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## Beyond the Pale: The Development of Yiddish Socialism

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Beyond the Pale  
The Development of Yiddish Socialism

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of Bard College

by  
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## Introduction

Shtick, tchotchke, klutz, and nosh... Words that one can often hear on a New York street corner without giving much thought. The English language (specifically the American vernacular of New York City) is particularly interesting in its ability to absorb and assimilate words from a variety of languages regardless of origin. This unique linguistic knack can be linked back to the influx of multilingual immigrants into New York in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among this flood of newcomers came droves of Yiddish speaking Ashkenazi Jews from central and eastern Europe. These immigrants brought a Yiddish culture of literature, music, and theater which left a noticeable impact on the cultural development of the eastern United States. However, to understand the role of Yiddish today one must look back to the Old World and into the heart of Prussia and Russia before the Haskalah or the Jewish Enlightenment of the 1800's. At its core, Yiddish is a linguistic creole of Middle High German and Hebrew with Aramaic and Slavic elements, written in the traditional Hebrew script. Most of the Eastern Europe Jewish population was isolated from much of the gentile population via political machinations and antisemitic cultural values found within Christian communities. Jews in Eastern Europe were subject to the so-called Pale of Settlement from 1791 to 1917, wherein they were relegated to the border regions of western Russia (between modern day Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania). Despite these oppressive forces, this climate allowed for the development of a unique Yiddish and Jewish culture as compared to their gentile neighbors.

Yiddish is referred to as “mame-loshn” or “mother-tongue” in contrast to Hebrew which is referred to as “loshn-koydesh” or “holy-tongue”.<sup>1</sup> This contrast shaped European Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weinreich. *History of the Yiddish Language*. Translated by Shlomo Noble. New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1975. 271.

culture with a similar format to the relationship between Latin and vernacular languages in pre-Protestant Reformation Christian communities. Latin education was often exclusively only available for the nobility and the clergy. For the nobility, Latin was a sign of status whereas the ability to read and recite Latin was a necessity for pre-Protestant Reformation Christian clergy members. Ultimately, the knowledge of Latin widened the growing gap between the cultural or political elite and the majority of everyone else that only spoke (and only rarely read/wrote) vernacular languages. While the average, middle to lower class Christian might know a smattering of Latin words or phrases from religious texts, they were not able to fully read and decipher Latin. This relationship is mirrored in European Jewish communities with the disparity between the Yiddish speaking majority and the rabbinical minority who were highly educated and could understand, read and write Hebrew. To clarify, this is not to say that rabbis and educated men spoke in Hebrew (conversational Hebrew had disappeared from much of everyday Jewish life by 6th century BCE) but they were able to read and decipher religious texts such as the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible).

The Yiddish-Hebrew dynamic would continue for centuries until around the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the onset of the Haskalah or the Jewish Enlightenment. The Haskalah is highlighted by the growing openness to secular culture among the Jewish intelligentsia and a demand for secular education in opposition to the traditional nature of many isolated Jewish communities.<sup>2</sup> It is incorrect to state that the Haskalah immediately appeared in the Pale of Settlement; rather, the initial seeds of the Haskalah can be linked back to predominantly Christian urban centers in Western Europe such as Berlin, which slowly moved eastward into the Pale. Following the general Age of Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many Jews (specifically

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<sup>2</sup> Max Weinreich. 285.



the intelligentsia) living throughout urban centers started to latch onto this growing movement of higher education found throughout the gentile world. These Jews became known as the Maskilim.

The Maskilim called for the initiation of a Jewish “Renaissance”, referred to as a desire to spread secular education and the newfound philosophies of the Age of Enlightenment throughout the isolated Jewish communities. This was in hopes to help “modernize” the Jewish community. The Maskilim differed from their intellectual predecessors in that they argued for Jewish assimilation, integration into European societies and learning European languages. The Maskilim argued that since many Jews only spoke Yiddish and lived in the shtetls, small isolated Jewish market towns, it prevented them from assimilation into the broader European community.

However, the Maskilim’s desire for Jewish modernity and European assimilation raised a conundrum. If they could not force younger or less educated Jews to learn European languages (and thus lead them to become more educated), how could they educate them? While many Maskilim tried to use Hebrew, it proved more limited than Yiddish as it was only understood by a minority of the population. As such, the Maskilim deemed Hebrew as “temporarily impractical” as the language of the Haskalah.<sup>3</sup> The Maskilim hoped that once Jews were educated they would adopt Hebrew as their nation language to replace Yiddish but for the time being it was impractical. To try and solve this conundrum, the Maskilim made a hypothetical “deal with the devil” in their submission to using Yiddish (a language they held great disdain for) as a language of secular education. Isaac Mayer Dick, a writer and Maskil of the time summed up the common conception of Yiddish by the Maskilim succinctly,

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<sup>3</sup> Johnathan Frankel. *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984) 86.

The old German proverb says that a man without a language is not a man. If we consider our Lithuanian Jews from this point of view, they are not men. We have no language but speak only Jargon [a term for Yiddish of the time], a non-language which is a conglomeration of old German with Hebrew, Russian, Polish, English, Spanish and French; a language which is not understood or spoken by any nation; a language which has no grammar but has gathered words and expressions from all languages like a beggar.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than trying to teach Jewish communities European languages, the Maskilim instead began the arduous task of translating books of science, culture, and history into Yiddish as well as producing literature mocking the backwardness of the shtetl Jews. The Maskilim hoped that antisemitism would be eliminated upon Jewish integration in European society and greater education was needed for this process to occur.

Jews have been oppressed throughout history given their political and cultural isolation as well as their consistent status as a minority. Numerous pogroms (antisemitic Jewish massacres) occurred throughout Eastern Europe most notably in the Pale of Settlement where Jews lived under the oppressive thumb of the Russian Empire. Economic antisemitism emerged throughout Europe towards Jewish communities who were viewed as capitalist scapegoats. Due to laws restricting Christians from handling money, many Jews during the Middle Ages were forced into work as tax collectors or money lenders. But often when a Christian noble was unable to repay their loans to a Jewish merchant, rather than trying to fulfil the obligation to repay the loan (and potentially go broke), they blamed the Jewish community for stealing or charging too much interest and call for a pogrom against them. This sets up a system where both the ruling class can blame Jews for their own economic failings and the working class blames Jews for the failings of the ruling class. Ironically, many socialists would adopt this antisemitic myth of the “Capitalist Jew”, blaming Jews for antisemitic violence and supporting pogroms, citing them as “anti-

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<sup>4</sup> I. M. Dick, *Di Eydele Rakhe* (Vilna, 1875), 19. In Emanuel S. Goldsmith. *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000. 42.

capitalist action” or “peasants revolting against the bourgeoisie” in the case of Tsarist Russia. Despite this, many Jews, influenced by the influx of European philosophies following the Haskalah turned to socialism during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, many Jews in the Pale of Settlement lived in extreme poverty under oppressive governments and had very little left to lose. Karl Marx’s theory of socialism, the idea of creating a classless equal society, spread rapidly throughout Jewish centers of learning and grabbed the minds of this new intelligentsia around the 1870’s. It was often only the Jewish intelligentsia (in contrast to the Jewish working class) that had the finances or resources to learn the language of their host country and break the glass ceiling so to speak into the general socialist community.<sup>5</sup> Due to the antisemitic Russian May Laws of 1882 which heavily hindered Jewish workers, many were unable to find work in the large Russian factories (home to the Russian proletariat). This presented itself as a unique obstacle for Jews that gentiles did not have to face, as such Jewish workers need to liberate themselves not only from economic oppression but antisemitism as well. Jewish Labor Bund leader, Vladimir Medem comments on how the Jewish working class was mainly relegated to small workshops and as such were not considered true proletarians by Orthodox Marxists.<sup>6</sup> This is explained by the fact that little of the Pale of Settlement was industrialized and as such there could be “no modern proletariat of the type envisaged by Marxist theory.”<sup>7</sup> While one would not consider Russia to be industrialized on the scale of Britain or France, the Russian heartland around Moscow easily surpassed the industry of

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<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Medem. *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist: The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem*. Translated by Samuel A. Portnoy, Ktav Pub. House, 1979. 234.

<sup>6</sup> Medem. 175-176.

<sup>7</sup> Frankel. 187.

the backwoods Pale of Settlement. Could a socialist movement even sprout up around a collection of intelligentsias rather than among “true proletariats”?

In contrast to socialism, nationalism as an ideology began growing in popularity among the Jewish community. This idea of modern nationalism reinforced the concepts of nation-states and national identity. Following the rise of modern nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, independence movements swept throughout the empires and kingdoms of Europe. Now Czechs called for independence from Austria-Hungary and Poles were calling for independence from Germany and Russia. In response to these nationalist movements, Jews were quick to adapt these ideas in forging a secular Jewish national identity.<sup>8</sup> From this ideology came the creation of the Zionism, often seen as the pinnacle of Jewish nationalism. While Jews had been a diasporic people since their expulsion from the Roman Province of Judea almost 2000 years prior, there had never been a true organized movement to return to the Jewish homeland until the emergence of the Haskalah. Zionism drew upon the ideas of nationalism including the philosophical and political implications of the nation-state. Zionists argued that the diaspora had failed Jews, as seen with the numerous pogroms over the past centuries and the only way to protect Jews was to leave Europe altogether and settle in Palestine (then controlled by the Ottoman Empire) and found a Jewish state. Within Zionism, there was a whole spectrum of different variations of Zionism from Religious Zionism (which advocated for a strict religious settlement of Palestine and the implementation of Halakhic Law) to Labor Zionism/Socialist Zionism (which advocated for the foundation of a socialist state in Palestine). Zionism would remain a major point of contention within the Jewish community and often clashed with more radical socialists.

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Dubnow. *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*. Translated by Koppel S. Pinson. New York: Atheneum, 1970. 45.

However, from between these two seeming opposite movements of Zionism and Socialism emerged a synthesis of both nationalism and socialism. In Karl Marx's 1848 Communist Manifesto he states that aspects of nationalism are necessary for the proletariat to unite. It only becomes problematic when that nationalism is manipulated by the bourgeois. Somewhat hypocritically Marx stated that "Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word".<sup>9</sup> By these standards Jews could never truly be socialist without assimilation since they did not possess a nation of their own. The proletarian nature of the Jewish working class was also questioned by Marx leading to a rejection of Jewish socialism. Another issue arose in the question of Jews as a religious group versus Jews as a nation. Karl Marx had declared religion the opiate of the masses while other socialists claimed religion was a private matter and should remain as such with a clear divide. Many Russian socialists agreed to supporting the separation between church and state. Nevertheless, Jews stood at a difficult fork in the road, if religion was a private matter, why should Jews constitute their own independent nationality group and as such be able to craft their own socialist movements? Other than the obvious language barrier, should Jews attempt to assimilate into the working class of their host country? Some Jewish socialists argued that Jews constituted their own independent nationality (based on their language and culture, not their religion) and as such, should be allowed to form their own independent socialist movements. Esteemed diaspora nationalist, Simon Dubnow states that despite the lack of a set territory or state, Jews possessed their own unique nationality due to the "myth of the nation-state".<sup>10</sup> Other than minuscule islands, there are no true nation-states, states that are encompassed, fully

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 1848. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Dubnow. 40.

embodied by and composed of a singular ethnicity. However, single ethnicities and nationalities can come to dominate a state as seen in Germany, France, and Spain. In these circumstances, the state benefits one nationality above all other minorities. Dubnow argues that nations exist outside and unbound by states. This idea would further form the ideas of ethnicity, race and nationality in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Anyone who constituted a unique religious, cultural or linguistic group was by Dubnow's standards considered a unique nation. Problems emerge when a single nation rises above the others to take control of a state. Dubnow then argues that since Jews have their own unique culture, language and religion they are in fact a unique nation despite not having their own state. He takes this a step further by claiming that Jews are one of the highest forms of nations due to their unique identity as a "spiritual nation" that transcends borders and states.<sup>11</sup>

By imagining Jews as a nation rather than solely as a religious group they could fulfil Marx's requirement of a national identity. However, this raises the question of the role of Yiddish/Jewish nationalism and its relation to socialism and states. Socialists who attempted to rectify these relationships between nationalism, socialism and their interaction with the state synthesized the idea of National Cultural Autonomy. Jewish Labor Bund leader, Vladimir Medem defined the idea of National Cultural Autonomy as the idea that,

Each national group would create a separate movement. All citizens belonging to a given national group would join a special organization that would hold cultural assemblies in each region and a general cultural assembly for the whole country... The national movements would be subject to the general legislation of the state, but in their own areas of responsibility they would be autonomous and none of them would have the right to interfere in the affairs of the others.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dubnow. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Medem. "Social Democracy and the National Question". 1904. In Yves Plasseraud (May 2000). "Choose Your Own Nationality or The Forgotten History of Cultural Autonomy", *Le Monde Diplomatique*. <http://www.panarchy.org/plasseraud/choice.html>. Plasseraud cites Henri Minczeles, *Histoire Générale du Bund*, Austral, Paris, 1995. 279-280.

By divesting the nation from the state, Jews could protect their unique culture and religious issues without the requirement of their own nation-state. This idea of National Cultural Autonomy proved popular among Jews who did not possess any territorial majority and often fell to the whims of other empires and nations. The idea of National Cultural Autonomy would later inspire the ideas of Austromarxism.<sup>13</sup>

Even by confirming the existence and validity of a Jewish national identity, Jews are still subject to negative forces unrelated to capitalism (such as antisemitism). As such Jewish socialists differed from their gentile counterparts who did not suffer from the pogroms and discrimination of the Jewish people. Thusly, Jewish socialists must create their own movements to specifically rectify the issues hindering the Jewish community. Yiddish as a language acts as the glue in these movements by holding together the Jewish working class (both secular and religious) and as such proves a vital element to confirming not only that Jews were a unique nationality but also justified their desire for separate socialist movements.<sup>14</sup> However, this struggle to discover the “Jewish national identity” would expand to conflicts between Jewish socialists who argued over the intricacies of Jewish identity and its role in the socialist world. Jewish socialist organizations such as the Jewish Labor Bund in Europe came into conflict with diaspora nationalists such as Chaim Zhitlovsky over philosophical and political details of the Jewish national identity. Assimilationist socialists such as Abraham Cahan in the United States drew from their predecessors, the Maskilim, in their desire for Jews to assimilate into secular society.

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<sup>13</sup> Frankel. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Dubnow. 266.

The General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia or more simply known as just the Bund was notable as one of the first major Jewish socialist groups in Europe. Founded in Vilnius (a major Jewish city in the Pale of Settlement) on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1897, the Bund sought to unite the Jewish working class with the Russian peasantry and working class against the Russian Tsar. The Bund followed a strict Marxist ideology and yet often came to blows (philosophically) with the Russian Bolsheviks among other socialist organizations who denounced the Bund as too nationalist despite its secularist ideology. However, the Bundists eventually set aside their differences and allied with the Russian socialists in aiding in the failed 1905 Revolution. Many socialist Jews dealing with the violent pogroms taken out against the Jewish community were inspired by the works of Austromarxists and incorporated the idea of National Cultural Autonomy into the Bund.<sup>15</sup> The Bund was also one of the first notable socialist movements to champion the shift from socialist propaganda to socialist agitation. Propaganda in the socialist context existed as a top-down method that advocated the usage of extensive literature and educating the few who would in turn form a vanguard to educate the masses. Agitation in the socialist context relied on populism by “agitating” the working class, using material that appeals to them and convincing the workers to advocate for themselves (in opposition to a vanguard telling them what to do).<sup>16</sup>

Chaim Zhitlovsky, a Jewish political theorist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, came to lock horns not only with the Bund but also the Bolsheviks and other Jews of the time with his radical ideas. Zhitlovsky was born in 1865 in the small town of Ushachy (near modern-day Vitebsk, Belarus) within the Russian Empire. Growing up in a strictly Jewish environment, Zhitlovsky later left to travel around Russia encountering both Russian and Jewish socialists of

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<sup>15</sup> Frankel. 252-253.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 185.



the time. During his travels, Zhitlovsky became a staunch socialist but after his encounters with the pogroms of 1881 he came to terms with his Jewish identity and attempt to synthesize both Jewish progressive nationalism and secular socialism. Like the Bund, Zhitlovsky was inspired by the idea of National Cultural Autonomy to both achieve socialism and preserve his Jewish culture. However, while the Bund was focused on integration and assimilation into European society, Zhitlovsky promoted a secular Jewish national identity centered on the usage of Yiddish. Zhitlovsky actively promoted the idea of Diaspora Nationalism, which in the Jewish context is the idea of forging a Jewish national identity that is not inherently linked to a specific territory or state.<sup>17</sup>

Abraham Cahan, a Jewish editor, socialist and later philosophical opponent of Zhitlovsky was notable for helping carry Jewish socialism from the Old World to the New World and helping it prosper among American immigrants. Born in 1860 in Podberezhie, Belarus (then part of the Russian Empire) like Zhitlovsky, Cahan was born to a very religious Jewish family which led him to seek out secular knowledge throughout the Russian Empire. However, Cahan diverged from Zhitlovsky and instead of returning to his home town he fled to the United States. Cahan quickly became enamored with the socialist movements and unions amongst the immigrant population of New York. He was quick to jump into American journalism and became the editor of the well-known Jewish Daily Forward.<sup>18</sup> Cahan like Zhitlovsky aimed for a revitalization of the Jewish community but with very different motives and ideals. Cahan sought an eventual total assimilation of the Jewish community into the united socialist working class and only used Jewish politics to an end to accomplish this goal. For Cahan, Yiddish was a

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<sup>17</sup> Frankel. 280-281.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Michels. *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) 104.

stepping-stone to eventual Americanization and assimilation into the united working class and yet he recognized its cultural and practical value where other socialists had scoffed at it.

