

Paul Novick: In Sorrow and Pride

By MORRIS U. SCHAPPES

I AM glad this is a beautiful and sunny day. You will remember the famous story by Sholem Aleichem about Jewish funerals — that on a poor man's funeral it rains and pours and showers. Well, Paul Novick deserved to be interred on a beautiful, sunny day like this one. He earned it.

We are here in sorrow at a great loss, but with pride not only in the length but the quality of Paul Novick's major contribution to the Jewish people, the progressive Jewish movement and the complex concept of socialism.

Our communal sorrow interfaces with the grief and bereavement of the stricken family — Shirley, his wife and widow, Alan, his son and orphan. Of Alan we must ask forgiveness for the way public demands on his father's private time affected their personal bonds of love and concern. To Shirley we are especially indebted, for by her love and care she added years to Paul's life and creativity. And may I add that the extended family of JEWISH CURRENTS endures a particular pain, for Paul Novick was one of our founding editors in 1946, when he helped give birth to our magazine in the very offices of the *Morning Freiheit*.

In the annals of American journalism Paul Novick will have a place for many reasons, the least of which is that he lived the longest life and had the longest record — over 60 years — of service of any newspaper editor in our history. He would have been 98 on Sept. 7. In these last months since the ending of the *Morning Freiheit* on

Sept. 11, 1988, his will to live did not weaken. His mind did not weaken. Only his body gave way. Well, what was mortal in Paul Novick is gone; what remains is cause for pride.

Olgin's famous last words were that he was leaving *a velt mit arbet*, a world of work. Paul this past year also faced a world of work. He left unfinished business, work he had begun, planned or envisioned. Why, three weeks before he died on Aug. 21 he called me up to ask for an extension of time in producing his article on the 50th anniversary of the death of Olgin for our November issue. He was having trouble with his failing eyes, he could barely read. Could he have a few more weeks? How well I knew his losing battle with his eyes! When he was preparing his response on receiving the M. S. Aroni Award at our dinner on May 7, he fretted about whether he would be able to read his typewritten text. To enable him to do so, we had to enlarge his type four times. And what a vigorously delivered and insightful address it was (it appeared in our October issue).

His unfinished business is our business to finish. He was 65 already when the Khrushchev report in 1956 hit him, hit us all, with a deafening blow that opened his eyes. At 65 very few people can undertake a drastic change. Paul Novick's vision of socialism did not change; his perception of reality did. Some of his comrades readily and glibly admitted they had all made mistakes — but let's move on. And they promptly forgot their past misjudgments. But in this case, to forget was to repeat.

Paul Novick was determined not to forget — not to repeat old blunders. He was ever acutely conscious of what he had done that was wrong, misleading,

Eulogy delivered at the funeral service on Aug. 25, 1989, at the Plaza Memorial Chapel, Amsterdam Ave. at 91st St., New York.

harmful. Like a pious Catholic telling (counting) his beads, Paul continually rehearsed his past failures in order to sharpen his present insights. His conscience was continually atremble and activated him to a passionate dedication to democracy in socialism.

He shed his illusions but not his principles. His capacity for that greatest of all Marxist, or for that matter Leninist, virtues, self-criticism, grew. Would that other sections of the Left learned to practice that self-criticism. Would that social-democrats and others admitted their tragic blunder in opposing the opening of the Second Front across the English Channel in 1942, when this action could have, as a by-product of its compelling Hitler to fight in vain on two fronts, saved the lives of millions of Jews. Would that ultra-leftists had self-critically evaluated the result of their tragic blunder in refusing to support the Grand Alliance in World War II.

Novick learned from his blunders, and taught us to learn too. He underlined for us the difference between the sorry practice of Soviet socialism and the concept of democratic socialism. He stressed that a socialism without democracy is a mismatch, a miscreation, a social monstrosity. Democracy is not monolithic, not one-party; democracy is pluralistic, multi-party, whether under socialism or capitalism.

It is what Paul Novick has done in the past 33 years of his life — the last one-third of his long and determined life — that is now most memorable. It is this that has called forth the respectful obituaries in the *N.Y. Times*, the *Daily News*, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *The Forward*, the *Algemeiner Journal* and others.

It is in this shared vision of democratic socialism that we will reinvigorate our struggles to complete the unfinished business Paul Novick left us as his legacy.

NOVICK FUNERAL SERVICE

WELL before noon on Aug. 25 the main chamber of the Plaza Memorial Chapel was overflowing into adjoining rooms with some 300 mourners of three generations who had come to pay tribute to Paul Novick. They were brought there by the obituaries and death notices in the *N.Y. Times*, *Daily News*, *Forverts* and *Algemeiner Journal* and by word of mouth among progressive Jews.

With Yisroelik Freed, former managing editor of the *Morning Freiheit*, presiding, the first eulogy was delivered by Gedalia Sandler of the Jewish Cultural Clubs and Societies. I was called upon next (see my eulogy herein). Morris Goldstein, veteran club activist, was followed by Max Perlow, a leading unionist among furniture workers, who stressed Novick's work in mobilizing workers on social as well as bread-and-butter issues.

Haim Suller, co-editor of the *Freiheit*, recalled the decisive innovative leadership Novick gave the Jewish left in the last few decades. Harriet Holtzman depicted the impact the *Freiheit* had on her entire family, including her son. Itche Goldberg, in a mournful, eloquent address, outlined Novick's wide range of service to Yiddish journalism, secularism, and the building of progressive Jewish cultural institutions (printed in full in the *Algemeiner Journal* Sept. 1 and *Yiddische Kultur*).

For Olgin's funeral in 1939, the late Yuri Suhl wrote a poem that Maurice Rauch set to music, entitled "*Mir zugen tsu*" (we promise, we pledge). So today we say to the memory of Pesach Novick and to his family: "*Mir zugen tsu*," we promise, we pledge. ■