

HENRYK ERLICH AND VICTOR ALTER

Two Heroes and Martyrs for
Jewish Socialism



Translated from the Yiddish
with Notes by


Samuel A. Portnoy

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Henryk Erlich (1882–1941) and Victor Alter (1890–1941) were leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland until they were incarcerated in the Soviet Union. A world-wide campaign was mounted to secure their release, attracting prominent figures in the United States and elsewhere. The efforts were ineffective and Erlich and Alter died in a Moscow jail at the orders of Stalin. Their brutal execution was met by another global campaign of protest.

This book, translated and revised from the Yiddish edition which was first published in 1951, is a memorial and a tribute from those who knew the two martyrs. It contains a number of personal first-hand accounts by people who lived and worked with them; extracts from the protests at their arrest and murder, samples of their own writings and some of the statements and letters written when a monument was finally erected to their memory in the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.



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HENRYK ERLICH AND
VICTOR ALTER:

*Two Heroes and Martyrs for Jewish
Socialism*

Translated from the Polish by

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter

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Contents

A Book in Memoriam	vii
The Life of Henryk Erlich	1
<i>Emanuel Nowogrudsky</i>	
The Life of Victor Alter	43
<i>Alexander Erlich</i>	
The First Arrest of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich Under the Soviet Occupation	71
On the Road with Comrade Erlich	82
<i>Joseph Rothenberg</i>	
Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in Soviet Russia	89
<i>Lucjan Blit</i>	
With Comrade Erlich in Soviet Prisons	110
<i>Abraham Finesilver</i>	
With Comrade Victor Alter in a Soviet Prison	136
<i>Dr. Jerzy Gliksman</i>	
Two Men	156
<i>Ksawery Pruszyński</i>	
With Victor Alter in a Soviet Prison: His Testament	161
<i>W. Gabicki</i>	
The Campaign to Free Erlich and Alter	164
Criminals in Judges' Robes	171
<i>Ludwig Honigwil</i>	
Between One Death Sentence and Another: Final Greetings, Letters, and Documents	178
The International Campaign of Protest Against the Murders	194
Voices of Protest from the World Press	209

FROM THE PEN OF HENRYK ERLICH

Terror in the Soviet Union	231
Manifesto of the General Jewish Workers' Union (Bund) in Poland	235
On the Eve of War, 1939—The Stalin-Hitler Pact	247

Is Zionism a Liberating Democratic Movement? (A Reply to Professor Simon Dubnow)	253
The Essence of Bundism	265

PERSONALITIES

Lenin	273
Vladimir Medem	285

FROM THE PEN OF VICTOR ALTER

The Moscow Executions: The Tragedy of the Revolution	295
Ten Years in the Soviet Union: Anton Ciliga's <i>In the Land of the Big Lie</i>	305
The Source of Our Belief	312
The Bundist Mentality	316
Spain in Flames	319

APPENDIX

Addresses at the Mecca Temple Protest Meeting	327
Selection from Messages Received by the World-Coordinating Committee of the Jewish Labor Bund	345
The Erlich-Alter Monument in Warsaw	362
A Belated Tribute by Victor Erlich	362
They Were Our Brothers	365
Speech Delivered by Dr. Marek Edelman	367
Letter from Willy Brandt	370
Statement by Albert Shanker	371
Selected Bibliography	374
Index	379

A Book in Memoriam

THIS BOOK—a revised English version of a miscellany published in Yiddish in 1951—is both a memorial and a record. It is a memorial to two remarkable men who jointly presided over one of this century's most vital socialist movements, and who perished at the darkest moment of modern history. It is a record of their accomplishments, their struggles, their ideas, and their tragic deaths. Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were immensely popular leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund, widely respected figures in interwar Poland's vibrant and diversified Jewish community, and influential spokesmen for their distinctive brand of socialism—at once militant and unswervingly democratic—within the international labor movement. For two decades they stood in the forefront of the struggle for the political and cultural rights of the Jewish laboring masses in Poland, defying the rising tide of fascism and anti-Semitism. In 1939, as a result of the fourth partition of Poland, they were delivered into the hands of a brutal and vindictive regime. While Polish Jews were being slaughtered by Hitler's machine in mass annihilation, Erlich and Alter were murdered at the behest of Joseph Stalin, who knew that they would never acquiesce in the Soviet domination of Poland.

For us, their erstwhile comrades-in-arms and associates, paying a tribute to their memory and salvaging some of their precious heritage is both a moral obligation and a compelling personal need. Yet in offering this volume to the English-speaking reader, we are guided by the firm conviction that its contents have profound significance and demonstrable relevance to present-day concerns and dilemmas. The biographies of the two leaders and the reminiscences of those destined to share some of their ordeals tell a story

of uncommon courage and dedication, of uncompromising struggle with evil. By the same token, their intellectual legacy, as illustrated by the selections from their writings—a blend of socialist internationalism with a staunch commitment to Jewish secular culture—amply warrants a respectful hearing at a time when the forces of chauvinism and bigotry are on the rise.

World-Coordinating Committee of the
Jewish Labor Band

The Life of Henryk Erlich

Emanuel Nowogrudsky

IN THE OLD CITY of Lublin with its former royal castle which had been used as a political prison by the Orthodox Russian tsar; Lublin with its old Jewish cemetery serving as a centuries-old resting place of eminent rabbis and Hasidic *Zaddikim* ("saints") renowned throughout Poland, Lithuania, and Russia; Lublin, within which there still stood the ancient gates—the *brumen* (the Yiddishized form of the Polish word *bramy*)—and through which the Jews are allowed to pass in order to stay overnight in the ghetto while permitted to return to the city in the morning. In that city with a specific and distinctive atmosphere of two cultures, two separate ways of life, was born a Jewish lad, Hersh-Volf, who grew up to become the leader of the Jewish Labor Bund, Henryk Erlich. He was destined to be a major figure in the international socialist movement, a revolutionary figure in the noblest sense of that term; a proud, unyielding fighter and martyr.

We know neither the precise date of his birth nor the precise date of his murder in Soviet Russia on the orders of Stalin in December of 1941. April 13, 1882 is the date which appears in Henryk Erlich's official papers. But within the family it was maintained that he was born on May 12, 1882. In any event, it was the date on which his birthday was celebrated in the circle of his intimates.

Hersh-Volf Erlich was a child of well-to-do Hasidic parents. His father, Moses Erlich, came from the city of Radom. He left his birthplace in order to settle in Lublin, where he married Sheyndl Blekzman, a daughter of an old Lublin family of elite pedigree. A

person of substantial means (he owned a large mill), Moses Erlich was also an ardent Ger Hasid. Yet he possessed qualities that set him off from his surroundings. He was already middle-aged when he emancipated himself from the Hasidic life and became a prominent *maskil*,* to the point of engaging in correspondence with Ahad Ha'am. Indeed, under his influence Moses Erlich became a confirmed "Ahad Ha'amist." He was one of the earliest members of the Bnei Moshe society which was founded by the supporters of the Ahad Ha'am school of thought.

Subsequently, Moses Erlich also began to correspond with the renowned Jewish historian Simon Dubnow. During those years, such a path of development for a Ger Hasid involved a real spiritual revolution. One had to possess a large measure of intellectual independence and of independence of character and will to pursue such a course. His son, Hersh-Volf, inherited many of those attributes, qualities which later flowered magnificently in his social and political activity.

Hersh-Volf was the third child in the family. The first two were daughters. Moses Erlich had passionately craved a son. And when Hersh-Volf first saw the light of day, the father was deeply moved. He was simply incapable of withdrawing his gaze from his son's face. To him it seemed as though the newborn infant was graced with the forehead of a scholar. And before his eyes there soared the figures of famous Jewish personalities—they, with the prominent foreheads and the deep, penetrating eyes of the familiar greats of the epoch. In this respect, his paternal intuition did not deceive him: Erlich's prominent forehead—the forehead of a thinker—and his marvelous eyes were the most remarkable features of his whole majestic figure.

The dreary square in Lublin on which the Erlichs lived was

*A *maskil* (pl., *maskilim*) was an individual devoted to the radically new socio-intellectual current in Jewish life called the Haskalah. Indeed, the latter had many of the earmarks of an authentic cultural revolution. The Haskalah, flowering in the nineteenth century and best translated as "Enlightenment," represented an admixture of elements in Jewish life: modernism; secularism and secular education in particular; attraction to Western and world culture. Thus, *maskilim* were "enlighteners," and on the leadership level largely of middle-class and upper-class background.—Trans.

also the location of the Catholic church of the Jesuit order and one of the *brumen*—the gate opening onto the narrow Jewish streets of the onetime ghetto. That was also where Krolewska (Royal) Street began—the avenue leading to the modern, Polish Lublin.

Moses Erlich was greatly concerned that his son should receive a traditional Jewish education and upbringing. As soon as Hersh-Volf grew a bit older, his father brought him to the *heder*. After a brief period of study there, the son was taught at home by a special *melamed* retained by the father. The instructor went at his task with diligence: in time he also prepared Hersh-Volf for the bar mitzvah. Each Saturday and holiday the father would take him along to the Hasidic *shtibl* for the prayer service. And like all his comrades in the *heder* and *shtibl*, Hersh-Volf wore a long Hasidic *kapote* (the long, dark coat worn by Orthodox Jewish men in eastern Europe), a velvet hat, and lengthy side-curls (*peyes*). But it was the prominent forehead and the tranquil and intelligent eyes that attracted the attention of the family members and guests who had come together for the princely bar mitzvah repast. Hersh-Volf delivered his bar mitzvah sermon. In a certain sense, that sermon constituted the first public address by the prospective brilliant speaker.

Hersh-Volf's father knew that he must guide his son in matters of piety and scholarship. Yet he did not know that he had powerful and influential opponents in his own household, under his own roof. Behind her husband's back, Hersh-Volf's mother arranged for the son to study Polish, Russian, and other general subjects. The two daughters, pupils in the local gymnasium, were enthused over this "revolutionary plan" for the education of their younger brother. What appealed to them was both the idea itself and the element of rebellion against the will of an obstinate father. The mother and above all the sisters were moved by the spirit of the times, by the powerful impulses to awakening that were coursing through the atmosphere during those years and by the very same thrust that would later drive the father himself to abandon the Hasidic way of life and become one of the leading *maskilim* of Lublin, no less.

The crisis came in 1896. Erlich was fourteen years old at the time and was still wearing his long Hasidic *kapote*. His sister Gitl

was concerned even more than before with her brother's secular education, and in this connection found understanding and support on the part of her husband, Isaac Slobodkin. Both discussed the matter and agreed that it would be a great shame to have Hersh-Volf's uncommon abilities go to waste. In the course of one such conversation a daring plan was broached for the first time, notably, that Henryk might perhaps become a pupil in the Russian gymnasium (high school) in Lublin. They knew they would never receive the father's approval, but they accustomed themselves gradually to the idea and began to work out the details of the "conspiracy." Hersh-Volf would proceed to the home of his sister, Gitl Slobodkin, each morning and, while there, change from his traditional Jewish garments into the uniform of a gymnasium student. After the gymnasium, on the way home, he would stop off at his sister's and once again emerge as a Hasidic young man.

Henryk himself was far from enthusiastic about the whole conspiracy. The thought of concealment, of this kind of "Purim play" involving changes of clothing, of deceiving his own father ran counter to his nature. But in the end common sense prevailed. Amid great secrecy the fourteen-year-old Hasidic boy passed the examination and was accepted, in 1896, into the third class of the Lublin gymnasium.

It didn't take long for Hersh-Volf's father to learn the secret when he came upon his son's textbooks. Everything suddenly became clear. His wife promptly confessed, and a terrible commotion erupted in the household. With his own hands Moses Erlich burned the *goyishe* textbooks. Yet somewhere deep within he felt it was futile: destiny was stronger than he. His son had taken the first step on the road from which there was no turning back. In the end he gave his consent to the course of action his son had chosen. For Henryk it was no longer necessary to live a double life. There began the normal years of a pupil in a Russian gymnasium.

The six years in the gymnasium—from 1896 to 1902—were the most placid in Henryk's life. They were years of physical and spiritual maturation, of arduous effort, and of visions enriched by dreams. He proved excellent in his studies. The Russian teachers praised Henryk more than once for his extraordinary progress and often cited him as an example to the other pupils.

The closing years of the last century and the beginning of the present were fateful for the peoples of the vast tsarist empire. They were the years in which the Jewish Labor Bund and the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party were founded. During those same years the Polish independence movement became active once again.

Zionism also made its entry into the Jewish social arena at that time. The revolutionary movement against tsarist autocracy won the allegiance, however, of ever broader circles of the population. It was the springtime of the modern Russian freedom movement. The spirit of the times also penetrated the precincts of the Lublin Russian gymnasium, just as it did all the other secondary schools and universities on Russian soil. It captured the hearts and the minds of the more idealistic and the more thoughtful elements among the academic youth. And it also found a way to Henryk Erlich.

As a Jew he had positive feelings about Jewish nationality. And he dreamt about the redemption of the Jews from their nearly two-thousand-year-long dispersion among the peoples of the world. While in the upper grades of the gymnasium, Henryk Erlich had even become a member of Bnei Moshe, the Ahad Ha'amist group to which his father belonged. But Henryk Erlich was also a son of the Polish soil; the aspirations to freedom of the Polish people were very close to his heart. Indeed, from the time he learned to take book in hand, Polish poetry and Polish literature constituted his spiritual nourishment. Images of the heroes of Polish uprisings—the executed, the prisoners condemned by the tsars to *katorga* (hard labor or penal servitude) and internal banishment—often floated before his dreamy eyes. Here was the young enthusiast captivated by the exalted social ideals which informed the struggle for the freedom of toiling humanity and the elimination of the division of people between rich and poor. The fight for a new, just, and righteous order would lead to the realization of the sublime visions delineated by the Jewish prophets and their disciples.

A choice had become unavoidable; his reason alone told him as much. Yet stronger than this rational element was still the youthful-visionary feeling, the feeling that somewhere, in the future, the Jewish, Polish, Russian, and universal ideals and aspirations would

be interlinked. On more than one occasion he discussed all these matters with his close comrades in the gymnasium; but the discussions were more like debates with himself, with his own doubts.

Henryk Erlich came to be held in very high esteem among his schoolmates. They felt not only great affection for him, but also respected him for his sincerity, his honesty, and his uncommon abilities. They elected him to the Lublin section of the illegal Jewish student organization in Russia, an organization which set itself the task of raising funds for the support of Jewish students abroad who had been denied admission to the Russian universities by the tsarist government. Toward the end of his gymnasium period he even participated in an all-Russian convention of that student organization in Moscow. He returned to Lublin from the convention as chairman for Poland of the organization's Central Committee.

Even before completing the gymnasium, he decided to continue his studies in the faculty of law. The whole Erlich family maintained that Henryk had chosen the right path, one that corresponded to his brilliant talents and acute intellect. Yet everyone knew that it was far from easy for a Jew in tsarist Russia to gain entry into a university's faculty of law. The quotas for Jews in the Russian universities barred the doors to Jewish students; only small cracks remained through which only a handful of individuals—recipients of the highest grades in the gymnasium—could press their way in. Accordingly, Henryk spared neither time nor effort and completed his gymnasium studies with a gold medal.

His mother was the first to notice that her son looked bad. He had become pale and thin as a result of the many days and nights during which he had prepared so diligently for the examinations. It was decided that he should spend the summer months of 1902 in the countryside, in Kazimierz. At that scenic summer place not far from Lublin, Henryk Erlich met a young student from Warsaw, Bronislaw Grosser. This fortuitous summer encounter of the two young men who were to play such a large role in the Jewish workers' movement was swiftly transformed into a profound friendship.

Bronislaw Grosser was the son of a highly assimilated Jewish family in Poland. His father and, particularly, his mother were far

removed from any sort of relationship with Jews and Jewish life. The prevailing attitude in the Grosser family was one of great reverence for Poland, for its literature and poetry. The traditions of the Polish independence movement and of the Polish uprisings were religiously observed in the household. Bronislaw, about three years younger than Henryk, was reared in the same tradition. At the time he met Henryk, he already had socialist inclinations; but his interests still focused essentially on Poland.

Bronislaw Grosser introduced Henryk to a circle of Polish youth in Kazimierz during that summer of 1902. In the circle's exhilarating atmosphere, the inspired and stirring lives of Mickiewicz resonated with a very special power of conviction. Polish folk songs and revolutionary songs were spurs to deeds, calls to sacrifice. Poland—its history, its uprising, and its future—was the subject of conversations and analyses. The youth circle had a powerful influence on Henryk Erlich. Many of its participants, in one guise or another, would subsequently play a prominent role in independent Poland.

The chance summer acquaintance of the two young men evolved swiftly into a deep and serious friendship. Bronislaw Grosser already knew about the Bund. But the life of the Jewish masses—indeed, Jewish life in general—was still a sealed book for him. He did not yet regard himself as a Jew. And when he talked about the Jewish question in Poland, he did so as a Polish socialist, as a revolutionary, but not as a Jew. In this respect Henryk Erlich was his antipode: if it was natural for Grosser to feel like a Pole, it was no less natural for Erlich to feel himself part of the Jewish community, the Jewish collective. Just as Grosser felt at home in a Polish environment, just so did Erlich feel at home in a Jewish one. Adhesion to the Bund was for Erlich just as natural and simple as a Frenchman's becoming a member of the French Socialist Party.

In Grosser's case, his way to the Bund was difficult and complex. He had to overcome many deep-rooted traditions and impulses which drew him to the camp of Polish socialism. It was only through a painful process of swimming stubbornly "against the current" that Bronislaw Grosser succeeded in thinking his way into the Bund and coming to grips with the reality of the Jewish working masses. There is no doubt whatever that the warm friend-

ship with Henryk Erlich helped him find his way. If Bronislaw Grosser linked Erlich more intimately and firmly to Poland and the Polish people, Henryk Erlich, for his part, revealed to Grosser the Jewish people. Both of them benefited greatly from their sojourn in Kazimierz.

On an overcast and rainy morning in the autumn of 1902, Henryk Erlich was standing at the Lublin railroad station bidding a hasty farewell to his mother and family. They had come to see him off on his departure for Warsaw, where he had been admitted to the faculty of law. He would be settling in the capital of Poland, in a city whose life, in contrast to that of Lublin, was stormy and clamorous, and where a solid Jewish working-class population had already participated actively in mass struggles on the economic front under the banner of the Bund, and in political battles with tsarist absolutism.

The atmosphere in Warsaw during those years was a harbinger of the approaching all-Russian revolutionary upheaval. In the very first months of his student life, Erlich already participated in a demonstration of the radically inclined Jewish academic youth against an anti-Semitic play, *The Golden Calf*, which was running in one of the Warsaw theaters. He paid for his participation in the demonstration with three weeks in jail. (This first arrest had no serious consequences, for the time being. The *nachalstvo* [officialdom] at Warsaw University looked the other way when it came to clashes between Jewish and Polish students; they were not seen as a threat to the tsarist regime.) In 1903, when his friend Bronislaw Grosser arrived at the conviction that it was his duty to join the Bund, Henryk Erlich, for whom the road to the Bund was far easier, also became a member of the Warsaw organization of the Bund. They were both captivated by the upward thrust of the revolutionary movement in the years 1903 and 1904. Bronislaw Grosser's passionate nature and extraordinary gift of oratory immediately thrust him to the fore in the ranks of the Bund. Erlich's advance was slower and more gradual: it corresponded to his temperament and disposition. During the university years in Warsaw he was a faithful member of the Bund, never refusing to fulfill the tasks entrusted to him by the organization. During the winter months of 1904 a Bund activist, Birencwajg, had died of tubercu-

losis in the tsarist prison in Warsaw. A demonstrative funeral was arranged by the organization; it was accompanied by numerous arrests. Erlich was among those arrested. He spent three months in prison and was expelled from Warsaw University.

Upon his release from prison the question arose for Henryk: What next? His exclusion from Warsaw University was a very painful blow. The family urgently demanded that he go abroad for the completion of his university education. His father promised to send him sufficient funds each month so that he would lack for nothing. Grosser also pressed him to take the same step. At the end of 1904 he left for Germany and enrolled at Berlin University.

Thus, in the capital city of Germany, Henryk Erlich would presumably be studying economics and political science. But his mind was decidedly not on any academic subject at that juncture. The year 1905 had rocked the vast Russian Empire from one end to the other. The impressive revolutionary upheavals among the peoples of the Russian Empire attracted the attention of the world at large. The revolutionary fire burned within the breast of the young student. In Berlin, on the streets of an alien German city, he felt like an exile. With every fiber in his body he was being pulled homeward—toward the revolutionary masses of Russia, of Poland; toward the Bund. As soon as the October Manifesto of 1905 restored to Henryk Erlich the opportunity to study in Russia, he promptly left Berlin and returned home. Together with Grosser he even managed to edit *Nasze Hasła* (“Our Watchwords”), the illegal Bund organ in the Polish language. It came out in Warsaw but was destined to have anything but a long life. It was suppressed by the tsarist regime, which had recovered quickly after initial setbacks.

The revolutionary events of the stormy years 1905 produced the first significant rupture in the fortress of tsarist despotism. But they did not destroy the tsarist beast; they merely wounded it. In short order it proceeded, with particular ruthlessness, to persecute the revolutionary parties and their leaders. For Erlich—just as for his closest friend, Bronislaw Grosser—the ground under his feet became too hot. Accordingly, both of them left for St. Petersburg in 1906 and enrolled in the law faculty at St. Petersburg University.

Thus began the Petersburg period in the life of Henryk Erlich. It was the winter of 1906. Russia’s capital was still breathing the

heady air of the revolutionary upheaval, although the tide of revolution was already ebbing. At one of the numerous student meetings, Erlich encountered "Comrade Abram," who used to electrify the meetings with his extraordinary speaking ability and fiery temperament. "Comrade Abram" was the pseudonym of Nikolai Krylenko, the son of an Orthodox priest in Lublin and a friend of Erlich's from the Lublin gymnasium. Years later "Abram"-Krylenko became notorious throughout Russia as the state prosecutor of the Soviet regime. On one occasion, at a meeting of the Bund group in Petersburg, the chairman announced that a number of guests were present, among them Comrade Henryk from Poland. Sophie Dubnow, a member of the group, saw standing before her a tall, thin young man, with soft, prominent eyes filled with yearning, and the forehead of a thinker. It was at this meeting that they first became acquainted and established what would become a lifelong tie.

Erlich and Grosser strove to complete the university courses and wind up their studies as swiftly as possible. They set to work intensively. The threesome—Erlich, Grosser, and the latter's wife, Slawa—settled into an apartment in Kuokala, a small town in Finland, so that they might work quietly and prepare for the examinations. From there they would travel into the city from time to time in order to attend the lectures at the university. A bit later they obtained a flat in Petersburg proper, where they became a foursome: Erlich, Sophie Dubnow, Grosser, and his wife. In this intimate circle they spent almost every evening together, helping each other make sense of the varied problems of politics, literature, and poetry. The national question loomed large in these sessions. The conversations quite frequently evolved into passionate discussions that would extend well into the night. On occasion the four would attend a theater performance or concert. As a rule, Bronislaw Grosser was the "soul" of such evenings. He would frequently begin the outings with citations from his notebook.

Erlich was not the only one to benefit greatly from those Petersburg evenings. Each of the participants derived a great deal from the other three. In many respects the four tended to complement and intellectually enrich each other.

Henryk Erlich had no material cares during his early years in

St. Petersburg. His father used to send him a sum of money each month which enabled him to get by. Worse, in this respect, was the condition of Bronislaw Grosser and his wife. The Warsaw law office of his father, Nikodym Grosser, was in a state of acute neglect; it produced less and less income with each passing year. The parents of Henryk Erlich's most intimate friend were themselves greatly in need and were therefore in no position to help their son who was studying in Petersburg.

In 1908, when Erlich and Grosser finally completed the law faculty studies, a friend of Grosser's father—the attorney Nowinski, whose office was located in far-off Chita, beyond Lake Baikal in Siberia, invited Grosser to serve as his assistant, offering him what was for those days a munificent salary. Despite the fact that he, just like Erlich, had dreamt of settling in Warsaw, Grosser accepted the offer. As for Erlich, he proceeded to Warsaw as soon as he finished his work at St. Petersburg University.

It very quickly became clear that he could not remain in Poland. After several months of intensive party activity, he was arrested in 1909 and imprisoned for three months, after which he was expelled, by administrative order, from the territory of Russian-occupied Poland. After living for a brief period in Paris, he received permission to return to Russia. He spent a half-year with his friend Grosser in Chita, after which both returned to Poland and settled in Warsaw. At the close of summer in 1910, Erlich and Grosser were invited by the Central Committee of the Bund to participate in the organization's Eighth Conference, which took place in Lemberg (Lvov). It was the first conference after the Seventh Congress in 1906. A number of important questions were dealt with, such as participation in the *Kehillas* (Jewish community councils), equality of status for the Yiddish language, and Saturday or Sunday as a day of rest. In the spring of 1911 the two comrades were indicted in Warsaw for membership in the Bund. Grosser was arrested; Erlich managed to flee and went into hiding.

After the trial he ceased his conspiratorial existence. During the same year he also went to Petersburg, where he married Sophie Dubnow. Immediately after the wedding the couple left for Munich. The two semesters (in 1911–1912) spent in the distinctive artistic and intellectual atmosphere of the Munich of those days

were perhaps the finest months of Erlich's life. He loved music very much, and Munich at that time was renowned as a musical center of the world. Aside from this, he did a great deal of work. At the University of Munich he attended the lectures on social sciences by the prominent professor Lujo Brentano. But Henryk and Sophie Erlich concentrated primarily on Otto Bauer's *Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question*. This seminal work which appeared in 1907, made a great stir in the socialist circles of Europe. Bauer's grasp of the national question and his conclusions were particularly stimulating and congenial to the Bundist Henryk Erlich.

On the way back to Russia from Munich, Erlich stopped off at Vienna. While there, he participated in a consultation arranged by the Central Committee of the Bund on the subject of the Bund's publishing a legal newspaper in Petersburg, *Di Tsayt* ("The Times"). The others who took part in this consultation were Raphael Abramovitch, Bronislaw Grosser, and Vladimir Medem. The first signs of a revolutionary revival in Russia were already evident by then, and the Central Committee of the Bund began to prepare for it.

Henryk and his wife arrived in Petersburg during the early summer of 1912. The Dubnow family strongly desired that the young couple live with them. They had a large, comfortable apartment in Petersburg. But Erlich was well aware of the kind of activity he was preparing to undertake and did not want the Dubnows to suffer because of him. One argument finally convinced Dubnow to give way: Erlich explained to him that, in the course of a police search, the gendarmes might also become interested in his manuscripts and even confiscate them. Such a danger was enough to frighten the historian Dubnow. It remained for the young couple to rent a separate flat in the same house as the Dubnows.

Erlich's apartment in Petersburg had one really big virtue: the building doorman was a drunk and, when in his cups, wholly unable to recognize anyone. Such an apartment—or more accurately, such a doorman—proved to be a real treasure for an illegal party in those days. Indeed, the sessions of the Central Committee of the Bund and other important party consultations used to take place in Henryk Erlich's home. Erlich was appointed by the

Central Committee of the Bund to collaborate with the Social Democratic deputies of the Imperial Duma in the capacity of the Bund's consultant. He was also appointed representative of the Bund on the Organizing Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (Central Committee of the Mensheviks).

Erlich's life in Petersburg after his return from Munich was filled with party activity and other political functions. His workday often stretched into the wee hours of the night. He not only helped formulate drafts of laws, but also quite frequently wrote speeches for the deputies which they delivered in the parliament. Erlich devoted an especially large amount of work to the campaign of the socialist deputy from Warsaw, Eugeniusz Jagiello, whom the Bund helped elect in 1912. That electoral campaign was exceedingly acrimonious as well as complicated. In the course of the campaign, Erlich and Grosser would come to Warsaw and work tirelessly for the election of Jagiello, against whom was pitted the whole of Polish society (except for the Left-PPS).^{*} Suffice it to say, the election of Jagiello coincided with the beginning of an intensified boycott against Jews in Poland. In St. Petersburg a committee made up of representatives of both the Left-PPS and the Bund was formed to carry on the work of the deputy whom their organizations had joined in electing to the Duma. Erlich and Grosser served on the committee. Jagiello knew very little Russian. He frequently spent days on end at the home of the Erlichs in order to prepare himself properly for an address in the Imperial Duma.

In December 1912 Erlich experienced a dreadful shock: the death of his intimate friend Bronislaw Grosser, after a brief bout with typhus. Together they had evolved spiritually, and together they had studied and found their place in the forefront of the revolutionary socialist struggle. Here was a veritable catastrophe from which Erlich was unable to recover for a long time. It was, in fact, precisely during this period that his work became more exacting, more involved, and more responsible. He had to take upon himself the fulfillment also of a very substantial part of Grosser's party obligations. At the Ninth Conference of the Bund

^{*}The initials stand for Polska Partja Socjalistyczna, or Polish Socialist Party.—
Trans.

in 1912, Grosser had been elected to the organization's Central Committee. At the beginning of 1913, Henryk Erlich, age thirty, was co-opted in his place.

Erlich was also a regular contributor at that time to the Russian radical paper, *Dyen'* ('*The Day*'). He was responsible for the foreign section of the paper. To avoid neglecting his law career he became an associate attorney working closely with the renowned political defender and social activist Maksim Vinaver. The Vinavers were originally from Poland; some members of the family even participated in the Polish uprising of 1863. Maksim Vinaver's attitude toward Erlich was most friendly—indeed, he held him in very high regard. He wished that his young assistant lawyer might give more thought to his future as an attorney, and predicted that Henryk Erlich had the makings of a famous defense attorney. "Why is he involved with so many meetings?" Maksim Vinaver would constantly ask when Erlich failed to appear in the office for days on end.

During the summer of 1913 Erlich was delegated by the Central Committee of the Bund to participate in the All-Russian Congress of Commercial Employees scheduled for July in the city of Moscow. The Congress was an economic gathering only for the sake of appearances. In reality, all the radical and socialist parties of Russia participated in it along with many deputies of the Imperial Duma. Alexander Kerensky was chairman of the Congress. The Bund was represented by several delegates from the larger cities; the Vilno delegate was the Bund activist Sonya Shapiro (Dina Blond).

The sessions of the Congress were very tumultuous and evolved into political demonstrations against the tsarist regime. In the end the government dissolved the gathering, in which Henryk Erlich played a prominent [directing] role. Indeed, he was arrested in connection with his activities at the Congress and was taken to the notorious Butyrki prison in Moscow, where he became seriously ill.

During this time, Sophie Erlich was staying at a summer cottage on the outskirts of Petersburg with her first child, a baby of six months. She learned of her husband's arrest through the press. Nikolai Dmitrievich Sokolov, a famous Russian defense lawyer in

political cases and a Social Democrat, took on Erlich's case and endeavored to have him freed. He was, in fact, released, but not until the police department had received a medical confirmation that Erlich was suffering from tuberculosis and only after he was incarcerated for three-and-a-half months. Erlich promptly resumed his public responsibilities and his strenuous activity in Petersburg.

The period from 1912 to the outbreak of the war in 1914 coincided with Erlich's debut as a writer on current affairs under the imprimatur of the Bund. In the aforementioned *Tsayt*—initially a weekly newspaper and in 1914 a biweekly under the name *Unser Tsayt*—he signed himself H. Al—sky. On the eve of the Congress of Commercial Employees in 1913 he published a lengthy article about the tasks of the Congress. All the prominent Bund activists and political leaders were associated with the *Tsayt* in the capacity of contributors and editors. They included Vladimir Kossovsky, Raphael Abramovitch, A. Litvak, Esther Frumkin, Moyshe Rafes, Moisseye Olgin, Professor Liebman Hersch, Beynish Mikhalevich, and others. The paper was closed down at the outbreak of the war.

From the beginning of the war until the February Revolution, i.e., during the period 1914–1917, Erlich became more active than ever in Jewish life. Aside from his party functions as a member of the Bund Central Committee, he collaborated with a group of his comrades in the publication of a Jewish weekly in the Russian language—*Yevreyskiye Vesti* ("Jewish News"). Erlich also participated actively in the work of such societies as the *ORT*, institutions which exerted themselves greatly on behalf of the persecuted Jewish masses who were being expelled by the tsarist government from a number of localities that lay close to the front. The regime accused the Jewish populace of spying, and saddled it with the blame for Russia's military defeats.

The socialist movement in Russia, like the majority of socialist parties in the warring countries, was far from united at the time with respect to its attitude toward the war. There were two distinct camps: one contended that Russia should be defended against the assault of German imperialism; its members were called *oborontsy* (defensists). The other camp held more strongly to the idea of international solidarity rather than national defense. They called themselves "internationalists." But even the two camps into which

Russian Social Democracy was divided were not unified. Various shadings and nuances existed in each camp. Erlich adhered to a tendency which called itself "revolutionary defensists." The supporters of this tendency were convinced that the tsarist regime must be eliminated in order to successfully defend Russia. The "revolutionary defensists" held that, while defending Russia, the socialist working class must not sacrifice its independent tasks and its revolutionary ideals. In accord with this attitude, Erlich became one of the three authors of the famous declaration of the Social Democratic faction of the Imperial Duma at the time the World War broke out. The declaration expounded the reasons why the socialists in Russia had not voted for the war budget. But at the same time Erlich favored active participation by the Russian workers in the special public committees (e.g., the War-Industry Committees) created by the government in order to speed up the arming of the fighting forces at the fronts and equip them with the necessary military tools.

The war years affected Henryk Erlich most adversely in every respect. Russia suffered one military defeat after another. As early as 1915, the German-Austrian armies had already occupied Warsaw, Lublin, and Brest-Litovsk, penetrating, in fact, as far as Dvinsk. All of Poland was cut off from Russia. Henryk Erlich lost contact with his parents. He remained in St. Petersburg with a wife and two small children dependent exclusively on his meager earnings as a journalist. Erlich, as a socialist, suffered of course from the fact that the Socialist International had shown itself incapable of counteracting the outbreak of the war. He experienced with great pain the notorious *Burgfrieden* policy of German Social Democracy in the course of the early war years.* Later, when the war ended, his critical attitude toward the reformist wing of the socialist movement became a firm component of his world outlook and a factor which helped shape his ideological position within the Bund and in the Socialist International.

**Burgfrieden*, or "civil peace," was the German term for the abandonment at war's outbreak of the traditional socialist opposition to war and militarism. The same policy of patriotic unity was manifested in France and the other belligerents. In Russia the socialist movements were badly split on the question of national unity behind the tsarist regime.—Trans.

The flames of the February Revolution of 1917 that erupted in St. Petersburg instantly ignited all Russia. Henryk Erlich was promptly thrust into the front ranks of the revolution. As a member of the Council (Soviet) of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies in the capital—the body which came to play such a decisive role in the subsequent revolutionary events—Erlich delivered speeches which resounded throughout Russia. He increasingly attracted the notice of friends and adversaries alike. He was also elected to the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets (or Central Executive Committee, the famous VTsIK). The latter was the coordinating body of the local soviets which sprang up in all the cities and towns of Russia and which possessed at that time greater real power than the Provisional Government of Russia.

Erlich's role during the first months of the revolution is depicted by N. N. Sukhanov in his well-known work, *Notes on the Revolution (Zapiski O Revolutsii)*. He tells of the comment by Stalin, in the latter's published notes on that period of the Russian Revolution, about one of Erlich's addresses in VTsIK. Henryk Erlich's speech, wrote Stalin, at a meeting of the Central Executive Committee was the most sensible one. (In Russian, Stalin's actual words were: *V Ispolkome samaya tolkovaya retch—eto Genrikha Erlikha.*)

While the revolution was in progress there could, of course, be no question at all of a personal life for Erlich. Rarely did he see his wife and children, and even more rarely did he find time to spend with them. At the conference of the Bund that was held immediately after the revolution, he was again elected to the Central Committee. Right after the conference, he was appointed representative of the Bund on the central leadership body of Russian Social Democracy (Mensheviks). During the summer months of 1917, Erlich served as emissary of the Central Committee at the Kharkov conference of the Bund organizations in the Ukraine. At this conference Erlich defended the "Centrist" viewpoint of the Bund against the extreme-right position of Moyshe Rafes. His speeches at Kharkov attracted everyone's attention. With each passing day the revolution was brought face to face with new problems and difficulties. Erlich had to take a stand on these problems and difficulties in the name of the Bund and of Russian Social Democ-

racy, with which the Bund had actively and intimately collaborated during that revolutionary period of *Sturm und Drang*. It was characteristic of Henryk Erlich that, even during such a time, he did not forget about Poland. He was the initiator and author of the famous proposal in the Petrograd Soviet about the independence of Poland.

“Peace Without Annexations and Without Indemnities” was the slogan of the Russian socialist world during this period. Himself a confirmed supporter of the slogan, Erlich understood very well, moreover, that the war constituted the greatest danger to the democratic revolution in Russia and to its immediate and long-range prospects. He could see how the *stikhiya** in the Bolsheviks were beginning demagogically to ride were about to wash away the earliest sproutings of freedom and democracy. He therefore supported the motion, and did so with fervor and convincingly, that the VTsIK of the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies should despite the war, send a peace delegation to the peoples of Europe and propose to them, in the name of the revolutionary peoples of Russia, a peace without annexations and indemnities, without victors and vanquished. Not only was Erlich’s motion adopted, but he himself was selected as one of the five delegates who were promptly to go ahead as the peace delegation from the Russian Revolution.

The whole world followed with the closest attention every step and every word of that extraordinary peace delegation. It was perhaps the first time in history that a people who found itself in the middle of a bloody war should avoid the normal channels of traditional diplomacy and appeal not to governments but directly to peoples. The very fact itself of such a delegation’s existence was a revolutionary act that carried great international weight. This famous delegation consisted of Yosif Goldenberg-Meshkovsky (Bolshevik), Nikolai Rusanov (SR’s); Emmanuil Smirnov-Gurevich and Vladimir Rozanov (Mensheviks), and Henryk Erlich (Bund). Erlich did not return to Russia with the other members of the delegation. It was decided that he should stop off in Sweden in order to participate in the conference of the Socialist parties of the

*The unrestrained, spontaneous, elemental mass passion.—Trans.

Scandinavian and other neutral countries being held in Stockholm. The task of the conference was the rebuilding of the Socialist International.

Returning to Petrograd from Sweden in August 1917, Erlich immediately felt the impact of the new winds which had begun to propel the democratic ship of the February Revolution toward the Bolshevik mooring of October 1917.

The so-called Democratic Conference of August 15, 1917, elected Henryk Erlich to the Russian pre-parliament, which bore the name Provisional Council of the All-Russian Republic. From that moment until the Bolsheviks seized power and deposed the so-called Provisional Government, Erlich found himself in a state of progressively greater depression. What surprised him most was the changed atmosphere at the meetings and mass gatherings which took place in all corners of the capital. It was enough for a sailor or soldier, or an ordinary worker, to mount the platform at such a meeting and let loose with a few Bolshevik outcries or hurl a few slogans, for the crowd to break into stormy applause, forgetting about the finest speakers and their well-thought-out, well-reasoned presentations. The speakers from the democratic socialist camp during that period of the Russian Revolution felt as though they had lost contact with a human mass that had fallen into a state of frenzy. It was a time when appealing to reason was futile, when the masses understood only the language of aroused emotions and primitive desires. Nothing, however, was more alien to the essence of Henryk Erlich's nature than playing on the feelings of the mob. In such an atmosphere he felt lost and forlorn. Inwardly he was deeply offended because of his helplessness in the face of the *stikhiya*.

After the Bolshevik uprising in October, which ousted the Provisional Government and drove out Kerensky, the Bolsheviks decided to conduct the elections to the Constituent Assembly. They were certain that, with the aid of the newly acquired state apparatus, they would succeed in winning a majority in that body. Erlich participated actively in the electoral campaign. He himself was a candidate for a first-place position in Kherson province and for a second-place position in Kiev province. As is known, however, the outcome of the elections to the all-Russian Constituent

Assembly did not justify the hopes of the Bolsheviks. The majority of the elected delegates were opponents of the Bolsheviks. The outcome of the elections strengthened the hope that the Bolsheviks would not be able to retain the state power they had won. Henryk Erlich stood with those who contended that the Russian Revolution would be back on the democratic track rather quickly. The Constituent Assembly was scheduled to open on January 5, 1918 (O.S.).* Russian Social Democracy (Mensheviks), the Bund, and all other radical-democratic tendencies in opposition to the Bolshevik regime called upon the population of Petrograd to gather at the Tauride Palace in order to welcome the elected delegates to the Constituent Assembly.

All Petrograd had readied itself for this popular demonstration. Leaving their children at home, Henryk and Sophie Erlich headed for the gathering place of the demonstration. The throng was so vast that they lost each other. The Bolshevik authorities called out a detachment of sailors who proceeded to fire machine guns at the demonstrators, dispersing them. By the time Sophie Erlich finally reached home exhausted, the children had already learned from the neighbors about the bloody events at the Tauride Palace. "Weren't you struck by a bullet?" was the very first question put by her older son, Oles' (Alexander). "No," replied Sophie. "And was father struck by a bullet?" he continued to press. His mother calmed him down, although she was not completely sure about the fate of Henryk. On January 5, 1918, the Bolshevik bullet did not strike Henryk Erlich. In the evening he returned home uninjured. But about twenty-four years later, a bullet from the same Communist rulers of Russia struck him dead.

The winter of 1917-1918 was exceedingly harsh. The suffering of the populace in the capital was particularly severe. Fuel and food supplies stopped arriving. The transportation system was terribly damaged. They were cold and hungry in the large Petrograd apartment. The Erlich children were pale and thin. Even the most vital necessities started to disappear.

*The Old Style (O.S.), or Julian, calendar, in the twentieth century, was thirteen days before the Gregorian, or New Style. The date of the Assembly's opening is often given as January 18 (N.S.). In February 1918 the New Style was officially adopted.—Trans.

In protest against the seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks, Henryk Erlich, along with the Menshevik and Bund factions, left the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets in October 1917. He resigned his seat on VTsIK, the Executive Committee of the Soviets. The October seizure of power brought the various ideological currents in Russian Social Democracy closer together, reinforcing their spirit of unity. The left wing, under the leadership of Martov, and the Menshevik center, led by Fyodor Dan at that time, formed a bloc. Erlich was elected to the Central Committee of this union. In November 1917 he was also appointed co-editor of the central organ of Russian Social Democracy, *Rabochaya Gazeta* ("The Workers' Paper").

In light of the conditions that set in after the October Revolution, these were highly creditable positions for a socialist leader who remained in opposition to the new regime. Thrust into the forefront of resistance to the dictatorship, Henryk Erlich excelled in tact, consistency, and clarity of thought. To stress the profound distinction between Socialists and the dictatorial regime while simultaneously underscoring the necessity of protecting the conquests of the revolution, this was the substance of all of Erlich's later statements, both written and spoken, in independent Poland and in the international socialist arena.

After the Bolshevik coup, Erlich was no less involved than before—indeed, if anything, he found himself up to his neck in various public activities. But his material situation had grown progressively worse. His heart ached as he looked upon his underfed children. He was tormented by worry over them and their future. Yet under no circumstances would he decide to leave Russia, although his father wrote letters to him constantly urging that he return to Lublin with wife and children. From these letters Erlich learned that his father had become a wealthy man. (Moses Erlich had provided flour for the Austrian army during the war years, when Lublin had been under Austrian occupation.) Henryk Erlich had often dreamt of what a haven his father's home in Lublin would be for his hungry children. But the revolutionary events in the former tsarist empire, their dramatic scope charged with the greatest social tension, bound him even more strongly to Russia. He was repelled at the thought of abandoning his posts,

his comrades-in-arms, and going to Poland. But conditions became so intolerable that he had to settle for a compromise—taking his wife and children to his father in Lublin for a brief period and returning alone to Russia. In August 1918 he gave up the apartment in Petrograd, reserving for himself just one room so that he would have a roof over his head when he returned. The members of the Erlich family were so certain they would return to Russia that they left all their possessions in Petrograd.

Up to the city of Chelm, which at that time was the transfer point for repatriates from Russia, the Erlichs traveled in one of the "famous" Russian *tyeplushki* (freight cars). The car was dirty and jam-packed. Amid the crowded conditions, the Erlich's valise was stolen; it had contained the children's things. Their one concern during the whole trip was that they should not lose the children in the great crush. Between Chelm and Lublin they traveled on a regular passenger train.

In Chelm the Erlichs learned from the newspapers about the attempt on Lenin's life. This only served to exacerbate their mood of dejection: the terror in Russia would become even more acute, the atmosphere even more poisoned, because of the attempted assassination. Who could know which direction the revolution would now take?

The train eventually arrived at the old station in Lublin. When Erlich's mother first looked at the two grandchildren whom she had never seen—pale and gaunt—she wrung her hands while muttering to herself: "Mere shadows; skin and bones."

It was quiet and congenial in the old apartment of the Erlichs on Zamoyska. Their way of life—sated, prosperous, and respectable—had not changed in the course of the war years. Moses Erlich engaged in lengthy and detailed conversations with his son. Although he did not agree with him in many respects, he nevertheless derived pleasure from his son's prominence in the political and social life of distant Russia. He was determinedly against his son's plan to return to Petrograd. The whole family and his closest friends sought to influence Erlich to remain in Poland. Yet he felt the pull back to the revolutionary battlefield—to the ground where he had left behind so many friends and comrades, where he had given so much of himself, and as a socialist and revolutionary

freedom fighter had personally learned so much. But the foreign newspapers were telling of the ever-greater terror in Russia, a condition which had become especially acute in the wake of the assassination attempt on Lenin. Letters from Simon Dubnow began to arrive in Lublin with increasing frequency, in which he let it be known, by various signs, that the situation was becoming progressively worse, that many of Henryk's comrades were either under arrest or preparing to leave Russia. Hence the conclusion to be drawn—Henryk should preferably remain in Poland.

Vladimir Medem came from Warsaw to Lublin and held a detailed discussion with Henryk Erlich. The time was October 1918, a month after Erlich arrived from Petrograd. Medem told him about the renewed activity of the Bund in Poland and about the prospects for a large Jewish labor movement in a Poland which would, in all likelihood, become an independent nation as a consequence of the war. He sought very strongly to dissuade Erlich from returning to Russia. "We are more in need of living leaders than of martyrs, or prisoners incarcerated in Russian prisons," said Medem.

Erlich could not shake off the impression which this conversation made on him. Nevertheless, he still remained unconvinced that his place was in Poland and not in Russia. He decided to travel from Lublin to Warsaw in order to see for himself—on the ground—and then decide on the next step. He arrived in Warsaw at the end of October. After a talk with Noyakh, the chairman of the Bund, he decided to remain in Poland. From that day until the Stalinist hangmen dragged him away, Henryk Erlich stood at the head of the Jewish workers' movement, a movement burgeoning amidst all manner of storms, a movement marching under the banner of the Bund.

To describe Erlich during the Polish period of his life and activity—the years 1918 to 1939—means, actually, to write the history of the Polish Bund. This would greatly exceed the limits of a biographical sketch. Erlich's journey in life up to 1918 and his whole public and party activity until he returned to Poland were, in a certain respect, a preparation for his Polish period. His insight into the Russian Revolution, which he gained not as an observer on the sidelines but as an active participant, gave him an opportu-

nity to orient himself from the very outset to the distinctive atmosphere of the Polish Bund. During those years the Polish Bund lived intimately with the problems of the Russian Revolution while experiencing its pains. Born and raised in Poland, Erlich enjoyed broad contacts with Polish political and public circles in general, and with the Polish socialist leaders in particular. His genuine feeling for the Polish language, culture, and literature instantly gave him the status of an insider, an intimate on the Polish home scene. But Henryk Erlich was, in the first instance, a Polish Jew with deep roots in the Jewish life of Poland; and he remained such to the end.

After almost 150 years of enslavement, Poland had only begun to construct itself at that time, to adapt itself to an independent economic and political life. In the circles of the Polish socialist movement Erlich immediately found old friends, some from as far back as his university years. The situation in the Polish workers' milieu had changed radically: the two Polish parties—SDKPL (for short, PSD—the Polish Social Democracy) and the PPS Lewica (the Left PPS)—united to form the Polish Communist Party. Already active in Warsaw at that time was Beynish Mikhalevich, whose close friendship with Erlich grew out of their collaboration in St. Petersburg before the war. During the years of the German occupation Mikhalevich was active in Vilno. The Germans arrested him in 1918 and sent him, under police supervision, to Otwock, near Warsaw. Of course he did not remain in Otwock but repaired to Warsaw and promptly entered into Bund activities, including editorial collaboration on the Bund press (*Lebnsfragen* and other periodicals).

Mikhalevich had been an intimate of the Erlichs already in St. Petersburg. More than once, while Henryk Erlich was busy half the night attending the sessions of the Social Democratic faction of the Duma, Beynish Mikhalevich would remain with Erlich's two small children. He thus grew very close to them. In close proximity to the Erlichs—indeed, on the same Elektoralna Street, lived Esther Iwinska and her brother, Victor Alter, who had returned to Warsaw at almost the same time as the Erlich family. Between Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter there promptly began a weaving of threads of mutual respect, of understanding and intimate friend-

ship. The ties endured for two decades. Erlich had encountered Alter even earlier. But it was only in Poland, in the course of common activity in the Polish Bund, that they established ties with each other and concluded a union which became in truth—indeed, quite literally—a union “of life and death.”

This intimate friendship was reinforced and made deeper not only by the similarity, but even by the contrasts, in their two personalities. Victor Alter was impulsive and temperamental; Henryk Erlich was calm and patient. Alter had a great breadth of interests and an indomitable will; Erlich—consistency, a feeling for reality. Alter had élan; he was forever impelling himself to the fore; Erlich, on the other hand, was ever conscious of the heavy burden of leading the masses; he always felt a sense of responsibility for the collective. Both were towering and distinctive personalities. Both were kneaded from that rare material from which leaders of large mass movements are made.

On ground so familiar, in an atmosphere of such warmth, Henryk Erlich's extraordinary qualities and gifts blossomed swiftly. At the time he came to Poland he still had difficulty writing Yiddish; much effort was involved in the translation of his articles from the Russian. In the course of a few months, however, he began to use the Yiddish language fluently in its written form. In time he came to occupy one of the most prominent places among Yiddish political writers. Although Erlich was already in Poland, he still published his first longer article in the Russian language. It appeared in the Bund miscellany *Unser Shtime* (“Our Voice”) (Warsaw, November 1918), under the title “Is the Soviet Government a Workers' Government?” Vladimir Medem translated the article into Yiddish. Erlich offered a brilliant analysis of the course of the Bolshevik coup d'état, providing citations from the writings of Lenin and Trotsky on the subject. He concluded:

The Soviet government does not have the right to speak in the name of the Russian working class. The November coup d'état was not an uprising of the workers. It was carried out by the Bolsheviks in the name of the gray soldier-mass. . . .

The communism of the Bolshevik regime has no relationship whatsoever to proletarian socialism. It has exactly the kind of

relationship to the socialism of Marx as the relationship that exists between the social ideals of a petty bourgeois peasant mass thoroughly committed to private property and the ideals of the revolutionary proletariat.

Prior to the Polish period it was very rare for Henryk Erlich to hold forth publicly in Yiddish. But in Poland he quickly became one of the finest speakers in the Bund. His lectures and political addresses attracted thousands of Jewish workers and common folk. His appearance in a provincial town would become a significant event not only for the local Bund organization but for the Jewish population as a whole. Many Jewish workers would come from the surrounding towns in order not to miss a public lecture by Henryk Erlich or a political rally in which he participated. His speeches had a distinctive charm about them: he literally captivated an audience with his sincerity, with the radiance of his personality. Even those who were not in agreement with him felt that here was someone who believed deeply in what he was saying; here was a speaker who tried not to influence people's feelings or instincts, but who appealed to each individual's reason.

Henryk Erlich's addresses excelled with their logical inner structure and broad scope and grasp. His was a temperament that eschewed surface effects, a temperament marked by a fire that burned within. Such, in a word, was the style of Henryk Erlich's speeches—speeches before closed sessions and at meetings of the Central Committee of the Bund; reports at the party congresses of the Bund and polemical speeches in closed party circles. These were always of such a quality as to literally rivet everyone's attention.

The high degree of admiration for Erlich extended beyond Jewish labor circles. As an emissary of the Bund he had occasion quite often to address large mass rallies of Polish and even German workers (large numbers of the latter were found in several cities of the Polish Republic, e.g., Lodz and those in Upper Silesia). Such performances invariably brought honor and esteem to the party. Through the ranks of the Polish Bund Erlich rose to become a leading personality in Poland's socialist movement in general and a prominent, as well as respected, figure in the international socialist movement.

The more than twenty years in the service of the Jewish workers' movement of Poland were the most creative and mature of Erlich's life. As a socialist for whom the ideals of equality, justice, and freedom were an organic part of his very being, Henryk Erlich found in the Polish Bund a movement that most fully corresponded to his nature. As a Jew who believed that the just national aspirations of the awakened Jewish masses could be satisfied through democracy and socialism, Henryk Erlich saw in the Polish Bund the party closest to his heart. A son of the Polish soil, with a profound feeling for it, he found an innermost satisfaction in the struggle for a democratic and socialist Poland. It was a struggle that engaged the Bund as an integral part of the socialist and freedom movement in the country. All three aspects which constituted the basis of Henryk Erlich's personality—the socialist, the Jew, and the Polish citizen—found a harmonious expression in his activity as a leader of the Polish Bund.

For its part, the Bund found in Henryk Erlich someone more than just another valuable personality or another leading figure. J. Hart has written: "In the stormy twenty years between both world wars, years of tremendously complex problems and fiery passions, Henryk Erlich was the calm captain who, with a clear eye and a steady hand, guided the ship of the Jewish masses in Poland between hidden mines and underwater cliffs."* He was not the type of leader, however, who imposes his will upon the movement. Such a leader would not have been able, generally speaking, to tolerate the deep-rooted inner democracy of the Bund. The unlimited confidence in Henryk Erlich was, to a significant degree, a result of the fact that he, on his part, respected the will of the party even on those rare occasions when he found himself in the minority.

At the close of 1918, that is, during the first months of Poland's independence, councils of workers' delegates were formed in Warsaw and in all the other large cities and industrial centers of the country. They constituted, in the full sense of the word, the parliament of Poland's working class, where all its ideological currents and parties appeared on a common stage. The Jewish

*J. Hart, *Henryk Erlich un Viktor Alter* (New York, 1943).

worker was liberally represented there; and Erlich was the recognized leader of the Bund faction in Warsaw and on the executive committee of the General Workers' Delegate Council of Poland.

When the first free elections to the Warsaw City Council were held in March 1919, the Bund placed Henryk Erlich's name at the head of its list of candidates. He was elected, together with four other Bundists: Victor Alter, Gershon Zibert, Esther Iwinska, and Mauricy Orzech. From then until the last day of Poland's independence at the outbreak of the Second World War, Erlich was for over twenty years one of the most prominent figures in the Warsaw City Council. He was continuously reelected to that body.

Of the 120 members of the Council, Erlich was the only one to oppose the Polish-Soviet War. In the summer of 1920, while the war was in progress—it began with Pilsudski's march on Kiev—he mounted the podium of the Warsaw City Council in order to deliver his famous speech against war, against imperialist plans of aggrandizement, and for an immediate peace with Soviet Russia. This position of the Bund produced reverberations throughout Poland. It made a tremendous stir in the country. Amidst the nationalistic-chauvinistic atmosphere of war, it took a great deal of personal courage and revolutionary daring to come forward with such demands. The forces of Polish reaction went wild. The campaign against the Bund flared up across the whole bourgeois press. Malicious use was made of a dispatch by the Soviet press agency in which it was reported that the Soviet government had allotted five million gold rubles to the Bund (the reference, of course, was to the pro-Communist Bund in Soviet Russia) for the needs of the war in the areas bordering Poland. Inciting their readers, the press declared that "the Bund in Poland has received five million gold rubles from the enemy," and so on. The Bund in Poland was denounced as a subversive party and was, in fact, declared illegal. Scores of Bund activists—among them many Bund councilmen in various cities—were interned in the Dombya camp near Cracow. The authorities closed local Bund meeting halls and organizations throughout the country. About ten police agents, headed by the chief of the security police, entered Erlich's home at night and searched it thoroughly, even ripping up the floor in the process. He was arrested and served three months in a Warsaw prison. The

leader of the PPS, Daszynski (Vice-Premier during the war), wished to intercede in order to obtain his release; but under no circumstances would Erlich allow anyone to intercede for him personally. He remained in prison along with dozens and dozens of other Bundists. When he appeared at the Warsaw City Council after his release, it was evident that the respect for him and for the party he represented with such dignity and political wisdom had grown even greater. The most stubborn anti-Semites in the Warsaw City Council learned to respect the representative of the Jewish working class, the Bundist Henryk Erlich.

In December 1938 Erlich was once again elected to the Warsaw City Council. In those final elections before the Second World War the Bund won a brilliant victory. Of twenty Jewish councilmen elected, seventeen were from the Bund list and only three from all the remaining Jewish parties. Henryk Erlich, who had for long years been the representative of a Bundist minority, now came forward in the new city administration as the spokesman of the Jewish population of Warsaw.

During the period between the two world wars parliamentary elections in independent Poland took place six times: in 1919, 1922, 1928, 1930, 1935, and 1938. The Bund did not participate in the first elections to the Polish Sejm because of the pro-boycott position of its Warsaw organization. The last elections, in the years 1935 and 1938, were boycotted by the whole socialist and progressive camp in Poland because of the new, fascist constitution and the revised electoral law. But in the elections of 1922, 1928, and 1930 the Bund played an active part—and the first candidate on the Bund list was invariably Henryk Erlich.

Erlich added a great deal of dignity and luster to the electoral campaigns of the Bund, campaigns conducted with great zest and on a broad scale, in the finest traditions of socialist mass propaganda and agitation. In the course of the months during which such an electoral campaign would ordinarily run, Erlich addressed meetings and rallies whose audiences totaled hundreds of thousands of Jewish, Polish, and even Russian and Ukrainian workers and peasants. A campaign involved not only severe physical exertion; it also placed a heavy burden on one's nerves. Indeed, a person needed strong psychic equipment in order to keep an electoral

campaign on the appropriately high socialist level at all times. Henryk Erlich was a true master in this respect. Rarely was anyone as capable of inspiring an audience, of enunciating the social content of the socialist electoral platform, of endowing it with actuality and imbuing it with political and national élan.

Erlich evoked this same attitude toward himself even in the circles of the Jewish establishment figures and among the leaders of the Jewish communal groupings. The Orthodox as well as the Zionists knew full well that Henryk Erlich was not one to compromise when it came to matters bearing upon his Socialist convictions. Yet despite this, or perhaps because of it, the attitude toward him was one of utmost respect, and his word carried a great deal of weight.

He was no fervent supporter of the Bund's participation in the Jewish *kehilla*. Still, when the party decided to participate in the elections to the *kehilla*, he was selected on the two occasions (in 1924 and 1936) as the Bund representative in the *kehilla* administration in Warsaw. He thus found himself thrust into the forefront of the struggle against Jewish clericalism and the entrenched power of the Jewish wealthy. Placed in the very thick of Jewish life, where generation-old traditions cut across modern trends, Erlich showed a masterful control of the situation. In his addresses from the rostrum of the Warsaw *kehilla* he scourged Jewish assimilationism, Jewish Orthodoxy, and the Zionist *kehilla* politicians. Yet there was nothing in Erlich's language that smacked of cheap demagoguery or a frivolous attitude toward the old forms of Jewish life. The broadest circles of the Jewish population in Poland listened with greatest attentiveness to Henryk Erlich's presentations in the Warsaw *kehilla*.

The leading role of Erlich in the Polish Bund, which enveloped him in so much affection and recognition emanating from the Jewish working masses, also exposed him to serious dangers. The twenty-one years of independent Poland represented a tumultuous period in the social and political life of the country. The democratic order was undermined as early as May 1926 by the so-called Pilsudski coup. Later, when Hitler came to power in Germany, the fascist movement in Poland grew even more wanton and openly threatened its opponents in the socialist camp with a bullet in the

head or a knife in the back. Both the semi-fascists in the government and the Endek groups,* which, for reasons of competition, were opposed to the governing Pilsudski camp, brought harassment of the Jewish population in Poland to the point where the latter was not certain of life and property. Every oppositional criticism of the semi-fascist regime in Poland and the practices of the forces of reaction was denounced as pro-Jewish and prompted by Jewish money. Even the Polish Socialist Party began to feel the consequences of this poisonous anti-Jewish propaganda. A political address by a Jew would be condemned by the fascist camp as an "interference by alien elements" in Polish affairs. The fascist bands frequently boasted that they were preparing "a night of the long knives"† and had already drawn up the lists of victims. One can imagine the degree of hatred against Henryk Erlich in that camp.

Dangers to Erlich also lurked in an altogether different quarter. The amazing upward movement of the Polish Bund was accompanied by a civil war in the Jewish workers' arena. The Communists declared war on the Bund and attempted to terrorize its militants by means of physical force. Knives and revolvers were brought into play. The underworld was incited and paid by the Communists to carry out assassinations of the more prominent Bundists. Henryk Erlich was a well-known figure. Not only did he address public mass meetings very frequently; he often appeared in the Jewish workers' neighborhoods in his capacity as attorney and councilman, in order to protect the impoverished Jews from being evicted from their living quarters for nonpayment of rent and the like.

In the autumn of 1934, after a series of assaults by fascist bands on Jewish passers-by, the Bund organization in Warsaw organized

*Endek was an abbreviation for National Democrats. The National Democratic Party represented the right-wing, openly anti-Semitic trend of Polish nationalism.—Trans.

†This refers to the sweeping purge in Germany of old political and military collaborators of Hitler and several hundred others, on June 30, 1934. Hitler ordered the execution of a number of important putative rivals for power, including Ernst Röhm, head of the Storm Troops (the SA), Gregor Strasser, Generals von Schleicher and von Bredow, and Edgar Jung, a close associate of Vice Chancellor von Papen.—Trans.

active resistance. For days on end bloody clashes occurred between the fascists and the Bund militia. As soon as it became known that a session of the Warsaw City Council was in progress at which Henryk Erlich, Victor Alter, and other Bund councilmen intended to protest in the sharpest manner against these anti-Semitic crimes, the fascists and Endeks decided to use the opportunity to provoke a bloodbath that would put an end, once and for all, to the "chutspah" of the Bund. The galleries of the Warsaw City Council would be occupied by hooligan elements that would continuously disturb the speakers with hostile and insulting interjections. Their plan was to assault the defenseless Bundist councilmen late at night when they were on the way out of the council building.

At the editorial office of the Bund *Folkstsaytung* on Novolipye 7, a number of telephone messages arrived from unknown informants about what was being prepared at the Theater Square, where the sessions of the City Council were held. Fortunately, it was not yet too late in the evening to inform the branches of the Jewish trade unions that an assault upon the Bund councilmen was imminent. Hundreds of Jewish workers armed themselves with whatever was close to hand and proceeded to flow toward the Theater Square.

Late at night a massive demonstration of Jewish workers was already in progress. While the demonstrators occupied the entrance to the council building, a detachment of the Bund militia entered the buffet of the City Council through a rear door. A clash erupted between the fascist hooligans and the Bundists. At first it was only verbal, taking the form of hostile catcalls. Meanwhile the hooligans were able to observe what was in store for them on the street. Realizing that their plan had failed, they withdrew from the battlefield. The demonstrating Jewish workers accompanied the Bundist councilmen all the way to their homes.

Several weeks later the commander of the Bund militia, Comrade Bernard Goldstein, received a confidential piece of information to the effect that the Polish fascists were preparing to shoot Henryk Erlich in his apartment. This item of information originated with the Polish socialist militia, which was on friendly terms with the Bund militiamen; indeed, they frequently came to each

other's assistance. An investigation soon established that a PPS militiaman had accidentally happened to overhear a conversation about this plan at a cheap nightspot in Grochów, a suburb of Warsaw. It was a place where various shady elements used to foregather for a little tippling. Even the precise day and hour of the planned assassination were mentioned.

The party secretariat of the Bund decided to adopt the requisite defense measures. The Polish socialist militia gladly agreed to take part. On the morning of the day of the planned action, the street on which Erlich lived was already occupied by a detachment of the PPS militia. Comrade Bernard brought only a single Bund militiaman with him—Comrade Eisenberg (now living in Canada). Jewish militiamen would have been too conspicuous in the Polish neighborhood in which Henryk Erlich lived at the time. Leaving the street under the observation of a group of tested militiamen, Comrade Bernard, along with a smaller unit, occupied the courtyard and the steps leading to the Erlich apartment.

At precisely ten o'clock in the morning—in accord with the information that had been confidentially received—the militiamen on the street signaled that two suspicious characters had appeared. When they entered the courtyard and proceeded to mount the steps to the Erlich apartment on the fourth floor, Comrade Bernard followed behind them. The two fascists approached the door of the apartment and rang the bell. Bernard was already directly behind them. When the door opened, he was the first to quickly enter the apartment. Whirling around and facing the unknown individuals, he asked them whom they were looking for. They immediately sought to pretend it was all a misunderstanding; they had rung Erlich's doorbell by mistake; they were looking for someone else, etc. Comrade Erlich later told how he had, in fact, received a telephone call the evening before. Two individuals, it seems, wished to consult with him about a political trial. The matter seemed a bit suspect to Erlich because the person at the other end of the line was unable to say who had recommended him. Nevertheless, he agreed to receive them at ten o'clock in the morning—on the day the whole occurrence took place.

After this episode, Bund militiamen guarded Erlich's every step

for a period of many months. He, however, remained totally unaware of it.