From analyzing the works of the Bund, Cahan, and Zhitlovsky, a central theme arises in the form of the Jewish national identity and its relation to socialism. Socialism and nationalism are portrayed as opposite ends of the political spectrum and yet one must ask if they are truly incompatible. Jews, in particular are caught in an ideological trap, so to speak. Marxism recognizes the necessity of the so-called “proletarian nationalism” and yet by denying Jews their nationhood, Jews are forced to assimilate into the national majority. One must then ask the question that if Jews classify as a nation in the socialist criteria, are they eligible to form their own socialist movements without devolving into bourgeois chauvinism?

Marx, an assimilated Jew himself, disregarded the concept of the Jewish nation and yet many Jewish socialists argued for their own ideological independence. What role does nationalism play in the development of these minority socialist movements that allows them to exist without being swallowed by their larger counterparts? For Jewish socialists what role does Yiddish play as the language of the Jewish working class, in their development of a Jewish national identity? Jewish socialism is unique in that compared to its gentile counterparts, the Jews had no prior national identity to build their socialist society on. As such many Jewish socialists have come to the important question: is antisemitism solely a byproduct of capitalism and if not, how can Jewish socialists best combat it? Should they reconcile aspects of Jewish nationalism into their socialism to readily combat these additional obstacles? Can this inclusion of nationalism allow for foundation of a sustainable Jewish socialist movement and allow for the development of Jewish socialism and nationalism? From these texts and historical commentaries,

we can uncover this complex relationship between socialism and nationalism and how their relationship factors into the ideological evolution of the Jewish socialist movement.

I would therefore assert that for Jewish socialism to flourish it must simultaneously reconcile and embrace aspects of Jewish nationalism to rectify the issues of antisemitism and assimilation. Yiddish as a language and national identity serves to build a foundation from which Jewish socialists can draw from to further support their sense of independence and nationhood. These ideas are reinforced in the works of Jewish writers from Europe to the United States. By examining the works of the Bund, Abraham Cahan and Chaim Zhitlovsky, this project will explore the symbiotic relationship of Jewish nationalism and Jewish socialism as an ideological device to counter assimilation and antisemitism.

## Chapter One: Jewish Socialism and the Labor Bund

In exploring the relationship of socialism and Jewish culture, one might be immediately drawn to the big names such as Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxembour. The roots of Jewish socialism had much more humble beginnings. Born from the hardships suffered in the shtetls and violence of the pogroms, many Jews latched onto socialism as an answer to their strife. However, many Jews felt excluded from general socialist movements. Antisemitism was present in both right and left-wing gentile movements. As such many Jews viewed antisemitism as a “bipartisan issue” in that it existed independently from the economic oppression of capitalism (though it was fueled to an extent by capitalism).<sup>19</sup> Due to antisemitism’s bipartisan nature, Jews found themselves ignored by the large gentile socialist movements who pinned the cause of all problems to capitalism and ignored the specific plights of the Jews.<sup>20</sup> From this antisemitism we see a clear cycle emerge. The right discriminates against Jews, Jews flee to the left, the left is still antisemitic and as such Jews form their own socialist movements. The gentile left then criticizes these Jews for being “separatist” despite being a driving reason behind these Jewish socialist movements.<sup>21</sup> Jewish socialists were forced away from these larger (but gentile dominated) socialist movements and the backlash to their own socialist movements forced them to further separate themselves from gentile socialists.

One of the longest lasting and most far-reaching groups to emerge from this Jewish discontent was the Jewish Labor Bund or known more officially as the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. The Jewish Labor Bund was often criticized by gentile

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<sup>19</sup> Medem. 269.

<sup>20</sup> Dubnow. 138.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 139.

socialists as too nationalist and yet managed to reconcile Jewish nationalism and harness it towards achieving Jewish socialism. The source of this criticism is linked back to claims of nationalism and separatism amongst the Jewish community. Dubnow cites that more often than not, cries of “separatism” are often weaponized by the ruling nationality of the state to prevent infighting and solidify their dominance over the state.<sup>22</sup> While other minorities of Russia such as Ukrainians and Lithuanians were discriminated against, they were at least relatively treated with more validity whereas the nationhood of Jews was questioned by socialists and Jewish intelligentsia (both of whom advocated for assimilation).

The Bund’s humble roots fall in Vilna (modern-day Vilnius, Lithuania) from the Vilna Social Democratic movement (later known as the Vilna Group) which was formed in 1892.<sup>23</sup> The Vilna Group marked a stark shift from propaganda as the main weapon of the socialist movement to the utilization of socialist agitation. This shift is often titled the “New Program” of proletarian agitation in contrast to the “Old Program” of intelligentsia propaganda.<sup>24</sup> Many criticized agitation as too populist and nationalist. However, Jewish socialists countered this stating that,

We must become nationalists. There is no need to be afraid of this word. National is not nationalistic... National agitation can only raise political consciousness without in any way hindering class consciousness; likewise, it can in no way lead to isolation or exclusiveness.<sup>25</sup>

For an ethnic minority especially one without a set territory, nationalism is needed

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<sup>22</sup> Dubnow. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Frankel. 173.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>25</sup> Bund, “Chetverty sezid,” Materialy, pg115-116. In Frankel. 221.

to mobilize their fellow workers. However, nationalism must be used sparingly and with moderation to avoid fueling reactionary movements such as chauvinism and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, fascism.

Georgi Plekhanov remarked on this shift “A propagandist gives *many* ideas to one or a few people but an agitator gives *only one or only a few* ideas to a mass of people... History is made by the masses.”<sup>26</sup> Propaganda was often limited to the bourgeois or intelligentsia, those who could afford to not only read and write the languages of the intelligentsia but also comprehend these often complex concepts. A propaganda aligned socialist would advocate for the creation of a “vanguard” so to speak, a group of intelligentsias to lead the working class. Agitation aligned socialists criticized propaganda as class restrictive, a seeming hypocrisy for a movement that advocated for class equality. Instead, these socialists called for rallying the working class (something that required little education) for simple socialist concepts. By following this method of agitation, socialists could reach a far larger group than any propaganda could.

This idea of agitation, “was based on the idea that the masses could be imbued with a sense of class consciousness through participation in the struggle for economic improvement.”<sup>27</sup> One might lead a horse to water, but they cannot make them drink. Likewise, they can give the tools of socialism to the working class but they cannot force the working class to become socialists. Instead socialists enact a form of (well intentioned) subterfuge by luring the working class towards socialism via economic improvements and reforms. The socialists hoped that since

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<sup>26</sup> Georgi Plekhanov. “O Zadachakh”, 58. In Frankel. 172.

<sup>27</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn. *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of Jewish Workers Movement in Tsarist Russia*. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970. 53.

all “true workers” should care about their fellow workers and want an improvement to their working conditions, appealing to these workers would draw them towards socialist politics.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, the workers would realize that “economic and political struggle were inseparable, that an imposing alliance existed between their immediate enemy, the employer and yet unrecognized enemy, the Tsar.”<sup>29</sup> By granting the working class significant improvements to their condition they would in turn demand better conditions. These workers would eventually demand socialism as it was viewed as the peak of worker’s rights. One could potentially see this as being intellectually dishonest by appealing to the desires of the workers and then tacking on a socialist agenda. However, this could be countered by the idea that socialism would not only fix the problems of the worker but also help them out in the long-run rather than focusing on small-scale economic problems. Avrom Lesin in later years commented on this distinction between the top-down propagandists and the bottom-up agitators as like the conflict between Zionism and the ideology of the Vilna Group.<sup>30</sup> Zionism sought to use an Intelligentsia to lead the people whereas these new Jewish socialists argued for assimilating the Intelligentsia into the people.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the added popularity due to Yiddish agitation, Jewish socialists still had to contend with their larger Russian counterparts. In an ironic twist, agitation proved to hinder the goals of Jewish socialists in their attempted solidarity with Russian socialists.<sup>32</sup> For agitation aligned Jews, it was only rational to use Yiddish as it was the language of the working class and it was just as rational that Russian socialists aligned themselves with the ethnically Russian working class and Russian speakers. One could easily see this as both realistic and practical for

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<sup>28</sup> Mendelsohn. 48.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>30</sup> Frankel. 195.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mendelsohn. 47-48.

any socialist movement of the time. However, the sheer number of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers (with the addition of their territorial concentration and national identity) compared to Jews and Yiddish speakers proved problematic. It can be deemed problematic that since agitation advocates populism and the majority of the populace speaks Russian, it would be in line with agitation and populism to target their appeal solely towards the Russian speakers rather than the Yiddish speakers.<sup>33</sup>

From a Russian point of view, their appeal to their working class and usage of Russian was only natural as their working class was predominantly Russian. However, the Jews had no territorial majority as such would be considered the consistent minority no matter where in the Russian Empire they lived. Why would a Russian agitator bother with a linguistic minority when the majority spoke Russian? These movements adopted on a notably nationalist element (highlighting their hypocrisy) by their lack of international accessibility. Russian socialist movements often blurred the lines between class and nationality as such the Achilles Heel of these Propaganda/Vanguard orientated movements was their monolingual/mono-national nature.<sup>34</sup> Due to propaganda's inherent class restriction, minority languages (or in the case of Yiddish, majority languages of the working class) were often erased in exchange for the language of the vanguard or the majority. While seemingly more practical and rational, these movements erased ethnic and linguistic minorities.

To clarify, one could assume that the Russian socialist movement was not intentionally trying to evoke this form of nationalism. Instead, they were simply trying to reach their widest audience, which at the time would be Russian speakers. As such it was practical for Russian socialists to focus most intensely on monolingual socialism and utilizing Russian culture for their

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<sup>33</sup> Frankel. 103.

<sup>34</sup> Dubnow. 141.



propaganda.<sup>35</sup> To bring up a somewhat anachronistic (but still relevant) reference, this falls in line with the socialist idea of the raceless, classless socialist human (seen particularly in the concept of the *New Soviet Man*), the new human being who under communism was united regardless of class, gender, race or language.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, this idea would be interpreted by the Stalin administration as a policy of Russification, for wouldn't it be easier to unite everyone by class and gender if they spoke the same language and had the same culture? In my opinion this mentality is reflected in the writings of Russian socialists, while no one is actively advocating for unification by assimilation, one might ascertain that given the majority Russian population, national minorities would be expected to conform to the "universal standard" (at least for Russians). This ideology remains prevalent in the minds of these early socialists who sought internationalism but unknowingly pushed their own ethnic nationalism via cultural assimilation. However, this ideal proved detrimental to minority communities who often differed from the language and culture of their host countries.

While the Russian socialists called for internationalism and unity they had ironically embraced a form of "subtle chauvinism" by demanding national minorities conform to their standards of internationalism.<sup>37</sup> Jews who did not have an ethnically homogenous nation-state to call their own were forced as the "eternal minority" to either conform in these "nationalist" socialist groups or ironically be branded as a nationalist. This spelled a death sentence for any unassimilated Jew who wanted to be involved in larger socialist movements. This is further

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<sup>35</sup> Dubnow. 151.

<sup>36</sup> Leon Trotsky. *Literature and Revolution*. 1924.

<sup>37</sup> Dubnow. "Jews as a Spiritual Nation among Political Nations". In Simon Rabinovitch. *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe & the United States (The Brandeis Library of Modern Jewish Thought)*. Brandeis University, 2012. 38.

proven by the fact that early in the socialist movement it was only assimilated intelligentsia Jews who managed to gain any foothold in socialist movements. These assimilated Jews like other socialists wanted to spread socialism to their respective working class but unlike their Russian or German counterparts, they had the issue of simultaneously calling for assimilation and socialism within the Jewish working class. This issue is highlighted in Vladimir Medem's idea of neutralism. Neutralism states that socialism should neither be assimilationist nor cosmopolitan and instead advocates for a neutral position (hence the name). Medem advocated that "There are three solutions to the national question: a nationalist one [read: a Zionist one], an assimilationist one, and a Social Democratic one."<sup>38</sup> The Social Democratic one is essentially neutralism. National adherence and national solidarity was not supported but neither was it suppressed as long as it did not interfere with class solidarity.<sup>39</sup> Medem described the idea that they should not force Jews to assimilate but if they became assimilated they would not fight against it. Despite this, Medem was quickly shot down during the Sixth Congress of 1905.<sup>40</sup> I would theorize that the idea of neutralism might be useful in a post-revolution world but given that the Bund relied heavily on populist agitation, it would prevent many Jewish workers from becoming radicalized.

While Jews bickered about the roles of assimilation and nationalism, many agreed that the Russian socialist movement was given more legitimacy simply for having a nation-state or territorial concentration to rely on. This hypocrisy was not unknown to Jewish socialists as such Jewish socialists were forced to reconcile with aspects of nationalism to replace their lack of territory. Jews tried to replace their lack of a territory by "latching onto" territorial socialist

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<sup>38</sup> Medem. 314.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 315.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

movements among the Poles (who lacked a state of their own) and in Galicia (Polish/Ukrainian region of Austria-Hungary). It is possible that Jewish socialists hoped that by aligning themselves with these multi-ethnic liberation movements and territorial entities they would be granted autonomy and a say within a new socialist territory. One of the groups to emerge was the Jewish Labor Party founded in Lemberg (modern-day Lviv, Ukraine) in 1892.<sup>41</sup> The Jewish Labor Party was fairly aligned with the stateless Poles and Ukrainians and received support from both groups who in turn supported Jewish nationalists (to an extent). Following in Martov's footsteps, the Jewish Labor Party declared that, "in order to propagandize the great masses of Jewish, Ruthenian [Eastern Slavs], and Polish workers it is essential to take and enlighten each linguistic group, each people, separately."<sup>42</sup>

Despite these obstacles, Yiddish agitation managed to flourish among Jewish workers and intellectuals. In 1894 Arkadi Kremer (the so-called Father of the Bund) with assistance from Julius Martov (the future leader of the Mensheviks) published his work, *On Agitation* which cemented the growing divide between the pro-vanguard (propaganda aligned) Russian socialists and the pro-agitation Jewish socialists.<sup>43</sup> While prior pro-vanguard/propaganda Jewish socialists had published in German, Russian, Polish or even Hebrew they were now forced to market not only to their fellow intellectuals but the Yiddish speaking masses. Johnathan Frankel argues that "Only if the agitators themselves heard the basic lectures in Yiddish would they be able to pass on the information easily and quickly to the rank and file."<sup>44</sup> As such this policy of agitation quickly became pro-Yiddish. Kremer's ally, Martov, was not blind to the difficulties of the

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<sup>41</sup> Frankel. 177.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 186.

