urging, became a popular Yiddish dramatist of the Ibsen school.

Another literary personality soon to appear on the American scene was Lithuanian-born L. Benedikt, or Morris Winchevsky, as he called himself, who during his early twenties — in 1878 — had published a Hebrew socialist magazine in Königsberg, East Prussia. After his expulsion from the Kaiser's territories, Winchevsky went to Denmark, to France, and, finally, to England, where he edited *Der Poylisher Idl* ("The Polish Jew") and also tutored Philip Krantz in the Yiddish language. It was not until 1894 that he came to the United States to take an active role in Yiddish socialist journalism.

THE EFFECTS OF A SCHISM

The year 1892 saw the beginning of an upturn in Jewish socialist fortunes. The appearance of *Die Zukunft* was in itself an indication of better times, or, at least, of the S. L. P.'s increased interest in the Jewish immigrants. The winter of 1892 ushered in an economic crisis, which wiped out the union gains won in 1890, and the S. L. P.-sponsored United Hebrew Trades (U. H. T.) stepped into the leadership of the spontaneous strikes which resulted. One of the benefits which the U. H. T. was able to win for the strikers was

an indemnity for losses incurred by the workers during the strike. The secretary of the U. H. T., Joseph Barondess, was charged with criminal extortion by the employers' association, and his trials attracted much publicity. His eventual judicial martyrdom, coupled with the benefits won in the strike, helped to endear the U. H. T. to the immigrants and won for that union a more permanent place in their affections.

In 1894, the improved situation encouraged the appearance of a Yiddish socialist daily, *Das Abend-Blatt* ("The Evening Journal"), with Philip Krantz as its editor. Between 1892 and 1894, the "monthly" *Die Zukunft*—under Krantz's editorship—had appeared only eight times, but in 1894 the periodical was able to achieve regularity in its appearances, and its circulation climbed. Abraham Cahan succeeded Krantz as its editor, and his journalistic talents improved *Die Zukunft's* contents, and hence its circulation, considerably. It should be noted here that none of these periodicals were actually published by the S. L. P. *Die Zukunft* was governed by a board of representatives from the various Yiddish-speaking socialist groups. The *Abend-Blatt* and the *Arbeiter Zeitung* were published by a different group, the so-called "Arbeiter Zeitung Publishing Association," a closed corporation of staunch DeLeonists.

Despite its success among the Jewish immigrants, the S. L. P. fared poorly in its other endeavors. In the December, 1896, issue of *Die Zukunft*, Louis E. Miller castigated the S. L. P. for its futile policies in the fields of labor and political action; he was especially critical of the S. L. P.'s rigidly doctrinaire approach which tolerated no honest dissent.⁷ The dogmatism of the "Arbeiter Zeitung Publishing Association" had been assailed also in July, 1896, when Cahan presented a proposal of the New York Yiddish-speaking sections of the S. L. P. that the party's Yiddish-language publications be turned over directly to the S. L. P.'s Jewish members.⁸

In January, 1897, a schism occurred in the ranks of the S. L. P.'s Yiddish-speaking members. Headed by Miller, a sizable minority in the "Publishing Association" walked out of an "Association"

⁷ *Ibid.*, December, 1896, pp. 22 ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, July, 1896, pp. 41 ff.

meeting after having been defeated on the question of control of press policy. This walkout sparked a party-wide split, as all the Jewish unions not affiliated with the U. H. T. joined the dissident socialists. Twenty-three Jewish socialist organizations from seven cities subsequently held a conference and decided to publish an opposition daily, the *Forverts* ("Forward"), with Abraham Cahan as its editor. The *Forverts* began to appear on April 22, 1897.

These dissidents still regarded themselves as a "loyal opposition" within the S. L. P. The branches which supported the *Forverts* did so through the legal fiction of "press clubs," to avoid the appearance of opposing the official party organ which DeLeon declared the *Abend-Blatt* to be. In June, 1897, however, DeLeon expelled the Philadelphia branch for endorsing the *Forverts* and, managing a hasty reorganization of the New York Jewish branches, effectively excommunicated these *Forverts*-supporting branches from the S. L. P.

Although DeLeon's action had been aimed only at the New York dissident faction, its effects reverberated throughout the Jewish socialist movement. Early in July, the *Forverts* proposed that the movement affiliate itself with Eugene V. Debs's newly-formed "Social Democracy of America," and on July 31st a convention was called to decide the question. Composed not only of the Yiddish-speaking S. L. P. branches, but also of other Jewish socialist organizations and unions, this convention voted overwhelmingly to affiliate with Debs's movement, despite the conventioners' apprehensions concerning the utopianism of the "Social Democracy." The erstwhile "Yiddish-speaking branches of the S. L. P." entrusted the publication of *Die Zukunft* to the "Forverts Association," but the financial strain proved too great, and in August, 1897, the pioneering *Die Zukunft* was compelled to suspend publication.