Another serious episode occurred during the years when the Communists wished, at all costs, to destroy the Garment Union, one of the largest Jewish trade union organizations in Poland. After a series of bloody clashes, a leaflet was published by the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party stating that the leader of the Bund, Henryk Erlich, had personally joined with a group of Bund militiamen in shooting and beating pro-Communist Jewish garment workers. What was intended by that despicable calumny was perfectly clear to the Bund. In the light of conditions during those years, the leaflet, signed by the highest Communist authority in Poland, meant an open preparation for bloody acts of revenge.

Several weeks after the appearance of the leaflet in question, Erlich had occasion to visit a courtyard in the heart of an impoverished Jewish district, on Lubecka Street. It was also a neighborhood where Jewish Communists maintained their *birzha*.^{*} Nearly all the residents around the courtyard had received "notices"—i.e., word that they were facing imminent eviction. It was a matter now of drafting a collective appeal to the court to rescind the eviction order. After Erlich gathered the necessary signatures and left the courtyard, he noticed several familiar Communist faces. He had taken no more than a few steps when a group of Communists surrounded him, pushed him against a wall, and began to accuse him of all kinds of sins. But the nearby crowd took him under its protection and defended him against the attacks of the Communists. At the editorial office of the *Folkstsaytung* the phone rang continuously. Unknown individuals described what was happening and asked the Bundists to come as quickly as possible to prevent any harm to Erlich. By the time a unit of the Bund militia along with a number of ordinary Jewish worker-volunteers arrived at the scene, the episode was over. Hundreds of Jewish residents of the street had gathered and pounced on the Communists; they were literally in a mood to lynch them.

The role of Erlich in the internal life of the Polish Bund was

^{*}A concentration point for political proselytizing, dissemination of propaganda, job seeking, etc.—Trans.

great indeed. He helped shape the political face of the Bund during the course of over twenty years. At the Cracow Unification Congress of the Bund in 1920 he was elected to the Central Committee. From that day until the final moment of his life he was the leading personality in the Central Committee of the Bund. During the whole period he was the actual editor-in-chief of the Bund's daily paper. Through his editorials in the columns of *Folkstsaytung* he formulated the position of the Bund on the latest events in the country and the world. He possessed not a trace of vanity. As with every outstanding individual, Erlich certainly knew his worth. Yet what was uncommon about him, what in fact made him so beloved in party circles, was his profound respect for the will of the collective even when he remained in the minority.

Those were years when it was not easy to remain throughout the authority in the Polish Bund while being valued and respected by all. The dispute that lasted for years around the question of the Bund's affiliation with the Socialist International tore the organization apart. The intensified factional struggle produced strained relationships among the adherents of the different ideological tendencies. Henryk Erlich maintained that the Bund should affiliate with the Socialist International regardless of its many defects. He was the head of the so-called *Eynser* (the "Number One" faction), i.e., the ideological tendency in the Bund which defended that position. However, the confidence in Erlich was so great, and the conviction that he would defend the position of the party with honesty and sincerity was so unshaken, that the Bund invariably delegated him to represent the movement at international socialist meetings even when the majority of the organization did not agree with his position.

The dispute in the Bund over the issue of the Socialist International lasted until 1930; nevertheless, Erlich remained the Bund emissary at the International Socialist Congresses in Hamburg (1923), Marseilles (1925), and Vienna (1931), gatherings at which the fate of the Labor and Socialist International after the First World War was debated. It was only after the decision adopted at its Lodz Congress in the spring of 1930 that the Bund joined the Socialist International and obtained a permanent place on its executive body.

At the International Socialist Congress in Vienna in 1931, the Polish Bund was officially represented by a large delegation for the first time. The delegation was headed by Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Erlich's criticism at that congress of the "reformist" policy of the German Social Democratic Party and his attack on its vacillation in the struggle against the danger of Nazism made an impression throughout the socialist world. Today, after all we have lived through, after the Second World War, many passages of his famous address at that time read like real prophecies.

The personal contact, between Erlich and the leaders of the socialist movement in other countries at congresses and at the sessions of the Socialist International's executive committee brought esteem to the Bund far beyond the borders of Poland. Its opposition to both "reformism" and communism, and its support of a third—revolutionary-socialist—position, greatly enhanced the moral authority of the Bund among the socialist parties of non-Jewish composition. Particularly friendly were the relationships established between the Bund and the Austrian Socialist Party, led at the time by Otto Bauer, and the Socialist Party of the United States. In these two instances ideological propinquity created a favorable basis for mutual understanding.

Erlich became a well-known political defense lawyer in independent Poland. All the interference on the part of Polish reaction notwithstanding, he obtained the right in 1932 to handle cases before the Polish courts. He was primarily involved with trials of communists and with cases relating to the persecution of, and pogroms against, Jews. He gained a reputation throughout Poland as a political defense attorney. Jewish workers and intellectuals in various provincial cities would observe the court proceedings in which Erlich held forth. His imposing figure in the dark robe of the defender, his dignified demeanor in the semi-fascist Polish court-rooms, his convincing speeches made a powerful impression.

As noted previously, Henryk Erlich had been a regular contributor to the large liberal Russian daily, *Dyen'*. From his earliest independent steps in life he had occupied himself with journalism. It was only in Poland, however, that he evolved into a first-class political writer whose articles were read and commented on by tens of thousands of his well-wishers and adversaries.

A company of highly talented writers and journalists grouped itself around the central organ of the Bund in Poland. They stood out in the world of the rich and colorful Yiddish press because of their style, their erudition, and the inner flame that illuminated their writings. Erlich was universally recognized as the animating spirit of the paper. The Bund had in him a political editor with the kind of scope and stature that would have made any large Socialist paper on the European continent proud.

Erlich was entrusted with the political direction of the paper even during the years when the centrist tendency in the Bund—the tendency of which he was the leader—was in a minority. Regardless of whether the majority of the editorial staff was made up of the adherents of the right-wing-centrist or the left-wing faction, it could always be certain that Henryk Erlich would not confront it with *faits accomplis*.

His articles possessed the same basic characteristics as his addresses: a rare ability to infuse the reader with his own deep convictions. Simplicity and sincerity characterized his style. He never sought the kind of journalistic lightning bolts that produce a momentary flash but provide little real illumination and fail to enlighten. Erlich adhered to the classical school of journalism that aspires, first of all, to clarify a complex question in order to give the reader an opportunity to make sense out of it. Whenever the Central Committee of the Bund found itself in need of a major document or programmatic statement on a particularly important matter, it invariably authorized Henryk Erlich to draft it. He was frequently the author of the May First proclamations under the imprimatur of the Central Committee of the Bund. A masterpiece of Erlich's pen was the manifesto addressed to the Jewish working people of Poland published by the Bund in 1937 on the occasion of the party's fortieth anniversary. The manifesto later appeared in pamphlet form, with a press run of over 100,000 copies.

Henryk Erlich was a superb polemicist. In his polemical articles he eschewed cheap effects: he would attack the *essence* of his opponent's ideological position, i.e., the basic foundation of the problem under consideration. This intellectual integrity endowed Erlich's polemical pronouncements with particular weight. Although born of the needs of the daily ideological struggle of the

Bund, they have not become outdated even now. Some of the longer polemical works of Erlich were published simultaneously in Poland and the United States (as, for instance, the discussion articles which involved an exchange with his father-in-law, the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, on the subject of Bundism and Zionism).^{*} A series of articles titled *Der iker fun bundizm* ("The Essence of Bundism") were published as a separate pamphlet in New York. A longer work, *Der kamf farn revolutsyonern sotsializm*, appeared in an English edition in New York in 1934 under the title *The Struggle for Revolutionary Socialism*. This pamphlet contains a brilliant analysis by Erlich of "reformism" in the international socialist movement, of the struggles centering on the setting up of a new International, an evaluation of the Communist International, as well as an illuminating report on the disputes between "right" and "left" at the International Socialist Conference in Paris in August 1933, following the Hitler catastrophe in Germany. It also deals with the conference of eighteen small Socialist parties and groups—among them the Bund in Poland—which took place on the eve of the general Socialist conference.

Despite expenditure of great amounts of time and energy demanded by the work on the *Folkstsaytung*, Erlich managed to appear also in the columns of the Polish socialist press, particularly in the Polish-language publications of the Bund.

An affectionate father, Henryk Erlich loved his two sons, Alexander and Victor, deeply. They were still children when he brought them from Russia to Poland. In the course of his years in Poland they grew up and proceeded to seek their own way and their own position in life. They joined Tsukunft ("Future"), the Bund youth organization and the Bund student organization, in which they came to occupy prominent places and experienced the stormy development of the Jewish socialist youth movement under the banner of the Bund. Quite often, when Henryk Erlich returned home after his exhausting work, he had occasion to engage in conversations with his sons for hours—particularly with the older son, Alexander—concerning the problems and doubts that tormented them. He urged his sons to study economics and social

^{*}Published in the *Tsukunft*, New York.

sciences in general in order to acquire a historical perspective and develop a firm *Weltanschauung*, a guideline that would enable them to orient themselves amidst all the confusions and zigzags of a complex social process.

The period coinciding with their spiritual maturation was charged with acute ideological struggles and with remarkable events that demanded clarification, enlightenment, and solid orientation. They found in their father the sure guide and the firm spiritual leadership that provided moral direction in their young lives. Alexander studied social sciences in prewar Berlin and economics in the United States. Victor devoted himself to the study of Russian and Polish literature. Victor is Professor Emeritus of Russian literature at Yale University.*

Henryk Erlich loved literature, theater, and music. Indeed, he had an excellent ear for music, and music had a profound effect upon him. He would recognize a false note in an instant. We had the impression that he always listened to the *rhythm* of the time in a purely musical, subtle fashion, that he grasped a political situation not only with his mind but also with an inner "feel" for it. An imposing presence, Erlich was characterized by inward harmony, a calm self-assurance—the achievement of an artist who has overcome inner waverings and doubts by creative zest.

It was possible to observe in the spiritual makeup of Erlich signs of a permanent inner conflict—a conflict with himself and within himself; a distance between his feeling and intellect, between his revolutionary temperament and sober understanding. Let us, for instance, take his attitude toward Soviet Russia. *Emotionally* his opposition to the Communist dictatorship in Soviet Russia was far stronger and more uncompromising than it was *politically*. On the level of feeling, he despised the totalitarian enslavement of thought in Soviet Russia and the trampling underfoot of elementary freedoms. The Byzantine cult of the leader disgusted him and insulted his sense of human dignity. But in his *political* pronouncements on Soviet Russia he always restrained

*Subsequently Alexander Erlich became a respected authority on Soviet and East European economics and Professor of Economics at Columbia University. He died on January 7, 1985.—Trans.

himself. He did not agree with Otto Bauer's position regarding Soviet Russia. He took issue with Bauer's view that the dictatorship in Russia was a necessity as long as there was not yet enough bread and well-being there for everyone. But considerations of international politics weighed heavily on Erlich; notably, his awareness of the hostile capitalist encirclement in which Soviet Russia found itself during those years, and the desire to save the genuine achievements of the Russian Revolution from a reactionary capitalist restoration. Of course, he always wrote and said what he *thought* about Soviet Russia, but he seemed to take pains to avoid bringing into the open what he *felt* about the subject. Whenever the question of Soviet Russia was posed, the political motives invariably mobilized his reason and bridled his temperament. In the years immediately preceding the Second World War—after the notorious Moscow Trials—the emotional factor began to weigh more heavily in his articles about Soviet Russia. This found most striking expression during the ominous weeks of August 1939, when the world was astounded by the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

If reason had been dominant in his writings about Soviet Russia, pronouncements on Jewish subjects were informed by commitment. During theoretical conversations on the Jewish question, Erlich never appeared as a zealous Yiddishist. Where language was concerned, Polish was his cultural medium no less than Yiddish. His continuous and close contact with the Jewish masses of Poland—with their daily needs and cares, with their smaller as well as weightier problems and needs—had a very powerful influence upon him. The life of the Jewish masses had been distant in the Petersburg days. Jewish problems were for him, at that time, more a matter of theory than living, pulsating reality. But in Warsaw Erlich found himself at the heart of Jewish life, breathing its air, acting in concert with it. The decrees against, and the persecutions of, the Jews, the sociopolitical anti-Semitism, the policy of economic extermination directed against Jews, unceasingly called for spirited countermeasures on the part of the Bund. And along with all this, there was the creative, colorful, and militant Jewish life, with its political differentiation and rich communal character which impressed people and drew them to it.

Henryk Erlich became integrated into the Jewish life of Poland more strongly and organically than he, the socialist internationalist, could have imagined. In such a "judaizing" process of his, the revolutionary national role of the Bund in Jewish life found expression.

Erlich's more than twenty years of party activity between the two world wars represented for him a period of tremendous physical exertion and a vast spiritual burden. It demanded the permanent intellectual, spiritual, and physical mobilization of all his energy, of his total vitality, in order to satisfy the needs of the movement that was experiencing a stormy growth. The Hitler victory in Germany, with its political and social repercussions in Europe generally and in Poland in particular; the vicious and steadily increasing anti-Semitism in the country proper; the clear signs of an approaching catastrophe—the preparations for the Second World War—all these were far from normal conditions for the tumultuous growth of the Jewish labor movement. Moreover, this movement was caught up in a bitter struggle against communism while concurrently waging an ideological conflict with the "reformist" wing of the labor movement. The situation was one without precedent in the history of the Bund. Tens of thousands of Bundists and ordinary working people hungrily awaited a word from the Bund, a directive from their party. In his capacity as a political editor of the central organ of the Bund and the most prominent leader of the party, it devolved on Henryk Erlich to enunciate the attitude of the party in the face of the ever-changing situation in the country and the world, and to formulate the position of the Bund in the struggle against both general and Jewish reaction—against Polish and Jewish nationalism.

This task Erlich fulfilled by way of his appearances at public mass meetings, at sessions of the Warsaw City Council and the Warsaw *kehilla*, in exchanges with Polish and German Socialists, and at sessions of Bundist party bodies. Comrades from all segments of the Bund movement—from the trade unions, the Yiddish secular school system,* the youth and children's organizations—

*The Central Jewish School Organization (known as the Tsisho school system after its Yiddish initials) was launched in 1921 at a conference in Warsaw.—Trans.

would constantly bring their problems and concerns to Erlich. There were no limits to his workday, which often extended well into the night. And although the Bund in Poland was a large and influential party, it was not in a position to assure a wholly satisfactory material existence for its leaders. Henryk Erlich was no exception in this respect. Already in his youth he had experienced a lung affliction; later, in Poland, he suffered from a kidney disorder from which he was never rid up to his tragic end. The more the movement demanded of him, the more he drew on his own untapped reserves of spiritual and physical energy.

“That’s the way it is with every mass movement,” wrote Beynish Mikhalevich in the *Lebnsfragen* in 1919. “It draws the individual into its depths where it devours him, drowns him beneath its billowy waves—indeed, drowns individuality itself. All his abilities, the totality of his skills and virtues are sucked out and literally swallowed up by thousands of hungry mouths of the anonymous mass. They are consumed and devoured like a sacrifice on the altar of the importuning and ceaselessly demanding movement. Yet he too—the leader, the individual—derives benefits from the mass, draws upon its energy, its psyche, the ideology it has fashioned. It constitutes a vast reservoir from which every political leader derives inspiration. Its collective will forges his courage; the feelings of hundreds bubble up out of his heart. The indignation of thousands is reflected in the eyes of the individual. It is a reciprocal process, a constant matter-and-spirit interchange between masses and leader.”

These lines were penned in connection with the anniversary of Bronislaw Grosser’s death. They also provide an answer to the question: Whence did the friend of Bronislaw Grosser’s youth, Henryk Erlich, draw the strength to fulfill his life-mission? With his *lebn fun a kemfer un toyt fun a martirer* (“life of a fighter and death of a martyr”), he—the wonderful, crystalline figure who illumined the path of the Polish Bund during a period of more than twenty years—will, for generations to come, hold a place in the grateful memory of the Jewish working people, like an eternal light blazing the way to a new and just world order. There are spiritual and ethical mountain peaks upon which only select numbers of human eagles can dwell. One such was *Henryk Erlich*.

The Life of Victor Alter

Alexander Erlich

The Early Years

Victor Alter was born in 1890, in the town of Mława. He was the youngest son of a wealthy timber merchant, Yisroel Alter, who died soon after Victor's birth. Although Victor did not know his father, he had heard stories from people close to him, stories on the basis of which there remained in his consciousness the picture of that colorful personality in whom fervent Hasidic belief was coupled with a deep and ardent zest for life.

After his father's death the family moved to Warsaw. His mother remarried. Her second husband, Yisroel-Volf Gliksman, was, for all his religiosity, already influenced by the Haskalah spirit. Thus he offered no objection when his wife decided to give her children a secular education. Like his brothers and sisters, Victor Alter attended the secondary school. He was recognized for his extraordinary ability and many-sided interests. He found time for both philosophy and mathematics, and for recreation as well as sports.

The road to a brilliant career and a carefree life lay open to this talented, passionate, superbly attractive young man. But he was drawn in other directions. The revolutionary storms of 1905 also captivated the fifteen-year-old pupil from the Górski Gymnasium in Warsaw. He became a member of the secret committee that organized the historic students' strike in favor of the introduction of the Polish language in the schools of the Russian part of Poland. The whole committee was arrested by the tsarist police.

As a minor, Victor Alter was released from prison after a few

weeks. The "deserved" punishment did not escape him, however: he was expelled from the school along with other active participants in the strike. He was the recipient of a *volchii bilet*,* that is, he was deprived of the right to be admitted to any school anywhere in the vast Russian Empire. This was Victor's baptism in fire in the revolutionary movement of Poland.

During the same period he also selected, once and for all, his place in this movement. The younger generation of the Alter family did not take the road of many of the rebellious sons and daughters of affluent Hasidim who were seeking a spiritual refuge for themselves in the non-Jewish socialist organizations in order to find in the struggle for the freedom of the Polish masses a kind of justification for their own national self-denial. Victor's older sisters, who were already associated with the Bund organization in Warsaw and had made their apartment available as a meeting place for the district committee of the Bund, also drew their younger brother into the technical-conspiratorial work of the organization.

This activity almost reached a very quick and dramatic conclusion. Victor and his older brother, Izak, taking advantage of the fact that the house in which the Alters lived at 4 Elektoralna Street belonged to their mother, concealed in the attic a large number of weapons that belonged to the Bund Fighting Organization. One day an explosion occurred where the weapons were stored. A fire broke out. The police suspected that something was fishy at that location. The chief of police himself headed for 4 Elektoralna Street. What saved Alter was literally a cinematographic coincidence: the *bojowcy** of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), who had long been planning to assassinate the chief of police, hurled a bomb at his carriage and killed him instantly.

Victor's further presence in Warsaw was clearly unwise, what with the *volchii bilet* and the explosion of the weapons cache. Accordingly, he departed for Belgium in 1906, where he passed the external examination, studied electrical and mechanical engineering at the polytechnicum in Liege, and graduated in 1910 with

*Literally, a wolf's ticket—Trans.

*Members of fighting and self-defense units common to many revolutionary parties and movements in tsarist Russia.—Trans.

an engineering diploma from those two faculties. At the same time Victor participated actively in the local student socialist organization and established ties with the united organization of the Bund groups abroad, whose base was in Geneva, at the office of the Foreign Committee of the Bund. It was at this time that Victor became acquainted with Melanie (Mila) Lorain, who would later become his wife.

Yet despite Victor's links to the new country, he felt the pull toward home, toward Poland. After entering into contact with the Central Committee of the Bund, he returned to Warsaw in 1912, ostensibly to accept a post with the Jewish Colonization Society (the ICO), but actually in order to participate in the underground work of the Bund. In 1913 Victor Alter became the Bund representative on the "Committee of Three," the body that conducted, in the name of the Bund and the two Polish socialist parties (the PPS-Lewica, or Polish Socialist Party-Left, and the SDKPiL, or Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania), the first electoral campaign for membership on the insurance boards that were being set up for workers throughout the Russian part of Poland.

Alter was arrested in the midst of this campaign. After incarceration for several months in the prison on Danilowiczowska he was exiled to the Narym region in western Siberia. He arrived there with a false passport prepared in advance (and sewed into the sole of his shoe). It didn't take long for him to put it to use. On the pretext that he was going out to hunt, Alter disappeared from his place of exile and fled abroad. He remained briefly in Belgium up to the outbreak of the First World War. Drawn into the maelstrom of war, he helped the mobilization effort involving resistance to the Germans by serving as a railroad stationmaster.

Following the German invasion, Alter managed to save himself by fleeing to England together with a flood of other evacuees. He worked in a factory as an ordinary worker and later as an engineer. During that time he provided leadership to the Bund group in England (the *Veker Farein*) and was also active in the British Socialist Party (BSP), which represented the Marxist tendency in the British labor movement.

Along with the majority of the organization, Alter was an

outspoken opponent of the war. He defended this position in the so-called Socialist Committee, within which were represented emigrant groups from all the Russian socialist parties (Bund, Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, SR's), and he participated in the campaign of opposition to military service waged by the committee among the Jewish emigrants in England.

In March 1917 the revolution broke out in Russia. Alter now felt that same inner impulse that had militated against his remaining in Belgium five years before. He left for Russia in the company of other Russian socialist emigrants. He became active in the Ukraine, which at that time was one of the most important centers of the Jewish workers' movement, and subsequently also in Moscow. At the Eighth Congress of the Bund in August 1917, Alter was elected to the Central Committee of the party as a representative of the "internationalist" tendency. The Bolshevik coup in October found him occupying that position. In July 1918 he participated in the Labor Conference which was convened by Russian socialists. He was arrested in connection with it, as were other participants. Very soon after his release he left Russia and returned to his Polish homeland.

A mere three years later, Alter had occasion once again to find himself in a Soviet prison. During the summer of 1921 he journeyed illegally from Poland to Moscow so that he might attend the Third Congress of the Communist International for the purpose of conducting negotiations, together with the other members of the Bund delegation, concerning affiliation of the Bund with the Comintern (the acronym for the Communist or Third International). (In this delegation, Alter was the representative of the so-called Centrist tendency in the Bund, which was opposed to the affiliation.) A comrade whom Alter knew personally approached him with a request to transmit a letter from a Russian socialist under arrest to Sylvia Pankhurst, a leader of the British Communist Party. Alter agreed. It turned out, however, that a member of the British delegation, a Russian woman who lived in England and to whom Alter had given the letter, was also a Chekist.* Of course, she

*An agent of the Cheka, the Russian acronym for the Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution and Sabotage. The latter was the first of the Soviet secret political police agencies.—Trans.

promptly turned the letter over to the Cheka. The Cheka requested that Alter disclose who gave him the letter. Alter categorically refused to do so. To the question whether he knew what was written in the letter, he replied, "I am not in the habit of reading letters that are not addressed to me."

He was arrested and incarcerated in the Butyrki prison. In protest, he declared a hunger strike that lasted eleven days. The doctors later expressed the view that, had the hunger strike lasted a few more days, it might have had a tragic ending. But in those days the Soviet authorities could not permit themselves to ignore the public opinion of the socialist world and the uproar which this story evoked among the number of foreign delegates at the congress in Moscow. Moreover, the determined attitude of the Bund representative, Comrade Meier Vasser, was not without result. Vasser persisted in badgering all the Soviet bigwigs, starting with Karl Radek. He categorically refused to return to Poland without Alter. To avoid an international scandal, the Soviet government had to yield. Alter was freed and returned to Poland.

IN THE RANKS OF THE POLISH BUND

Alter concentrated his daily activity primarily in the areas of economic struggle and constructive aid. From the very first, he became active in the Jewish union movement and in the leadership trade of the workers' cooperatives. In both spheres he swiftly moved to the fore. Under Alter's leadership, the workers' cooperatives evolved into a centralized organization with a broad network of cooperative stores, eateries, and production establishments—a structure which even the bitter crisis of the 1930s proved incapable of destroying completely. He had a great share in the unification of the trade union movement in Poland into a single interethnic federation in which the Jewish workers were organized on autonomous grounds under the leadership of the National Council of Class Trade Unions.

In his capacity as chairman of the National Council during the whole period of its existence, Alter led the Jewish union movement with a firm hand through the innumerable dangers that threatened as a result of economic turmoil, police persecution, and communist

terror during the era of Social Fascism.* He helped formulate the union strategy that was intended to be militant and simultaneously realistic—a policy that kept the employers in check while not allowing chaos to develop in the industries, and one that eschewed all attempts to replace organized mass action by the physical terror of the “toughs.” Alter was concerned that the Jewish trade union movement in Poland, which numbered 100,000 members before the outbreak of the Second World War, should have an understanding of the responsibility and the new tasks associated with its growth. This involved the establishment of firm cooperation between the workers and the self-employed domestic producers (the *khalupniks*) in the struggle against the employers and the development of a broad network of social assistance that would embrace both the union membership and the unorganized Jewish masses.

Victor Alter was held in great esteem in the executive body of the Central Commission of the Trade Unions (the chief leadership group of the whole free trade union movement, in which he had represented the Jewish unions since 1922), despite the fact that his opinion often failed to coincide with the position of the majority. On more than one occasion the executive entrusted Alter with the task of drawing up important documents that contained the formulation of the position of the whole organized working class of Poland on the most important social and economic questions, and to represent the position in question at the congresses of the Trade Union International.

The Warsaw City Council was another important sphere of activity for Alter. From 1919 until the outbreak of the war he represented the Bund in all three City Councils that were elected in the capital of Poland during the twenty years of independence. He became known as one of the finest experts on the subject of municipal politics in the whole socialist camp in Poland. The high

*The wholly Stalinized Comintern, at its Sixth Congress in 1928, adopted the line that socialist and social democratic leaders and parties everywhere were actually a species of fascist and fascism which constituted a greater danger to the working class than the original variety. Unchanged until 1935, the line justified communist violence against socialists and other elements of the non-communist left.—Trans.

point of his activity in this area was reached in the period 1927–1934, when Alter was a member of the magistracy (the administration of the city government). The reactionary and anti-Semitic majority of the magistracy, together with the representative of the Jewish bourgeoisie and a few former Polish socialists who had gone over to the Pilsudski camp, formed a united front against the Bundist. Indeed, for a long while Alter found himself frozen out of all activity. In the end he was accorded a third-rank department—the administration of the city pawnshops. The custom had been introduced of disposing of the most important matters not at the plenary sessions but at secretive consultations to which Alter was not called. But these antics had little effect. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the reactionary city bosses, Alter still knew enough about their “worthy deeds” to enable him to create a storm at the sessions of the magistracy and the City Council with his accusatory speeches in which the emotionalism of the attack was always coupled with expertise and iron logic.

In the city pawnshop administration (where he was, as one would say in New York, the “Commissioner”). Alter succeeded in creating the best possible conditions for those who came there to pawn some of their worldly goods. He also used his position to support most energetically the struggle of the Bund faction in the City Council for the right of Jewish workers to be employed in city enterprises and for subsidies to Yiddish schools and cultural institutions. But nothing redounded so greatly to Alter’s reputation as his readiness to devote himself to the personal cares of every ordinary Jewish person, whether it was a matter of stopping an eviction, sending a child to a summer colony, or obtaining support from the social-assistance fund. They came to Alter for everything, aware that he would not grow tired of intervening, demanding, pleading, and that matters which more than once appeared hopeless could be made to move off dead center.

This untiring activity, which had elicited for Alter, the Bundist alderman, so much gratitude and love among the Jewish masses, had to evoke respect even among honest adversaries. It was not without reason that the future mayor, Stefan Starzyński, who, for all his reactionary character, was still a very capable administrator and an individual of great stature, found it necessary to declare

that the only individual in the magistracy who worked satisfactorily was the Bundist Victor Alter.

It would be no exaggeration to say that, in the whole Bundist movement there was no single individual so burdened by this kind of "minor activity" as Victor Alter. In Alter's case, what would have been more than sufficient to fully occupy the life of a labor activist and to assure him an honorable place in the history of his movement was only a fragment of his activity. Despite all the time he committed in his concern for the small, daily needs of the Jewish common folk, Alter's real spur to action was, nevertheless, the dramatic political struggle in Poland during the twenty years of independence. There was not a single significant political action of the Bund in which Alter failed to participate in a leading capacity—for instance, in elections to the Polish parliament (Sejm), the city councils, or the *kehillas*; in mass actions against anti-Semitism; and in militant responses to reactionary attacks on political freedoms and social legislation which the workers of Poland had fought for and succeeded in winning during the early years of independence. No other leader of the Bund had the distinction of earning, by his actions, greater hatred on the part of Polish reactionaries.

Particular indignation used to be called forth by his articles in the Polish publications of the Bund, which Alter had established or helped to establish in order to familiarize the Polish public with the viewpoint and the struggles of the Bund. The reactionary system that ruled Poland displayed a special kind of hatred for the newspaper *Pismo Codzienne*, a Polish socialist daily edited by Victor Alter together with a group of comrades from the Bund and the PPS. The paper was censored almost daily, frequently twice and three times a day—that is, censored and not allowed to be distributed. And when this did not succeed in crushing it, the paper was forced to cease publication in March 1932 by the shutting down of its printshop. (It was part of the publishing house of the Bundist *Folkstsaytung*, which also fell victim at the time to reactionary arbitrariness and had to cease publication for several weeks.)

After the shutdown of the daily paper, Alter began to issue a Polish weekly, *Nowe Pismo* ("New Journal"). But this journal too did not have a lengthy existence: after about three years of continuous harassment and confiscations, the newspaper was closed

down because it failed to join in the national mourning over the death of Josef Pilsudski, the dictator of Poland, in May 1934, and dared to provide a critical evaluation of the dictator. Indeed, things at that time had reached such a pass that the matter might have had a far worse outcome. For such transgressions in those days one might very easily have ended up in the notorious Bereza Kartuska concentration camp. But Alter was not overawed, and he reissued the journal under a different name, *Myśl Socialistyczna* ("Socialist Thought"). Later, the publication had to undergo yet another change. At that point the Central Committee of the Bund officially took over publication of the Polish journal, which appeared under a new title, *Nowe Zycie*. Under the editorship of Victor Alter, Henryk Erlich, and Emanuel Scherer, it continued to appear until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Attacks and threats on the part of the reactionaries did not faze him, and he remained unaffected by the hysterical howls of the Polish reactionary press after he, together with the Polish workers' leader Antoni Zdanowski, visited, in 1937, the fighting fronts in the Spanish Civil War as emissaries of the Polish trade union movement. It was on the occasion of this tour that Alter spoke from the same platform as the representative of the Polish Communist Party, which was illegal in Poland. To all the insults and threats, Alter responded with calm disdain and by helping to organize a broad campaign of assistance to the Spanish children and the secret shipments of arms to the fighters of the Republic.

Following Hitler's rise to power, Victor Alter, along with the recently deceased secretary of the Transport Workers' International, Edo Fimen, and a third labor leader, organized a secret radio station. Its aim was to send freedom reports to the enslaved German people. The secret radio station which Alter, in his capacity as an engineer, had helped organize and personally erect, was installed on a ship off the Polish coast.

In view of the political conditions prevailing under the Pilsudski regime, only a thin line separated the "legal" labor leader from prison or concentration camp. Alter crossed that line more than once, and it was undoubtedly only his great popularity within the country and abroad that stayed the hand of the reactionary "guardians of order."

Alter's name resounded throughout Poland. Everyone who came in contact with him—whether responding with admiration or the gritting of teeth—had to recognize his sweeping grasp of issues, his intellectual brilliance, and his utter contempt for danger. But only those who were destined to be in the same movement as Victor Alter were able to evaluate in full measure what he was and what he meant for the cause to which he committed his life.

THE MAN AND THE THINKER

According to the proverb, many are the roads that lead to Rome. To socialism, also, people have come via many roads and for various reasons. And these individual distinctions find the strongest expression precisely among those persons for whom the linkage with the workers' movement is no mere coincidence but a result of deep, inner needs.

Within the revolutionary underground of Tsarist Russia (including Poland), there existed a universal type—the *intelligent*: an individual stemming from the upper stratum who came to socialism driven by guilt feelings with respect to the oppressed and the tormented. His "going to the people"* was an act of atonement for sins, a dramatic gesture involving the shaking off not only of material conveniences but also of life's pleasures and the cultural refinements he had absorbed. Individuals permeated with that spirit frequently raised themselves to the heights of supreme saintliness and martyrdom. But behind the sanctity one could frequently discover inner depression and embitterment—a high price one paid for the triumph over self.

Victor Alter was the complete opposite of this type. Socialism, to him, was not something to which one was drawn in order to offer oneself up as a sacrifice. His socialism arose from the wellsprings of turbulent energy, from physical and spiritual valor, and from the inexhaustible zest for living enriched with modern

*This winged phrase is associated with the uniquely Russian socialist current called Populism. It was coined by Alexander Herzen, who, during the 1860s, urged radical and alienated youth to bring the socialist gospel "to the people."—Trans.

humanist culture. Alter could not make peace with a system in which the race for profit and the bitter struggle for existence drained and crippled the human being, depriving him of the chance to live colorfully, intensely, creatively. For Alter, nothing could be more natural and the source of greater joy than to transmute his own life into a challenge hurled in the face of today's world—to rupture the armor of egotism within which it confines the individual and to respond with burning indignation to every injustice committed against others, whether the judicial murder of Sacco and Vanzetti or a flood in a coal mine, whether the bombing of Spanish cities or an eviction on Niska Street.

Alter was drawn to wherever the struggle was blazing. He would stand forth in all his brilliance during an impassioned ideological discussion, at a stormy mass meeting, or in the midst of an action associated with great danger. For him, personal risk was no cause for restraint; indeed, it served rather as an inticement. The spirit of the young gymnasium student, who used to go to the Saxon Garden in order to fight with anti-Semitic hooligans, lived within the party head of twenty years later who could relate, with eyes aglow, how he had just "given it" to an Endek ruffian in the course of an attack on the Bund May First demonstration. Protecting a comrade from a bullet or a blow with his own body was as natural for Alter as hiding would have been for an ordinary mortal.*

And those who were with Alter on the Polish roads in September 1939 will never forget how, in the course of the heaviest German bombardments, he would buck up the people around him

*To illustrate—just one example: On a certain occasion in the month of May 1926, when Pilsudski carried out his March on Warsaw and bloody battles took place on the streets of the capital, Alter and Erlich were on the way to a press conference at the Warsaw Town Hall. They had already gotten as far as Senatorska Street when a sudden hail of bullets poured down from machine guns concealed atop the roofs on opposite sides of the street. Running into a house was by then out of the question, since all the gates were barred shut. Suddenly, Alter pressed Erlich to the wall and shielded him with his body. Erlich's every attempt to extricate himself from the clamp was futile, and to all his protests Alter rejoined: "You're needed more." And he did not let go until the shooting stopped.

with a friendly word and a good-natured joke, arguing with them to the effect that, on the basis of probability theory, each one of them had at bottom a very small chance of being hit by the bomb.

A romantic rebel? Certainly. Not without reason does the introductory chapter of Alter's last book, *Man in Society*, carry the title: "In the Footsteps of Don Quixote." The knight who seeks justice and beauty in the midst of a cynical and hostile world and is prepared to lay down his life for their attainment symbolizes, in the eyes of Alter, the best to be found in human beings: the quest for truth regardless of whether it is accompanied by success or failure. But no matter how much Alter cherished this revolt, it never became transmuted into the equivalent of "art for art's sake." He wished to convert his craving for a worthy and proud human existence into the realization of socialist victory. Together with his ideological kindred he understood that, while the most important result of the previous historical period was the union of the workers into an independent political movement, this movement must now be converted into a force capable of directing society and rebuilding it on new foundations.

From the perspective of a distant future, socialism became the central task of the present generation. This conviction was the basis of Alter's "leftism." But for all that, he felt more acutely than others that the theory and strategy of prewar socialism were not suited to the changed situation. And in his attempts to resolve this problem, he devoted the full power of his mathematical and engineering intellect, which was able not only to analyze problems but also to resolve them.

To Alter's important achievements in this sphere there unquestionably belonged his concepts about an "active economic policy." He categorically rejected the opinion which the socialist politicians of the period had borrowed from the accepted economic teachings, to wit, that the printing of paper money dare not exceed a definite proportion of the total amount of gold in the possession of a given state, and that the state budget dare not show a surplus of expenditures over revenues. As long as there are people without employment and unutilized means of production, argued Alter, the greater expenditures by the state (even when they exceed the revenues and when the means for them are created by printing

more paper money) do not lead to the chaos of inflation, but to a diminution in unemployment and the growth of production. The crises of overproduction are no "phenomena of nature"; the state is in a position to break them because it can—in contrast to private capitalists—subsidize the consuming power of broad masses and thereby increase purchasing power. It can also achieve the same goal by undertaking investments which do not produce a profit, but which can—just like *any* investment—create employment for a certain number of jobless and thereby enable them to purchase the goods they need. This will result in growth in employment and production also in other branches of the economy. Socialization (partial or complete) could create favorable conditions for the application of such a policy, but not its replacement.

Such was the essence of Alter's thought, which he defended in the course of almost twenty years in books, speeches, and articles. It would be no exaggeration to say that he was the first to fight within the socialist ranks for ideas that had been developed at the same time by the great British economist John Maynard Keynes, and which are today accepted in socialist and progressive movements throughout the world.

No less characteristic was Alter's response to another question that played a big role in the discussions that went on between the two world wars. European socialism, whose political influence and responsibilities expanded so greatly after 1918, had to draw practical conclusions from the fact that in one important regard the orthodox Marxist prophecies had turned out to be erroneous. The so-called middle strata—groups on the social ladder occupying a position between the bourgeoisie and the working class—had not become proletarianized and remained an important factor in economic and political life. For the "right-wing" socialists this was an added argument on behalf of their policies. One dare not frighten off the "little people" of town and country, they contended, by radical socialist demands and fierce political struggles. The best means for bringing about cooperation with them was via coalition governments made up of the parties representing those strata.

Quite understandably, the reaction among the "left-wingers" to such a right-wing posture was a tendency to underscore the proletarian exclusivity of the socialist movement, supported by the

hope that in a revolutionary situation the proletariat would be in a position to "carry along" such elements. Alter was among those who rejected both standpoints. He pointed out that, regardless of the fact that the traditional forecasts had turned out to be incorrect, there was no absence of stimuli to conflict between the middle strata and capitalism: e. g., oppressive dependence upon the banks and commercial giants; exploitative pricing policies of cartels and trusts; uncertainty about making a living in an economy generating periodic crises.

But the mutuality of interest between the working class and the middle strata did not follow solely from this opposition to big business. It could also obtain its firm basis "on the morrow following the social revolution" if the socialists would take account of the positive role that individual initiative, based upon private property, could play in those spheres of the economy over which large-scale production had not achieved the upper hand. Socialists must understand that the existence of the market, without which these small economic units cannot function, could also be of great help to the large nationalized enterprises by protecting them from bureaucratic immobility, by providing a spur to the lowering of their production costs, and by prescribing a more satisfactory adaptation to the needs of the consumer. Alter was convinced that a policy based upon such premises was capable of laying the groundwork for an "honest compromise" between the proletariat and the middle strata—an understanding based not on the renunciation of socialist tasks but, conversely, on advancing to the fore precisely those demands aimed at the very essence of today's economic system, and which should form the axis of tomorrow's "mixed economy."

The originality of thought which Alter manifested in the development of his conceptions regarding general socialist economic policy also illuminated with lightning clarity his economic justification of the struggle against anti-Semitism. In *Economic Anti-Semitism in the Light of Statistics*, which appeared in both the Polish and Yiddish languages (20,000 copies of the former were issued by the Bund), he demonstrated with figures—in economic terms and mathematically—that anti-Semitism is not only a political and human crime, but also economic nonsense. No one in

Poland succeeded in demolishing the major arguments of the anti-Semites in a clearer and more impressive fashion than did Alter in that publication.

Alter did not formulate his ideas as a kind of new Torah handed down from Mount Sinai. Nothing was more alien to him than the devising of cures that would serve as guarantees against all possible ailments. He found it constantly necessary to remind one of the tremendous role played in politics by such things as flexibility, creative improvisation, and the ability to stand up for one's own truth. His own "heterodoxy" did not arise as a result of a sudden revelation. The struggle on behalf of his ideas was waged over many years not only with his opponents, but also within himself. He honed his thoughts, made his formulations more precise, and verified the basic premises and conclusions in the light of experience. Alter experienced moments of the greatest exaltation in the course of this activity, the kind of exaltation induced by the pioneering spiritual deed. Commingled with these joyful feelings, however, was a feeling of profound disquiet: Would the socialist movement allow the chance provided by history to slip by? Would it, because of its helplessness and conservatism, permit its enemies to head it off and use for their nefarious ends that energy and those means which the socialists did not dare to use on behalf of the cause of human emancipation? The victory of German fascism and its economic and political successes were, in Alter's eyes, both threat and warning, and during the final years before the Second World War, he saw how another danger, of a similar kind, was arising on the part of a faction which he had hitherto regarded as a part of his own camp.

THE DISINTEGRATED HOPE

When Alter arrived in Poland at the beginning of 1919 he found his party in a state of bitter internal conflict. Bolshevik Russia, which was engaged at that time in struggle against domestic counterrevolution and the attempts at foreign intervention, also drew to itself the enthusiasm of the Jewish workers of Poland. This enthusiasm found tangible expression in the political attitude of the Jewish Labor Bund. At the Cracow Congress of the party in 1920, the

decision was taken to open negotiations for affiliation with the Comintern.

Victor Alter, from the very outset, took his place in the ranks of those opposing affiliation. While he remained the same outspoken ideological opponent of "right-wing" socialism he had been during the war years, he was deeply convinced that the tasks of revolutionary reconstruction could not be resolved by separating off, organizationally, from the majority of the socialist working class and by attempting to carry out the will of the radical minority with the aid of armed putsches or the bayonets of the Red Army. In the eyes of Alter, the Comintern—regardless of this or that policy at a given moment—represented an attempt to stabilize and make eternal the split in the ranks of the workers. Thus his counterposing to the slogan of affiliation with the Comintern the idea of the unity of the whole working class. The concrete forms in which he envisaged that unity changed over the years. In 1919 Alter thought about the creation of an international linkup between the workers' councils which existed at that time, aside from Russia, also in Poland, Germany, and Austria. They represented all of the proletarian tendencies in those countries.

In subsequent years Alter placed his hopes in the activity of the so-called *Wiener Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, an international association of left-socialist parties (dubbed the Vienna, or "Second and a Half," International) that set themselves the goal of becoming a bridge between Soviet Russia and the western European labor movement. When the Polish Bund, at its Third Congress (December 1924), finally shucked off the Comintern orientation, Alter, together with the new majority of the party, defended the Bund's affiliation with the so-called Information Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Parties, which desired to renew the efforts of the "Viennese." Scarcely three years later, he became the leading advocate in the Bund of the proposal to affiliate with the Socialist International, whose ranks, since 1923, included the large majority of the world socialist movement.

The Bund [wrote Alter in his emendation to the theses of the party majority] cannot adopt the viewpoint of waiting until the majority of the world will accept the position of the Bund. The Bund must build

an organizational bridge now between the Jewish working class *as it is* and the rest of the working class *as it is*. In this way, mutual understanding will be facilitated and the groundwork laid for ideological unity. This rapprochement is necessary for the daily struggle of the Jewish working class. However, it is far more necessary in case of the probable revolutionary events.

Alter's motion failed of adoption at the congress of the Bund in January 1929. The leaders of the party majority, who in essence agreed with Alter, contended that the party was not yet internally prepared for such a radical turn. But the ice had been broken, and a year-and-a-half later the special congress of the Bund voted to enter the Socialist International. Still, for Victor Alter and his friends this was no time for celebrating a victory. The new stage in Bund politics coincided with the fateful crisis in the political development of the world: the German elections of September 1930 brought the first big triumph for Hitler. The victorious advance of brown fascism had commenced.

In the years that followed, the intentions that lay behind the "left course" proclaimed by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International became clear. The German Communists had advanced the slogan "Social Democracy Is Enemy Number One," and did not hesitate in a number of instances to go "part of the way" together with the Hitlerites. Their Polish comrades persisted in ridiculing the struggle between the democratic opposition and the Pilsudski dictatorship as "a quarrel within the fascist family." At a time when the political and union organizations of the workers found themselves under the most virulent assault on the part of the semi-fascist regime and its agencies, the communists were doing everything in their power to tear down and smash them through wild strikes and filthy campaigns of slander. These strikes were supplemented, in the Jewish workers' environment, by physical terror directed against their opponents. All this while Soviet Russia not only encouraged its German disciples to compete with the Nazis in the "struggle for the national liberation of the German people," but also thought nothing of demonstrating warm friendship for fascist Italy.

In the struggle of the Jewish Labor Bund against such politics,

Victor Alter played a most active part. He predicted that the communist incitement against the official socialist movements for the purported crime of "Social Fascism" would ultimately clear the way for the real fascism. He urged the most energetic resistance to the anarchy and banditry introduced into the workers' milieu by the adventuristic "revolutionary exercises" and the murderous attacks upon ideological adversaries. No one provided a more devastating evaluation of the maneuverings of Soviet foreign policy, which, in retrospect, appear as a modest anticipation of the subsequent Hitler-Stalin pact.

The Soviet Union [wrote Alter] must, of course, take advantage of the contradictions between the imperialist countries. But the question is *how* to take advantage of those contradictions.

We know of only a single case in the history of socialism in which socialists desired to play upon the contradictions among the bourgeois elements by means of an agreement with their reactionary part. We refer here to Ferdinand Lassalle's attempt to reach an understanding with Bismarck. Subsequently, however, one could not find a single responsible socialist who did not condemn that step.

The Soviet Union is committing a grave political error if it considers it possible at present to go together "part of the way" with fascist states. Don't the communists understand that with such a tactic they hold up to ridicule their own slogan that all forces have to be thrown into the struggle against fascism?*

This last question was not a rhetorical one. Alter conducted his struggle against the communist policies out of the deep conviction that he was fighting not against the communists as such, but for their souls. He believed in the victory of the unity idea. It was for him a virtual axiom that the logic of life, or more correctly, the bitter defeats of the labor movement owing to the guilt of both of its extreme wings, would compel the labor movement to unite its forces. Indeed, there came times quite soon when it might have seemed that these expectations were being fulfilled.

The earthquake which Hitler's victory touched off in international relations brought about a change in the foreign policy of the

**Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, January 2, 1931.

Soviet Union. An understanding with the democratic states of the West became an urgent necessity in order to disrupt the attempts at anti-Soviet concentration. At the same time, the attitude toward the socialist parties also changed. It had now become a matter of primary importance to make use of the visible influence enjoyed by these "twin brothers of fascism" in order to sway the policies of their respective countries on behalf of an understanding with the Soviets.

None of the responsible leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund had any doubts about the real reasons for this new communist policy vis-à-vis the socialists. Alter was, in this respect, no less free of illusions than were others. Yet it did not interfere with his being one of the strongest optimists in the party concerning the prospects for workers' unity. He was firmly convinced that, the motives of the communist leaders notwithstanding, the inner logic of the collaboration between workers of different persuasions in the struggle against the common enemy would, by degrees, neutralize the poison of mutual hatred and root out the methods of physical and spiritual terror directed against those who thought differently. Collaboration would finally lead to a united movement capable of crushing any attempt to revive the old spirit of cleavage. When the Central Committee of the Bund concluded an agreement in September 1934 with the Communist Party of Poland concerning a united front, a number of activists believed that the chances of loyal cooperation on the part of the communists were far from sufficient to justify a step that would seriously jeopardize the legal existence of the Bund movement. Alter defended the decision of the Central Committee most ardently. Despite the fact that the communists withdrew from the agreement after only a few days, Alter did not abandon the hope that an understanding was only a matter of time. He worked assiduously—indeed, with enthusiasm—in effecting the unity of the trade union movement, something that became possible thanks to the communist change of course. The successes in this area, and even more, the headway being made in western Europe by the policy of the united front served to strengthen his faith.

Of course, Alter's optimism, even in those years, did not for one moment turn into uncritical zeal. He was worlds apart from

those elements in the socialist camp for whom the united front consisted of turning the left cheek toward the partner after receiving a slap on the right. Whenever he encountered instances of disloyalty and "maneuvering" in the sphere of the unified unions, Alter did not hesitate to call the guilty to account in the harshest terms. And just as little did he find it necessary to conceal his negative attitude toward the communist "Popular Front" idea which had surfaced at that time. The thought that, in order to defeat fascism, it was necessary to haul down the anti-capitalist slogans was just as unacceptable to Alter when it bore the Comintern's imprimatur as when it was voiced by a German Social Democrat during the closing years of the Weimar Republic. Still, while fighting against the slogans of the Popular Front, he always retained the feeling of solidarity with the mass movements that had developed under those slogans. His attitude toward the "Blum Experiment" in France and his untiring activity on behalf of the Spanish Republic were practical examples of that disposition. Alter was capable of rejoicing at the victories and feeling pain at the defeats of the Popular Front forces, as he would with his own movement's victories and defeats. Moreover, he had the firm conviction that it was precisely unity which created for the labor movement the best condition for growth through its successes and for learning from its failures. Not one of the leaders of the Polish Bund at that time believed more fervently in the creative powers of unity than did Victor Alter. And no one experienced more profoundly the tragic turn that came in later years.

While Alter was analyzing the prospects of the unity movement, he never lost sight of internal developments in the Soviet Union. His attitude toward these developments was always colored by the singular attributes which characterized his approach to the core question of socialist politics. Thus, his concepts about the "mixed economy" enabled him to evaluate the developmental possibilities of the Soviet economy on noncapitalist bases differently from those socialists who continued to adhere to the traditional view that a country must first attain a high level of industrialization in order to become "ripe" for socialism.*

*This, incidentally, was the reason why Alter's evaluation of Soviet accom-

Alter's major contentions were from the very outset of a different order. Along with other left-socialists of the time, Alter made allowance for the thought that one can picture situations in the course of which the revolutionary authority must drastically curtail democratic freedoms in order to frustrate attempts at counterrevolutionary resistance. But there was truly a vast distance between conceding that possibility and accepting the elimination of all manner of freedom for those who think differently, something which had always distinguished Russian Bolshevism from all other currents in the proletarian camp, even the most "left." With its sirit of brutality and mendaciousness, Russian Bolshevism poisoned both Soviet life and the international communist movement.

Alter was never one of those socialists who succeeded in making peace with the anti-libertarian character of Russian Bolshevism. This was the case during the time of the most vicious communist attacks and also during the heyday of the united front. He believed, just as did the other leaders of the Bund, that socialist parties dare not make their collaboration with the communists dependent upon political changes within the Soviet Union. Alter had not the slightest doubt that the unity policy would not last long if it were not accompanied by the democratization of the Soviet regime.

Fraternization with socialists abroad and imprisonment of socialists at home could not go hand in hand for very long without the spirit of cynicism and insincerity poisoning the agreement. Together with many others, Alter deeply believed that democratization would come. He wished to see its symptoms in phenomena that had become apparent in Soviet life at that time, namely: the normalization of the general economic situation and of the relation-

ships in the economic sphere was different from that of the majority of European socialists interested in such questions. He saw that the so-called New Economic Policy of the years 1921-1928 was not the beginning of a return to capitalism but a policy of a "transitional period" which, in essence, was a correct one both for purely economic reasons and from the standpoint of establishing normal relations between the proletariat and the "middle strata" in village and town. And for this reason Alter was really more critical than many others regarding the subsequent Soviet policy, with the dizzying industrialization at the cost of bitter privation and the forced collectivization of the peasants.

ship to the peasants, the proclamation of "Socialist Humanism," and the preparation of the new constitution that was supposed to be "the most democratic in the world." Which is why Alter's speeches and articles at this juncture were permeated with optimism and confidence. "The eighteenth anniversary of the Soviet Union has begun under the sign of peace between it and the labor movement," he wrote in November 1935. "May the peace be concluded the more swiftly because *history doesn't wait.*"

But Alter's hope was even then mingled with disquiet. "The Soviet communists," he wrote in his article about the Soviet constitution, "will have to bring to realization their own words about democracy, and they will be judged according to their deeds. One can imagine the joy should their new words indeed become the flesh and blood of Soviet life. And one can envisage the disappointment if everything should remain as it was."

Alter did not have to wait long for the answer. Several months after the above lines were written, there took place the "Trial of the Sixteen," with Zinoviev and Kamenev the leading defendants. Wrote Alter:

The shots in Moscow struck not only the condemned; they severely wounded the revolution. This is the source of the intense grief that has enveloped all of us. The depth of this feeling shows how large a place the Russian Revolution has occupied and still occupies in our hearts. And for this very reason every Bundist and presumably every communist feels such profound chagrin over the trial in Moscow and its consequences, because this shame of the Russian Revolution is, despite everything, the shame of us all. . . . Comrade-communists: Guard your human dignity! Look at what has happened to your leaders of yesterday!

Such was Alter's initial reaction to this first of the Moscow Trials. An outcry of pain and despair. A flaming protest. But not yet an attempt to revise his political position. In a subsequent article on the same subject, the belief in unity found expression once again. Even months later (at the Sixth Congress of the Jewish unions), Alter found enthusiastic language for the help which Soviet Russia had provided to Spain at that time.

Events did not stand still, however. It very quickly became clear that the trial of the sixteen communists, with Zinoviev and Kamenev occupying the leading spots, was not an isolated case followed by "everything remaining as it was," but the beginning of mass extermination of the Bolshevik "Old Guard" and a gigantic leap toward complete totalitarianism. It became known that the Soviet aid to Spain which had evoked so much joy in Alter, was given at the cost of being able to apply GPU methods also in relation to the fighters of the Spanish Republic. The experience in France (the cradle of "unity in action") had demonstrated the whole arsenal of less drastic, but still effective, communist means of struggle against their socialist partners in the united front: a demagogic campaign against socialists "of the left" frequently coupled with coquetry toward bourgeois Popular Front partners; the "colonizing" of the non-communist workers' organizations by capturing the key positions in their apparatuses through fair means and foul; wanton incitement against anyone not agreeing to say amen to every new twist and turn in the communist line. It turned out in the end that this policy was being executed with blind loyalty by the overwhelming majority of those very "comrade-communists" to whose "human dignity" Alter had appealed over the fresh graves of the builders of their movement.

These events were bound to affect Alter's attitude. True, on the surface there was very little change in his politics. The struggle against fascism—domestic as well as international—continued to occupy first place in his hierarchy of political tasks. Accordingly, he did not permit himself for one moment to eschew those weapons whose value had been tested in the struggle. Faithfully protecting the unity of the union movement until the last moment, Alter respected the rights of the communist opposition and categorically opposed every demand by the Polish authorities for removing the communists from the positions to which they had been elevated by the will of the membership. He spared no effort in trying to nullify all repressive measures against the communist-dominated unions and to avert the danger to their leaders of prison and concentration camp.

The "anti-communism" of a reactionary police character remained for Alter as distasteful as ever. And inasmuch as the Soviet

Union continued to be one of the most important objects of attack by international fascism, it was no less clear to him that the tie between the Soviet Union and all anti-fascist forces must be maintained and strengthened. But behind this conviction, to which he adhered until the last moment of his life, there no longer stood the belief in the inner kinship that would eventually lead to unification. Alter elaborated on this point in *Man in Society*:

It is necessary to revise the old opinion that communism and socialism, which grew out of the same soil and even the same tribe, later parted company on questions of tactics and methods of struggle, only to meet each other anew at a mutual, final goal—the society of tomorrow.

It was thus at one time; but today it is different. The vision of that final goal has itself become bifurcated. While socialism has remained faithful to the libertarian concept of the society of tomorrow, communism has moved steadily away from it to where it has reached the present condition of Stalinist, antilibertarian totalitarianism.

The anti-fascist attitude of Soviet diplomacy first emerged when the fascist governments proclaimed a crusade against the Soviets. *If tomorrow the creators of the Berlin-Rome Axis were to extend a hand of peace to Moscow, Soviet diplomacy would hasten to accept that proposal* [emphasis added]. . . .

It must be categorically underscored that what is happening in the Soviet Union has no relation whatsoever to our society of tomorrow. The Soviet attempt to implement the socialist order has ended in complete moral bankruptcy. . . .

The Soviet experience is not only an example that ought not to be imitated, it is a forbidding example of what the society of tomorrow should *not* be.

The realization of that order is a task that must be undertaken totally anew.*

“READY TO PAY ANY PRICE . . .”

The political catastrophe of the 1930s buried beneath its ruins more than one socialist belief. Victor Alter emerged from the storms

**Man in Society*, pp. 126–133.

deeply shaken but inwardly resolute, with a clear view of reality, with a deep grasp of socialist fundamentals, and with a tremendously strengthened feeling of attachment to his party, the Jewish Labor Bund.

People who knew Alter only superficially would often ask in amazement: What impelled this assimilated *intelligent*, at home and fluent in several European languages, toward none other than the Jewish social movement of Poland? At first glance, the question appeared to be not wholly without justification. No single individual in the Bund movement felt more at home in a number of European cultures and socialist parties than did Alter. Moreover, for everyone who was able to observe Alter on the grounds of the movement, it was clear that the life-style of the party was, in a number of particulars, different from his own.

The typical Bundist family-feeling and unaffected friendliness did not correspond to his conception of relationships among people. The sobriety and caution that characterized the attitude of Noyakh or of Henryk Erlich regarding the questions in dispute within the party were foreign to his nature. "With his head" he understood excellently the need for compromise; but it was difficult for Victor Alter to convince himself to register agreement with decisions which expressed only a part of what he considered true, and which contained—just as every compromise does—something provisional and unexpressed. He never ceased his striving toward the end of having the party adapt its position ever more swiftly to changes in conditions and draw the most far-reaching conclusions from its position. "Comrade Alter travels only by express train and doesn't believe in brakes," a comrade once observed in the course of an inner-party discussion. Yet the contrast between Alter's intellectual impetuosity and the slow, gradual changes in the consciousness of the party collective could not destroy the deep inner closeness between Alter and that collective.

For Alter there was nothing more elevated than the struggle for his own truth and the right to live in accord with the command of his own reason and conscience. Always drawn to those who choose in this struggle the line of *greatest* resistance, Alter found the line of greatest resistance in the Bund. With the assured feel of a rebellious heart, he could apprehend how much daring and how

much revolutionary challenge there lay in organizing the "pariahs among the proletarians" into a political force waging the struggle against well-entrenched powers in the surrounding world and against generations-old inferiority complexes in their own environment; and a political force incorporating itself into the international socialist community as an independent and fully qualified party.

Alter knew that this attitude evoked indignation among the enemies of the Bund, and more than once, regret among many socialists who were not accustomed to a relatively small "fraternal party" permitting itself to come out with open criticisms of their actions. This "Bundist impertinence" suited Alter just fine. There was another feature of the Bund movement, moreover, that made it especially dear to Victor Alter. In his ideological struggle against communism, he often emphasized that the touchstone of a movement's democratic character needs to be sought not in the slogans it propagates, but in the character of its internal life. "Every party," he observed, "is structured precisely in the way it envisages the future structure of the society and the state."*

In the eyes of Alter, the Bund was the best confirmation of this rule. Under all conditions—whether in times of advance or defeat, of political standstill or the most furious conflict—the separate ideological tendencies in the Bund had total freedom to compete in the struggle for the soul of the party. Not only organized factions, but individual protesters as well were able to raise their voices against the policies of the party leadership. The youngest member of Skif could freely and without inhibition criticize the actions of the Central Committee. In this way the party avoided being transformed into a discussion club and did not lose its militant impetus.

Small wonder that such a movement had to be near and dear to Victor Alter. And it is quite understandable that this feeling was not just one-sided. Currents of warmth radiated from the party mass, a body that numbered many thousands, toward the "Bundist alderman" who would move heaven and earth within the reactionary magistracy on behalf of every impoverished Jew. They saw in Alter the fearless orator and publicist who used to enrage the

**Man in Society*, p. 142.

censors and police agents, and the “troublemaker” who did not confine himself to accepted diplomatic practice in the sphere of interparty relations. The movement’s activists took pride in this restless spirit who, in his “heresy,” stimulated thinking in the party and impelled it in new directions. The influence of this personality’s magic, wherein the skeptical spirit of modern relativist philosophy harmonized so wonderfully with the boundless loyalty to one’s own ideal, and the ardent love of life, indeed, with the readiness to confront death in the struggle for one’s own truth—this influence extended deep into the circles of the radically inclined Jewish intelligentsia.

Rarely did Victor Alter reflect upon the wellsprings of his conduct and beliefs. As occasionally happens with personalities of authentic and powerful emotions, he manifested a certain reticence about the expression of his feelings. But during the last years, breaches in this reticence appeared more and more frequently. In the East the great revolution writhed in convulsions of bloody slaughter and ideological self-destruction. From the West the fascist deluge approached ever more menacingly. The brazenness manifested by domestic reaction of all stripes continued to grow apace in Poland proper, and along with it, unrestrained anti-Semitism. Alter witnessed it all. He also observed how, in the midst of this gloominess, the Bund was pulsating and seething with life; how, under its leadership, the wave of mass resistance to fascist barbarism rose higher and higher, and how it introduced into the darkness of the time clarity and light reminiscent of the sunny era of 1905. Which explains why, in Alter’s addresses of the time, the tone of pride and gratitude came to resound ever more forcefully when he made reference to the movement that had brought this miracle to pass.

We are [he wrote in 1938] quite ordinary Jews, devoid of haughtiness and shame. For this reason, indeed, we did not have to “discover” our Jewishness because of anti-Semitism. And we don’t have fits of ecstasy because of that discovery, Jews without nationalism; Jews who link their destiny, first of all, to the struggle for socialism, and for whom one fatherland—the place where they live—is sufficient. This is the Bund.

The attacks upon Jews are starting once again in the very heart of the capital, in the Saxon Garden. Do Jewish workers avoid that "dangerous" area? On the contrary: despite possible blows, they insist upon their right to breathe a little fresh air and to protect themselves against assailants.

Because the right to stroll in the Saxon Garden is only a microcosm of the right to live a normal life in Poland.

We shall not voluntarily relinquish those rights. We shall fight everyone who wishes to deprive us of them. We shall not rest until those rights are assured to all workers in Poland; what's more, we are ready to pay any price to achieve that goal.

This is . . . Bundism.*

A year and a half after these words appeared in the columns of the Bundist *Folkstsaytung*, their author found himself behind the bars of a Soviet prison and his readers . . . in the death-camps under the Nazi occupation. The time of most severe testing had arrived; and the response was forthcoming. The fighters of the underground Bund managed to tap sources of spiritual courage and martyrdom in themselves and in the Jewish masses around them, in comparison to which the most dramatic battles of all revolutions and freedom struggles pale into insignificance. Thousands of miles from them, behind the walls of the same Lubyanka where, years before, scores of the founders and builders of the Soviet state had been trampled to dust, the Bundist Victor Alter did not cease for one moment his struggle for human rights and the labors of his spirit. And he continued to wage the same struggle and in the course of his two-and-a-half months of freedom—until the bullet of the murderer cut short his life. On the barricades of Warsaw and Bialystok and in the cellars of the NKVD in Kuibyshev, the same price was paid—the price for not wanting to capitulate, for protecting human dignity, for eternally sanctifying the ideal of authentic and nonfalsified socialism.

The pledge was kept.

**Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, May 29, 1938.

The First Arrest of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich Under the Soviet Occupation

ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1939, Hitler's armored troops attacked Poland, thus unleashing the Second World War.

Immediately after the war's outbreak, the Central Committee of the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland published an appeal drafted by Henryk Erlich which called for unstinting sacrifice and armed resistance to the bloodthirsty foe—Hitlerism. The appeal depicted how terrible it would be if Hitler were to emerge victorious.

As the Nazi divisions drew closer to the gates of the Polish capital, the Central Committee of the Bund decided that its better-known leaders should leave Warsaw in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy. Under the changed conditions, comrades who were publicly less well known were to direct the work that was already proceeding underground.

The leaders who left included Erlich and Alter. The latter, in fact, wanted to stay; he had already made all the necessary preparations for shifting over to an illegal existence. But the Central Committee was against it because it believed that Alter, who was very popular in the city, would have been seized very quickly, thereby bringing misfortune to himself and the whole movement. He therefore left along with Erlich and other comrades.

They split up on the way, Alter and a group of comrades setting off in one direction, Erlich and his group in another. It was later learned that Warsaw was being defended thanks to the fact that the

representatives of the city administration and the remaining military units had reversed the previous decision of the government to declare Warsaw an open city. Alter sought to go back to Warsaw, but that was not possible. The road to the city was cut off because the German forces had already surrounded it on all sides. Alter's group, accordingly, headed for Lublin, where, in the course of a few days and under a hail of enemy bombs, it took the lead in the mobilization and organization of the Jewish community. Alter even managed to publish two issues of the *Lubliner Shtime*, the organ of the Bund which used to appear weekly before the war. His first article in the paper was titled: "Hitler Must Lose!"

Alter was in Lublin only a few days. With the approach of the German armies, Alter left Lublin for the city of Kovel. Some of the comrades in his group remained in Lublin and subsequently became active in the underground movement during the Nazi occupation.

When the Germans entered Lublin, the Gestapo began to search for the leaders of the Bund just as it had in Warsaw, Lodz, and other cities. In Warsaw the search for Erlich was especially vigorous. The Gestapo inquired about Erlich at his apartment, at the editorial office of the official Bund organ, the *Naye Folksztaytung*, and elsewhere. In this connection, it arrested a number of persons named Erlich, on suspicion that the Bund leader might be found among them.

THE ARREST OF VICTOR ALTER

Victor Alter was the first to be arrested. It happened in Kovel on September 26, 1939.

The major leaders of the Polish railroad workers, who were among the most prominent trade union leaders in the country, surfaced as refugees in Kovel at this time. Victor Alter, as a key member of the top leadership of the trade union movement in Poland, now met with them. Together they drafted a declaration to be submitted to the Soviet authorities. Alter, along with several Polish union leaders, handed in the declaration, in which hope was expressed that Soviet Russia would help the subjugated population of Poland free itself from Nazi slavery. The representative of the

Soviet government promised the group of trade union leaders a swift reply.