Jewish working class as he was a from a Jewish working-class family from Istanbul. Martov described one of the major issues for the Jewish working class,

Relegating the Jewish working-class movement to second place, we tended to scorn the realities of its existence, and this attitude found expression in the fact that we conducted our work in the Russian language... Having placed the mass movement in the center of our program we had to adapt our propaganda and education to the mass, that is to make it more Jewish.<sup>45</sup>

Martov recognized the socialist potential in the Jewish community, a historically oppressed community that had often been ignored by socialists who viewed it as the constant outsider. Martov recognized the necessity of multilingualism and multicultural aspects in socialism despite its potential nationalist element. Martov went so far to claim that a separate Jewish labor organization should be created to specifically aid in the liberation of Jewish workers as many gentile socialist movements had relatively ignored the specific struggles of the Jewish working class.<sup>46</sup> Martov's theories aided in the construction of the future foundations of the Bund in that it hoped to "put down roots in the proletariat, expand in size, and become more democratic so it inevitably produced a more national program".<sup>47</sup> Unlike the future Soviets, the Jewish intelligentsia did not have an army to force the working class in line with their beliefs. Instead, they appealed to the Jewish masses, educating them to boost the popularity and scale of the Vilna Group and other Jewish socialist movements before attempting any major national progress.<sup>48</sup>

In 1895, Kremer with support from other Jewish socialists officially stated that the Vilna Group should support the rights and freedom of the Jewish working class of Europe.<sup>49</sup> In June of

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<sup>45</sup> Julius Martov. "Povorotny Punkt". 18. In Frankel. 174.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 175.

<sup>48</sup> Frankel. 203.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 200.

that year, Kremer held a joint-conference between the Vilna Group and representatives of the Jewish Social Democratic movement. While not officially, this conference received relative support from the Jewish Labor Party (from Galicia). During this conference, Kremer reaffirmed the necessity of the “New Program” and the shift away from authoritarian propaganda towards democratic agitation.<sup>50</sup> Despite these developments, Kremer stated that the “Jewish [socialist] movement should not advance in isolation from or too far ahead of the Russian movement.”<sup>51</sup> The Jewish socialist movement retains a *separate but equal* stance in regards to the Russian socialist movement in order to simultaneously support socialist solidarity while also maintaining their cultural integrity.

This combination of cultural autonomy, socialism, and Jewish nationalism would come to a head on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1897 when Arkadi Kremer alongside other Jewish socialists from the Vilna Group and Jewish Social Democrats (with support from Martov) founded the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia or more simply known as the Bund.<sup>52</sup> Arkadi Kremer, Vladimir Kossovsky, and Yosef Mill came to represent the “Old Guard” of the Bund. The Labor Bund sought to keep the Russian socialist movement at arm’s length. While there was general support for the gentile Russians, the Labor Bund recognized the necessity for space between the Jewish socialists and their gentile counterpart. Bundists argued that “The Jewish people, and the proletariat as a section of that nation, had its own interests to defend. And only a special Jewish organization can undertake to defend those Jewish interests – an organization which is completely free to act as it sees right.”<sup>53</sup> At the end of the day, the Russian

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<sup>50</sup> Frankel. 200.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 203.

<sup>52</sup> Goldsmith. 79.

<sup>53</sup> Arbeter Shtime “Undzere Tsiln” 1898. 7. In Frankel. 209.

socialist movement was most concerned about the Russian proletariat as such a Jewish socialist movement must be created to better suit the needs and desires of the Jewish proletariat. Despite this, it was in the best interest of the Russian socialists to support their Jewish comrades as antisemitism often proved to be capitalist element that afflicted the working class.<sup>54</sup> Since antisemitism was often weaponized by the bourgeois to distract the proletariat, removing it would allow the proletariat to focus on their real enemies, the bourgeois. According to historian Emmanuel Goldsmith, Bundists reconciled their somewhat nationalist policies by pushing the necessity of “national consciousness” in the Jewish community.

The national consciousness of the Bund was heightened and its national program crystallized in response to the hostile criticism it met in the Russian, Polish and Austrian Socialist movements. It was only by affirming the national individuality of East European Jewry as expressed in the Yiddish language and its culture that the Bund was able to justify its separatist position vis-à-vis other socialist parties.<sup>55</sup>

The Bund’s existence revolved around the fact that Jews were simultaneously accepted and rejected. Jews were rejected and oppressed through antisemitism (which many gentile socialists seemingly ignored) and seen as alien to their host country but the second they started advocating for themselves and developing their own nationalism, they were criticized and told to assimilate into their host country’s population. By proving that Jews were their own unique people and nation, the Bund could advocate for the creation of a Yiddish socialist movement that suits the needs of Yiddish speaking workers (which in this case are mostly Jewish with very few exceptions discounting converts from Judaism) just as a Russian socialist movement would work to fit the needs of Russian speaking workers.

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<sup>54</sup> Frankel. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Goldsmith. 85.

In later years, Vladimir Medem (a hardened Bundist) wrote that the Bund was indispensable due to its focus on not only the problems of the proletariat in general but covering issues that specifically affected the Jewish community. The Jewish proletariat dealt not only with the economic oppression but political oppression as well which required unique tactics to resolve. This difficulty led to the rise of the so-called Polu-Intelligentsia, the working-class intelligentsia for Medem and the Jewish socialist movement.<sup>56</sup> While Polu-Intelligentsia had been very common throughout the Jewish community (many Jewish intellectuals of the time were also living in poverty) they had not been fully recognized by the socialist movement. One might even consider the Polu-Intelligentsia a Jewish synthetization of agitation and propaganda. I theorize that Eastern European Jewish culture and social dynamics are specifically directed towards this model due to many Jewish intelligentsia living in poverty. This allowed these intelligentsia to not only be educated in socialist theory but truly understand the plight of the working class. Unlike with Russian socialists where a steady divide was growing between the intelligentsia and proletariat, these Polu-Intelligentsia lived among the proletariat and were more ‘in touch’ with the working class as such proved effective leaders in the Jewish labor movement.<sup>57</sup> The Polu-Intelligentsia existed as “vanguard of agitation” that used populist tactics to rile up the Jewish working class then used their own intellectualism to properly (and constructively) guide the “righteous rage” of the Jewish working class towards socialism.<sup>58</sup>

Shortly following the Bund’s official creation Kremer came into conflict with Georgi Plekhanov, a notable Russian Marxist writer of the time. Despite Plekhanov’s early support of

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<sup>56</sup> Frankel. 202.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Kremer's *On Agitation* he was quick to criticize it and the push for democratic federalism and cultural autonomy within the Bund citing them as too nationalist and bourgeois.<sup>59</sup> Kremer later recalled that "The founder of Russian Marxism put a hard question to me: How can we represent you [at congresses abroad] when you are not united among yourselves [the Jewish proletariat]? Formally, there is as yet nobody to represent."<sup>60</sup> Plekhanov raises a realistic critique. Can socialists properly protect the interests of the working class while also granting autonomy to ethnic minorities and nationalist movements? Essentially, could nationalist and socialist movements co-exist? This autonomy could easily lead to the infiltration of bourgeois or capitalist ideas as such a unified political body should be used to maintain control and stability. One must wonder if in an alternate universe where Julius Martov and his Mensheviks defeated Lenin and his Bolsheviks, if the 1917 Russian Revolution would have even succeeded or the Soviet Union would have even been founded? Violent authoritarianism holds people together and fully utilizes them whereas federalism and autonomy weaken the state allowing it to be easily defeated.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1898 the Jewish Labor Bund alongside the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class and other Russian socialist groups merged to form the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (the precursor to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). However, the Labor Bund remained an independent entity that was granted autonomy to run Jewish socialist activities.<sup>61</sup> The Bund proposed that the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Rossiyskaya Sotsial-Demokraticheskaya Rabochaya Partiya) adopt the term "Rossiyskaya" instead of "Russkaya" regarding its name. While seemingly meaningless to English speakers (as both are translated as "Russian"), Russkaya specifically refers to ethnic

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<sup>59</sup> Frankel. 205.

<sup>60</sup> Arkadi Kremer. "Osnovanie Bunda", 52. In Frankel. 205.

<sup>61</sup> Nora Levin. *While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917*. Schocken Books, 1977. 262.



Russians whereas *Rossiyskaya* refers to the citizens of Russia who themselves might not be ethnically Russian.<sup>62</sup> This is especially important as it recognizes the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party as a party for all citizens of the Russian Empire and not just ethnic Russians. This idea is later reaffirmed during the 1901 Fourth Congress of the Bund when the Bund stated that the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party should be rebuilt as a federation of nationalities rather than a Russocentric organization with minorities only recognized as subsidiary branches.<sup>63</sup> They hoped “that a state such as Russia, which is composed of many different nationalities, must in the future develop into a federation of nationalities in which every nationality enjoys full national autonomy, regardless of the territory which it occupies.”<sup>64</sup> Dubnow argued that this was essential for the survival of any multiethnic state (socialist or not). The policy of enforced assimilation for socialists and reactionaries alike would only prove disastrous for both the minority and the ruling party as they would suffer from “constant civil war” and Balkanization.<sup>65</sup> As such Dubnow agrees to this idea of federalism to prevent the breakdown of states.

The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was supposed to represent the working class of Russia and yet not all the working class of Russia are Russian themselves. As such the Bund argues that ethnic minorities should have equal status to ethnic Russians and these dynamics should be implemented within their socialist movements as well. This federation would support all nationalities and culture groups and work as a unifying force. At the same Congress, the Bund stated that Jews constituted their own unique nationality with Yiddish as their “mother tongue”. The Bundists under Vladimir Kosovsky came out in support of policies of national autonomy

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<sup>62</sup> Frankel. 209.

<sup>63</sup> Medem. 233.

<sup>64</sup> “Der ferter kongres fun algemaynem yidishn arbiter bund in rusland un poyln”, 1901. 99. In Frankel. 220.

<sup>65</sup> Dubnow. 141.

with multiple autonomous nationalities living within a united territorial state.<sup>66</sup> These ideas would go on to inspire Otto Bauer (a Jew himself) who would help craft the ideas of National Cultural Autonomy and Austromarxism in 1908.

Austromarxism sought to reconcile nationalism and socialism within a Democratic Socialist context. Jewish socialist groups hoped to harness this nationalism to combat Zionism (which was deemed bourgeois) and nudge the Jewish working class towards attaining class consciousness. Austromarxism and the idea of National Cultural Autonomy worked as the sword and shield of the Bund as their answer to Zionism. While “normal” Marxism advocated for the eventual assimilation of all culture into a singular “working class culture”, Austromarxism recognized the realities of cultural differences and as such advocated for “National Cultural Autonomy”. Austromarxism advocated for the creation of political rights and cultural autonomy for all cultural nations within a singular federalized state/territory.<sup>67</sup> In an odd turn of events, Frankel theorizes that Simon Dubnow (who was often at odds with the Bund due to his nationalist tendencies and opposition to socialism) was inspired by the works of Austromarxist socialists<sup>68</sup> and in turn the Bundists drew from Dubnow (a Jewish academic who almost assuredly mixed in the same intellectual circles of the Bund).<sup>69</sup>

National Cultural Autonomy is the “personal principle [that] wants to organize nations not in territorial bodies but in simple association of persons.”<sup>70</sup> This refers to the idea of disjoining the nation from the nation-state to produce a secular federalized state (many nations in a singular state/territory). To clarify, they want the cultural nation to continue to thrive but in a

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<sup>66</sup> Medem. 263.

<sup>67</sup> Dubnow. 141.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>69</sup> Frankel. 252-253.

<sup>70</sup> Otto Bauer. *Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question*. 1907. Translated by Joseph O'Donnell. 281.

united territorial federation existing as a political umbrella for these cultural nations.

Austromarxism emerged from the ethnic tensions of Austria-Hungary in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Austria-Hungary, a home to Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks and Czechs alike had survived where other empires had collapsed due to its policies of internal cultural autonomy. But these policies began to fail in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (leading up to World War I) fueling multiple cries for independence from the various nationalities. Socialists who viewed the collapse of this system of autonomy became more aware of the needs and desires of differing cultural groups. By putting all these nationalities into “one box” (even if that box was a socialist box) the box (or state in this metaphor) would quickly collapse due to cultural and ethnic tensions. As such by allowing freedom within that “box” instead of the internationalism of socialists and chauvinism of the right, they could achieve relative harmony while also maintaining the integrity and stability of their box.

This idea suited the Bund as it allowed Jews to function independently as a cultural group while also working alongside other cultural nations to function as a united territorial entity. However, this idea proved extremely controversial to gentile Russian socialists who advocated for a top-down socialist system and a Russian “internationalist” assimilation.<sup>71</sup> Autonomism was extremely popular among Jews as it allowed them to maintain their cultural and national integrity while also participating in socialism. The Bund’s support for National Cultural Autonomy was cemented years later during the 1905 Sixth Congress of the Bund when Bundists specifically stated their support for Austromarxist policies and the divestment of nation from the state.<sup>72</sup> The

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<sup>71</sup> Medem. 168-169.

<sup>72</sup> Frankel. 246.

Sixth Congress is a turning point for the Bund as it increasingly embraced nationalism and nationalist policies.<sup>73</sup> Bundists demanded the creation of a system of,

national-cultural autonomy... those governmental-judicial institutions which would permit each nation its free cultural development... The [governmental] functions connected with cultural questions (public education, etc.) should be removed from the state and from local and territorial self-government and be transferred to the nation...<sup>74</sup>

Frankel claims that the Sixth Congress of the Bund could be interpreted as the high-point of the Bund's strength and nationalist resolution.<sup>75</sup>

However, despite the Bund's successes, they were prone to failure as is evident on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1903 when disaster struck with the Kishinev Pogrom. Vladimir Medem once commented that Kishinev marked the decisive birth of the modern Zionist movement: "For a segment of Zionist-inclined youth, it was the decisive factor in a spiritual crisis. Until that time the Zionist movement had been strictly 'loyal' and apolitical."<sup>76</sup> Ironically, the lack of interest in Kishinev by gentile socialists pushed many Bundists and socialists to Zionism. 1903 also signaled the split of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party between the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin and the Mensheviks led by Julius Martov. The Bund began to shift away from the authoritarian communist Bolsheviks and towards the libertarian socialist Mensheviks.<sup>77</sup> Leon Trotsky (who Medem earlier referred to as an assimilated Jew) critiqued the Bund and Medem who stated that Russian socialists did not care about antisemitism.<sup>78</sup>

It was not necessary to fight anti-semitism in particular. Anti-semitism was, after all, nothing more than a consequence of the universal lack of consciousness

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<sup>73</sup> Frankel. 252.

<sup>74</sup> Fun partey-lebn: der VI tsuzamenfor fun algemaynem yidishn arbeiter bund in lite, poyln un rusland, "Der veker" (1905), 4. In Frankel. 247.

<sup>75</sup> Frankel. 247.

<sup>76</sup> Medem. 267.

<sup>77</sup> Frankel. 211.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 269.

among the broad masses. Hence the need to bring them to a state of general awareness, after which anti-Semitism would fade away willy-nilly. To make the Jews a special subject of discussion among the broad masses was superfluous.<sup>79</sup>

Trotsky also went on to criticize the Bund for decrying the Christian workers who had participated in the pogrom. Trotsky (despite his Jewish background) like many other Russian socialists would denounce any form of Jewish separatism (even socialist separatism) is nationalist, counter-revolutionary and inherently reactionary. Frumin (Y. Blumshteyn, first name unknown) countered Trotsky stating that “so many Jewish socialists, including members of the Bund itself, had got it into their heads once and for all that they are socialists, not Jews. In Roumania Jewish blood flows in the streets and the Jewish socialists look on and are silent.”<sup>80</sup> Frumin claims that Trotsky had essentially sold out his own nation for the idea of “internationalism”. I theorize that based on Frumin’s rhetoric, “internationalism” in this context could be viewed as a code-word for Russian assimilation. Socialism was inherently a people’s movement and so why shouldn’t the people’s movement speak the language and practice the culture of the people? By these standards, national minorities are seen as outliers due to their deviance from the culture and language of the people.

I would consider Kishinev to be a decisive moment for Zionists due to the fear it elicited and a feeling that the diaspora had failed Jews. For the working class and socialists, Kishinev was simply another injustice enacted by the Tsar but for the middle-class who had been relatively unaffected by the capitalist violence, this was a horrific travesty. The working-class Jews were used to the Tsarist violence in the form of capitalism (which the middle-class was relatively immune to) as such Kishinev was seen as a greater threat to the middle-class who had

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<sup>79</sup> Frankel. 269.