REVISIONISM AND THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

The tumult and discord raging within the American Jewish socialist microcosm were paralleled in the world socialist macrocosm. As socialism ceased to be a parlor game for intellectuals and began to take part in the rough-and-tumble of unionism and political action, crises developed. In the first place, the dogmas of Marx

often revealed themselves as inapplicable to real situations. Moreover, the drive to gain adherents and popularity frequently required the dilution of the strong socialist medicine and its sweetening with compromise. Such a "revision" of pristine socialism was first publicly proclaimed in Germany in the late 1890's by Eduard Bernstein, a leader of the German Social Democratic Party, then the leading socialist party in the world.

Revisionism, attacked and reviled by the socialist faithful throughout the world, spread nonetheless. It did not grow as a movement, but as a spontaneous reaction to local conditions. The American Socialist Labor Party schism of 1889 constituted an early manifestation of revisionism, when the party split over the question of participating in the apolitical trade unions. By preferring to work within the existing unions, rather than to found Socialist unions, DeLeon was, in effect, a revisionist. When this plan proved futile, however, he reverted to orthodox Marxism and founded the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance. Despite DeLeon's attempts to maintain the S. L. P. along the rigid, doctrinaire lines of a scientific socialist party, he was predestined to failure. Had he not himself set the example for future revisionists?

WORKERS OF *EACH LAND*, UNITE!

Although Marx's stirring proclamation — "Workers of all lands, unite!" — had implied the formation of an international proletarian movement, the prevailing nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century reinterpreted his dictum to mean "workers of *each land*, unite!" There appeared, consequently, in the nations of Europe socialist parties organized on a national basis, parties whose chief concern was to win full rights for the working class of their individual nations. Marx's own Social Democratic Party of Germany was the prime example of such a national socialist party; as the most successful of the socialist parties of the world, it set the pace for all others. In Western Europe, those Jews who were socialists participated in their national parties and were accepted as equals.

The Russian Empire presented a different situation, since it encompassed many non-Russian peoples. In addition to Russian socialist parties, such national minorities as the Poles and the

Lithuanians founded their own parties, combining the old struggle for national independence with the new social revolution. Initially, Jews participated in the parties of those national groups in whose territory they resided, so that, for example, the Polish revolt of 1863 included Jews who fought for Polish independence side by side with their Polish comrades. In Russia proper, Jewish socialists regarded the struggle of the Russian radicals as their own and joined the various Russian parties.

In the 1880's, the Russian government made nationalism the crux of its anti-Semitic program and charged that the Jews were an alien nation in the midst of the Russian Empire. Not only were the benighted Russian masses quick to accept this indictment, which justified their excesses against the Jews, but the liberal and radical Russian intelligentsia, too, failed to reject a theory of Jewish "alienness." Caught up in the currents of nineteenth-century nationalism and officially labeled by the government as a national group, the Jews of the Russian Empire endorsed this designation. Jewish nationalism evolved, however, along two main lines: Zionist nationalism, on the one hand; and diaspora nationalism, on the other. It is, of course, the latter which directly concerns us, because it led to the organization of the Jewish socialist movement in Russia on the standard pattern of the national socialist party. No longer did Jewish socialists seek equality for all Russian citizens, including Jews, but now their program sought to achieve *equal national rights for the Jewish national minority* of the Russian Empire. Significantly, the year 1897, a year which saw the First Zionist Congress, witnessed also the founding of the "League of the Jewish Workingmen of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia," known more succinctly as *Der Bund* ("The League").

All of this was important to American Jewish socialism, because, as we have already seen, that movement was basically the Russian movement transplanted to the American environment. We have seen that its leaders regarded themselves as "Yiddish-speaking members of the Socialist Labor Party." We may anticipate that the emergence of national socialism among Russian Jewry would have some effect on the American Jewish socialist movement, and our anticipation would, in fact, be correct.

AGAIN THE "KANGAROOS"

With the departure of the *Forverts* faction from the S. L. P., the Jewish socialist movement entered upon sorry days. In September, 1897, the dissidents were reinforced when twenty-two of the United Hebrew Trades' twenty-five affiliated unions bolted the S. L. P.'s "Alliance" and organized the new "Hebrew Federated Trades." On the political scene, too, there was tumult. Debs' "Social Democracy of America" split in June, 1898, over the question of political action. Among those favoring such action were such Jewish leaders as Winchevsky, Miller, and Barondess, who helped to organize the new "Social Democratic Party of America" (S. D. P.). Their venture was approved by their organizations, and as early as December, 1898, the Jewish sections of the S. D. P. held a convention.

Meanwhile, the S. L. P. strove to repair the damage caused by the walkout of the *Forverts* faction. By the end of 1897, its reorganized Yiddish-speaking sections numbered twenty-eight, and a new monthly, *Die Neue Zeit* ("The New Era"), edited by Krantz and Feigenbaum, replaced *Die Zukunft*. Nevertheless, the final S. L. P. schism was imminent. As noted earlier, the S. L. P. split in 1899, and in 1901 the dissidents joined forces with the S. D. P. to form the new Socialist Party.