The "reply" came the next morning: the GPU arrested the whole group, including Alter. GPU agents appeared at his apartment and took him away. His close comrades who were in Kovel at the time report that Alter had clearly weighed the dangers associated with his approach to the Soviet authorities. They keenly urged him to go into hiding. But Alter wouldn't hear of it. To hide, he said, was beneath his dignity. As a responsible political and trade union leader, he considered it his duty to give expression to the desire of the workers to wage a life-and-death struggle against Nazism and other forms of fascism. Hence, he had to do it.

All this occurred barely four weeks after Hitler's invasion of Poland and nine days after the Soviet invasion from the other side.

HOW HENRYK ERLICH WAS ARRESTED*

After long, horrible weeks of wandering through villages and towns, I arrived weary, exhausted, in Brest-Litovsk on October 1, 1939. The Germans had already left the city after turning it over to the Soviet military. The streets were alive with people, among whom I spotted many Bundists; groups of them were moving about in complete freedom. I indicated to our comrades that it was reckless to circulate so openly; we would be providing the GPU with the opportunity to wring our necks like so many chickens.

Three days after I arrived, the GPU "called in" local leaders of the Bund. They pressed strongly for information concerning the whereabouts of the Central Committee and Comrade Erlich in particular. Clearly, they were beginning to implement the "party line."

I was supposed to accompany Erlich on his journey. When I was first apprised of this, I could feel my heart pounding faster owing to the responsibility devolving upon me. Carrying my slender knapsack, I went to Comrade Erlich's apartment. There was a mournful look about him; yet his smile was bright and his eyes shone. In his dark blue suit, with his clean, pressed collar and his

*As related by Leybetckhe Berman, a Warsaw Bund activist.

aristocratic appearance, Erlich stood out conspicuously from us ordinary refugees.

We remained painfully silent for a while. Erlich slowly paced the floor, all the while emitting clouds of cigarette smoke. One of us broke the silence. The question was broached about hiding out from the GPU. But no, he did not wish to hide: the idea was repellent and beneath his dignity. He intended to turn himself in to them. Let them do with him what they would. He merely sought to do so in a larger city. He was frightened at the thought of ending up in a hole somewhere at a smaller railway station where a semiliterate agent would proceed to torment him with questions that might lead him to abandon his composure. This he feared. I was shocked at Erlich's foolhardy thought of placing himself in the hands of the GPU. But I offered no rejoinder, for I was aware that disputing with Erlich over a matter which he regarded as touching upon his dignity was wasted effort.

I proposed—and comrades concurred—that Erlich shave off his beard and mustache; that he should wear a cap in place of a hat; and that he should exchange his black coat for a gray one. Here is where Erlich declared that he did not wish to disguise himself. He did not want the GPU to have an opportunity to level the charge against him that, in the identification documents, he had a beard. My argument that he could have removed the beard, after all, not because of Stalin but because of Hitler, was unavailing. Erlich stood his ground; he would not indulge in a masquerade, although he had at one time actually removed both beard and mustache—and his wife and children had failed to recognize him!

With the help of a comrade who guided us through the dark streets, we set out for the railway station at 10 p.m. on October 4, 1939. Once at the station I quickly realized how correct my proposal was that Erlich change his appearance. The waiting room was brightly lit. Erlich's clean, dark coat was very conspicuous amidst the refugees lying about on the floor in dirty, scruffy clothes. But it was his distinctive beard that accounted for my despair, a beard that stood out in his dark corner of the station. Wherever I happened to be standing, I was able to observe the only hat in the station and Erlich's small white beard, which sparkled like silver.

All the seats were occupied. I could think of nothing better than arranging a place for Erlich on the stone floor. As I proceeded to the cashier's window to purchase tickets, I suddenly noticed in the distance how a Jewish communist approached Erlich, peered into his face, and swiftly disappeared through a side door of the station. I was petrified. Approaching Erlich, I proposed that we seize the few minutes we still had and promptly leave the station.

Erlich rose to his full height, breathed deeply, and calmly replied: "No. I do not wish to run, and I will not. I am not a criminal!"

I tried to call up a few words in the nature of a rejoinder, but Erlich's expression gave me pause. We remained there awaiting our fate.

No more than five minutes elapsed before the betrayer arrived, accompanied by two armed soldiers of the Red Army and a senior official of the GPU. They led Erlich to a room in a distant part of the station.

I remained there alone, waiting. Maybe they'll let Erlich go? Meanwhile I observed how the young communist who had turned Erlich in to the GPU began to approach me in the company of the armed soldiers. This time he pointed out two individuals on the side, noting that one of them was Hersh Himmelfarb, Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union. The examination of their documents resulted in the failure of the spy's effort, for they left alone.

Time was dragging on. My gaze was directed toward only one spot: the door through which Erlich had been led. In the distance I could see the senior GPU man who had taken Erlich into custody. I walked up to him and asked if I could give a package of items to my comrade whom he had earlier taken in.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Is that you?! Come with me."

I was conducted into a small room in which Erlich was located. It turned out that his documents were in the satchel that had been with me the whole time. The agents apparently were unable, for that reason, to determine his identity.

Thus they spread our documents out on the table, around which were seated a few military men dressed in caps of red and green trim. The documents were passed from hand to hand. An elderly individual in civilian clothes translated the contents of the docu-

ments from Polish into Russian. One of the men in uniform asked me why I had fled from Warsaw. I replied that I had been fleeing from the Hitler regime. Why had I fled before he arrived? came the question, this time accompanied by a glint in his eyes. I looked at him and said: "You are acting like a naive individual. How would you act if Hitler reached Moscow?"

He turned his face away and asked no more questions.

A few of the military personnel went into an adjacent room for a consultation. When they returned in a few minutes, one of them asked me my occupation. He checked my response against the passport, returned the document, and told me to go. As for Comrade Erlich, he said that he would be held until the senior man arrived, some time around eight o'clock in the morning. I said goodbye to Erlich while the agents cast penetrating looks at both of us.

I left the small room that housed the railway GPU. The communist informer, a slightly built, repulsive-looking young man of around twenty, stood about, his chest swollen like a victor's.

After a while one of the uniformed agents who had examined my documents came over to me and struck up a conversation.

"Tell me, comrade," he asked, "what is he to you, that man in custody?"

"A comrade," I replied.

"Was he ever in Russia?"

"I don't know," was my cautious evasion of the truth.

"He was!" came the triumphal confirmation.

"Well, if he was, so what?" I asked.

"That means he had a task!"

"I don't understand what sort of task you are talking about."

"What is there not to understand?" he responded with genuine astonishment. "He received a task to incite the bourgeois countries to overthrow the Soviet government!"

Determined to learn what was happening to Erlich, I found various pretexts for knocking on the door of the room in which he was being held. Each time I knocked I was admitted; and each time I found him with a cigarette in his mouth. The last time I entered the room I asked the guards to allow him to lie down on the bench on which he had been sitting because, I said, "my

comrade is a sick person.” Erlich declined to do so, however. He said a few words to me, but he spoke so softly that I was unable to hear anything.

By then day was dawning. As I left the room, I noticed that the corridor leading to it had another exit. The corridor led only to the rooms of the GPU. Outsiders were not permitted there. Yet, fearful that I might lose track of Comrade Erlich, I decided to take a chance. From time to time, uniformed and nonuniformed GPU associates would pass through the corridor. Several of them asked me what I was doing there. I would reply that a comrade of mine was being held for some reason, and that I had been told to wait there until the matter was cleared up. Thus I managed to remain in the corridor until approximately ten o’clock in the morning. At around nine o’clock, four civilians arrived (from their appearance, Jews) and entered the room in which Erlich was seated. Shortly thereafter a man arrived through the same door; he was evidently a military official of higher rank. He was rather odd looking: strikingly tall and thin, wearing gold pince-nez, his skin a ruddy complexion often seen among Germans. When I later described him to one of my comrades, the latter recognized the individual as the same GPU military man who had interrogated him about Erlich the day before. A short while later another military man came out and asked what I was doing in the corridor. I responded with the same refrain, hoping I would succeed once again in remaining at the place from which I could observe both exits. But this time I failed. The man, in an angry tone, ordered me to stop hanging about and to leave the corridor promptly. I did so.

Half frozen from standing so long on the stone floor of the cold corridor, where the damp morning air penetrated through the open door, I sank down on a bench in the waiting room. My heart was heavy and steeped in sadness. My weary brain had searched for means by which I might be able to keep an eye on both exits of the corridor. Once again I bumped into the Communist blackguard who had fingered Erlich. The scoundrel was standing right next to the door, like a dog. As soon as a uniformed GPU agent appeared, he would loom up and circle about the latter to attract his attention. But no one paid him any heed.

Standing there with nerves strained, immersed in gloomy

thoughts, I had a singular feeling of uneasiness. As I looked about, I came face to face with the civilian agent who had translated our documents for the uniformed GPU men. This was a small, thin individual with angular Polish facial features. Around forty years of age, he was dressed in a black, cotton-quilted vest, and wore simple boots and a cap on his head. He looked like a worker who had just left his workbench. All through the night he drifted about in the crowd with silent, shifty, catlike steps—listening in on conversations, cautiously poking into every corner, as if nothing in particular interested him. The man was standing in a corner and conversing with a Jewish lad dressed in a bright brown coat. I had a feeling that he was pointing me out to him, because, at a certain moment the lad, as if accidentally, turned his face toward me.

Increasingly wary, I kept my eyes fixed upon him.

Now the meaning of my swift release became clear: there could be no doubt that the agents of the GPU wished to cast a net around me in order thereby to ferret out other comrades. Accordingly, I was forced to abandon my decision to continue waiting and providing protection for Erlich, especially since I was almost certain he would not be taken through the waiting room, but through the other exit, where I would no longer be able to protect him. Thus, around twelve noon, I hopped aboard an incoming train and disappeared from the Brest-Litovsk station. Happily, my getaway was not observed by the agents of the GPU who were supposed to keep me under surveillance.

The last time I saw Erlich was an hour before I left the station. Around eleven o'clock a Red Army man, weapon in hand, led him to the lavatory at the other end of the waiting room. It was a bizarre and dreadful scene: Comrade Erlich, in his dark blue suit, with his head bare, with his attractive and proud appearance—and behind him a short Red Army man, with a long Russian rifle, conducting him as in the old tsarist days. Hundreds of pairs of eyes focused on this sight. Dozens of those who recognized Erlich averted their eyes so as not to witness the shame of the Soviet government.

The following fact should serve as a symbolic accompaniment to the arrest of Henryk Erlich. On one of those days, in the same city of Brest-Litovsk, a military parade took place on the main

square—a fraternal march-past of Soviet and Nazi military detachments. Brest-Litovsk had become at that time a border city, and the joint military parade was meant to serve as a sign of Soviet-Nazi friendship. Thus, the swastika and hammer-and-sickle flags flew side by side, and the rhythms of the “International” and the “Horst Wessel Song” mingled in the air. This shameful scene was witnessed not only by the Jews of Brest-Litovsk but by thousands of Jewish refugees from cities and towns in Poland which the Nazis were incinerating and robbing, and whose kin were being tortured, raped, and murdered by the Nazi butchers.

EFFORTS TO LEARN ABOUT THE FATE OF THE ARRESTED MEN

As soon as the news of the arrest of Comrades Erlich and Alter reached Vilno, where the remaining part of the Central Committee of the Bund was already located, the search began for ways to ascertain where they were being held—in which prison and under what conditions.

As regards Alter, it had been learned earlier that from Kovel, where he was arrested, he was sent deeper into Soviet Russia, probably to Moscow. With respect to Erlich, several comrades in Vilno offered to slip across the border to the Soviet side in order to learn the location of the prison in which he was being held. Three comrades made such attempts, but only one succeeded in ascertaining that he was no longer present in the Brest-Litovsk prison, that is, in the city where he had been arrested at the railway station. This bit of intelligence came from Comrade Shmuel Adler, a printer who had worked in the printshop of the *Folkstsaytung* until the outbreak of the war. Although he himself was suffering severely from kidney disease, Comrade Adler, at direct risk to his life, crossed from Vilno to the Soviet side and proceeded to spend substantial time searching about. Finally reaching Brest-Litovsk, he was assured by some refugees that Erlich had been seen strolling in the prison yard. Comrade Adler, hearing that a tin worker was needed to work on repairing the prison roof, gained entry to the prison in that capacity, worked on the roof for a few days, and succeeded in learning definitely that Comrade Erlich was

no longer in the Brest-Litovsk prison. They had removed him. This turned out to be the last bit of information to come from Adler, who was arrested shortly thereafter on the Soviet side, imprisoned in Bialystok, and died somewhere in a Soviet prison along with hundreds of others arrested at that time.

Another attempt to determine the fate of the two prisoners was made in the city of Lemberg by the intercession of the well-known writer Wanda Wasilewska, a former member of the Polish Socialist Party—the PPS—and daughter of the renowned Polish socialist leader, Leon Wasilewski. She had gone over to the communists after the occupation of eastern Poland by the Red Army and became an influential personality in Kremlin circles. In the city of Lemberg (Lvov) she was even elected to the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow. Wanda Wasilewska was very well acquainted with the Bund circles in Warsaw and had been friendly with Erlich and Alter.

At the end of December 1939, Berek Shnaydemil (he would fall during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943) arrived in Bialystok while en route from Vilno to Warsaw, to which he had been assigned for underground work by the Bund Central Committee. Comrade Ludwik Honigwil was living in Bialystok as a refugee at the time. Honigwil, the prominent political lawyer, was a close friend of Erlich and Alter. It was to him that Comrade Shnaydemil passed along the directive of the Central Committee that he proceed from Bialystok to Lemberg in order to see Wanda Wasilewska and request that she do whatever she could on behalf of both prisoners. Comrade Honigwil had also known Wasilewska quite well back in Warsaw. Although Bialystok and Lemberg were located in the same Soviet occupation zone (Vilno was under Lithuanian occupation at that time), the road from Bialystok to Lemberg was anything but smooth in those days of vast confusion. Moreover, Comrade Honigwil was a well-known Bundist, which in itself tended to place him in a dangerous position.

It was far from easy for Comrade Honigwil to meet Wanda Wasilewska directly when he arrived in Lemberg in January 1940. Through the intercession of the prominent defense counsel Leyb Landau (later executed by the Nazis), he came in contact with Boleslaw Drobner (a prominent member of the left wing of the PPS

who had gone over to the communists along with Wanda Wasilewska). Drobner had already arranged for a meeting between her and Comrade Honigwil. Wasilewska promptly stated: "It's not so easy to intercede with the Bolsheviks." Nevertheless, she was prepared to attempt to learn something about the fate of Erlich and Alter. But it would take considerable time—certainly many weeks. Before departing from Lemberg, Comrade Honigwil asked that Comrade Leon Feiner (subsequently the leader of the underground Bund in Warsaw) be given the information from Wasilewska, should such arrive, and pass it on to the Central Committee in Vilno. The reply from Wanda Wasilewska reached Vilno sometime later. It was very brief—only three words: "They are alive." Under the circumstances, this laconic bit of news meant a great deal.

On the Road with Henryk Erlich

Joseph Rothenberg

. . . WE HAD MOVED no more than twenty steps when we again heard the angry roars and droning, followed by the horrendous explosions. This time the furious rage was unloosed over the very heart of the Jewish population of Miedzyrzec. Comrade Erlich and I began to look for a suitable hiding place. Not far from us was a spot marked by a sparse collection of small trees. We had barely reached that poor imitation of a woods when we noticed a fire burning furiously. Beyond the woods stood a number of peasant houses. . . . The dreadful explosions did not let up for a moment. The women grew hysterical; their wailing and screaming was enough to make one's hair stand on end. . . .

Lifting my head from the ground to determine how far we were from where the bombs were falling, I noticed that Erlich was standing up. An intense look had come over him. Was he concentrating on the vastness of the night, on the sky aflame with the crimson reflection of the fire? Or had he heard the heart-rending wails of the unfortunate? . . . I laid my summer coat out on the ground and suggested he sit down. (I was certain he would not lie down under any circumstances.) "We've got to go over there and

Joseph Rothenberg was a Bund activist. In the following excerpts from his book *Fun Varshe biz Shankhay* ("From Warsaw to Shanghai") (Mexico, 1948), he tells of his encounters with Henryk Erlich during the flight from Warsaw across the part of Poland that had been occupied by the Soviets on the basis of their pact with Hitler.

help," he said softly, although nearly everyone could hear him quite clearly. Indeed, one could hear in those words such deep compassion and sadness—and simultaneously, demand. A number of us arose and set off in the direction of the screams. . . . Once again a thundering roar, and again everything shook under the impact of the dreadful explosions. . . . The night was engulfed by a sea of fire. . . . The wailing still did not cease.

We left Miedzyrzec late at night. . . .

With lightning swiftness the town [Kamienec] learned that Erlich was there. In no time at all we were settled in. "Are you one of Erlich's people?" I was asked by a young man with a genial smile. "Come into the house. Everyone is here."

. . . We set out at the break of dawn. We were moving uphill along a twisting road of thick sand. To avoid tiring the horses, we proceeded on foot. . . . Only the women and occasionally the older and weaker men rotated riding in the *drozhky* (horse-drawn carriage). . . . Comrade Erlich always refused to make use of his place in the rotational scheme. I had my own surmise in this connection: at various moments, on different occasions (and there were many such en route), I observed how Comrade Erlich would avoid every privilege as it related to himself. Not only did he avoid all such suggestions, but he reacted to them with distaste. Not in so many words, to be sure. Nor did he make a conspicuous display of his feelings. But that's how it turned out: he didn't wish to be among the privileged during the riding, among the first during the eating, and among the last in carrying out some kind of task. When, as was frequently the case, there was not enough room for everyone, places would be rotated every twenty minutes. While some of the people forgot—perhaps unwittingly—that their time had elapsed, Comrade Erlich never forgot. On the contrary, he was almost too zealous in taking precautions that he should not—heaven forbid—be responsible for wronging someone. Under no circumstances would he allow himself to be deceived by the clock when others in the party attempted to shave off, for his benefit, a piece of time from their own. People on the arduous wanderings displayed many weaknesses; the instinct of self-preservation showed itself to be far more potent than social teachings and traditions. Comrade Erlich witnessed everything, but with delicacy and tact he would look

away. Never an angry demeanor; rarely—very rarely—a sharp reaction. Always calm, in control of himself, warmly attentive to everyone. When it proved necessary to stop for a rest, Comrade Erlich would look around to see if everyone was present. The same at eating time. And all of it done so quietly, without any commotion.

. . . The following morning we set out from Pruzany in the direction of the small town of Maltsh, which was located on the road to Bereza Kartuska. It was Saturday, and the Jews of Maltsh were observing the Sabbath as if nothing had happened. War? Who ever heard of it? As in all the Belorussian towns, the market constituted the Jewish core from which all the other little streets radiated. This day the market was quiet. It was the Sabbath, and more and more Jews began to appear in their Sabbath attire. They were returning home, apparently, from the services.

They immediately spotted us; in a trice we found ourselves engulfed by a crowd of men, women, and children. We caught their whispering almost immediately: "Oh my, Attorney Erlich, the leader of the Bund, is here." It was the younger people, it seems, who recognized him. They pointed him out to each other with gestures of great respect. "Can you imagine, it's Attorney Erlich," I heard an elderly Jew enlightening another. The latter, nodding in admiration, kept his eyes riveted on Erlich. "What an impressive figure; one of the top people in Poland," was the comment of a husband enlightening his wife. Others—indeed, Jews of advanced age—approached and greeted him with *sholom aleichem* (the universal common greeting of Yiddish-speaking Jews).

. . . Deeply moved by the hearty welcome, Comrade Erlich proceeded to bid the crowd farewell. His face, with its characteristic expression of modesty and graciousness, broke into a friendly smile. "Be well, my friends," he said, smiling. "May we live to see better times." His face grew serious and somber; for an instant all turned quiet, as if the crowd suddenly sensed the gravity of the moment. . . .

In Bereza we immediately repaired to the home of Reb Shakhno. He was not only the town's rich man, but also the most distinguished community figure, the town ornament. He was a

unique Jewish personality: a Litvak,* a man steeped in talmudic wisdom, and an individual possessed of the disposition and unaffected nature of an ordinary Belorussian Jew. . . .

As we approached the small bridge in front of Reb Shakhno's house, everyone was already waiting for us. Old Reb Shakhno greeted Erlich, taking his hand into both of his own and holding it long and silently. As the people began filing into the house, the old man said to me in a tremulous voice: "I thank you wholeheartedly for the distinguished guests you have brought into my house. When would I have had the rare honor of welcoming a distinguished guest such as Erlich to my home?"

. . . The aged Godl Piasetsky was also a strong admirer of Erlich. (The oldest member of the Bund in Bereza, Piasetsky was a personal friend of Beynish Mikhalevitch, with whom he had worked long before in Brest-Litovsk.) Since I had been involved in arranging lectures and lining up lecturers, Piasetsky was constantly trying, during our negotiations, to invite Erlich. Unfortunately, Comrade Erlich was always busy.

I will never forget the expression on this oldster's face; it is truly difficult to find words to describe the encounter with Comrade Erlich. A thin stream of tears trickled down his cheeks. So great was his excitement that he was unable to utter a word. All one could hear was a stammered "Comrade Erlich." Piasetsky finally composed himself and sat down next to Comrade Erlich, his eyes fixed on him all the while.

Old Reb Shakhno, a benign smile crossing his face, remarked to me: "You see, it's possible to assure oneself of *oylem haba*† in one minute. Today you earned it no less than twice: with respect to Piasetsky and to myself." I drew close to the old man and said to him softly: "*Nu*, Comrade Piasetsky, we finally have Comrade Erlich in Bereza." . . .

A day after our arrival in Pinsk, there were rumors, soon confirmed by the radio, that the Red Army had crossed the Soviet-

*Literally, someone from the Lithuanian region of the tsarist empire, which contained such cities as Pinsk, Vilno, and Minsk, and was renowned for its high level of Jewish learning in both the religious and the secular spheres.—Trans.

†Hebrew expression meaning: "A share in the world to come."—Trans.

Polish frontier at several places. It was Tuesday, September 18. . . .

. . . I recall a certain evening: it was the same day the radio officially reported the news about the movements of the Red Army. We all kept quiet, in expectation that Comrade Erlich would say something. But he too kept quiet. Someone, unable to restrain himself any longer, finally said: "It's a stab in Poland's back. They are ostensibly seeking to secure their borders." To which Comrade Erlich calmly responded: "Yes, the story has just begun. Let us therefore wait and refrain from premature comments. The matter is far too serious."

We had for some time been under no illusions that the presence in Pinsk of a large part of the Central Committee of the Bund could long be concealed. On a certain morning, Comrade V. was called in to the city's military headquarters, where, in a rather friendly tone, they began to interrogate him about the Bund and—incidentally—whether the Central Committee, with Erlich at its head, was located in Pinsk; and also what they intended to do and what the Central Committee's position was on the latest events, etc. We all arrived at the conclusion that it was high time to move along. . . .

. . . We arrived at Brest-Litovsk.

The news about Comrade Alter's arrest in Kovel spelled *finis* to all illusions. It became clear to each of us that things would get worse for Bundists with each passing day, and that the leading individuals should leave for Vilno as quickly as possible, or better yet, for the Lithuanian border, which was the only way to save oneself.

But how to get there? The question was particularly acute with regard to Comrade Erlich, not only for objective reasons, but also for purely subjective ones that were associated with Comrade Erlich's personality. I have already mentioned how, in Miedzyrzec, near the hill on the outskirts of the city, Comrade Erlich remained standing when everyone was seized by a tremendous fear which prompted them to hurl themselves on the ground. I was under the impression that he did not wish to lie down on the dirty ground. That was when I spread out my coat. But he continued to stand, while gazing at the fire and listening. He was standing above us, with his tall, imposing figure. And we in our fear, lying on the

ground, looked so pitiful, so utterly helpless. I had thought just then that for someone to retain such nobility under the circumstances was not only a sign of daring (Can there really be a question of daring, with aircraft flying overhead and dropping a hail of bombs?), but was attributable to a powerfully developed sense of human dignity.

. . . I can recall the following episode in Pinsk. After the arrival of the Red Army and after the NKVD inquired of Comrade V. about Erlich, it was felt that Comrade Erlich should appear on the street as rarely as possible during the day. Hence the decision to provide everything that was needed so that no one in the Erlich family should have to appear in public too often. On one occasion I found myself waiting for bread on the premises of a baker whom I knew. Suddenly the baker rushed in from the street, shouting: "Oh, the things that can happen! Erlich—Comrade Erlich—is standing in line for bread. I couldn't believe my eyes." He grabbed two loaves and dashed out.

. . . Comrade Erlich could not tolerate any privileges; he personally took his place in line for bread. As regards conspiratorial behavior, he accepted the need for it as something imposed on him but very difficult to tolerate on account of his innate dignity. At Brest-Litovsk the situation was far more serious; and there, too, Comrade Erlich had occasion to "indulge in conspiracy," as he used to put it. Each evening Comrade Mendelson* and I would go to Comrade Erlich and take him out for some fresh air and a brief walk in the dark, adjacent streets. He was constantly in a depressed state. As usual, he did not complain, nor did he display an external signs whatsoever of nervousness or irritation. But from his silence and the quiet sadness in his eyes one could feel the oppressive effect upon him of a conspiratorial existence.

One evening, when I arrived at Comrade Erlich's, I met all of them there: Mendelson, Leybetchke,† and Gilinsky.‡ I learned that Comrade Erlich, accompanied by Leybetchke, would be leav-

*Shloyme Mendelson.—Trans.

†See Leybetchke Berman's memoir on how Erlich was arrested; above, p. 73.—Trans.

‡Shloyme Gilinsky, a Bund activist and educator.—Trans.

ing that very evening. Comrade Erlich appeared to be in a more cheerful mood. From his demeanor and tone of voice, one could sense a total calmness of spirit. How to account for the change in bearing? The fact (such was my interpretation) that he was finally relieved of having to indulge in the painful and senseless conspiracy. As for me, I was nowhere near as calm, and was preoccupied with the thought of what precautions might be taken so that the imposing figure, the aristocratic-intellectual countenance (Comrade Erlich's face was known to every worker in Poland) should not be recognized. I awaited the coming day with impatience.

And the great tragedy struck. On the following day, Comrade Leybetchke returned to the city and reported to us that Comrade Erlich had been arrested during the night. . . .

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in Soviet Russia

Lucjan Blit

THE ANCIENT GREEKS did not know the significance of the word "coincidence." They were deeply convinced that every step of a human being is determined by his fate. Religious Jews believe that every minute of our lives is under the supervision of God in heaven.

Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich did not choose Soviet Russia in order to find protection there from the Hitlerite storm that disrupted and destroyed the peace of the world in the early hours of September 1, 1939. Borne on the turbulent waves, they unexpectedly witnessed, on the 17th of September of the same year, cities which had been part of the Polish Republic only a few hours earlier suddenly occupied by the Soviet army.

The fate of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter was sealed, just as the fate of the Jewish socialist movement in Eastern Europe was sealed at that time—and just as fate has, up to the present, closed off the chapter titled: freedom and justice in half of Europe.

On Wednesday, September 6, the Warsaw newspapers informed the public that the government had left the Polish capital.

Two socialist leaders—one from the PPS and the other from the Bund—showed on that day that intuition is worth not less and perhaps even more than logical calculation in moments of great crises. . . .

Lucjan Blit's account was originally published in London in January 1949.

Not a single person in Warsaw knew, as did very few in the world, that on August 23 of the same year, Ribbentrop and Molotov in Moscow had also signed, along with a Nonaggression Pact between the Communist Kremlin and Hitlerite Berlin, a Supplemental Secret Protocol whose second paragraph read in part: "in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San."

On Wednesday September 6 at eight o'clock in the morning, when the evacuation of Warsaw decreed by the government and by the High Command of the Polish military had officially become known, a delegation from the Central Committee of the Bund, in the persons of Erlich and Alter, approached the Central Executive Committee of the Polish Socialist party. Its purpose was to arrive at a joint determination of subsequent tactics to be followed by the workers' parties in view of the serious situation on the eve of the German occupation of Warsaw. At 7 Warecka Street they met the General Secretary of the PPS, Kazimierz Pużak. He told the representatives of the Bund: "I don't believe in the assurance of our government and of the military leadership that we will be able to defend ourselves against the Germans on the Bug-San line. If Poland cannot defend itself at the Vistula, among twenty million Poles, God Himself will be unable to help it at the Bug, among Ukrainians and White Russians." Indeed, within two weeks it became manifest how much better Kazimierz Pużak intuitively understood the consequences of the catastrophe than did the majority of those who still believed that the Polish army could successfully resist the Hitlerite *Wehrmacht* deeper inside the country.

Two hours after this encounter, the last meeting of the Central Committee of the Bund—a body which had been freely and openly elected at a large congress of the party—took place under the chairmanship of Noyakh Portnoy. One question did not elicit any difference of opinion at all among the members of the Central Committee who were present, namely, the question of the evacuation of its members to a location that would not fall under Hitler's rule. On the basis of the experience of the socialist movements in

Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia—wherever the swastika had installed its regime of violence before the year 1939—one thing was beyond any doubt: the legal Socialist Party would be exterminated the moment the German army and Gestapo occupied Warsaw. If anything like a double certainty were possible, it existed with respect to the Bund. The first to be physically exterminated would be the leading personalities of the Bund—as socialists and as Jews.

The only question was finding new leading people, less well known publicly, who would promptly undertake the building of the new, illegal organization of the Bund under the Hitlerite occupation. Alter, accordingly, was proposed as one of the leaders of the illegal organization. To everyone present at the meeting, this proposal appeared illogical and even dangerous for the new, underground organization that was supposed to be born the following day. Alter was, after all, one of the most popular and best-known people in Warsaw. In the course of twenty years he had spoken at public meetings, Polish as well as Jewish, several times a week. During the whole period of Polish independence Alter had served as councilman and alderman (i.e., member of the magistracy) of the Warsaw city administration. Virtually everyone knew him. He was certainly well recorded among all those who were already by then involved in German espionage or who would be engaged in it later. As the leader of the illegal Bund organization, Alter would not only quickly bring about his own end, observed Erlich at the meeting; he would also drag along the illegal organization proper. But Alter then uttered some words which did not, perhaps, embody conventional logic, yet they were, withal, an expression of a brilliant and tragic intuition: “This is my second world war. We shall—one hundred of us—leave here; and after the war perhaps ten will return. I have just as much chance of remaining alive in Warsaw as I would if I left Warsaw.”

A committee cannot allow itself to be influenced by premonitions. Alter was not given permission to remain in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Together with other comrades of the Central Committee, he made the arduous journey to Miedzyrzec. When word reached them en route that Warsaw had not surrendered but was still resisting, the Central Committee decided that Alter and a group of

youthful comrades should try to break through to Warsaw. Alter and the youths managed to get as far as Lublin after putting up with constant bombardments along the way. In Lublin they succeeded in reorganizing the local movement. Working with the PPS, they projected plans for continued activity in the city. Despite great difficulty, Alter even succeeded in bringing out one issue of the *Lubliner Shtimme*, the local organ of the Bund which had appeared prior to the war.

But Lublin fell quickly. Alter continued moving eastward. He reached Kovel on September 17, the very day the Red Army began its march into Poland. The aforementioned Paragraph 2 of the Secret Additional Protocol, which was drawn up in the Kremlin on August 23, now went into effect. The Soviet army captured Kovel on the way to the Vistula, Bug, and San rivers.

Like all the members of the Central Committee of the Bund, Erlich left Warsaw a day after the government and military leadership left. Moving on foot together with some members of his family and a few close comrades, he tried to break through to the city of Brest-Litovsk, on the Bug River. That was where the Central Committee of the Bund was to begin functioning immediately, and from which Erlich was supposed to enter into contact with the new, secret leadership of the Bund in Warsaw, whose top man was now Abrasha Blum. Blum had been until then a member of the Warsaw Committee of the Bund and of the Central Committee of the Bund youth organization, the *Yugnt-Bund* "*Tsukunft*." But the German bombers and tanks demolished that plan, as well as many others. Instead of remaining in Brest-Litovsk, the majority of the Bund leadership made its way to Pinsk. While there they held a lengthy meeting; this was after it had become known that Soviet Russia had decided to occupy the eastern half of Poland. The possibility of a struggle against Hitler was thereby precluded at the place in which Erlich and his comrades found themselves. Erlich decided to return to Brest-Litovsk, which lay on the border of the part of Poland occupied by Germany.

Victor Alter was first to be arrested in Kovel by the secret police.

Other political refugess had also arrived in Kovel. Among them were several members of the Central Commission of the Polish

trade unions, in particular leaders of the powerful organization of railway workers. Alter met them as a member of the Central Commission. Together they drafted a memorandum to the Soviet regime in which the Polish labor leaders gave expression to their opinion that the struggle against Hitlerism was not over, and that they were prepared to collaborate with the local Soviet authorities in order to give renewed stimulus to life in eastern Poland. Alter and several other trade union leaders submitted this memorandum to the commander of the Soviet garrison in Kovel.

The conversation was friendly, and failed absolutely to give any warning of the tragic results which ensued the next day. For on that day—September 26—all the trade union leaders who had signed the memorandum addressed to the Soviet authorities were taken from their homes by armed soldiers of the Soviet political police (the NKVD) and led off to prison. Its gates were slammed shut behind Alter for precisely two years.

Erlich was arrested at Brest-Litovsk eight days later—on October 4, 1939. The plan had been for him to proceed to Vilno from Brest-Litovsk via Bialystok. The Central Committee of the Bund had planned to reassemble there. The strong Jewish socialist traditions of Vilno and the size and maturity of its Jewish population were expected to envelop the Central Committee in a protective moral and material atmosphere within which organizational activity could commence, e.g., establishing contact with the underground leadership in Warsaw; organizing assistance both by dispatching to it selected individuals from among those who had gathered in Vilno and by mobilizing in its behalf aid from abroad, especially from the United States. Serious rumors had even then been circulating that Soviet Russia would turn Vilno over to the Lithuanians. This lent substance to the thought that it would be easier to figure out how to act vis-à-vis the secret police of small and weak Lithuania as against the GPU of powerful Soviet Russia.

Erlich expected to be arrested by the Russians. But he did not wish to alter his appearance, to shave his beard and pass himself off as a lost refugee—one of the hundreds of thousands who crowded all the railroad stations in the Soviet-occupied part of Poland at that time. His human pride militated against his being a successful conspirator.

A Jewish communist from Miedzyrzec easily recognized Erlich among the thousands waiting on October 4 for the train that was supposed to leave for Bialystok. A good communist, he promptly informed the Soviet railway police concerning the identity of the tall man with the gray beard who, by his calm demeanor, stood out from the frenzied, embittered, noisy crowd. Erlich was arrested.

People who live in civilized countries cannot imagine the condition of a prisoner in Soviet Russia. From the moment the police lock him in the prison cell, his previous life is suspended for good. With no rights whatever, even in the matter of his defense, he becomes a number among millions of others. He is dragged from one prison to another. He does not know for months why he has been arrested, of what he is accused, whether he will be tried, and when a trial will take place. He has no right to call witnesses. He has no right to inform even his closest family members, his wife and children, as to his whereabouts and that he is even under arrest. He is dead to everyone who has known him heretofore, who has loved and cherished him. He is convicted even before he has been handed the formal verdict, before the investigating judge has asked him at the initial interrogation one of the hundreds of questions he will be asked. In Soviet Russia a person's trial is conducted by the secret agent who places his heavy hand on the shoulders of his victim. The verdict is known before the indictment is recorded and before the interrogation begins.

Erlich and Alter disappeared. Jerzy Gliksman, Alter's half-brother (they had the same mother), learned where his older brother was confined. He went to the commandant of the Kovel prison to find out why Victor was under arrest; he also brought with him a bundle for Victor containing underwear, soap, and tobacco. For this he himself was incarcerated in the same prison. After a month under "warning-arrest" Gliksman was told that he should never again dare to concern himself with the fate of his brother.

When Miriam Gutgeshtalt, a teacher in the Warsaw Tsisho schools, approached the Soviet prison authorities in Vilno to inquire about the lot of her arrested husband, Hersh, the Soviet prison officer declared: "You women of Poland aren't completely

normal. When a husband is arrested in Soviet Russia, the first thing the wife does is get a divorce and find someone else.” . . .

Very few of the tens of millions who went through the Soviet prisons in the course of thirty years of Communist rule were able to tell the world what happened to them. We know, however, what happened to Alter and Erlich between October 1939 and September 1941, i.e., during the period of their first arrest.

The author of these lines spent his whole time together with Erlich and Alter in Kuibyshev between October 29 and December 3, 1941, i.e., in the course of roughly five weeks before and up to the moment of their second arrest.* The Polish poet Wladislaw Broniewski had brought me two letters from Erlich and Alter while I was at Buzuluk. (I had arrived there in order to enlist in the Polish army which was being formed in Soviet Russia in accordance with the agreement between Sikorski and Stalin.) The letters described their last two years and their plans for the immediate future. They touched on certain questions relating to the situation of the Polish Jews in the military, and asked me to come as quickly as possible to Kuibyshev, where they were then located. That letter brought me to Kuibyshev in the course of forty-eight hours.

From the moment of my arrival there until the time both of them disappeared I lived in the same apartment as Alter and Erlich—No. 31, on the second floor of the Soviet Grand Hotel at 131 Kuibyshev Street. From time to time each of us provided certain details of his life in Russian prisons.

Erlich had not been confined very long in the Brest-Litovsk prison. He was quickly transferred to Moscow and placed in the notorious Butyrki, where the GPU confines its most important political prisoners. He was interrogated numerous times, and, as is customary in Soviet Russia, in the middle of the night. Once, during the interrogation, he spotted the well-known chief commissar of the GPU, Lavrenti Beria. But Beria himself did not deal with Erlich; as a rule that was done by other high police officers.

*A shorter memoir by Blit, dated London, March 1943, was included in a brochure issued in 1943 by the American Representation of the General Jewish Workers Union of Poland. See Lucjan Blit, “Five Weeks With Erlich and Alter at Kuibyshev,” in *The Case of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter*, pp. 11–14.—Trans.

Erlich was accused of every conceivable crime. He was charged with having organized acts of sabotage in Soviet Russia together with the prewar Polish espionage agencies. Two statements were read to him by persons who had confessed that Erlich had sent them into Russia to perform acts of sabotage. I can no longer recall the name of one of the two. I only know he was a shoemaker, had belonged to the Bund for a period of time, became a communist at the beginning of the 1920s, and later left for Russia. The second person who was supposed to have signed such a "confession" was Moyshe Gutman-Baltikaklis (known in Poland as B. Zelikovitch). He had been a prominent leader of the SS* (later called the "Fareynikte"). In 1921 he joined the Bund, but did not long remain in the organization. He left it in the middle of 1925, and, having become an active Polish communist, strongly fought against the Bund. In time he and his family went to Soviet Russia, where he became deeply involved in Jewish communist activity. Gutman-Baltikaklis was, among other things, the administrator of the printing facility for the Yiddish organ, *Emes*, in Moscow.*

A statement by this individual was read to Erlich in which he recounted a first-class crime tale: Erlich, Honigwil, and Esther Iwinska*, together with the head of the Polish political police, Chief Commissioner Banko, were accused of drawing up the plans for sabotage in Russia and assigning to him (i.e., to Gutman-Baltikaklis) the task of implementing them when he would go to Soviet Russia as a communist. Other accusations were less sensational but no less outrageous. There was a wish to make Erlich responsible for all the cases in which workers who were assaulted by Jewish communists at Bund meetings used to pay back their assailants with interest. It goes without saying that all kinds of charges were leveled, in this connection, against Social Democrats and their parties.

Erlich was convinced that he would never leave the Communist prisons. He decided, therefore, to make use of every item in the

*The Russian initials for the party of Zionist-Socialists.—Trans.

**Emes* was issued by the Jewish Section ("Yevsektsia") of the Communist Party.—Trans.

*The sister of Victor Alter and a leading figure in the Bund.—Trans.

indictment in order to leave behind in written form a document that would, at some point in the future—after the GPU archives were opened, just as the tsarist archives had once been—convey the truth about the Jewish Labor Bund and its leaders. Erlich wrote a great deal. From what he told me, he had certainly written, in the course of those two years, the equivalent of a large book about the history and ideology of the Bund.

In July 1941, shortly after Germany launched the war against its former ally, and in the midst of the greatest defeats which the Red Army was suffering at the time, Erlich was transferred from Moscow to the prison in Saratov. There he was notified that he would be tried by a military tribunal in a matter of days. That, in fact, is what happened. On the day in question Erlich found himself in a hall that was not very large and in which there were only officers. Three of them served as judges; one was the prosecutor, and two were engaged in recording something. The prosecution brought forth no witnesses at all. The prosecutor likewise made no speech at all. Erlich did deliver a speech—again, for the purpose of leaving for posterity another document that would tell the truth about the Bund and about the defendant himself. No one responded to it. Only once did someone say something; that was the officer in the role of chairman. He announced that “the individual accused of sabotage activity against Soviet Russia has been sentenced to be shot.”

Erlich was moved to another cell—the death cell. His shoes were taken away and he was given slippers—the death slippers. He was informed that he had no right of appeal against the verdict, but that he could submit a request for clemency to the Supreme Soviet. Erlich told me that he had decided to use the opportunity and write something that would express the essence of his socialist faith. He had a few days in which to do it. But he *did not*. Why? In the execution cell he met a famous individual from the Russian theater who was finding the wait for the execution of the death sentence a most painful experience. He was ill; Erlich had to take care of him, to converse with him day and night. Hence the failure of Erlich to record his piece. . . .

But on the eleventh day, when Erlich was certain that they had come to take him out for execution, he was informed that the

Supreme Soviet had, on its own, commuted the death sentence to ten years of labor in a concentration camp (*Ispravitel'nyi Trudovoy Lager*). At the end of August he was again transferred to the Moscow prison.

Alter likewise was quickly brought from Kovel and placed in the Moscow Butyrki. He himself told me very little about his activity there. But even before I had arrived at Kuibyshev, a former high Polish officer—V. B.—who had occupied the same prison cell as Alter for a time, told me about it. Over forty people occupied the cell: Russians as well as Polish citizens. It was a cell for very important prisoners. Incarcerated there were Russian professors and former Polish government ministers (for instance, the former Premier, Aleksander Prystor, who died in prison). Alter quickly became the leader of the prisoners in the cell. He began a struggle for the rights of people in prison. That happens so rarely in a Soviet prison that the prison administration was from the outset more surprised than incensed, and was at a loss for what to do. Yet it dared not give in even to the slightest extent. The regime of the internal NKVD prisons is exceedingly strict and makes life for the arrested person equivalent to hell. But Alter declared that he would fight for the rights of his fellow prisoners as he would for his own. He requested reading material—books and newspapers; and he asked that a prison doctor visit the severely ill. He requested the very least that an individual in prison used to get under the Tsar.

When Alter's requests went unsatisfied, he declared hunger strikes. All told, in the course of the two years, Alter conducted such strikes for over forty days! Each time he was force-fed. He did succeed, at least partially, in obtaining paper and a pencil so that he might record the document in which he endeavored to formulate the laws of a non-Newtonian physics. The paper was granted only after a hunger strike of several days focusing on a single request: that the prospectus of his work be sent to the Russian scientific academy for its decision as to whether the work had scientific value. The reply was positive.

Alter told me that the investigating judges did not derive a great deal of satisfaction from their exchanges with him. To their wild accusations he offered one response: "It's a tissue of lies from

beginning to end.” When he did find himself entering upon a conversation with these investigators, the subject was invariably, on Alter’s part, the need to end the terror in Russia. From time to time Alter would demonstrate to the investigating judge that he himself could not believe in the charges he was leveling against him. These discussions, in which Alter’s acute logic assuredly prevailed, had anything but a favorable outcome. In the spring of 1941 Alter was transferred to another Moscow prison, Lefortovo. It is a prison to which prisoners are sent for “softening up.” Alter told me a bit about that prison. The cells are constructed in such a way that a person of average height can never stand up straight. And Alter was tall. The inadequate eating conditions in normal prisons became transformed in Lefortovo into a simple hunger regimen. My Polish acquaintance who had seen Alter before he was sent off to Lefortovo prison and after his return to the more “normal” Butyrki told me that he didn’t recognize him.

As with Erlich, Alter too was tried in August 1941. His trial took place in Moscow. But if, at Erlich’s trial, only one individual spoke—Erlich himself—at Alter’s trial no one uttered a word. Alter maintained a contemptuous silence after declaring that he did not feel himself guilty in the least. And then an officer announced in mechanical fashion that “Victor Alter has been sentenced to be shot for sabotage activity against Soviet Russia.”

The convicted prisoner was moved into the death cell of the Moscow prison. His shoes were removed and he was dressed in death slippers. Told that he had ten days in which to appeal to the Supreme Soviet for clemency, Alter asked for paper and pencil and wrote—another chapter of his manuscript on physics. On the eleventh day he was informed that his sentence was being commuted without an appeal, and that “he will have the punishment carried out in the course of ten years in a concentration camp.”

Two weeks before the verdict of death was rendered against Alter and Erlich, an agreement was signed in London between the Soviet and Polish (Sikorski) governments about wartime cooperation. To begin with, the agreement anticipated the release of all Polish citizens being held by Soviet Russia in its prisons and concentration camps. Thus, at the very time Erlich and Alter were receiving their verdicts, prominent Polish politicians and military

men were already in the process of being released. The newly opened Polish embassy in Moscow was told about the two prisoners by Poles, now free, who had been incarcerated with Alter and Erlich in their separate cells. The Polish representatives began to intervene on their behalf; on September 12, 1941, Henryk Erlich was released from prison; Victor Alter was let out the following day. But not for long: all told for less than three months.

Of the tens of thousands who were freed from the Soviet prisons and camps at the same time, only a few hundred received a financial indemnity. Larger sums went to generals and higher officers. Scholars, politicians, writers, and community leaders obtained smaller sums. Alter and Erlich were given enough to enable them to purchase underwear, suits, and overcoats upon leaving prison. They acquired the right to live at the Moscow hotel for the privileged—the Metropole.

Right after they were freed, Aaron-Arkady Volkovisky, a colonel in the NKVD and Commissar Beria's right-hand man, came up to their hotel room. He said to Alter and Erlich that they should consider their two years in prison and their death sentences a "mistake," and were asked to forget about them. "Now," he said, "all of us are standing together in a common struggle against the mortal danger of Hitlerism (Hitler's armies were just then approaching Moscow), and we must fight together and forget the past." He proposed that Erlich and Alter head up a worldwide Jewish committee for the fight against fascism. He further proposed that the two of them should appoint the majority of the committee's presidium, and he suggested that the Moscow Jewish actor Mikhoels* serve on the latter as representative of Russian Jews.

The Soviet government was especially interested in America at this time. Although formally neutral, the United States was even then engaged in large-scale assistance to Great Britain, selling her needed food and war materiel. Volkovisky was very knowledgeable about the political influence of the Jewish trade unions and other

*Solomon Mikhoels died under mysterious circumstances on January 13, 1948. While the authorities claimed the death was accidental, Stalin's daughter Svetlana called it murder.—Trans.

Jewish labor organizations in American life. The Soviet regime presumably wished to make use of the political esteem in which the Bund leaders were held in order to win the sympathy of their friends in America for a campaign in support of Soviet Russia. Inasmuch as Erlich and Alter were convinced that the help of America for Soviet Russia was desirable and necessary at that moment in the interest of the struggle against Nazi Germany, they were prepared to impel the Jewish labor organizations in the United States to aid Russia in its struggle against the Third Reich. But they did not share, for a single moment, the naive illusion that, from the instant Russia was attacked by Hitler, there were no longer any differences between them—as socialists—and the communist regime in Russia; or between the democratic world and the totalitarian, dictatorial government in Moscow.

Alter and Erlich had left the Soviet prison. Yet in one particular—a fateful particular, as it later turned out—their freedom was different from that of all other Polish citizens. Each of the hundreds of thousands who were released from the prisons and concentration camps during those months received a document drawn up by the Soviet authorities which indicated the person's name and his Polish citizenship. But Erlich and Alter received no such documents. For the moment it wasn't taken seriously: things are so frequently mishandled in Soviet Russia that neither Erlich nor Alter attributed particular significance to the matter. Immediately after being released, they received new Polish passports provided by the Polish embassy in Moscow. But two months later it turned out that the NKVD had neither by accident nor because of neglect forgotten to provide Erlich and Alter with the Soviet *oodostovnyerenye* (identity card).

When I set eyes on Erlich and Alter at the end of October in the pathetic Grand Hotel in Kuibyshev, it was still difficult for them to climb the stairs to their room, which was located on the second floor. Still, despite the fact that they had turned completely gray, they appeared more or less normal and full of energy. Yet friends who had met them in Moscow during their first days of freedom, and who knew them well before the war, told me that they were unrecognizable until they heard their names. The sketch

of Alter drawn by the Polish painter Felix Topolski provides a good picture of one of them during those days. The photograph of Erlich right after he was released is sufficiently telling. As late as six weeks after their release they still felt the gnawing sensation of hunger, which for a long time could not be satisfied simply by eating.

Nevertheless, Erlich and Alter immediately proceeded to carry out the sociopolitical obligations which, they felt, rested heavily upon them. On September 24 they submitted a letter to Professor Stanislaw Kot, the Polish ambassador in Moscow, containing a declaration of their attitude toward the war, which had just then taken a very dangerous turn. In the letter they called upon the Polish Jews who found themselves in Russia (it was calculated, in fact, that at least a half-million Jews from Poland found themselves in Russia) to join the Polish army in order to fight in it against the Nazi enemy. The letter contained a pledge by Erlich and Alter to lend their assistance in the organization of aid to the refugees in need of it. It also contained an exposition of their democratic and socialist views on the future shape of Poland following the expulsion of the Nazi troops from its soil.

They promptly set about organizing self-help for Jewish refugees. This included attempts to establish contact with Jewish groups in various parts of the enormous Russian empire in order to obtain a picture of how much and what kind of help was required. In this connection Erlich and Alter knew that they could count not only on the funds promised by the Polish government for this purpose, but also on the help of various Jewish organizations in the United States. In addition to certain sums which they distributed on their own, they influenced the distribution of other sums by the Polish embassy's assistance department.

When the Polish government sent emissaries to various locales with substantial numbers of Polish refugees, Erlich and Alter urged that prominent Jewish public figures who chanced to be in Russia should be included among the emissaries. To some degree their efforts proved successful, although the number of Jewish personalities made available was smaller than the two had requested and indeed counted upon. Reports began to reach Kuibyshev that certain Polish delegates were treating Jewish clients badly. Alter

decided to set out on a tour of inspection to those parts of Soviet Russia in which larger groups of Polish Jews were concentrated. His trip was supposed to begin in December and last at least six weeks.

Erlich and Alter were heavily preoccupied with another matter, something that caused them considerable grief: this was the condition of Jews in the Polish armed forces that were beginning to take shape. The Polish military staff was situated in the small city of Buzuluk, on the Volga. Famished Poles and Polish Jews, often severely ill and half-naked, were streaming into town day and night, seeking to enlist in the army. Some did so because of a desire to fight; the large majority was drawn to Buzuluk in order to find a refuge, a secure place where they would be among their own and taken care of. But an unpleasant attitude toward Jews immediately began to take shape in Buzuluk. There was open talk that the Jews ought to form a separate army. A group of Revisionists—among them the lawyer Kahan from Warsaw and Sheshkin from Vilno—approached the Polish military authorities with a plan to separate the Jews and appoint them—the Revisionists—leaders of such a “Jewish Legion.” They sought, thereby, to entice the anti-Semitic Poles with the promise that this “legion” would leave for Palestine, and Poland would be rid of a large part of the Jews. A Bundist who was present in Buzuluk at the time submitted a memorandum to the same Polish military offices in which he pointed to the harmfulness of the plan. He had a conference on the subject with the Polish Commander in Chief, General Wladislaw Anders, and his then Chief of Staff, Colonel Okulicki, the same individual who was later sentenced in Moscow to ten years. He also informed Erlich and Alter in Kuibyshev about it. Then both of them, for their part, requested a conference with the Polish ambassador and General Anders. At the conference they advanced a series of demands about protecting the rights of Jews in the military and requested, among other things, the establishment of an office of spokesman for Jewish affairs on the military staff. The situation in the Polish army was one of the reasons why I felt the challenge to go from Buzuluk to Kuibyshev. The Revisionist Jewish Legion in Russia was not established. Had that happened, many thousands of Jews would have remained in Russia, possibly

forever, instead of breaking out of Russia in the year 1942, together with the Polish army. But none of the other demands of Erlich and Alter were ever met.

In the small Polish "colony" that had benefited from diplomatic privileges in Kuibyshev and was able to live and eat in the Grand Hotel, there was a group of about ten socialists. Victor Alter, in keeping with his nature and temperament, considered it his duty jointly to work out a perspective on the goals which the socialist movement in Poland should set itself after Hitler's defeat. For this purpose he drafted detailed theses on several subjects which circulated among the socialists.

Erlich and Alter were almost continuously surrounded by friends and acquaintances, people who had found each other, people who had come out of the prisons and camps alive and wished to see them; or Polish political figures and intellectuals who, in the "old days," could not have imagined that they might someday have common intellectual interests with representatives of "Jewish tailors and shoemakers." On that small hotel-island, they sensed in the two Jewish socialists the presence of a spiritual and moral force that had a particular potency in times of catastrophe.

The question of the projected Worldwide Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee occupied a substantial place among all their plans for the immediate future. As previously noted, the suggestion for the project itself originated with the Soviet government. Erlich and Alter informed the Polish ambassador about it and also conveyed the information to their comrades in New York. During the conversations with Soviet government representatives, and with Colonel Arkady Volkovysky above all, it was proposed that the committee's activity should center around the implementation of various projects. The Soviet representatives wished to have a broadly based Jewish committee that would embrace all kinds of Jews. Among others, they proposed, as one of the founding members of the committee, the Latvian Agudah* leader, Rabbi Nurok. Erlich

*The common designation for *Agudas Yisroel* (or League of Israel). In the Jewish Orthodox camp, it was rigidly anti-secular, anti-Zionist, and strongly fundamentalist-traditionalist in character.—Trans.

and Alter desired, at least in the beginning, to have on the committee only socialist, trade unionist, and democratic Jewish elements. As a consequence of the initial conversations, Alter and Erlich submitted to the Soviet representatives a roster of Bundists who found themselves at the time in Soviet Russia, primarily in camps and prisons, and who were supposed to be used for work on behalf of the committee. Many of them were brought to Moscow or, later, Kuibyshev. However, among those released there was hardly a single Jewish socialist leader who had been active before the war in the eastern sections of Poland. The Soviet authorities did not let them out of prison even for a single moment.

Erlich and Alter compiled the draft of a statute for the Anti-Fascist Committee. They were then invited to meet with Beria, who informed them that, inasmuch as the committee would have to work abroad, only one person in Soviet Russia could validate the details as well as the general expenditures: *Stalin*. Erlich and Alter thereupon addressed a letter to Stalin in which they voiced their fervent desire to participate in the struggle against Nazi Germany and thereby also help Soviet Russia. Along with the letter they included the draft of the statute for the Anti-Fascist Committee and asked Stalin for permission to begin the activity.

October 15, 1941 arrived. The German army was just a few dozen kilometers from Moscow. On that day panic erupted in Moscow. It seized all segments of the population, not sparing even the government circles. That very day, the members of all the diplomatic missions and of a number of ministries and commissariats were put on trains and sent off to more secure locations, mainly to Kuibyshev. Erlich and Alter were among those evacuated by the government. They were placed in Kuibyshev's Grand Hotel, which had been designated for associates of foreign diplomatic missions, foreign telegraphic agencies, newspaper correspondents, prominent writers, generals who were most likely engaged in carrying out important assignments in the rear, etc.

I've already mentioned that I lived in the same room as Erlich and Alter in Kuibyshev. Consequently I knew precisely how they spent every minute up to the fatal night of the third to the fourth of December, 1941. We would leave the hotel very rarely. There was nowhere to go in the depressingly dark and hungry city. On

one occasion we attended a concert; and once or twice we saw a film. We used to visit the Polish embassy from time to time to dispose of various matters on behalf of individuals needing help. We once visited the gypsy fair, a kind of market where it was possible to obtain tobacco at a very high price.

A tall man around thirty-five—Khazanovitch by name—came to our room several times. He was unquestionably a Jew. He would show up ostensibly in connection with matters involving the Anti-Fascist Committee. Khazanovitch did not make a secret of the fact that he was associated with the NKVD. On each visit he used to report to us that no reply had yet arrived from Moscow to the letter addressed to Stalin. Although we were clearly impatient because of this, we knew full well—or thought we did—the reason for it: Russia's fate, not to speak of the fate of Moscow, was hanging on a thread at that moment—on a very thin thread.

One committee project included the sending of someone to London and to the United States. Aside from that, there was a plan to drop a young comrade by parachute into Poland. But even before December 3, Khazanovitch stated that it was impossible to airdrop the comrade into Poland because the Russian aircraft could not fly that far at that juncture. Something like a difference of opinion developed between Erlich and Alter: Which one should go where? The New York comrades had written that they wanted Erlich to go to London in order to represent the Bund there on the Polish National Council. Alter on the other hand, and according to plan, was supposed to go to New York. But Erlich wished very badly to make that visit: his whole family was there, and he felt a deep longing for them. He once told me that, in order for him to be able to work again, he would need a rest for about two or three months. Accordingly, he wished that Alter should be the one to go to London. I know that Alter essentially had the same wish. London, more than New York, was on the forward battleline then; and Alter was drawn more strongly to it. Yet he did not desire to act contrary to the decision of the Bund representatives in New York.

December 3 arrived. The Polish colony had been unusually excited during the days immediately preceding it. General Sikorski, the Premier of the Polish government in London, had flown to

Moscow. People were counting on important decisions that aimed to alleviate the condition of the Polish citizens in Soviet Russia and that would clarify the plans of Stalin for postwar relations with his Polish neighbor. Erlich and Alter intended to see Sikorski in order to discuss with him some general political questions and the subject of anti-Semitism, some manifestations of which had already made themselves felt with sufficient acuteness in the Polish army.

Around twelve noon on December 3, 1941, Erlich and Alter left for the Polish embassy in order to learn when they might expect Sikorski's arrival in Kuibyshev from Moscow. A while later the telephone rang in our room. I heard a familiar voice: "This is Khazanovitch. Is Victor Izraelevitch at the hotel? Is Genrikh Moiseyevitch there?" Neither was present. Khazanovitch thereupon told me to inform both of them that "someone has come from Moscow with the reply." He promised to call again later.

After they returned from town, we waited with considerable impatience for that telephone call. The afternoon and evening went by and still no telephone call. We generally sat in the hotel lobby until late at night. Nearly all the hotel residents did the same. The rooms were cold, hence everyone preferred to sit in the well-lighted lobby and drink a glass of tea rather than to lie in a cold and very uncomfortable bed.

We were sitting and drinking tea. With us was the cadet-officer Kazimierz Natanson, whose father was the famous Jewish financier, Stanislaw Natanson. Although Kazimierz was a Roman Catholic, he remained very sensitive to the wrongs that were committed against Jews in the army, and we proceeded to discuss this matter. It was 12:30 at night when one of the hotel employees (they were all agents of the NKVD) came up to our table and said in Russian: "Citizen Alter, you're wanted on the telephone." We knew without an extra word who was calling. He returned immediately and said to Erlich: "Henryk, get your coat. We must leave at once." They went up to their rooms for their hats and coats and came down again. Since Natanson was a stranger, they did not say where they were going. They would answer my questions, they said, when they returned; they were certain they'd be back in an hour.

They never returned.

I waited almost until morning for them to return. By noon,

when they still had not returned to their rooms, I went to the Polish embassy with a request that it intercede with the Soviet authorities. The ambassador was in Moscow together with Sikorski. Vyshinsky, having just then arrived in Kuibyshev in his capacity as Deputy Soviet Foreign Minister, was asked about them by a high official. His initial response was that he had no information concerning the fate of Erlich or Alter. On the following day, Vyshinsky stated that they had been arrested "on the direct order of Moscow," and that the authorities in Kuibyshev had nothing whatever to do with the matter. The Polish embassy attempted to establish telephone contact with Moscow in order to inform Sikorski of the arrest and to ask that he intercede with Stalin. But the telephone connection was refused on the pretext that "the weather is bad." That day I brought to the embassy from their room at the hotel all the documents, letters, etc., that belonged to Alter and Erlich. Although I remained in the same room until the end of December, the Russian police never conducted a house search there.

I immediately went to see Sikorski and the ambassador, Stanislaw Kot, upon their arrival in Kuibyshev. Sikorski was very ill. Consequently, a group of three Bundists who were in Kuibyshev at the time addressed a letter to him in which they underscored in the strongest terms the political significance of the arrest. In his reply, Sikorski promised that the ambassador, the Polish government, and he personally would do everything possible to gain the freedom of Erlich and Alter. The ambassador took the matter of the arrest very much to heart and promptly dispatched a note to the Soviet government. The reply, signed by Vyshinsky, contained no specific charges at all, but did include an ominous assertion—that Erlich and Alter were "Soviet citizens." Further notes were sent, but they produced no change in the situation. Professor Kot spoke to Vyshinsky about the matter several times. The last time was in July 1942 when he came to take his leave prior to relinquishing his post in Russia. On that occasion he said to Vyshinsky: "I appeal to you to give me a memento of Russia: give me Erlich and Alter." Vyshinsky's cynical response was: "The future Poland will get along without them."

During the early days of March 1943, the names of Erlich and Alter were mentioned in the Kremlin. The Polish ambassador to

Russia at the time was Tadeusz Romer. Relations between the Polish government in London and the Soviet government had grown progressively worse. Romer, consequently, requested to see Stalin, which actually happened. In the course of their conversation, Stalin assured Romer that he wished to see “a strong and independent Poland.” But Romer had his doubts, and asked Stalin to show his sympathy for Poland by certain deeds. Among other things, Romer asked Stalin: “Why are you keeping Erlich and Alter in prison?” Stalin did not answer with a single word. Having almost nothing further to say, he offered a cold farewell to the ambassador. He never received him again.

In Moscow Romer was unaware that ten days earlier—on February 23, 1943—the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Maxim Litvinov, had sent a letter to William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, in which it was announced that Erlich and Alter had been shot.*

*This is a reference to the first of the two letters from Litvinov to Green. For the text, see below, pp. 166, 169.

With Comrade Erlich in Soviet Prisons

Abraham Finesilver

IT WAS A SUMMER NIGHT in 1941 when the prison guard knocked at my cell door in Butyrki prison in Moscow. He directed me to stand up and remain prepared. I wasn't sleeping, but simply lying on the hard board listening to the ceaseless tumult in the prison.

A constant movement. Doors opening and closing. One could hear the heavy steps of soldiers' boots and the lighter steps of civilian shoes. And one could hear the characteristic short commands being shouted: "*Poskorey, Poskorey!*" ("Faster, Faster"!)

When the door of my cell opened, I was already prepared. A three-man detail of armed guards from the NKVD surrounded me and started leading me away. I had to strain in order to keep up with the swift pace of the march. When we reached a gate we encountered a reinforced guard. The senior member of the group put me through a detailed frisking.

The gate swung open. We stepped out of the Butyrki prison. It was pitch-black, and I was unable to see where to set foot. With the guards holding me firmly under the arms, we set off. I had already taken several such nighttime "promenades" in the company of armed NKVD men, and yet—this time as well—I experienced that sensation of dread felt by someone taking his final walk.

We stopped. A creaky little door opened and I was swiftly shoved inside. The door was closed again. I remained standing in the dark, unable to move. I sensed the presence of people around

me. The place was so densely packed that it was impossible to move. It was hot, stifling. People were shouting, arguing, shoving. No faces were visible, and no one could distinguish anyone's feet. Thus people were stepping on neighbor's feet, with the resultant outcries.

Presently one heard the noise of a motor. The prison van began to move. It lurched and quivered. The vehicle was so solidly packed that it was impossible for anyone to fall.

The ride was long. People were groaning and panting heavily. I barely managed to remain standing. Finally the van came to a halt and we were let out into the fresh air. We were ordered to sit on the ground in total silence.

It was daybreak. At our isolated location we were able to discern railroad tracks and cars nearby. Hundreds of people were seated on the ground in separate groups, each group guarded by around ten armed NKVD men. The ten-man units were accompanied by a number of large dogs. An NKVD man, roster in hand, stood near each group. He would call a name on the list and the individual would rise and be led off by a guard. My name, as it happened, was called almost at the very end.

The guard led me to one of the cars and pushed me in. The car was already solidly packed with people; there was hardly enough space for me to set both feet down. A few more people were shoved in after me. The crush became even greater.

Soon the boxcar doors were locked in place and bolted, and the train was underway.

Along both sides of the car wooden boards had been fashioned into benches capable of seating and sleeping roughly twenty people. But over sixty people were squeezed into the car. A tiny window had been cut out of one corner of the car. Through that tiny window with an iron bar across, over sixty people were supposed to obtain air for breathing. It was also the only spot through which the light of day and darkness of night penetrated to us. In the center of the car a bit of space was set apart for attending to basic needs. One can readily imagine the kind of stifling and stinking air we were forced to breathe during the whole journey.

The train had been moving for only a few minutes when a person shoved his way toward me through the crush. He put a

hand on my shoulder and addressed me by name. The voice was familiar; yet, for a split second, I was unable to recognize the individual with his long, emaciated face and sunken cheeks; with a head of sparse gray hair and a face with such a velvety-soft expression in the deep-set eyes. No, there could be no mistake: the person standing next to me was . . . Comrade *Henryk Erlich*.

We embraced and said not a word. I looked at his wrinkled and weary face which, in the course of the twenty-two months since the arrest, had changed and aged so greatly as to be literally unrecognizable. The tears welled up in me; I tried but was unable to hold them back.