<sup>80</sup> Frumin/Y. Blumshteyn. “Der driter kongres fun algemaynen yidishn arbiter bund un di natsyonale frage”. In Frankel. 222.

not experienced these horrors before. Zionism like Bundism sought to harness nationalism to protect the Jewish community. However, Zionism sought to politically isolate Jews from the rest of the population as a means of preserving their cultural integrity. The Zionist movement quickly became a rival to the Bund and while there existed Socialist Zionists, the Bund considered the Zionist movement to be their political opposite as a reactionary nationalist movement.<sup>81</sup>

While the Bund could not provide a territory, they could provide solidarity among Jewish workers and the promise of liberation from capitalism. The Bund critiqued Zionism as reactionary and nationalist, as Zionism only sought to build its own state which the Bund claimed would not solve the issues of antisemitism since antisemitism stemmed not only from cultural values but capitalism as well.<sup>82</sup> The Bund also critiqued the Zionists for “running away” from their problems in Eastern Europe, claiming that these problems would not simply disappear even in a Jewish majority state. Zionists competed with the Bund for the loyalty of the Jewish workers as Zionism promised political liberation (via founding their own state) whereas the Bundists promised economic liberation which in turn would lead to political liberation.<sup>83</sup> Despite the rivalry between the two, theorists such as Nachman Syrkin and Ber Borokhov claimed that the two ideologies could be fused into a “Zionism of the Jewish proletariat”.<sup>84</sup> Syrkin recognized that the oppression of the Jewish working class would not just disappear upon founding a state of their own as they would simply be living under another capitalist state. He instead called for the creation of a predominantly Jewish socialist state which could suit the needs of not only the working class but the unique struggles of the Jewish people.<sup>85</sup> Despite the Bund’s adversity

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<sup>81</sup> Frankel. 223.

<sup>82</sup> Goldsmith. 80.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

towards Zionism, I find it curious that this new ideology of Labor Zionism did not have that much support from the Bund as even the Bund recognized that not all issues plaguing Jews were spawned solely by capitalism. One could argue that Labor Zionists and Bundists had the same end-goal, the creation of socialist state and the elimination of antisemitism but they diverge in where that state might be. For Labor Zionists it was in Palestine whereas the Bundists put less emphasis on where that state was or were opposed to the creation of a state altogether. Labor Zionism seems like a fractured reflection of Bundism, mixing nationalism and socialism albeit with a 75% nationalism to 25% socialism whereas one could consider Bundism to be 75% socialism to 25% nationalism.

The Zionists and Marxists were not the only rivals of the Bund since in later years it would receive harsh criticism from diaspora nationalists such as Chaim Zhitlovsky. Zhitlovsky stood politically between the Zionists and the Bundists which often resulted in humorous incidents such as Theodore Herzl (one of the Zionist leaders) inviting Zhitlovsky to a conference under the assumption that he was the leader of the Bund. Upon arriving at the conference, Zhitlovsky aptly stated that he wanted nothing to do with the Bund or the Zionists.<sup>86</sup> Zhitlovsky criticized the Bund for siding with gentile Russian socialists rather than with other Jews.<sup>87</sup> Despite these qualms, in 1906 Zhitlovsky would help form the group known as the Serpists (from the Russian acronym, for “Jewish Socialist Workers Party”, SERP) which fused the ideas of Diaspora Nationalism, Bundism, and Territorialism.<sup>88</sup> The Serpists “sought Jewish cultural autonomy everywhere and political autonomy wherever Jews lived in compact masses.”<sup>89</sup> They

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<sup>86</sup> Medem. 294-297.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 297.

<sup>88</sup> Goldsmith. 249.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

sought to liberate Jews by all means: politically, economically and culturally. The Jews were politically liberated by granting them equal status as gentiles as well as political representation and self-governance within Jewish territorial centers, cities, and towns. The Serpists supported Austromarxism and the application of National Cultural Autonomy.<sup>90</sup> The Jews were economically liberated by adopting the ideas of socialism and removing the oppressive forces of capitalism. Finally, the Jews were culturally liberated by granting them freedom of expression, religion, and language and to live how they see fit.

The Bund would later lead the charge during the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, which while a setback increased membership of the Bund.<sup>91</sup> Following this revolution, the Bund lost many members because of the Odessa Pogroms later that year. I would consider this similar to Kishinev in that it greatly increased the appeal of Zionism as many Jews were keen on fleeing the pogrom torn country for an idealist Palestine. Despite the creation of self-defense units, the Bund's credibility dipped during this period.<sup>92</sup> This is further supported by the fact that in 1906 the Bund rejoined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party despite having declare its autonomy only 5 years early at the Fourth Congress of the Bund.<sup>93</sup> First generation Bundists decried this reunion as being manipulated by "ultra-Marxists" and as a betrayal to the Bund's original values.<sup>94</sup> Despite this, the damage had been done and just as the Russian socialists split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, the more authoritarian socialist Bundists sided with the Bolsheviks (as the aptly named Communist Bund) while the more libertarian socialist Bundists

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<sup>90</sup> Frankel. 464.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 246.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 143-144.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 247.



sided with the Mensheviks (as the Social Democratic Bund). The Bolsheviks would quickly turn on the Bund as they passed amendments which limited the powers of the Bund and basically boycotted them from electing Bundists to the socialist congress.<sup>95</sup> Despite this, the Bund aided the Bolsheviks during the 1917 Russian Revolution and were one of the only Jewish groups recognized by the Soviets. By 1921 the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia had been dissolved, its mechanisms and members absorbed into the rapidly growing Soviet behemoth. The Bundists who opposed Soviet rule fled Russia for the United States, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom. The Bund especially flourished during the interwar period of the Second Republic of Poland.

The Bund would be remembered as the “Soviets of the Jews”, the quintessential Jewish socialist movement that has impacted socialists both gentile and Jewish alike. One of these socialists impacted by the Bund (but more often or not opposed to it) was Chaim Zhitlovsky who had grown up during the early days of the Bund and had constantly been at odds with its members and ideology.

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<sup>95</sup> Frankel. 255-256.

## Chapter Two: Chaim Zhitlovsky and Diaspora Nationalism

Chaim Zhitlovsky stands as a paradoxical figure in the Jewish political sphere. He was described as too nationalist by the socialists and too socialist by the nationalists, and yet his work helped synthesize modern-day Jewish identity. The historian Johnathan Frankel referred to Zhitlovsky as a politically fluid character:

At varying times, he was a sharp opponent of Zionism and a Zionist, an antiterritorialist and a territorialist, a supporter of the Bund and one of its harshest critics, a Socialist revolutionary and an apologist for Bolshevism. He was a kind of ideological nomad, forever on the move.<sup>96</sup>

Zhitlovsky's political ideology evolved with respect to his life experiences growing up in the Russian Empire and the heart of the traditional Pale of Settlement. He very early on made the acquaintance of Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport (better known by his pseudonym, S. Ansky) who later became one of the most prolific Jewish writers with foundational works such as *The Dybbuk* (1920) and *Di Shvue* (the anthem of the General Jewish Labor Bund).<sup>97</sup> Growing up in a very strict religious environment, Zhitlovsky often wrote that he felt suffocated by his intense religious education in the yeshiva. It was this disdain that led Zhitlovsky to consume socialist literature at a voracious rate (one might assume the young Zhitlovsky was motivated by a form of social rebellion as a teenager in a socially restrictive environment).

However, in 1881 disaster struck with a massive pogrom in Kiev after Russian Jews were blamed for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. This pogrom, in turn, led to hundreds of other pogroms sprouting up across the Pale of Settlement. These events sent shockwaves even into the city of Vitebsk, leading to Ansky's expulsion from the local yeshiva after the rabbi blamed him for passing around socialist literature he received from the Narodniks (which the rabbi claimed

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<sup>96</sup> Frankel. 258.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 260.

was indirectly responsible for the pogroms).<sup>98</sup> Narodniks were predecessors to the main Russian socialist movement who focused on populist tactics and were forbearers of agitation tactics against the Tsar and capitalism.<sup>99</sup> Following his expulsion, Ansky left Vitebsk for the heart of the Russian Empire to work and live amongst the Russian peasantry. Ansky's departure is historically surprising as while the idea of 'going to the people' was not new and was prevalent amongst both Jewish and gentile socialists, this proletarian "field trip" for Jews was rare after the 1881 pogroms. To clarify, the idea of "going to the people" is the socialist idea of someone going to live and work among the proletariat, working class, and peasantry to provide solidarity to workers and push them towards socialism. Ansky had been the nail keeping Zhitlovsky tied to Vitebsk, and with his self-imposed exile Zhitlovsky ventured forth from Vitebsk and ended up staying with relatives of Ansky in Tula (about 113 miles south of Moscow). Ansky had continuously pushed Zhitlovsky to leave the "bourgeois atmosphere" of Vitebsk and go live among the working class.<sup>100</sup>

Zhitlovsky's experience in Tula with "going to the people" was marked by a short period in which he was dogmatically socialist and heavily pro-assimilationist. Zhitlovsky was captivated by the Jewish community of Tula which was primarily composed of cantonists (military conscripts).<sup>101</sup> Tsar Nicholas I had enacted policies which conscripted Jews and non-Russian ethnic minorities at a very young age into the military to assimilate them into the greater Russian sphere and despite these policies ending decades earlier, their impact on the Russian Jewish community lasted to this point in time. It was these policies that had influenced Zhitlovsky towards idealizing assimilation as the end goal for Russian Jews. This period in

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<sup>98</sup> Frankel. 261.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 263-264.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 261.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Zhitlovsky's life is notable in that it was one of the only times in which Zhitlovsky was notably assimilationist, the antithesis of his later ideologies. This would be the last time in his life he held these ideas of assimilation as in 1883 Zhitlovsky was called back to Ushachy by his mother to stay with his uncle. Towards the end of his life, he recalled the assimilationist ideas of his youth in his 1935 essay entitled "The Jewish Factor in My Socialism" in which he wrote on the near impossibility of Jewish assimilation. Zhitlovsky countered the ideas of his younger self writing that:

This new socialist ideology did not vindicate antisemitism, but if I would then have asked, 'Are you for us or against us,' the answer definitely could not have been 'for you'. Socialism was a stream of ideas containing elements inimical to Jewish existence in the Diaspora.<sup>102</sup>

Since the first Partition of Poland, Russia had consistently been a source of antisemitism towards the Jews of Eastern Europe, as seen with the Pale of Settlement and numerous pogroms. Despite the sheer amount of violence towards Jews, many Russian socialists who despised the Tsarist state readily agreed with these antisemitic policies and wholeheartedly accepted Russian antisemitic propaganda. The Russian socialists had cheered on the antisemitic pogroms of 1881 and 1903 citing them as proletarian revolts against capitalists (a.k.a. Jews).<sup>103</sup> In an ironic twist, the Russian capitalists would paint the Jewish population as dangerous leftist revolutionaries while the Russian left would paint the Jews as right-wing bourgeois capitalists.

Zhitlovsky recognized and accepted this political paradox which further motivated his creation of a uniquely Jewish form of socialism in his later years. By taking this middle ground between socialism and nationalism, Zhitlovsky began to synthesize the core of Jewish Diaspora

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<sup>102</sup> Chaim Zhitlovsky. *The Jewish Factor in My Socialism*. 126.

<sup>103</sup> Irving Howe. *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 126.

Nationalism and Yiddish Socialism. Why must Jews assimilate into the Russian working class when there was already a substantial population of a Jewish working class? Why must Jews stop being Jews to be considered a revolutionary force when the same is not asked of Russians, Germans or Poles? I would consider this the crux of Zhitlovsky's ideology in finding the balance between nationalism and socialism "In those days there were not yet any socialist Jews, but only Jewish socialists, who did not care to be identified as Jews. I never heard of any socialist theories that harmoniously united socialist ideals with the problems of Jewish life."<sup>104</sup> Antisemitism was engrained in European society, as such those who claimed to stand up for the working class of all races and creeds refused to stand for the Jewish working class.

It was back in the shtetl where the initial foundations of Zhitlovsky's theory of Jewish identity began to formulate. Surrounded by Jewish literature and culture, the young Zhitlovsky immersed himself in Hebrew press and political theory. Zhitlovsky became particularly enamored with the works of Moshe Leib Lilienblum, a disenchanted Maskil and harsh critic of the religiously orthodox, and his defense of the Palestinophile cause. Lilienblum argued for a "reconstruction of Jewish life in a new country and on a new economic basis"<sup>105</sup> on the notion that he viewed Jewish merchants and traders as oppressing and exploiting the Russian peasantry. Jews have traditionally worked as traders, merchants and craftsmen, all typically nomadic professions because Jews were often forbidden from purchasing land or working as serfs. As such they were not as tied to the land as many Russian peasants were.<sup>106</sup> This links back into the stereotype of Jews as capitalist oppressors which blamed Jews for the hardships of the Russian peasantry even though many European Jews lived in poverty. The Russian nobility simply used

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<sup>104</sup> Howe. 133.

<sup>105</sup> Frankel. 262.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 265.

them as a distraction from themselves (who profited from both Russian peasant labor and Jewish merchants). Lilienblum's work left Zhitlovsky feeling spiteful towards the Jewish population. This spite transformed into anger against gentile critics after reading Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Poor Wolf*: "A storm of chauvinist nationalism beat at my head and heart. So! We are wolves... And that's how Shchedrin of all people regards me. We are men: better, more human, than you all. My assimilationist ideas disappeared like smoke."<sup>107</sup> Zhitlovsky reacted harshly to the merciless antisemitic words of Saltykov-Shchedrin who referred to Jews as an "insufferable burden on their neighbors."<sup>108</sup> While he acknowledged and supported Lilienblum's call for a Jewish cultural and economic reconstruction he now stood proudly for the Jewish community. It is important to note that although Zhitlovsky approved of certain ideas within the Palestinophile movement he was not a self-identified Zionist. While he was supportive of the ideas of "national self-liberation and self-renewal" within the Jewish community, Zhitlovsky viewed the movement as corrupt due to its leadership among the political and economic elite and its desire to incorporate the orthodox and rabbinical class into the movement which Zhitlovsky viewed as socially and politically backward.<sup>109</sup>

Zhitlovsky's reaction to Lilienblum and Shchedrin's work represents a key moment in his political growth as it marks the beginning of his synthesis of Jewish nationalism and socialism. Drawing from different aspects of Jewish politics Zhitlovsky combined the idea of "national regeneration" from the Palestinophiles and the desire for modernity, cultural progression and socialism from the pro-assimilation socialists.<sup>110</sup> National regeneration is the creation of a new Jewish national identity based on Jewish culture and incorporating the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideals of

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<sup>107</sup> Zhitlovsky. "Memories of My Life, Volume II" (1940), 95. In Frankel. 263.

<sup>108</sup> Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. "Otechestvennye Zapiski" (1884), 278. In Frankel. 263.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 265.

<sup>110</sup> Frankel. 265.

nationalism. While Zhitlovsky had rebuked Lilienblum, he agreed with him to an extent about the effects of the Jewish merchant class on the Russian peasantry. Zhitlovsky recognized that a cultural revitalization and economic transformation of the Jewish population from that of a primarily mercantile/trade base to an agricultural/labor based one was necessary for the “rebirth” of the Jewish people.

In 1884 Zhitlovsky made his first strides towards joining the greater socialist community with his admission to the socialist organization Narodnaya Volya (Russian for “People's Will”) that advocated for “socialist terrorism” (assassinating the bourgeoisie) to “kick-start” the Revolution. Narodnaya Volya was heavily aligned with the Narodnik movement in general who supported this form of violent populism.<sup>111</sup> The Narodniks were, in fact, responsible for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II which in turn led to 1881 pogrom which in turn had indirectly led to Ansky’s expulsion from yeshiva only three years prior and started Zhitlovsky on his path towards socialism. His time with the Narodniks was cut short after he petitioned his local chapter to publish a socialist newspaper in Yiddish to convert Jewish students and workers towards the socialist cause. This petition was rejected by the executive committee of the party who cited it as too nationalist and counter to the group’s interests which led to Zhitlovsky’s self-imposed exile from the party.<sup>112</sup>

While dejected from his failed petition, Zhitlovsky was now more than ever filled with vigor to synthesize Jewish nationalism and socialism. In 1886 Zhitlovsky went to Saint Petersburg where he extensively researched Jewish history, both biblical and modern. From his research, he wrote a historical and philosophical analysis of the Jewish people within the Roman

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<sup>111</sup> Frankel. 138.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 263-264.