In the Jewish labor movement, the reconciliation took less time. In 1899 the emaciated United Hebrew Trades joined with the Hebrew Federated Trades to form the United Jewish Trades, and in 1900 the new organization affiliated with the A. F. of L. In the party and the press, this reconciliation between the dissidents of the 1897 *Forverts* faction and the "kangaroos" of 1899 was slower in developing. Perhaps the memory of hostility and personal invective was still too fresh to allow the *Forverts* faction to accept the newer converts. Now it was *they* who had an organ of expression, and "kangaroos" like Krantz and Feigenbaum lacked one. This latter pair made two unsuccessful attempts to publish a "kangaroo" weekly in 1899-1900. In 1901, all the Jewish socialists were united again in the Socialist Party, but the feuds still continued in the Jewish world. Excluded from the *Forverts*, Krantz joined the staff

of *Die Yiddishe Velt* ("The Jewish World"), a daily founded in 1902 by native American Jewish interests as represented by Louis Marshall. Feigenbaum preferred to divert his efforts to furthering the growth of the flourishing fraternal order, *Der Arbeiter Ring* ("The Workmen's Circle").

Although the 1897 Jewish dissidents were called the "Forverts faction," actually they had no common program. They were individuals who had become disgruntled with the S. L. P. for a variety of reasons, and when it came to publishing the *Forverts*, disputes were frequent. As its editor, Cahan had hoped to make it into an American-style newspaper with popular appeal, but a majority on the publishing board was content to have it simply another *Abend-Blatt*, published under the aegis of the *Forverts* faction. With the Yiddish socialist press in such straits, Cahan gladly accepted Lincoln Steffens' offer of a position with the *Commercial Advertiser*, and so in 1898 he resigned the editorship of the *Forverts* to venture into the greener fields of general journalism. The "Forverts Press Federation" still continued to publish the daily, but what had begun as a representative body of sympathetic organizations was now simply a group of interested individuals. These individuals changed the "Federation" into the "Forverts Association" in 1902 and invited Cahan to return as its editor.

A SPOKESMAN FOR THE ARBEITER RING

In addition to the Jewish socialist movement proper, there was a considerable periphery of sympathetic organizations which came to have an increasing effect on American Jewish socialism. During the years of official party decline, from 1897 to 1902, these groups grew in strength and were thus able to contribute much to the resurgence of the movement in 1902. Most prominent among these groups was the fraternal organization, *Der Arbeiter Ring* ("The Workmen's Circle").

The advent of East European Jewish immigration saw the development of the *landsmannschaften*, mutual benefit societies (*fereine* or *chevras*) organized by immigrants from the same European home locality. These societies, in their adherence to traditional Jewish

religious observance, in their lack of concern for education, and in their imitation of the organizational ceremonials of the non-Jewish lodges, were clearly little suited to the free-thinking and radically-oriented immigrant. Thus the *Arbeiter Ring* was founded in 1892 as an organization for the socially conscious Jewish workingmen, an organization which would provide for their physical needs through mutual benefit and for their spiritual needs through education.

During the socialist-anarchist struggles of the 1890's, the *Arbeiter Ring* sought to remain neutral for the sake of internal harmony. Even though its concern with mutual benefit earned it the scorn of the doctrinaire social revolutionaries, it was tolerated, as were all sympathetic *fereine*, *chevras*, and lodges whose support was needed by the conflicting parties. Toleration soon became opposition. At one point in the struggle between the socialist *Arbeiter Zeitung* and the anarchist *Freie Arbeiter Shtimme*, neutralism was abandoned, and a majority in the *Arbeiter Ring* voiced a rather remote support of the socialists. The *Ring's* tenuous support of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* was sufficient to incur the hostility of the anarchists, yet insufficient to win it the approval of the socialists.

Such hostility on the part of the radical parties doomed an important part of the *Arbeiter Ring's* program to failure — its attempt to organize immigrants' cooperatives, which, like the mutual-benefit program, were viewed as a means to the end of wooing workers away from the conservative *chevras* and acquainting them with the radical social and political ideas. The political parties, viewing the *Arbeiter Ring* as a competitor rather than as an ally, refused to back the *Ring's* undertakings, which subsequently failed.

During the period of party schism and decline, this hostility intensified. Many disillusioned and disgusted sympathizers withdrew from political and union activity to seek refuge in the calm haven of the *Arbeiter Ring*. Party and union leaders chose to interpret the *Ring's* increasing strength as the cause of their troubles, rather than as a result of their misguided policies. As its strength increased, however, the party factions began to look upon the *Arbeiter Ring* with new interest. When the *Forverts* faction split with the S. L. P. in 1897, it sought the support of the organization.