“What a happy coincidence our being thrown into the same car,” whispered Comrade Henryk softly. “Now we will stay together. After all, we have so much to tell each other. You are surely familiar with the fate of my family. You must certainly also know what has happened to all our mutual friends. It is literally unbelievable that you should be here next to me,” said a smiling Comrade Henryk. “You must begin to relate right now.”

I had been arrested nine months after Comrade Erlich. I therefore had, in fact, a great deal to tell him—about Comrade Sophie and the children, who were already in Vilno; about his father-in-law, Simon Dubnow, who had come from Riga to Vilno to see his family; about the life of our refugees in Vilno and Kovno: how they sneaked across the border in order to find protection in semi-fascist Lithuania; how they settled in as best they could; how they organized assistance in the form of places to sleep and eat, etc.; how they engaged in party and cultural activity. I tried to mention the names of all the Bundist comrades who had succeeded in breaking through to Vilno.

Comrade Erlich’s joy mounted with the mention of each new name. But the look on his refined face grew ever more doleful as I told about the unrestrained terror of the Soviet authorities in the occupied cities and towns of Poland; about the liquidation of all non-communist party and public-communal organizations; about the arrest and dragging away of dozens of our finest comrades and friends. I also gave him all the details about the arrest of Comrade Victor Alter. At that precise moment neither of us knew that we

and Victor had been incarcerated for a long time in the same Lubyanka prison in Moscow—indeed, on the very same floor.

My narration lasted almost the whole first day of our journey. No matter how exact my account about everything, Comrade Erlich still wished to know more and more. He asked me for details about persons and events, about general matters, and about the current political situation.

The train was moving along and carrying us farther and farther from Moscow. The people in the car gradually “settled down.” Everyone somehow found a modicum of space—some sitting, some standing, and some even managing to lie down. Making use of all possible “space,” some individuals even squeezed themselves in under the plank cots and fell asleep there. The luckier and stronger grabbed the places on the plank cots; the weaker remained in an upright position. Comrade Henryk and I succeeded in appropriating a standing place next to the plank cot but with support for one’s shoulders against the wall of the car.

The train made frequent stops, indeed sometimes for hours on end. At one of the stations food was distributed. We were handed a piece of black bread, a dry, highly salted herring, two pieces of sugar, and drinking water. The water had been poured into a pot; this treasure was protected by a guard consisting of two prisoners. Only twice in the course of twenty-four hours did everyone receive one small cup of drinking water. The shortage of drinking water became the overriding torment for all of us during the whole journey. A burning sun heated the roof and walls of the sealed car. And the air was fetid and stifling. The saltiness of the herring only served to aggravate our thirst; and water for drinking was so scarce that the condition gave rise to a system of bartering in our boxcar: bread, cigarettes, sugar, and even shirts were traded for a little water. With each passing day the price of water rose. At night fights erupted in the car; beatings were administered to those who were trying to steal a ladleful of water from the pot.

On the occasion of one of the long stops we had a surprise. It was during our first day underway. The train had pulled into a small station. We were able to hear human voices—male voices, female voices, and also the laughing and crying of children. One of

the prisoners who looked out of the small barred window described to us what he saw.

Standing at the same station was another train with a large number of cars, both open and closed. All of them were overflowing with human beings, some even sitting on the roofs of the cars. After several questions and answers it became clear that it was a train carrying civilians who had been evacuated from Minsk, the capital of Soviet Belorussia. It was only then that we learned that Hitler had been at war with Soviet Russia since June 22. It now became clear to us why we were being transported in these malodorous freight cars, and why the NKVD in Moscow was in such a hurry.

The armed NKVD men were shouting and threatening us with their weapons as they sought to prevent any contact between people on the two trains. Our "speaker" at the little window received a severe blow on the face from the butt of a rifle and quickly resigned his job. However, there was one individual on the "free" people's train who understood our eagerness to learn about the situation at the front. The stranger on the other side, ostensibly for the benefit of the people in his car, began to read the information from the newspapers out loud—loud enough so that we could hear everything quite clearly. Our car grew deathly still, for we didn't want to miss a single word.

The news items were from June 26, 1941—that is, they were only two days old. In the official telegraphic dispatches there appeared names of well-known cities which had been occupied by the Nazi armies in the first few days. The Germans were now applying the blitzkrieg strategy against the very people who had provided them with bread and oil only days before. In the course of those initial days, the Germans had already captured almost all the territories occupied by the Soviets that had previously belonged to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Esthonia, and Rumania.

The majority of "travelers" in our car was made up of Soviet citizens. The reports dealing with the war's outbreak and the situation at the front were just as unexpected to them as they were to us. Yet they showed not the least surprise. There was no expression whatever of regret, of astonishment. Their faces were pictures of total indifference.

The colony of "foreigners" in the car was small in number. Almost all the people in the group were victims of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. They included several Polish staff officers who had been taken to Starobelsk, the notorious Soviet camp for prisoner-of-war officers. The NKVD had picked several high officers from the camp and brought them to a Moscow prison for "interrogation."

With us were two high officials from Polish foreign embassies. They had not managed to leave the embassies when the Soviet government announced that Poland no longer existed. These officials had been conveyed to Moscow so that the diplomatic secrets of their embassies might be extracted from them. The interrogations to which they were subjected had been anything but diplomatic.

Our car also held a group of three Polish poets. Before the war they had been known as writers favorable to communism. One of them, in fact, had been imprisoned for pro-Soviet overtones in his poetic creations. At the time the Soviets took Lemberg (Lvov), the three Polish poets volunteered their services and cooperated actively with the local communists. They occupied important offices in the communist propaganda department and marched in lock-step. Now they found themselves together with us in the prison car.

We learned that one evening the three poets had been seated around a table at a Lemberg restaurant, drinking. At a table nearby was seated a group of Soviet officers. They, too, were imbibing Polish vodka. A conversation opened up between the men at the two tables. The conversation evolved into a discussion, and the discussion culminated in a scuffle. In a matter of days, the three Polish poets were confined in the NKVD prison, from which they were later taken to Moscow. Interrogated in Moscow, they were charged with anti-Soviet propaganda and were sentenced, then banished, then freed—owing to the subsequent agreement between the Polish government in London and the Soviet government. All three of them are in Poland today, where they continue to serve the communist regime.

This group of Polish writers knew Comrade Erlich quite well. During the course of the journey they stayed close to us in the

prison car. They didn't even conceal from us their bitterness and disappointment with communism of the Moscow-NKVD variety. At night, when everyone was asleep, we would engage in whispered conversations for hours on end. They would quietly recite their poems from memory. Under those bizarre circumstances, the poems made an unforgettable impression; they sounded like some kind of secret prayer.

In the prison car night came early. As soon as the sun went down, darkness settled over us. There were no lights. The weary and weakened prisoners swiftly began to doze off.

Once each night, four of us—Comrade Erlich, two of the Polish poets, and I—would stand pressed together, conversing quietly. We exchanged opinions on the news from the front which we had picked up during the day. It was the evaluation presented by Comrade Erlich in the course of the conversations that became etched in my memory.

He foresaw a swift turn in the relations between Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Convinced that only the assistance of America would be able to stop the march of Hitler's divisions in Russia, he anticipated that the assistance would come very quickly. Erlich was the only optimist in our group at that moment. The biggest pessimists were the Communist poets.

Our train was coming to a stop. The noise of the racing wheels was cut short, along with our conversation: things had grown too quiet in the car and we didn't wish our conversation to be overheard. I do not know how many people in the car were awake at that moment and listening to the sounds from outside. But no one broke the silence. People simply kept thier ears cocked.

Comrade Henryk whispered: "A checkup is most likely underway in the other cars. We, too, can count on a visit from them. The scoundrels, with their pistols and dogs, will surely be here soon."

It did not take long for the visitors to knock at our door. A group of five men entered the car: three men of the NKVD and two dogs. A strict order was issued: "*Molchat!*" ("Silence") "Anyone uttering a single word will be shot on the spot like a dog."

With his pistol held in an extended position, the group leader

began the head count of the car's "inventory." On the first count he was short three bodies. So two NKVD men started to count: one counted the mass jammed together in one half of the car; the other counted the equally jammed massed in the other half. After totaling both figures, the NKVD man started to curse and to shout abuse in the good old Russian manner. For he now came up with two prisoners too many. Hence the order for a complete "migration": all the prisoners, helped along by the dogs and the NKVD men, were squeezed into one half of the car. Then, one by one, the prisoners were sent to the other half of the car. This time the count came up short by one. The three NKVD men flew into a frenzy, screaming and huling imprecations. The two dogs began to bark. And we stood pressed together like herrings in a barrel and remained silent.

We heard the sound of a short whistle. A larger group of NKVD men came up to our car. On order, they commenced banging on the walls and the roof of the car with their rifles. Everything was solid; they did not find the place through which the missing "single" had disappeared. So they began to "poke around" inside the car. They checked every board on the wall and the floor until they finally nabbed the culprit. They proceeded to pull the missing "item" out from under the plank cot.

The senior member of the group sought to awaken the sleeping figure. He "worked him over" with his boots until the reclining figure began weeping and howling like some creature being slaughtered.

The numbers finally "checked," the counters departed, the doors closed, and the "passengers" resumed their former positions.

We had such countings in the car every night.

When the train started moving again and the people in the car, weary unto death, began to fall asleep, the two of us remained standing in our corner. Comrade Erlich broke the silence and began to narrate.

I was all ears: I forgot all about my physical exhaustion; the enveloping dark nightmare somehow disappeared.

I cannot recall today all the details of his account; but I have retained the essence. The most important moments have been

engraved on my memory, and I will surely carry them with me until the end of my days.

From the Brest-Litovsk railroad station where Erlich was arrested (on October 4, 1939), he was led off to a small, dirty cell of the Brest-Litovsk prison. It was there that he was first confined all by himself. He was interrogated several nights in succession, the interrogation being conducted by a captain of the NKVD.

Comrade Erlich did not even attempt to deny that he was a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Bund and editor of the Bund central organ, the *Folkstsaytung*. He responded to all the hundreds of questions in the "questionnaires" and explained precisely the reasons for his going from Warsaw to Brest-Litovsk.

The interrogator had demanded that Comrade Erlich confess that he had come to Brest-Litovsk in order to organize and direct the Jewish Labor Bund's counterrevolutionary and anti-Soviet activity. He asked for the names and addresses of other members of the Central Committee, as well as the names of the Bundists in Brest-Litovsk with whom Comrade Erlich was associated.

Comrade Henryk tried to enlighten the Chekist captain. He described for him the situation in Warsaw during the days when the Nazi divisions broke the resistance of the defenders. He told him about the evacuation of Warsaw and the deadly danger looming over him and other well-known socialist leaders on the part of the Hitlerite Gestapo. Comrade Erlich wanted the interrogator to understand the meaning of the right of asylum for people seeking protection among the Soviets because they did not wish to subject themselves to the tender mercies of the Hitlerite hangmen.

The Soviet interrogator, however, could not "understand" this. The Gestapo, after all, had been rampaging in the Polish cities on one side of the river Bug by the same "right" as the Soviet NKVD's rampaging in the Polish territories on the other side of the Bug. Indeed, this "conversation" took place in the same city which the Nazi commanders—in solemn fashion and with a military parade—had turned over to the commanders of the Soviet garrisons. The interrogator himself certainly must have been a witness to the big demonstration of friendship.

The Chekist was very dissatisfied with the interrogation. He

threatened and shouted; he was alternately soft and hard, respectful and abusive; but he did not prevail over Comrade Erlich.

After two weeks in the Brest-Litovsk prison, Comrade Henryk was brought to Moscow. He was taken to the notorious interrogation Lubyanka prison. During the first month he was kept in a one-man cell. Not once was he allowed to enjoy a quiet night's sleep. The interrogations would last from three hours to eighteen hours without a break. Erlich was asked to acknowledge that all his activities were treasonous, hostile to the people, and anti-Soviet.

When they were not successful in this approach, they began to treat him somewhat better for a while. They gave him a cell with another prisoner, then with two others, and later with three. It was at this time that Comrade Erlich wrote from memory the history of the Bund in Poland. (This was after he had actually resolved a number of times not to write it. But after lengthy reflection he decided to do so.) Each day he was led from his cell into a small room which contained a desk, a chair, a pitcher of drinking water, paper, ink, and a pen. The door was shut and no one disturbed him. He was thus able for quite some time to unburden himself of the senseless and painful "discussions" with the interrogators about socialism and communism, about democracy and revolution. He decided to provide the answer to his tormentors on paper. It was a difficult task, to write under such conditions and only from memory the history of what was most cherished and sacred in his life, while knowing in advance the kind of filthy and bloody hands into which the written work would be delivered! Yet he forced himself to continue the work, recording the history with a consciousness that this was the sole means of giving a worthy response to his interrogators.

For several months, Comrade Erlich worked on his twenty-one-year history of the Bund in Poland, i.e., the interval between the First and Second World Wars. Who knows when the GPU archives, drenched in rivers of blood, will become accessible to the Russian people? Who knows when we shall have the good fortune to read that incredible history of the Polish Bund written in a Soviet prison by Comrade Henryk Erlich?

When the writing was completed they began to torture Comrade Erlich anew. A different interrogator went to work on him.

The written history was declared to be a malevolent deception vis-à-vis the Soviet interrogation, and he was asked for the truth.

A small Chekist of around thirty tried assiduously, over an uninterrupted period of several months, to convince Comrade Erlich that the Bund and counterrevolution were synonymous, and that the Central Committee of the Bund was in the service of the Polish political police. Comrade Henryk rejected, with dignity, the filthy insinuations, and with superhuman courage continued to endure the agony of the interrogations. Although he was not beaten, he was humiliated and insulted in the most vulgar fashion. He was racked with hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, and solitary confinement.

The unequal "debate" between the armed Chekist and the tormented but unbending leader of the Jewish labor movement ended once more in a failure for the interrogator. A short time later, Comrade Henryk was brought before yet another interrogator. It actually turned out to be not an interrogation but a chat. For two nights in a row he talked with a colonel of the NKVD. The conversation was almost civilized. The colonel's tone was friendly and compassionate. He had read Comrade Henryk's work on the Bund, and on the basis of that work wished to demonstrate that the democratic road to socialism was condemned to inevitable failure, and he boasted about the victories of communism in Russia. He scoffed at the weakness of the labor movement affiliated with the Socialist International and bragged about the successes of the Communist International. He advised Comrade Erlich in a "friendly" fashion to change his incorrect attitude and write a supplementary work that would spell out the "mistakes" of the Bund and its leaders. Comrade Erlich thanked the courteous colonel for his amicable advice.

During the conversation, the NKVD man evinced interest in the Jewish trade union movement in Poland. He was surprised when Comrade Erlich told him about the strength of the movement, which had been founded and led primarily by Bundists. Comrade Henryk described the democracy and freedom of opinion that had prevailed in the trade unions, and the large role of the Bund in the general labor movement of Poland.

Erlich had the impression that the colonel knew very little

about the movement, and that what he did know was totally incorrect. The information in the interrogator's possession stemmed from the familiar communist arsenal. According to him, the militant organization of the Jewish workers in Poland was Social-Fascist, treacherous, and a tool of capitalism.

The colonel proposed to Comrade Erlich at the close of the conversation that he write the history of the trade unions in Poland. He accepted the suggestion, doing so with the same motives that had earlier prompted him to write the history of the Bund. Thus, in the course of a few months, working in that special little room, Comrade Erlich recorded the history of the Jewish unions. And in the process he gained a respite once again from the interrogations. Once again he was able to live for several months in the atmosphere of the glorious past, to take himself back to his former world.

When the writing was finished, Comrade Henryk was permitted to rest for a time. He was not called out for either questioning or conversation. But the period of rest did not last long.

The worst phase of the interrogations now commenced. A new interrogator set to work with fresh energy. This phase dragged on for long months, with the interrogator a brutal, uncouth, and dissolute NKVD captain. What crimes did he not attribute to Comrade Erlich?! Struggle against the Bolshevik/October Revolution; sabotage and underground activity against Soviet Russia; collaboration with Trotskyists and Mensheviks; organizing the Socialist International in opposition to the Communist International; collaboration with world capitalism in order to liquidate the Soviet Union; assisting in the liquidation of the revolutions in Germany and Hungary; working with the Dollfuss regime in Austria and the Franco regime in Spain; and more of the same.

The interrogator read falsified translations of Erlich's articles and speeches. He produced alleged records of Bundists who had "already confessed" to all the "crimes," and who cast the blame upon Erlich and Alter. The Chekist interrogator made Erlich responsible for the defeat of the Soviet attack against Poland in 1920; for the failure of a communist revolution to take place in Poland; for the fact that the Communist Party was illegal in Poland and, simultaneously, also for the fact that the same Communist Party was full of Trotskyists, spies, provocateurs, and traitors.

The interrogator made the Bund responsible for the coup d'état by Pilsudski in 1926 (which had been supported by the Polish Communist Party). He insisted that Comrade Erlich bore the responsibility for the Pilsudski-Hitler agreement. Yet the call for participation in the defense of Poland against the Hitler attack in September 1939 was also a case of Bundist "betrayal," for in so doing, Comrade Erlich was supporting the imperialist war.

The most outrageous act occurred during the final days of the interrogations. The communist interrogator drew up a protocol which contained a statement by Comrade Erlich. According to the protocol, Erlich was supposed to admit that the Bund was led, controlled, and sustained by the Polish fascist police, and that he personally was a paid agent of said police.

I shall never forget the moment when Comrade Henryk described to me this most appalling part of the interrogations. His voice actually quivered. He remained silent for a while. Then he resumed his narration.

"You can understand how I felt when the NKVD man handed me the piece of paper for my signature. That night he demonstrably kept his revolver on the table. From time to time he toyed with it, and checked to see if it had any cartridges. I felt like someone who has been defiled and lashed. Exerting myself, I read the piece of writing to the end. I looked at the interrogator, who happened to be toying with the revolver just then. I crumpled up the filthy piece of paper and with pretended calm dropped it into the wastebasket next to the desk. At that moment I was prepared to receive his revolver bullet as a salvation. I wanted him to do it. I looked at him with a defiant expression and waited."

"He didn't shoot," continued Comrade Henryk. "He was bewildered by what had happened. But he swiftly regained his composure. He arose and proceeded to wave the revolver in front of my face. Cursing, threatening, hurling epithets, the Chekist concluded with a statement that I would pay dearly for offending Soviet interrogation."

After the prolonged questioning, Comrade Erlich was placed in solitary confinement. From that cell he was brought to the same interrogator a number of times. Once again the NKVD captain

shoved the infamous protocol before him for his signature. And once again Comrade Erlich thrust it back.

In the cold solitary-confinement cell Comrade Erlich became ill. He ran a high temperature and was taken to the prison hospital for several days. After that he was returned to a regular cell.

Following a brief rest, Comrade Henryk was again brought in for "conversations" with the aforementioned colonel of the NKVD. Receiving Comrade Erlich like an old acquaintance, he asked about his health, and filled him in on the situation at the front and the political situation in the world.

These conversations took place a few months before Hitler's attack on Soviet Russia. The colonel boasted about the achievements of the "brilliant" Stalin-Hitler Pact, alluding to the acquired territories, the peace which the pact had guaranteed to the nationalities of the Soviet Union, and the readiness of the Soviet armed forces for any eventuality.

The NKVD man quoted from memory passages in Comrade Erlich's article published in the *Folkstsaytung* during the early days of the Nazi attack on Poland. And he wanted him to state whether he was still the same stubborn opponent of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Comrade Henryk continued determinedly to defend his position and offered weighty arguments that pointed up the dangers inherent in the pact even for the Soviet Union.

The colonel took notes while Erlich was speaking. He asked him questions and recorded the answers. Comrade Erlich's conclusions included the prediction that Hitler would attack the Soviet Union!

On the night following this conversation, Comrade Erlich was brought for questioning into a different room, a room luxuriously arranged. Present in the room, aside from the colonel, were two other high-ranking officers of the NKVD. The colonel read from a sheet of paper what Comrade Henryk had said to him the night before about the prospects of war. This time there were no falsifications. The colonel had prepared his presentation on the basis of the notes, and he accurately reported the opinions of Comrade Erlich.

The NKVD officials asked questions; their tone was civil and friendly. It became clear, on the basis of the questions posed, that

they were interested in the response of public opinion in America and England to a war between Hitler and the Soviet Union.

In the midst of the discussion the door from the adjacent room opened and a new visitor slowly strolled in and sat down at the table. Comrade Erlich recognized the individual who had just entered as the chief inquisitor of the NKVD—Lavrenti Beria.

His visit did not last long. He listened to the conversation for a while, never removing his gaze from the prisoner. Then he left the room.

In the course of the exchange, Comrade Erlich expressed the thought that the Nazi attack on Russia would bring about a rapprochement between the Anglo-Saxons and the Soviets; and this, he hoped, was the only way to save the world from Nazi enslavement.

At the conclusion of this extraordinary encounter, the colonel proposed that Comrade Erlich record all the views he had expressed. The suggestion was accepted. Comrade Henryk was pleased to be able to analyze thoroughly the situation that had been created as a result of the Stalin-Hitler Pact. In an extended statement, Comrade Henryk elaborated on the notion that the Soviet Union should promptly dissolve its friendship with Hitler and swiftly seek a rapprochement with the United States and Great Britain. He also indicated the need to begin anti-Hitler activity in the countries that had been occupied by the Nazi armies.

This was the last written work by Comrade Henryk. He penned it two months before the Nazi assault on Russia. When the Hitlerite armies were approaching the gates of Moscow and the situation in Russia became deadly serious, the people in the NKVD's high places must surely have reminded themselves about the individuals within the prison walls who had dared to foresee what had come to pass.

Two weeks before he was removed from Moscow, Comrade Henryk was called out once again for prolonged nighttime interrogations. The interrogator informed him that if he wished to expedite his trial, he should cease being so stubborn and sign. (It was still a question of that same despicable protocol.)

The protocol was not signed and the trial had not yet been held.

The outbreak of the war interrupted the course of that grievous matter.

By the time Comrade Erlich concluded the story of his inquisition, the breaking day had already begun to send its first gray shafts of light through the little window in the prison car. He placed his hand on my shoulder and spoke words that send shivers through me to this very day.

“I have told you absolutely everything [he said]. I have confided to you the complete truth about my worries and pain. I am weak and exhausted. Who knows how long I will have the strength to hold out? Besides, even if my strength should suffice, *they, in any case, will not let me out alive.*”*

“You are stronger and younger than I; perhaps it will yet be your destiny to become a free person. The present situation contains within itself the chance of your being freed. I know that you yourself have worries aplenty, and here I’ve been burdening you with my own. I beg you to etch in your memory what you’ve been told so that you should not forget it. Who knows what kind of vile frame-ups the NKVD may yet concoct against me in order to blacken my memory before the world. You will have to tell our comrades, the working-class public, and the whole free world, what I have confided in you; it alone is the truth. Regardless of what happens to me, you may rest assured that I did not degrade the honor of the Bund and of socialism. You may perhaps be destined to meet my family—perhaps, who knows? Perhaps they will save themselves. Tell them that in all the most difficult hours and minutes, I never stopped thinking of them with love. Should you meet up with the members of our Central Committee, convey my warmest feelings of love and devotion.

“I am fortunate to have you near me, fortunate that I found a comrade to whom I have been able to communicate all of this.”

This is how Comrade Erlich ended his tragic testament.

The second day of the journey in the prison car ended without incident. The group “settled down,” everyone finding a circle of individuals with which to pass the time. Comrade Erlich, and later I as well, succeeded in obtaining a bit of space on the plank cot for

*Abraham Finesilver’s emphasis.—Trans.

a few hours. Despite the noise and the hubbub that prevailed in the car during the day, we managed to sleep well for those few hours.

It was a blessing. We were so completely drained that the few hours' sleep invigorated us and even raised our spirits. When night fell and we had survived the visit of the counters and the dogs, we occupied the same corner as the previous night, and I began my story.

I recounted my experiences to Comrade Erlich with precision, from the first to the last day of my arrest—the day, that is, when I met Comrade Erlich in the prison car. My narration also continued for nearly a whole night; the story was only interrupted during the time the aforementioned Polish poets approached us. We chatted a bit with them and once more listened to their poems so rich in emotion.

They left us alone, and I managed in the course of the night to conclude my sad report. Everything was still fresh in my memory. Comrade Henryk evinced interest in the precise details of various interrogations. He asked me questions and I responded. I sought to draw from within myself everything that had tormented me in the days and nights after the interrogations. There were times, in fact, when I had regrets about myself—there were moments in which I was not sufficiently strong, not sufficiently capable of resistance; moments of weakness and want of courage.

I unburdened myself of everything. I had the great good fortune to have Comrade Erlich as listener. I was waiting to hear his evaluation of my conduct during the interrogations.

During those days I did not yet know what kind of verdict awaited me, although I was certain I would be convicted. From them I expected nothing else. But in those premorning hours I waited with a deep inner quivering for a different verdict—the verdict of Comrade Erlich. And I received it. It left me feeling cleansed and elevated. Comrade Erlich's evaluation was for me compensation for all the pain, the anguish, the humiliations on the part of the sadistic Soviet inquisitors.

On the fourth day of our journey we had an experience that was very characteristic of the mood that prevailed among the prisoners on the train. The train had stopped somewhere at a small railway station. Suddenly we heard the roar of airplane engines.

From our little window it was impossible to identify the type and number of aircraft overhead. Suddenly the prisoners in the adjacent cars began pounding on the walls and shouting: "Germans are flying!" "Open the doors!" "Let us out!" "Open, open!" The prisoners in our car also began to pound and scream. Panic erupted: the screamers—exclusively the Russian prisoners—succumbed to frenzy, fell into hysteria.

Soon the sounds of rifles and revolvers being fired came through to us. The NKVD men rushed up to the cars and yelled through the small windows for immediate quiet. The aircraft were Russian, not the enemy's, they announced. To show us that they were serious about their threat to shoot into the cars, they poked the barrels of their rifles through the window.

Such methods of calming the terror-stricken people were successful. The panic subsided. Moreover, the roar of the airplane engines had already faded away.

On the fifth day our train stopped at a station. It was the end of our journey. Several hours elapsed before the observer at our little window noticed that the front cars were being vacated. Finally our turn arrived. The car doors opened widely and we were let out.

It must have been noontime. We stood under a broiling sun, with the clear sky a bright blue. In the area adjacent to the cars we were counted once again, after which we were brought together with more prisoners from the other cars.

We were lined up in rows of six across. Then the march commenced. NKVD men, armed with rifles and accompanied by bloodhounds, surrounded the throngs of tormented prisoners. I was walking arm-in-arm with Comrade Henryk. While still in the prison car we had agreed to try by every means to stay together.

After only a few minutes of the forced march in that scorching heat we grew tired and were drenched in sweat. We began to fall out of line and allow the stronger people to go ahead of us. Then the NKVD swung into action, goading the ones who were falling behind. "Faster; keep moving," they yelled. "No lagging behind." But the number who lagged behind increased. And those accompanying us were in a big hurry; there was apparently no time to waste. Their rifles were used to prod the weaker people along; and those still weaker were driven forward by the dogs.

Comrade Erlich, utterly exhausted and barely able to propel himself, began to pant heavily. His heart was beating abnormally fast. He suggested that I go ahead: he didn't want me to suffer punishment from the dogs and rifles on his account. I held him more firmly under the arm and we pulled each other along.

At last we were led into a city. People were standing on both sides of the street staring at us. Their expressions told us of their compassion and sympathy. But their lips remained closed.

The movement of the prisoners lasted several hours. People fell to the ground and simply lay there, in the road. Not even the dogs were able to make them get up again. Both of us collapsed and lay prostrate on the ground. An NKVD man with a dog revived us. "No more, I can't go on any more," said Comrade Erlich to me, his voice scarcely audible. Still, drawing on his last scrap of energy, he managed to move along.

We arrived. Wide doors swung open and we entered a huge courtyard surrounded by stone walls and barbed wire. We were in the prison in Saratov, a city on the Volga. Comrade Henryk sank to the ground with his head resting on his hand. He closed his eyes. He was barely breathing.

The immense prison yard was jammed with prisoners. Thousands of people had been brought there from the various prisons that were close to the war fronts. The prison administration received the prisoners most hospitably. Large barrels with *kipyatok* (boiling water) stood in several parts of the yard. Thousands of individuals surrounded the barrels. Yet very few of them were fortunate enough to have something in which to scoop up a bit of water for drinking. Hence people by the thousands, burning with thirst and collapsing from hunger, simply bent over the barrels and buckets and with their tongues lapped at the boiling water.

The strong were first at the barrels; they lapped at the water while others were finding it hard to move them aside. The weaker had to wait. People became frantic, cursing, shoving, fighting each other as they tried to make their way to the barrels.

I was fortunate. I managed to obtain a little clay bowl from one of our acquaintances in the prison car. He had already quenched his thirst and now entrusted me with the treasure—his little clay bowl. Shoving my way through, I filled the bowl to the rim, took

several sips, and returned to my spot, the place where I had left Comrade Henryk. He had not yet come out of his fainting spell; he continued to lie there with his eyes closed. I put the bowl of water to his parched lips. I handed him a piece of sugar which I still had in my pocket. He opened his eyes, took the bowl into his hands, and sipped. A weak smile came over his face. But he was incapable of saying anything.

For several hours the mass of prisoners lay sprawled about in the prison yard. Then they were taken out in groups and lodged in the cells. Since they apparently were using the rosters from Moscow, I was brought to the same cell as Comrade Henryk. Indeed, all the prisoners from our car also entered the cell. On top of that, prisoners from two other cars were squeezed into our cell, which had room for only one-quarter of the total.

I succeeded in getting a place on a plank cot. Comrade Henryk managed to obtain a seat on a long bench against the wall. It took me just a few minutes to finish the process of "settling down" in the new quarters. I promptly left my place on the cot and went over to Comrade Erlich, who was sitting with his eyes closed and head against the wall, breathing heavily. I took his hand and tried his pulse. I grew very perturbed: his arm was hot and his heart was beating both too fast and irregularly. I brought him some drinking water. He took several sips. Then, still drinking, he began to quiver, and collapsed, unconscious, on the floor.

I went to the door of the cell and proceeded to pound on it heavily "Open up, open up. Someone is dying," I shouted. The prison guard came in, looked at the figure lying on the floor, and left. A few minutes later, a doctor and a nurse entered the cell. They examined the sick man and tried to give him some kind of pill. But they were unable to force it into his mouth. Comrade Henryk went into convulsions. The doctor gave him an injection on the spot. He sent the nurse away, telling her to hurry. She returned very quickly, along with two NKVD men carrying a stretcher. They laid Comrade Erlich on the stretcher and removed him from the cell. Although I spoke to him a few times—I addressed him by name—and felt his head, which was burning with fever, Comrade Henryk remained unconscious. He did open his eyes several times, but I had the impression he didn't see me.

I felt crushed and lonely. The picture of Comrade Erlich on the stretcher was constantly before my eyes. I was tormented by the most morbid thoughts: his condition appeared to me hopeless.

I myself was in a state of acute exhaustion. In the middle of the night I began to feel ill. My heart was behaving capriciously and I was seized by acute thirst. Stepping off the cot, I headed toward some water and collapsed on the way. My fall apparently awakened those who were lying on the floor. They poured water on me and I revived. In the morning the doctor was summoned and came to my assistance. He told me in a friendly fashion that, regrettably, he was unable to send me to the prison hospital because it was full. I was urged to lie down and remain quiet.

It was my strong physique that enabled me to overcome this latest problem. I managed to get back on my feet in very short order. A few "companions in misery" showed me a degree of friendliness and humanity. They provided me with a modicum of service, like handing me the prison soup and the piece of black bread, and bringing me some water. Under the inhuman prison conditions, this bit of humanity on the part of a few cellmates was for me both a salvation and a consolation.

Comrade Henryk and I had agreed that under all circumstances, and wherever we might happen to be, we should seek out people who had met up with Comrade Victor Alter in prison. We were convinced that he too was confined in a Moscow prison. Our interrogators, moreover, had bragged that they were holding him. Indeed, the interrogator had threatened to confront me with Erlich and Alter, who, in his words, had already confessed everything to him.

Thus I began to make inquiries in the cell, unfortunately without Comrade Erlich's assistance. I struck up friendships with dozens of individuals, concentrating especially on those who had been brought to Saratov from the Moscow prisons.

In the course of conversations with my cellmates over a number of days, I encountered a knowledgeable Russian Jew who introduced himself as a journalist; in fact, as a former staff member of the Soviet daily newspaper, *Izvestia*. A man in his forties, he was an intellectual, as well as clever and voluble.

This journalist had for several months shared a cell with two Polish citizens. They became friends. He strongly praised their demeanor in prison. Upon learning that I too was a Polish citizen, he gained confidence in me and spoke to me without inhibition. He referred with particular admiration to one of the two prisoners. He especially lauded the man's courage with respect to the prison administration, and also extolled his friendliness and comradely attitude toward all his fellow prisoners. He was simply charmed by the person's wisdom, erudition, and clear-sightedness. Here was an individual whom he had—in his own words—literally come to love.

The former Soviet journalist remembered the name of the one on whom he had showered such lavish praise. It was Victor Alter.

Thus I drew very close to my cellmate, doing all I could to win his confidence. This is far from a frequent occurrence in a Soviet prison. I succeeded in drawing out of him everything he knew about Alter. And when he learned from me that Victor Alter was a close friend of mine, he even confided in me his own tragic story.

This Soviet journalist had shared a cell with Alter in the Lubyanka prison in Moscow. At the time Alter was brought to the cell, the journalist had already been there for quite a while. In a matter of days, Victor had become the darling of the cell. He made no secret of the fact that he was a socialist, a leader of the Polish Bund, and an executive committee member of the Socialist International.

Six of the eight men in the cell were Soviet citizens with a glorious communist past. Up to the time of their arrest they had occupied high posts in the administration and the party. Even in prison they regarded themselves as good Communists. Comrade Victor would engage in passionate discussions with them about socialism and dictatorship, about good and bad planned economy, and about current world problems. He told them about the labor movement in different countries and about economic problems in the world beyond the boundaries of Soviet Russia. "I marveled at his keenness, daring, sweep, and depth in dealing with problems," emphasized the former *Izvestia* staff member. "I was amazed by his persistence and audacity in discussing such matters in a Soviet prison." Victor Alter had seemed to be ill when he first appeared

in the cell. He later explained that this was after a five-day hunger strike, a strike prompted by the refusal to provide him with the scientific books that he needed in connection with a work of his on physics. What Alter requested, in short, was the opportunity to write a scientific treatise.

He was confined to a punishment cell and was force-fed. In the end he won his point. Alter would thereafter be taken almost daily from the general cell to a small cell that contained his books and in which he did his writing.

A few months later it was my lot to be sitting with Victor Alter in the famous Metropole Hotel in Moscow and, in fact, to become involved with that work. While free from prison, Comrade Alter had made improvements in the writing.

Approximately six months before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, Comrade Alter was removed from his cell and led away somewhere. The Soviet journalist was never to meet Victor again. "I am very pessimistic regarding his subsequent fate," said the narrator, with sadness in his voice. "Our people don't like such obstinate types."

Several weeks before Alter was taken from the above-mentioned cell, he was subjected to intense interrogation. He would be questioned all through the night. On several occasions he was questioned for over twenty hours without letup. He used to return from the interrogations shaken and exhausted. That was when he would remain silent for hours on end while pacing the cell.

"Only once did Alter sum up for me in a few words what it was they desired of him. They were eager for a Bundist trial on the model of the notorious Moscow Trials. At such a trial they wanted Alter to proclaim himself a spy, a traitor, and a counterrevolutionist. Alter then said to me: 'Their baseness and brutality know no bounds. But I shall defend myself until my very last breath. *They will not bring me alive to such an ignominious trial.*'* I gazed with admiration at this unyielding individual; and I began to believe that he in fact would not allow himself to be broken. Which is why I am so pessimistic about his fate," said the Soviet journalist, concluding his account.

*Emphasis Abraham Finesilver's.—Trans.

After several days I was moved to a different cell, a small basement cell which had room for only five prisoners. But three times as many were squeezed into it. In that filthy, wet, and foul-smelling cell, we were not even provided with straw mats, and had to spend the nights pressed together on the bare floor.

Yet that horrible cell would become for me a place of unforgettable joy, for I encountered there a prisoner who had come directly from the prison hospital. A captain of cavalry in the Polish army, he too had been brought to Saratov from a Moscow prison. He had been bitten by one of the guard dogs when he fell down during the march from the train to the prison. He bled profusely and lost consciousness. When he came to, he found himself in a prison hospital.

I persisted in questioning the captain until I elicited from him that he had met Henryk Erlich in the hospital. The captain was unaware of the identity of the individual in question and didn't know his name. But he provided me with a precise description of his appearance and clothing; and he assured me that the sick person about whom I inquired had been discharged from the hospital a well man only the day before.

I no longer encountered Comrade Henryk in prison. When, a few months later, we met in Moscow after being released from prison, Comrade Erlich told me that he had sent regards to me by way of several prisoners while in the hospital. He asked them to seek me out wherever they might happen to be, and to tell me that he had recovered and was out of the hospital.

After his discharge from the hospital in the Saratov prison, Comrade Henryk was placed in a one-man cell. He was called out for interrogation one more time, and was notified that his trial would begin in a few days.

The trial took place in the Saratov prison. He was tried by three judges—NKVD men in military uniforms. The wording of the indictment was just as despicable, shameful, and mendacious as was the protocol of the investigation which Comrade Henryk had refused to sign. The courtroom held only the three-judge panel and a few armed NKVD men guarding the defendant.

When the chairman of the judicial panel completed the reading of the indictment, he asked the accused if he confessed to the

enumerated "crimes." Comrade Erlich firmly rejected the indictment and asked the court for permission to serve as his own defense counsel. After receiving permission, Comrade Erlich opened his speech in defense. He was interrupted several times by the chairman, who asked him to cut it short. Comrade Erlich continued speaking, however, until he was ordered to stop. The verdict was already prepared.

On the basis of the Soviet Criminal Code—specifically Article 58, Paragraphs 6, 8, 10, 12, and several others which bolstered Article 58, the military NKVD court sentenced the leader of the Jewish labor movement in Poland to the supreme penalty under Article 58: death by shooting.

The chairman finished the reading of the verdict and announced that there was no appeal. The sole recourse available to the condemned was a request for commutation of the death sentence. He declared, moreover, that such a request had good prospects for a positive disposition.

The response of Henryk Erlich to the announcement of the death sentence was a declaration that he considered the whole trial an act of violence and injustice; that he would submit no request for commutation of the sentence because he did not acknowledge the right of the court to try him; and that he considered the verdict an act of brutal revenge.

The chairman ordered the removal of the condemned.

Comrade Erlich was led away to the death cell. The sentence of death had come as no surprise to him. He expected to be executed by the NKVD. Yet even in the death cell, Comrade Erlich was given no respite. Night after night a lieutenant of the NKVD came to him and urged him to request a pardon. He was assured that the death sentence would be annulled. Indeed, he handed him paper and adjured him to write. Erlich, however, rebuffed the effort of the lieutenant to persuade him, and would not make use of the paper which he left behind in the cell.

Eleven days and nights went by. Erlich sat in the death cell and waited. He was certain that at any moment someone would arrive and take him out. In the early morning hours of the eleventh night, an NKVD major entered the cell and extended his hand to Comrade Erlich—and congratulated him. The death sentence, he de-

clared, had been commuted to ten years imprisonment. At the same time he told him that he would be removed shortly from the prison and be brought back to Moscow.

The following day Comrade Erlich was removed from the death cell and escorted to a different one. At the end of a week Comrade Erlich was taken from the Saratov prison and returned, under guard, to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow. He was held there for only a few days. He was brought from his one-man cell to the NKVD colonel, Volkovisky, for some conversations. These were friendly and very polite, with Colonel Volkovisky assuring Comrade Erlich that he would be released very soon. He suggested that Erlich should begin without delay to prepare a plan for helping in the great struggle of the democratic world against Hitler Germany.

In mid-September 1941, Comrade Henryk was released from prison and put up in the luxury hotel of Intourist in Moscow, the Metropole. Thanks to the intercession of Comrades Victor and Henryk, I too was brought back to Moscow and was reunited with them at the Hotel Metropole as early as September 28.

It was my good fortune to be together with Comrades Erlich and Alter. Later, I was also destined to experience—in Kuibyshev—their second tragic arrest, the arrest from which they were never to return.

With Comrade Victor Alter in a Soviet Prison

Dr. Jerzy Gliksman

. . . THE GROUP OF socialist leaders from Poland which found itself in Rovno became convinced very quickly that talking with the Polish communists about freedom for Victor Alter was wasted effort. They were, after all, the same people who had been, only a few weeks earlier—that is, before the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact—ostensibly passionate devotees of a “united front” of all workers’ parties in Poland. They were the very people who, not long before, had preached with fervor the need for rallying all anti-fascist forces against Hitler Germany. Now they performed a complete *volte-face*.

“Now” was October 1939, and *they* were in the saddle. Now *they* were the ones enjoying complete power, meaning they no longer needed to look for any sort of allies in the socialist ranks, allies moreover who proved inconvenient owing to their consistent opposition to the pact with Hitler.

The Polish communist leaders cynically scoffed at the charge of hypocritical behavior that we leveled against them. We asked them how the slogan “united front” could be reconciled with the arrest of the leaders of the party with which they allegedly desired

Dr. Jerzy Gliksman was a half-brother of Victor Alter. (They were children of the same mother.) He described his experiences in Soviet prisons in the *New York Jewish Daily Forward*, in *Unser Shtimme* (“Our Voice”) (Paris), and in his book, *Tell the West* (New York, 1948), pp. 13–19, 28–32, 40, 43–45, 49, 356–358.

to cooperate? How truly naive we were! What did they need us for, now that they had the bayonets of the Red Army behind them?

The Polish communists offered us a piece of “friendly” advice: “You’d better keep quiet or else you may experience the same fate as Victor Alter. Naturally, the wisest thing would be for you to become ‘realists’ and adapt yourselves to the actual situation, that is, publicly repent for your fascist, counterrevolutionary past. You might be forgiven if you do so.”

Thus we clearly understood that further conversations with such people were futile. We decided, consequently, that it would be better to talk directly to the bosses rather than to their servants. In short, we would try one more time: I would go to Kovel and intercede with the NKVD there.

But before I tell you of my trip to Kovel and of what transpired there, I should make mention of an attempt to intercede with the Polish communists about the arrest of Alter. Several weeks after Alter’s arrest, Henryk Erlich was arrested in Brest-Litovsk. A group of Bund leaders decided to intercede with the prominent left-wing Polish writer Wanda Wasilewska in the matter of Alter and Erlich. The attorney Ludwik Honigwil, a Bund activist and well-known political defense counsel from Warsaw, who, during the course of the preceding twenty-five years, had been involved in the trials of many leading Communists was authorized to carry out the intervention.

Wasilewska, who in 1945 played such an important role in the organization of the pro-communist Polish government in Lublin (and who is now the wife of the Ukrainian playwright and former Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Alexander Korneichuk), had been an active member of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) in prewar Poland. Her attitude toward the Bund had always been very friendly. Indeed, from time to time she would be featured at lectures and meetings organized by the Bund and aimed at the Polish-speaking Jewish intelligentsia. She also co-authored the scenario of the noted film about the Medem sanatorium in Miedzeszyn, near Warsaw, titled *Mir Kumen On* (“We Are on Our Way”).

Wasilewska worked with the Jewish Labor Bund in helping the thousands of Polish Jews who had been deported from Nazi Germany to Poland shortly before the war. It was the time when the

Polish government kept them for a prolonged period in the notorious little Polish bordertown of Zbaszyń.

Prior to the war, relations between Wasilewska and Erlich and Alter had been very friendly. Now, with the occupation of the Polish *kresy** by the Red Army, she became a communist, and it was believed that she had great influence in Soviet government circles. Hence the decision to send the Bund representative to her in Lemberg (Lvov). After hearing Attorney Honigwil's account, Wasilewska emitted a heavy groan which suggested sympathy over the severe fate of the two prisoners. She promised to exert what effort she could to obtain their release. But she quickly conceded that she had no real hope of accomplishing anything. And as it later turned out, she did not, in fact, accomplish anything. Whether she was unable or unwilling, or even afraid, who can tell?

The trip to Kovel was no simple matter during those days—in October 1939. The trains had already begun to run again, although there existed no definite timetable for their departure. A passenger would simply appear at the railroad station and wait until a train arrived. Sometimes the wait was a few hours, sometimes the better part of a day, and sometimes all twenty-four hours.

The station in Rovno, as in virtually all other cities of the newly occupied Soviet area, was besieged day and night by thousands of people. Thousands more, tightly squeezed together, lay sprawled out on the dirty, muddy concrete floors in the unheated rooms of the station. These were refugees, and most were Jews. Having lost their homes, the mass of men, women, and children, with their pathetic remnants of earthly goods, didn't know which way to turn. No one showed any concern for them: they were simply starving, and sickness was beginning to spread among them.

Yet waiting for a train was as nothing compared to the difficulties in obtaining a train ticket. Long hours had to be spent standing in line, and even then one would leave the line empty-handed. Finally—indeed, worst of all—there was the brutal struggle to work one's way onto the overcrowded train.

I finally managed to get aboard the train. It crawled all the way

*The eastern borderlands of the prewar Polish state, which were largely populated by non-Poles—Trans.

from Rovno to Kovel, a trip of fourteen hours instead of two. The car windows were broken. It was very cold despite the crush. And the car was dark at night; there were no lights.

But at least we finally reached Kovel.

Through a chance encounter, I succeeded very quickly in making contact with a group of Polish socialist leaders—mainly railway workers—who were familiar with the details of Victor Alter's arrest. They told me the following:

Alter had been in Kovel when the Red Army occupied the city. His comrades had advised him to go into hiding until it became clear as to what kind of policies the Soviets would apply toward the leaders of the non-communist parties. But Alter categorically rejected the suggestion that he hide, as something beneath his dignity. On the contrary, he contended that it was his obligation openly to voice his position about *the way* the common struggle against Hitler should be waged.

Only a few days after the seizure of the city by the Soviet army, a joint consultation had taken place between Polish and Jewish socialist leaders in Kovel. During that parley a *political declaration* proposed by Alter had been unanimously adopted. To the best of my recollection its essence was as follows:

The occupation of the eastern *kresy* of Poland by the Soviet army has actually saved the population of those areas from a Hitlerite occupation. Accordingly, the Polish and Jewish socialist leaders are prepared to help the new authorities in the inevitable and indeed approaching struggle against the fascist German hordes. At the same time they voice the hope that only the free wishes of the population will ultimately decide the future destiny of the newly occupied regions. In the meantime, individual freedom shall prevail in those areas, along with the kind of democratic system that will provide the existing workers' and peasant parties the opportunity to conduct their activities.

It was also decided at this meeting to transmit the text of the declaration to the Soviet authorities by the following morning. But by the following morning—in fact, at the very break of dawn—there appeared automobiles with Soviet police at the doors of nearly all those who had participated in the consultation and they were arrested. A stool pigeon had been present who informed the

NKVD about everything during that very night. Among those arrested, aside from Alter, was another well-known individual: the leader of the Polish railway workers and long-time socialist deputy in parliament, Mieczyslaw Mastek. (Mastek was released from prison in 1941 and permitted by the Soviet authorities to go to London. He subsequently died there of an illness contracted during the prison years in Russia.)

The NKVD in Kovel (naturally!) occupied the nicest building in the city. Entering it was not easy. It was even more difficult to obtain an audience with the *nachalnik* (the person in charge): a large number of officials first interrogated me at length about the aim of my visit. I had to tell each that the family of Victor Alter had authorized me to learn about his fate and endeavor to obtain his release. I succeeded at last in gaining entry into the office of one of the *nachalniki*. I briefly explained why I had come, telling him, among other things, the following:

“Victor Alter is a sick person. His family and friends are very alarmed over his health. He is a political refugee, someone who left Warsaw because the Germans had occupied the city. Had they caught him, they would have instantly murdered him as a well-known anti-fascist fighter. The granting of asylum is a venerable part of international law, that is, a refuge for *political* emigrés. The Soviet constitution as well, in Paragraph 129, anticipated that the Soviet Union would offer protection to foreign citizens who were persecuted for their political activities in the countries from which they fled.

“Alter, moreover, did not flee to Russia but to Kovel, which was part of Poland. Only later was the city occupied by the Soviet troops. Hence Alter should be treated as a political emigré. If, however, this was deemed inconvenient by the Soviet authorities, and they did not wish that Alter should remain under Russian rule for the duration of the war, they ought to send him abroad—for example, to Sweden. It would be sufficient to deport him just across the border. As a member of the Executive Committee of the Socialist International, Alter is well known in Western European labor circles, and all foreign socialists would be prepared to receive him with open arms.

“Yet why should he be kept in prison in the first place? He has

committed no crime whatsoever against the Soviet regime, and he was arrested, indeed, only a few days after the entry of the Red Army into the city. Furthermore, Alter's activity in Poland before the war represented, as you know, a courageous struggle for the realization of socialist ideals. Even if that activity does not please the Soviet authorities—in the same way that the activities of other socialist leaders in the world fail to please them—is one to conclude from this arrest, that all socialists who might accidentally fall into the hands of the Soviet authorities would be put in prison in Russia? Recently the communist movement all over the world has constantly preached brotherhood among all in the labor movement."

It is difficult to convey in print the uncouth and brutal response which I received. And when I attempted any sort of a rejoinder, I was simply thrown into the street. I had been denied an answer even to the question concerning the state of Alter's health and his immediate fate; and I was not able to learn whether he was still in the Kovel prison! In short, no hope of any kind.

What's more, as soon as I "left" the building of the NKVD in such a brutal fashion, I noticed at once that I was being followed by another "shadow." They were spying on me. Thus, I was no longer able to meet with anyone for fear that my action might lead to tragedy for the individual in question. Accordingly, the only thing left for me to do was to attempt to have food sent to Victor Alter in prison.

I managed, notwithstanding the considerable difficulties involved, to obtain bread, sausage, and sugar. I also purchased a few hundred cigarettes: Alter was a passionate smoker. I also put together a parcel of warm underwear because I was told that Alter had fled Warsaw with very few things to wear. And at the moment of his arrest he was able to take hardly anything along.

At the break of dawn the following day, with parcel in hand, I took my place in line at the prison gate. I found myself in the midst of the anguished and weeping wives, sisters, and old mothers of the prisoners—Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian women. All of them were carrying bundles and baskets, waiting in the cold and the rain for the prison authorities to begin accepting the so-called *peredachas* (the term used in Russian prisons for prisoners' packages).

As things turned out, I was fortunate. It happened to be a day when *peredachas* were being accepted (there were only two such days a week). Yet, could I be certain my parcel would be accepted that day? No! The people who were standing in front of the prison gate explained that one could never be sure. Frequently, with no rhyme or reason, and despite the fact that it was the right day, everyone would be driven off after hours of waiting, and the packages for their close relatives, which had been put together with so much effort and love, were simply not accepted.

The women also pointed out that on occasion a package would finally be accepted—and be brought back after a while by the prison guard. This meant the prisoner was no longer there. Various and dreadful conjectures would then arise: Could he have died? People in town say that dead bodies are secretly removed from the prison every night in little carts. But it's possible he was "merely" transferred to a prison in a city deep inside Russia. Or perhaps "only" removed to a concentration camp? Who knows? Thus the family remains in a state of dreadful uncertainty for a long time, and often forever.

At eleven in the morning they finally took my parcel. What followed was a long, nerve-wracking hour. Will the package—heaven forbid!—be brought back? Is Alter still in the Kovel prison? Is he still alive?

The guard finally came outside with a considerable number of parcels. Mine was not among them! I breathed a sigh of relief. The women who had their parcels returned burst into plaintive weeping. Then the guard began to distribute the slips of paper that had been turned in along with the parcels; they contained an itemized list of the contents. (When the prisoner completed checking the list against the contents of the parcel, and the two coincided, he would place his signature at the bottom of the list.) I obtained my signed list!

In addition to Alter's signature, the slip of paper also contained a penciled addendum—a few words which the guard had happily overlooked: "Thanks. Don't send cigarettes or wurst any more; send bread, butter. My kisses to all of you. *Victor.*"

Only later did certain things become known which clarified the content of that slip of paper and the reasons why Alter had asked

that butter be sent rather than cigarettes and sausage. The prison doctor, a Jew, who had been practicing medicine in Kovel even before the war, confided—naturally in great secrecy and only to a friend of his—that Alter had just then conducted a severe hunger strike in prison. He had written a detailed letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The letter had important political content. In the letter, Alter formulated his political position, a position similar to the one that had been adopted at the Kovel consultation with the Polish socialists which was followed by the arrest of all the participants. Now he also demanded that he be freed. When several weeks passed without any response at all, Alter started a hunger strike. He ate and drank nothing for ten days and became severely ill. That was when he was promised a reply if he would interrupt the strike. He did so, but his illness persisted for a long while, during which he was unable to smoke or eat any wurst, but was directed by the doctor to eat butter.

At that moment I knew nothing about all this. I remained in Kovel for another few days, until the next time the parcels would be accepted at the prison. As for my “shadow,” who had been following me constantly, I had already grown accustomed to him.

I put together a parcel just as I had done before, only this time it contained a substantial amount of butter. I received the written confirmation with Alter’s signature. I then decided to return to Rovno, where I had left my wife and a small child. I headed for the railway station to wait for the train to Rovno, but at the very entrance to the station building I was arrested.

I was still choked up with shame and humiliation after my first Soviet *obisk* (search), when the guards took me off to a cell after my arrest by the Kovel NKVD men. In that small, empty little room in the basement of the building I felt so utterly exhausted that, as soon as I entered the cell, I lay down on the bare floor without even removing my overcoat or rubbers.

I was unaware of how long I had been lying on the floor of that bitterly cold cell. I had slipped into a state in which I was only half conscious of my surroundings and of my own fate. Only later did I learn that I had been lying thus for over two whole days.

I could not fall asleep even for a moment; my own severe

nervous state and a low-hanging electric bulb that was on all day and night directly over my head made sleep impossible. In that tiny cell the extremely bright bulb, of around 250 to 300 watts, cast a paralyzing light. Much as I tried to hide my head, the piercing light still managed to reach and torment my eyes. I felt as though I were permanently under a reflector.

Through the small, heavily barred single window in the cell virtually no daylight could penetrate. Thus there was in effect no difference at all between night and day.

With that added feature—pain via powerful light—I was to become acquainted during all my subsequent wanderings through Soviet prisons. That light had been introduced on the basis of one of the obligatory paragraphs in the Soviet prison code. It serves as a means of inducing a depressing effect on the prisoner's spiritual condition, constituting, indeed, only one small link in the lengthy chain of methods used by Soviet justice for achieving certain effects.

During the whole two-day period I was given neither food nor water for drinking or washing. True, I did not ask for anything. No one showed any interest in me. No one asked me any questions. An appalling silence prevailed all about me.

In the early morning hours of the third night, an officer of the NKVD entered my cell and hurled a shout in my direction: *Sobiraisya s'vyeshchami! Odyevaisya!* ("Gather up your things! Get dressed!") coupled of course with "*Poskorey, Pobistrey*" ("Quicker").

There was nothing to gather up. I had not undressed; I had not even opened my bag. I rose from the floor and was promptly set to go.

The time was around four in the morning when I was taken out to the street. The city of Kovel was a scene of ceaseless police activity, although the streets themselves seemed dead. I was surrounded by six soldiers with rifles and attached bayonets aimed at me. We walked in the middle of the street, while an officer, revolver in hand, accompanied us on the sidewalk.

I had been sharply warned before we left the NKVD building that I must walk ahead in a straight line and that if I as much as dared step out of line, it would be regarded as an attempt to

escape, in which case the guards would shoot without warning. That whole "parade" frightened me greatly. I naturally had no intention of escaping, but I could not understand the "honor" of such a large "escort."

There was really no basis for my disquiet. I was later in a position to convince myself that the "parade" involved nothing special. In Soviet Russia the *konvoy* (escort) for prisoners was always very large and far more strict than anywhere else in the world.

We moved forward at a rapid pace, almost running. It proved very difficult for me both because of my weakened condition and because my shoes were constantly slipping off. (The laces, along with my belt and tie, had been confiscated during the search.) The officer in charge had occasion several times to step from the sidewalk, approach me, and threaten to use his revolver. It was his way of "helping" me proceed faster.

At last we reached the prison ground where, only a few days before, I had been standing in line—still a free person—holding food parcels for Victor Alter. The escorting officer turned me over to the prison *nachalnik* on duty while whispering something to him at length. The only thing I could overhear was that I should be placed in a single cell and in a location where I could not make contact with Victor Allen.

My new *nachalnik* directed that I be placed in Cell No. 33 on the third floor. Although it was a very large cell designed for several dozen prisoners, I was the only one there. All the window-panes were broken, and the wind frolicked without interference. Fortunately I found a few very old straw mats in the cell. The straw inside them had, in fact, already been rubbed to the consistency of a powder. With every movement the mats would release clouds of dust. The straw mats were very dirty and full of fleas; yet it was a stroke of good fortune to find the mats there.

I made a "royal" bed out of the straw mats: one served for a pillow; one was placed under my sides; and one became a blanket. I did not undress, and even continued to wear my overcoat, hat, and rubbers. Still it was hard to endure the cold, which penetrated to the very marrow of my bones. The rain and snow came through the windows.

Eventually I decided to begin a struggle for a transfer to another cell, one with solid windowpanes. Aside from the terrible cold, I had yet another and hidden reason for seeking a transfer to a different cell: my strong desire to see Alter. I knew that the whole floor on which Cell No. 33 was located was empty. Presumably the panes in all the cell windows on that floor were broken. Consequently, all the prisoners (and very likely Alter among them) would be situated on the floor below. I therefore complained twice as strongly about the broken windowpanes; and I warned that I was in danger of becoming ill.

My requests, however, proved completely unavailing, until I really took sick with a cold and fever. My heart too began acting up. Finally after a visit from the doctor, the prison administration shifted me to the floor below, to a cell with solid windowpanes.

My plan for meeting Victor Alter had been realized. When I entered my new cell and observed that its number was 11, I knew immediately that Alter's cell could not be far from mine, since it was No. 13. How had I learned his cell number? While I was in the prison doctor's small room I noticed a short roster lying on the table. It was made up of the names of sick prisoners scheduled for a visit. Next to mine was No. 11; Alter's name was also there, with No. 13.

I regretted that our cells were not adjacent to each other (we were separated by Cell No. 12), for then I would have tried to communicate with Alter by the system of knocks on the wall (according to a special alphabet known and frequently used by prisoners). Alter was very familiar with that alphabet from the days when he was incarcerated in tsarist prisons.

One day I appealed to the guard near my cell, a Pole, he who, as a communist, had occupied a cell in a Polish prison not long before. I said:

"You must surely know what it means to be in prison and suffer from hunger. Here you are, bringing me the hot, turbid water each day which is supposed to represent tea. But no sugar is provided, hence I am forced to drink bitter tea. Yet right here, in this very prison, there's a man named Alter, a friend of mine whom I provided with a good *peredacha* containing several pounds of

sugar only a few days ago. Be so kind as to tell Alter that Dr. Felix is asking him for a few teaspoons of sugar?"

After hesitating for quite a while because of the breach of discipline involved in meeting my request, the guard finally acquiesced. He knocked on the door of Alter's cell. I could hear him saying to Alter through the *yudash* (the little window in the door) that Dr. Felix was asking for a few spoonfuls of sugar. But before Alter could say anything in response, the guard hastily closed the *yudash* and went away.

He returned to my cell with the sugar a few minutes later. "I'm afraid," said the guard. "I'm not allowed to carry anything from one cell to another. Here is some of my own sugar." I thanked him most heartily. My aim had actually been achieved: he had let Alter know that I was in the same prison as he.

Now I began to think of ways I might meet Alter. And I was also successful in this regard. During the *provyerka* (checkup) I had said that I must submit in writing a very important appeal to the prosecutor and the investigating judge, hence my need for paper and pencil. I repeated this request many times over several consecutive days. I continued to raise the question at every *provyerka* until the guard finally brought the necessary writing materials.

I already knew that I would not be permitted to do any writing in the cell proper, that I would not be entrusted, in short, with the paper and pencil. According to the official order, I would have to write in the corridor, where guards circulated and could keep an eye on me.

Accordingly, I sat in the corridor for a long time, writing very very slowly. My excuse to the guards? I allegedly knew little Russian and could not write more quickly. Moreover, I was in the process of submitting an important document to the very prosecutor himself, and I had to think hard before deciding what to write.

In truth, I knew Russian quite well. And what I had written was really nothing more than a cliché-ridden *zayavlenye* (appeal) wherein I pleaded innocent, in profuse language, and asked to be released quickly.

My idea about prolonged sitting in the corridor turned out to be an auspicious one. When Alter was led from his cell at a particular

moment, both of us caught sight of each other. On the way past me he stopped beside me for an instant. He looked extremely thin and seemed to have aged. His face was a sickly, jaundiced color, the sign, presumably, of his latest hunger strike. He smiled at me and I responded with a smile. The guard instantly shoved Alter back into his cell. I would never see him again.

A few days later, however, I did hear his voice in the corridor. With great effort he and another prisoner were dragging a heavy hand-machine for polishing floors. They had already dragged the machine back and forth along the length of the corridor a couple of dozen times. From my cell I could even hear the guard venting his anger over the fact that they were not performing properly, that the floor was not sufficiently shiny. I was able, through the door, to hear Alter's sharp retort that he could not work any better; that as a sick person he was excused altogether—on doctor's orders—from any physical labor.

As for the other prisoner, it appeared, from his voice, that he was an ordinary Christian; and from his words it was possible to understand that prison was nothing new to him. This was how he argued with the guard: "Yes, it's true, in fact, that the floor shone better in Polish times than it does now. But in those days we prisoners, as you know, were given wax with which to polish the floor. How, pray tell, can you expect the floor to have the same luster minus wax and only from the brush?"

The guard's response took the form of a few expletives. It was immediately followed by an order to Alter to clean the thresholds of all the doors with a rag. When he came up to my door, I approached very closely from my side and we managed, in whispers, to exchange a few words of greeting and encouragement.

I must observe that the conditions in the Kovel prison during that transition period, i.e., during the first months after the occupation of the Polish eastern districts by the Red Army, were not typical of an average Soviet prison. The regime at that time was far milder there in comparison with other Soviet prisons.

MY LAST CONVERSATION WITH VICTOR ALTER

On November 29, 1941, I found myself in Tashkent, the capital of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. At the railway station of this

Asiatic city I succeeded in jumping off a train that was filled with hundreds of *brodyagas* (vagabonds) like myself—former slaves of the Soviet concentration camps. Although nominally “free” people, we were in fact still subject to various police directives and a strict control. Only a few days earlier, for instance, we had been removed from the collective farms where we were working, placed in railroad cars, and taken once again in an unknown direction to an unknown fate.

Driven by hunger and fear, I sneaked off the train. For more than two years I had had to submit passively to the dictates of my unhappy fortune, in the face of which I remained completely helpless. Now at last an opportunity had arisen which offered me a chance to resist, to struggle and escape if possible from the vicious cycle of misfortunes that had plagued me relentlessly ever since the beginning of the war.

I moved toward the city through unfamiliar streets. Not knowing what to do and without the slightest idea where to turn, I looked out upon this sprawling, alien city—indeed, upon the whole wide world—as something empty and desolate. Nowhere did I find a single kindred soul, a friendly spirit who might extend a helping hand. Yes, I knew that somewhere far away—in Poland, in Belgium, in America—I did have relatives. I smiled bitterly: they were just names, empty sounds. All the money in the world would not have enabled me at that time to get in touch with those distant lands. I did not even have an opportunity to ascertain whether those closest to me—my parents, my wife, my little daughter—were still alive.

And here as well, in this gigantic land of the Soviets, there should also be one of the dearest people in the world—my brother Victor Alter. Here, in Soviet Russia, he must certainly have experienced far more than I. Had he now, like me, also been freed? Was he alive? Where would one look for him?

All my thoughts were dominated by a feeling of disquiet. I was hungry, dressed in tatters, almost without a penny to my name, and lacking any personal documents. The only important document I possessed—the certificate of release from the camp, the *udostoverenie*—had just been stolen from me.

It was difficult for me to walk; my swollen feet were a torment.

White lice promenaded over the collar of my navy-blue, padded *fufayka* (jacket).

I dragged myself to the center of the city. Long queues in a number of places offered evidence of where one could find something to eat. As if by instinct I moved to take a place at the end of one such line. I soon found myself squeezed into a solid human knot. After several hours I finally reached the entrance; at the very doorway my nostrils were assailed by a warm odor of cooked food. With virtually my last rubles I paid for a plate of watery cabbage soup (*shchi*), which I quickly and eagerly downed. I was beginning to feel relaxed; indeed, I was overcome by something like a pleasant feeling for a time.

But the winter night had set in quickly. The streets emptied and I still did not know where to turn in order to find a place to sleep. It was a time when Tashkent was jammed with thousands of war refugees from parts of Russia captured by the Germans along with many thousands of Polish citizens who had just been released from prisons, camps, and places of deportation. The city could not accommodate such great masses. The permanent residents of Tashkent angrily closed their homes to us *brodyagas* who brought with us filth, disease, misery, and crime.

Returning to the train station, I found the whole building overflowing with homeless and miserable people. Waves of foul air and the wailing of babies issued from the special mothers' and children's room. It was simply impossible to find a spot for myself and my little sack among the bodies tightly squeezed together as they lay sprawled out on the floor.

I went outside once again and headed for the small garden located next to the station. Here, too, thousands of people lay stretched out among the trees, on small wooden trunks or simply on the bare earth. Dark, shadowy figures drifted among the crowd. I observed their swift, suspicious movements. I could hear cries for help along with the sighs and bickering. It was not without good reason that the garden at the Tashkent station had such a bad name and was regarded as a focus of crime, where gangs of thieves, swindlers, and assorted bandits practiced their professions without hindrance as they sought out their helpless victims among the refugees.