Province of Judea and the ancient Jewish rebellions that occurred in the years that followed.<sup>113</sup> Zhitlovsky manages to synthesize socialist ideology into biblical history in this text. While not completely foreign to socialism, what remained a major metaphorical element for Zhitlovsky's writing in later years in contrast to the mainly secular writing of gentile socialists. Zhitlovsky identified two major themes in the Post-Second Temple Period as major factors behind Jewish struggle in Judea: the struggle for social justice and the struggle for national survival.<sup>114</sup> With Judea under siege by Romans, the Jews were forced to put aside the struggle for social justice to focus on the struggle for national survival. Two major sects emerged from the religious elite among Jews, the Essenes and the Pharisees. While the Essenes advocated for egalitarianism and equality among the masses they were targeted for their major role in the Jewish revolts, leading many Jews to side with the Pharisees who represented the rabbinic elite and advocated for isolationism. Zhitlovsky compares this struggle to the modern strife of Jews in Europe: the Essenes represented the socialists, the Pharisees represented the Rabbinical elite, and the Romans represented the European bourgeoisie or the Russian Tsar in this scenario. While Jews struggled under the boot of the Romans/bourgeoisie they were more likely to take the easiest/quickest route, that is the Pharisees/isolationism. If the Jews remained isolated from their oppressors, they were spared (to an extent) some of the antisemitic violence but it also prevented them from seeking out a long-term solution (the Essenes/socialism).

Zhitlovsky described this culture of waiting in rabbinic Judaism (and its continuation into the modern day). Waiting for the Messiah to come or waiting for the war to end they became passive and one could argue that they even adopted a cultural policy of 'sticking your head in the

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<sup>113</sup> Zhitlovsky. "Thoughts on the Historical Fate of Jewry", 1887. 19. In Frankel. 264.

<sup>114</sup> Frankel. 264.



sand' so to speak.<sup>115</sup> He argued that this "Ostrich Method" (as I aptly termed it due to Jews figuratively sticking their heads in the sand) despite its original use as a protective measure had consequentially been the driving force behind the isolation and perceived lack of modernity among Jewish communities. The "Ostrich Method" therefore translated into a form of Jewish passivity via isolation. This "Ostrich Method" behavior in the Jewish community frustrated Zhitlovsky endlessly who viewed it as the eternal weakness of the Jewish people: "For the Jews to alienate themselves from others means to corrupt themselves, to degrade their own type... the terrible picture of parasitism in an entire people."<sup>116</sup> This self-deprecating logic is often espoused by many antisemitic socialists who draw upon age-old stereotypes about the inherent capitalist nature of Jews who function as a middleman between the wealthy elite and destitute peasantry. This isolationism increased antisemitism by distancing Jews and gentiles which in turn led to more isolationism. This "Ostrich Method" is often mentioned by the Maskilim who critiqued the Jewish religious elite as isolating themselves from the "real world" by submerging themselves in Torah study and religion.

In 1892, Zhitlovsky published "A Jew to Jews"<sup>117</sup> in which he refuted many of his points from his 1887, "Thoughts on the Historical Fate of Jewry". Zhitlovsky comments on the Jewish Question as a conflict between Judeophobes and Judeophiles on the status and role of Jews in society. "Judeophobes represent the interests of the Russian petit and middle bourgeoisie who otherwise have no means to compete with the more energetic and enterprising Jewish merchants; it is from these quarters that we hear cries of an 'attack of the Yids.' Judeophiles have in mind

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<sup>115</sup> Zhitlovsky. "Thoughts on the Historical Fate of Jewry", 1887. 70. In Frankel. 264.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>117</sup> Zhitlovsky. "A Jew to Jews". In Rabinovitch. 80.

the entrepreneurial interests of the Jewish craftsmen and traders...”<sup>118</sup> While Judeophobes represent the classic anti-Semites (the clergy and upper-class) who pushed the classic capitalist antisemitic myths of the “Jewish parasite”, the Judeophiles were wealthy Jewish intelligentsia who were isolated from the Jewish working class. Zhitlovsky argues that the Judeophiles are essentially playing in the courts of the Judeophobes by viewing Jews from their singular urban Western European bourgeoisie framework.<sup>119</sup> Both Judeophiles and Judeophobes associated Jews with capitalism and (knowingly or unknowingly) reinforced antisemitism.

Whilst many Judeophiles advocated for Jewish Emancipation and the removal of laws restricting Jews, Zhitlovsky argued that was only one half of the problem. The other half is capitalism. One might compare this struggle to the modern Suffragette movement which was run and developed by wealthy women to grant themselves political independence but did little to nothing to improve the conditions of women living in poverty and women of color. While political emancipation might free up Jewish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia from gentile legal discrimination it still serves to only benefit the Jewish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia (who still suffer from cultural and economic antisemitism),

To counter all the ills of Jewish existence – the poverty, ignorance, oppression, and persecution that are bleeding workers dry – they only have one prescription, one hope: complete legal equality for Jews with the rest of the population. How will the emancipated Jewish proletarian prosper physically and spiritually, given that his only possession is “unbelievably cheap” labor power? Who will support him in this endeavor and will not his emancipated Jewish “employer” become the same villain that every employer is in relation to every proletarian?<sup>120</sup>

Zhitlovsky argued earlier that antisemitism was often a product of capitalism so what would “political emancipation” for Jews within a capitalist system accomplish? The wealthy

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<sup>118</sup> Zhitlovsky. “A Jew to Jews”. In Rabinovitch. 84.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>120</sup> Zhitlovsky, “A Jew to Jews”. In Rabinovitch. 85.

would remain wealthy and even get wealthier while the Jewish working class had to contend with yet another harsh employer (Jewish or Christian). The Jewish bourgeoisie attributed all their problems to political antisemitism, assuming that their problems and hardships would evaporate as they gained political emancipation. Zhitlovsky later compared this mindset to Zionists who he believed to be single-minded in their answer to antisemitism.

The Judeophiles were unknowingly playing into yet another antisemitic stereotype by erasing the Jewish working class from their answer to the Jewish Question. Many Judeophobes and anti-Semites of the time pinned Jews as an inherently capitalist and greedy race who did not participate in manual labor and fed off the fruits of the working class. The existence of a Jewish working class is obviously counter to this myth and as such, it benefits Judeophobes when Judeophiles ignore them: “However, the Jewish folk – the manual workers, diggers, porters, masons, as well as farmers, wherever they may be found – this entire class of Jewish proletariat has completely faded from the horizon of the Jewish question...”<sup>121</sup> The majority of the Jewish working class lived within the Pale where they made up such a large chunk of the population that factory owners and businesses were forced to employ them. This contrasts with their Western European counterparts who were more urbanized, industrialized, and mercantile than their Eastern counterparts.<sup>122</sup> The Jewish working class always existed but remained inconvenient to the myths of Judeophobes and appeared as “backward” to the urban Judeophiles. Economic antisemitism is unique in that unlike racial antisemitism which is often reserved solely for the far-right it remained prevalent on both the left and the right of political spectrum. The point of this is that both the right and the left could equate the 1%, political elite or bourgeoisie with the

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<sup>121</sup> Zhitlovsky, “A Jew to Jews”. In Rabinovitch. 85.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 90.

Jews giving political ammunition to both right-wing nationalists and left-wing anti-capitalists. Judeophiles no matter how much they preached their love for the Jewish community were indirectly fueling Judeophobes with their faulty rhetoric.

In 1897, Zhitlovsky finally locked horns with Zionists and Palestinophiles of the time at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. The First Zionist Congress headed by Theodor Herzl was notable as it adopted Hatikvah as the Zionist national anthem (it would later go on to be adopted by the State of Israel as their national anthem) and laid out plans for Political Zionism that stayed in play well after 1948.<sup>123</sup> While primarily for Zionists, the Congress proved to be a staging ground for Yiddishists and socialists such as Zhitlovsky and the Bund. Zhitlovsky had long been opposed to Zionism seeing it as impractical and an escapist fantasy to avoid the real heart of antisemitism (capitalism) and was a middle-class response to antisemitism. Zhitlovsky went as far to say that, “for West European Jewry Zionism may be a progressive phenomenon but utterly and completely bourgeois; for East European Jewry it is absolutely reactionary and harmful.”<sup>124</sup> West European Jews up to the point had only suffered from relatively minor antisemitism compared to that of their Russian counterparts. For Western European Jews, the only thing separating them from their gentile counterparts was their faith. Western European Jews had been granted political emancipation freeing them from political oppression but still dealt with economic and cultural oppression. As such it made sense for Western European Jews to support Zionism, moving to a new land where they could succeed without living as a religious minority. However, this was not the same for Eastern European Jews who suffered not only under the boot of antisemitism but the crushing fist of capitalism as well. For Eastern European

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<sup>123</sup> Zhitlovsky. “Maryne Ani Mamims” (New York, 1937). 336. In Goldsmith, 167.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 168.

Jews, moving somewhere else would not just erase their problems as capitalism would follow them where ever they went. As such, the Zionist movement seemed almost naïve to many Eastern European Jews who knew they would still be poor and destitute even in the Holy Land.

Ironically Herzl, the so-called Father of Zionism led to a widening divide between Zionists and socialists as he attempted to appeal to the Russian government which in turn told him to essentially pacify the Jewish socialist movement. During the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, Herzl attempted to convince his followers to behave “calmly and legally”<sup>125</sup> towards the Russian government. This was seen as somewhat ironic by many Jewish socialists who highlighted the hypocrisy of Herzl’s bourgeois background. He was only constrained by political antisemitism which could be resolved by simply moving whereas many of the poor Jewish working class still struggled under the yoke of capitalism and their employers (both Jewish and Christian).

In 1903, disaster struck once again with the Kishinev pogroms against the Jewish population of Bessarabia (modern day Moldova) within the Russian Empire. Reactions to Kishinev were mixed with Zionists citing it as further proof why the Jews should flee Europe for Palestine whilst it helped unify Socialists and push even more Jews towards socialism. The aftermath of Kishinev mixed with the socialist outrage towards Herzl and the Zionists culminated in the formation of Vorozhdenie (Russian for “Rebirth”).<sup>126</sup> Zhitlovsky joined this movement in 1904, seeing it as a balanced mix between his Jewish socialist aspirations and Jewish nationalist desires. Vorozhdenie advocated for socialist territorialism in contrast to both Bundists and Zionists. “They were for the creation of a world-wide Jewish socialist organization

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<sup>125</sup> Frankel. 279.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 275.

(to be represented at the Socialist International), for the direction of Jewish emigration to a chosen area, and for the establishment of a ‘territorial center’.”<sup>127</sup> Territorialism is the idea that the Jews should have some physical territory to call their own. However, in Vorozhdenie’s case this territory would exist to help govern the international Jewish community and would not necessarily be a Jewish homeland, more so of a safe-zone so to speak to protect the interests of the Jewish nation.<sup>128</sup> Vorozhdenie countered the escapist bourgeois ideologies of the Zionists while also standing against the assimilationist attitudes of many Bundists. Vorozhdenie criticized both Bundists and Zionists as too single-minded in their ideologies, seeing anything other than their respective goal (colonization of Palestine or socialist revolution) as frivolous.<sup>129</sup> Vorozhdenie lambasted both Zionists and Bundists as having utopian ideologies and as viewing Jewish liberation as a black or white (class unity or national unity) when in fact Jewish liberation could encompass both class unity and cultural revival.<sup>130</sup> Zhitlovsky was inspired by these ideas and quickly shifted his political ideology towards that of socialist territorialism.

As Zhitlovsky continued to write, he slowly became an increasingly popular figure among the Jewish intellectual community. In 1908, alongside Nathan Birnbaum and Isaac Leib Peretz, Zhitlovsky helped lead the Conference for the Yiddish Language, better known as the Czernowitz Conference, in the Austro-Hungarian city of Czernowitz (modern-day Chernivtsi, Ukraine). Czernowitz was specifically chosen for its location in Bukovina, a heart of Yiddish culture and Jewish coexistence with the surrounding ethnic groups. While Birnbaum was technically the president of the conference he was limited in his participation due to his limited knowledge of Yiddish as such Zhitlovsky, who had been elected the vice-president of the

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<sup>127</sup> Frankel. 279-280.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 275.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

conference, was essentially the leader of the conference and functioned as the moderator for the debates and discussions.<sup>131</sup> Zhitlovsky was instructed to write the invitations for the conference in which he remarks on the degradation of Yiddish by other languages and the lack of standardization which he attributes to this linguistic and grammatical degradation.<sup>132</sup> Zhitlovsky during the conference was an ardent supporter of the adoption of Yiddish as the national language of the Jewish people, the proliferation of Yiddish culture and the creation of a unique Jewish national identity.

The Czernowitz Conference acted as a junction for Yiddish authors, poets, playwrights and other Yiddish wordsmiths. The conference planned to catalog the Yiddish language and standardize its grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. The conference also sought to discuss the role of Yiddish in modern Jewish society and its potential political future. Peretz claimed the goals of the conference were as follows: the recognition of Yiddish as a legitimate language, creation and dissemination of Yiddish art, culture and entertainment and the creation of a Central Agency of the Conference of the Yiddish Language. This agency would aid in the publication of Yiddish literature, establish Yiddish libraries, schools, and theaters and standardize Yiddish.<sup>133</sup> Ironically, the debates were bogged down by petty squabbles between political theorists and as such little to none of Peretz's agenda was accomplished during the conference. The conference also sought to discuss the role of Yiddish in modern Jewish society and its potential political future. The conference was attended by Yiddishists and Bundists with Hebraists and Zionists in attendance as protestors.

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<sup>131</sup> Goldsmith. 188.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 195-196.

However, the Czernowitz Conference had been thoroughly co-opted by the squabbling of the Zionists, Hebraists, and Yiddishists alike and as such, the goals of standardizing Yiddish and the discussion of Yiddish cultural elements were thrown to the side in exchange for the debate over the status of Yiddish within the Jewish community. Esther Frumkin (supported by Zhitlovsky) went so far as to refer to Yiddish as the national language of the Jewish people.<sup>134</sup> Despite its failure in unifying the Yiddishist movement, Czernowitz proved to be a keystone point in Zhitlovsky's career and the history of Yiddishism and Yiddish studies. In his later years, he would travel about the world discussing the future of Yiddish, but never again would he have the same philosophical momentum he had during Czernowitz Conference. In his later years, Zhitlovsky would lament the failure of the conference citing Yiddishism's utopian ideals, naivety regarding statelessness and inability to combat the reactionary elements of Zionism.<sup>135</sup> I would consider the Czernowitz Conference the height of Zhitlovsky's political career with his political writings and ideologies integrated into Yiddishist movements worldwide.

Zhitlovsky's political writings are scattered throughout his life and can be seen as the inspiration for Czernowitz (or they were inspired by Czernowitz depending on their chronology). This idea of declaring Yiddish as the national language of the Jewish people can be linked back to Zhitlovsky's 1898 essay "Zionism or Socialism?", in which Zhitlovsky expands on the idea of the intersections between Socialism, Yiddish, and the Jewish community.<sup>136</sup> Zhitlovsky states, "We hope that the Yiddish language, which is to us as dear and holy as German is to the

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<sup>134</sup> Goldsmith. 209.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 218.

<sup>136</sup> Zhitlovsky "Zionism or Socialism?", 1898. 72-73. In Dovid Katz. *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*. New York: Basic Books, 2007. 133.



Germans, Russian to the Russians and Hebrew to the old-fashioned Jews, will become all the richer in words and expressions.”<sup>137</sup> The idea is that while Jews have no national territory, they are united by the Yiddish language which in turn creates a truly unique Yiddish culture which embodies the Jewish national character. Just as the use of the Russian language creates a unique Russian culture and in turn builds the character of the Russian people, Zhitlovsky is alluding to the idea of the Yiddish language creating a unique Yiddish culture to build up the Jewish people.