Such recognition by an official political group coincided with increased growth. In 1901 the *Arbeiter Ring* won a state charter, which permitted it to expand its benefits program. By 1903 it had twenty-four branches, and a year later the number swelled to seventy. A good measure of the *Ring's* expansion is attributable, from 1900 on, to the immigration of "Bundists." The ardor and energy of the infant *Bund* were carried to America by its supporters, who soon established their own *landsmannschaften*, *Bund* clubs, Socialist Party sections, and *Arbeiter Ring* branches.

The *Arbeiter Ring* played a leading role in the revival of *Die Zukunft* in 1902. Ostensibly an independent socialist periodical, *Die Zukunft* increasingly became a spokesman for the *Arbeiter Ring*. Benjamin Feigenbaum, who was the general secretary of the organization from the early 1890's, frequently contributed to the monthly, and served as its editor for a short while in 1903.

A CHANGED MOVEMENT

Even before its sympathizers began to immigrate in considerable numbers, the *Bund* had an effect on American Jewish socialism. The convention of S. L. P. dissidents which met in July, 1897, considered the possibility of forming a separate American Jewish socialist party like the Russian *Bund*, but finally agreed to join Debs's "Social Democracy." A separate movement like the *Bund* seemed more appropriate to Tsarist Russia than to the United States.

Even in Russia, the leaders of the *Bund* had visualized it originally as the Yiddish-speaking sector of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Gradually the nationalist sentiments of the Jewish masses began to assert themselves, and by 1901 the party's fourth convention had affirmed the concept of Jewish nationality. This "nationalism" — repudiating, however, any "return to Zion" — was based upon the new and as yet meager secular culture evolving in Eastern Europe with the Yiddish language as its means of expression. Jewish socialist leaders of the old school were hard pressed to accept so "reactionary" a concept, and some who refused to compromise their Marxist doctrines continued their activity in the Russian party at large.

Apologists strove to point out that there were two kinds of nationalism, one evil and one good, and that Jewish nationalism was of the good variety.⁹

Nationalist sentiment entered the American Jewish socialist movement along with the masses of new immigrants. Here, too, the leaders of the earlier era had to compromise with popular feeling if they wished to continue to be leaders, and some, like Morris Hillquit, chose to leave the Jewish for the general American movement. American Jewish socialism entered the twentieth century as a changed movement.

THE VERY SPIRIT OF THE TORAH

Die Zukunft resumed publication in January, 1902, but now shared little more than its name with the semi-official organ of the Socialist Labor Party of the 1890's. It was no longer the spokesman for an official party or one of its factions, but was now published by the "Zukunft Press Federation," a voluntary association of socialistic groups. The *Arbeiter Ring* urged its branches to take out a subscription for each member, and similar support was received from progressive independent *fereine* and branches of the *Bund*. The periodical continued to publish articles on matters of social and political interest concerning the American scene and the socialist world, but increasingly there appeared general articles on history, science, and literature — especially Yiddish literature. A comparison of the contents of the January, 1902, *Zukunft*, with those of the first *Zukunft*, published ten years earlier, reveals some of the changing currents in American Jewish Socialism:

- p. 1: Our Movement and Our Press (An editorial on the reasons for the past failures).
- p. 11: Moses Hess (Biography).
- p. 14: Translation of a Speech by August Bebel.
- p. 19: A Preface to Marxism.
- p. 22: The Problem of Predestination and Free Will in the Socialist Movement.
- p. 25: Sociological Studies.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1902, pp. 435 ff.; 1903, p. 280.

- p. 28: The Eighth Division in Gehinnom (A discussion of I. L. Peretz' writing).
- p. 33: Paganini (A free verse translation of Heinrich Heine's poem).
- p. 35: The Day After the Wedding (An original short story).
- p. 38: Jewish Wit.
- p. 42: Bacteriology.
- p. 45: A Morning in New York (An original poem).
- p. 46: Sociology: The Principles of the Science of Society.

The literary material is of particular interest as an indication of evolution. In Russia, a Jewish literature in Yiddish had been slowly emerging since the 1880's as the Yiddish language came to be accepted by the "Jewish national minority" as its "national language." We note, however, that the original *Zukunft* had reproduced little of this new literature; it had preferred to publish Yiddish translations of world literature — Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Guy de Maupassant, Heinrich Heine, and Bret Harte. To the publishers of *Die Zukunft* from 1892 to 1895, the Yiddish language was to have been the means of bringing education and socialism to the Yiddish masses, and, in their steadfast denial of "Jewish nationality," they had preferred to bypass original Yiddish-language literature in favor of the "international" classics. By 1902 this was no longer the case. As the sun of Jewish nationalism dawned with the twentieth century, the periodical's pages came increasingly to feature Yiddish literature.

A growing stress on Jewish particularism was also evident in the first "new" issue, in the article on Jewish wit, where we encounter the startling pronouncement: "That optimism which was the very spirit of the Torah had its effect on the [Jewish] people while it was yet in its infancy." This complimentary allusion to the Torah, this tacit acceptance of Jewish nationality, were by no means indicative of a complete transformation of American Jewish socialism. Yet these references did reveal the new and burgeoning trends within the movement.