I left the garden in fear and again turned toward the old city. I dragged myself around for a long while during which I was drenched by the rain and shivered from the cold. At last, on one of the side streets, I saw the light of a *tchai-khana*, an oriental tea room, and I went in.

Seated at the door was an old Uzbek in traditional folk dress collecting the admission fee from the customers. Boiling water was bubbling in a large samovar. The Uzbek poured the boiling water into teapots containing a few leaves of a type of green tea. A large group of Uzbeks sat cross-legged on the worn-out, dark-red carpet which covered the whole floor. They were engaged in lengthy conversations in their Asiatic tongue, which sounded at times like the cooing of pigeons. They drank the pale, bitter tea and ate dried fruit, all the while inhaling clouds of smoke through their long pipes. The water in the water pipes gurgled rhythmically.

In the interior of the room, through the thick smoke, I recognized several familiar figures: released prisoners like myself. I shuffled over toward the group, where I could feel a bit more at home. Dead tired, my head resting on my sack, I dozed off with my eyes half-open. The dim light of the red lanterns blending with the colorful figures of the oriental people began to dance before my eyes.

Suddenly I heard near me a few words in Yiddish. They came from a person lying next to me who, recognizing in me a "colleague" and a former *lagernik* (prison camp mate), proceeded to strike up a conversation. This young Jew came from Warsaw. In Tashkent he had been living a vagabond existence for over a week, he told me. It was impossible for one of our people to find the smallest bit of lodging in the city, even the poorest little corner in which to get a night's sleep. The only places where one could find a roof over one's head were the *tchai-khanas*, in which people lay sprawled on the filthy rags (carpets!), teeming with lice. It was dreadful: in the city of Tashkent, just as in other cities and towns of Soviet Central Asia, infectious diseases were beginning to spread—in the first instance, an epidemic of typhus.

My incidental acquaintance also warned me about still greater danger: in the middle of the night, he said, the police conducted searches in all the *tchai-khanas*, looking for suspect individuals

and examining personal documents. But I had no documents. I sensed that I would most likely be unable to explain things to the satisfaction of the Tashkent police, that I would be unable to wiggle out of the web of suspicion and mistrust. Greatly alarmed, I quickly slipped away from the *tchai-khana* and once again moved onto the streets and into the abyss of a black night.

The next morning I registered at the local "office" of the Polish embassy, whose task it was to see that Polish citizens received help. The "office," located in the Hotel National, was surrounded by thousands of desperate people, primarily Jews. After hours of waiting, I moved up to the official at whose table I was able to obtain, along with everyone else, a puny bit of financial assistance and an unhelpful explanation to the effect that the embassy was no longer able—for the time being—to provide additional help: it had no funds for any substantial help, and it also had no right to issue any personal documents.

Our situation was catastrophic. We had been released from the prisons and camps at the time of the victorious advance of the German armies into the heart of Soviet territory. Thousands of kilometers from us, somewhere in the vicinity of Moscow and Leningrad, severe battles were in progress; and the dreadful hurricane of history had shattered and driven from place to place hundreds of thousands of unfortunate people.

Burdened thus with sad thoughts, I stood amidst the mass of humanity at the entrance to the Hotel National. Suddenly I heard someone call my name out loud. And within seconds—totally unexpectedly—I found myself among friends, indeed among close comrades of long ago. Such good fortune was almost too good to be true! Through my tears I was able to observe their changed, pale faces, their shapeless figures dressed in wrinkled, dirty tatters which represented our clothes. We embraced each other warmly.

They too had gone through the hell of prisons and camps. We hurled question after question at each other. One question in particular burned my lips; but I was afraid to ask it. Then, suddenly, I was relieved to hear: "Do you know that your brother is in Kuibyshev?"

Tense, excited in the extreme, I listened to everything that one of my friends was able to tell me about my brother Victor. Only

now did I learn that Victor, together with Henryk Erlich, had been sentenced to death; that their sentences were later commuted to ten years in prison; and that after the amnesty which led to the release of the Polish citizens, they too had been freed. *Beria*, the Commissar for Internal Affairs (NKVD stands for "People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs"), even apologized to them personally for all the "unpleasant" things they had lived through in the prisons. He called upon them to collaborate in the mortal struggle being waged by Russia against the Nazi armies.

Hearing all these marvelous bits of news about my brother, I immediately rushed over to the telephone station. I was told that long-distance telephone calls could not be made during the daytime by private individuals. I was told to remember that there was a war in progress and the telephone lines were overloaded. But I could book a telephone conversation with Kuibyshev late at night, and at a cheaper rate.

The cost, naturally, was an important matter, since I obviously had very little money. I had sold my gold wedding band, which I had actually held on to for just such an emergency. At night I returned to the telephone office.

That day I no longer had any worries about a place to sleep. I sat on the narrow bench at the telephone office and waited until four in the morning for an open line to Kuibyshev. There, in the warm room, I caught a few winks of sleep; and I felt truly happy as I waited for the conversation.

I can't recall Victor's first words or my first response. On hearing the voice of my brother, the years of loneliness, of suffering and enslavement, seemed to disappear. How delighted we felt at having found each other again! Victor had also been searching for me. He too had had no idea whether I was alive, whether I had survived Soviet prison life.

He briefly filled me in on family matters. He had received news via telegram from our sister in the United States. The reports were good: everyone was alive. Victor told me about himself. I detected no sign of bitterness in his words when he alluded to his experiences. While in prison he had written a book on physics, a purely theoretical work. He had always been passionately interested in problems of physics. Victor described his present activity. As in

the past, Victor still exuded energy and initiative and even showed a zest for living. Brimming with hope and optimism, he asked me at the close of our conversation to remain in telephonic contact with him during the next few nights.

I left the telephone station in a mood of unalloyed happiness. I had another talk with Victor the following night. I also had an opportunity to converse briefly with Henryk Erlich. We greeted each other warmly. Comrade Henryk told me that he had received word from his family to the effect that they had arrived in the United States from Vilno without incident. On the third night I came to the telephone station on Pushkin Street once again. It was a pleasure to catch a few winks there while I waited for those joyous minutes on the telephone. This time Victor told me that money had already been sent out for all of us and that his efforts to bring me to Kuibyshev—no easy matter in Russia!—were proceeding. In fact, I should have the definitive answer when I called the next night.

That night—the night between December third and fourth—would remain deeply etched in my memory. I was told on the phone that Victor was not in his hotel room. This seemed unbelievable to me. It was, after all, four o'clock in the morning. I then asked to speak to Henryk. He was also not there, came the response. Comrade Lucjan Blit, who had been staying in the same hotel room as Victor and Henryk, came to the phone.

"How can it be possible?" I asked incredulously. "Victor himself told me to call; and where could he be at this late hour of the night? Perhaps he's attending an important conference?"

"No," was Lucjan's curt reply.

"Could they possibly have gone somewhere?"

"No."

"When are they coming back?"

"I don't know."

Over the following two nights I called Kuibyshev and the replies were the same: apprehensive, terse, dry, incomprehensible.

One day (it may have been a week or two after my last conversation with Victor) I had occasion to meet up with my comrades once again. We discussed whether I should try to call Victor or whether we should wait a bit longer.

Suddenly another comrade walked up. All of us immediately noticed how pale he looked. He approached us in silence, his eyes filling with tears. We looked at him fearfully. "I have just learned from a reliable source," he said softly, leaving the sentence unfinished. "There's no need any longer for you to phone. Victor and Henryk have been arrested again by NKVD."

The comrade's words reached me as if from a great distance. It took me quite a while until the significance of his words fully sank in.

Almost two years later I was to learn that both had been executed.

Two Men

Ksawery Pruszyński

IT WAS DURING the first ten days of September 1941 in Moscow. I was sitting with Wladyslaw Broniewski in the restaurant of the Hotel Metropole. We had just begun to eat lunch when two men entered. It was evident that they were not Russian; and they also did not look like foreigners. At first glance they gave the appearance of that specific type of Russian person who had just come out of prison.

Broniewski looked at them closely: he recognized them. They were Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. I knew that both leaders of the Bund had in fact been released from prison that very day and had appeared at our embassy, where they met with the ambassador. I recalled that Broniewski had been together with both of them for a time in the Lubyanka prison. He had related various things about them which I could not recall at the moment. The looks of both of them told virtually the whole story: they were simply not themselves.

During their two years of incarceration they had not lost their poise. Of course their health was destroyed and they had aged badly. But their psychic state remained absolutely unaffected. It was as though there existed no relationship between their psychic

Ksawery Pruszyński was a prominent Polish writer of the conservative, neo-Catholic camp. In this account, first published in *Nowa Polska* (London), in April, 1943, he describes his impressions of his initial encounter with Erlich and Alter in Moscow immediately after their release. In the few excerpts that follow he provides a brilliant and accurate characterization of both individuals as personalities and as leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund.

and their bodily state. It was almost enough to make one believe that they had not been in prison at all. But their clothing—quite new and quite inferior—indicated that the two of them had been dressed, bathed, given a good breakfast, and . . . released from the confines of the Lubyanka that very day.

I had long been accustomed to the view that the leftist leaders were far more intelligent, more intellectual, than the average leader on the right. But these leaders of the Bund—of the tailors on Franciszkańska Street, the domestic workers of Balut, of Muranow, did not look at all as they were supposed to, according to my simple notions. In their speech and gestures lay something that is customarily described by the expression “good manners.” Theirs was a calm self-assurance far removed from aggressiveness. In conversation—attentive, serious, friendly, nonconfrontational. The impression they gave was of people standing somehow above and outside themselves; people who estimated both themselves and everything around them from some kind of distant perspective. Quite possibly even there, in prison, during the weeks spent in the death cell, they also looked at everything as if at stake were not their own fate but some other person’s, and just as if what was happening to them was not of such transcendent importance.

Yet the two were not alike. Victor Alter was a tempestuous individual, a person with a preference for struggle rather than reflection and discussion; for animation rather than cerebration. Even his memory had not been damaged in prison, as happened, unfortunately, in many other cases: he could recall articles, books, opinions expressed about this or that problem by this or that person—all going back to the time before the war. Even in the midst of eating his soup, Alter would begin to polemicize, and become agitated, disputatious, determined to prevail in an argument.

Alter had been educated as a chemical engineer. In prison he had written a work in that field.* In his joy of the moment there was something like what an inventor must feel when his experiments have been successful. He rejoiced not so much over his own freedom but because events developed as the Bund—and he personally—had predicted, e.g., the Soviet-Hitler war.

**The New Physics*.—Trans.

Erlich was a different type altogether. He was moderate and composed. It could almost be said that Erlich's presence tended to calm Alter down. He was older, much older than his comrade (or so it seemed); and he was very restrained, pensive, and terribly lonely. If one might have had the impression, where Alter was concerned, that only yesterday, in prison, and two weeks ago, in the death cell, he was just as high-spirited and militant as now, where Erlich was concerned, one might have believed that the amnesty and the release from prison had left him wholly unsatisfied. With Erlich too, everything that concerned his person proper somehow flowed *past* him, was peripheral to him and not consequential. Important were other problems. Their freedom, like their imprisonment, was merely a fraction of those problems.

People stepping out into freedom are immediately dazzled by the sunshine. To them it seems as if the world has somehow become different from what it had been, that it is inhabited by angels and led by wise men. The awakening, consequently, is that much more painful. The two persons in question were certainly the only ones I encountered who had no such illusions. Alter, one could imagine, now compared in his mind that which had actually occurred with that which he had imagined inside the four walls of the prison cell. Thus his mathematician's brain now probed and investigated, asking where, in which realm, did the error in his thinking reside, so that he might avoid it in the future. Erlich, his body stooped over, listened, while the expression on his face seemed to say: It is indeed so; it's hard to expect things to be better; things could even be worse.

Were both these people, in their aloneness, detached from life? Perish the thought! One of them, with the scientific mind of a talmudist, of an outstanding mathematician, of a logician, of a Marxist, had *foreseen* the consequences of the events which had reached him in a distorted form behind the walls of the prison. The other one had a *premonition*. With respect to the former, there were few surprises (perhaps several new situations, but none of them essential), while for the latter—for Erlich—there simply were no surprises at all. The surging waves of world events had perhaps begun to wash away new shores, inundate new homes and households, but the water remained the same as it had been dozens of

years before, always. And perhaps it was, in fact, this *nonchangeableness* in the raging current which endowed Erlich's face with the expression of placid pessimism.

Somewhat later I had occasion to converse with a Catholic priest, a person of truly high morality and intelligence, the kind seen very rarely among us. He had occupied the same cell as Erlich and Alter for a period. It was the saddest time: France had fallen, and England too, it seemed, was on the verge of falling; the Soviet Union had occupied the Baltic countries. He alluded to the time he had been incarcerated with the two Jewish socialists. "Their bearing was something extraordinary; it was absolutely incomprehensible to me," he said. "How could individuals who did not possess the moral foundation represented by religion maintain such a demeanor?"

. . . At a much later date, in Kuibyshev, I was attending the theater with Józef Czapski. That giant and artist contended that in the Soviet theater, one could see that a few things from old Russia still remained in the area of culture. "Take a look at that person near the entrance, toward the left," he said to me during the intermission. "That is surely someone from the old days." I looked toward the person. That individual, in whom the eye of the artist and of people from aristocratic society had perceived someone from the old days, was indeed the chairman of the Bund. He stood alone, meditating, completely alien to his surroundings, somewhere far off in his looks and thought. Faces and people of that type brought to mind the old group photographs of a convention, of a congress of Social Democrats in Zurich, Brussels, Geneva, or London during the nineteenth century. . . .

Many of the "investigations" in the Soviet prisons were reminiscent of the religious disputations during the Middle Ages: the *slyedovatel* was not only a political inquisitor but also an ideological polemicist. In such exchanges between the Soviet interrogators and Erlich and Alter, it would be as if a pathetic chess-player from a Malkin somewhere were pitted against Alyokhin. The inquisitor was driven into such a position that he was prompted to arrive at the conclusion—either absurd or Stalin can't be wrong. . . .

Moscow looked upon the Jewish proletarian masses of Poland and the whole world as its property, its reservoir, from which it

was supposed to draw recruits each year. To deprive it of such recruits was tantamount to a crime. But it was precisely Erlich and Alter and the Bund that took those recruits away from Stalin. If a Jewish worker was not a Communist it was because Erlich and Alter were able to interpret and enlighten him on this critical matter, to wit, that the light sent forth from the dawning in the East was not the light of true socialism, that the people who came after Lenin would extend a hand to fascism.

Is it any wonder that, from the Soviet standpoint, Erlich and Alter were the most harmful people in Poland and perhaps not only in Poland? Even if they had not written in their newspapers—which the Jewish proletarian masses read like the Bible—on the day after the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact that it was *treason*?!

“You should understand,” Alter once told me, “that if a Prince Sapieha says to a foreign representative that Vilno must belong to Poland, it would not make a strong impression on me. Prince Sapieha is a Polish magnate whose forests and estates are located somewhere near Vilno. But I don’t own any forests and estates near Vilno. I am neither a prince nor a magnate. I am not even a Pole. I am a Jew and a socialist—and a left-wing socialist at that. If I, the representative of the Jewish proletariat, speak up for Poland, it has an altogether different sound and significance.”

Those were truly people of the nineteenth century. Social Democrats of the time of Kautsky, Jaurès, Liebknecht, Vandervelde; enriched, moreover, by the practice of our time, but linked even more powerfully to that other.

Their socialism was of a libertarian character but not of a totalitarian kind. Their revolution derived from the barricades but not from the GPU.

Those to whom they were the most inconvenient decided to act first. On a certain night, in a restaurant in Kuibyshev, Alter was called—ostensibly—to the telephone. . . .

“Henryk, we’re being asked to come. . . .”

And they headed out into a dark, December Russian night.

With Victor Alter in a Soviet Prison: His Testament

W. Gabicki

I DO NOT KNOW the date and place of his birth. The years of his childhood and youth, as well as the periods of study, are also shrouded in mist. Precise details about his political and public activity are also unknown to me. He lived in Warsaw immediately before the war. I did not know him personally. I only knew he had been a prominent figure in the international socialist movement, one of the leaders of the Jewish working class in Poland, and a councilman on the Warsaw City Council. All these pieces of information would have been too sparse under normal conditions for recording the reminiscences, or providing a characterization, of a person about whom one knows little.

Yet there are strange moments in the lives of people which leave behind ineradicable traces in one's memory, although such moments are brief and swiftly disappear. My becoming acquainted with Victor Alter actually fell into the category of such moments. It occurred under peculiar circumstances—in Moscow, where he found himself, by a strange twist of fate growing out of the September war in 1939, a war which sentenced that important socialist and Jew to inactivity, lifelessness, and the useless physical destruction of his organism. Notwithstanding all the fatalism asso-

W. Gabicki, a Pole, was imprisoned with Victor Alter in the Soviet Union. He later served as an officer in the Polish army in England. This account was published in London on March 12, 1944.

ciated with the tragic moments of Europe at that time, and Alter's own far-from-happy prospects, he never lost faith in the human being and in the truth, the thing that makes living worthwhile. During many conversations in our prison cell, the theme derived from Romain Rolland repeatedly came through in his words—as a visionary premonition of what awaited him in the near future: “Not for the sake of being happy does the human being live. He lives in order to fulfil his right. Die, but be what you ought to be—a human being.”

By his bearing, Alter awakened and strengthened among his comrades who were sharing his fate (sometimes completely accidental comrades) a belief in, and a certainty of, a better future and the dawn of a new world. Among strangers, on the other hand, this European evoked respect both for himself and—in the first instance—for that which he represented amidst the depressing places and the places of darkness of the human soul. In the days when I came to know him, he fought unceasingly for the dignity and the rights of a human being. He sometimes fought for them to the detriment of his own health and organism. This was the case, for instance, when he wrote a scientific treatise in which he confronted the old precepts of Newton with the wave theory of present-day physics. At that time Alter was concerned lest the pages of his work wander away and not end up at the correct address.

Alter's final words, which he expressed only minutes before we were brutally separated, were:

“Should you encounter my wife and son someday, convey to them that I shall—to the end and regardless of what may befall and assail me along the way—remain faithful to the truths in whose name I have gone through life. I want them to follow my path, to continue the work I have begun, and not to lose heart because of personal misfortune. The truth—and that also means the final victory—belongs to us.”

I do not know, just as he himself did not know, where the tempest of war has dispersed his closest relatives. I do not know whether our paths shall ever cross again. Hence I fulfill his request in this place. The circumstances that accompanied Alter's death are living and significant proof of his last words to me. He did not

wear a soldier's uniform of the Allies. Still, his grave is today transformed into a symbol.

Victor Alter fell at his post like a soldier of democracy—one who would not bend, and who refused to be led on the leash of opportunism that arose out of political circumstances and life in general. The fact of his death only testifies to the kind of worthy standard-bearer he was for the fight for democracy. And it testifies as well to the kind of danger he presented—in his person—to all the real and fundamental enemies of democracy. The location of Alter's grave, like that of so many others, remains unknown. Yet it may be regarded as a further milestone on the road to that complete and final victory for which Alter strove and fought, and for whose realization he laid down his life.

The Campaign to Free Erlich and Alter

IMMEDIATELY AFTER the first arrest of Erlich and Alter in 1939, strong efforts were undertaken to effect their freedom. The organization of Bund representatives in the United States entered into contact with the major trade union organizations of the United States and Great Britain, as well as the most prominent representatives of the liberal world, about intervening on behalf of Erlich and Alter. The representatives of the Jewish Labor Bund encountered a sympathetic and supportive attitude everywhere. There was a universal desire to help save the two Jewish labor leaders, who were well known in both the international labor movement and liberal circles.

The interventions began in November 1939 and lasted until February 1943. Active support in the rescue campaign was offered by, among others, the following prominent figures in trade union, political, and public life generally: William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor; Philip Murray, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations; David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union of America; Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; Adolf Held, chairman of the Jewish Labor Committee;

Much of the material in this and later sections of the book has been drawn from the Yiddish journal *Unser Tsait*, a monthly organ of the Jewish Labor Bund, and from the pamphlet by J. Hart, *Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter* (New York, 1943), issued by the American Representation of the General Jewish Workers Union (Bund) of Poland.

Joseph Weinberg, president of the Workmen's Circle; Dr. B. Hoffman (Tsvion), chairman of the I. L. Peretz Writer's Union; Professor Albert Einstein; Reverend Henry Smith Leiper, executive secretary of the Universal Christian Council; Dr. Frank Kingdon; Reinhold Niebuhr, chairman of the Union for Democratic Action; Raymond Gram Swing; Paul Kellogg; Clinton S. Golden, vice president, United Steelworkers of America; J. B. S. Hardman, director of the labor press for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; Norman Thomas; James B. Carey, secretary of the Congress of Industrial Organizations; Leo Krzycki, president of the American Slav Congress; Dr. Alvin Johnson, director of the New School for Social Research.

Others who became interested in the Erlich-Alter case were the American State Department, American ambassadors, and also Wendell Willkie and Eleanor Roosevelt (her involvement came in response to a personal appeal from Erlich's family). With respect to Willkie, he intervened on two occasions: the first time—personally—when he was present in Moscow in the autumn of 1942; the second time, in January 1943, with a written communication.

The campaign to save Erlich and Alter was also conducted by the labor movement in England. Demands for their freedom were raised after both the first and the second arrest by the most prominent leaders of the Labor and Socialist International and the International Confederation of Trade Unions, and by socialist parties in Europe and South America and labor organizations in South Africa and Australia.

As early as 1939, the general secretary of the British trade unions, Walter Citrine, intervened with the Soviet ambassador in Britain, Ivan Maisky. In addition, the government of Belgium, which had not yet been drawn into the war at that time, became involved in the matter. A number of French socialists, led by Léon Blum, also offered their help to save the arrested Jewish labor leaders.

The most prominent leaders of the British Labor Party joined in the campaign: Clement Attlee, Herbert Morrison, Arthur Greenwood, William Gillies, James Middleton, Stafford Cripps, H. N. Brailsford, and others. At the sixtieth annual conference of the British cooperatives, representing millions of members, a resolu-

tion was unanimously adopted which demanded the freedom of Erlich and Alter.

Other prominent international figures who participated in the campaign were Friedrich Adler and Oskar Polak, leaders of the Austrian socialists; Louis De Brouckère, Camille Huysmans, and Paul-Henri Spaak, leaders of the Belgian socialist movement. For the Polish government, intervention was undertaken by Premier General Sikorski, Foreign Minister Edward Raczynski, and the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Professor Stanislaw Kot.

All these far-reaching efforts, however, did not have the slightest effect. The Soviet government failed to display even a modicum of decency by responding to the many inquiries concerning the location of the prisoners and whether they were alive. It also refused to reply to the American Red Cross. In an official Soviet reply to a message from the American ambassador in Moscow, the latter was told that Russia wanted no intervention whatsoever by him with respect to non-American citizens. And a few months after the second arrest, the Polish ambassador in Kuibyshev was told, cynically, that he had no right to intervene in the matter of Erlich and Alter because both were Soviet citizens.

On January 23, 1943, a number of well-known labor leaders headed by William Green and Philip Murray and a group of liberal personalities headed by Albert Einstein jointly addressed a telegram to the Soviet government requesting freedom for Erlich and Alter. This turned out to be the final intervention, the last attempt at rescue. For this time—*the only time*—an answer did arrive.

One month later, on February 23, 1943, the following letter from Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, was addressed to William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor:

My dear Mr. Green:

I am informed by Mr. Molotov, People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, of the receipt by him of a telegram signed by you concerning two Soviet Citizens Alter and Ehrlich. I am instructed by Mr. Molotov to inform you of the following facts:

For active subversive work against the Soviet Union and assistance to Polish intelligence organs in armed activities, Ehrlich and Alter were sentenced to capital punishment in August 1941.

At the request of the Polish Government Ehrlich and Alter were released in September 1941.

However, after they were set free, at the time of the most desperate battles of the Soviet troops against the advancing Hitlerite army, they resumed their hostile activities including appeals to the Soviet troops to stop bloodshed and immediately to conclude peace with Germany. For this they were re-arrested and on December 1942 sentenced once more to capital punishment by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court. The sentence has been carried out in regard to both of them.

Yours sincerely,
Maxim Litvinov
Ambassador

In this appalling document, the savagery of the crime is compounded by the shameless lies and slanders.

In the very first paragraph it is stated that Erlich and Alter were Soviet citizens. This is an outright lie, because (a) they were born in Poland; (b) they were councilmen on the Warsaw City Council from 1919 to 1939, a body whose membership was only open to Polish citizens; (c) they never adopted Soviet citizenship; and (d) according to international law, the citizenship of inhabitants of a country that has been occupied may not be changed while a war is still in progress.

The second paragraph declares that Erlich and Alter were sentenced to death in August 1941 for conduct hostile to the Soviet Union and for collaboration in the armed activity of the organs of the Polish intelligence network (the *defensywa*.)

But that same Soviet government declared, after releasing Erlich and Alter in September 1941, that a *grave mistake had been committed*, and they were officially asked for forgiveness. After all, it was the Soviet government itself which had, through its supreme guardian of order, Beria, head of the NKVD invited Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter to take over the leadership of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the autumn of 1941.

The third paragraph reads: "At the request of the Polish government, Erlich and Alter were released in September 1941."

Of course the Polish government (and other quarters as well)

requested they be released. We have already seen how the requests proved unavailing. They were released from the Soviet prisons and concentration camps exactly like tens of thousands of others—Jewish and non-Jewish Polish citizens—on the ground of the general amnesty which Soviet Russia had obligated itself to proclaim in line with the agreement reached with the Polish government-in-exile.

Molotov, in his message to Litvinov, claims that the arrested men were Soviet citizens. If they were really Soviet citizens, why should Soviet citizens have been freed “at the request of the Polish government”? And if the first sentence of death had been rendered against them as Polish citizens (which was really the case), how could they have been sentenced the second time—and executed—as Soviet citizens?

Finally—the fourth paragraph: The leaders of the Bund, after their release, allegedly appealed “to the Soviet troops to stop bloodshed and immediately to conclude peace with Germany.” For this reason they were again arrested and sentenced to death a second time.

Erich and Alter had received the first death sentence for “collaboration in the armed activity of the organs of Polish intelligence.” That was supposed to have been in September 1939, which prompts the conclusion that the Bund leaders were enemies of Hitler at the time. How then could the same two individuals—and this after the Nazis had slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Jews (among them scores of close friends and relatives, including Alter’s old mother); killed tens of thousands of Poles; plundered their belongings and destroyed their land—how could those two individuals suddenly have evolved into friends of Hitler?

Every one of the four paragraphs in Litvinov’s letter was based on a lie, on a trumped-up charge. There remains yet a fifth paragraph, the last one, which, unfortunately, *is* true—the *only piece of truth in the whole document*.

At the end of April 1943, i.e., approximately two months after the first letter, Litvinov sent a second letter to William Green. He wrote that there was an error in the date given for the execution: the correct date was December 1941, not December 1942.

At the beginning, when the announcement of the execution was

first made, there were two versions of the time of execution: Litvinov's 1942, and 1941—the date given by the New York Soviet consul. (Litvinov's version, however, i.e., the 1942 date, was the one accepted.)

Then, two months later, Litvinov himself reported that the execution was in fact carried out in 1941. His letter, again addressed to William Green, read as follows:

Dear Mr. Green:

In my letter of February 23 I transmitted to you a communication from Mr. V. M. Molotov concerning the case of Alter and Ehrlich, in which the date of their execution is given as December 1942, as I read it in the decoded cablegram.

Having now received in the diplomatic pouch a copy of the above cablegram, I find that the date reads December 1941. I checked the matter and found that a mistake was made in coding the cablegram and that the execution took place in December 1941.

I am sorry that this mistake has given rise to a controversy in the Press.

Yours sincerely,
M. Litvinov
Ambassador

Let us state for the record: in the course of a whole year dozens of the most distinguished leaders of labor, writers, scientists, and public figures intervened to bring about the freedom of Erlich and Alter. Instead of replying that both were long dead, the Soviet government remained silent, thereby deceiving the public opinion throughout the world. What's more, the Polish ambassador, Professor Kot, intervened personally several times on behalf of the arrested men,* during his talks with the most prominent Soviet

*The controversy referred to by Litvinov occurred on the pages of the liberal *New Republic*, which, as will be shown below, had vigorously condemned the murder of Alter and Erlich in its March 15, 1943 issue. On March 29, 1943, the *New Republic* published the following letter from Feodor Orekov, first secretary in the press division of the Soviet embassy in Washington: "In the March 15, 1943 issue of the *New Republic*, in the editorial on Erlich and Alter, a letter written by Ambassador Litvinov to Mr. William Green is misquoted. The date of the execution is given in the editorial as December 1941, while in fact the information received from Moscow and transmitted by the Ambassador to Mr. Green the date is given as December 1942.—Trans.

government officials, they did not tell him that Erlich and Alter were already dead. On the contrary, during the conversations it was clearly stated that both were alive. This was in the year 1942, after the murders. This recurred in the autumn of 1942, when Wendell Willkie, during his visit to Moscow, was assured that the matter of Erlich and Alter would be settled in a satisfactory fashion.

The Soviet Government concealed the fact of the death sentence and the execution for nearly fifteen months. It did not announce it to the Soviet people or to public opinion in the outside world, which had manifested great interest in the fate of Erlich and Alter. On the contrary, by creating the impression over a period of fifteen months that Erlich and Alter were still alive, the Soviet officials not only proved themselves liars, but also showed that they were afraid to tell the world of the horrible outrage they had committed.

Criminals in Judges' Robes

Ludwig Honigwil

POLITICAL TRIALS in Soviet Russia have already come to possess a distinctive character and tradition. Such trials ordinarily receive a great deal of publicity when the accused are well known abroad. This absolutely does not mean that court proceedings are public and due process is observed, i.e., that the courts are subject to the control of public opinion. There exists nothing of the sort.

The Soviet propaganda organs, lacking all sense of proportion, as well as common sense, disseminate in various languages putative stenographic reports containing the statements of the accused, of the experts, of the witnesses, and the speeches of the prosecutor and the defender. The Soviet government organs devote an inordinate amount of energy seeking to convince public opinion abroad of the exceedingly vile character of these particular individuals, people who, not long ago, were celebrated as shining heroes and honored leaders of the working class.

In the light of this record in the sphere of publicity technique, what was it that interfered with the dissemination, on the part of the Soviet government and its propaganda apparatus, of similar reports dealing with the "trials" of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter? Erlich and Alter, after all, had been distinguished working-class leaders for over two decades, men who enjoyed the confidence of socialists and liberals the world over. They were influen-

Ludvik Honigwil, a prominent attorney in prewar Poland, was a widely respected defense counsel in political trials.

tial members of the Executive Committee of the Socialist International. Aside from their role as leaders of the Jewish laboring masses in Poland, they had great influence among Jewish workers in other lands, especially the United States. Hence the Soviet government understood full well that its foul insinuations about Erlich and Alter's treason and service to Hitler could not make the slightest impression upon honest people.

There should have been published, particularly in connection with this "trial," an exact, verbatim report—including all the testimony of the witnesses and the experts, and the statements of the accused themselves. Indeed, this massive silence on the part of the always voluble Soviet government says more than volumes of reports.

Erlich and Alter were tried twice in Soviet courts.* After the death sentence in August 1941, they were released in September and permitted to remain free for three months—until December. It was during that brief interlude that they entered into contact with their comrades.

In a handwritten letter by Alter, he says that he was sentenced on the false charge of being "a member of the executive of the Socialist International who was involved in continuous anti-Soviet activity for many years and who directed the underground work of the Jewish Bund in the Soviet Union according to instructions of the Polish police."

Erlich's handwritten letter states that he was convicted on the false charges of (1) being linked to the world bourgeoisie; and (2) acting by himself, or in conjunction with Alter, to maintain contact with the underground organization of the Jewish Bund in the Soviet Union according to an agreement with the Polish political police. The two were charged with utilizing the Bund organization for espionage purposes and with issuing instructions to that end, while raising money and recruiting people.

Erlich and Alter received separate trials in separate court-

*Concerning the first time, we learned of it directly through them. With respect to the second, we only know about it from Molotov's letter to Litvinov. It is certain that no trial took place: they were simply liquidated, *i.e.*, the old verdict was carried out.

rooms. With regard to the first death sentence, the Molotov-Litvinov letter to William Green declares that it was issued because of “active subversive work against the Soviet Union and assistance to Polish intelligence organs in armed activities.”

There is nothing surprising as to why Molotov and Litvinov concealed from Green the accusation about Erlich’s being “linked to the world bourgeoisie.” At a time when the Soviet Union was receiving assistance from the United States and Great Britain, it would have been awkward on its part to acknowledge that a “link to the world bourgeoisie” was a terrible crime in the Soviet Union. Moreover, Litvinov and Molotov concealed the fact that Erlich and Alter had been accused of espionage. This shows that they had still not lost a sense of reality and of shame.

Both letters—the one from Alter and the one from Molotov-Litvinov—coincide on the point in the accusation concerning “anti-Soviet activity.” But here too Molotov and Litvinov had covered up an important feature of the accusation as formulated in the Soviet court. The charge against Alter was that “he engaged in anti-Soviet activity as an executive member of the Socialist International.” The Soviet court thereby *issued, in effect, a death sentence by way of Alter’s person against all members of the Executive Committee of the Socialist International*, and through this claim also against the socialist movement proper. It would really have been very inconvenient to write about it to William Green, who had many friends among the members of the Socialist International.

Erlich and Alter were Jewish socialists and citizens of Poland whose activities had taken place in independent Poland. Not having the least ground and the least right to try them for their activities as *Polish* citizens, the Soviet government pulled a little trick: it suddenly proclaimed them to be *Soviet* citizens. This is juridically, politically, and just plain humanly absurd and an act of viciousness. Both Erlich and Alter, who had actively participated in Polish life, considered themselves Polish citizens.

According to the Treaty of Riga (the treaty between Poland and the Soviet Union signed in 1921 after the Russo-Polish War), everyone who found himself on Polish soil had the right, if he

wished, to adopt Soviet citizenship; but Erlich and Alter had never desired to become Soviet citizens.

The Soviet government organs themselves confirmed, after the occupation of Poland in September–October 1939, i.e., during the second half of 1941, that Erlich and Alter were Polish citizens and were regarded by the Soviet authorities as Polish citizens.

On July 30, 1941, Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London, in the presence of Prime Minister Churchill, Foreign Minister Eden, and General Sikorski, signed the following protocol which was appended to the Polish-Soviet agreement of the same date: "The Soviet government guarantees an amnesty to all Polish citizens who find themselves on Soviet territory at the present time—both as war-prisoners or for other adequate reasons—as soon as diplomatic relations are established."

In September 1941, as Polish citizens, Erlich and Alter were released from prison. Molotov and Litvinov conceded as much in their letter to William Green, wherein they asserted that "*at the request of the Polish government, Erlich and Alter were released in September 1941.*"

When and on what basis could they have become Soviet citizens? There will never be an answer to this question.

But in this regard something else occurred, and it underscores ever more strikingly the shameless arrogance which the Soviet regime has manifested in the Erlich-Alter matter. Already after their murder and after their having been declared *Soviet* citizens, the Soviet government organs approached the embassy of the Polish government-in-exile for payment of the bill for the hotel room which Erlich and Alter had occupied in Kuibyshev before they were arrested for the second time. The Polish embassy paid the bill and stressed that it was doing so because Erlich and Alter were *Polish* citizens. Thus the Soviet government itself exposed its lie about the Soviet citizenship of Erlich and Alter—but only after it had murdered them.

Among all civilized nations, it is accepted that amnesty means not only the freedom of the criminal from all the consequences of his crime, but also that the crime itself is forgotten. In an international document, the Soviet government had declared before the whole world that it would forgive and forget all the crimes of which

Erlich and Alter had allegedly been accused. Yet here too the Soviet government once again failed to keep its promise. After Erlich and Alter had been murdered, it repeated the previous groundless accusations and even added new lies. This reveals once more the moral level of that government.

Molotov and Litvinov affirm the fact that Erlich and Alter were freed in September 1941 as Polish citizens and were rearrested in December of the same year. We know that the second arrest took place on December 4. That is, they were free almost three months.

What did they do in the course of those three months?

Molotov and Litvinov inform us that "at the time of the most desperate battles of the Soviet troops against the advancing Hitler army, they resumed their hostile activities, including appeals to the Soviet troops to stop bloodshed and immediately to conclude peace with Germany."

Let it be said once more: Erlich and Alter were released after two years incarceration and after the death sentence had been annulled. On the basis of information provided by numerous individuals who saw both of them after their release, they were sick, weak, and terribly exhausted. The members of the Polish embassy in Moscow provided for them until mid-October, when, because of the danger of German occupation, the embassy was evacuated to Kuibyshev. Erlich and Alter were promptly evacuated there along with the personnel of the embassy. They arrived in Kuibyshev around the twentieth of October. Six weeks later they were arrested.

Sick, exhausted, and completely debilitated, Alter and Erlich arrived in Moscow, where they had no friends or contacts whatsoever. Indeed, had they had any, the Soviet government would surely have liquidated the two immediately after their first arrest. For that is the long-standing tradition in the Soviet Union—to exterminate every friend of a criminal who is convicted. How then could they have engaged in anti-Soviet activity under such circumstances? Who were their accomplices? How were they able to distribute their appeals to the Soviet troops?

They left for Kuibyshev in the middle of October. They themselves had not chosen that city as a place in which to live. The Soviet government selected Kuibyshev as the temporary location

of the Polish embassy. It agreed to the request of the Polish embassy that Erlich and Alter go along to Kuibyshev. Upon arriving there, they rented a room in a hotel which had been pointed out to them by the Soviet officials. It goes without saying that the supervision over them was the same there as it had been in Moscow. No one was able to stay on in Kuibyshev without special permission of the Soviet government. In October 1941, Erlich and Alter found themselves in a wholly new environment, surrounded by altogether new people.

Engaging in anti-Soviet activity, which included propaganda in the Red Army, could only have been done with the help of a corresponding organization. But such an organization was not named by Molotov and Litvinov; nor were any individuals cited as their collaborators and contacts.

If the Soviet government had had documents demonstrating that two Polish citizens, enjoying the friendship and protection of the Polish government, had committed treason by helping the common enemy of the Soviet and Polish governments, it should have—in keeping, after all, with the friendship agreement that had been concluded—transmitted those documents to the Poles in order thereby to convince them that they had given protection to dastardly criminals.

The Polish government, at numerous times, demanded freedom for Erlich and Alter. Hence it would have been quite natural for the Soviet government to inform the Polish government about the nature of the activity being conducted by those two individuals. It did no such thing. The Polish government interceded constantly for the arrested men. The most prominent representatives of the civilized world, including political figures and scientists, also intervened. During a period of fifteen months, the Soviet government remained silent and offered no response at all. Only after Russia's military situation had improved to the point where one could foresee the victory of the Allies; when the sympathies of the world for the Russian people had increased tremendously—only then did the Soviet government find it possible to deliver a slap in the face to the civilized world: Erlich and Alter, in whose fate that world had been so greatly interested, turned out to be, surprisingly . . . Hitler agents and spies!

The renowned French criminologist Gabriel de Tarde once wrote that on more than one occasion in the history of mankind it has happened that the most ugly crimes have been committed in the form of courtroom verdicts.

Criminals have once again donned the robes of judges.

Between One Death Sentence and Another

Final Greetings, Letters, and Documents

A LETTER FROM HENRYK ERLICH TO HIS FAMILY

Moscow, 27 November 1941

Sophie dearest, beloved children! I embrace you warmly and strongly—all of you together and each of you separately! Could it be possible that I am writing to you again? There were moments when it seemed to me unlikely. It was then that I reflected upon my whole life. . . .

I tried to envisage your life without me, and was filled with the most tender love for all of you and with infinite gratitude for the abundance of happiness you have given me.

There have been other moments, the most dreadful, when I prepared myself for the worst (death I have never considered the worst); thus I endeavored to marshal and concentrate within myself all the powers of resistance of which I am capable. It was then that I thought most intensely of you, my beloved boys: I thought of your honest eyes and crystal-pure hearts; I feel I must leave to you an unsullied name. And this is what strengthened my belief that I shall hold out.

Yet quite frequently, and in defiance of common sense, I did not believe that I would never see you again; and during long hours in the silence of the night I engaged in endless conversations with

The letters were written in Polish. The translated versions presented here are abridged.

you. (More often than not I would find myself together with you, at 68 Meža Avenue.)*

In a word, what is improbable is not that I am writing to you. What is improbable is this sudden and tremendous change in the circumstances in which I live: from the “death cell” to the Hotel Metropole, where I enjoy solicitous concern and protection; from the vile accusation leveled against me and Victor to the present toadying and cajolery. All of it is so utterly fantastic, simply a mirage!

But let’s leave all this aside for now (you will learn the details from the letter to the comrades). I cannot understand why you are not together: why you, Zosia, together with Wika and Iza have gotten stuck in Montreal? This is the more interesting to me since it’s possible that I will be in North American in the not-too-distant future, at which time I will, of course, have to find a place to live in New York. . . .

I would like very much to know how you are getting on there. What are you doing? Do you have any word of your father and of my relatives in Poland? I know that D. is in the Soviet Union, in a camp. I have already tried, via the embassy, to have him brought to Moscow. The same, of course, goes for Oler. Tell this to his wife. I hope he’ll be released from the camp very soon, at which time he himself will wire her.

My dear ones! It is not possible at present to correspond in a normal way. Turn your letters over to the comrades; they will find a better channel. In any event, it is necessary to be very cautious in writing—nothing whatever aside from personal matters.

Why haven’t you sent me your address, Zosia? I will write to New York, but not too often, because it is not so easy here to find an opportunity.

Your,
Henryk

P.S. Dear Oleś! After reading the letter, send it, of course, on to mother.

*The residence of Professor Simon Dubnow in Riga, Latvia, where the Erlichs spent part of the summer of 1939.

A LETTER FROM HENRYK ERLICH TO HIS COMRADES

Dear Comrade Emanuel!*

Permit me, first of all, to embrace you and all the Bundist comrades in the United States most warmly. I need not tell you with what sort of feeling I do so. There have been moments during the past two years when my reason told me: "There is not the least basis for hoping that you will ever be able to enter into contact with those closest to you, and with comrades and friends." Yet in my heart I believed it would be different. In any event, I did not doubt for a moment that all of you in America were doing everything possible to wrest from the clutches of the NKVD myself, Victor, and all the other comrades who have found themselves in that grip. And of one other thing I am certain: If the gentlemen of the NKVD have not dared to apply physical force to me and to Victor, we owe it, once again, to your campaign in America.

But let us not talk now about what has been. That should be dealt with orally or written about in detail for the historical record (the latter is very difficult, at a time when we are able to write the truth only on the extraterritorial ground of the Polish embassy). Today I merely wish to relate in a limited number of words the amazing story of my last two years.

I was arrested on October 4, 1939, at Brest-Litovsk. After four days in prison there, I was taken to Moscow. The investigation dragged on endlessly. On May 2, 1941, I addressed the People's Commissar with a categorical demand in writing that I finally be told what I was being accused of. One way or another—the matter had to come to a head. On May 9 they "accommodated" me and informed me that I was accused of the following: (1) a connection with the international bourgeoisie; (2) maintaining contact—sometimes alone, sometimes together with Victor, and by agreement with the Polish secret police [*the defensywa*]¹—with a secret Bundist organization in the Soviet Union; and, through it, engaging in sabotage and espionage activity, and providing it with instructions, financial resources, and personnel for that purpose.

*The letter is addressed to Emanuel Nowogrudsky—Trans.

On June 26 the actual "investigation" into these crimes commenced. But as early as June 28 I was brought to a prison in Saratov along with thousands of others who had been arrested.

My investigation judge from Moscow came to me in Saratov on July 26. He told me that the "investigation" in my case was finished. That was when I received the opportunity to acquaint myself fully with the fantastic nonsense that had been extorted by physical force from scores of people in the years 1937 and 1938 (among them, Berl Gutman-Zelikovitch), and which served as a basis of the accusation against me and Victor.

On July 30 the indictment was handed to me. On August 2 I was tried and sentenced to death. I was given twenty-four hours to submit an appeal. As a sign of protest against the terrible conditions in which I found myself in the "death cell," I notified the court that I renounced my right of appeal. Twenty-five days later, on August 27, I was informed that the death sentence had been commuted to ten years in a forced-labor camp.

On September 9 I was brought to Moscow by second-class railroad car. On September 11 I was freed with great ostentation and was put up in one of Moscow's most luxurious hotels.

The friendly attention being shown both of us at present is simply indescribable. We are continually told that we were freed not on the basis of the agreement with Poland, but because they had concluded that an injustice had been done to us and wanted to make up for all the wrongs to which we had been subjected.

One of the traits that characterizes the people of the NKVD is the naive belief that with lies it is possible to achieve everything in the world, and that there is nothing of which human beings cannot be convinced. This is a further expression of the profound contempt in which communism holds people.

But let us leave philosophy aside for now. I wish to devote my first letter essentially to a series of practical problems.

Our primary concern after being released was, of course, with our arrested comrades. We drew up two lists that included up to seventy-five names. We are exerting ourselves on their behalf by approaches both to the Polish embassy (which, incidentally, has received us with extraordinary kindness), and the NKVD. We have been promised that all of them will go free. Unfortunately, we

learned from the NKVD that Comrade Anna Rosenthal [one of the leaders of the Bund in Vilno] died in prison. We asked to be told when, where, and under what conditions. They promised to get us the information. As of now, I know nothing about Yuzef, Kosovsky, Shloyme, Leivik, and Sarah. Concerning Chaim and Scherer, I surmise that they are in the United States.* Let me know right away how all of them are getting on. It would be good if you were to compile for us as full a list as possible of all those arrested about whom you know. Perhaps we have omitted someone.

Now another very important matter. The representatives of the NKVD are flitting around us in extraordinary fashion. The reason is that they hope to make use of our contacts in the United States. We, on the other hand, wish to make use of them in order to be able to establish contact with Poland. They are prepared to bring us information from our comrades there, and they are willing to bring one of our comrades from here to Poland should we consider it necessary. It goes without saying that only a *handful* of comrades (indeed, fewer than the number of fingers *on one hand*) should be apprised of what I am writing here. I would positively consider anyone a criminal who as much as makes a peep about this.

In order to expedite our contact with you, the NKVD people are ready to move our correspondence through special channels, so that a letter to you from us should take roughly a week, and the same in return. We will make use of it. So don't be surprised if you suddenly receive news from us through Soviet channels. You will shortly be receiving from us, among other things, a plan of our activity which we've drawn up for them. In today's mail we are sending you a document—a declaration which both of us gave to the Polish ambassador in Moscow, first orally and then in writing. The declaration, received with great seriousness and cordiality, is being promptly transmitted to the Polish government in London. I hope you will agree with it. The ambassador has shown us, meanwhile, the domestic political platform of the government. In matters relating to us it is satisfactory. . . .

*The references are to the following prominent Bundists: Yuzef—Noyakh Portnoy, Vladimir Kosovsky, Shloyme Mendelson, Leivik Hodes, Sarah Shveber, Chaim Wasser, and Emanuel Scherer—Trans.

I must close. Let us know to whom to send letters of thanks for their participation in the campaign to win our freedom. Heartiest greetings to all of you from your

Henryk and Victor

P.S. It goes without saying that everything I've written here relates to Victor as much as to me.

Victor was arrested on September 26, 1939 in Kovel. After six weeks of imprisonment there, he was taken to Łuck. On December 8, 1939, he was brought to Moscow. His "investigation" also lasted twenty months. His treatment also was not bad, although he resisted by means of hunger strikes. All told he subjected himself to starvation and semi-starvation four-and-a-half months.

On July 20, 1941, a court sentenced him to death. The charge reads: "As a member of the executive of the Socialist International, he engaged in anti-Soviet activity during a number of years, and conducted the illegal work of the Bund in the Soviet Union while in the service of the Polish political police."

Ten days after the verdict, Victor also had his death sentence commuted to ten years in a camp. On September 14 he was released and is now together with me. He is extremely exhausted physically but is now feeling better. He believes that he will have returned to his normal physical condition in a few weeks.

It is very likely that, pursuant to our conversations here, I will soon have occasion to be en route to you. Hence the question arises of a visa for me (remember that according to the passport, my name is Hersh Volf). I believe that in any case, it would also be good to have a visa for Victor.

APPEALS TO STALIN AND BERIA

In keeping with the proposal by the Soviet government concerning the establishment of a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee which was supposed to be headed by Erlich and Alter, both of them addressed a memorandum to Stalin and a letter about it to L. Beria. What follows is the verbatim text of the memorandum and the letter:

To the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union,
L. P. Beria!

Very distinguished Lavrenty Pavlovitch!

Pursuant to the conversation with you, we held a series of discussions aimed at working out the details in regard to the principles about which we arrived at an understanding with you. The result of these deliberations is an appeal to the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars by the initiating group concerning the establishment of a Jewish Anti-Hitler Committee coupled with a request for permission to erect such a committee on the territory of the Soviet Union.

We enclose a copy of the appeal.

At the same time we appeal to you, very distinguished Lavrenty Pavlovitch, with a request for help in getting this matter taken care of quickly and resolved in a positive fashion.

With Socialist greetings,
H. Erlich V. Alter
Moscow, October 1941

To the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the
Soviet Union, J. V. Stalin!

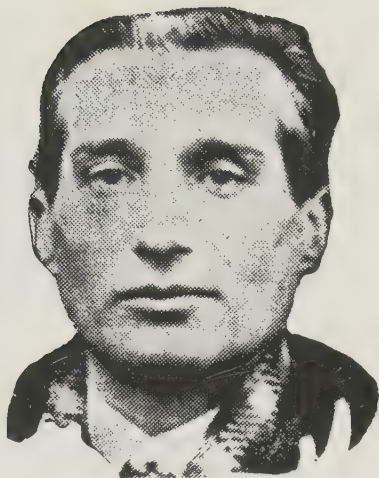
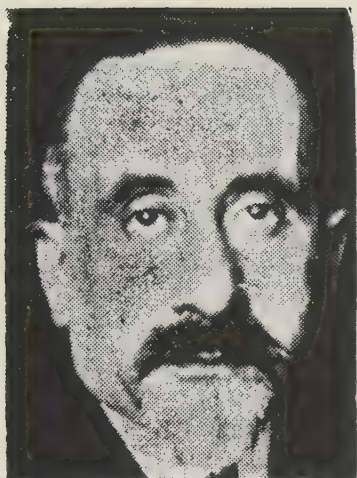
Very distinguished Josif Visarionovitch!

Never has civilized humanity faced such a danger as now: Hitler and Hitlerism have become a deadly menace to all the conquests of human culture, to the independence of all countries, and to the freedom of all peoples.

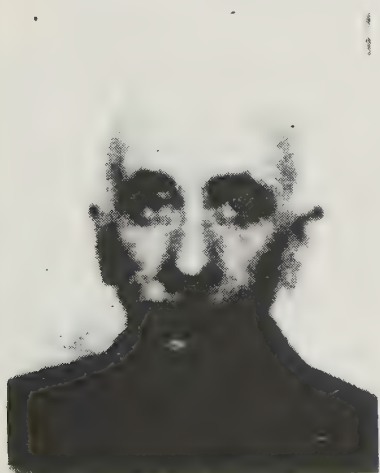
The fate of the workers' movement and of all mankind depends on the outcome of the gigantic battles now taking place across vast areas of the Soviet Union.

The struggle against this danger demands a tremendous commitment of energy on the part of all who wish to save themselves, their culture, their peoples, and all humanity from the destiny of fascist barbarism headed by Hitler.

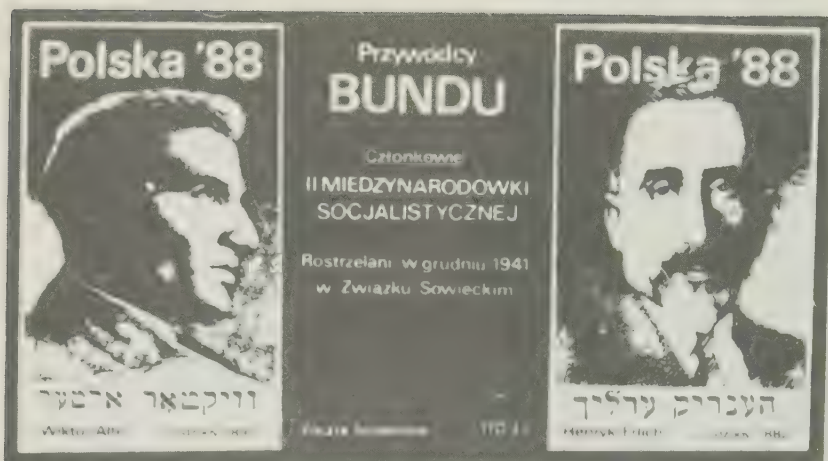
Hitler is seeking to enslave everyone without exception—countries and peoples. But it is the Jews whom he persecutes with particular savagery. He tramples in the dust the human and national



H. Erlich and V. Alter before their arrest by the Soviet authorities in Fall, 1939.



H. Erlich and V. Alter following their release from Soviet Prison in 1941.



Illegal commemorative postage stamp issued by "Solidarity" in Poland to honor H. Erlich and V. Alter, April of 1988.



At the dedication of the monument for H. Erlich and V. Alter in Warsaw on April 17th, 1988 (a portion of the gathered crowd).



V. Alter and H. Erlich at a street demonstration in Warsaw.



May Day, 1933 in Warsaw. H. Erlich speaking at the demonstration in front of the Bundist club on Przejazd Street.



Bund leaders heading a street demonstration in Warsaw. In the third row H. Erlich and V. Alter.



H. Erlich at a session of the Executive of the Socialist International with Leon Blum and Vincent Auriol.



Bundist delegation, with H. Erlich and V. Alter, at a conference of the Socialist International before World War II.



Central Committee of the Bund in Russia at the tenth party conference in April of 1917. Second in the first row is H. Erlich.



H. Erlich and some of the leading staffers of the Bundist daily, *Di Folkstsaytung*, in Warsaw.



Presidium of a joint meeting of Jewish and non-Jewish workers in Warsaw, with H. Erlich in the first row and V. Alter in the second one.



Presidium of the central anniversary celebration of the 30th year of the Bund, with H. Erlich. Standing in the center is N. Portnoy, Chairman of the Bund in Poland.



H. Erlich with the leaders of the Bund in Rumania, Cernauti, 1929.



H. Erlich speaks at the fourth convention of the Bund in Warsaw, 1929.



Bundist delegates at the fourth trade union convention in 1929 in Warsaw, with H. Erlich in center.



The presidium of the fourth convention of the Jewish trade unions in Poland with V. Alter and S.M. Zygielboim.



H. Erlich among the Bundist delegates at the sixth convention of the Polish trade unions, October of 1937.



Members of the Youth Bund "Tsukunft" contingent at the second workers' Olympic games in Vienna, 1931.



Victor Alter and Anthony Zdanowski, as delegates of the labor movement in Poland, among the Republican fighters in Spain during the Civil War.



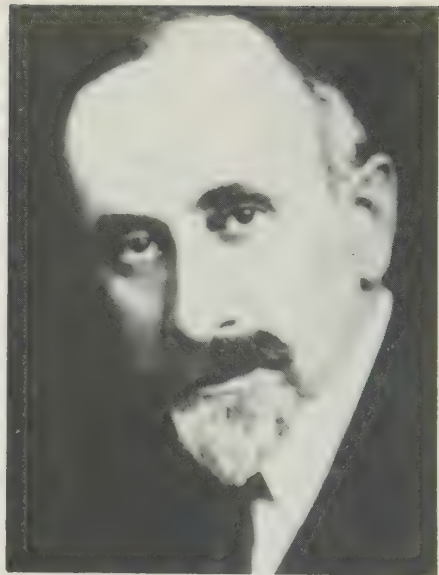
The Erlich family with Simon Dubnov (H. Erlich's father-in-law), Sophie Dubnov-Erlich, H. Erlich, their sons Alexander and Victor.



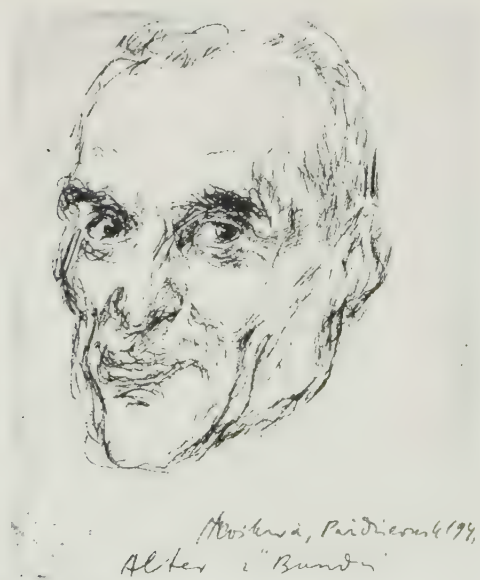
H. Erlich and V. Alter with N. Chanin, S. Dubnov-Erlich and the Kastelanskis (Warsaw).



V. Alter.



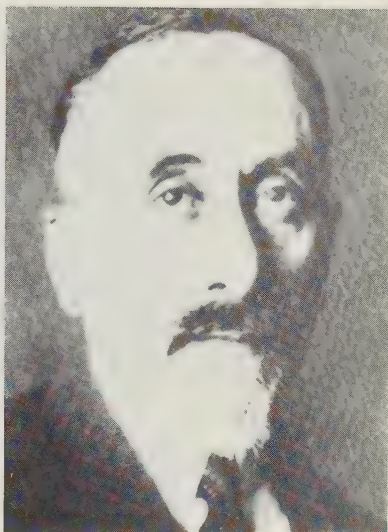
H. Erlich.



V. Alter as drawn by F. Topolski in Moscow, 1941.



V. Alter



H. Erlich

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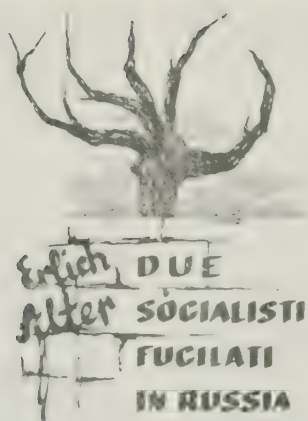
WE CONTINUE COMMON STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM FOR SOCIALISM

STREET COMRADES FRIENDS

ERLICH ALTER HOTEL METROPOLE

Telenhone: HAnover 2-1811 To secure prompt action on inquiries, this original RADIOGRAM should be presented at the office of R.C.A. COMMUNICATIONS, Inc. In telephone inquiries quote the number preceding the place of origin.

The cable about their release from Soviet prison in 1941.



Pamphlet, published in Rome in 1945, on the execution of H. Erlich and V. Alter — with the handwritten dedication, "For Emanuel (Nowogrudzki)," Secretary General of the Bund.



The H. Erlich-V. Alter monument erected in 1988 in the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw.

Hearthbroken and stricken with grief, we consider it our sacred duty to inform the people of the United States and throughout the world that the two prominent leaders of the Jewish labor movement of Poland who were the inspiration of the Jewish underground movement of Poland, our beloved friends and comrades

HENRYK ERLICH

*Member of the Executive Committee of the
Labor and Socialist International*

and

VICTOR ALTER

*Member of the Executive Committee of
the Trade Union Congress*

***Were Executed by
The Soviet Government***

Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Ambassador in the United States, officially informed William Green about the execution. The good names of these well-known anti-Fascists and Socialists were besmirched with the shameless accusation of complicity with Hitler-Germany.

***The Jewish People
Will Never Forget
This Bloody Crime***

**AMERICAN REPRESENTATION OF THE
GENERAL JEWISH WORKERS' UNION OF POLAND**

**EMANUEL NOVOGRODZKY, General Sec.
175 East Broadway, N. Y.**

Statement of the Bund following upon the official Soviet notification of the execution of H. Erlich and V. Alter (The New York Times, 3-3-1943).

We Shall Never Forget
the
Murder in Cold Blood
of
ERLICH and ALTER

Ten years ago HENRYK ERLICH, member of the Executive Committee of the Labor and Socialist International, and VICTOR ALTER, member of the Executive Committee of the Trade-Union Congress, were secretly murdered by the dictators of the USSR. One year later the news of this dastardly act was blandly released from behind the Iron Curtain, and was made known by the American Representative of the General Jewish Workers Union, internationally known as Bund.

ERLICH AND ALTER, leaders of the Bund, had devoted their lives to the ideals of Freedom, and the welfare of workers everywhere. That was their death warrant when they fell into Stalin's hands. They are the symbols of the vast army of martyrs who have gone to their graves on orders from the Kremlin murder machine.

Today, in reverence and devotion, we salute the memory of ERLICH and ALTER. In their names we re-affirm our undying pledge to continue our crusade side by side with all democratic forces until the evil menace of Communist tyranny and every other kind of totalitarianism will perish, and victory of Democracy, Freedom and Justice is finally assured.

REMEMBER ERLICH AND ALTER

Signatures

William Green, President,
American Federation of Labor

David Dubinsky, President
International Ladies Garment
Workers Union

Jewish Labor Committee,
Adolph Held, National Chairman

Jewish Daily Forward,
Alexander Kahn, General Manager

Jewish Socialist Verband,
N. Chanin, Chairman Administration Com-
N. Gelfi, Chairman National Executive,
I. Levin-Shatzkes, National Secretary

Norman Thomas, Chairman,
Socialist Party, U. S. A.

Philip Murray, President,
Congress of Industrial Organizations

Louis Hollander, President
New York State, CIO

National Executive Committee
of the Workmen's Circle,
Leon Arkin, President,
Joseph Buskin, General Secretary

Alex Ross, President,
United Hatter, Cap and Millinery
Workers International Union

World Coordinating Committee
of the Bund
Emanuel Nowogrudsky, General Sec'y,
Dr. Emanuel Scherer, Exec. Committee,
Room 305, 175 East Broadway, N. Y.

Statement of American labor and Socialist leaders on the tenth anniversary of the execution of H. Erlich and V. Alter (The New York Times, 12-26-1951).

dignity of the Jewish population. He places it beyond any kind of law, even beyond a fascist law of his own. It seems that his aim is the extermination of the whole Jewish people. It is therefore understandable why the Jewish masses must participate in the struggle against Hitlerism with particular vigor and spirit of self-sacrifice. This applies to the Jewish citizens of those countries in which Hitler's barbarism has, from a threat, become a gruesome reality. This applies in equal measure to the Jewish citizens of all other countries.

With this as a point of departure, the undersigned, as representatives of the Jewish population of countries that have fallen victim to Hitler's aggression, consider it necessary to establish a special Jewish Anti-Hitler Committee; and, as an initiating group, they appeal to you, Very Distinguished Josif Visarionovitch, as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union, with the request that you permit the establishment on Soviet territory of such a committee, whose work would be based upon the following principles:

1. General Principles

The total activity of the Jewish Anti-Hitler Committee (hereafter referred to by the initials JAC), and in the first instance its propaganda, must proceed from the conviction that

(a) the freedom of the Jewish masses from oppression anywhere at all, and from Hitler's persecution in particular, is inextricably linked to the freedom of all nationalities living in the same state;

(b) the true liberation of the Jewish masses from national oppression is only conceivable on condition that there shall exist the principle of social justice as the foundation of the country's national life;

(c) accordingly, the Jewish masses of all countries, hand in hand with other masses of the population, have to wage a struggle for social and national liberation.

2. The Objectives

(1) To stimulate and harness the energy of the Jewish masses and, as far as possible, the totality of Jewish society in all coun-

tries, for the struggle with all our means and all our might against Hitlerism.

(2) To organize help for the Jewish masses in the countries subjugated by Hitlerism and fascism in general. The JAC also intends to assist the Jewish refugees from said countries who presently find themselves on the territory of the Soviet Union.

In the fulfillment of its tasks, the JAC will strive for constant cooperation with the governments and embassies of the countries fighting against Hitlerism and on whose territory there exists a numerous Jewish population.

3. *The Means*

(1) The JAC in the Soviet Union will strive to establish a permanent link to the Jewish population of the countries enslaved by Hitlerism, with the aim of obtaining exact reports from them about the condition of the Jewish masses, bolstering their courage, and helping them with all means possible in their struggle against Hitlerism.

(2) The JAC will establish a permanent link to the larger centers in the Soviet Union containing refugees from the countries referred to above, with the aim of

(a) rendering assistance, so that all those capable of military service shall enroll in the army being organized by their government;

(b) organizing aid departments that will work for the army and military production;

(c) helping to install all the remaining refugees in work situations, at places assigned to them for that purpose.

(3) The JAC will establish a connection with a number of individuals and organizations in the United States for the purpose of helping broaden and deepen the anti-Hitlerite propaganda and strengthen the campaign in favor of

(a) maximum assistance by the United States to the Soviet Union, in the form of ammunition and instruments of war;

(b) maximum credits for the Soviet Union.

(4) The JAC will involve the Jewish population of the United States in fund-raising, providing food supplies, and defraying the

costs associated with the support activity on behalf of Jewish refugees from countries occupied by Hitler and presently located on the territory of the Soviet Union.

(5) The JAC, together with our American comrades, will also consider other means of active participation by American Jews in the fight against Nazism, at a time when the greatest burdens in this struggle are borne by the Soviet Union.

(6) Within the limits allowed by conditions, the JAC will also embark upon activity in Great Britain, analogous to that which was indicated in the previous points for implementation in the United States.

(7) In its work, and in every way possible, the JAC will make use of both oral and the printed word.

The Organizational Structure of the JAC

(1) The projected composition of the JAC in the Soviet Union: seven representatives of the Jewish population from countries under Hitler's domination, and one representative each from the Jewish population of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain.