From this concept of tying Yiddish to the Jewish people, Zhitlovsky theorized that Jews were a nationality no different from a German or a Pole. Yiddish was the language of the common people, working class, and everyday life despite being primarily spoken only by Jews. However, until the rise of Yiddishism it remained a vernacular tongue and not a “kultursprach” (culture language), it was the tongue of the commoner and the low-culture, not fit for high culture literature. Zhitlovsky also supported the creation and cementation of a secular Yiddish culture based on the Yiddish language. Yiddish is critical to Zhitlovsky’s development as a diaspora nationalist as it provided a justification for the nationhood of the Jewish people. Socialism was notably critical of religion and as such, for Zhitlovsky to convince others that Jewish nationalism and socialism can co-exist he would have to divest Jews from their religious nature and prove they could be a secular nation like any Russian. By proving that Jews were a secular nation, Zhitlovsky could support his calls for a uniquely Jewish socialist movement without being branded a chauvinist. This process of secularization among the Jewish community only serves to support Zhitlovsky’s claim towards the idea of the Jewish nationality:

The new thing is the secularization of Jewish national and cultural life. It is a complete revolution. Previously for a Jew to live a Jewish life meant living within the framework of the Jewish religion, including the Jewish language. As the

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<sup>137</sup> Zhitlovsky “Zionism or Socialism?”, 1898. 72-73. In Dovid Katz. *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*. New York: Basic Books, 2007. 133.

traditional religion began to lose its dominance over Jewish hearts and minds, as religion grew to be a private matter for each individual and Yiddish was able to satisfy the cultural needs which have nothing to do with Jewish religious faith...<sup>138</sup>

This concept of secularization is key to Zhitlovsky's work. By his standards, one could still be ethnically Jewish while also a practicing Christian if they spoke Yiddish, practiced Jewish culture and considered themselves to be a Jew. While this might seem odd one might consider the role religion plays even in supposedly secular societies. David Biale considers this idea that Jews can exist independent of their religion as a unique ethnicity:

...the Jews were a people before modernity, possessing what he calls a collective personality. Here, too, it was oppression that created the people: the enemy turns into one against our wishes. Religion apparently played no role in forming this identity, which was forced upon unwilling Jews. Jewish collective identity is therefore not the result of positive factors...<sup>139</sup>

While Biale is not adopting the Zionist line of thought that Jews today are the direct descendants of Israelite exiles, he is claiming that due to antisemitism and political isolation Jews have been forced to develop their own culture, language and nation. This is in contrast to writers like Vladimir Jabotinsky, who were inspired by the ideas of Italian fascism, declared Jews a unique race descended from an unbroken line of Israelite exiles.<sup>140</sup> One could then consider that by removing antisemitism and isolation, Jews would assimilate into their surrounding population which was a common idea among assimilationists and socialists alike. Languages naturally form from geographic isolation and diverge to such an extent that they are unintelligible to their parent language, one

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<sup>138</sup> Zhitlovsky. "What is Secular Jewish Culture?" 92. In Joseph Leftwich. *Great Yiddish Writers of the Twentieth Century*. Jason Aronson Inc. 1969.

<sup>139</sup> David Biale. *Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 115.

<sup>140</sup> Biale. 111.

might consider this the case for the Jews of Eastern Europe who lived so differently from their host populations that they were essentially “un-assimilatable”.

Adopting a secular nationality was extremely important for the development of a Jewish national identity and Yiddish high-culture. Only a small percentage of the Jewish population could speak Hebrew and as such, many Yiddishists viewed it absurd to claim a language that only the elite could read and speak as the national language of the Jewish people. This anti-capitalist nature to Yiddish (in contrast to the bourgeois/intelligentsia nature of Hebrew) is supported by Zhitlovsky’s 1897 essay, “Why Only Yiddish”, where he critiques many of the Jewish Intelligentsia as advocating for a “bowtie-Haskalah.”<sup>141</sup> The idea of a “bowtie Haskalah” potentially refers to the idea of in-depth education being out of the reach of working class Jews and as such, they are not included in the production of Yiddish high-culture. In the Pre-Haskalah Period, much of what we consider to be Yiddish culture was sociologically treated as low-culture (as opposed to high-culture), with much of Yiddish culture emerging from folk songs and cheap novellas as opposed to the supposed high-culture of Russian, German, French, and Hebrew. Zhitlovsky argued that this low-culture was, in fact, the basis for the development of a universal Yiddish culture as it provided a link to the Jewish masses of all classes whereas the intellectualism of the Jewish intelligentsia was limited to the upper class.<sup>142</sup> Zhitlovsky claims that Zionists and Bundists alike were out of touch with the working class. Zionists advocated for learning Hebrew, a process which required resources that many working class simply could not

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<sup>141</sup> Zhitlovsky. “Why Only Yiddish?”, 1897. In Rabinovitch. 100.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 101.

afford and Bundists who advocated for assimilation ironically asking the working class to give up their culture.<sup>143</sup>

Yiddish was the language that the common people spoke, read and wrote in and was the most realistic choice of a national Jewish language. Zhitlovsky took this idea and connected it back to the mass of Jewish culture and literature:

By translating the Bible and the Jewish cultural treasures into Yiddish, we will open for the Jewish people the great sea, which the great masses have not seen until now. Whatever our approach to the Bible, we must admit that it is necessary to create the means for every Jew to understand it.<sup>144</sup>

Like early Protestants, Zhitlovsky argued that Biblical literature was unavailable to the Jewish masses and as such, it should be reprinted in Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses. Alongside religious development, Zhitlovsky claimed that the adoption of Yiddish as a national language was imperative for the cultural and political development of the Jewish community and as such, he claimed that Yiddish translation should be a major focus of the Jewish community.<sup>145</sup> Zhitlovsky also wanted to breach the barrier that previously existed between Yiddish and Hebrew. Hebrew had been mainly reserved for religious texts as people saw it as a holy language (as such not fit for the use in common literature). Zhitlovsky argued that Yiddish should breach this barrier to encompass not only secular literature but religious texts as well. Yiddishists advocated for the translation of world literature into Yiddish as it allowed Jews to build a unique cultural canon from which they can draw on to produce their own culture. There was an inherent exponential nature to Yiddish translation as by translating literature into Yiddish they could expand the Jewish cultural sphere and further expand Jewish culture.

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<sup>143</sup> Zhitlovsky. "Why Only Yiddish?", 1897. In Rabinovitch. 101.

<sup>144</sup> Goldsmith. 210.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 211.

In 1910, Zhitlovsky left Europe for the United States as he worked alongside Poale Zion (a Marxist-Zionist organization) where he supported the creation of secular Yiddish schools. These schools would later be adopted by the Socialist Jewish-American organization known as the Workmen's Circle (Der Arbeter Ring). He also went on to write *Dos Naye Lebn*, a journal that drew from both the secular socialist newspapers and literature while also adding in Jewish news and science in Yiddish.<sup>146</sup> During his time in the United States, Zhitlovsky came into conflict with Abraham Cahan in 1903, a political rival from his prior ventures to America who functioned as a political foil to Zhitlovsky. Cahan was a socialist and ardent assimilationist whereas Zhitlovsky supported Yiddish culture and the creation of a unique national identity.

Zhitlovsky is often understood as the father of Yiddishism and I would humorously consider him the step-son of Diaspora Nationalism (the title of father of Diaspora Nationalism goes to Simon Dubnow) and for a good reason. Overall, Zhitlovsky was an oddity of his time, between the radical left-wing Socialists and right-wing Nationalists. Zhitlovsky mixed the two (albeit more of the first and less of the second) but managed to coalesce Jewish national identity with socialist ideology through the vector of Yiddish. Other writers such as Abraham Cahan would draw from his work, but unlike Zhitlovsky who believed that Jewish nationalism and socialism could remain equal, Cahan believed that assimilation into the greater working class should be the end goal of Jewish socialists.

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<sup>146</sup> Michels. 144.

### Chapter Three: Abraham Cahan and the Jewish Immigrant

Abraham Cahan born July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1860 in Podberezhie within the Russian Empire (in modern-day Belarus) is often seen as one of the greatest American Jewish writers despite his European roots. Like many Jews in Eastern Europe, Cahan received an intensive Jewish education but his true passion at the time was secular knowledge and the study of the Russian language and Russian literature. In 1881 when Tsar Alexander II of Russia was assassinated by members of Narodnaya Volya. This in turn sparked a surge of anti-communist and antisemitic violence against Jews and radicals alike all over the Russian Empire. This is seen as the start of Cahan's revolutionary interests as he began consuming revolutionary writing at a voracious rate. Cahan traveled to Vitebsk for a teaching position but this only served to further inflame his socialist ideologies. He became entangled with the socialist community of Vitebsk only barely escaping capture by the Russian police who had been hunting down revolutionaries in the area.

Upon fleeing Vitebsk, Cahan encountered the Yiddish theater in Moghilev which would spark his passion for Yiddish in the years to come.<sup>147</sup> It was during this time when Cahan first met early Zionists who called for Jews in Russia to flee to Palestine, citing the recent pogroms in Kiev and Yelisavetgrad. Consequently, it was a Zionist who convinced Cahan to emigrate to America when he encountered the self-proclaimed Zionist, Israel Belkind who asked Cahan, "If I was so determined to serve my socialist ideal, why must I go to Switzerland? Why not America? Many socialists were heading for America, where they planned to establish communist colonies."<sup>148</sup> These "communist colonies" are referring to the Am Olam movement which advocated for creating independent Jewish socialist agricultural communes within the United

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<sup>147</sup> Seth Lipsky, *The Rise of Abraham Cahan* (New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2013) 26.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

States. Cahan would later meet up with members of this movement on his train ride to Germany. Cahan later criticized this movement in stating that the settlers “confused communism with the concept of eating off the same plate and sleeping in the same bedroom.”<sup>149</sup> Cahan claimed these settlers simply did not have the ability as isolated communes to improve the lives of the working class.<sup>150</sup>

Cahan arrived in the United States on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1882 in the city of Philadelphia where he quickly traveled to New York a few days later. New York in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is often considered a hotbed of Jewish life, but it was not always the epicenter it is today.<sup>151</sup> While the earliest Jewish immigrants to the United States were Sephardic, the majority of later Jewish immigrants were Ashkenazi following the initial surge of Jewish immigrants from Central Europe in the 1840s to 1860s and the influx of Jewish immigrants coming from Eastern Europe from the 1880s until 1924. Due to the horrific working and living conditions of New York during this time, socialist movements rapidly gained support from the immigrant working class. Ronald Sanders describes this environment as truly unique in that: “an industry that contained a large class of proletarian intellectuals, who brought an articulate class consciousness right into the shops at a time when such an attitude still normally, elsewhere in the world, had to be imparted to workers by intellectuals from the outside.”<sup>152</sup> This relates back to the Bundist idea of propaganda versus agitation, some socialists relied on educating an elite class of intellectuals to form a vanguard party. This vanguard party would then act as guides and leaders for the proletariat (despite not necessarily being proletariat themselves) as a top-down focused movement. Sanders is suggesting that in the case of New York, there was large overlap between the proletariat and

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<sup>149</sup> Howe. 86.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Lipsky. 29.

<sup>152</sup> Ronald Sanders. *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (Harper & Row, 1969) 53.

intelligentsia as such it gave birth to a new class of Proletarian-Intelligentsia who focused on a bottom-up focused movement.

The tenements, factories, and slums of New York evolved into centers of socialist discussion during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as European immigrants discussed the philosophies and ideologies they had brought from the Old Country. There was also heavy influence from pre-established German and Russian socialists who had immigrated in earlier years.<sup>153</sup> Jewish immigrants toiling away in New York were quick to adopt socialist ideologies in hopes of alleviating their hardships.<sup>154</sup> Many factors came together to produce the unique environment seen in New York City including the rise of Jewish working class in industrial markets, the increase of class solidarity, support by pre-established socialists, the collapse of old religious elites and the environment of relative political freedom seen in pre-WWI America.<sup>155</sup> While there were virulent antisemitic laws in Russia, this new land allowed Jewish immigrants greater autonomy than they had ever received allowing their culture to flourish.

During his first months in New York, Cahan began to denounce the well-established German Jews (who had immigrated in years prior) whom he viewed as bourgeois (and one might assume they viewed him as an unintelligent peasant) which only further aligned him with his fellow Eastern European Jews.<sup>156</sup> In June 1882, Cahan was confronted with his first real strike and a test of his capabilities as a socialist. He was drawn into a Jewish socialist meeting by Yiddish advertisements when the meetings themselves were given in Russian. During this meeting, despite being only twenty-two at the time, Cahan gave an impassioned speech

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<sup>153</sup> Michels. 29.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>156</sup> Sanders. 58.



supporting their comrades back in Russia, cementing his place within the socialist sphere of New York. Cahan argued with well-established Russian socialist Sergius Schevitsch, who had previously complained about Jewish scabs (scabs are newly hired workers who fill in for striking workers) that many Jewish immigrants simply did not know better as they did not speak English, Russian or German.<sup>157</sup>

Cahan would later confront one of his comrades on why the group only gave speeches in Russian when working class Jews spoke Yiddish. While advertisements and propaganda posters had been posted in Yiddish, Yiddish was viewed as an obstacle to greater class solidarity. This makes sense from the mindset of the socialist organizers who were aiming to unite the working class. Yiddish was an obscure language that was only spoken by a minority while German and Russian were the supposed languages of the revolution and English was simply the most common language in the United States. A multilingual working class is exponentially more difficult to organize than a monolingual populace. As such Yiddish and other minority languages were relegated to propaganda and left out of the major meetings and speeches. Cahan argued that while they may be able to lure in Yiddish speaking immigrants with propaganda, they would be unable to push them into class consciousness as they simply would not be able to understand the Russian, German or English speeches.<sup>158</sup> Class consciousness is the idea that one must become aware of one's own class, the hierarchy of class and evils of capitalism. Someone who has become conscious of their own class and the realities of class, can supposedly be easily converted to socialism. This once again falls into the realm of the Jewish Labor Bund who pushed an ideology of socialist agitation.<sup>159</sup> By using populist appeal socialists can convince

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<sup>157</sup> Howe, 103.

<sup>158</sup> Michels, 29.

<sup>159</sup> Frankel. 185.

workers to unite against the ruling class in doing so making them aware of their class (and the oppression of capitalism) thus leading them to socialism on their own terms. Workers wanted to improve their working conditions and socialists helped them recognize that more was in play than just working conditions. Their working conditions would never be truly good enough under capitalism which only viewed them as commodities.

Like the Maskilim during the Haskalah in the decades prior, Cahan pushed the socialist Jewish intelligentsia (who spoke Russian, German or English) to begin giving rallies and speeches in Yiddish to rally the Jewish immigrants. By giving these speeches in Yiddish they could not only draw in the Jewish working class but also push them towards the socialist idea of “class consciousness” by educating them on the ideas of socialism and communism. While Cahan was not the first to suggest this idea, one could potentially correlate the following explosion of Yiddish socialist printing in the United States to Cahan’s actions and speeches. He was one of the first Yiddish speaking socialists in America to take a proactive step forward and implement plans around Yiddish in socialist movements rather than just simply discussing it.

Cahan’s calls for the implementation were finally recognized on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1882 when he gave a two-hour speech in Yiddish (to the great disdain of his fellow socialists) in a German saloon on East 6<sup>th</sup> Street<sup>160</sup> on the basics of Marx and concepts of socialism to Jewish immigrants.<sup>161</sup> Much to his comrades’ surprise, this speech was incredibly popular and drew Jewish immigrants from all over to come see him speak. Cahan hoped that by giving his speeches in Yiddish he could convince new Jewish immigrants to join the socialist cause. Cahan viewed the Lower East Side as a revolutionary juggernaut that had yet to be awakened.

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<sup>160</sup> Sanders. 64.

<sup>161</sup> Howe. 103.

According to Howe “Cahan saw that the greatest strength of the budding socialist movement on the East Side would be its intimate association with workers in shops, even though – indeed, because – this might force the radicals to modulate some of their theories and relax some of their postures.”<sup>162</sup> Cahan often brought up the metaphor of the new “Greenhorn” and the assimilated “Yellow” immigrant. The Yellow immigrant claims that the United States is a republic and is such free for all but the Greenhorn counters this: “Does that mean that Mr. Jones is an emperor over the machine shop which you showed me?”<sup>163</sup> While workers are on paper free, they are enslaved by the capitalist machine which treats them like any monarchy would.

One of the major issues that Cahan brought up was the question of, “can Jews maintain a vibrant ethnic community in the United States while participating fully in the larger society?”<sup>164</sup> This applied not only to Jews but to the hordes of immigrants the populated the poorest districts and slums of New York City for whom assimilation (according to Cahan) often meant loss of class cohesiveness as they assimilated into the American capitalist culture. Cahan argued that assimilation into the American capitalist system could make Jewish immigrants who once suffered in Europe, complacent in the bourgeois capitalist system of the United States. For centuries Jews had been forced to be insular due to virulent antisemitism and now in an open democracy like the United States could they prevent capitalist assimilation? This is not to say that Cahan wanted the Jews to remain insular; instead one might ascertain that he feared the Eastern European Jews Americanizing and embracing American capitalism like their Western European Jewish counterparts.<sup>165</sup> While Cahan was extremely harsh on the United States he very overtly favored the United States over Russia. Cahan commented on American democracy

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<sup>162</sup> Howe. 115.