It was not *Die Zukunft* alone that benefited from the upsurge in socialist interest. Cahan returned to the editorship of the *Forverts* in 1902, but friction between himself and the staff and publishing association of the paper soon led to his resignation. In 1903 he was

again asked to take over the paper on his own terms, and from that time on he was the absolute master of that influential daily. To obtain a mass reading public, Cahan was prepared to compromise on basic socialist principles — religion, Jewish nationalism — and he did so despite criticism from more doctrinaire socialists. When Cahan launched a personal vendetta against Jacob Gordin, Louis E. Miller requested space in the *Forverts* to reply to the editor's attacks. Cahan's refusal not only caused a final breach with Miller, but resulted in the appearance of a new Yiddish socialist daily, *Die Wahrheit* ("The Truth"), first published on November 11, 1905, by Miller and his supporters. Many prominent socialist leaders and writers deserted Cahan, and it was only his firm control of the United Hebrew Trades and the *Arbeiter Ring* that enabled the *Forverts* to weather this storm.

Dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of coverage which they received in the *Forverts*, several unions attempted to publish their own newspapers between 1902 and 1905, but none of these publications were successful.

THE OLD GENERATION GROWS OLD

The bestial Kishinev pogrom which took place in Bessarabia in April, 1903, stirred the whole civilized world. A much deeper and more lasting impact was made upon the Jewish world. As far as the Jewish socialists of both Russia and America were concerned, their response was almost predictable. The more doctrinaire "internationalist" socialists argued that such pogroms were a part of the Tsarist "divide-and-conquer" policy and that the only true salvation for Russian Jewry lay in hastening the Russian Revolution.¹⁰ As for the nationalists, and particularly the "Bundists," the Kishinev pogrom served to intensify their cry for national rights.

Of even greater interest, however, was the effect of this outrage on the formerly uncommitted and apolitical masses of both Russian

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1903, pp. 271 ff., 316 ff.

and American Jewry. The emotional impact of the Kishinev pogrom on them was comparable to the feelings that the Nazi excesses aroused in the American Jewish community of the 1930's and 1940's. The Kishinev massacre, wrote Dubnow, "awakened the burning feeling of martyrdom, but with it also the feeling of heroism."¹¹ The *Bund's* policy of forming self-defense units gained it many admirers and adherents who were attracted *not* by its Marxist doctrines, but by its heroic "national" stand. *Die Zukunft* described these newcomers who swelled the ranks of the Jewish socialists:

The "Jewish Socialists" are quite a new species of humanity, which suddenly emerged after the Kishinev massacre. Most of them believe almost everything that the earlier ones do, except that after the Kishinev murders, they began to evoke an undefined "Jewish feeling," began to praise Jewish characteristics as the best and the finest, and began proclaiming that Jewish Socialists must be "first and foremost, Jews."

Precisely what do they mean by this? What are we to do, and towards what are we to strive as Jews? This they have never specified. They are, therefore, not to be seriously reckoned with as a separate faction, since they have no positive program in their Jewishness. It is a temporary emotion. Such cheap phrase-spouting also provides many with an opportunity to gain favor with the common Jewish masses.¹²

Just as the ranks of the regular "ideological" Zionists would be inundated by the post-1945 tidal wave of sentimental Zionism, so, too, the Russian and American Jewish socialists were soon almost submerged by the post-Kishinev swell of "Jewish feeling." It was not only the masses that contributed to this development; even intellectuals did not demur. Thus we find the rising poet Yehoash [Solomon Bloomgarden] depicting a new concern for his "suffering people" in the poem "Olympus and Horeb."¹³ In describing the trend as a "temporary emotion," *Die Zukunft's* above-quoted writer was astonishingly mistaken. These new "Jewish Socialists" quickly came to dominate the Jewish socialist world, both in America and

¹¹ Dubnow, III, 79.

¹² *Die Zukunft*, 1903, p. 480.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

in Russia, and the former leaders had perforce to make their individual compromises with the new order.

Characteristic of the transformation was the modified attitude towards the Jewish religion, an attitude already hinted at in the first issue of the revived *Die Zukunft*. The contention that "religion is a private matter" was already being raised in 1902 and was being attacked by the orthodox socialists.¹⁴ By 1904, however, a compromise was accepted by the *Arbeiter Ring*, which subsequently almost split over the question,¹⁵ and we read apologetic words:

We do not turn away religious people, or even clergymen who wish to join us; but because of this we should not weaken by a hair's breadth, not only the class conflict, but also the anti-religious and especially the anti-clerical conflict.¹⁶

Another article declared sadly:

It often occurs that we encounter people who are socialistically inclined, and at the same time you may see them attending *slichos* [supplicatory prayers offered during the New Year season], fasting on Yom Kippur, etc.¹⁷

Old campaigners such as Feigenbaum continued their anti-religious writings,¹⁸ only to find them challenged on the very pages of *Die Zukunft!* Dismissing Feigenbaum's anti-religious concepts as passé, a *Zukunft* writer did not hesitate to assert that "nowadays any schoolboy knows . . . that religion was always and everywhere an important factor in human progress."¹⁹ The scandalized "Zukunft Press Federation" promptly censured not only the presumptuous writer, but *Die Zukunft's* editor as well:

The "Zukunft Press Federation" hereby expresses its displeasure with the editor of the *Zukunft* for permitting Mr. A. Litwin to use such a

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1902, p. 498.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1904, pp. 645 ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 647.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 405 ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

tone in his article "About Judaism" against Comrade B. Feigenbaum, against a comrade who has done much for the education of the Jewish reader.²⁰

Nevertheless, the significant fact remains that such ideas were current and even found expression in *Die Zukunft*.