(2) The work of the JAC is to be directly conducted by a presidium of three members: H. Erlich, chairman; V. Alter, secretary, and ____.*

(3) The JAC will select as honorary members (assuring itself of their approval in advance, of course) representatives of the Soviet government, the ambassadors of the United States, Great Britain, and Poland, and a number of authoritative individuals in public life (science, art, economics) in the Soviet Union and also in other countries.

(4) The JAC may assign its authorized agents to centers in the Soviet Union where Jewish refugees are located in substantial numbers and also delegate its representatives to other countries.

These are the guidelines and the tasks of the projected committee. We hope that there will be no obstacles to the creation of the

*The place was left open here for the third member of the presidium, who was supposed to be the artist, Mikhoels. See also fn., p. 101.

committee by the Council of People's Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

With socialist greetings.

H. Erlich

V. Alter

Moscow, October 1941

OUR PLAN OF WORK

1. In Poland

(1) To issue an appeal to the Jewish masses in Poland. To find a way to get the appeal into Poland. In addition, to impart its content by way of radio and, if possible, by air drops.

(2) To arrange the sending of literature into Poland.

(3) To establish a permanent connection with Poland aimed at sending directives there and receiving in turn exact and detailed reports about the Jewish population and other possible information as well as propaganda.

(4) To bring to pass the realization of the aims noted in points 2 and 3; to utilize the existing connection and also to send a special person to Poland.

2. Among the Polish Jews in the Soviet Union

(1) To conduct a recruiting drive with the aim of attracting all able-bodied individuals for military service in the Polish divisions being formed on the territory of the Soviet Union.

Toward this end, the following is desired:

(a) The gathering of as much precise information as possible about the Jewish citizens of Poland within the Soviet Union;

(b) The issuing of an appropriate appeal;

(c) The use of radio for presentations;

(d) The subsequent publication and dissemination of a number of leaflets;

(e) The appointment of its own authorized representatives at places with a significant number of Polish-Jewish refugees.

All of the foregoing activity should be conducted in close association with the Polish embassy.

(2) To organize military assistance groups (tailors, shoemakers, for repair jobs) within the jurisdiction of the armies (for the Polish divisions as well as the Red Army) of Polish citizens of Jewish origin who are incapable of performing military service. To check on the activity of the labor assistance groups and see that the activity is carried out.

(3) To set up work situations for the remainder of the Polish-Jewish citizens in the Soviet Union. This activity should be conducted via contact with the Polish government.

3. *Abroad*

To begin with, in the United States of America—

(1) To establish a link with a number of persons and organizations in the United States, and with their assistance proceed to launch a campaign aimed at obtaining:

(a) maximum assistance from the United States for the Soviet Union in the form of ammunition and tools of war;

(b) maximum credits for the Soviet Union.

(2) To deepen and broaden the anti-Hitler propaganda, in the first instance within the United States.

(3) To raise the question of organizing a legion from among citizens of the United States and other countries that would participate directly within the ranks of the Red Army in the struggle against Nazi aggression. Should this idea meet with approval on the part of public opinion in the United States, and a positive response by the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, a campaign would be promptly initiated on behalf of the legion, coupled with direct steps toward its organization.

(4) To involve the Jewish population of the United States in participation (by way of fund-raising and the collection of various products) aimed at defraying the costs associated with aid to the Jewish refugees who fled the countries occupied by Hitler and now find themselves on the territory of the Soviet Union.

(5) To consider—together with the American comrades—other forms as well of active participation by American Jews in the struggle against Hitlerism, the heaviest burden of which rests today on the Soviet Union.

(6) To proceed, within the limits allowed by circumstances, with activity in England, activity analogous to that projected for the United States in the items listed above.

(7) In order to strengthen and develop this activity in the United States and England, it will be necessary in the very near future to send delegates to New York and London.

(Signed) Erlich, Alter

THE FINAL APPEAL OF HENRYK ERLICH AND VICTOR ALTER TO THE JEWISH MASSES IN POLAND

Greetings, brothers and sisters—the Jewish masses in Poland!

We know how frightful is the torment which you are enduring. Your human and national dignity is being trampled underfoot, and for you there is no justice, and no law exists to protect you. The fascist Asmodeus* has set himself the task of wiping you out through starvation, epidemics, and ruthless physical force.

But do not be disheartened, do not succumb to despair. You are the ones who, more than any others, are being put to the test; but you are not the only ones: over half of Europe is languishing today beneath the bloody Hitlerian boot.

Alongside you live the Polish masses. Hitler wishes to turn them into slaves, into fertilizer on the fields of Germany. Living in a state of subjugation and desolation are the masses in Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France, Yugoslavia, Greece, Rumania—and the masses of Germany proper and its allies. And in the course of several months, Hitler has revealed his bestiality on the vast stretches of Soviet soil.

It is a mad fantasy that he will succeed in enslaving the world. Hitler's armies have encountered heroic resistance on the plains of the Soviet Union. Germany's cities are being destroyed by British and American bombs. The stolen property is not sufficient to

This draft of an appeal by Erlich and Alter was to be sent in the name of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to the Jewish masses in Poland.

*In Jewish lore, the king of demons—Trans.

satisfy the German people. And the subjugated peoples have already risen up in struggle against the savage oppressor.

Do not be discouraged, do not lose heart. Join in the struggle of all the oppressed against the horror of Hitlerism. Erect an iron wall of pitiless hatred against the oppressor. Show by your attitude that you are worthy of living like free people, enjoying all human and national rights. Not by despondency and not by fasting and prayers will you win your freedom, but only by self-sacrificing, revolutionary deeds.

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee has the task of awakening the Jewish masses of the whole world and calling upon them to come to your assistance in this struggle. It appeals to them to exert all their energy and to participate by all possible means in the struggle against the enemy of mankind and the deadly foe of the Jewish people—Hitlerism.

Let everyone, wherever he may be, do whatever he can. Unite your forces with the forces of the Polish people, because only in common struggle with them for the freedom of the country will you also free yourselves.

And we—all of us together, united with the oppressed of other countries—shall prevail over the enemy and erect upon the ruins of his regime a new, a free, and a just world.

THE LETTER TO AMBASSADOR KOT

Immediately after Erlich and Alter regained their freedom in September, 1941, they addressed the following letter to the Polish ambassador:

Moscow, 24th September, 1941

Your Excellency,

When the prison gates closed behind us two years ago, we who had been involved in the Jewish public life of Poland were the representatives of the largest political current enjoying the confidence of the Jewish masses. We believe we have the right to speak in the name of those masses now that we have acquired the opportunity to return to active political and public life. Hence, we consider it our obligation at the present extraordinary historical

moment to impart to you—and through you to the Polish public as a whole—our position with respect to the two most crucial problems: the problems of war and peace.

To struggle against Hitler and Nazism, to struggle with every means, is the obligation of every person who despises barbarism and all that is vile and of every nation that loves freedom. As socialists and citizens of Poland, which has been so cruelly enslaved by Hitler, we take our place in the ranks of the fighters against the Nazi-beast. As sons of the Jewish people who are being especially violated and persecuted by Hitler, we consider it our particular duty to participate in the struggle for the defense of our human dignity by the greatest possible effort. Today, when a new Polish army is being formed on the soil of the Soviet Union in order to continue the struggle against Hitler, we turn to all Jews who are Polish citizens and capable of bearing arms, and who find themselves on the territory of the Soviet Union, with the clarion call: To arms!

Take your places in the ranks of the soldiers preparing once again to pay with their own blood for the right of Poland to enjoy a free life, and who wish—together with the armies of the United Nations—to free Poland and the whole world from the brown beast, from enslavement. And those among you unable to bear arms should spare no effort to facilitate the army's fulfillment of its tasks in order to bring the victory closer!

Participation in the present war for freedom is a duty and also a privilege which enhances our human dignity. In the name of the Jewish working masses and the Jewish intelligentsia, who have accorded us their confidence, we proclaim our readiness to fulfill that duty and demand that we be given the opportunity to make use of that right.

So much for the war. Inextricably linked to the problem of war is the question of peace, the question of a new Poland. We leave aside for the present the errors associated with overall Polish policies in the prewar period and also the wrongs committed with respect to the Jewish population of Poland. Today we wish merely to establish what we consider the indubitable consequences of the historical experiences of the preceding years.

(1) Poland will be able to exist without a constant threat of losing its freedom only in a free and democratic Europe.

(2) A free, democratic Europe can emerge, ensure its existence, and develop under conditions of peaceful work only when the countries of Europe, simultaneously with the military victory over Hitler, proceed with a decisive and radical social reconstruction that will extirpate nationalism, imperialism, and the danger of new wars, which are part of the very nature of the capitalist system.

(3) The new social organization of the European countries should correspond to a new political structure of Europe based, not upon antagonisms and mutual struggle among the individual nations, but on their mutuality of interests and the readiness for a common defense against a common danger.

(4) The new Poland must be an active member of the association of nations that will determine the fate of the future Europe in the spirit of political freedom, social justice, and national equality. This signifies, naturally, that these principles must be applied both in the internal life of Poland proper and in the relations with other countries and peoples.

(5) The attainment of all these goals depends upon the determination and creative energy of the working masses of city and village in Poland, on their ability to bring to pass the realization of their vision of a Poland that would be a true mother to all its inhabitants.

The Jewish masses of Poland whom we represent constitute an organic part of its working-class population and will spare no efforts in order to participate most fruitfully in the building of a new Poland aimed at the welfare of its population and the free spiritual development of its citizens.

Proceeding from these principles, we embark upon our activity on the soil of the Soviet Union. The main part of our work will consist of participation by us in the recruitment drive for the Polish military among the Jewish refugees, and also in the sphere of social welfare on behalf of the refugees. We desire to conduct our activity in close contact with the Polish embassy, and we hope there will be no obstacles whatsoever to a harmonious collaboration.

(Signed) H. Erlich, V. Alter

The International Campaign of Protest Against the Murders

THE NEWS OF THE MURDER of Erlich and Alter made a tremendous stir. It evoked profound sadness and vigorous protest on the part of millions of workers and ordinary, honest people wherever the grim news was heard.

The press throughout the United States and in a number of other Allied countries (aside from the Soviet Union), featured the news, as did the press in the few remaining neutral countries. This alone had the effect of thwarting Stalin's calculation that because of the war, the infamous crime would be passed over in silence.

With the exception of the Communist press, the whole labor press, as well as numerous radical and liberal newspapers and journals, sharply condemned both the physical murder that had been committed and the attempted moral murder of the two spotless anti-Fascist fighters.

We are not able to take note of all the voices of the press, of organizations, of meetings—hundreds and hundreds of resolutions expressing sorrow and protest that were adopted by political, trade union, and fraternal organizations all over the world. Of those voices which gave expression to pain and fury and remonstrance, we must perforce limit ourselves to the presentation of just a few examples.

IN THE NAME OF THE JEWISH UNDERGROUND LABOR MOVEMENT IN POLAND

At a moment when the tormented Jewish population of Nazi-ruled Europe is bleeding to death, when thousands of our brothers and

Statement issued in New York, March, 1943, by the American Representation of

sisters, among them the noblest and bravest sons of our people, are being butchered daily—at this moment of Hitler's most horrible atrocities against the Jews, official Soviet representatives in America have made public the news that Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, the two main leaders of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland (the Jewish Labor Bund) and the intellectual inspirers of the Jewish underground struggle against the Nazis, have been executed in a Soviet prison.

The part played by these two men in the Jewish, Polish, and international labor movements; the horrible deed perpetrated upon them; the shameful libel fabricated against them; their honor and the honor of the Jewish masses, to whom Erlich and Alter have been and will remain paragons—all this moves us, the closest friends and comrades-in-arms of these murdered men, to make the following declaration to the public:

Henryk Erlich was executed in his sixty-first year, Victor Alter in his fifty-second. From their earliest youth, both stood in the front ranks of the Jewish and international labor movement, first in the days of the Tsar, and later, after the First World War, in independent Poland.

Ever since 1919 they were the recognized political and intellectual leaders of the Jewish labor movement and, through it, of the broad Jewish masses of Poland. By word of mouth and with pen; in thousands of articles in the daily and periodical labor press; in books and pamphlets in the Yiddish, Polish, French, and English languages; at countless Jewish and Polish meetings, conferences and congresses; from the platform of the Warsaw Municipal Council; at international Socialist and Labor congresses, conferences, and executive committee sessions—indefatigably and unflinchingly, they roused and fostered the belief in a new world, a world of freedom, democracy, and socialism

Unforgettable is their role in the battle waged in Poland against fascism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism. Indescribable is the love and

the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland (Bund) and the Foreign Delegation of the Bund youth organization, Tsukunft. This is the statement as it appeared in the English-language pamphlet, *The Case of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter* (New York [April?] 1943), pp. 27–30.—Trans.

respect, the esteem and confidence, in which they were held by the Jewish masses and intelligentsia not only in Poland, but far beyond its borders, and here in America too. . . .

Erlich and Alter always stood in the very thick of the fight against Polish reaction, and were intimately associated with everything in Polish and international life that was animated by the struggle for freedom and by the struggle against every form of violence, brutality, and oppression.

It was from *their* pen, at the outbreak of the present war on September 1, 1939, that there came the flaming call of the Central Committee of the General Jewish Workers' Union (Bund) of Poland to the Jewish masses to spare no energy or sacrifice and to throw themselves heart and soul into the sacred war for the destruction and annihilation of Hitlerism and fascism. The important part played by the Jewish working people of Warsaw in the immortal defense of that beleaguered city was in large measure the fruit of their militant spirit, the seed they had planted in the hearts of the Jewish masses.

At the beginning of October 1939, they were arrested in the Eastern part of Poland immediately after the occupation of that region by the Soviets. For two years the Soviet Government kept them in prison. No outside influence could be brought to bear that would induce the Soviet authorities to conduct a public proceeding or grant a modicum of due process. Initially, they were both condemned to death. Subsequently—war between Russia and Germany having already begun—they were granted "clemency" in the form of ten years imprisonment. The death sentence was based on the preposterous and utterly fantastic charge that they had "collaborated with the Polish Intelligence Service." It was thanks only to the Polish-Russian Pact that Erlich and Alter were released from the Soviet prison in September 1941. . . .

Immediately after leaving the Soviet prison, Erlich and Alter sent a cable from Moscow to New York in which they declared: "We are continuing the common struggle against Fascism and for Socialism!"

In line with this, they—as Polish nationals—through the instrumentality of the Polish Embassy in Moscow—issued a call to the Jewish refugees of Polish citizenship located in Soviet Russia, to

join the Polish army then being formed on Soviet soil with the consent of the Soviet Government. They called them “to arms”—to armed participation in the struggle of the United Nations for freedom—“*for the deliverance of Poland and the entire world from the specter of brown slavery.*”

They were free for a few weeks only. . . .

Now we learn from official Soviet sources in America that they were sentenced to death and executed in December, 1941. Secretly, under mysterious circumstances, without the semblance of a public trial, and on the absurd and shameful charge that they had “urged Soviet soliders to stop the bloodshed and make immediate peace with Germany.” . . .

We declare:

The attempt to represent Erlich and Alter as Nazi agents is a shameful and contemptible libel. Those who fabricated them are incapable of casting any aspersions upon the spotless characters of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, upon their absolute devotion to the ideals of liberty, progress, and humanity, upon their bright and sacred memory. Not upon the two martyrs, but upon those who murdered them, will the stain of the perpetrated crime rest forever.

. . .

We affirm:

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were not Communists. They fought for a social order that would combine Socialism with freedom, with democracy, with respect for the human person. Without blinking at the negative sides of Soviet realities, they nevertheless recognized the positive elements of the Soviet’s constructive work and oriented themselves to the cooperation of the Soviet Union with the universal forces of democracy, progress, and Socialism. In their attitude toward the Soviet Union they accordingly took a stand which coincides with the views of tens of millions—democrats, liberals, Socialists—in America and in Great Britain, a stand which also has the full approval of the fighting underground workers of Poland and throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.

Erlich and Alter, both members of the Executive of the Labor and Socialist International, are *the first non-Russian and non-Communist labor leaders* the Soviet Government has permitted

itself to arrest, try, and put to death merely, as a matter of fact, because they were freedom-loving Socialists, Socialists with a name and influence in the international labor movement. The old Communist hatred of the free, independent, and above all, Socialist labor movement, descended in all its fury upon their heads. Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter perished in a Soviet prison as martyrs to the sacred, libertarian, Socialist ideals in which millions believe and which the Soviet regime cannot tolerate.

The murder of Erlich and Alter is *the first case of its kind since the outbreak of the war*. This proves anew the terrible consequences resulting from a reign of terror and despotism and reveals plainly the great perils it holds for the new order that will have to be reared on the ruins of fascism and Nazism. . . .

We declare:

The murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter is a desecration of the high aims and ideals for which tens of millions of people—members of the United Nations family—are shedding their blood.

For this we hold responsible and condemn not the Soviet people, but those who rule in its name. They are to blame for widening the tragic gulf between the world of Socialism and Communism.

We will never forget their bloody deed!

The anniversary of their crime will remain a day sacred to the memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter as long as there shall exist a Jewish working class and a Socialist labor movement.

IN THE NAME OF THE POLISH UNDERGROUND LABOR MOVEMENT

The delegation of the Polish Socialist Party (PSP), which represents the underground Polish labor movement, adopted the following resolution in London:

The members of the Polish Socialist Party, now in Great Britain owing to wartime conditions, render homage to the memory of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich. The news of their execution has

Statement issued on March 5, 1943, by the Foreign Committee of the Polish Socialist Party. Published in the English-language pamphlet, *The Case of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter* (New York [April?] 1943), pp. 30–31.

moved us deeply. It was more than personal friendship that formed a strong link between us and them.

They were comrades in arms in our daily struggle for Freedom, Democracy, Workers' Rights and Socialism in the Polish Republic. As leaders of the Jewish labor movement, they regarded it as their first duty to fight for a better life of the Jewish masses in the Polish Republic, yet they did not forget their duty of real and sincere solidarity with the Polish worker and peasant masses and their movement.

Thanks to their work and under their leadership, the solidarity of all the working people of Poland grew and developed into a living body without distinction of origin, religion or nationality. That solidarity was the best and supreme expression of Polish national patriotism. It was embodied in the persons of Alter and Erlich. . . .

. . . Even a long imprisonment in the U.S.S.R. could not break their spirit. Having regained their freedom in September, 1941, they appealed to the Jews, Polish citizens on the territory of the U.S.S.R., to take part in the armed struggle against the German invader. They magnanimously forgot their sufferings and wrongs; they concentrated all their efforts toward one end: Victory over Germany and her satellites.

We condemn the abuse heaped by the murderers upon the victims. We repudiate all calumnies no matter whence they come. We have known these two comrades. They have been in the same ranks with us for years, they shared with us for decades our sufferings and our sorrows. No one dare desecrate the graves of these two fighters for Freedom, Socialism, and the Independence of Poland. The mud that is being thrown at them by some people will never reach them.

The Polish working masses will forever retain in grateful memory the names of Comrades Alter and Erlich, along with other innumerable victims of the struggle against the invader. . . .

DECLARATION OF THE BRITISH LABOR PARTY AND OTHER WORKERS' PARTIES IN EMIGRATION IN LONDON

The undersigned representative Socialists from Allied countries warmly associate themselves with the tribute to the life and work

of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich expressed in the resolution of their Polish comrades:

Louis de Brouckère; Camille Huysmans: (Belgian Labor Party)

A. J. Dobbs; Lincoln Evans; William Gillies; J. S. Middleton; Eleanor Stewart; Mary E. Sutherland; James Walter, M.P.: (British Labor Party)

Josef Belina: (Czechoslovak Social Democratic Labor Party)

Louis Lévy: (French Socialist Party)

Alf Severin: (Norwegian Labor Party)

Berl Locker: (Palestine: Jewish Labor Party)

London, March 12, 1943

DECLARATION OF THE AUSTRIAN LABOR COMMITTEE— NEW YORK

Friedrich Adler, long-time secretary of the labor and Socialist International, sent the following letter in the name of the Austrian Labor Committee, which represents the socialist emigrants who were active in the Social Democratic and trade union movement in Austria:

To the American representation of the Bund in Poland:

Over the course of many years, the comrades making up the executive of the Austrian Labor Committee came to know Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter personally. They recall their presentations, as leaders of the delegation of the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland, at the congress of the Labor and Socialist International in 1931, and they also cannot forget the solidarity with the Austrian workers displayed by Comrade Erlich when, as one of the first foreign Socialists, he came to them in 1934 after the bloody February days in Vienna.

Comrades Erlich and Alter had always been part of the wing in the Labor and Socialist International that was furthest left. They were ideologically very close to Austrian Social Democracy. Not many words are needed, therefore, in order to understand our

Originally published in *The Case of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter*, pp. 205–206.

most profound conviction that in Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, today as in the past, we see illustrious fighters for Socialism, loyal comrades always prepared to do battle for their convictions.

This is why the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter is for us doubly shocking. We lose in them not only tested comrades-in-arms and personal friends. Their unexpected deaths at this moment have made us conscious—with a dreadful cruelty—of the tragedy being experienced by the international labor movement ever since the outbreak of the First World War. Victims of this ignominious judicial murder are not only two leaders of the Bund, but the Soviet Union as such, and with it the working class of all Europe.

We understand the infinite grief which the comrades of the Bund are experiencing. We share those feelings. We hope, however, that the comrades of the Bund, who have lived through so much in the past months, will not let themselves become disheartened by this latest and most severe blow. We hope they will continue to devote themselves to the great tasks which the future will set for us—tasks which, in the end, can be fulfilled only by the cooperation of the whole European working class. This was the idea for which Erlich and Alter fought so tirelessly.

Permit us at this tragic moment to express to you our feeling by way of our Austrian party greeting: *Freundschaft!* [*Friendship!*]

PROTEST MEETING AND DECLARATION OF THE TRADE UNIONS IN NEW YORK

A series of impressive protest and memorial meetings took place in the United States and Great Britain. Representatives of millions of organized workers constituted the packed audiences at meetings in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Boston, Montreal and Toronto, as well as London and other cities in the British Isles.

In New York, the large meeting at Mecca Temple on March 30, organized by the Labor Conference of 250—leaders and activists of A.F. of L. and C.I.O. unions under the chairmanship of David Dubinsky—heard speeches by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, United States Senator James Mead, William Green, James B. Carey,

David Dubinsky, Abraham Cahan, Shloyme Mendelson, Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, Adolf Held, and J. B. Salutsky-Hardman.*

The Mecca Temple meeting closed with the unanimous adoption of the following resolution:

We, 3,500 delegates and members of labor unions and fraternal organizations in Greater New York, representing half a million members, assembled at Mecca Temple, March 30, 1943, express our indignation and protest against the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, internationally known labor union leaders of Poland, ordered by a military court in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

We scornfully reject the charges, presented to the court and accepted by it as justification of the verdict, that Erlich and Alter were actively or otherwise engaged in Nazi service; or that they sympathized in any way or manner with Nazi aims or anything that Nazism stands for; or that Erlich and Alter were less than wholeheartedly devoted to the war effort of the United Nations, including the USSR, in the present war to the finish on the Axis powers.

*The meeting was the climax of growing public interest and press publicity. The *New York Times* carried a front-page story on March 30 headed: "Mayor to Join Protest Tonight Against Two Executions in Russia." The following day another front-page story in the *Times* was captioned: "Mayor Denounces Red Executions, Joining Labor in Protest Rally." The Mecca Temple meeting was the lead item in the New York column of the *Times'* "News Index."

How the Communists and their fellow travelers both outside and particularly within the labor movement systematically worked to frustrate Dubinsky's effort to organize an impressive protest meeting at Mecca Temple is described by Dubinsky in David Dubinsky and A. H. Raskin, *David Dubinsky: A Life With Labor* (New York, 1977) pp. 249-251, 273: "When Wendell Willkie went to Russia in 1942, we asked him to make a personal plea to Stalin to save Erlich and Alter. On his return, he told us that Stalin had assured him that they were both all right and that his people would look into the case. Green followed up by asking Soviet Ambassador Maxim Litvinov in Washington to find out what happened. Then we learned that they had actually been executed a full year before, that there was no truth to any of the things Stalin told Willkie. . . .

"War or no war, I decided that we had to hold a memorial meeting in New York, to protest this outrage. It was not a popular undertaking. The Russian people were fighting for their lives and for our lives, too. I was wholeheartedly with them in that fight. But the principles underlying the fight, the things that differentiated us from the tyrants, had to be kept clear."

Thousands of us knew these two leaders of labor in Poland personally and well, and all of us have watched their record, over many years, as determined fighters against Hitlerism, fascism and every form of tyranny, oppression and brutalitarianism. Out of this, our knowledge and firm conviction of the innocence of the two men, indeed, of their proven loyalty to all aims which we hold dear, we reject the validity of the reason for the murder verdict. We entertain no shadow of suspicion or doubt about the innocence of the executed men of labor.

We mourn the loss of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, as a grave loss to the cause of labor, democracy and humanity.

Lest our protest be misunderstood or be wilfully misrepresented, either by enemies of American democracy or by Nazi agents seeking to confuse the public mind and to divide the allied nations, we solemnly declare here that despite the grievous injustice perpetrated by the Soviet Court on the two servants and leaders of labor, we are as ever, loyal and devoted to the declared and clear aims of our country's alliance with the Soviet Union, and all the United Nations, as expressed in the Atlantic Charter and given living meaning by President Roosevelt.

Nothing can or will swerve us from doing our utmost to secure, by common effort, total victory in this war and lasting international peace in the wake of the war.

Our keen reaction to this tragic occurrence does not deter us from placing our all—honor, labor, life itself—at the service of the United Nations against the Axis powers. Neither can or will the terrible judgment and execution of our two friends and comrades-in-arms at the hands of the Soviet courts diminish our admiration for the heroic, indeed superhuman achievements of the Russian people and their armed forces in this titanic struggle against Nazism and aggression and for freedom.

Free citizens of a great democratic nation, we consider it not only our privilege but duty as well to voice our protest against a great wrong committed by an ally, even as we together, and at one with our allies, fight to the crowning end, for a common and decisive victory.*

*From ILGWU archives at the Labor-Management Documentation Center, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University—Trans.

THE TRADE UNION INTERNATIONAL ON THE MURDER OF ERLICH AND ALTER

On the first page of a report for the year 1943 that was issued in London, a list was published of deceased and executed leaders of labor. The list included the names of Victor Alter, a member of the General Council of the Trade Union International, and of Henryk Erlich.

The depiction of their fate in Soviet Russia was followed by these words: "The Executive Committee of the Trade Union International, which was familiar with the political record and moral character of Victor Alter and his comrade, Henryk Erlich, during the whole of their lives, considers it *impossible* that the two Polish workers' leaders could have betrayed the cause of labor, of humanity, and of freedom."

Walter Citrine, chairman of the Trade Union International, declared at a session of its council:

"Whoever knew Alter and Erlich cannot believe that the charges against them are just. We believe that their execution constituted an injustice. The Executive Committee of the Trade Union International considers it necessary to issue its statement as part of the official report. The words have been selected with caution in order to evoke the least bad feeling among the nations associated in the common war effort."

A large international protest meeting took place in London on March 28. The chairman of the meeting was George Dallas, leader of the British Labor Party. The prominent socialist leaders Camille Huysmans and Louis de Brouckère voiced the protest of the international labor and Socialist movement against the killing of Erlich and Alter. Adam Ciolkosz ("Adamchik") and Shmuel Zigelboym ("Artur") spoke in the name of the Polish and Jewish workers.

PROTEST DECLARATION BY REPRESENTATIVES OF YIDDISH LITERATURE AND JOURNALISM

The following declaration of protest was issued jointly by representatives of Yiddish literature; by writers of the three Yiddish daily

newspapers: the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the *Day*, the *Morning Journal*; and by writers for a number of periodicals in New York:

“We, the undersigned, were appalled by the news that the Soviet government has carried out a death sentence against the two renowned and exemplary Jewish socialist fighters and working-class leaders, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Many of us knew these two individuals well personally, but *all of us* know of their extraordinary devotion to the cause of labor and their unyielding struggle against fascism and Hitlerism.

We indignantly reject the accusation that Erlich and Alter conducted propaganda in support of a separate peace with the Hitlerite enemy. Both before and during the present war they stood in the front ranks of the resolute, the dedicated fighters against Nazism. They did so both as socialists and as Jews.

Over the course of long years, indeed up to the very outbreak of the Second World War, Erlich and Alter were prominent Yiddish political writers whose words roused the Jewish masses and summoned them to battle for their rights. By their pen they educated tens of thousands in waging the unremitting struggle against fascism and reaction.

During the brief interval between their first and second arrests, Erlich and Alter managed to issue an appeal to the Jewish refugees from Poland to enter the Polish army en masse in order—along with the Red Army—to fight the main enemy of mankind. They were actively involved in organizing a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. They reported to the American Jewish public via telegraph that they were prepared to continue waging the struggle against fascism and for Socialism.

We protest most vigorously the besmirching of the names of such noble Jewish working-class leaders who, for large numbers of Jewish workers, served for decades as models of idealism.

It is precisely because we are filled with admiration for the heroic Red Army that our anguish and wrath are so great over the fact that the innocent blood of such anti-fascist fighters as Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter—in a country that stands at present together with the whole democratic world in war against Hitler—has been shed in such senseless and horrible fashion.

We bow our heads in honor of these martyrs.’’

(Signed)

Jacob Abramovitch, Raphael Abramovitch, Jacob Adler (B. Kovner), Ephraim Auerbach, David Einhorn, A. Almi, Joseph Opatoshu, M. Osherowitch, B. and R. Botwinick, Lazar Borodulin, Menahem Boreisha, B. J. Bialostotzky, Dr. Shlomo Bickel, Khone Gottesfeld, Dr. Hirsh Leyb Gordon, Jacob Glatstein, A. Glanz-Leyeless, Shlomo Grodzensky, Naftoli Gross, Dr. Hayim Greenberg, Mordechai Dantsis, Benjamin Demblin, Isaac Horowitz, Kh. H. Hurwitz, B. Weinstein, Dr. Max Weinreich, M. Winograd, Simon Weber, N. Zalowitz, Sh. Ts. Zetser, J. Chaikin, A. Tabachnik, Joseph Tunkel, Daniel Charney, E. Tcherikover, Isaiah Trunk, Charles Joffe, Mark Khinoy, Melekh Chmelnitsky, Dr. Tsvi Kahan, Harry Lang, Z. Libin, A. Lirik, David Lieberman, Mani Leib, H. Leivick, N. B. Linder, Leibush Lehrer, I. Levin-Shatzkes, Jacob Leshchinsky, Joseph Margoshes, Dr. Samuel Margoshes, Dr. A. Mukdoni, Ben-Zion Maimon, N. B. Minkoff, M. Melamed, Abraham Menes, Moyshe Nadir, Shmuel Niger, Melech Epstein, William Post, David Pinsky, Dr. Lazar Fogelman, J. Fogel, J. Foshko, L. Feinberg, L. Finkelstein, Jacob Fishman, B. Tsvion, Abraham Cahan, N. Kantorovitch, M. Kosover, Don Kaplan, Joseph F. Katz, M. Kaufman (K. Mikhal), I. Kissin, L. Kessner, Jacob Krepliak, Hillel Rogoff, Hersh Rosenfeld, Sh. Rosenfeld, Tsvi-Hirsh Rubinstein, Benjamin Ressler, Dr. Jacob Shatzky, David Shub, Mark Schweid, Zachary Shuster, Moshe Shtarkman, Zalman Shneour, Baruch Shefner, Z. Sher, L. Shpizman.

DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

The National Executive has received, with profound sadness and pain, word of the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Two individuals have been cut down in their prime, individuals who devoted the whole of their lives to the struggle for socialism, and the last ten years to the struggle against fascism in all its forms.

The National Executive Committee of the Workmen's Circle

simultaneously expressed its deep protest against those responsible for the horrible murders.

Alter and Erlich had visited the United States several times and were guests of our organization. They visited our branches across the country, during which they entered into close contact with our membership. The speeches they delivered to our broad membership in denunciation of fascism and dictatorship are still fresh in our memories. They called upon our membership to fight for freedom, for democracy, for true justice. Knowing well the two martyrs Erlich and Alter, being intimately familiar with their lifelong activities, we hurl back the wild and loathesome concoction which the Soviet government seeks to attach to the records and the names of the two martyrs who fought with such sincerity and honesty for all that is beautiful, for all that is human and just in life.

The National Executive Committee of the Workmen's Circle obligates itself to do everything possible not to permit the names of the two sacred martyrs to be sullied by the Soviet government. And we obligate ourselves to do everything humanly possible to hallow and immortalize the names of the two martyrs.

The National Executive of the Workmen's Circle calls upon all branches of the labor movement and all sincere liberal elements throughout the country to have recourse to fervent protest against the gruesome act of murder committed by the Soviet government against these two innocent human beings.

DECLARATION OF THE JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

The American Jewish Labor Committee has received the terrible news about the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter on orders of the Soviet Supreme Court with deepest shock. We regard the announcement of the Soviet government that the two renowned fighters, sterling personalities, had been agents of the Polish secret police and worked in Soviet Russia among the men of the Red Army in favor of a separate peace with Hitler, as a horrendous calumny—a desecration of the martyrs after their deaths.

The Jewish labor movement in the United States knew the victims well over the course of many years. On several visits to

our country as guests of our labor movement, Erlich and Alter appealed for help in the struggle against fascism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism in Europe. Respected and loved among tens of thousands of American citizens, they were on terms of warmest friendship with the leaders of labor in our land.

We of the Jewish Labor Committee know well the record of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Many of us were their closest friends. Many of us were their pupils in the process of mastering the teachings of the freedom struggle, of the struggle for justice and democracy. Not a few of us had occasion to visit Poland in recent years, where we were able to observe those two lustrous personalities at work and witness the general respect and love that enveloped them.

Their noble lives were to us an open book: they lived for the people whom they served honestly and with fidelity. We reject in the most categorical manner the absurd and utterly fantastic charges that Erlich and Alter were agents of the Polish secret police and worked for a separate peace with Hitler. No one will succeed in casting a blot upon their absolute devotion to the ideals of freedom, progress, and humanity.

We regard the execution of Erlich and Alter as a double murder—a physical and a moral one. The statement that the two victims worked for a separate peace with Hitler we consider a challenge not only to the Jewish workers' movement in Poland, to those who are now laying down their lives on Polish fields and in Polish cities, but a challenge also to all of us who have shared with them common ideals of freedom over many years.

The Jewish Labor Committee of the United States which has done, and which during this World War continues to do, everything humanly possible in the fight against our Nazi and Japanese foes, takes into account with the most profound regret the damage done to our general struggle for freedom and justice by the dual murder of Erlich and Alter.

In voicing our protest over their execution and our sadness over their deaths, we declare: While we carry the shining memory of the victims in our hearts, we shall continue to make the greatest sacrifices in the struggle being waged by our land, together with the United Nations, for freedom and justice, and against violence and dictatorship.

Voices of Protest from the World Press

IN ALL COUNTRIES with a free press and independent public opinion, the newspapers carried reports about the murder of Erlich and Alter, and sharply condemned the crime. The labor press in England, Switzerland, Sweden, countries of Latin America, and other regions reacted forcefully.

Some excerpts follow from the hundreds of American publications that assailed the murders and defended the victims against the shameless calumny.

FROM THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS IN THE UNITED STATES

New Republic (*editorial*)—*March 15, 1943*

The Erlich-Alter Executions

If Henrich Erlich and Victor Alter had been born Frenchmen, their names might have been Léon Blum and Léon Jouhaux. It is only because they were Poles that they were not so well known in Western Europe and America. . . .

[In 1939] they fled before the invading Nazi hordes, and were arrested by the advancing Russians. . . . Now . . . Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Ambassador in Washington, has written to President Green of the AFL, they were executed in December, 1941, for "subversive activity and espionage." . . .

Those who could believe Léon Blum and Léon Jouhaux guilty

of similar charges will feel that Erlich and Alter were guilty as charged. Those who would brand any such accusation a monstrous falsehood if made of Blum or Jouhaux must also reject the possibility that Erlich and Alter can have been guilty. . . .

Liberals must know where they stand. . . . In forming their opinion of the . . . Soviet regime, they must take deep cognizance of facts like the execution of Henrich Erlich and Victor Alter.

The Nation (editorial)—March 13, 1943

An irritant to good relations with the Soviet Union is the execution of the Polish labor leaders—Erlich and Alter. The record of these men provides the strongest possible refutation of the charges of anti-war activity on which they were condemned by a Soviet court martial. They were not Socialists of a pacifist stripe. On the contrary, they helped organize the valiant resistance to the Nazis of the workers of Warsaw, and kept up the struggle long after the Polish government had fled. And in reactionary circles, where the fate of two labor men would ordinarily be a matter of vast unconcern, the executions are being used as another instrument against the unity of Russia and the West. For this the chief responsibility lies with the Soviet government. The execution of Erlich and Alter was not only bad justice; it was also bad propaganda.

New York Post (editorial)—March 31, 1943

The Erlich-Alter Case

Soviet Russia needs to be constantly on warning that her political murders are no more excusable by democrats than those of our avowed Fascist foes. If this outrage dampens the enthusiasm of Americans for closer alliance with the Soviet Union, it may be unfortunate in a military sense.

But the greatest misfortune would be to condone by our alliance such acts of treason against the common man.

American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service
 (Washington, D.C.)—March 9, 1943

“Facing the Facts” with Philip Pearl

And it is our duty to judge not the victims but the kind of Government, the kind of justice, that could condemn them. . . .

But we cannot forget. We cannot acquiesce to murder without becoming accessories.

To us it seems unmistakable that Erlich and Alter were executed not for collaborating with Hitler but because their political and trade-union beliefs made it impossible for them to stomach Stalinism, which once operated in partnership with Hitlerism.

The Call (*weekly publication of the Socialist Party*)—March 12, 1943

. . . Russia’s plans for Eastern Europe—unifying it under a Stalinist dictatorship—make it a matter of absolute necessity to win the workers and peasants of that area to an acceptance of Stalinism as their political expression. It will be easy to wean the masses away from the bourgeois democrats and the neo-fascists after the hard lessons of the past few years. *But the most dangerous obstacle, and potentially the strongest force, blocking the establishment of Stalin’s hegemony over eastern Europe is militant democratic Socialism. . . .*

The Jewish Socialist Bund is the living proof that the workers do not have to choose between reformist Socialism and Stalinism. The Bund translated traditional Socialism into a militant and practical program of action. . . .

To Stalin, [the Bund] is a dangerous tendency because it combines militancy with the democratic Socialist attitude. . . . This must have figured in the carefully thought-out plans of Stalin and his lieutenants.

The personification of militant Socialism, both to the Jewish workers in Poland and to the Socialist workers throughout the world, were Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. How logical, once

they were in Stalin's hands, for the GPU to arrange their "liquidation."

Free World (journal of international affairs)—May 1943

Norman Angell, "Progress of the Struggle"

That execution has shocked liberal opinion of all shades (outside the Communist Party of course) both here and in Great Britain. It is altogether wholesome that expression should be given to the feeling of moral indignation. And a wholesome reminder that Sacco-Vanzetti cases are not the pure product of capitalism, that the inauguration of a socialist society does not automatically ensure political freedom and the respect of elementary right.

By the execution of Erlich and Alter, Russia has shown that it has not changed its dictatorship spots. We do not hesitate to criticize England for its treatment of India; we do not hesitate to condemn undemocratic tendencies of our own government. We should not therefore remain silent when Russia commits such an outrage as to kill two non-Communist labor leaders who had lived lives of brave and unselfish service to freedom and labor.

The American Communist press and their stooges within the labor movement are doing their best to drown out protests against the Erlich and Alter executions by libelling the records of these two men. They should not be allowed to succeed. Philip Murray knew that these men were honorable labor leaders who deserved defense. We should do at least as much as Phil Murray. We should remember these executions as proof of the fact that although Russia is our military ally, Communism and the Communists have not changed one bit.

United Automobile Worker—April 1, 1943

Soviet Executes Polish Laborites Despite Pleas Made by U.S. Labor

. . . Despite the resentment felt in U.S. labor circles over the executions, no section of labor is even suggesting that the case should be used to slacken American support, industrially and

militarily, of the struggle being carried out by the Russian army. The military success of Russia in the war will be a deciding factor in the war of the United Nations against Nazism; all support through lend-lease and military operations, must be given.

The execution of Erlich and Alter, however, is another illustration of the fact that effectuation of the Four Freedoms, in England and the United States, as well as Soviet Russia, cannot be taken for granted merely through lip-service of the governments involved. The labor movements must fight that battle too.

338 News (*organ of Local 338, Food Employees Union, New York*)—April 1943

“The Murder of Erlich and Alter” by Ephraim Schwartzman

Erlich and Alter were martyrs in the truest sense of the word. They are two additional sacrifices on the altar of the world struggle of the workers to create a better world. Their names will be remembered as long as workers fight for freedom, fraternity and human decency. The attempt by the OGPU to besmirch the names of these labor leaders as fascist agents will make as little difference to mankind as the attempts that have been made to besmirch other martyrs.

The New Leader, March 6, 1943

Jonathan Stout, “Capital Comment”—Washington, D.C.

. . . And the eyes of American diplomats and foreign envoys, from Eastern Europe particularly, say more eloquently than words that the Russian “Sacco-Vanzetti Case” will be forgotten or forgiven no more than the American Sacco-Vanzetti case has been. . . .

The Militant (*organ of the Socialist Workers party*)—March 20, 1943

The Murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter by Albert Goldman

Erlich and Alter were not ordinary people. They were articulate leaders and well-known in the labor movement. They had received

world-wide publicity. They knew the Russian language. They undoubtedly had met many a revolutionist in prison. They had learnt much and to release them and permit them to go out of the country would mean to free two people who could speak and write with great authority on the situation in the Soviet Union. Stalin simply could not permit these people to get out of the Soviet Union and reveal the secrets of his prisons and prisoners.

The Advance (organ of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America)—March 15, 1943

Column by J. B. S. Hardman

From the viewpoint of Soviet policy and the building of good will, the execution of Erlich and Alter was stupid, which, in politics, is even worse than criminal. Certainly such disregard of public opinion in an allied country does not rhyme with sensible international relations policy. The only possible explanation of this action by the Soviet regime is that it permitted partisan—Communist party—motivation to affect state action. Hatred for party opponents guided the verdict of the court. Soviet policy was subordinated to Communist phobia.

Jewish Frontier (organ of the Poale Zion)—March 1943

Article by Leon Dennen

It is therefore the obligation of all familiar with the histories of those two men to declare as strongly as possible that they were valiant fighters for socialism and for democracy all their lives. This affirmation of fact is due the memories of men who, as socialists and firm believers in democracy, may have been political opponents of the Bolshevik party, but whose political integrity was beyond question.

Congress Weekly (published by the American Jewish Congress)—March 19, 1943

Execution of Ehrlich and Alter (editorial)

Public indignation over the execution in Soviet Russia of the leaders of the Jewish Bund in Poland, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor

Alter, is fully justified. To accuse these famous Socialist leaders of "fascism" and "loyalty to the Germans" is a cynical slander, adding gross insult to irreparable injury. [We] fully [sympathize] with the representatives of the Polish Jewish Bund in this country in the loss they have sustained. . . .

The execution of Ehrlich and Alter is a criminal act and is part of the Communist war upon the Socialists of other denominations. Bolshevist hatred of the Jewish Bund goes back to the first decade of the century when Lenin wrote vitriolic attacks upon this "bourgeois" Jewish party. . . .

Peter Garvi, in the Sotsialisticheski Vyestnik, organ of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Menshevik)

. . . This great people, overcoming the invasion by the enemies of freedom, will not wish to remain forever in the death-grip of dictatorship. It cannot be that the blood of millions of Red Army men and partisans, with which is mixed the blood of our two comrades—the patriots of freedom, democracy, and socialism—shall have been shed in vain.

From the statement of the Russian Social Democratic group (left-wing Mensheviks), Novy Put'

This nightmarish crime—the execution of Erlich and Alter—is a savage blow to the cause of uniting the working class and the laboring masses of all countries in the struggle for the military and political defeat of German and world fascism and ending the war with the socialist liberation of humanity and consequently for the vital interests of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union.

THE SOCIALIST PRESS ABROAD

Arbetet (Swedish labor paper)—March 6, 1943

Members of the Bund have been executed, members of a Jewish organization, children of a people which is being horribly persecuted by the Germans. Russia has responded to the martyrdom of

the Jews with the volley of an execution squad. This was how honorable people, who had sought refuge in Russia from the merciless enemy, died. Russia's attitude remains a mystery because its comradeship-in-arms with the Western democracies has not altered the principle being practiced in the Soviet Union of liquidating socialists by means of executions.

News Comment (organ of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation [CCF]) reprinted in New Leader—March 27, 1943

. . . This execution of socialist leaders and the subsequent attempts to besmirch their names and character is a great disappointment to socialists and democratic peoples everywhere. It shows that in spite of the war, the Stalin dictatorship in Soviet Russia has not let up.

La Vanguardia (organ of the Socialist Party of Argentina)—Buenos Aires, March 14, 1943

. . . In the course of his whole life as a fighter for the moral and material elevation of the working class, [Henryk Erlich] never betrayed his integral conception of freedom which cannot exist without regard for the human personality. This concept always represented the point of departure of the ideological tradition of Erlich and Alter. This, indeed, is what the interpreters of communism, who settled old accounts by this murder, could not understand.

El Sol (organ of the Socialist Party of Uruguay)—Montevideo, March 5, 1943

. . . A senseless act of revenge by the Communist party against individuals who lived and fought for freedom, against individuals who never renounced their personal beliefs. Workers the world over shall never forget the outrages, which serve to stain only those who commit them, while the memory of their victims is elevated for all time.

FROM THE YIDDISH PRESS IN THE UNITED STATES

Tsvion in the Jewish Daily Forward—March 3, 1943

If the communist murderers in Russia were not such cowards, and had not sunk so outrageously low, they would openly have said that they killed Erlich and Alter because they waged a struggle in Poland against communism.

That would have been brutal. That would have called forth a general denunciatory protest against the murderers. But the murderers themselves could have said that they had the courage to affirm the whole truth, and had done what their need for revenge dictated. But they did not have the courage to state the truth. They feared an outburst of condemnation against such open, cynical brutality.

Within every murderer there lies concealed a coward. Far worse than the communist murder is the enormously outrageous effort of the killers to blacken the names of their victims with a shameless calumny.

Jacob Glatstein in the Morning Journal—March 1943

It is an idiotic accusation that will compel many Soviet yes-men to revise their position on the Moscow Trials.

. . . If Henryk Erlich, my Lublin landsman, was also something of a Nazi, then the accusation rubs off on me. And under no circumstances can I believe that, if I were to find myself stranded in Soviet Russia, I would not have become involved in pro-Nazi activity and in weakening the courage of the Red Army. On the contrary, I would chase after the Red Army and ask to be honored with a rifle. . . .

And Erlich and Alter also would most likely have considered themselves fortunate had they been honored with self-sacrificing activity against the Nazi beasts.

But their socialist past had already produced a death sentence for them. It was only a matter of time: they were dead men as soon as they fell into the hands of the Soviet regime.

Abraham Menes in the Wecker—May 1943

Two Jewish socialists, two remarkable fighters for justice, two crystal-pure personalities, were killed in a most despicable fashion. They fled from Hitler and sought protection in the land of so-called socialist justice. There they were arrested, subjected to a ritual-murder type trial, and killed. But for the murderers that was not enough. Now, following their martyrs' death, the most venomous and despicable campaign against the sacred name of these martyrs is being conducted, especially on the part of the Jewish communists and their fellow travelers. . . .

Yet we can affirm with satisfaction that the democratic Jewish and non-Jewish world has reacted properly to the crime that was committed against the Jewish socialist leaders, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. The protest action that has been undertaken in connection with the Erlich-Alter murders provides us with the moral strength to wage the struggle against the bloody Hitler regime even more energetically.

The campaign to besmirch the sacred memory of Erlich and Alter has failed completely. What remains besmirched is only the name of all those who have participated in this campaign. The truly impartial court of the democratic world and of history has rendered its verdict: not the sacred victims, but their murderers are guilty, along with all those who were witness to the innocent blood that was shed and remained silent!

Shlomo Grodzensky in the Yidisher Kemfer (organ of the Poale Zion)—March 5, 1943

The message which Ambassador Litvinov transmitted in the name of his government has fallen with the impact of a landslide in our midst. This sadistic killing, this cold-blooded explanation of the killing, this final thuggish spitting on the grave of the two martyrs is a challenge: This is what we are, this is what we do, this is what we shall continue to do as long as we are able—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. No one will stop us, no one will interfere with us. You don't like it? Well, what are you going to do about it? . . .

Raphael Abramovitch in the Jewish Daily Forward—March 2, 1943

Under Stalin's dictatorship nothing is done without calculation or by accident. And the calculation was a clear one: in order to be able to sovietize and communize Poland and the workers of Poland, the leadership of the Socialist movement in Poland must be annihilated. And if it is required to chop off the heads of the Jewish and Polish Social Democracy, the heads are first and foremost those of Erlich and Alter.

The leaders of the Polish Bund have fallen because they were great Socialist leaders and among the most attractive and sincere human beings in the whole international Socialist movement. This was their great crime, for which the Communist International could not forgive them, because world Communism requires an atomized, disorganized, leaderless working class which should be capable of becoming an easy victim of Communist demagoguery. The more popular, the more beloved, and the more revolutionary the Socialist leaders of a country, the more powerful they can become as opponents of Communist demagoguery. And therefore the greater the need to destroy them.

A. Almi in the Freie Arbeiter Shtime—March 5, 1943

Although I have been an ideological adversary of the Bund and its program all my life, Erlich and Alter evoked respect and reverence on my part.

To say they were Hitler agents is equivalent to spitting in the face of the whole world.

From this infamous and idiotic accusation against the two Jewish labor leaders, we are able to arrive at the best idea as to how much truth was embodied in the charges against all the accused in the notorious Moscow trials.

Hillel Rogoff in the Jewish Daily Forward—March 4, 1943

Fate has linked our country and other democratic countries in a single struggle with Soviet Russia against a common enemy.

But because the Red Army is helping us win the war we are not obliged to remain silent in the face of such ghastly crimes as the execution of persons who devoted the whole of their lives to bringing freedom and justice to the world. Were we to do so, we would not be morally justified in winning the war against Hitler.

Editorial in Der Tog—March 16, 1943

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, the two political leaders of the Bund who devoted all of their lives to the struggle for freedom, should be sentenced to death for seeking peace with the greatest tyrant in the world. What a devilish irony!

They, who devoted the largest part of their lives to the freedom of the Russian people from its tsarist rulers, were sentenced to death by a Russian court!

No human being with a clear mind, no normal human logic, could accept the possibility that Erlich and Alter, two great fighters for freedom, two Jewish revolutionaries, should agitate for peace with the enemy.

An accusation of this kind against Alter and Erlich is a tragedy for Soviet justice no less than for its victims.

Editorial in Der Fraynd (official organ of the Workmen's Circle)—February–March 1943

How bitter indeed is the irony that those who had kissed and fallen on one another's neck in the Kremlin, the banqueters who broke bread with the emissary of the hangman Hitler, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, for whom parades were staged—those miscreants are the ones who accuse Erlich and Alter of helping Hitler. But, clearly, the leaders in Moscow have lost all sense of decency and did not have the courage to say that they murdered the two leaders because they were socialists.

J. Kener in Proletarisher Gedank (organ of the Left Poale Zion)—March 15, 1943

The execution of Erlich and Alter is deeply painful not only because two prominent anti-fascist fighters fell in a senseless way

before the rifle shells which could have been used for shooting a few real enemies of the Soviet Union, but even more because the Kuibyshev "judges," the "firers," and the authorities who inspired and arranged the murder, belong, unfortunately, to the proletarian camp. . . . When working-class leaders were murdered by Hitler or Mussolini or Franco, the crimes filled us with sadness and indignation. But when working-class leaders are shot by their "own," by other working-class leaders who stand at the helm of state, we feel, aside from the sadness and the pain, also the shame and the disgrace that envelop our time and dominate our feelings. . . .

From the Farband-Shtime (organ of the Jewish National Workers' Alliance)

The accusation reaches the highest level of political absurdity. . . . We join in the sadness and pain which the Bund and all socialist labor forces are now experiencing as a result of the execution.

From an Editorial in Gerekhtikayt (organ of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union)—April 1943

Nobody can deny that the prestige of Soviet Russia has suffered greatly as a result of the Erlich-Alter murder. By their action, the communist killers have committed a crime against everything that is human and just. But they also committed a crime against the interests of Soviet Russia by undermining its prestige.

From Foroys (organ of the Society for Culture and Aid in Mexico)—March 1943

With the killing of the two leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund, the rulers of the Kremlin, who pose as the heads of a working-class regime, as bearers of the socialist idea, and as rulers of a socialist land, have once again inflicted a mortal blow against the authentic socialist ideal which they have set themselves as a goal to destroy.

From Di Shtime, Mexico

The only sin of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter could have been that they were opposed to the Stalin-Hitler Pact at that time. They had written against that shameful act and had affirmed before the world and the socialist working-class that it was a crime and a disgrace.

From Der Veg, Mexico

The worst enemies of the Soviet regime could not have done as much damage to it as its most loyal supporters, the Communists, have now done by the execution of the two prominent Jewish socialist working-class leaders.

Marc Turkow in Di Yidishe Tsaytung (Buenos Aires)—March 1, 1943

The Bund in Poland produced a number of important Jewish leaders to whom the Jewish working masses were strongly attached and whom the masses honored enormously. Erlich and Alter were among those Bund leaders who sacrificed their lives for the revolution and who perished in such a horrible fashion.

Yankel Botashansky in Di Presse (Buenos Aires)—March 12, 1943

Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich lived lives of struggle, of prison, of exile, lives in which they found themselves with the sword of Damocles hanging over them. During the final years they devoted the best part of their lives to the struggle against Hitlerism, and they were put to death so tragically just when their lifelong struggle was entering upon its most desperate battle.

Special Edition of Unser Vort (issued by the Bund group in Buenos Aires)—March 1943

. . . The local Jewish community has gone into action. A wave of protest has surged up against those who have once again murdered

socialists—workers' leaders; against the regime that makes all these shootings possible. . . .

For decades Comrades Erlich and Alter fought for freedom, helped build the socialist movement and forge the Bund. During the last few decades they were the spokesmen of the Bundist masses in Poland, the representatives of the Bund in the international labor movement.

Thousands of Bundists in Poland are dying in the struggle against Nazism. With how much anguish the Jewish masses in the ghettos will receive the horrible news that the Soviet authorities have executed the defenders of the Jewish working masses—Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. . . .

In shooting Erlich and Alter, the Soviet government struck a blow not only against the Bund movement but also the whole socialist and democratic world.

The memory of the executed comrades will illuminate the path of the Jewish working masses in their ongoing struggle for a free, socialist world.

From Dr. Emilio Frugoni, "A Mysterious and Despicable Murder," In Mourning and Protest (issued by the Bund group in Montevideo, Uruguay)—April 1943

International Socialism is obliged to voice its noblest sentiments against the execution of the two popular Jewish-Polish socialist leaders, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, so that the murder shall not go unpunished—the murder that has delivered a wound, by way of the bodies of these two exemplary Socialists of Poland, to the very heart of this great, inspired movement that is striving for a future of justice and brotherhood.

M. Kusher in the Australian Jewish Forum—April 1943

The hand trembles, it is almost impossible to write down the words; Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, the two most respected and beloved Jewish labour leaders in Poland have been executed by the Soviet Government. . . . It is not an evil dream, not a mere nightmare, but a grim reality. To me who had for nigh on twenty

years worked under their direction and leadership, who saw them almost daily, it is impossible to accept the thought of their death.

The terrible news has robbed all those who knew the two men and their crystal clear personalities, of peace of mind, and has deprived them of rest. Could this really happen?

I can see them now in the Warsaw Municipal Council fighting fearlessly against Polish reaction and anti-Semitism, or at vast public meetings of Polish and Jewish workers, their speeches applauded by the thousands. . . .

It is indeed tragic that while the Nazis slaughter mercilessly 250 Jewish children and their teachers in the Medem Sanatorium near Warsaw, and the Jewish workers' Bund carries on the heroic underground struggle against Nazism, the leaders who organized this struggle are dying in the prisons of Russia, or are executed on the disgusting accusation of seeking a separate peace with Germany. . . .

These two great leaders of unsullied reputation will be remembered in history as two Jewish Socialist martyrs destroyed by a political opponent who had them in his power.*

Victor Chernov, "Martyrs and Victims of the United Front," Der Fraynd (organ of the Workmen's Circle)—April–May 1943

I can still remember Comrade Erlich from the time of the Russian Soviet of Workers' Deputies in the year 1917. He was still so very youthful but, belying his years, with a calm steadfastness in his

*The Bund group in Melbourne, Australia, issued a pamphlet titled *Why Were Erlich and Alter Killed?* It contains a number of documents and evaluations of the murder. A second pamphlet, titled *Martyrs Not Traitors*, is a reply to a malicious pamphlet by the Australian Communists: *Why Did the Soviet Government Execute the Two Traitors Erlich and Alter?* A third brochure, *The Case of Erlich and Alter*, is a reprint of the English-language edition that was published in New York and London by the representatives of the Bund in 1943. The brochure, with an introduction by Camille Huysmans, former chairman of the Socialist International, contains a number of articles, documents, and evaluations about our two martyrs and their murderers, reports of protest meetings, declarations of organizations and international personalities.

convictions. He was a person deeply involved in the essence of the issues of the moment and revealed a powerful inner discipline.

Erlich, as a member of the "Left-Center" of the Soviet democracy, had done so well in arriving at an evaluation of the complex and serious international situation of the Russian Revolution, that his was almost the first candidacy to be approved for the delegation that was supposed to convene a "Socialist Peace Congress" in Stockholm.

Five or six years later, at the time of my first visit to the Baltic areas of Poland, I suddenly encountered Erlich in Warsaw. Although the Jewish youth of Poland had been closely drawn to him, that same youth—together with virtually the whole of "Young Europe"—looked upon the Soviet Union at the time through the aura of the "Red Legend." But to Erlich, the ruling Communist Party in Soviet Russia had long since ceased to appear in such a light.

With fearless candor, Comrade Erlich shared his views with me on all this. He gave expression to disturbing premonitions about various dangers: the future looked bleak—that very future which has become the destiny of our present. He warned, however, that one cannot live with pure skepticism and pessimism. Indeed, Erlich himself had a need for someone who would tread the same path as he and be less dominated by doubt—someone who would more readily yield to faith.

For Erlich, that one was *Victor Alter*, who exuded youthful and naive enthusiasm. With his vibrant energy, Alter was someone whose mind toyed with daring and constructive ideas.

Alter, in his own way, would have most eagerly changed the whole Communist experiment and would have found—as he thought—a middle way between the constructive passivity of pre-war Socialism and Russian Bolshevism. He believed it was necessary to search out a middle way and through it establish a kind of peace between Socialism and Communism.

We ought not to be surprised at such thoughts. The Europe of that time was flooded with not only such illusions. . . .

In the eyes of Moscow and the Comintern, Erlich and Alter bore the responsibility for the Polish Bund's having slipped through their fingers and not having followed in the Russian footsteps. And

woe to anyone who doesn't know that such things are not forgotten and not forgiven in Moscow. . . .

"Fifth-columnists"; "Polish Socialist quislings"; "the kind of people who carried out in Soviet Russia the same dirty work that Goebbels is trying to carry out in America"—this was the kind of inscription the Communists sought to place over their graves—the graves of two of nature's elect, spiritual sons of the Socialist and labor movement of the Jewish masses.

Erich—honest, long-tested, sad, pensive, and unbending!

Alter—temperamental, ever aspiring, full of zest for life!

The moment for committing the second murder against you was very artfully selected by experienced professionals who know their business.

Poor Erlich! Poor Alter! You paid a very heavy price for a hope that arose for you like a flash of lightning and which deceived you; a hope for a sincere coexistence; a hope concerning the establishment of a united front with those who did not wish to renounce or somewhat restrain themselves from revenge against you at the moment of the worst tragedy facing mankind.

It was the aspiration throughout your lives to close the abyss between Socialism and Communism, between Sovietism and democracy.

A sad chapter about the fate of this wrecked aspiration will be forever associated with the illustrious memory of *Erich* and *Alter*.

THE ECHO OF THE MURDER IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

Excerpt from Bernard Goldstein's Finf yor in varshever geto ('Five Years in the Warsaw Ghetto'), New York, 1947

The murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter shocked us to the very depths of our souls. We learned about it through the Polish underground radio. Even now I can see before me the comrades in the ghetto during those days as they moved about in a state of bewilderment. Their mournful eyes reflected infinite pain and anger and helplessness. The news greatly enraged the Polish comrades of the underground as well. The whole clandestine Polish press ran articles that evaluated the role of the murdered individuals in the

Polish and international socialist movements and the meaning and purpose of this dastardly political murder.

We brought out a special bulletin which gave expression to our deepest bitterness, indignation, and pain. . . .

We lived in a jungle, tormented and hunted by wild beasts which lay in wait every minute in order to extinguish our lives, which daily ripped and tore out of our ranks those dearest and closest. Over the sea of blood that reached to our necks; over the clouds of smoke and the fires from the gas-ovens and crematoria, our vacant eyes peered into the wide world in search of a ray of light, a spark of hope. . . . Our tortured souls craved a bit of consolation, encouragement, relief. And here came the voice of that "wide world" to announce that our finest leaders and our dearest friends and comrades had been killed in the most despicable manner. And on top of it, their killers had dishonored their sacred memory, covering it with the filth of the most vicious lie. . . . To be able to endure something like that demanded much spiritual fortitude and moral stamina.

FROM THE PEN OF
HENRYK ERLICH

Terror in the Soviet Union

THE SOCIALIST CONSCIENCE

The Kirov assassinatin does not cease to attract the intense interest of the whole proletarian public. With each passing day the unfolding of the events associated with the assassination becomes more dramatic and shocking. . . .

We are still far from knowing the truth about the assassination. But certain things are already beyond any doubt today. And one of them is—that the 109 who were shot in the Soviet Union during the first week after Kirov's death had no connection whatsoever with the assassination. They were shot, that is, for no reason other than to provoke fear and to display a "strong hand."

This does not lend itself to strengthening the moral prestige of the Soviet Union in the world. . . .

Socialists as well as communists are trying to win for the struggle against fascism not only the working-class public, but also increasingly broad segments of the radical, bourgeois intelligentsia. The communists do not hesitate to attract even lords and barons to their Thälmann Committees. Is the mountain of the executed in the Soviet Union calculated to facilitate this particular task? . . .

Do the communists believe that the form of dictatorship revealed to the world by the Bolsheviks is capable of strengthening the power of attraction of that slogan [dictatorship of the proletariat] among the broad working masses of the capitalist countries?

All these are arguments from revolutionary expedience, and they all speak against the dreadful slaughter in the Soviet Union. They are not the sole arguments, however. Aside from revolution-

"The Socialist Conscience" was originally published in *Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, December 1934.

ary expedience, there is still a thing like—revolutionary morality, like—a socialist, a revolutionary conscience which calls for protest against those sanguinary events that is completely independent of motives of expedience.

When the Bolsheviks were on the road to power, one of their slogans was: "Down With Capital Punishment!" And when they seized power, one of the first things they did was issue a decree abolishing the death penalty in Russia.

They quickly reintroduced it, and justifiably. At the time of the civil war, at a time when the young revolutionary regime was struggling for survival, it could not renounce this admittedly severe weapon. But today? Seventeen years after the revolution? Today, when the Soviet regime has overcome all its domestic foes and the firmness of its rule is threatened by no one? Today—such a mountain of people executed, shot to death for no reason but to induce fear with a strong hand. Was it for this that generations of revolutionary Marxists stirred flaming hatred toward the capitalist rule of force in proletarian hearts, so that we ourselves, after coming to power, should do something like the latest slaughter in the Soviet Union? . . .

Yesterday's Trotskyist, Karl Radek, who with citations in hand two weeks ago "proved" that the Kirov assassination was carried out by emissaries of the Harbin, Parisian, and Belgrade White Guards, may provide assurance a thousand times over that the Zinoviev-Trotskyist opposition—indeed, that every communist opposition in general—is an "anti-Soviet," "counterrevolutionary" organization. One will not find a single worker in the world with normal feelings who will believe it. . . .

We do not believe that the Kirov assassination was carried out by any working-class opposition group within the Soviet Union. We do not believe it was done by a "Zinoviev group." We do not know if such a group still exists at all, unintentionally giving rise to the terrible suspicion that the Kirov assassination is being exploited by the leading elements of the Bolshevik Party in order to exterminate physically every vestige of a proletarian opposition within the Soviet Union.

Because it has been established that Zinoviev, Kamenev, and five other members of the Bolshevik Party had no connection with

the Kirov assassination, they are “merely” being exiled to the regions of the Far North. What, then, awaits those who will any day be brought before the highest military court—the same court that sentenced those 109 to death—people who also had no apparent connection with the assassination? . . .

What has taken place in the Soviet Union since December 1, and what continues to take place there in relation to the assassination, is something that no Socialist conscience will be able to justify.

THE UNBELIEVABLE HAS HAPPENED

So—the unbelievable, the horrendous has occurred: all of the accused in the Trotskyist trial, without exception, have been shot to death!

We must confess: We did not believe until the last moment—despite everything!—that it would happen. We knew that the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union stops at nothing on the way to his goal. We remember all too well the human hecatombs that fell on the grave of Kirov. But the reckoning with the so-called Trotskyists was carried out this time in the form of an open political trial.