<sup>163</sup> Michels. 81.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>165</sup> Frankel. 454-455.

giving him lee way he had never seen before in Russia: “The anarchists and even the socialists argued that there was no more freedom in America than in Russia. But that was just talk, I concluded. There was no czar, no gendarmes, no political spies. One could say and write whatever one wanted.”<sup>166</sup> This economic conflict between Eastern and Western European Jews further supports Cahan’s fears:

The conflicts between German and east European Jews have been traced to a variety of cultural causes, but one brute fact should be kept in mind: the relations between German and east European Jews in the garment industry during the eighties and nineties were often those of class enemies.<sup>167</sup>

As many German Jews had settled in the US in decades prior to the new Eastern European Jews, they were better established (both economically and socially) and as such Howe claims that a majority of the garment factories (where a majority of the Jewish immigrants worked) were owned by German Jews whereas their workers were Eastern European Jews. Cahan could have viewed German Jews as fully assimilated and bourgeois capitalist and to avoid going this same route he denounced assimilation into the American capitalist system. However, while critical of capitalist assimilation, his end goal was for Eastern European Jews to assimilate into the greater American working class and proletariat.

While Cahan was still relatively new to the US, he rapidly mastered English and in 1883 was hired as an English teacher at the Young Men’s Hebrew Association night school. This left him available to spend his days writing and reading.<sup>168</sup> Despite his love for this new world he still longed for his Yiddish homeland. Although he was surrounded by Yiddish speaking immigrants, Cahan complained about how their American dialect *grated on his ears* and he felt

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<sup>166</sup> Lipsky. 39.

<sup>167</sup> Howe. 82.

<sup>168</sup> Lipsky. 39.

lost in the United States. While he had learned English he still felt culturally isolated in the vast cultural melting pot of America. Cahan describes how despite the massive Jewish community in New York he still felt isolated by the American system and culture.<sup>169</sup> In the United States, Russian Jews, Polish Jews, and German Jews all became just Jews and eventually, those Jews would become just Americans.<sup>170</sup>

In the years to follow, Cahan became more entranced by his new home and the benefits of American liberal democracy in contrast to the autocratic monarchism of Russia. His journalistic life started with the 1884 presidential elections in which he wrote scathing criticisms (in English) of both the Democratic and Republican Party (these criticisms still hold weight to this day). He would go on to write an English article about Jewish life in the Lower East Side for *The New York Sun*, for which he was greatly praised.

In 1886, Cahan shifted from English journalism to Yiddish journalism when he helped start *Di Naye Tsayt*, a Yiddish socialist newspaper. However, this paper would quickly crash and burn and was shut down only six months later.<sup>171</sup> Tragedy would continue to follow as later that year, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, around 1,200 people would protest police violence against striking workers in Chicago's Haymarket Square. This would become known in later years as the Haymarket Affair and give birth to May Day. It was relatively peaceful until the final remarks when an unidentified assailant threw a home-made bomb at a policeman, causing the crowd to erupt in chaos. Multiple police officers and workers were killed and many more were injured and wounded. The press blamed the anarchists and in turn, the leadership of the German anarchist paper *Arbeiter-Zeitung*

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<sup>169</sup> Sanders. 242.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 243.

<sup>171</sup> Lipsky. 45.

was imprisoned and four of them were executed.<sup>172</sup> Cahan viewed this as a great injustice towards the working class. Following this tragedy, Cahan was hired by the *New York Commercial Advertiser* in 1887 as a reporter. This is where Cahan finally comes into his own as a journalist as his success skyrockets from interviews with celebrities like Buffalo Bill to political theorists like the famed anarchist, Peter Kropotkin. Cahan stood in contrast to his co-workers in that he was an immigrant and had a real insight into the underbelly of New York and the immigrant community. Sanders describes this period of Cahan's life as a "literary midwife" in that Cahan rapidly gained followers and cultivated younger writers encouraging and pushing them.<sup>173</sup> One could potentially cite this as the philosophical seed for Cahan to transition from just a writer to an editor.

The *New York Commercial Advertiser* was not to last and Cahan quit in 1890. Later that year he joined the new Yiddish newspaper named after their fallen comrades, *Di Arbeter Tsaytung*. During this time Cahan began his "Proletarian Preacher" column which aimed to use traditional Jewish values and stories to teach Socialist concepts.<sup>174</sup> I find this interesting as it leads back to Zhitlovsky who early on in his career attempted to do something similar in trying to teach socialism through Jewish tradition and stories. Cahan recognized that while Marx cited religion as the opiate of the masses, for many new immigrants (not just Jews) religion was their only solace, hope, and pleasure during their time in the tenements and factories.

Howe states that Cahan was unconvinced that secular socialism was always the best route and that "religious emotions slide into secular passions and how necessary it was for anyone trying to organize immigrant Jewish workers not only to avoid antagonizing but positively to

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<sup>172</sup> Michels. 50.

<sup>173</sup> Sanders. 218.

<sup>174</sup> Lipsky. 47.

draw upon their religious loyalties.”<sup>175</sup> Cahan uses biblical verses to support socialist teachings, denouncing greed and supporting generosity and charity. This mixture of socialism, Jewish tradition and a good sense of humor allowed Cahan to quickly rise through the ranks of *Di Arbeter Tsaytung* eventually becoming the editor in chief only a year later.

In 1891, Cahan was pushed into the spotlight as he was assigned as the delegate for the United Hebrew Trades (an alliance of Jewish labor unions) to the second Congress of the Socialist International in Belgium. He was specifically chosen for his early work in organizing Yiddish speaking Jewish socialists.<sup>176</sup> On his way to Belgium, he stopped over in London where he was asked to give a lecture to a group of anarchists. During this lecture, Cahan gave a scathing criticism of anarchism. This critique was potentially fueled by Cahan’s feelings towards the Haymarket Affair, as the violence was (as claimed by the media) incited by anarchists even though Cahan stated he supported the workers at Haymarket. Cahan creates the metaphor of a poisoned stream running through a village. Sixty percent of the villagers wants to dam the stream while forty percent wants to build a bridge over the dam. In a socialist system the majority would win out whereas Cahan claims that in an anarchist system, which values personal freedom over all, the inhabitants would both dam the stream and build a bridge over it as such exerting twice as much labor as was initially needed. Cahan stated that anarchism was highly inefficient in maintaining a working society as one often must sacrifice some personal freedom for the safety, security, and benefit to all.

During his stay in London, Cahan encountered Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx. Their short meeting reveals a highly critical element to the Marx family. Many

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<sup>175</sup> Howe. 112.

<sup>176</sup> Sanders. 148.

Jewish socialists such as Zhitlovsky have commented on Karl Marx's antisemitism, having been baptized as Lutheran and "whose 1844 essay, 'Zur Judenfrage' (On the Jewish Question) advocated the 'emancipation of society from Judaism.'"<sup>177</sup> Eleanor stood in stark contrast to Karl as she had stated during the Socialist International's first Congress that: "We Jews have a special obligation to devote ourselves to the working class."<sup>178</sup> I find it intriguing how different she is from her father and how she relates to Cahan in regards to Jewish unity with the working class.

During the days that led up to the Congress, Cahan stated that he wanted to discuss the Jewish Question during the Congress and debate its value to the socialist community and greater working class. Cahan received harsh pushback from socialists who cited it as 'unimportant and irrelevant to the Congress'.<sup>179</sup> Many socialists claimed that the Jewish Question was irrelevant to the topic as it only served to form divisions within the working class. For socialists, antisemitism (among many other negative factors) was exacerbated by capitalism and as such could be solved by implementing socialism. Cahan countered this by citing the rise of a new form of antisemitism across Europe. Whereas much of antisemitism in years prior had been religious antisemitism, this new antisemitism was politically and racially motivated at the time of the conference.<sup>180</sup> This idea ties back to the Jewish Labor Bund which advocated for a degree of separatism regarding Jewish socialist movements in contrast to their larger gentile counterparts. The Bund argued that not all antisemitism was stemmed from capitalism as such a Jewish socialist movement must work to liberate Jews not only from capitalism but antisemitism as well. Whereas many gentiles view antisemitism as a side-issue that would be eliminated upon the

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<sup>177</sup> Lipsky. 51.

<sup>178</sup> Sanders. 152.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 150.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 149.



introduction of socialism, Cahan argued that this was not only naïve but dangerous as it endangered Jews by ignoring their specific struggles.

Lipsky relates Cahan's frustration to a quote from Theodor Herzl in which Herzl commented on this new antisemitism: "the irony of the emancipation of Europe's Jews was the liberal enterprise had spawned an illiberal backlash."<sup>181</sup> Essentially, while the liberal democratic ideas that had spawned from the French Revolution had reformed parts of the capitalist system that was detrimental to Jews. Emancipation had failed to fix the root problems of antisemitism and as such caused a political backlash towards the newly freed Jews.<sup>182</sup> I find it curious that even ardent socialists believed that antisemitism would simply crumble into dust once socialism had become implemented. Socialists argued that the bourgeois systems of reform could never truly emancipated the Jews. Why would granting Jews citizenship immediately erase the past thousand years of European antisemitism and the mindsets that followed in their footsteps? However, Sanders claims that the socialists did not all have positive intentions as many had internalized antisemitism as Cahan is quick to recognize,

Until that moment, he had not realized how deeply ingrained anti-Semitic sentiments were among some West European socialists. This was particularly the case with the French delegates, who had difficulty dissociating the word "Jew" from the word "Rothschild," and who were in no way prepared to assume what they thought would seem to their colleagues back home to be a "philo-Semitic" stance.<sup>183</sup>

The Rothschild myth is a common antisemitic theory that a network of Jewish families controls a majority of the world's wealth. Sadly, this myth has been embraced by both the right and left wing as right-wing politicians claim Jews are greedy and hoarding money whereas left-

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<sup>181</sup> Lipsky. 53.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Sanders. 151.

wing politicians claim Jews are capitalists undermining the working class. I find it ironic that it was Western European socialists who were espousing this antisemitic rhetoric as Western European Jews were more likely to assimilate than their Eastern counterparts as such they are not very different from the Maskilim. Western educated, assimilated, middle to upper class Jews who looked down on the unassimilated and “backwards” Shtetl-Jew.

In the months that followed the Congress Cahan was caught in the center of a socialist spat between the two socialists, Daniel De Leon, an ardent socialist who believed reform would weaken the working class, and Morris Hillquit and Eugene V. Debs who supported socialist reform to alleviate the plight of the working class. De Leon went on to lead the Socialist Labor Party of America and forge the ideology of De Leonism which mixed Syndicalism and Marxism.<sup>184</sup> Cahan sided with Hillquit and Debs as he moved towards Democratic Socialism though was still sympathetic to Marx. Lipsky comments on how this conflict “foreshadows later feuds – between, for example, the New Left and American liberals in the 1960s, and between liberals and neo-conservatives in the 1980s.”<sup>185</sup> Hillquit later joined Cahan at *Di Arbeter Tsaytung* while Debs would later found the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905.

*Di Arbeter Tsaytung* received harsh competition from other socialist newspapers such as *Dos Abend Blat*, *Tageblatt*, and *Yishe Gazetn*. However, in 1897 cracks started to form in *Di Arbeter Tsaytung* as ideologies began to bubble up leading to a journalistic civil war between the so-called Loyalists led by Philip Krants and the so-called Opposition led by Cahan. These ideologies would come to a head on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1897 when fifty-two members of *Di Arbeter Tsaytung* split off and formed the Forverts Association. The Loyalists were dogmatic democratic

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<sup>184</sup> Howe. 523.

<sup>185</sup> Lipsky. 50.

socialists whereas the Opposition was a more moderate alternative. The Forverts Association in turn on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1897 established what many would consider Cahan's capstone achievement, the Yiddish newspaper known as *Di Forverts* (The Forward).<sup>186</sup> Inspired by his early socialist speeches, Cahan took the Forward in a unique direction by implementing "spoken newspapers" which allowed them to spread information to those who could not read, too poor to afford a paper or simply did not have the time to sit down and read the paper themselves. Spoken newspapers are literally just the editors and writers of said newspaper reading the articles aloud in a public space. These spoken newspapers quickly rocketed the Forward into popularity as it included editorials, lessons in Marxist theory, news, poetry and even sections of Cahan's Proletarian Preacher where he connected the weekly Torah portion to socialist theory.

Importantly, 1897 proved to be a critical date for Jews in the Old Country and New Country, while the Forward had just been founded, the Jewish Labor Bund was founded just a few months afterwards. Bundists claimed that, "Yiddishism was simply the culture of one wing of the worldwide proletariat."<sup>187</sup> The simultaneous emergence of the Forward and Bund established a "Transatlantic Socialist Trade" as ideas flowed from Cahan and his writers to the Bund and visa-versa. Likewise, both organizations recognized the necessity for an independent Jewish socialist organization that worked to subdue not only capitalism but antisemitism. As a consequence, Cahan supported the Bund's decision to break with the Bolsheviks and side with the Mensheviks.<sup>188</sup> The Forward regularly supported the Bund and reported on its activities.

Sanders claims that:

The formation of a Yiddish-speaking labor movement in New York had been a major source of inspiration for the founding of the Bund in the first place. The

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<sup>186</sup> Michels. 104.

<sup>187</sup> Sanders. 331.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 332.

Forward's own moderate social-democratic stance had also undoubtedly been of influence in the evolution of a similar attitude among the Bundists.<sup>189</sup>

This interrelation between the Bund and Cahan eventually led to the Forward assuming role as the Bund's representative in the United States.<sup>190</sup> Whenever a Bundist visited the United States, Cahan was one of the first people to greet them. Sanders claims that Cahan quickly found himself the middle-man between the "heroes of the homeland and the coffers of America".<sup>191</sup> Cahan as both an ideological and geographical middleman, was suited to communicate between the radicalized and Americanized alike.

Despite its fantastic hype, following the Forward initial release, Cahan suddenly decided to go on hiatus to spend time working on his fiction writing and short stories. While he was relatively unsuccessful during this period, his fictional writing inspired him for his later years as a writer. I would relate Cahan's ardent support for Yiddish literature back to this hiatus. The Forward struggled economically for its first couple years until 1902 when Cahan was requested by the prior advertising managers, William Lief and Albert Feller, to help rework the Forward. Cahan, returning from his short hiatus as the new editor of the Forward decided to redirect the Forward from simply a socialist paper to more so of a general interest newspaper. Cahan recognized the failings of the Forward as cut-and-dry socialist newspapers were going out of style and a new direction was needed to keep readership up.<sup>192</sup> This new direction, while still socialist, allowed for more diversity in its opinions and beliefs as well as incorporating yellow journalism into its contents. Yellow journalism was a newly formed type of journalism that could be equated to the 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of "Click Bait" as it relied on sensationalism and flashy

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<sup>189</sup> Sanders. 333.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 250.

headlines. However, Cahan being the man that he was, the Forward still retained a notable political streak and leftist spin. The Forward rapidly turned around and quickly became one of the most popular Yiddish newspapers in New York.<sup>193</sup>

One of Cahan's first decisions as editor was to start having all articles written in "pure, plain Yiddishe, Yiddish"<sup>194</sup> to make them even more available to all Yiddish speaking people in contrast to the complex language often used in many socialist newspapers. Sanders comments on Cahan's decisions, "that socialist theoretical discussions, for all their talk *about* the worker, meant very little *to* the average worker..."<sup>195</sup> One might consider the failure of many dogmatic socialist newspapers was their inability to really connect to the working class. Cahan transformed the Forward from a paper about the working class to a paper for the working class. While previously he had advocated for secular socialist movements he now recognized the need for an openness towards religion as much of the working class were themselves religious. This departure from the dogmatic socialist Yiddish newspapers is potentially what allowed the Forward to become so popular so quickly as used accessible language and appealed to the average worker. Simply put, after a hard day of work many workers just did not want to read something as dense as Marx, Lenin or Engels. They wanted something simpler that understood where they were coming from.

In 1904 following the brutal Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, Yiddishist Chaim Zhitlovsky toured the United States giving speeches and meeting with other Jewish socialists. During his travels, he encountered Abraham Cahan which sparked an intellectual rivalry for years to

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<sup>193</sup> Michels. 107.