Even more noticeable was the upsurge in nationalistic sentiment which had emerged in the *Bund* and become intensified by the post-Kishinev emotions. Although Zionism continued to be castigated as a false bourgeois nationalism,²¹ the *Bund's* diaspora nationalism grew in favor and popularity among the new "Jewish Socialists." Again Feigenbaum undertook to fight a rear guard action against this socialist heresy:

All earnest Socialists without exception are opponents of nationalism.²²

To tell the truth, we absolutely cannot comprehend what kind of Jewish "cultural" independence it is that "enlightened" Socialists wish to maintain.²³

An article replying to his sought to enlighten him:

To be national means to possess the national self-consciousness — i. e., the recognition that certain individuals belong to my nation, and that my nation is no better and no worse . . . than all other nations, and has the same right to exist as all other nations. "National" and "international" are not opposites, but two concepts which complement each other.²⁴

That the rising thrust of national sentiment could not be expressed in rational terms clearly constituted no hindrance. The strongest weapon in the nationalist arsenal was the common language — Yiddish. In vain, the older cosmopolitans sought to destroy this weapon. A *Zukunft* writer argued contemptuously:

What special demands can it [Jewry] present as a nation? . . . What do Jews have in common besides a synagogue, a *mikveh* [ritual bath], a *chazan* [cantor], a *shochet* [ritual slaughterer], and a solemnizer of weddings?

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 388 ff.

²² *Ibid.*, 1903, p. 560.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 562.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1904, p. 98.

Give Jews civil rights, and what remains of the national demands? The language? The literature? Who is preventing the Jews from using their language and from developing their literature, even today and even in Russia, where they have no rights at all? Who is preventing the Jews of New York from having six daily newspapers and four Jewish theatres . . . schools, Kosher meat, and everything else? . . . And what more can they request as Jews? What traditions, what special culture, except the talmudic culture?²⁵

He convinced no one who did not already agree.

If such arguments fell on unresponsive ears, it was that, for the masses of Jewish immigrants, although their bodies were in America, their souls remained in the Tsar's domains. Political events in Russia were much more real to them than campaigns in their adopted communities. The immigrants in general loyally voted for socialist candidates at election times, but almost all their effort and energy was thrown into the political struggles of their Russian-ruled brethren. The *Bund's* withdrawal from the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903 was an event of the first magnitude on New York's East Side. Spokesmen for the Russian Social Democratic Party, the Social Revolutionary Party, and the *Bund* made the long voyage to the United States to enlist spiritual and financial support for their factions. The Jewish socialist movement in America had begun as an intellectual movement among a small group of immigrant intellectuals. By 1905 it was well on its way to becoming a mass movement, nourished by the emotional Yiddish-centered nationalism of Russian Jewry. Among the former "Yiddish-speaking Socialists," the adjective was coming to dominate the noun, as the chief American activity of the Jewish socialists became the establishment of *Yiddish* culture — journalism, literature, schools, and drama.

Jacob Gordin, himself an outstanding Yiddishist, viewing this development from the standpoint of an unorthodox socialistic universalism, was moved to utter his forebodings in *Die Zukunft*:

The strivings and the high ideals of the Jewish people have always been, not national, but international. . . . They say . . . that Yiddish will be, or is already, the language which has created a distinct Jewish national

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

culture — that Yiddish will unite Jews into a great nation. . . . Certainly, as long as millions of Jews can read and understand only Yiddish, then speaking to them and writing for them in Yiddish is as valid and useful as writing in English or French. Yiddish is a means whereby we can take the by-passed Jews and lead them into the great international treasure chamber of world culture. . . . I cannot at all comprehend how the Jewish people will become a nation by means of a language alone, and which language? Yiddish! What then will those Jews do whose mother tongue is German, English, French, Turkish, etc.? And what will you do with Hebraists who say that the legitimate Jewish language is Hebrew? All of these, it appears, will no longer belong to our people The children, the new generation, will not wait In America alone, 100,000 children are already lost to the Yiddish language and the Jewish people forever. Those in the older generation are becoming Americanized, changing their natures and their names.²⁶

With these remarks, Gordin had assumed the role of a Canute, watching the rising tide of nationalism inundate the Jewish socialist movement, and powerless to impede its flow, even in the knowledge that its ebb was inevitable. As *Die Zukunft* mournfully commented in the autumn of 1905,