We remember the big SR trial. We remember the big Menshevik trial, and the series of trials of all the various economic *spetsya* [specialists] who were sentenced for sabotage. Each of these trials had its specific political aim. The aim of the Menshevik trial was to extirpate from public opinion in the Soviet Union any vestige of sympathy for that party; to kill that party once and for all—morally and politically—in the consciousness of the very last working person in the country. The goal of the trials for sabotage—parallel to an actual struggle against sabotage—was to provide an explanation for the initial, unavoidable failures in the construction effort, and they served to justify and provide a supportive atmosphere for a definite policy on the *spetsy* and the nonparty intelligentsia in general. . . .

“The Unbelievable Has Happened” was originally published in *Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, August 1936.

Yet in not one of those trials (to the best of our recollection—not even in the trials for sabotage) was the death sentence carried out—indeed, not even when the court rendered a death sentence. The Soviet government and the leadership of the Communist Party were satisfied with the grandiose propaganda display, without actually executing the accused. . . .

But the incredible has happened. With contempt and furious vilification, the Bolsheviks have rejected the appeal of the Labor and Socialist International to permit foreign defense counsel to attend the Trotskyist trial, and their request that the accused not be sentenced to death. The Chairman and the Secretary of the Socialist International, with whom the emissaries of the Comintern conducted fraternal discussions more than once in the course of the last two years, have been described by the Soviet press as—defenders of Gestapo agents and scoundrels. And the verdict was carried out. . . .

We are unable to imagine a single honest revolutionary—i.e., an inwardly free and proud Socialist, who would fail to receive the news of the death sentence carried out after the Moscow Trotskyist trial without feeling the deepest and most dreadful shock and most fervent protest.

Manifesto of the General Jewish Workers' Union (Bund) in Poland

(Adopted at the Anniversary Congress in
Warsaw, November 13, 1937)

TO THE JEWISH working men and working women.

To the rank-and-file of the Jewish people and working intellectuals!

At a difficult time, at an hour of destiny in your lives, the Bund turns to you.

There are people who say that the crisis is passed, that the situation has improved and has even become favorable. It is surely so for the wealthy, whether Jews or non-Jews; but not for you. The worker continues to be plagued by unemployment or low wages. The artisan and small tradesman live in poverty and want. The upcoming generation of workers has no prospect of employment, and the same calamity torments the working intellectual!

Yours is a hard and bitter struggle for economic survival, while at the same time all of the dark forces of the country have pressed down upon you. They wish to destroy you, to exterminate you, to drive you from Poland. All the hardships from which Poland is suffering stem from you, they say. All the afflictions from which other nations suffer are supposed to emanate from you as well! And here is the proof: Jews are being persecuted in Germany and

Rumania; Jews are being beaten in Palestine. And the peddlers of venom, the incendiaries and cannibals in Polish society do everything they can to poison your lives, to inflame in the country an infernal fire of hatred toward you.

Is it necessary to remind you of the frightful devastation which this fire has already succeeded in bringing about up to now? Need one total up the victims, enumerate the losses, make a survey of the ruins? No, it is not necessary.

Przytyk, Mińsk-Maxowiecki, Wisokie, Czestochowa, Brześć*—these aren't all; they are merely the most painful stages along the road of martyrdom of the Jewish masses in Poland during the past year and a half.

But the cannibals continue to incite. They aren't satisfied with the boycott directed at the Jewish worker and working intellectual; nor are they satisfied with the economic extermination drive against the petty Jewish laborer. Physical force is not enough for them; they desire to degrade the human being in you, to trample upon your feeling of self-worth, to turn you into pariahs devoid of legal rights and dignity. For Jewish students they've introduced a ghetto in the universities; and their request is . . . to broaden the ghetto for the Jews to encompass the whole country. They fiercely demand exceptional laws for Jews on the model of Hitler Germany. They desire to place us beyond the bounds of social and political life, outside the law. They wish to deprive us not only of the right to live but also of the possibility of self-defense and struggle.

WHAT IS THE WAY OUT?

Jewish workers and common folk: Not a single one of you has asked during these dark days: What shall be done? Is there a way out of the situation, and where should one seek it?

The Jewish bourgeois parties attempt to provide answers to these painful questions while they themselves bear a great deal of responsibility for the present condition of the Jewish masses. As a part of the bourgeoisie in the country, they share in the responsibility for the economic misery of the common people in Poland.

*Towns in central Poland where anti-Jewish pogroms took place—Trans.

And as Jewish politicians, they have bowed all their lives before every holder of power and have been prepared to sell out the interests of the Jewish masses to all of them. At one time they concluded *ugodes* [unprincipled deals and agreements] with the Endeks. Later they placed themselves at the service of the Pilsudski forces. As recently as September 1935 they urged the Jewish masses on to the ballot boxes in order to elect to the Sejm the greatest anti-Semites. And to this day their representatives are ensconced in the present Sejm and Senate, bodies boycotted by the workers and peasants.

They have a simple answer to the questions that torment you.

Some of them—the zealous religionists, the Orthodox, declare:

“It is God’s punishment. Jews committed sins. Hence the need to atone, to plead for mercy, to engage in fasting.”

In short, it is not they who’ve sinned, but—you. Yet everyone knows, of course, that it is the poor, the needy, who suffer most from anti-Semitism. And if anti-Semitism is God’s punishment for sins committed, then how account for the fact that the most bitter punishment has been meted out precisely to those who spend their days in heavy toil; who collapse from hunger thrice daily; who don’t even have time to sin not only in deed, but even in thought. Why is God’s punishing hand felt least of all precisely by idlers and the rich?

And the “secular” leaders—the Zionists—have their answer to your questions. They are bankrupt not only here but also there—in Palestine. They know already today, just as certainly as we, that Zionism is not a solution to the Jewish question. But they hold stubbornly to their position, and repeat along with all the Jew-haters:

“That’s how it is; there is a law of some kind: ‘gentiles’ must hate Jews. There is no alternative. It is necessary to flee from here.”

And in order to win the support of the overlords for the dissipated Zionist dreams, they approach those who are responsible for making our lives so bitter and declare:

“Correct, there is really insufficient bread for everyone in Poland. Correct, there is really a surplus of Jews in the country. So help us take the Jews to Palestine.”

To which we reply:

Jewish workers and common folk: the answer to the questions that are tormenting you is an altogether different one. But if you wish to grasp it, you must briefly step out of the confines of your Jewish misery.

Look about you and you will see—the Jews are not the only ones who are suffering. The overwhelming majority in the country, whether Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, or others, is suffering from the economic crisis, from the difference between rich and poor. In the Polish, White Russian, or Ukrainian village, people live in a dismal state. Millions of others are scarcely able to eke out a daily existence. Hundreds of thousands of Polish workers are in deep despair under conditions of joblessness and, along with the landless peasants and the unemployed Jewish workers, exploring the possibility of migrating, of being able to earn by the sweat of their brows a piece of bread in the coal mines of Belgium and France or in the distant fields of Brazil or Paraguay.

Shift your gaze beyond the borders of Poland toward the wide world and you will see:

Seventy million people are languishing under the heavy boot of Hitlerism. Not only the 500,000 Jews—the whole German people has been transformed into a nation of slaves. After four-and-a-half years of Hitler rule, even fresh bread is an item of luxury in Germany. And instead of butter, the common people of Germany are fed guns.

Forty million Italians have been turned into a footstool for the "great" Mussolini. The Italian workers and peasants have long forgotten what eating a full meal is like. Which is why Mussolini is hurling their children from one battlefield to another; which is why Mussolini is calling on Italian women to bear children without letup so that there will be no lack of soldiers for his coming wars.

And just as in Germany and Italy, millions of working people in other, smaller countries which have become areas of reactions are sunk in privation and bondage.

This system of oppression and enslavement is called fascism. It was devised and effectuated by the possessing classes as protection against the rebellion of the exploited masses. But fascism has not managed to eliminate a single one of the sources of anguish that

have driven the masses to rise up. It has only deepened their misery and made the danger of a new world war infinitely greater. Fascism not only murdered freedom where it was victorious, but it carries murder, oppression, and enslavement wherever its criminal hand reaches. It is sufficient to mention Abyssinia, Spain, China, Danzig.

But despite the most difficult conditions, the ravished masses struggle against the incubus of fascism. With ever greater success, the masses who have retained their freedom struggle against the fascist danger. The edifice of fascism is already decaying from within. The goal is still distant, but sooner or later fascism must collapse under the burden of its crimes.

And when the hour of victory shall sound, the working people will not be satisfied with eliminating the fascist abscess from the body of today's social order. They will, at that time, fundamentally cure the sick body and do away with the causes that gave rise to that festering abscess. And the causes are inherent, after all, in the capitalist nature of today's economic system. They are related to the fact that the greatest riches of the world find themselves in the hands of a tiny number of people.

The common masses throughout the world are fighting today not only against fascism, but also against capitalism; not only for democracy, but also for socialism. What is happening in Poland is merely one sector of the vast front on which the struggle is being waged. And Jewish life in Poland can be correctly understood and evaluated only when seen as part of the total life of the country and as part of the tremendous conflict taking place in the world today.

The Bund calls upon you today, Jewish workers and common folk, to become a part of the throng in Poland and throughout the world that is fighting against fascism. This is our answer to the questions that are tormenting you.

THE SPIRIT OF THE BUND

The Bund arose forty years ago. Profound darkness prevailed in the boundless tsarist state. Millions upon millions of its subjects lived in abject want and slave-like thralldom. And more oppressed

than all the others were the Jewish masses. Harassed by the police, exploited by the rich man, kept in a state of fear by the clericals, the Jewish worker was quieter than water and lower than grass.

The Bund infused the Jewish working man with a new spirit. The Bund filled his heart with a new faith. The Bund awakened in the Jewish worker the feeling of human dignity and, as a consequence, also his national consciousness, the need to find fulfillment within his national culture. And as an equal among equals, it introduced the Jewish worker to a new and proud world, the world of the militant proletariat.

The Bund also taught the Jewish worker how to feel and think like a citizen of the country. It taught him how to link his own destiny to the destiny of the country. It inculcated in him the unshakable conviction that in the place where he lives and in the land in which he expends his toil, he must demand his rights and stand up for his rights with all his strength.

The Bund taught the Jewish worker that his power lies not in national unity with his exploiters, the rich and their minions, the clericals, but in class struggle against the capitalists without difference of nationality; and in international unity with all toilers and oppressed.

The Jewish worker grasped the message of the Bund. While the Jewish bourgeois elements sang words of blessing for the bloody Tsar; while the Jewish clericals preached humility as the response to all the evil decrees, and the Zionists promised the tsarist ministers, people dripping with workers' blood and Jewish blood, to lead the Jews out of Russia—Jewish workers, under the red banners of the Bund, fought for freedom in the front ranks of the revolution; the Bundist self-defense groups, with guns in hand, bravely defended the Jewish masses against the wild bands of tsarist *pogromshchiki*.

The Bund transformed the obsequious Jewish working man into a class-conscious proletarian, into a socialist, into a revolutionist.

That remained the spirit of the General Jewish Workers' Bund in Poland.

IN INDEPENDENT POLAND

In the rivers of blood that were spilled for the freedom of the peoples of old Russia and for the freedom of Poland, there can be

found a substantial amount of Bundist blood. The Bund welcomed the emergence of independent Poland and awakened in the Jewish masses a civic feeling with regard to the country, a feeling that contains, together with the consciousness of rights, also the consciousness of duty. The Polish bourgeoisie, which came to power in liberated Poland, had an opinion about this quite different from that of the working class. Consequently a fight for liberation—political and social—and a fight for complete equality of the Jewish masses remained the task of the Bund also in independent Poland.

IN THE HEAT OF STRUGGLE

This tremendous task did not come easy for the Bund. It was forced to put up with bitter resistance on the part of Polish reaction. Against it were aimed the poisoned arrows of Jewish reaction. It was compelled to continue its historic struggle against the despair and alienation from local Polish life which Zionism, strengthened by the seductive Balfour Declaration and the work of the Polish anti-Semites, sowed among the Jewish masses. And it was forced to put up with a bitter struggle within the working-class camp itself, at times a real civil war on the part of the communist movement which, in shocking blindness, regarded as its main task, its historic mission, the splitting and smashing of the Bund, and above all, the destruction of the whole socialist movement.

After the years of turbulent uphill progress by the international labor movement, the retreat set in. The Bund can state with justified pride that it was among the few who warned in time of the approaching danger. It offered its warnings in the working-class camp of Poland and in the international proletarian arena, and called for unity and determined action. Within Jewish life it warned against the unavoidable, indeed the fatal consequences of the cringing policy of the Jewish bourgeoisie and the dangerous game with the playing of the Zionist card.

Then came the catastrophe. Germany was inundated by the filthy waves of Hitlerism, and their poisonous foam spread out far beyond the borders of Germany. Polish nationalism raised its head and grew frenzied. A terrible panic seized large parts of Jewish society. Stampeded emigrationism celebrated victories; and as

always in times of political twilight, Zionism gave expression to its jubilation. As for the Communists, the political line, indeed, the whole ideology of communism, collapsed. A large section of the fellow-travelers of the labor movement began to waver, and together with it . . . more than one socialist.

The Bund found itself in something like a besieged fortress. But the banner of consistent socialism did not for one moment grow shaky in its hand. Baited by Polish nationalism and scoffed at by Jewish nationalism, the Bund never grew tired of calling upon the Jewish masses; "Do not succumb to despair; do not surrender to any feeling of panic!" More than ever, the slogan remains valid:

"Ours is a life-and-death struggle against fascism, against every form of nationalism, and for socialism!"

Today, as always, and despite everything, the slogan remains in force:

"Salvation lies here and nowhere else, in untiring struggle for freedom, hand in hand with the working masses of Poland!"

We persevered. It took some time and the tide, slowly but surely, started to ebb. The working masses throughout the world gradually began to take hold of themselves. In Jewish society the sobering-up process developed more swiftly. The dream of Zion manifestly proceeded to come to an end. And with each passing day, the complete senselessness and criminality of the domestic policy conducted in Poland for years by the Jewish bourgeois parties became more glaring.

Then came Przytyk.* It was a surge of electricity passing through Jewish society and shocking it from top to bottom. And when the Bund, in response to Przytyk and to the whole policy of which Przytyk was the symbol, proclaimed the general protest strike of March 17, 1936 and mobilized in that protest a significant part of the Polish working class and the whole proletarian public of the country, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people, in a powerful, incomparable demonstration of struggle, responded to the call of the Bund.

Since then the Jewish population of both large and small cities of Poland has more than once found itself in grave danger. It was always the Bund which strengthened and encouraged.

*The scene of a pogrom on March 9, 1936—Trans.

And when the door was opened not long ago for a Nuremberg law in Poland through the edict concerning the Jewish benches in the universities, it was the Bund which demonstrated also this time, in the magnificent mass display of October 19 of this year, the readiness of the Jewish masses to defend their rights with tooth and nail.

AFTER FORTY YEARS

Forty years ago, thirteen activists of the young Jewish labor movement in Vilno, deceiving the vigilant tsarist bloodhounds, gathered in deep secrecy and established the Bund. They numbered by then far more than thirteen. The Central Committee which was elected at the First Congress of the Bund already had behind it what was for that time a rather substantial working-class movement. But all told, the Bund was still an insignificant minority in Jewish society. Today, during the time of its fortieth anniversary, the Bund appears before the Jewish and non-Jewish public of Poland as the largest party in Jewish society. After the elections of 1936 and 1937 no one will doubt that. Strengthened by the confidence of the broad Jewish masses, and with the consciousness of the historic mission of the socialist movement to become a spiritual leader and political spokesman of the overwhelming majority of every national society, the Bund declares today:

Our greetings to you and our thanks!

Our first word is to you, the thousands and tens of thousands of Bundists and members of Tsukunft and Skif in Poland. Like an iron wall, you surrounded the banner of the Bund in both good times and bad, and, with unbounded love and devotion, you fulfilled your duty toward labor's cause with exemplary revolutionary discipline. To you, the thousands of Bundists of today and of years gone by, who have been dispersed by fate over the wide world; who at whatever time may have breathed the air of the Bund and suffered for the Bund and for the cause of labor in general; and who maintained an intimate, inner connection with the Bund—greetings to all of you and our Bundist gratitude, comrades, on the occasion of our great celebration!

We greet you, proletarians of Poland, brothers in deprivation

and struggle. We want you to know that we are prepared, to our very last breath, to fight alongside you for bread and true freedom for all working people in independent Poland!

We greet you, proletarians throughout the world with whom a common destiny unites us; and in the first instance, you heroic proletarians of Spain and all of you languishing in the prisons of fascist dictatorships!

Our greetings and encouragement are addressed to the working-class youth, over whom there lurk privation and fascist hyenas and who, more than any others, are threatened by the war plans of fascism! Remember, youthful brothers, that your only salvation lies in socialism!

Join the Bund!

Jewish workers in factory, workshop, and office who have hitherto stood outside our movement or outside the proletarian movement in general: we call upon you—help us to liquidate definitively the divided condition of the working-class camp which has already done so much harm to labor's cause.

When the founders of the Bund had to decide upon a name for it at the First Congress, two motions were offered: The Union of Jewish Social Democratic Groups of Russia and The General Jewish Workers' Bund. The congress defeated the first motion and adopted the second. In one of the first issues of the central organ of the party, the *Arbeter Shtimme*, we find the following substantiation of this decision:

“A Union of the Social Democratic Groups would have been a union of those top-level people standing at the head, a union of the few leaders of the working class.” But “the Bund can have strength only when the whole fighting mass will enter it and not a handful of leaders.” The “General Jewish Workers' Bund literally means that the Bund embraces the whole Jewish proletariat, opening the doors wide for every worker who unites with others in the struggle of the proletariat for a better life. Every individual who yearns for the struggle and feels the need for it, should enter the Bund. He will be an equal and full-fledged member of the organization.”

Jewish proletarians, you who have stood apart from us until now, enter our ranks in the spirit of these wonderful words:

become members of our movement, fighters sharing responsibility for the cause of the working class!

But "fighting mass" means more than working class. The urban workers will not be able to attain their emancipation if they do not succeed in winning for their struggle the large mass of the lower-middle-class people in city and country: poor peasants, artisans, domestic producers, petty tradesmen, and laboring intellectuals. There are no contradictions whatever between the interests of this mass and the interests of the working class. Other than its landlessness, other than its hopelessness, this mass has nothing to lose and everything to gain as soon as the socialist system replaces the capitalist.

All toiling people unite!

But the majority of this mass has not yet, up to now, grasped the mutuality of interest linking it to the working class. Embittered, lost, it continues to wander down the blind alleys of bourgeois politics. We turn to these masses of people today:

Your salvation lies not in passivity and servility; not in empty dreams about a Jewish state built on sand and on a British cannon; not in national unity with the Jewish bourgeoisie and Jewish nationalism, but in a community of struggle with the working class, in struggle here on the ground where you live and where your fathers and grandfathers lived.

Of course the situation is miserable, and no one knows if the worst is already behind us. But do not fall into despondency and do not lose confidence. The wave is already ebbing away.

Wherever a contest is taking place in the world between socialism and fascism, we are witnessing a downhill course for fascism and an uphill movement of socialism. In the most recent days we've seen this in France, in Norway, in Great Britain. The kind of marvel of which a mass inspired by socialism is capable has been seen by us for sixteen months in Spain.

And in our country? Can't you see how the multitudes that are prepared to fight for freedom are growing in our country? Haven't the echoes reached you of the courageous struggle being waged by Polish socialism against nationalistic barbarism? In the hour of grave danger to your naked existence, haven't you seen near you

in any number of cases, besides the hand of the Bund, the protecting hand as well of the Polish worker?

Therefore, abandon the hopeless and swampy roads of Jewish nationalism and forsake your passivity if you've hitherto been standing on the sidelines! And let all of us together—all the toilers among the Jewish people—constitute one great force which shall be capable, at the decisive moment, of throwing its weight onto the scale of events.

At this solemn hour, during the days commemorating the date when the Jewish working class broke down the walls of the spiritual ghetto and moved into the historic arena as an independent political force, we call upon you, Jewish working men and working women, Jewish toilers and laboring intellectuals, to enlist in the struggle—

Against anti-Semitism, against all manner of human hatred, against one's own and foreign nationalism!

Against fascism in all its forms!

Against capitalism!

For a free and democratic Poland!

For complete equality of all citizens!

For the right of free national-cultural development of the Jewish masses!

For a civic coexistence of all nationalities in Poland and the world!

For a workers' and peasants' government!

For socialism!

On the Eve of War, 1939

THE STALIN-HITLER PACT

One can become crazy as a result of the sea of opinions that have been flooding the columns of this newspaper in connection with the Hitler-Stalin “bombshell.”

The Soviet embassy in London has reported that independently of the Non-Aggression Pact which Germany proposed to the Soviet Union, negotiations between the Soviet Union and France will be continued, and that the Soviet Union is ready at any time to sign an agreement with Britain and France.

Will the negotiations really be continued? Neither the British nor the French government has until now commented on the question. . . .

Let us not speak yet about the political results of the German-Soviet “bombshell” while the Non-Aggression Pact has not been signed, and, as of this writing, only the ceremonious reception by the Moscow government for the emissary of the Third Reich is taking place.

On the other hand, let us devote a few words to the ideological significance of what has occurred.

If ideological honesty, sincerity, and morality played any role in the policies of those elements in the world that are friendly to Hitler, the latest diplomatic stunt of the Third Reich would have to induce in them a state of terrible indisposition. How is it possible—such a tremendous, such an unheard-of “betrayal!” After all, the life-and-death struggle against Communism and its embodiment,

“The Stalin-Hitler Pact” was originally published in *Naye Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, August 24, 1939.

the Soviet Union was the foundation of the whole National Socialist *Weltanschauung* and the ideological cover for the international policy of the Third Reich. In keeping with that struggle, all the dark forces of the world were assembled and mobilized on the platform of the Anti-Comintern Pact. And suddenly—a political rapprochement with the “nest of the Jewish-Bolshevik danger” against which Berlin warned the capitalist and reactionary world over the course of six years!

It would have had to be truly an immense spiritual shock for the reactionaries and fascists of the world, if they were indeed being honest. But they never were, and they believed less than anything in the honesty of Hitlerism. They know just as well as we that without or without the Non-Aggression Pact with Moscow, Hitlerism remains the same as it was: a life-and-death foe of all libertarian thought and of the working class as the main bearer of that thought in the first place. The worldwide forces of reaction were never fastidious about the means for reaching their goal. Hypocrisy, fraud, trickery were normal weapons in their “diplomatic” arsenal. Which is why they were not shocked by Hitler’s latest diplomatic trick.

It is different in the camp where the Soviet Union has looked for friends, the camp in which honesty and morality are thought of highly, where trickery is despised, and fascism is sincerely and profoundly hated. There the “spirit of Munich” was furiously opposed, and the hypocrisy and criminality of the British, French, and other reactionaries were branded because of the actual help Hitler received from their side. It was for these circles that the friendly handshake exchanged yesterday by the representatives of the Moscow government with the creators of the Anti-Comintern Pact was a truly shocking experience.

The situation of the communists is not to be envied at all. At one time they were taught that all of humanity outside the communist camp was black, and that all the capitalist countries were, to the same degree, reactionary. The communists in those days could still have found a rationale for Stalin’s moves: “What is the difference,” they would have asked, “between Hitler Germany and Conservative Britain?”

But for five years now the communists have had an altogether

different teaching drilled into them. For five years they have been taught that democracy is a tremendously important matter; that there is no more dangerous enemy in the world of the working class and of the Soviet Union than fascism in general and Hitlerism in particular. No compromise whatsoever is possible with this enemy. Everything possible, including even those questionable democrats, must be mobilized for the struggle against it, because it is Enemy Number One.

And suddenly—Ribbentrop in Moscow! What could the communists in France and Britain be thinking now? How do they feel, the communists of Germany, who, together with the socialists, dream of the political and military defeat of Hitler Germany? How do the proletarians in the concentration camps of Germany, Britain [*sic*], and Czechoslovakia feel when they know how the club wielded by their tormentors has been strengthened by . . . Moscow?

“A VICTORY FOR PEACE AND SOCIALISM”

On August 23 the British ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, arrived at Berchtesgaden in order to submit to Hitler the final warning of the English government. Hitler replied with a categorical no. For the security of Europe, he declared, he would not renounce interests vital to Germany.

It is possible, of course, that Hitler would have given such an answer under any circumstances. But what person in his right mind would consider it a “coincidence” that Hitler gave that answer in the very hour when the aircraft taking Ribbentrop to Moscow was landing at Moscow airport? . . .

Today all Europe looks like one vast war-camp, and the peace of the world hangs by a hair. But the Paris *Humanité* [the official organ of the French Communist party], after twenty-four hours of silence, has appeared with an article declaring that Stalin . . . has saved the peace of Europe. And the Communist Party of Great

“A Victory for Peace and Socialism” was originally published in *Naye Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, August 26, 1939.

Britain issued a manifesto referring to the Moscow pact as "a victory for peace and socialism."

Yesterday we received a new issue of *Neuer Vorwärts*, organ of the German Social Democratic emigration. The editorial staff is shocked by what has occurred, and it recalls what the diplomatic representative of the Soviet Union said in the year 1935, in the name of his government, at a session of the League of Nations in Geneva:

We are familiar with a different political doctrine, one that opposes the idea of collective security and proposes to conclude bilateral agreements that do not embrace all nations but only nations selected arbitrarily for that purpose. This doctrine has nothing at all in common with pacifist ideas. . . .

It is no surprise that the supporters of such agreements express themselves in favor of wars being localized. Whoever speaks of the "localizing of war" wishes to say thereby that the war is free and legitimate. Thus a bilateral non-aggression pact can become a guarantee of aggression.

Two years later, the same Soviet diplomat declared:

It is purely an illusion to expect that there can be cooperation between countries that strive toward different ends, that adhere to different conceptions of international life and the mutual rights and duties of nations!

A synthesis between aggression and non-aggression, between peace and war, cannot be imagined.

Someone might say that this unambiguous condemnation of such pacts as the one concluded in Moscow contains two "weak points": first, it was expressed two or as far back as four years ago—a vast time spread where tactical questions are concerned; and second, it was Litvinov who uttered those words. In the year 1935, and even as late as the year 1937, no one, indeed, was as justified as he in speaking in the name of the Soviet Union in the international arena. But today Litvinov is a person shorn of his glory.

The *Daily Herald* took the trouble to assemble a number of

quotations from *Izvestia* and *Pravda* of the very latest period, quotations that also have a direct bearing on the matter.

On April 2, 1939 *Izvestia* wrote:

it is necessary, once and for all, to give up any attempts to calm Germany by negotiations. The democracies must return to the policy of decisive resistance and collective security. In that case, they can count on the complete support of the only country that bears no responsibility for Munich.

On May 11, 1939 *Izvestia* wrote:

If Britain and France truly desire to erect a fence against aggression in Europe, they must first bring about a united mutual assistance pact, made up, if possible, of the four large, major states of Europe: Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and Poland; or, at the least, the first three. An agreement should be concluded, according to which those three states should guarantee the security of other states in Central Europe that are threatened by aggression.

After July 31 of this year, *Izvestia* wrote:

The Bolsheviks were not pacifists during the years 1914–1918 and are certainly not so today. They maintain that a general peace front ought to be established, capable of stopping the further development of Fascist aggression. The second imperialist war has already begun, and the whole world knows that the aggressor is Germany.

And finally, a few words from *Pravda*, written on August 15 of this year:

A war by the Soviet Union against Fascism would be the most just and legitimate of any war ever waged by mankind. The best means of defense is a strong offense, with the aim of totally destroying the enemy on his own territory. To destroy the enemy means to destroy Fascism, to raise up the workers against it, and to help them in their war against Fascism.

Eight days after these words were written, Molotov renewed the friendship pact with *Hitlerite* Germany that Chicherin had concluded seventeen years earlier with the *German Republic*.

In the face of the quotations presented, and with the shakiness of world peace today, the leadership of the French and British Communists wishes to convince us that during the night of August 23 to August 24 peace and Socialism scored a great victory. . . .

Is Zionism a Liberating Democratic Movement?

(A Reply to Professor Simon Dubnow)

PROFESSOR DUBNOW is attempting to engage in a public discussion with the Bund on a number of basic problems in Jewish life. In the name of the "Bundist friend" to whom his letter is addressed, I am glad to accommodate him and to respond to his argument in as positive a way as possible. . . .

The Bund is today not only the strongest Jewish socialist party, it is the strongest party *in general* within the Jewish arena in Poland. This has been demonstrated in all the elections of the past two years to the city councils and *kehillas*. *No one* in Poland doubts it today, neither our opponents nor our friends. Our opponents may hope it is a passing phenomenon; that's their concern. Everyone consoles himself as best he can. But it does not alter the fact.

Before we turn to the subject, let us dispense with authorities, because, to begin with, against the names of Léon Blum, Emile Vandervelde, and Eduard Bernstein, I can put forward others, no less dignified members of the Socialist International, such as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, Victor Adler, and Fyodor Dan, who adhere to the Bund position on the question of Zionism. And secondly, it is no argument at all. My attitude toward Comrade Vandervelde is

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one of greatest respect—perhaps greater today than ever. But what can he know about Zionism and about our internal Jewish problems in general? Let us preferably conduct the disputation with our own forces, minus the help of authorities.

And now—to the subject:

Mr. Dubnow expresses the wish that the Bund “should renounce its old negative attitude toward *klal yisroel** and become an organic part of the Jewish people to the same degree that British or French Social Democracy is organically linked with its people, forming a common front with all progressive elements.”

I do not know the source of Professor Dubnow’s view that the Bund does not feel itself organically tied to the Jewish people, or, as he formulates it elsewhere in his letter, that the Bund doesn’t consider itself a part of the Jewish people but a part of the “Jewish proletariat.” Professor Dubnow declares that he heard the latter formulation “in the name of several party leaders of the Bund.” If so, I can assure him that his informants are—as informants—not worth a penny. Mr. Dubnow could not have heard from any leader of the Bund—neither today nor yesterday—what he was told *in the name of* Bund leaders. In what Professor Dubnow writes here about the Bund, one can hear an echo of the caricature of the Bund which its most bitter enemies circulated during the first years of our party’s existence. And it is truly regrettable that Professor Dubnow, who in his historical writing would not make the slightest assertion without having support in the form of *documents*, considers it possible to base himself upon word-of-mouth in his attitude toward such a large movement in Jewish life as the Bund.

No, Professor Dubnow was poorly informed. It has never occurred to the Bund to think that the destiny of the Jewish working class can be severed from the destiny of the Jewish people. The Bund has therefore always and constantly thought of itself as an organic part of the Jewish people. Its *true* ambition, just like the ambition of every vital socialist party, is to be the standard bearer and champion of the broadest masses of the Jewish people,

*The concept of the Jewish people as an undifferentiated ethnic entity subsuming such significant differences as class, religion, political philosophy, and others.—Trans.

i.e., of the *large majority* of the Jewish people, *whom we identify with the Jewish people as a whole*. From the small minority of Jews who live by exploitation and are prepared to identify Jewish interests with the interests of their pocketbooks, we part company with a light heart.

It is the interests of the Jewish people, *thus understood*, that the Bund has had in mind during the course of its history. When the Bund, as part of the revolutionary movement of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, carried on its struggle for freedom, for complete national equality, and for socialism; when its armed workers' detachments fought the tsarist *pogromshchiki*; when, in connection with the Beilis trial, it called on the broad Jewish masses to mount an active protest, the Bund did not do so only in the interest of the Jewish proletarians, in the narrow sense of that term.

And today, when the Bund organizes the Jewish workers, employees, artisans, domestic producers, and laboring intellectuals in the struggle for their economic, political, and national rights; when the Bund, working stubbornly and in the face of the severest obstacles, builds a far-reaching network of Yiddish secular schools; when, at the present grievous time, it conducts—systematically, unceasingly, and all along in Jewish society—gigantic cultural activity among the Jewish masses; when it mobilizes those masses for militant actions on behalf of their fights (e.g., March 17, 1936; October 10, 1937); when it sees to it that the Jewish masses are not left defenseless against the fascist elements threatening their very physical existence—when the Bund does all of this, it does not do it solely for the Jewish worker in the factory and workshop, but for the vast, suffering Jewish mass, for all those whom we call by the name of—the Jewish people.

Professor Dubnow is therefore in error when he believes that we “isolate ourselves” from the Jewish mass. On the contrary, we seek ever closer and more intimate ties with it, and as the facts demonstrate, moreover, not without success.

But Mr. Dubnow is indeed correct when he asserts that we isolate ourselves from the Jewish *bourgeois parties*. In this respect, we are stubborn Jews.

Let us, at the outset, identify the *subject* of the disputation.

Mr. Dubnow, in the sentence previously quoted, speaks of both

klal yisroel and a "common front with all *progressive elements*." These are two different things, however. *Klal yisroel* does not exclude anyone from the community at large. *Klal yisroel* bases itself upon the unsophisticated principle of *vos mir zaynen zaynen mir, ober yidn zaynen mir*.^{*} But Mr. Dubnow is, in fact, and along with us, ready to omit the *Agudah*. With respect to the *Agudah*, he says, the Bund is completely correct. Yet if Mr. Dubnow is prepared to eschew cooperation with a tendency in Jewish society as significant as the *Agudah*, he himself is renouncing, after all, the principle of *klal yisroel*.

But the term *klal yisroel* is used only once in the letter of Professor Dubnow. Generally he speaks about a "common front with all progressive elements"; about "a unification of all democratic and progressive elements." He thus touches upon a question that already has a lengthy history in the international labor movement, a question that is being passionately debated there to the present day. . . .

But let us leave this question aside. It was certainly not the intention of Mr. Dubnow to enter into a debate with his Bundist friend about the intimate, internal problems of the international proletarian movement. What interests Mr. Dubnow is the *Jewish side of the question*. Granted that "a common front of all progressive elements" is a good thing. Why do we Bundists refuse to collaborate with Zionism? Why don't we wish to see in it . . . "a liberating democratic movement"? Why do we continue to oppose this movement as we have in the past?

This is the basic question with which Professor Dubnow turns to his "Bundist friend," and I shall try to provide an answer.

It is Professor Dubnow's belief that the Bund's actions vis-à-vis Zionism forty years ago could not be the same today. I have the impression that this is somewhat too subjective, since Mr. Dubnow's own attitude toward Zionism, not only forty years ago but also considerably later, was different than it is today. To be sure, he has reservations even today, and quite serious ones. "It is necessary," he says, "to fight against the negation of *goles* [*galut*, diaspora] and the God's-chosen-people attitude of the Zion-

^{*}"Although we are what we are, we remain Jews first of all."—Trans.

ists, which is a dangerous negation of the whole world.” This reservation was once sufficient to determine Dubnow’s negative attitude toward Zionism. But he has presumably experienced the same change as have so many others in Jewish society, that is to say, the Hitlerite flood has washed away the idea of *goles*; and his long-standing reservations about Zionism as a danger to the Jews of the world have necessarily lost a large part of their former force. Now, just like other new pro-Zionists, he is in general no more ecstatic or uncritical about it than the Zionists are among themselves (and not only among themselves).

Professor Dubnow was never an active political figure. Indeed, for a long time he has found himself completely outside political life for a number of objective reasons, while within the ivory tower of his solitude he lives in the company of the spirits of Jewish history and of *abstract ideas* about Jewish social movements stripped of their authentic garb. Mr. Dubnow speaks of the Bund in categories that have very little relation to reality. And that is how he thinks and speaks about Zionism. We, however, are not involved with a “platonic idea” of Zionism, but with living Zionist reality.

None of us can deny that the Zionists have achievements to record in Palestine. We submit only two “very minor” reservations:

(1) What has been built there has been built on sand, both economically and politically. We see from here the economic catastrophe, in the literal sense of the word, that Palestine is experiencing today. We see from here the blind, hopeless alley into which Zionism has politically maneuvered itself.

(2) What has been built there has cost world Jewry a treasure-house of money (approximately 100,000,000 pounds), and is worth—approximately—not less than it cost. The Zionists have demonstrated the trick of how to virtually monopolize the aid of Jewry throughout the world. They have even succeeded in extracting many millions from Polish Jewry, which is in such tremendous need of help.

But these are the least of our charges against Zionism, and they do not explain our determined struggle against it, nor our reluctance to engage in political collaboration with the Zionist party.

What have been our main arguments against Zionism in the decades of the Bund's existence? We stated that Zionism was not and could not be a solution to the Jewish question, and that by sowing the illusion among the Jewish masses that it is, Zionism diverts their attention and energy from the actual aims of their struggle. Moreover, because of its attitude of contempt toward *goles* and toward the Yiddish language, it is an obstacle on the road of development of Jewish culture.

Over the years, Zionism has evolved into *an open ally of our deadly enemy—anti-Semitism*. Zionism has, in fact, always derived its spiritual nourishment from the persecutions suffered by the Jewish population, and from political reaction above all. In the course of the forty-year existence of Zionism, the rule that has actually applied all the way through is: the darker things are in the world, the brighter things are in the tents of Zionism; the worse things are for Jews, the better for Zionism. . . .

What can a Jewish Palestine be, *under the best of circumstances*? The small state of a tiny Hebrew tribe within the Jewish people. When the Zionists speak to the non-Jewish world, they are tremendous democrats and depict conditions in the Palestine of today and the future as models of freedom and progress. But if a Jewish state should arise in Palestine, its spiritual climate will be: eternal fear of the external enemy (Arabs); eternal struggle for every foot of ground and for every bit of work with the internal enemy (Arabs); and an untiring struggle for the extermination of the language and culture of the non-Hebraized Jews in Palestine. Is this a climate in which freedom, democracy, and progress can grow? Indeed, is it not the climate in which reaction and chauvinism ordinarily flourish? Even kosher Zionist publicists who visit the Holy Land affirm the tremendous influence of clericalism, despite the fact that manual workers play such a prominent part in the Zionist organization. An eventual Jewish state cannot offer itself as a spiritual center to the Jewish masses of the *goles* lands, and as a center for immigration (the natural growth alone of the Jewish population of Poland significantly exceeds the absorption capacity of Palestine). The Zionists themselves have already significantly reduced their ambitions today: in a memorandum submitted by the representatives of the Jewish Agency to the Council of the

League of Nations during its September session in 1937, they speak of Palestine as only a *partial* solution to the Jewish question. But even this, in light of the aforementioned facts, is nothing more than delusion, than bluff.

We have—in fact, together with Professor Dubnow—always regarded as a crime the Zionist attitude of contempt toward the *goles*, their readiness to sacrifice the interests of millions of Jewish people throughout the world for the sake of the “elect,” represented by the Jews of Palestine.

I would not be exaggerating in the least if I were to say that, observing Zionist politics of recent years, one frequently gets the impression that those people have simply gone out of their minds, that in a state of profound desperation and wishing to salvage a modicum of the Zionist illusion, they commit crimes, each one greater than the last, with regard to the Jewish masses!

The leaders of the Zionist movement have, in fact, *openly begun to play the anti-Semitic card*. The incredible thought is stumbling around in their heads today of helping to form a bloc of countries with anti-Semitic regimes as allies of Zionism, as a force that should help Zionism “exert pressure” on the British government. If Professor Dubnow reads Supplement No. I to the memorandum (*aide-memoire*) which the Jewish Agency submitted in September 1937 to the members of the League of Nations Council, he will be convinced of what has just been stated. And in order not to arouse the ire of said countries, the Zionists are trying to keep quiet—*consciously* to keep quiet—about all the persecutions of the Jewish masses there.

September 1937 was a time when the specter of “deprivation” of citizenship and civil rights hung over the Jewish population of Rumania. In September 1937 the Jewish population of Warsaw experienced painful days, and in September 1937 the representative of Poland at Geneva (incidentally, not for the first time) issued a declaration that the Jews must leave Poland.

In the corridors of the League of Nations, the most prominent representatives of the Jewish Agency and of the World Jewish Congress “officiated” at that time. But not a single word was uttered by those gentlemen in defense of the Jewish masses of Europe. And the Polish Foreign Minister, Joseph Beck, after a

conference with Dr. Chaim Weizmann, was able to issue a declaration to the press that a complete and sincere agreement had been reached between him and the leader of the Zionist movement in regard to the Jewish emigration problems.

There was a Zionist journalist in Geneva who mustered up his courage to go to the Zionist leaders and voice a lament: "You can see what's going on [these were his approximate words], so, at the very least, issue a statement to the press with the reminder that the Balfour Declaration consists of *two* parts; that if there is reference in the first part to a national home for Jews in Palestine, there is an assertion in the second part that the national home in Palestine must in no case bring about a worsening of the political condition of the Jews in their old homes."

But the representatives of the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress, in which Professor Dubnow would also have liked to see the Bund, *refused even to do that* because it would evoke dissatisfaction among the representatives of the countries with anti-Semitic policies. And these leaders of Zionism—Mr. Weizmann as well as Mr. Moshe Shertok, Mr. Nahum Goldmann as well as Mr. Yarblum—replied with the greatest cynicism: "It's too bad. If a collision occurs between the interests of the Jewish state and the Jews in *goles*, the latter must be sacrificed."

The attitude of the Zionist delegations at Geneva (for the delegation of the World Jewish Congress is likewise a Zionist delegation) elicited surprise even in Zionist circles. The Zionist *Israelitische Wochenblatt*, which appears in Zurich, bitterly declared that during the September session of the League of Nations, while cries of woe could be heard from various quarters, the anguish of the Jewish masses found no expression there in any form whatsoever. Because—wrote the Geneva correspondent of that same paper—

Palestine ties everyone's hands. . . . One marvels at how the representative of the Jewish Agency, Nahum Goldmann, conducts his diplomatic conversations with a serious mien. Just a few days ago, the Revisionists engaged in negotiations with the Polish delegation. Now Weizmann also has had a conversation with the Polish foreign minister, Beck, who is an ally, as is known, in the question of an expanded opportunity for immigration into Palestine.

But the Zionists do the same things within the countries of mass Jewish life as they do in the international arena. I could refer to examples in various countries; I shall limit myself to facts about Poland.

Who can forget Yitzhak Grünbaum's notorious comment in the year 1927 about the "million superfluous Jews" that must be removed from Poland? Who can forget his no less notorious comment in the year 1928 that "the Jews are polluting the air of Poland"? The Polish anti-Semites excellently recall those words, and have periodically revived them—indeed, up to the very present—in the memory of their readers and listeners.

But 1927, 1928—those were heavenly years in comparison with the present. Of course the slogan *Zydzi do Palestyni* ["Jews to Palestine"] was popular not only among the Zionists but also among the anti-Semites. Yet who in Polish society seriously questioned our rights as citizens of the country?

However, eight fateful years went by. The year 1936 arrived—the year of Przytyk, of Minsk-Mazowiecki,* of a number of other similar events. The openly fascist camp in Poland not only preached but actively implemented an economic extermination campaign. It demanded forced mass-emigration and ghetto and Nuremberg laws for the "temporary" remnants. And it preached, by word and deed, physical force as a means of hastening the exodus from Poland. Even the head of government let fall during that year the expression that was destined to become famous: "Economic boycott—by all means." The Jewish masses felt their elementary civil and human rights threatened. And they mobilized for a struggle in defense of those rights, as in the strike of March 17 and the mass campaign for a congress dedicated to the struggle against anti-Semitism.

It was at that very time that three Zionist celebrities descended upon Poland, individuals representing the most varied tendencies in the Zionist camp: David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Grünbaum, and Vladimir Jabotinsky. Each of them—in the manner of a statesman—called a press conference open to the whole Polish press; and each, for his part, affirmed in his own way that *the Polish anti-Semites were 100% correct!*

*Towns in central Poland where anti-Jewish pogroms took place.—Trans.

The only solution to the Jewish question in Poland, declared the Poale Zionist Ben-Gurion, is in fact emigration; the Jews are indeed an obstacle in the path of the Polish peasant and the wife of the Polish sergeant, declared the General Zionist, Mr. Grünbaum; the Jews should indeed be evacuated from Poland, and as fast as possible, declared the Jewish "Duce," Jabotinsky.

Each of these statements fell upon the heads of the Jewish people of Poland like a clap of thunder. But all three were received by the whole anti-Semitic press as the highest expression of political wisdom. The Zionist writers on current public affairs in Poland (except for the most foolish and shabby ones) gagged over the declarations of their prominent leaders—literally unable to swallow or to spit them out. But the anti-Semitic press declared Ben-Gurion, Grünbaum, and Jabotinsky to be the greatest, indeed the sole national politicians of the Jewish people. The anti-Semitic *czas* opened its columns wide for any topic of the "Duce"; the anti-Semitic *Kurier Warszawski* transformed Jabotinsky's book, *Di Yidishe Melukhe* ["The Jewish State"], into almost the greatest literary event of our time. What more can you want?: Julius Streicher, no less, reprinted Grünbaum's statement and added his own comment: "This Grünbaum is a decent Jew."

That was in the year 1936 and today is 1938. No matter what we may think about the *internal* state of international fascism today, externally its influence has significantly increased during this period because of the criminal and suicidal policies of the Western European democracies. Everyone feels it, and we too feel it in Poland. The main council of an organization (commonly known as Ozon), which actually took the place of the former government party in Poland that was dissolved in 1935, has just held its session. A program on the Jewish question that was adopted at the session coincides completely with the program of the remorseless anti-Semites of the so-called National Camp.

The Jewish population of Poland was declared a "group outside the state" which, by its very existence, "weakens the normal development of the Polish national and state forces and stands in the way of the evolution now taking place in Poland." Hence Jewish participation in the economic life of the country must be reduced; the number of Jews in the schools must be reduced;

Polish culture must be protected from Jewish influences. All this is only a *partial* "solution" to the Jewish question. Its "basic solution" is—emigration: to Palestine and elsewhere, because Palestine itself is too small.

This, in short, is the program. The press commentaries on the program are consistent with the well-known anti-Semitic incitement style. And only *one idea* in Jewish life met with "respectful recognition" on the part of the authors of the program and the commentators on it: that is—Zionism.

Such "compliments" will not add any luster to the Zionists. But every objective person must concede, in view of what was stated above, that *the compliments they received were richly deserved!*

Does Professor Dubnow believe that all these are only "small defects" on the charming face of Zionism? Minor inaccuracies in the operation of the Zionist mechanism? Does Professor Dubnow really think that what he himself characterizes in Zionism as a "danger to the world Jewry," as well as all the facts cited above, are nothing more than—accidental? A tactical mistake that can be eliminated by a piece of good advice and by good intentions?

If such is Professor Dubnow's belief, it proves that he is operating with fictions and that the living and functioning Zionism is unknown to him. Zionism, in point of fact, has always been a Siamese twin of anti-Semitism and of every kind of national chauvinism. Zionism has always regarded the law of force, of nationalistic reaction, as the normal law of history, and on this law has based its perspectives of Jewish life. In the forty years of its existence it has always appeared lost and helpless in the presence of any victorious freedom movement.

To be sure, if the future of humanity really belongs to fascism, then the historical perspective depicted by Zionism will turn out to be correct; what then truly awaits us in *goles* is death and destruction. But death and destruction will then be the destiny of all human civilization and culture. Would Zionism be capable of saving *us alone* from the fascist deluge? It is ridiculous even to think about it! But then there will remain its "theoretical" *justification of anti-Semitism* as its sole "historical merit."

I have intentionally avoided speaking about the frequently ugly

and openly reactionary role that Zionism plays in the internal life of Poland or Rumania. I leave aside such little gems as the "solemn assurance" given a short time ago to Mussolini by the Zionist representatives of the World Jewish Congress to the effect that "the Jews never fought against fascism." I have endeavored to describe exclusively the political role of Zionism in Jewish life. (Their cultural role is a chapter in itself.) And I think that after all this, Professor Dubnow cannot expect us to look upon Zionism as a "liberating democratic movement" and as "a large popular movement that has embraced all other(?) progressive, democratic, and socialist parties"(?); or expect us to wax enthusiastic over the expression about the "revival of the Palestinian center as the greatest marvel in Jewish history," an expression with a pathetic ring, lifted out of the Zionist lexicon.

Professor Dubnow is correct in his assertion that it is necessary to exert all our power in the struggle "against the reactionary, hostile world that has lately become a danger to all peoples." But for this struggle we must seek partners *other than* the Zionists. This is not only the opinion of the Bund today but rather the opinion of the broadest strata of the Jewish masses in Poland and of the disappointed, embittered Jewish masses in Palestine.

The Essence of Bundism

1.

The Bund is alive, effective, and engaged in developing an intensive and many-sided activity in both the national and international spheres. The large masses of workers and working-class youth who listen to its message and march with enthusiasm behind its standard are the best evidence that the Bund has retained its youthful vigor in the fullest degree, and that today, just as in the first years after its emergence, it remains the expression of the social and national aspirations of the Jewish working class.

This we owe to the mass character and profound inner democracy of our movement. These qualities have protected the Bund from becoming rigid and case-hardened, and have provided the opportunity for testing and correcting its principles and slogans in the crucible of experience. But, of course, the Bund movement would not have achieved the mass character which has marked it in all its phases had its principles and slogans not expressed the needs of the Jewish working masses and the demands of the times.

What constitutes the essence of Bundism? To what degree has Bundism justified itself?

Those who refer to the history of the Bund usually have in mind the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. But that Bund actually existed only until 1914–1915. The First World War broke the Bund into separate parts. The Bund in the Soviet Union exists today only as a potential force. Besides this, the Bund in Poland arose on the territory of what had once been Imperial Russia, which, in addition to the former Russian

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territories, also included western and eastern Galicia. And in more recent years a Bund has arisen in Rumania. With the exception of Bessarabia, the regions encompassed by this very youngest Bund never belonged to the "territory" of the old, prewar Bund. But the socialist Jewish workers' movement in Rumania, through its own free choice, linked up with the traditions of the Bund and adopted its ideology.

When we speak today of the history of the Bund and the essence of Bundism, we must therefore keep in mind not only the prewar General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, but also all postwar Bunds, and above all the Bund in Poland, the active heir to the old-time Bund.

Three things distinguished the Bund and distinguish it to this very day: (1) its organizational principle; (2) its response to the Jewish question; and (3) its attitude toward the central problems of the general labor movement.

2.

The working class of every ethnic group must have its own organization, which should be adapted to the language and other national conditions of the given environment. This is the principle that has been defended by the Bund from the first moment of its existence: the general nationwide party which, in a natural fashion, must first of all be adapted to the conditions of life of the national majority of the country, can win to socialism more or less significant parts of the working class from the other nationalities. But to penetrate into the depth of the working class, to agitate it to its very core and lead it in large, compact masses to the socialist banner—this can be done only by an organization that has grown out of the bosom of that particular working mass.

The working class of every nationality must have its own organization but not its own party. In a country with several nationalities, only one party should exist, composed of as many autonomous national organizations as there are nationalities in the country.

The Bund arose [in 1897] a year before the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party was founded. But at its very inception

it regarded itself as a part of the coming national party, and as soon as the RSDWP was founded—with its active cooperation—the Bund, quite naturally, occupied an autonomous place in its ranks. Until the present day the Bund in Poland has been a completely independent party, but not because we regard it as something better or because we have departed from the traditional organizational principle of the Bund, but because conditions in Poland are not yet ripe for the emergence of a single party. The socialist party of the Polish proletariat has not yet decided, up to this very moment, to abandon its national parochialism and become a national party instead of a national-Polish party—in short, to become in place of a Polist Socialist Party (PPS) a Socialist Party of Poland (SPP).

I emphasize this point in particular because we have more than once heard the charge of “separatism” leveled against us.

Has our principle of organization justified itself? Life has confirmed it with proofs that are both positive and negative. The Jewish labor movement in Latvia, Rumania, and the United States had to develop according to the same principle.

And the negative proof is the Soviet Union. The All-Russian Communist Party rejected the organizational principle of the Bund. It forced the “Kombund” [Communist Bund] to disband its organization and compelled its members to enter the general Communist Party as individuals. The result is that while there is much work that needs to be done in the Soviet Union, the Jewish workers there have no such thing as a Jewish labor movement. And with the present structure of the Soviet Communist Party, a Jewish labor movement would not be able to exist today even if greater internal democracy prevailed.

If the struggle for our organizational principle can be regarded as more or less completed, the same cannot yet be said about our struggle for the correct response to the Jewish question. It is something almost unbelievable for today’s generation of Bundists that there was a time when the Bund had occasion to conduct a persistent struggle against assimilationism. I would like to be correctly understood: I am not referring here to practical assimilation, i.e., to assimilation as one of the processes taking place in Jewish life. The Bund never denied the existence of such a process.

I am referring to assimilation as one of the *ideologies* in Jewish society. There exists even today no lack of assimilated Jews in the world and of individuals (Jews and non-Jews) who consider assimilation a solution to the Jewish question. But within our sphere of influence there virtually no longer exists a party or even a more or less significant group that is ready to defend assimilation as a program. Both the PPS and the communists recognize the right of the Jewish masses today to a school in the mother tongue (Yiddish) and to the Yiddish language in court and administration.

In the area of the national question there has remained, in full strength, our great dispute with the Jewish bourgeoisie, more accurately with Zionism as the sole remaining species of territorialism. Yet in a certain sense, here too life itself has resolved the issue: for no matter how stubborn the struggle against Bundism waged until this very day by the Zionists, they have had to admit that the hope for a successful ingathering of all the Jews of the world—or at least the largest part of them—to Palestine, and the notion that Zionism could serve as a solution to the Jewish question in general, has turned out to be a dream, a mirage. Whether another two hundred, three hundred, or even five hundred thousand Jews are successfully brought or smuggled into Palestine, or whether the Arabs together with the British occupier succeed in reducing Jewish immigration to a minimum, the big question that confronts the Jewish masses in the so-called *goles* [diaspora] countries—What next?—will not find an answer in Zionism. Palestine can be, and can remain, nothing more than another *goles* country in the world. . . .

Both the social and national problems of the Jewish masses can find their solutions only where the Jewish masses live and only as a result of a radical political and social upheaval. In other words, the reply to the question: Here or there?, which has really been the main question in dispute between us and Zionism all along, has been provided by life itself in the form of the unequivocal answer: Here!

Thus, what finally remains is how to characterize the Bund's attitude toward the basic problems of the general proletarian movement.

The Bund had been part of the RSDWP and played a most

active role in the life of that party, in its persistent internal ideological conflicts. The first years of the war found the Bund in Poland cut off from the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. And when the storm-and-stress period of the postwar years followed the indescribably difficult years of war and occupation, the Bund in Poland, as an independent party, was already impelled to take a position on all the enormous problems that confronted the labor movement throughout the world. Under the impact of the gigantic scope of the Russian Revolution, a large part of the European proletariat was swept into the communist current. When the condition of international communism today is compared with what existed in 1919–1920, one simply cannot believe how swiftly the communists squandered what they possessed. Communism, as something radiating from the Russian Revolution, was surrounded by an immense aura at that earlier time. The Jewish workers' movement in Poland did not avoid the fate of the workers' movement in the world at large: the first so-called Unity Congress of the Bund in Poland (unity with the Jewish Social Democratic Party in Galicia) drew the Bund closer to communist positions.

But the realism of our movement and its profound internal democracy made it impossible for our party to maintain those positions. Virtually no party in the world came out of that period without being damaged or split. The cost to the Bund of its experience with communism was comparatively negligible. When the Second Congress of the Bund rejected the "21 Conditions" of the Comintern, *five* out of fifty democratically elected delegates left the congress. We attribute this negligible loss not only to the democratic structure of our movement but also to the deep internal cohesion that has characterized the Bund from its inception.

The Bund in Poland swiftly discarded the communist illusions. This shift received organizational expression after a number of years of passionate but comradely intraparty disputes, in the form of affiliation with the Labor and Socialist International. But the Bund absorbed the tremendous experience of the postwar revolutions and of everything that happened after them. Against the background of that experience, and in accord with the principles

of revolutionary Marxism and its own party traditions, the Bund formulated its attitude toward the core problems of our time.

We are opposed to reformism. We reject the illusion that socialism can evolve within a capitalistic system in a peaceful, purely democratic fashion. We appreciate the great significance of the so-called democratic freedoms for the development of the labor movement within the framework of a capitalist society, but the experience of recent years, especially in Germany and Austria, has clearly demonstrated the limited nature of so-called formal democracy in the struggle for socialism. Hence we know that it will be impossible to realize socialism without the methods of revolutionary class-struggle, and that the road to authentic, i.e., socialist, democracy proceeds through a transitional stage of dictatorship by the revolutionary classes.

Yet just as we reject reformism, we also reject communism. We are opposed to the anti-Marxist tactics of the communists. The regime of unfreedom or "freedom" reminiscent of the Prussian barracks, which the communists have instituted even in their own ranks, is totally alien to us. We oppose their endeavor to violate the will of the working class and to institute the dictatorship of the Politburo over the working class. And we condemn most sharply the criminal divisive policy of the communists, their policy of civil war in the workers' ranks, which has already brought so much harm to the labor movement of the whole world.

This is our position. We have defended it for years on end. The events of the recent past have served to strengthen our devotion to it.

PERSONALITIES

Lenin

(Reminiscences and Impressions)

1.

I met Lenin for the first time in 1917, after the March Revolution in Petrograd. Up to that time I was familiar with Lenin only from a distance, on the basis of his articles and books and the unwritten history of the Russian movement.

Like the large majority of my party comrades, I too was among the opponents of Lenin's school of thought in the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. The political position of the Bund was not always identical with that of the Mensheviks. But there were a number of questions on which we always differed with the Bolsheviks—even those among us who had outspoken Bolshevik sympathies. They were the questions concerning the general organizational structure of the party, the question of the relationship between the leader and the mass and of the role of the party apparatus in the movement, the questions concerning internal party democracy, and others. These were questions over which all of us deviated from Lenin. I had an image of Lenin not only as a theoretician and publicist but also as an individual. He was a person possessed of a colossal capacity for work, with both an iron will and iron consistency. He was a passionate factionalist. He defended his views and the interests of his faction with fanatical

“Lenin (Reminiscences and Impressions)” was originally published in *Folkstytung*, Warsaw, February–March 1924, accompanied by a note stating: “The editorial staff does not fully concur with all the judgments and conclusions in the article.”

obstinacy. The question of means simply did not exist for him. All means, without exception, were satisfactory if they were capable of serving the interests of his faction.

On the personal level it was a case of an extraordinarily modest individual. For almost two decades he lived in foreign emigration under conditions of the greatest want. His sole diversion was music. His family life was a model of the idyllic.

From 1900 Lenin was one of the most recognized leaders of the Russian workers' movement. But none of those who met him, aside from the narrow circle of his admirers, detected in him any signs of greatness, any portent of the leader who would shake the world and whose name would evolve into a symbol. The turbulent, elemental force of the revolution was needed for all the latent possibilities in Lenin to unfold.

2.

The date was April 3, 1917. News reached the presidium of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies that a group of emigrants headed by Lenin would be arriving in the afternoon. This was the first group that reached Russia by way of Germany. The Executive Committee decided to send a delegation to welcome the arriving émigrés, above all Lenin, the old revolutionist and recognized leader of the Russian workers' movement. The head of the delegation was Nicholas Chkheidze, chairman of the Executive Committee. A large crowd of workers and soldiers, with banners and bands, came to meet the train.

The train arrived. The first person to alight was Lenin. Medium in build and broad-shouldered, Lenin was close to fifty years of age. On a short but powerful neck—a broad-boned face with Mongol features; small, sprightly, crafty eyes; a small mustache and pointed beard; and a head with almost no hair. Altogether, the appearance of a typical Russian merchant from Moscow or Rязan. In his face and his whole being there was an expression of singular stubbornness and iron power.

Chkheidze delivered a warm address of greeting. He praised Lenin as a teacher and guide, as leader of the Russian proletariat.

He alluded to the dangers facing the revolution and to the fact that unity was needed in the revolutionary camp.

Lenin all but turned a deaf ear to Chkheidze's words. He did not even take note of the whole delegation. As far as Lenin was concerned, the spot occupied by the delegation and Chkheidze was just an empty space. And no sooner had the latter concluded his greeting than Lenin proceeded to deliver a pitiless and extraordinarily pungent speech against the policy of the Workers' Soviet and its leaders. . . .

3.

From the railway station Lenin and his comrades promptly left for the Bolshevik club at the palace of the famous dancer Kshesinskaia, which the Bolsheviks had seized during the first days of the March Revolution. Lenin remained there until five o'clock in the morning, during which time he apprised himself of the situation while hammering away at and haranguing his comrades without interruption and without letup.

It should be understood that Bolshevism, prior to Lenin's arrival in Russia, was not how it later came to be known throughout the world. Already during the first weeks after the March Revolution, the Bolsheviks were an oppositional element in the Petrograd Soviet of Soldiers and Workers. They diverged from the majority of the Soviet on a whole series of practical and tactical questions. But that which later became the essence of Bolshevism—the view of the Russian Revolution as a *socialist* revolution—was hardly mentioned at the time by the Bolsheviks in Russia.

Even on the question of the war, there were no particularly deep disagreements between the Bolsheviks and the left wing of the Mensheviks. Suffice it to say that about two weeks before Lenin returned, the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks decided to remove from the slogan "Down with the War!" their agenda as "not timely." . . .

Incredible as it may seem, the fact remains: during the initial weeks of the revolution the talk in both Menshevik and Bolshevik circles was of a union of both parts of the RSDWP. And a group of Social Democratic leaders was formed, made up partly of Menshe-

viks and partly of Bolsheviks, who set themselves the direct task of effecting that unification. . . .

No one knew the subject of conversation during the twelve hours of Lenin's first encounter with his comrades. But already by the next morning, the Tauride Palace (the locale of the Soviet of Workers) was full of rumors that Lenin had carried out a complete revolution in his party.

4.

Between April 1 and April 4 an All-Russian Conference of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets took place in Petrograd. The group of Social Democratic leaders, supporters of unification, invited all Social Democratic deputies (both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) to a special unification conference in the Tauride Palace scheduled for April 5.

Lenin arrived at the conference almost directly from the Bolshevik club. After a brief address by one of the initiators of the conference, Lenin was given the floor.

He did not even try to oppose the idea of unification; he simply ignored it, as something not even worth wasting any time on. The slogan, he said, is not unification but *split*. It is necessary to cast off "the yellow rag of Social Democracy." The Russian Revolution is a socialist revolution, and its way is civil war. Everything done by the revolution until now is one long string of mistakes. The task is to overthrow "the government of capitalists and landowners" and to proclaim a government of the Soviets that will introduce socialism.

It is necessary to approach the army with the slogan of civil war and not of peace, said Lenin. The soldiers should be told: "Turn the bayonets against your landowners and capitalists. Get rid of them—and the whole world will believe that you are not waging an imperialist war, and peace will be concluded with you." Imperialism, continued Lenin, means not only the seizure of new countries but also the desire to retain within the boundaries of Russia such countries as the Ukraine, Poland, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia, and others.

Only when the revolution relinquishes all this will it be believed.

And if, nevertheless, there should be a desire to wage war against it, the socialist revolution will itself declare war against the whole world.

This, in brief, was the content of Lenin's one and one-half hour speech.

It is impossible to describe the commotion it unleashed. The place was like a seething cauldron. Impassioned speeches quickly began to gush forth from the platform. The first one to come forward was Goldenberg-Myeshkovsky, a Bolshevik of long standing, one of Lenin's closest collaborators and a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee. It was the first time in his life that he had come out against Lenin. He spoke with his heart's blood, with deep bitterness.

Woytinsky spoke next. He too was a former Bolshevik, indeed, one of the most prominent. A number of Mensheviks also spoke. Only two Bolsheviks—Kollontai and Nogin—supported Lenin.

There was no longer any talk about unification. The conference broke up. The first fiery torch of civil war had been hurled into the turbulent, agitated country.

5.

Lenin's attitude initially surprised even his own party comrades. His first article in *Pravda*, the central organ of the Bolsheviks, published in Petrograd, appeared with a notation that the editorial board did not concur with the article. But that was the last trace of disagreement. Several days went by and, on the central organ, Lenin—and only Lenin—was already dominant. And after another brief period, it was only Lenin who prevailed throughout the Bolshevik Party. With relentless energy he subjected the whole party to his will, and he commenced to lead it with a firm hand in the predetermined direction.

Lenin almost never appeared at the sessions of the Workers' Soviet or the Executive Committee. To engage in discussions in a comparatively restricted circle of individuals with crystallized opinions was considered by Lenin a waste of time. He delegated others for such a task. He himself organized and fortified the party apparatus and agitated in speech and writing amidst the masses.

All Petrograd, indeed all Russia, was one vast discussion club at that time. Lenin would address meetings quite frequently, and wherever he spoke the struggle would reach the highest level of intensity.

Was Lenin a good speaker? Certainly. But his speaking ability was of a very special kind. In his speeches there was not a shred of lyricism, not a vestige of pathos, no oratorical embellishment whatsoever. The structure of his speeches was uncommonly simple; the language, primitive, even impoverished. The thoughts, oversimplified in the extreme. But within those simple speeches there lay a colossal, literally an elemental, power. His thoughts would catapult upon the listener with the force of a raw, granitic boulder. He would overwhelm an opponent with the extraordinary simplicity of his trend of thought, which was so well adapted to the level of the mass. Consequently the more unsophisticated the listener, the more unbeatable was Lenin the speaker.

6.

Lenin the theoretician did not flower during the revolution, and before the revolution no one considered him a genius. Lenin the genius was born in the fire of the revolution. And his genius consisted not only of his colossal organizational power, but perhaps even more, of his extraordinary ability to adapt himself to the *stikhia*, the spontaneous elemental forces, and to become their reflection and expression.

The immense country resembled an ocean during a storm. The surface of the ocean, the crests of the waves, were the urban proletarian masses. But the basis of the revolutionary *stikhia* was the enormous, gray peasant mass at the front, in the barracks, and the villages. For this mass, Marxism, or even just socialism, was a mystery. It was not only incapable of grasping them; it had absolutely no need for them. Hegemony in the revolution was exercised by the working class, which imposed its socialist ideology and phraseology on the movement. The peasant mass introduced its *own* content into the proletarian slogans: "*Peace and land!*"

But whoever truly wished to lead the revolution was compelled

to master this particular *stikhiya* and was forced to formulate the slogans and catchwords of the movement in such a fashion as to be, in Lenin's words, rendered accessible to the most backward peasant. And in this regard Lenin had no equal. Here are a few examples.