<sup>194</sup> Sanders. 256.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 257.

come.<sup>196</sup> Zhitlovsky argued that Jewish immigrants should retain their Yiddish language and culture and actively combat assimilation into American culture whereas Cahan (who shared Zhitlovsky's love for Yiddish literature) saw Yiddish as but a stepping stone for inevitable assimilation into the general working class. Both men were writers and while Cahan was more an avid journalist, Zhitlovsky continued to write *Dos Naye Lebn*, a journal that mixed socialist and nationalist Jewish writing.

While Cahan's material was known for its easily accessible language, Cahan criticized Zhitlovsky for the "intellectual aristocracy" in his writing.<sup>197</sup> Despite this, Cahan recognized Zhitlovsky's masterful use of Yiddish albeit a form of Yiddish that was unavailable by the uneducated. Cahan instead argued that Zhitlovsky should write with a simpler form of Yiddish to be accessible to the masses. Yiddish was very important to Cahan as his mother-tongue and despite his qualms against Yiddish nationalism he recognized its cultural value and usage as a tool of socialist agitation. Zhitlovsky was notable for his ardent Yiddishism and nationalist tendencies which Cahan was quick to write off as bourgeois drivel. Cahan claimed that Jews did not need a nation of their own and Yiddish while a meaningful part of their past, should remain in the past in exchange for Russian, German or English.<sup>198</sup> Despite all of this, Cahan did commend Zhitlovsky on his translations of educational texts into Yiddish if only to educate the populace until they learned English. Zhitlovsky agreed on the idea of publishing more information in Yiddish but stated that it should be printed in Yiddish for the sake of being in Yiddish not to function as a stepping stone to English.

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<sup>196</sup> Michels. 146.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 145.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

This rivalry would come to a head in 1905 when Zhitlovsky according to Michels *decimated* Cahan in a debate about Marxism leaving him feeling embarrassed and bitter.<sup>199</sup> Yiddish was a completely different tool for the two men. For Cahan intellectuals should function like Maskilim by bringing knowledge and education to the uneducated masses via Yiddish. The end goal for Cahan was assimilation into the general working class. Zhitlovsky agreed with this but had a very different end goal. Rather than assimilation, Yiddish would become the unifying factor for the masses to develop a new Yiddish culture.

Despite Cahan coming off as the ardent socialist in contrast to Zhitlovsky's nationalism, Cahan slowly became more moderate as the years went on. Sanders describes Cahan's growing tendencies towards yellow journalism as somewhat nationalistic in contrast to the straight forward socialist journalism seen previously: "For Cahan is also making a frank appeal here to Jewish nationalist or chauvinist sentiments, another traditionally forbidden course in Yiddish socialist journalism."<sup>200</sup> This turn towards populism might be interpreted as a betrayal of Cahan's ardent socialist roots though this concession allowed the Forward to skyrocket once again into popularity. The Forward was the anchor every immigrant needed in this new country. It could answer all their questions, tell them about the happenings of America while also explaining taxes and how to vote. Cahan walked a very difficult line between socialism and populism. He had stated that he wanted his paper to be, "an organ of 'socialism' and not of 'socialists' and this meant it should not confine itself to a narrow circle of true believers but should reach out to the masses and be a genuine 'folk paper' reflecting broadly human concerns."<sup>201</sup> This idea of a divide between the socialist intelligentsia and the working class began to dominate Cahan's

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<sup>199</sup> Michels. 146.

<sup>200</sup> Sanders. 259.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. 264.

philosophy. He wrote for the working class not the *intellectual snobs* like Zhitlovsky. In one of the editorials for the Forward, Cahan commented on this new divide between intelligentsia and proletariat:

When Karl Marx gave us to understand, that real socialism is the struggle of the working class and the emancipation of the worker through his own power, he did not mean to construe the working class as some fanatical, selfish little Hasidic circle... How was the ordinary, unlearned, sometimes barely literate worker to become a socialist in the first place, if a group of socialist intellectuals simply talked to each other in an abstruse language that that worker was unable to understand?<sup>202</sup>

Cahan had ironically come full circle and was more so like his rival, Zhitlovsky than he was to his fellow socialists. Unbeknownst to Cahan, Zhitlovsky's journal *Dos Naye Lebn* proved to be wildly successful with all classes of people including the working class who felt a sense of community due to this intellectual material cheaply available in their own language. Both men accomplished their goals of attracting the working class, educating the working class (to an extent) and yet neither accomplished their end goal. As we can see today, American Jews did not manage to start a socialist revolution in the United States like Cahan desired. Likewise Hebrew has superseded Yiddish as the national Jewish language showing Zhitlovsky's failure. Though it would not be too kind to either's memory to call their works a failure; Cahan and Zhitlovsky have both left lasting impacts on the international Jewish sphere alongside a memory of socialist unity.

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<sup>202</sup> Sanders. 265.



## Conclusion

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Yiddish is often relegated to the isolated Hassidic communities, loan words with forgotten origin and the musty books of old and yet still manages to thrive with a lasting cultural impact. For many Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddish is their homeland more so than Russia, Poland or Germany ever were. It exists as an ephemeral territory. It seemingly phases in and out of existence whenever people speak Yiddish or participate in Jewish culture. In the decades following the famous 1908 Czernowitz Conference, this idea would culminate into the creation of the concept of Yiddishland. The idea of Yiddishland was in essence, “the creation of a worldwide ‘spiritual national territory’ – Yiddishland – in which a Jewish national culture in Yiddish could take root.”<sup>203</sup> The concept of Yiddishland was initially conceived by Zhitlovsky in his 1913 essay, “A Yidisher Medine” (Yiddish for “In a Jewish/Yiddish State”). In this essay Zhitlovsky reminisces on his childhood in the shtetls of Russia and he never once felt like he lived in the exile of diaspora. Instead the diaspora was his home.<sup>204</sup> The idea of Yiddishland as we know it was first developed during the 1937 International Yiddish Cultural Congress in Paris which was organized by Zhitlovsky.<sup>205</sup> During the Congress Zhitlovsky referred to Yiddishland as a “spiritual, national Jewish home”<sup>206</sup> This tied into the Yiddishist goal of the, “creation of a more or less secular, Yiddish-speaking, progressive, modern East European Jewish nation.”<sup>207</sup> Yiddishland would serve as an alternative

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<sup>203</sup> Matthew Hoffman. “From Czernowitz to Paris: The International Yiddish Culture Congress of 1937” 161. In Weiser, Kalman, and Fogel, Joshua A. *Czernowitz at 100: The First Yiddish Language Conference in Historical Perspective*.

<sup>204</sup> Zhitlovsky. “Yidishe Velt”. 1913. In Jeffrey Shandler. *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language & Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. 36.

<sup>205</sup> Shandler. 159.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>207</sup> Mendelsohn. “The Czernowitz Conference: Context, Ironies, and the Verdict of Jewish History” 11. In Kalman and Fogel.

to assimilationists and Zionists alike. It allowed the preservation of a Yiddish culture without physically isolating the Jewish population. Despite the Bund's rejection of the idea of Yiddishland due to being opposed to the idea of a concrete territory, they supported the idea of *doikeyt* (Yiddish for "here-ness) which falls into a similar vein as Yiddishland.<sup>208</sup> *Doikeyt* is like the saying, "home is where the heart is". Essentially followers of *doikeyt* believed they should not have to move to some far-off country to be emancipated and culturally free, as such they accepted their own diasporic culture. Jeffrey Shandler asserts that in this case "doikeyt implies Yiddishland."<sup>209</sup>

Shandler has thoroughly dissected and revived the idea of Yiddishland for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in his 2005 book, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language & Culture*, in which Shandler delves into the concept of Yiddishland. The idea of Yiddishland is one difficult to grapple with. While one might be led to believe that Yiddishland is a physical place such as the Jewish community of Galicia or Bukovina, according to Shandler, Yiddishland transcends all national borders<sup>210</sup>. What is a nation without a territory to call its own? Yiddishland is the idea of creating all the cultural elements of a nation-state (literature, entertainment, education, politics, philosophy, etc.) in the Yiddish language and using the Yiddish language as a transnational force to unite the Jewish Diaspora without physically tying Jews to a specific territory or state.

Shandler describes Yiddishland as this ephemeral entity that one could consider to be a Schrodinger's Cat of Nations (so to speak),

...Yiddishland as phantasmic (suggesting that it may or not be a 'mythic country'), transcendent ('the intellectual luggage Jews took with them all over the

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<sup>208</sup> Hoffman. 160.

<sup>209</sup> Shandler. 36.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 40.

world'), appealing unofficial ('a territory without borders, army or flag'), and evanescent (always 'fragile and vulnerable')<sup>211</sup>

Yiddishland is a metaphorical Jewish homeland. It is a country that never really existed and a land that never really had set borders (Shandler himself comments on the wide spread of Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe and that a political Yiddishland would have to encompass Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia).<sup>212</sup> Yiddishland is as a country that one can essentially take with them where ever they go.<sup>213</sup> The sovereign citizens of Yiddishland are themselves exclaves of Yiddishland, in that whenever they speak Yiddish or participate in Jewish culture they are metaphorically projecting a bubble around themselves. That bubble is Yiddishland. Yiddishland would serve as an alternative to assimilationists and Zionists alike. Despite Abraham Cahan's silence on the idea of Yiddishland one could assert that his magnum opus, the Jewish Daily Forward, was a gateway to Yiddishland. The Jewish Daily Forward provided a window to the world of Yiddish and the Jewish immigrant, a look into the specific communal issues of Jews and a lingering symbol of Yiddish culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ironically, in later years the Soviets would attempt to give a physical territory for Yiddishland in the form of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast (also known by its capital city, Birobidzhan) as a communist alternative to the Zionist Israel.<sup>214</sup> The name is somewhat ironic given that Jews only make up a fraction of the population and Yiddish is greatly outweighed by Russian. Though one could link the Birobidzhan's failure to its remote location, harsh weather and even harsher government, I would assert that attempting to create a physical Yiddishland

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<sup>211</sup> Shandler. 47.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 37.

would always end in failure due to the inherent ephemeral nature of Yiddishland and Yiddish culture.

I would assert Yiddishland as the culmination of the ideology of the Jewish-Socialist movement. For Jews who lacked a territory, nationalism was required to build the sediment for a proper socialist movement. Socialism cannot be built on an empty plot and requires fertilization from pre-existing national systems. Jews, suffered not only from capitalism but from political and cultural oppression in the form of systemic antisemitism. Even for Jews who were fully assimilated and advocated for assimilation found themselves often at odds with gentiles. Despite their claims to be a Russian, German or Pole, at the end of the day many gentiles still viewed them for what they are, a Jew.

In a world where Zionism has succeeded and founded a Jewish state in Palestine, one might view Jewish Socialism and Diaspora Nationalism as a failure. However, like the Jew who has survived centuries of pogroms and oppression they continue to survive, badly beaten, but very much alive. Yiddish culture has flourished in the United States where American Jews have managed to craft a truly unique culture and have survived despite Americanizing. Yiddish loanwords have proliferated into American English and Jewish American culture has become an integral part of the greater culture of the United States. The culture of socialism within the Jewish community has not entirely disappeared either as seen with American Jews voting predominantly for left-wing parties.<sup>215</sup> The flourishing of a secular Jewish culture has proved once and for all that Jews do in fact constitute their own nation (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century political

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<sup>215</sup> Jewish Virtual Library. U.S. Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record.  
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-voting-record-in-u-s-presidential-elections>

sense). While writers such as Chaim Zhitlovsky, Abraham Cahan and the original Bund are long deceased, their writing and theories continue to shape Jewish national identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite the decline of the international Yiddish movement, it still continues to thrive and the writing of its forefathers continues to shape the movement.

The General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia lasted until 1920 when it split between authoritarian communist Bolshevik supporters and libertarian socialist Menshevik supporters as the Communist Bund and the Social Democratic Bund. While the Communist Bund was eventually subsumed by the larger Russian communist movement, the Social Democratic Bund united with the General Jewish Labor Bund in Poland (considered the general successor to the original Bund).<sup>216</sup> The General Jewish Labor Bund in Poland lasted until 1948. Its numbers had been greatly reduced by the Holocaust (many Bundists served as Jewish partisans and freedom fighters) and the creation of the State of Israel lured away many of the surviving Jewish proletariat. The General Jewish Labor Bund in Poland was replaced by the International Jewish Labor Bund, created by Bundist refugees and exiles in America. The International Jewish Labor Bund is considered the current iteration and successor of the original Bund. Despite these trials and tribulations, the International Jewish Labor Bund characterizes itself as an opponent of the Zionist Israel and as a patron and champion of Jews in the Diaspora. The Bund has often been characterized as one of the strongest and most united Jewish political parties before the rise of Israel and symbolizes a potentially bygone era of Jewish socialism fused with Yiddish nationalism. They walked a narrow line as a self-proclaimed socialist group

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<sup>216</sup> Frankel. 184.

that supported its independence as the representative of the Jewish proletariat. For the Bund, the end goal has always been socialism and yet they have been unable to let go of aspects of Jewish nationalism which allows them suit the specific needs of the Jewish community.

While Chaim Zhitlovsky spent less time in America than both Cahan and the Bund his philosophical contributions to the Jewish cultural sphere remain present in his ideas of Yiddishism and the Yiddish national identity. His works inspired organizations like Der Arbeter Ring (which in recent years has become more in line with Zhitlovsky's philosophy) as well aided institutions like YIVO (Yiddish: Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut, Yiddish Scientific Institute) which pushed the standardization of Yiddish, documentation of Yiddish history and proliferation of Yiddish culture. In 1925, Zhitlovsky was declared an honorary member of the YIVO board. His idea of the secular Jewish identity linked with Yiddish has indirectly sparked a resurgence of popularity of Yiddish culture as Jews go back to their roots in the decades following his death in 1943. Zhitlovsky is potentially the most conservative (relatively) in comparison to Cahan and the Bund. He was by far the most nationalist of the three who sought the creation of Yiddish nation and a Yiddish cultural sphere. Zhitlovsky has been criticized as too nationalist and bourgeois by everyone to the left of him politically and yet represents a critical aspect of Jewish socialism. Many Jews tried to leave their Yiddish identity behind and assimilate into their host nation's population but in many cases, despite how assimilated they were, they were still targeted for being a Jew. Zhitlovsky recognized this and asserted one should not have to leave behind their mother-tongue and culture to be considered a legitimate nation. Zhitlovsky went beyond the fears of antisemitism to assert Yiddish as an independent nation unto itself that deserved independent.

Abraham Cahan probably had the largest impact (or at least is the most well-known) due to his populist (bordering on sensationalist) tactics in attracting readers for the Forward. The

Jewish Daily Forward continues to this day shifting from page to screen allowing it to release articles with a greater reach than ever before. They still publish a physical monthly magazine continuing their long heritage of Yiddish and print. While the Forward has shifted from publishing about Jewish immigrants to reporting on Jewish news and politics they retain their leftwing mentality and political tilt. It remains a popular news source for Jews, though has become increasingly more conservative in past years. Cahan is a political curiosity. Due to his role as the editor (rather than writer), one must glean his fiction and sporadic writings for his own political leanings. Ironically, despite his claims of eventual Americanization and assimilation for Jewish immigrants, he continued to publish in Yiddish and has contributed more to the general Yiddish culture of the United States than the Bund or Zhitlovsky. Cahan is a perfect case of saying something then doing something completely different. Despite never vocally supporting a Yiddish culture, he became a patron of Yiddish culture and literature. For many Jews, he served as their link back to the Old World. This somewhat highlights the irony of American Jewish history, simultaneous assimilation and nationalism.

Yiddish and Judaism go hand in hand mostly because they both have always received the short end of the stick. Despite Yiddish's prevalence among Jewish communities it was viewed negatively as a jargon rather than a true language. Likewise, were Jews isolated from the gentile neighbors. Despite all of this, Yiddish along with socialism has come to symbolize the underdog spirit of Jews. It was the fire that would not go out. Jews had no territory to call their own for most of their recorded history and yet the languages they developed in the diaspora, be that Yiddish, Ladino or Judeo-Tat/Juhuri, carry the stories, lives and experiences of the Jewish people where ever they stand. Jews built their own kingdoms and countries from the metaphorical ether

carried in the words, lands to call their own. A nation in a jar so to speak. Jewish words helped cement Jewish national identity which in turn built the foundation for Jewish politics and from this foundation grew the fruits of Jewish socialism



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