The old generation has grown old, has died spiritually, has lost its courage, its energy, and — worst of all, its faith, its Socialist convictions.²⁷

KOSHER HANDS AND IRON WHIPS

The attitude of American Jewish socialists towards the native Jews whom they found in America was constant during this period from 1892 to 1905; it was one, namely, of contempt, distrust, and hostility. This was the result of two factors. First, the socialists were immigrants from Eastern Europe, whereas the Jews who received them — often with a decided lack of enthusiasm — were mostly of Central European origin, so that there existed the basic cleavage between the *Yidn* (immigrant “Yiddish” Jews) and the *Yahudim* (native American Jews). Second, the native American Jews were distinctly middle-class and as such the natural class foes of the socialists.

It is of interest, in this regard, to examine the attitude of the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1905, pp. 601 ff.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 631.

socialists towards Reform Judaism. Both Reformers and socialists were, of course, much concerned with attacking Orthodoxy; indeed, many articles in *Die Zukunft* which treat Orthodox theology, attitudes, and customs from a historical-critical viewpoint could have stemmed equally from spokesmen of the Reform group.²⁸ Still, though they may have shared some ideas with Reform Judaism, the socialists had only hostility and scorn for it as an institution and for its leaders, "the 'great ones of Israel,' the Rabbis and Reverends."²⁹ In *Die Zukunft's* satirical series, "From the Moon," we are given the following picture:

There, in a secluded corner, goes a well-stuffed individual with a pious face. Two others accompany him — they call him "Rabbi." They pause near a house. Through the window I can see naked girls dancing with fine gentlemen — The Rabbi enters.³⁰

A similar opinion is expressed by Feigenbaum in a personal recollection:

I studied with such a fine fellow, a nice young man, the son of a truly noble Jew. This fine fellow is today a preacher of morality in a Jewish Reformed Temple in America. In my presence, he himself "took pride" in his heroic deeds of violating innocent women and girls . . . He confided to me that he had his eye on a certain respectable Jewish girl . . . [and] he would most certainly have accomplished this, were it not that he had to flee the country because of another incident.³¹

Not only the morality, but also the scholarship, of Reform was ridiculed by the socialists. Many of the outstanding socialist spokes-

²⁸ The following is a representative list of some of *Die Zukunft's* historical-critical articles. It is not an exhaustive listing.

"The Flood"	December, 1892.
"The Creation Myth"	November, 1894.
"Whence Grew Religions?"	July, 1895.
"Adam and Eve"	January, 1896.
"The Afterlife"	July, 1902.
"Judaism and Slavery"	November, 1902.
"Days of Awe"	October, 1903.
"Science and Religion"	November, 1903.
"Let Sin Perish"	January, 1904.

²⁹ *Die Zukunft*, December, 1895, p. 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, April, 1892, p. 47.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1903, p. 344.

men were well-versed in traditional Jewish studies. Their opposition to Orthodoxy did not prevent them from hailing the Jewish scholarship of their religious fellow immigrants, scholarship which contrasted so sharply with the minimal attainments of the native American Jew. *Die Zukunft* made no attempt to conceal its scorn for the spiritual and intellectual pretensions of the native American *Yahudim*:

That which they do downtown to further religion and morality, we might describe as ludicrous, were it not so tragic. Uptown *Yahudim*, who understand as much about the Jewish religion as an Irish *goy* [Gentile] understands about [the talmudic tractate] *Baba Kama* . . . they are going to concern themselves with the religious problems of the East Side! Don't they know that a Hester Street teamster is a scholar and a savant and an utter saint compared to the president of a Fifth Avenue Temple?³²

Reform Judaism's greatest flaw in socialist eyes lay, nevertheless, in its role as the religion of the Jewish bourgeoisie. The immigrants were woefully vulnerable to all the harsh economic realities of their time, and when their exploiters were coreligionists, they were all the more embittered. Z. Libin, a writer who described the immigrant scene, fulminated against the *Yahudim* employers, "who had been as cold and as harsh as iron whips from the very beginning" and "were becoming increasingly powerful and arrogant":

A large group of Jewish workers is leaving wives and children behind in the grip of hunger, to go forth to seek bread in this great and free country. It was not a decree from some king or despot, nor an expression of anti-Semitism that provoked this emigration, but hunger, troubles, and sheer necessity, which had emanated from the kosher hands of wealthy Jewish-American bosses.³³

In view of the willingness of many "wealthy Jewish-American bosses" to exploit their immigrant brethren, the idealism of Reform Judaism, the religion of the "bosses" in immigrant eyes, was assailed as hypocrisy by the socialists:

According to the ideas of these "reformers," it also appears that we can do humanity no greater service than to promulgate the Jewish doctrines

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, October, 1896, p. 22.

of morality, equality, and brotherhood (albeit among their fat-bellied exploiting adherents, these fine qualities are seldom seen).³⁴

Attempts by well-intentioned American Jews to assist their immigrant brethren in adjusting to American life were usually viewed by the Jewish socialists as a sinister plot to achieve social as well as economic mastery over the exploited immigrants. The pages of socialist journals like *Die Zukunft* abounded in anti-nativist *soupons* such as those uttered by Jacob Gordin:

They have said quite openly and plainly that all of the "Yidlach" from the ghetto are wild animals, a mob made up of individuals, each of whom would rip his fellows apart, and destroy all law and order, if they, the leaders, did not take the trouble to restrain the mob.³⁵

A mighty educational movement is now flourishing in every corner of the Jewish ghetto, and they who were and continue to be strangers, who do not understand the spirit and do not know the actual needs of the Jewish population, they take upon themselves the right to be our mentors, our guides, our critics and chastisers. They want to control every branch of our life, our politics, our education, our press. How did they come to achieve such prerogatives?³⁶

It is time that we considered and understood the character and significance of their favors. Whom are they doing a favor, themselves or us? . . . Who is asking them? The reason is, however, that they do not mean it for our benefit, but they are guarding their own interests. They are cowards. They do not speak frankly to their Christian fellow-citizens. They lack the courage to be original and independent, and they are afraid that the originality and independence of the Russian Jews will offend the eyes of John and Peter . . . They are afraid for their own skins. They fear for themselves . . . The Christians have fixed up a building in the ghetto and have founded a university settlement, where they are accomplishing a good deal more practical and useful work for the population of the ghetto.³⁷

They, lacking intelligence and education, lacking true philanthropic feeling and a Jewish heart, want to control the entire life of hundreds of thousands of Jews, want to control their religion and their education, their press and their political activity. Not only do they receive glory and honor because of their favors, but also practical benefits. They get the votes for their candidates . . . They are our representatives and patrons! How is

³⁴ *Ibid.*, June, 1896, p. 16.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1903, p. 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

this coming to them? . . . True, in the early days they helped us. But if they did this from a sense of *mitzvah* [religious duty], then God will reward them If they did this for their own benefit, then they have already repaid themselves for it

How much longer shall we allow people who have nothing in common with us . . . to be our counsellors and guides? It is time that we stood upon our own feet, and returned to these "philanthropists, benefactors, and educators" the crutches upon which they taught us to walk, and upon which they themselves walk all their lives.³⁸

Nevertheless, vehement as Jacob Gordin was in expressing these views on behalf of the Jewish socialists, when Louis Marshall founded *Die Yiddische Velt* in 1902 to convey the views of the native American Jews to the Yiddish-reading immigrants, that paper had no difficulty in recruiting the journalistic services of Philip Krantz and other socialists and anarchists.³⁹

THE USES OF YIDDISH

The period from 1892 to 1905 witnessed an almost complete transformation in the nature of the American Jewish socialist movement. The movement had begun among a small group of immigrants, whose radicalism was of the contemporary Russian variety — intellectual, academic, and doctrinaire. In attempting to emulate the practical activities of the other radical groups which they encountered in America, these men became increasingly embroiled in real situations which required them to compromise more and more of their purist principles.

The ultimate compromise, one into which they were forced willy-nilly by the circumstances of their time, was that of Jewish nationalism. The early socialists had been overwhelmingly cosmopolitan, bent on denying that they were Jewish either in religion, race, or nationality. Trying to find a niche in the American socialist movement, these "Yiddish-speaking Socialists" focussed their activity and agitation on the masses of the Jewish immigrants, among whom they sought converts and followers. Initially, the Yiddish

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹ Chaikin, p. 141.

language constituted their sole link with these masses, but it soon became a chain, binding them to the Jewish immigrants permanently.

In Russia, the official anti-Semitic accusation of Jewish "alienness" was gradually evoking a spirit of Jewish nationalism — or rather, two spirits: Zionism, which saw attachment to the ancient homeland as the basic component of Jewish nationality; and Diaspora Nationalism, which regarded the commonly spoken Yiddish language as the basic component. The nationalizing process was catalyzed by the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. In both Russia and America, the Yiddish-speaking immigrants were swept up in a wave of emotional nationalism, a wave whose magnitude and motion also carried along the American Jewish socialist leaders. Of the three original arenas of American Jewish socialist activity — politics, labor, and journalism — the first two steadily dwindled in importance. Socialist Party candidates were supported at election times, but concern for the social revolution in the United States became subordinated to concern for the social revolution in Russia — and especially its Jewish national-socialist component. As for the Jewish unions, organized with so much effort and energy, they were allowed and even encouraged to enter the apolitical American Federation of Labor.

Of all the noble programs of the "Yiddish-speaking Socialists," only the use of Yiddish flourished — on the lecture platform, in books and pamphlets, and particularly in the press. By 1905, the activity of the American Jewish socialist movement was becoming increasingly confined to the Yiddish press, which assured the movement of a following for at least its own generation. As the widespread use of the Yiddish language was predestined to wane, so, too, were the fortunes of the American Jewish socialist movement. That, however, is another story.