In June 1917, Lenin advanced the slogan: "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!"

Not "capitalism," because the latter is an abstract concept; but the term "ten capitalist ministers" was concrete. The ten were assailable. Thanks to the intensive agitation by the Bolshevik press and its party apparatus, the ten capitalist ministers became for the "most backward peasant" the living embodiment of the dozens of crises from which the country was suffering, and of all the suffering experienced by the masses in the course of generations. Since these ten capitalist ministers did not wish to end the war promptly, since they contended that the estates of the landowners should not be seized immediately, and that it was necessary to wait until the convening of the Constituent Assembly, the slogan "Down with the ten capitalist ministers" very quickly, in fact, penetrated to the last trench and filled the untutored masses with an extraordinary hatred for those ten ministers who were an obstacle in the path of the people's happiness.

At the First Congress of Soviets in that same month of July, Lenin delivered an important speech about the prospects of the revolution. In the speech he declared, among other things, that in order to smash capitalism in Russia it was sufficient to place one hundred capitalists in prison.

Lenin the theoretician, Lenin the Marxist, surely could not have meant that. But such simple and superficial slogans had an electrifying effect.

Another example:

It was November 7, 1917. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets had opened in Petrograd, the congress that proclaimed the Soviet Republic and the beginning of the Russian and socialist revolution. After hiding out for about four months not far from Petrograd, Lenin once again appeared in public. Welcomed with tremendous enthusiasm by the congress, at which the deputies from the front constituted an overwhelming majority, Lenin spoke

about the significance of the new epoch. The essence of the socialist revolution, said Lenin, is the "expropriation of the expropriators"; and in its Russian context, he said, it means: "*Grab Nagrablennoye*," i.e., "Steal what has been stolen from you."

Such a translation would surely have caused the hair of Lenin the Marxist, the Lenin of old, Lenin the theoretician of the RSDWP, to stand on end. The strictly scientific, Marxian concept, which means the socialization of private property, has here been transmuted into the petit bourgeois concept of parceling out, of tearing apart the accumulated private fortunes, i.e., into the opposite of socialism!

But "Steal what has been stolen" was a truly brilliant adaptation of socialist terminology to the process spontaneously under way in Russia at that time. From July onward, the mansions of the landowners were burning, and the peasants were dividing up the land of the landowners and the state along with the movable and immovable inventory. From August onward, a broad stream of soldiers flowed from the front toward the countryside, men who were fed up with the long wait for peace and who were heading home in order not to be too late for the dividing up of the land, dragging with them rifles, machine guns, frequently small cannon, horses, horse-drawn wagons, and money from regimental treasuries. This *stikhiya*, which focused on parceling out, also seized the imagination of the many city workers who had left the village only during the war in order to enter war industry. They too ran home, fleeing to the villages from the cities over which was already hovering the specter of starvation. In the process they carried out of the factories whatever might, in their judgment, be useful to them at home.

"Steal what has been stolen" was the only form in which socialism was accessible to this nonproletarian mass.

7.

From the very first moment of the revolution, Lenin consciously moved toward his predetermined goal: power for the Bolshevik Party and the dictatorship of that party.

I remember it as if it were today: The event was the First

Congress of Soviets, at the beginning of June. A heated discussion had arisen focusing on the central question of the Congress, the question of power. Kerensky's first coalition government was in office at the time. It was made up of three representatives of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers—Tseretelli, Skobelev, and Peshekhonov—and the "ten capitalist ministers." The fourteenth member of the coalition was Kerensky himself. The Congress was faced with the decision whether to remain in a coalition with the bourgeois parties (in actuality, with the Kadets)* or to form a purely socialist government of the Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets. In favor of coalition were the Mensheviks and S.R.'s; against were the Bolsheviks and Menshevik-Internationalists. But of the more than 720 delegates, there were, all told, only 120 Bolsheviks; and the number of Menshevik-Internationalists was insignificant.

Tseretelli, the main speaker, represented the supporters of coalition. The central thought in his address was that the Soviets of Workers were not able at that moment to resolve, by their own strength, all the questions confronting the revolution.

"I ask you," said Tseretelli, "and, in fact, I want an answer: Is there any organization or party in the country today which has the courage to assume the responsibility, by itself, for the fate of the country?"

There was dead silence in the hall. Then, in the midst of that silence, Lenin arose and replied calmly and unhurriedly: "There is such an organization. It is the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party."

For a split second the Congress sat petrified in the face of Lenin's wholly unexpected words. But the overwhelming majority of the audience quickly erupted into resounding laughter. Even the largest part of the Bolshevik faction reacted by lowering its eyes, so utterly fantastic, so incomprehensible did the idea seem to them.*

*Constitutional Democrats, the party of Russian liberalism—Trans.

*It should, in fact, be recalled that even after November 7, that is, after the successful seizure of power, two such pillars of Bolshevism as Kamenev and Zinoviev resigned from the Bolshevik Party Central Committee and announced it in the press, because they found it impossible to assume responsibility for the *coup d'état*.—Erllich.

But Lenin's face revealed not a trace of a smile. He looked at the laughing delegates with genuine surprise. And it was clear that he was aching to understand just what it was they were laughing about, and why his words apparently seemed so absurd, when in reality the matter was so simple.

One of Lenin's arguments was especially characteristic of his way of thinking. The Russian tsars, he wrote, ruled Russia for centuries, basing themselves on 130,000 great landowners. Why should not the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party be able to govern with the help of its 240,000 party members?

This single thought encompasses a whole *Weltanschauung*.

The slogan "All Power to the Soviets" was not a question of principle for Lenin but a question of expediency, of the best and most direct way that would lead to the power of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. After the unsuccessful uprising of July 4, when the Soviets made a definite move to the right and a feeling of bitterness against the Bolsheviks prevailed among the masses, Lenin withdrew the slogan "All Power to the Soviets." The Bolsheviks renewed their agitation around this slogan—indeed, with all the energy they could muster—only after the Kornilov uprising in August, when the Soviets moved to the left and the bitterness of the masses was turned against Kerensky and the moderate elements in the socialist camp.

Lenin cared hardly at all about "internal democracy," even in the socialist camp itself. At the very time he was concentrating all his agitation around the slogan "All Power to the Soviets," he let slip no opportunity (with the help of external pressure) to impose upon the Soviets—those sovereign organs of the revolution—the will of the Bolsheviks, even where they were in the minority.

During the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks, with a total of ten percent of the votes, quietly prepared a large armed demonstration that was supposed to compel the Congress of Soviets to adopt the Bolshevik position. By chance the preparation was exposed and the Congress compelled the Bolsheviks to abandon the plan.

They returned to it several weeks later, when their armed demonstration against the Central Executive Committee (which

had been elected by the Congress) took the form of the unsuccessful July Uprising in Petrograd.

And even the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets (the November Congress), which was intended to decide the further destiny of the revolution, and concerning which Lenin knew for certain that it would have a Bolshevik majority—even that Congress was confronted by a *fait accompli*. At the moment the Congress opened, the secret Military Revolutionary Committee had already occupied all of Petrograd, and the warships bombarded the Winter Palace, the seat of Kerensky's government.

To unleash the *stikhiya* and direct it beyond all bounds, to lash its waves toward an ever higher crest in order to ride that crest into power—this was Lenin's basic tactic until November. Eight months of revolution showed how insecure was the position on the crest. Lenin did not wish to make the fate of his government dependent upon a caprice of the *stikhiya*, hence his aim after November became: freedom from the fortuitous nature of the *stikhiya*; to direct the turbulent sea into granitic channels; and to continue to guide the revolution according to a clearly set plan toward a prearranged goal.

Lenin now grasped the helm of the whole ship of state with the same iron hand with which he had directed his party up to November. He was the soul of the government. Nothing of greater or lesser significance took place without his knowledge and approval. He held the whole apparatus of the colossal state in his hands.

Lenin's audacity was enormous, not only in deed but also in thought (a phenomenon that is far more rare). He never held back in the matter of the most far-reaching compromises involving programmatic principles. Between one day and the next he dropped the cardinal question of the Russian Revolution—the agrarian question—and without wavering adopted the program of the SR's as soon as he became convinced that it better suited the desires of the peasant mass. He was completely certain that on November 7 the realization of socialism had commenced in Russia. But he was not adamant as to which road was supposed to lead to it. If one road led him down a blind alley, he tried to shift direction toward a different road. If the second road turned out to be a

wrong one, he sought a third. But in one respect Lenin would brook no compromises whatsoever: in the *question of power*. Sharing power with any other party was for Lenin totally precluded. One day he was capable of appropriating the program of the SR's on one question; the following day, on a different question, the platform of the Mensheviks. But in both instances Lenin would do this without, or in opposition to, those particular parties, indeed, in an envenomed struggle against them. Lenin did not doubt for a single moment that any bourgeois who undertook to compete with the Bolsheviks was a mortal enemy of the working class and the revolution, and every socialist as well. Which explains why pitiless terror was one of the basic foundations of Lenin's policies.

A characteristic trait: At the start of 1919, when the terror was especially virulent, mothers, wives, and sisters of the arrested and convicted would, en masse, call upon Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, to intercede on behalf of their children, husbands, and brothers. This prompted Lenin to run the following brief announcement in the press: "Please do not disturb my wife with requests about arrestees because it is totally useless."

This was no expression of personal cruelty. What found expression in Lenin's attitude toward terror was only his unbounded fanaticism, that same fanaticism which allows people to be sent to the stake in the profound conviction that it is only salvation for the souls of the burned.

A passionate ideological struggle within the proletarian camp centering on the work of Lenin's life will go on for many years. But everyone—even his most bitter adversaries—will have to concede that he was one of the most notable individuals and greatest revolutionaries history has produced.

Vladimir Medem

A TEACHER, a guide, a recognized leader has left us.

An individual has left us who, in the course of roughly twenty years, was the spokesman of the party of the Jewish proletariat and its political standard-bearer before the world at large, in the presence of friends and adversaries and foes.

Among the “oldsters” of the Bund, Medem was one of the youngest. Others laid the foundation stones of the organization, laid brick upon brick, erecting the structure of the Jewish workers’ party in the course of severe struggle against a thousand obstacles.

Medem arrived later. But among us there was not—and indeed is not—a single individual whose name is so closely associated with the Jewish Labor Bund as *Vladimir Medem*. For he was the one who laid the groundwork for the ideology of the Bund. Owing to his rich and talented makeup, he became, in a natural fashion, the most brilliant defender of that ideology in speech and writing.

The first large-scale ideological struggle that the party of the Jewish proletariat had to endure was the struggle with the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party over the organizational principle of the Bund. In practical terms, that dispute was fought out in northwestern Russia and partly in Poland, where the Jewish workers had occasion to endure the stubborn and not-always-clean competitive struggle with the assimilated Jewish socialist intelligentsia, which had not yet found for itself any satisfactory activity in the Russian and Polish proletarian environment. But the theoret-

“Vladimir Medem” was originally published in *Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, January 12, 1923. It was written as soon as the report arrived of Medem’s death in the United States.

ical struggle centering on the organizational question was conducted in the press, a significant portion of which was published abroad; at public meetings of the socialist colonies in the outland; and at closed interparty discussions and conferences. It was in those places that the young Medem represented the Bund viewpoint most brilliantly.

But soon the disagreements turned more serious and profound. The Jewish workers' movement was growing, and with each passing day embraced larger and broader circles. The deeper the roots being sunk by the Bund among the Jewish proletarian masses, the more many-sidedly was it forced to reflect their needs and desires. And the national aspects of the Jewish workers' movement had, of necessity, to find greater expression within the Bund.

By a caprice of history it was precisely through him—Vladimir Medem—that the national needs of the Jewish proletariat found most striking and classic expression. Through him, who had come to the Jewish working class from afar, from a totally alien if not directly hostile environment.

Medem's pamphlet, *Social Democracy and the National Question*, in which the demand for national-cultural autonomy was formulated in detail and substantiated for the first time, became the basis of the Bundist party program. It was around this pamphlet that the passionate ideological struggle was concentrated, the struggle waged by the Bund within the socialist camp.

Medem placed at the service of his party and the Jewish working class the uncompromising force of his acute, cold logic and the incandescent flame of his young, fresh, vibrant soul. Proudly and with his zest for life, Medem stood in the midst of the raging struggle. In the proletarian camp he fought for the recognition and the national demands of the Jewish proletariat. In the Jewish arena he was the most dangerous adversary of all those who sowed despair among the Jewish masses, who wished to enmesh those masses in the sticky web of nationalism.

The banner of the Bund fluttered wherever Medem made his appearance. His every word and his refined yet courageous bearing exuded such wonderful magic that there had to arise, even in the worst enemy, a feeling of respect toward the young, upcoming Jewish proletariat whose standard-bearer was Medem.

Medem and the Jewish Labor Bund became one.

The year was 1905–1906. Immediately after the joyous reports about the first Russian Revolution, there arrived the dreadful news about the anti-Jewish pogroms. The revolutionary Jewish proletariat responded to the pogroms with armed, self-sacrificing defense and with the reinforcement of its revolutionary activity. But the Jewish nationalists flooded the Jewish milieu with lamentations and feelings of despair. They sowed apathy, discouragement, depression. . . .

The years 1905–1906 did not bring victory for the revolution. Still, they did change radically the conditions in the country. They confronted the working class with a new political situation. Organized political parties arose, with more or less definite political programs, both in the general political arena and in Jewish life. New tasks were faced by the party of the proletariat in the general life of the state as well as in the Jewish sphere, tasks about which there had been no thought until that time.

Medem was of the breed whose energy grows commensurately with the obstacles accompanying events and tasks. The earlier disputes about the position of the Bund in the general proletarian movement and in Jewish life had been to a large degree fought out. The task facing the party of the Jewish proletariat was to fortify and extend the positions of the working class in the struggle against general as well as Jewish reaction and to prepare for new and unremitting conflicts.

Medem almost never occupied himself with the practical, day-to-day party activity; yet there was not a single activist involved in the practical work of the movement, no matter how experienced, who did not consider it his duty—even in regard to practical questions—to consult with Medem.

Medem was one of those few who could be called the brains of the movement. He aroused and fructified—and did so without letup—Jewish (and not only Jewish) proletarian thought in the country. Wherever he appeared, the comrades felt more steady and secure in their work. After the revolution, as before, Medem remained the teacher, guide, and leader.

Chance dictated that Medem should spend his final and most active years in Poland. During the dark days of the German

occupation, tens of thousands of Jewish workers gathered about him as about a lighthouse. Amidst the barbed wire of the occupation regime, he stood with them in an intimate and heartfelt association. And whenever Medem appeared, courage was reinforced, faith was enhanced, and joy and pride filled people's hearts.

The stormy years of 1918 and 1919 arrived. New winds, new aspirations began to waft across Europe. Medem's eternally young heart of a revolutionist had welcomed the hot breath of the revolution. But his head remained cool. He warned against unconsidered steps; he urged caution. Not always did his views at that juncture coincide with the views of his comrades. Yet there was not a single instance when Medem's words were not listened to with the greatest attention and the greatest respect. For all the differences of opinion, there was not a single individual who did not continue to relate to him as to a teacher and leader, who did not regard him as the pride and jewel of our movement. . . .

Medem left for America in 1920. In every last corner of our movement his absence was painfully felt. But every day we remained aware of his deep attachment to the Jewish working masses in Poland and his fatherly concern for them. We knew Medem was with us, and we hoped he would return.

And here we are now, standing before his open grave: old and young, the whole Jewish working class; we stand as orphans, with broken hearts and heads bowed.

HOW DID MEDEM COME TO THE BUND?

Medem came to the Jewish working class from afar. As soon as he was born, his parents had him baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church. When he was thirteen his parents also converted to Christianity.*

"How Did Medem Come to the Bund?" was originally published, in *Folkstsaying*, Warsaw, January 1924, on the first anniversary of his death.

*Medem's evolution, from childhood to tested Jewish revolutionary Marxist and Bund leader, is vividly depicted in his memoirs, a singular example of this literary genre. See Samuel A. Portnoy, ed. and trans., *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist: the Memoirs of Vladimir Medem* (New York, 1979).—Trans.

Medem grew up in a household in which the only sign of Jewishness was the old Jewish woman who used to bring food into the home several times a week. The environment of his childhood years was of Russian officials and officers. His Russian nursemaid used to take him to the Orthodox church, where he would pray with fervor. His mother tongue was Russian. The culture he absorbed from childhood was the Russian culture.

How did Medem come to the Jewish working class? It was, in part, coincidence. Medem grew up in a Jewish city, Minsk. His closest friends during childhood and adolescence were Jews. The first socialist organization with which he came in contact was the Bund. Had Medem been born somewhere like Tula or Penza, who knows? Maybe he would not have become a leader of the Jewish workers' movement.

But I believe that the Jewish proletariat has not only that coincidence to thank for Medem's having come to it. Medem was a son of assimilated Jewish parents, and his father wished for his Vladimir to take a further step on the road to assimilation. Assimilation, however, is something that cannot be tolerated by every personality. Of course assimilation is frequently only a matter of conviction. But it is generally something more than conviction—or something less, as the case may be. In most instances it involves a degree of careerism, a substantial dose of lack of character, a bit of timorousness, a wish to make life easier, to adapt to the environment, to dress up in khaki color in order to avoid the arrows of the enemy.

Medem's father was a liberal who had an interest in social questions in general and the Jewish question in particular. He read *Voskhod** regularly. And he agonized over the persecution of the Jews. The Jew-hater, Count Nikolai Ignatiev (the Minister of the Interior), was a despised figure in his household. But he desired that his Vladimir should not have to suffer any anti-Semitic mistreatment or feel the taste of the quota system,† of *pravozhitelstvo*,‡ or of other lovely things reserved by tsarist Russia for

*A popular Russian-Jewish journal.—Trans.

†The notorious *numerus clausus*.—Trans.

‡The system of discriminatory residential requirements for Jews in tsarist Russia. Confinement in the Pale was the norm, while restrictive special permits were needed for Jews seeking to reside outside the Pale.—Trans.

Jews. Hence his decision to dress his son in khaki clothes: he had him baptized.

But Vladimir Medem was no "khaki person." Vladimir Medem sought no easy or comfortable way in life. Vladimir Medem never accommodated himself to the environment and never avoided a struggle. Neither ethically nor even esthetically was he able to abide cowardice.

When Medem saw the cruelty of the tsarist regime, he became a revolutionist. When the whole predatory mechanism of the capitalist system, built upon oppression and exploitation, revealed itself to him, he joined the camp of the socialist proletariat. And since the Jewish worker was the pariah among pariahs, the enslaved among the enslaved, Medem unwaveringly entered the ranks under the banner of the Bund. In a natural fashion, without the slightest inner struggle, Medem made his move despite the bourgeois-fatherly concern for his future on the part of those close to him. Not only did he return to being a Jew; he himself was the one who placed a number of new and serious obstacles on his path to a "career," to a calm, genteel, peaceful existence.

MEDEM'S ROLE IN THE BUND

Medem became one of the foremost individuals in the ranks of the party of the Jewish working masses. He entered the Bund two years after the founding of the party in 1897, at a time when its physiognomy was not yet clear and its own ideology not yet sharply crystallized. The organization of the Jewish proletariat grew spontaneously out of the soil of the Jewish workers' movement, like a tree rising in the middle of a field—a tree that has neither been set out nor grown from seed. It was a time when the essence of what was Bundist and what constituted Bundism had assumed only a semiconscious form in the minds of the Bund leaders. And Medem, of all people, turned out to be the one whose fate it was to formulate and hone Bundist thought and defend it against a world of foes and adversaries in the Jewish and non-Jewish arenas. Medem was one of the most active creators of Bundism. He was its most illustrious standard-bearer.

The essential content of Bundism and what distinguished it

from Russian Marxism and endowed the organization of the Jewish proletariat with its unique character was the organizational principle and the national program of the Bund. Historically, it was the former that matured first. In connection with that principle, the Bund had occasion to endure the most tenacious struggle with the Russian and Polish socialists. The acute disagreements over the organizational question compelled the Bund in the year 1903 to leave the ranks of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party—the All-Russian party which had been built with its hands.

That was the *Sturm und Drang* period in the history of the Bund. That was the heroic epoch of the party. Within the Pale the Jewish proletariat stubbornly conducted its revolutionary struggle against tsarism. Its ideology was forged in the sociopolitical arena. And in the front ranks, in the most exposed position stood Vladimir Medem. He was the author of the first Bundist pamphlet opposing Zionism. He was the first to provide a finished and elaborately substantiated formulation of the Bund's national program. Medem was the major developer of that program.

Every word of his and every public address was infused with the brilliance of his speaking ability and literary talent; they projected the magic of Medem's personality.

Medem was one of the youngest in the party. But nobody's name was so powerfully woven together and blended with that of the Bund as the name Vladimir Medem. He was the very personification of the party, the inspiration of the Jewish workers' movement. . . .

SELECTED WRITINGS
FROM THE PEN OF
VICTOR ALTER

The Moscow Executions: The Tragedy of the Revolution

NOWADAYS, when people who have some relationship to the labor movement come together, the conversation unavoidably turns to the executions in Moscow. And their talk is suffused with deep pain and a feeling of personal humiliation.

A comrade told me: "The story of the Moscow fusillades is a nightmare for me; it gives me no rest. I can't free myself from this nightmare. Only once in my life have I experienced anything like it—when Hitler came to power. For me it is not only a political event but a painful personal experience."

And this is how all of us feel. Bundists, unaffiliated people, communists. Even such communists who shout in public: "Hurrah! Stalin is right!"

And the common character of these feelings is a sure—if subjective—sign that the Moscow executions are not an episode to be forgotten tomorrow, but an important historical event. . . .

It's not a matter of compassion for the sixteen condemned. Something far more important is involved. All of us feel instinctively that a *horrible tragedy of the Russian Revolution* has been played out in Moscow. The Moscow fusillades struck not only the condemned. They severely wounded the revolution itself.

Hence the acute sadness that has enveloped everyone. The depth of feeling shows how great a place the Russian Revolution occupies in our hearts. We experience its tragedy as we would a

"The Moscow Executions" was originally published in *Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, September 1936.

purely personal one. And nothing is capable of rupturing the thread that binds us so firmly to every revolutionary movement in general, and to the Russian Revolution in particular.

It is precisely for this reason that every Bundist, and, presumably, every communist, feels such burning shame over the Moscow Trial and its consequences. Because, despite everything, the shame of the Russian Revolution is our own shame.

Such is the precept of international class-discipline: we all belong to a single family, whether we wish to or not.

NOT INDIVIDUALS BUT LEADERSHIP

Feelings play a big role in political life. Yet one cannot get by on feelings alone. It is also essential to understand what has taken place, and to draw the necessary consequences.

Let us first get the facts straight.

The Soviet regime, which is led today by Stalin, has branded as counterrevolutionists, in a public trial, all the living founders of the Soviet regime—except for Stalin. Because those being condemned are not, after all, only Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev. Sentenced as well in this trial were also Tomskey, also Rykov, and also Bukharin. And it was these six people, indeed, who—with Stalin making the seventh—constituted the Politburo, the highest among the leading organs of the Russian Revolution, that was appointed after the death of Lenin. Thus, the people officially labeled traitors and agents of Hitlerism in Moscow were not just any six leaders, but the decisive majority (six-sevenths) of the official and actual leadership of the revolution.

Consequently, the question that arises for every worker is: Either the Moscow verdict is just, in which case the whole leadership of the revolution consisted for years of unworthy individuals. Or the verdict is false, in which case the present Soviet regime has committed a dreadful crime with regard to the previous leadership of the revolution, which, after all, built the country during the most difficult period of civil war.

Whatever the answer, it must be a tragic answer. In any event, every sincere socialist and communist must feel deceived in his

faith—either previously deceived by the whole Politburo headed by Stalin, or presently deceived by Stalin alone.

And it is a tragedy of the revolution when the feeling is aroused among its supporters that—regardless of where the truth lies—they have been deceived.

IS THE VERDICT JUST?

The resolution of the Central Committee of the Bund certainly expresses the convictions of all Bundists. No, it isn't possible: Trotsky and the other leaders of communism certainly committed serious mistakes, perhaps historic crimes, but they were not traitors to the revolution, not agents of the Hitlerite secret police, and not a gang of murderers.

Such is the belief of all Bundists and of the vast majority of proletarians in all countries. But there are communists, and probably sincere individuals, who don't wish to agree with the thought that Stalin betrayed their confidence and killed innocent individuals. Thus they argue: "But the accused themselves confessed their guilt!"

This was really so. But the accused simultaneously declared that they had on previous occasions—and in fact more than once—issued statements of regret in which they accused and condemned themselves. And they added that their statements of regret were not sincere and simply aimed to mislead the party.

If this were the case, if the accused had already previously submitted false statements under the pressure of the party leadership, why should one believe today that their present declarations are really sincere and truthful?

Which prompted a sincere communist to respond to me as follows: "Why should Zinoviev, Kamenev, and the others tell lies this time when they themselves pleaded to be sentenced to death?"

Again, this was really the case. But how little sincere the defendants were in this respect is revealed by the fact that, immediately after the verdict, they appealed for clemency. Is it possible, under such circumstances, to believe in the truthfulness of their statements? . . .

Here is where the realm of facts comes to an end, and the realm

of interpretation and the research for causes and clarifying consequences begins. It would be impossible, even in a whole series of articles, to attempt to resolve all the important questions. We will have to limit ourselves only to the most important ones.

WHY DID THE DEFENDANTS ACCUSE THEMSELVES?

Could it be possible for sixteen defendants to offer false declarations with such unanimity? And how could persons with such a revolutionary past have been brought to such a state?

That it is possible was shown by the well-known trial of the Mensheviks, at which all the accused unanimously confirmed matters that later turned out to be completely false (e.g., the alleged journey of Raphael Abramovitch to the Soviet Union). And here, too, let it be noted, all those being tried were revolutionists.

Which leaves the second question: How could people who played such a great role in the communist movement be brought to such a level of degradation?

To understand this, it is sufficient to recall the atmosphere that prevails in the communist parties in general and in the Soviet Communist Party in particular. Socialists have pointed out more than once that the method of not allowing any independent thought whatsoever in the communist movement must, of necessity, depress the moral level of its members. All the practices of "self-criticism," of letters of regret and indulging in public self-flagellation, have perforce the effect of suffocating, among the practitioners of such operations, the feeling of human dignity, of political decency and sincerity. The Soviet press is full of letters with this kind of "self-criticism." Everyone knows that they are forced declarations in which the authors themselves do not believe. But such are the methods that break the backs of the most stubborn resisters. That is the road that leads to degradation. That was the road on which all those oppositionists had embarked who failed to bear up under the bitter fate of opposition. And it was the road already taken by Zinoviev and Kamenev years before, the road down which they propelled themselves all the way to the . . . Moscow Trial.

It is horrendous and revolting, but it is an understandable

consequence of the intolerable regime that prevails in the communist movement and that makes of people . . . rags.

That regime was actually seated in the dock along with the former chairman of the Comintern and his comrades. And the regime is surely far more guilty than all those who were shot.

But the Moscow Trials still give rise to a whole series of important questions.

THOSE WHO REJOICE

Reactionaries throughout the world do not conceal their elation over the bloody executions in Moscow. To begin with, their feeling of hatred and vindictiveness with regard to the most active leaders of the October Revolution has been satisfied. Secondly, they hope that the Moscow Trial, which has already poisoned the relations between the two proletarian tendencies, will destroy the possibility of the United Front and again lead to rejoice over the blow to the moral prestige of the revolution and socialism. "This," they say, "is what the justice and humanity of socialism looks like!"

It must be conceded that the reactionaries have a basis for their celebration. The moral blow suffered by the whole labor movement because of the Moscow executions represents harm that is particularly egregious. One encounters people at every turn—people who only yesterday were fervent admirers of the Soviet Union—who feel profoundly shocked and disillusioned, and who declare that they have lost faith in socialism.

Such sentiments must be vigorously counteracted. It must be stated loud and clear: The socialist movement bears no responsibility for the Moscow executions. They have been unanimously condemned by all socialists without exception.

WHY DO SOCIALISTS CONDEMN THE EXECUTIONS?

Socialists consider the Moscow Trial and the executions a crime and a calamity in the labor movement. And this for two reasons. The first involves the sense of justice without which no socialist movement can exist. The trial did not correspond to the most minimal demands of justice. And the shooting of defendants who

have already spent years in prison, who discredited themselves by their undignified conduct, and who have been made harmless in various ways, constituted a denial of every humanitarian sentiment.

The second reason is the total absence of political expediency in the executions. This is revealed with particular clarity by the latest communist tactics. Take, for instance, the French communists. On the one hand, they sing the praises of the French army and its leaders, or greet heartily the leader of the Polish army, General Rydz-Smigly. On the other hand, they heap filth and abuse upon the main leaders of the Soviet revolution, and above all on the founder of the Red Army—Trotsky.

This contrast is a symbol of the degeneration experienced by communism under Stalin's leadership.

THE BASIC REASON

Socialists of all shades condemn the Moscow crime. But what of the official communists? They contend that everything is just fine. In fact, it is an occasion for rejoicing: The "dogs" met an "ignominious end." And all those daring to protest are shouted down as scoundrels and agents of the Gestapo.

How does one account for it? What was the reason such a trial could take place at all—a trial now being justified by the official communists?

Trotsky and his supporters aver that the blame rests with the Soviet bureaucracy, which has broken away from the people. By such trials it seeks to preserve its rule, extinguishing every expression of opposition in the process.

It is our view, however, that the cause lies far deeper. Why did this Soviet bureaucracy succeed in obtaining unlimited rule in the Soviet Union? Because it based itself upon the Communist Party. And some basic flaw must exist in the communist movement that makes such sad events possible.

This fundamental defect is the organizational principle of the communists—their *Führerprinzip*. The communists want a monolithic movement in which everyone thinks alike and the final word is reserved for the leaders and, in the end, for *the Führer*. . . .

Bringing the communist parties around to this system of "leadership" was called "Bolshevizing" the parties. And it was none other than Zinoviev, in his capacity as chairman of the Comintern, who was one of the chief culprits in the carrying out of this operation.

Zinoviev—along with Kamenev—actively aided Stalin during the years 1924 and 1925 in undermining the influence of Trotsky, whom they considered the most dangerous pretender to the position of *Führer*. The struggle between Zinoviev's group and Stalin began only later—the struggle that would end with the Moscow executions. But the final, tragic act was merely a consequence of the basic shortcoming: *of the absolute lack of true proletarian democracy in the communist movement*. The *Führerprinzip* killed the largest part of the leadership. With their own hands, Zinoviev and Kamenev created the preconditions for their tragic end. . . .

Just as the cloud carries within it the rain, the *Führerprinzip* and the lack of proletarian democracy carry within them, intrinsically, the seeds of such crimes as the Moscow executions.

BACK TO HUMANITARIANISM

Whoever condemns the Moscow executions, and does not want them to be repeated in the future, must oppose personal dictatorship in the most decisive manner. And this applies equally to socialists as to communists. Even more than heretofore, the socialist workers must protect and strengthen real democracy in their parties—proletarian democracy. And proletarian democracy, first and foremost, means freedom of opinion within the organization. The struggle for this freedom must once again become one of the basic foundations of the whole labor movement. Moreover, struggle for freedom means restoration in the labor movement of appropriate respect for the individuals, for its human beings. No blind subservience of the masses toward the leaders, but free, conscious discipline of the masses and the leaders. Not the autocratic rule of one person or of a small clique over the labor movement, but the authentic rule of the proletariat in its own organization. Not the suffocating barracks spirit, but true humanitarianism which should suffuse the whole of our activity. . . .

THE GENERAL SQUARING OF ACCOUNTS

In the preceding pages we discussed the content of the Moscow Trial and its basic course. But why was the epilogue so bloody? Why was the death sentence carried out?

It is impossible to point to anything politically purposeful in justification of this bloodletting. And from a purely ethical standpoint, all socialists and communists are, after all, supporters of humanitarianism and opponents of the death penalty. Hence what remains is the only possible explanation: Stalin's tremendous hatred of his opponents in general and Trotsky in particular.

As early as 1923, Lenin wrote that the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky constituted a danger to the unity of the party. On the surface, the Soviet Communist Party was "monolithic" at that time and for a number of years thereafter. All the congresses used to adopt "unanimous" resolutions, but a bitter conflict had already flared up at the summit. Sometime later, Stalin, the victor, expelled Trotsky from the country. But that did not end the struggle.

The recent Moscow Trial, with the executions, was merely one more episode in the dogged struggle. The main defendant at the trial was Trotsky. Stalin desired to kill him politically via the sentence. He tried to settle accounts with him physically* when he demanded that the Norwegian government withdraw Trotsky's right of asylum—a gratuitous and senseless embarrassment.

Is Trotsky really such a danger to the Soviet government and to Stalin? No, the helpless emigrant represents a negligible danger threatening the dictator of the Soviet Union. Yet Stalin's hatred for the former leader of the October Revolution is great, so great, indeed, that it leads him to delude himself and to commit such unpardonable blunders as the Moscow executions.

The Moscow Trial has fully revealed Stalin's capacity to hate and wreak revenge. The trial represented a general squaring of accounts with all his opponents. In the course of the trial, virtually all the communist leaders who had come out against Stalin at any

*He succeeded in this by means of an NKVD agent who murdered Trotsky at his home in Coyoacan, Mexico, on August 20, 1940.—Trans.

time were besmirched in one way or another. Not all of them were shot, but all of them sensed that their former opposition had not been forgotten, and that the victor kept a sword hanging over their heads. Tomsky was the sole individual to free himself from this threat. But he achieved it through . . . suicide.

ONCE AGAIN "SOCIAL-FASCISM"

The consequences of the volleys in Moscow have cast a new light on a number of problems in Soviet life and dispelled a number of doubts. Yet for us, what is most important today is the question: What will be the influence of those Moscow volleys on the primary problem of unity in the labor movement and of relations between communists and socialists? The answer is: a catastrophic one.

Let us begin with the communist side. When the socialist press protested against the Moscow executions, the Soviet newspapers responded as follows: All Social Democratic leaders are despicable lackeys of the bourgeoisie. They are stubborn enemies of the Soviet Union. All of them are directed by the Gestapo and assist fascism in its fight against the international proletariat!!! (*Pravda*). And all of this, mind you, consequent to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, when the era of the United Front was in its most fervent phase!

What is this—hysteria? No, it is just the same as the Moscow Trial. Virtually the same accusations and the same verdict; the same madness and the same fatal consequences. And within this madness, indeed, lies the method.

This is the picture of Stalin's real attitude toward his "fellow socialists." Today the leaders of the Labor and Socialist International are, to him, agents of the Gestapo. Tomorrow they will probably be charged with organizing terrorist acts against his person. . . .

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE OF THE SOCIALISTS?

What is the attitude of socialists toward the situation that has developed after the Moscow executions and the renewal of the ugly communist invective directed at the trade union and socialist

internationals? First of all, a tremendous growth of distrust toward the leaders of the Comintern. To a high degree, the psychological rapprochement that occurred during the past year has come to naught. The isolation of the communist movement has markedly increased. Even the pro-communist elements—the “fellow-travelers”—in the socialist camp have become convinced that Stalin can under no circumstances become the leader of the international workers’ movement. And the tendencies in opposition to the United Front with the communists and, most certainly, to organic unity with them, have of necessity also grown stronger. For instance, an article in *Robotnik** finds the editor-in-chief saying: “There is an abyss between socialists and communists. There can be no talk of unity.”

Today, just as in the past, we do not agree with this position. Just as in the past, we believe today that socialist and communist workers have so much in common as to justify their being in a single organization within which all disputes could be resolved in a democratic fashion and on the basis of freedom of thought and discipline in action.

Today, just as yesterday, we shall not cease calling on the communist workers to engage in a logical and fraternal collaboration in the struggle against fascism and capitalism. Today, even more than yesterday, we shall demonstrate that the main obstacle to unity is the organizational principle of the Comintern, which establishes a dictatorship over the masses and is the primary source of schism and fratricidal conflicts in the proletarian ranks.

*The official organ of the Polish Socialist Party.—Trans.

Ten Years in the Soviet Union

IT HAS BEEN a long time since I read a book with as much interest as the one I recently read by Anton Ciliga—*In the Land of the Big Lie*. It is worthwhile telling the readers of the *Naye Folkstsaytung* about this book.

Who is the author? Ciliga is a Yugoslav, but an Italian citizen (more correctly, an Italian subject). In 1918, while still a student, he joined the ranks of the labor movement and promptly became a member of the Communist Party. Advancing rapidly in his party career, he rose to membership in the Politburo of the Yugoslav Communist Party, and within a year, to membership in the Balkan Bureau of the Comintern. At the end of 1926 he left for Moscow as a deeply confirmed communist.

Ciliga spent all of ten years in the Soviet Union. But there his career took an altogether different turn. In the course of the first two years he became acquainted with Soviet reality. As a consequence, he entered into contact with the Left Opposition and was duly expelled from the party for a year. At the same time, Ciliga was removed from political work and transferred to Leningrad, where he was appointed professor of history at Leningrad University. Arrested the following year, Ciliga spent three years in prisons in several cities. Those years were followed by three additional years of languishing in various political isolators and places of exile in Siberia; he engaged in three hunger strikes and one attempt to commit suicide by slashing his wrists. During the

“Ten Years in the Soviet Union,” Alter’s reflections on Anton Ciliga’s *In the Land of the Big Lie*, was originally published in *Naye Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, 1938.

final years, Ciliga demanded—as a foreigner and in accordance with the laws of the Soviet Union—to be deported from the country. (His suicide attempt was, in fact, a protest against the denial of his demand.) The decision finally arrived, after Ciliga had given up all hope: deportation. Thus, precisely ten years after coming to the Soviet Union, Ciliga left the land of his hopes in December 1936, heading for Prague by way of Poland.

A peculiar coincidence: on the way to deliver a lecture at the time, I encountered a strange-looking person: an emaciated individual, with an intelligent face, and speaking Russian. It was easy to see, not only because of the language but also because of the many different bundles, that he was coming from the Soviet Union. One word led to another—and he proceeded to tell me his story. A one-time communist big-wig. Then a Trotskyist. By the time I met him, he had already become disappointed in Trotsky. He had even developed reservations with regard to Lenin. Yet he was a picture of glowing faith and combativeness.

On taking his leave he introduced himself: "My name is Anton Ciliga."

The history of those ten years is recorded by Ciliga in his book. Personal impressions. Conversations with individuals. Theoretical reflections. The thorny path of ideological experiences. The history and evolution of the various "oppositions." Life on the outside and inside prisons—in Europe and Asia. The way of life among various segments of the population. Ciliga's book covers all these. It is a pulsating document in which one experiences sincerity and a quest for truth.

Ciliga entertains no hatred for the Soviet Union. On the contrary, he admires this gigantic and powerful country whose swift development accounts for its change in external appearance every few years. He is delighted with the "dynamism" of the population and is full of optimism with respect to the future of the country.

But Ciliga is a socialist. He strives for an end to the oppression of man by man. Accordingly, from this standpoint, he is disappointed in the Soviet Union. He sees it as a vast country, a "new America" in which great things are being achieved. But he found no socialism there.

While observing the rise of broad new social strata and both

swift and significant economic conquests, Ciliga contends that all this is taking place on a foundation of new capitalist exploitation and political oppression of the common masses, of the workers and peasants. It is, declares Ciliga, a new version of the old period of "primitive accumulation," which, although in fact economically progressive, was characterized by Karl Marx as the most ruthless exploitation in the world. And this reality is officially disguised by the most radical slogans and by the loveliest dreams of mankind. This is the contradiction which Ciliga sees between the official theory and the reality, between the hopes and their realization, between words and deeds. This, he says, is the gigantic lie one feels in the Soviet Union at every turn. Hence the title of his book: *In the Land of the Big Lie*.

The book ought to justify the title; but the title, of course, is not the issue. Far more important is the basic question that occupies the minds of all oppositionists who, while incarcerated in the prisons, attempt to resolve their theoretical doubts: What kind of social system prevails in the Soviet Union? What is the class content of the Soviet regime?

After lengthy wavering, Ciliga arrived at the conviction that it is incorrect to consider the Soviet Union a country of socialist revolution and the Soviet regime a workers' regime.

His response is the following: A new system is being built in the Soviet Union that is based—just like the old system—on oppression and exploitation. Only the form is different. Instead of private capitalism, it is a system of state capitalism that exists there; instead of the ruling class of private capitalists, we have a ruling class there in the form of a bureaucracy. But the workers and peasants are no less enslaved—if not more—in the Soviet Union than in the old capitalist countries.

Such is Ciliga's opinion. But whence came the new oppressors? Ciliga offers, as the motto for his book, a quotation from Balzac: "Revolutions that are made by the people have no more ruthless enemies than the people whom the revolutions have elevated to power."

Ciliga holds that this precept is justified in the case of the Soviet Union. The newly arisen bureaucracy, he contends, has evolved

into the most dangerous enemy of the October Revolution. It constitutes the new class of oppressors.

Is Ciliga's opinion justified? Does his own book provide support for this opinion?

A book should be evaluated as one would an individual: not according to its shortcomings but according to its virtues, not according to what is incorrect in it but according to what is new and correct. Many ideas in Ciliga's book may turn out to be unjustified, but it is sufficiently accurate for us to acknowledge its value. Indeed, we must become familiar with these accurate ideas before we can provide an answer to the above questions.

WHAT IS THE MAIN ISSUE?

In the preceding pages we related that the former communist Anton Ciliga does not consider the Soviet Union a socialist state and does not consider the Soviet government a workers' regime. But why? Don't the leaders of the country say they are building socialism? To which Ciliga replies: Let us arrive at an understanding as to the meaning of socialism. It is wrong to believe that socialism is—according to its nominal definition—the state ownership of enterprises. Socialism has to do, first and foremost, if not exclusively, with “the relationships among people.” Or to put it another way: it is the liberation of the working people. And “the essence of socialism is the feeling of intimate attachment to the lower classes of society.”

Proceeding from this standpoint and basing himself upon a mass of material, Ciliga affirms that in the Soviet Union the majority of workers and peasants are economically unfree and politically without any rights, while a minority in the form of a bureaucratic stratum plays the role of the new ruling class.

We won't dwell here on Ciliga's descriptions of the condition of the broad masses. The picture is generally familiar. It is worthwhile, however, to partially communicate the characteristics of the class of “new rulers” which Ciliga presents. Here are several excerpts:

The true rulers of Soviet society are the bureaucrats and the high officials. It is a new aristocracy which is completely conscious of its

being a privileged class, and which is permeated with the hierarchical spirit, the spirit of a caste.

The largest part of these kindred elements stems from workers or artisans. They have emerged from the people, and their past is reflected in their language, manners, and appearance. But how cold is their attitude toward today's workers!

They show respect for those who occupy a higher post in society. Whoever hasn't succeeded in clambering up "to our level" in the Soviet Union is an inferior individual. The value of a person there is measured by his apartment. It is measured by his furniture, his clothes, his position in the administrative hierarchy.

The wives of the high officials do not conduct themselves in diplomatic fashion. They wish to impress with their attire and grooming, with the elegance of their living quarters, with their boxes in the theater. . . . They have the consciousness that they are shaping "society." And they live exclusively to satisfy their petty ambitions. . . . There are ladies who participate in social welfare activities: they allow themselves to be photographed at sessions of MOPR (International Aid Organization for Revolutionary Fighters) just as countesses did in the old days at the meetings of the Red Cross.

What is the picture of the bureaucracy's material resources? Their incomes are comparatively modest. But first off, they are rewarded "in kind" at the expense of the state. They pay a ridiculous rent; their furniture, automobiles, gorgeous summer homes, theaters, books, the education of their children, cost them nothing. Secondly, they have quietly arranged with the directors of the commercial enterprises to reserve for them the finest goods at very cheap prices.

Whole pages of the Ciliga book are devoted to the description of the ways of life of rich and poor in the Soviet Union. And Ciliga's conclusion, based upon that is: There is no socialism in the Soviet Union.

But how did this condition come to pass? How is it possible that the most penetrating of all revolutions arrived at such a state? Ciliga undertakes to clarify these bitter questions by tying them in with his own ideological changes. And the sincerity with which he describes his ideological wanderings and constant disappointments is perhaps the most valuable element in his book.

Arriving in Russia as an orthodox, one-hundred-percent supporter of the official line, Ciliga was deeply convinced that the Communist Party and the working class were one and the same, and that the party represented the interest of the workers at every moment.

The first few years were enough to convince Ciliga that things were different. The official party line was adapted, essentially, to the interests of the newly emerged bureaucracy. Hence his "feeling of attachment to the lower strata" drove him into the ranks of the opposition. At first it seemed to him that the contrast between the Communist Party and the working class stemmed from the fact that the leadership of the party—specifically, Stalin—was unsuitable. Oh, if only Trotsky were leading the movement, all would look different. Thus Ciliga, indeed, became a Trotskyist.

But he gradually noticed that the difference between Stalin and Trotsky was hardly very great; that actually Stalin was in agreement with Trotsky and Trotsky with Stalin on all fundamental questions. True, Stalin was uncouth and brutal, and Trotsky might indeed have avoided the uglier forms of Stalinism. But both created the illusion that what was happening in the Soviet Union was already the flowering of socialism. Neither of them wished to fight the power of the bureaucracy. And Ciliga concludes: "Trotsky refuses to understand that the 'deviations' against which he inveighs are merely a logical and unavoidable consequence of the whole system that he defends so passionately. In essence, Trotsky is the theoretician of a regime of which Stalin is the reorganizer."

After the disillusionment with Stalin came the disillusionment with Trotsky. Ciliga went over to the camp of the Workers' Opposition, whose leaders were A. G. Shliapnikov, S. Medvedev, and others. And it was here that he arrived at the thoughts that constitute the essence of his disappointments in communism.

He formulated his position as follows: What separates the Workers' Opposition from Trotskyism is, first of all, the manner of understanding the role of the proletariat in the revolution. For the Trotskyists, the party was the driving force of the revolution. For the Workers' Opposition, it was the working class. The struggle between Stalin and Trotsky had a relationship to the policies of the party and to the leadership of the party. For both of them the

proletariat was merely a passive object. The Workers' Opposition, however, concerned itself above all else with the condition and the role of the working class. How can the proletariat as a class win control of the means of production that have been taken from the bourgeoisie? How to effectively control the party and the government in order to introduce workers' democracy and protect the revolution from bureaucratic degeneration?

But Ciliga failed to stop even here. His ideological development led him unavoidably to a new question: And Lenin?

Ciliga describes the kind of pain he experienced when he was forced to say farewell to his worship of Lenin as the eternally correct revolutionist; when he finally arrived at the conviction: "Lenin prepared the way for Stalin."

His thought was formulated very carefully: "Lenin lost faith in the working class during the final period of his life, and he believed only in the power of the administration."

Ciliga believes that Lenin—up to 1918—was altogether different from what he became in his role as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. But here he is in error. Lenin, even at the inception of Bolshevism in 1903, defended the view that the working class must be led by the party, and the party by professional revolutionists. This very idea already contains the seed of the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat, and of the dictatorship of the leaders—or in the end, of the leader—over the party. It was this viewpoint that represented a threat to the revolution from the very outset and brought it to the point where the party as such became a trade union of future bureaucrats.

It is indeed a degeneration of the revolution and the party. But such a condition endangers every proletarian party that forgets about its task of being the guide to its class, about its duty to fulfill the role of vanguard of the class and to serve the proletariat faithfully and consistently.

The Source of Our Belief

A GOOD CATHOLIC must believe that the Pope is infallible. A good communist must believe that Stalin is never mistaken. A good Bundist can and ought to ask himself at all times whether his party (together with himself) is on the proper course.

Every Bundist has the right to criticize the policy of his party. But the severest critic is reality itself. And let us, indeed, in the light of experience, verify the correctness or incorrectness of the fundamental political principles that have determined the policy of the Bund during the past twenty years. These twenty years constitute the second period of our party's history—from the victory of the Russian Revolution to the present day.

UNITY

When the epidemic of splits in the labor movement erupted at the time of the emergence of the Comintern, the Bund, after some brief waverings, came down solidly on the ground of unity. It seemed to be a hopeless position at the time, when both the reformists and the communists contended that the split was unavoidable and—productive. The Bund adhered to the small minority in the labor movement that regarded the split as a misfortune and a source of weakness and setbacks.

And today? After the bitter experiences of twenty years, the whole labor movement has arrived at the conviction that the most important guarantee of success in the proletarian struggle is—

“The Source of Our Belief” was originally published in *Naye Folktsaytung*, Warsaw, November 26, 1937.

unity. The supporters, on principle, of splitting have grown silent. And although unity has not yet been realized, the Bundist idea of unity has already been victorious. In this area, we were in the vanguard; life has justified our position. . . .

Splitting was and remains harmful. But unity can also vary. There is unity on the Stalin model, where intolerance and compulsion prevail with respect to every ideological minority. It is a unity that leads inevitably to new splits. And there is unity of the Bundist type, in which freedom of thought is coupled with discipline in the performance of deeds. This is the only loyal, fraternal, and lasting unity.

DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

We have always been adherents of democracy. But we oppose those reformist supporters of democracy for whom parliamentarism and universal suffrage are sacred objects. We always counterpose true social democracy to formal political democracy, with its class character. . . .

Life has vindicated our position. How dearly the German workers are now paying for the reformist fetishism of formal democracy and for not having dared, when possessing the power, to infuse the democracy with a vigorous class content. And how dearly the masses in the Soviet Union and the actual communists there are paying for the character of the Soviet government, which has transgressed proletarian democracy. The autocracy of Stalin, drenched in blood, is a consequence, after all, of the denial of democracy in the communist movement.

Hence we remain faithful to our position regardless of the fact that it is far from being recognized by the whole labor movement; to wit: (1) against personal dictatorship, including the Stalin kind; for proletarian democracy; (2) against formal democracy, which makes peace with the system of social class-oppression; for proletarian democracy that links political democracy to a radical transformation of the existing order. . . .

NATIONAL CULTURE AND INTERNATIONALISM

For years we were criticized in the following terms: You are nationalists because you foster the national traits of the Jewish

masses and consequently resist their joining forces with the non-Jewish population. We responded: There is no other way for the masses of various nationalities to join together in a dignified fashion than by building their national cultures. And life has shown that the Bundist path to nationalism is the only one that can attract not only individuals or small groups, but indeed broad masses. It is the only path where internationalism is coupled with human dignity.

The charge has been leveled against us that we wish to cram the Jewish masses into their backward and impoverished culture, thereby closing off their access to the modern and rich culture of the surrounding peoples. Life has demonstrated that the creative powers of the Jewish masses can best find expression precisely through their own cultural upsurge. Which is why the Bund, indeed, became one of the co-builders of the modern Jewish-socialist culture. And it is no coincidence, after all, that with respect to this question, all tendencies in Jewish proletarian life have adopted the position of the Bund.

The charge was leveled against us on the part of the bourgeois world that the Bund, while opposing traditional Jewish attitudes, customs, and ideals, jeopardizes the national survival of the Jewish people. If national survival is equivalent to nationalism, we are proud of our struggle against it. We have shown for a fact that it is possible to pour into the national form of Jewish culture the sincere international content that spiritually unites the Jewish masses with the militant, international proletarian army.

The Bund preaches to the Jewish masses both internationalism and the need for a feeling of personal and national dignity. We question the ostensible *mitzvah** of becoming similar to other peoples, just as we have denied the alleged socialist "theory" that in the socialist society everyone will be identical with everyone else.

But we—the Jewish labor movement—unwilling to artificially change our skin, have simultaneously endeavored to become better and more attractive. Together with the international labor movement, we strive within our milieu to lift both the individual and the group to a higher level in the material as well as the spiritual sense.

*Aside from its meaning as a commandment of the Jewish law, a *mitzvah* is also considered a meritorious or laudable act.—Trans.

And the results of these exertions prove that the path is a correct one, and that the labor has been not in vain.

CONCLUSIONS

Of course we haven't exhausted all the fundamental principles of our movement. But the above-mentioned examples are sufficient to convince any objective person that the Bund, in general and on the whole, is able correctly to delineate the line of its policy. Our ideological position has passed the test under fire during the past twenty years with great success. This explains why the Bund, despite tremendous difficulties and the attacks of all its adversaries and foes, is today so influential and internally solid. It explains why the Bund has such power of attraction for Jewish working-class youth, which, like all youth, seeks a clear and honest answer to all the social questions that torment it. It explains why the Bund has celebrated its fortieth anniversary in a mood of faith in itself and its future.

The Bundist Mentality

THERE IS A WELL-KNOWN Marxian precept: "Being determines consciousness."

I will permit myself to extend this formula and include in it not only consciousness, but also the subconscious and unconscious elements of our psyche.

What constitutes "being" is the whole surrounding environment of people. In the Jewish environment, especially in the workers' precincts, the Bund is an important component of this "being." As a political party, indeed, it is a conscious creation of human thought. It has become a factor that exercises a constant influence on the shaping of the psyche, of the mentality, of a large number of Jewish workers.

I do mean, in fact, "psyche"—in the broadest sense of the word. I am concerned here not only with Bundist ideology and the general treasure of socialist ideas and the Bundist adaptation of them to the concrete conditions of Jewish reality. I am also concerned—and perhaps before all else—with the totality of singular feelings, and the almost instinctive approach toward life, that sets off the Bundists as a group, as a collective. . . .

Of course this particular psyche is not something frozen. As with anything alive, it is constantly undergoing change. All of us, without exception, take pains that it should change for the better. Yet, in the course of dozens of years and under its various conditions, this psyche still contains within it something that is permanent—a continuity thanks to which it remains the same

From an address delivered on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Bund Club in New York, October 1938.

notwithstanding all of the changes. It is similar to a living being: in the course of forty years everything in it has changed; every cell within its body has become different; and yet—it is the same human being.

When I came to New York years ago, I found many new, interesting, and attractive phenomena. Truly a new world capable of surprising every “green” European. And in the heart of the vast and turbulent city of New York, I suddenly recognized something very familiar, something very intimate: *the Bundist mentality in its authentic form.*

I recognized it in the Bund Club in New York. It was as though I had suddenly discovered in the very heart of America one of our Polish Bund organizations. Here was something very familiar, yet simultaneously exotic—like a native flower that one suddenly beholds in a strange land.

To be sure, the Bundist mentality is not an American growth. And perhaps those who contend that American soil is altogether unsuited to such growths are correct; it would indeed be impossible to imagine that the Bundist mentality could become the tone-setter in the psychic life of the Jewish masses in America. What is possible, however, is perhaps a modest if no less glorious task: to weave the Bundist mentality—as *one* of the factors—into the “being” of the American labor movement. And not necessarily in the Jewish arena alone.

The Bundist mentality possesses an important feature: an instinctive feeling for the blessing of unity in the workers’ ranks. Bundists can engage in the sharpest arguments among themselves, but all of them feel—indeed *feel* more than *know*—that these differences of opinion dare not jeopardize their unity. And whoever had begun to preach, on principle, the necessity of splitting in our movement, has automatically produced a break with the Bundist mentality.

Would it not be worthwhile that this feature be transplanted to the American socialist movement? The latter has lived through years of splits, and its health has in no way benefited from them. Trends aimed at bringing back the severed limbs are now growing stronger in the socialist movement. And here is where the Bundist mentality—the Bundist psyche—can be nurtured.

We don't wish to suggest at all that a Bundist mentality is the best and only one that has a reason for existence. But we believe that the good which it possesses can and ought to enrich the labor movement in all countries with substantial masses of Jewish workers. Because this is the part which the body of Jewish workers—the Bund—has invested in the great cooperative that calls itself the international labor movement.

The Bund Club of New York is, in a manner of speaking, a "safe" in which a part of that capital has been deposited. The greater the number of valuables that are shifted from the "safe" into the fervent enterprises of the American labor movement, the better for both the Bund Club and the movement.

Spain in Flames

DURING THE COURSE of the Spanish Civil War, the Trade Union International sent a delegation to Spain made of representatives from all countries, in order to become acquainted with the situation on the ground. Victor Alter was one of the two delegates representing the Central Commission of the trade unions of Poland. In a special pamphlet written in Polish, *Spain in Flames* (Warsaw, 1937), he provided a detailed report on the journey to Spain. The same pamphlet also contains a lengthy article titled "What Are the Spanish People Fighting For?" written by the famous Social Democrat, Julius Deutsch, former leader of the Austrian *Schutzbund* and one of the military leaders of the Spanish Revolution.

Alter depicts meetings and conferences with representatives of all the parties involved in the revolution. He discusses the visits with its leaders and presents the responses by the representatives of all the political currents to the question: "How do you envisage the future of Spain after the war and revolution?" Alter analyzes the relationships of forces, the character, the sentiments, and the role of each of the major parties: the socialists, anarcho-syndicalists, communists, and bourgeois democrats. In addition, without failing to characterize various smaller groupings, Alter concentrates particularly on the role of the two central bodies of the trade union movement: the anarcho-syndicalists and the socialists.

He presents penetrating thoughts and formulations concerning the problems of unity in the labor movement, and perspectives on

"Spain in Flames" was originally published in *Folkstsaytung*, Warsaw, January 1939.

the war and revolution. And all of it is written in Alter's customarily concise style—colorful, trenchant, to the point.

We present here the final chapter of Alter's pamphlet on Spain, in which his conclusions are formulated.

SUMMING UP

One of the members of the bourgeoisie left in Catalonia began his conversation with us as follows:

"What does a poor man do when he wins a million? He rushes to buy a loaf of bread and a kilo of sausage, and eats until satiated. He has no greater aspirations. Our Spanish proletariat can be compared with a poor man. When he won power in July 1936, what did he do? He raised his wages by fifteen percent—and that was all."

The comparison just drawn corresponds to a certain degree with reality. The modesty of the Spanish working class is even greater because the increase in prices has long ago exceeded the rise in wages. The Spanish workers, in fact, are far from being satiated. And they live in conditions of extraordinary stress, in a terribly supercharged atmosphere.

Yet, despite it all, their will to fight and win continues to burn brightly. No sacrifice gives them pause. Gritting their teeth, they are prepared to sacrifice themselves and those closest to them. "Just so we win!"

Of course, among the opinions we heard in the camp of the Spanish proletariat there were those that appeared to us to be more correct than others. We would have greatly wished that precisely such views and opinions should gain the upper hand in the Spanish Revolution. It seems to us that this would bring victory more swiftly.

Our sympathies, however, were not monopolized by one part of the movement. They belonged *to the whole Spanish working class and to the Spanish Revolution as such*. It would be absurd to assume the role of a judge who has to decide which side is right and which is not, whom to praise and whom to condemn. We are not simply casual onlookers observing the Spanish Revolution as

one would a football match. It is our very own cause—not only with its virtues, but also with its faults.

We cannot take offense at the Spanish Revolution even when it commits errors. The Spanish proletariat is paying with streams of its own blood for every misstep. And it likewise pays with its blood for *our errors*.

Every Spanish worker fully understands that the struggle in Spain is *for their own freedom and also for ours*. Hence their mistakes have tragic consequences for us. Hence our mistakes have tragic consequences for them.

By our mistakes we have in mind the mistakes of the international labor movement. And when, on leaving Spain, we asked ourselves the question: Have we fulfilled our duty with respect to our brothers and comrades in Spain?, we had to admit: No, we have done too little. How little is our help in comparison with what international fascism has given the generals in the rebellion?! . . .

A well-known foreign socialist who occupies a high position in Spain told us: “It’s simply a miracle. No, it’s a whole mountain of miracles. From a purely military standpoint the government should have collapsed long ago. The other side had virtually a whole army, and the government—almost nothing. The former subsequently received a great amount of weaponry from Germany and Italy; the government, virtually nothing. Moreover, the fascists obtained 80,000 fully armed soldiers from Germany and Italy. Yet we endured it all. And we shall soon go over to the attack. These are real miracles.”

This marvel can be readily explained: the Spanish people possess tremendous creative powers that erupt spontaneously and amaze the whole world. That’s how it was prior to those July days, when the people themselves, without waiting for directives or orders from “above,” took up arms and stamped out the rebellion in nearly all the cities of Spain.

That’s how it was when the people themselves, not waiting for directives and decrees, abolished the big private capitalist enterprises.

That’s how it was when the people—independently—undertook to organize the economy, which had previously been directed by

private capital. This mighty energy and creative power of the people is the miracle of the Spanish Revolution.

Three times, on different occasions during our period in Spain, we heard one and the same statement. We heard it the first time from the president of the Catalonian government, Luis Companys: "We are fighting against extraordinary difficulties. But I say to you: *Have faith in the Spanish people!*" We heard similar words a second time from a member of a workers' committee in a large textile factory. He explained to us the difficulties in the factory, of which the greatest was the shortage of foreign raw materials. And he concluded: "Yes, there is still a great deal to be done for the factory to function properly. But—*have faith in us!*"

The third time we heard those words was in Madrid, from an ordinary soldier of the International Brigade: "We are already able to ward off the attack of the enemy. We cannot go over to the attack yet; but we shall. *Have faith in us!*"

The Spaniards made believers out of us; we left Spain enraptured and infused with faith. Not because everything we observed there was exemplary and satisfying, but because the positive considerations exceed the negative by a significant degree. The objective conditions are favorable, and the subjective moods of the masses are encouraging. And when the train carried us through the Pyrenees from the land so deeply inflamed by revolution and war back to calm and sunny France, we took an inventory of our feelings. The final conclusion is:

Have faith in the Spanish working class and hasten to bring it many-sided help.

BARCELONA HAS FALLEN

It is a severe blow for Spain, for the working class of the world, for socialism.

And dreadfully painful for each of us.

Only a week ago it seemed as if the Catalonian front was stabilizing itself. But things turned out differently. Barcelona did not become a second Madrid.

Why?

There was no lack of heroism and will to fight. Lacking,

however, was ammunition and bread. Not fear of death, but plain hunger and shortage of war matériel compelled the government army to abandon Barcelona. The policy of "Non-Intervention" brought about the defeat of Catalonia.

Who suffered the defeat?

The Spanish Republic? Certainly. But at the same time the freedom movement throughout the world. And world peace. And simultaneously all countries that do not wish to submit to the dictates of fascist rulers.

And who recorded the victory?

The Spanish nationalists? They play a secondary role. The real command-giver has announced to the world: "The conquest of Barcelona has opened a new chapter in the history of the new Europe that we are in the process of writing. . . . The Reds have issued the slogan: 'They shall not pass!' But we have passed, and I assure you we will go further."

This was how Mussolini spoke in Rome the day Barcelona fell. And the fascist mob seized upon this open threat and disclosed its essence with shouts of: "Corsica! Tunis!"

This was how the Italian dictator confirmed that Barcelona is not the end of a historic drama but the start of a new one; or more precisely—it is a link in a chain that is already strangling Europe today and is threatening the whole world.

Yes, it is true. Barcelona is not the end. The war goes on. It goes on in Spain, and it goes on in the rest of the world.

How criminally short-sighted are those politicians who believed that an ordinary civil war was taking place in Spain. And how great, even today, is the need of a common effort on the part of all forces in the world capable of fighting fascism together with its source, capitalism.

There are people who believe that it is already too late.

Fools! It is never too late as long as the struggle persists, and it shall persist as long as people are alive who wish to wage the struggle.

Barcelona is only one position. Our army was forced to pull back from it. Hence we shall continue our struggle from new positions.

Because the war goes on—and it will not cease until the enemy

of the common masses of all countries shall be stopped, until the enemy of the common masses of all countries shall be defeated.

Barcelona has fallen. So Barcelona will sooner or later have to be retaken; and not merely Barcelona.

APPENDIX

Addresses at the Mecca Temple Protest Meeting, March 30, 1943, Sponsored by the Labor Committee of 250

DAVID DUBINSKY—PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL
LADIES GARMENT WORKERS UNION

Friends, fellow trade unionists:

Six years ago, in 1937, Henryk Erlich spoke from this platform, in Mecca Temple, at a meeting at which I was the chairman. Erlich spoke about the great menace of Nazism and called upon us in America to help combat that menace.

Tonight we meet in Mecca Temple again. We meet to honor the memory of two fallen leaders, two of the noblest souls in the ranks of worldwide labor—Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

The lives of Erlich and Alter were as full of high human endeavor as their death was violent and tragic. To honor their memory is to protest at the same time the brutality and inhumanity of those who are responsible for their execution.

These two emotions are inseparable. The voice that is full of tears and mourning registers fiery indignation and bitter anger over the unpardonable act of their murder.

Copies of the addresses in this section will be found in the I.L.G.W.U. Archives, Labor-Management Documentation Center, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University.—Trans.

Erlich and Alter are no strangers to us in America. They are close to our labor movement, we worked with them, we cooperated with them, and we loved them for their idealism and for their high integrity. Erlich and Alter were revolutionists, they were true children of the working class of Poland. Revolutionists, fighters for liberty, have frequently paid with their lives for their idealism. Human history is full of examples of such martyrdom. Erlich and Alter, who suffered imprisonment in the days when the Tsars ruled Poland with an iron hand and by the whips of the Cossacks, knew well the taste of sacrifice and the bitterness of persecution.

Yes, Erlich and Alter, like true revolutionists, were not afraid of the hangman or the firing squad. But the great tragedy of this historic case lies in the fact that Erlich and Alter were struck down from behind by the treacherous hand of the Communist Party, at a time when they sought haven in Russia from the bloody Nazi Gestapo.

They were executed in defiance of appeals for their release from President William Green of the AFL, President Philip Murray of the CIO, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Wendell Willkie, Dr. Albert Einstein and many other outstanding representatives of democratic and labor opinion here and in England, including the British Labor Party and Sir Stafford Cripps. Both the State Department and the British Foreign Office, as well as the Polish Government-in-Exile have taken a deep interest in the case.

They were executed because they were democratic socialists, champions of trade unionism, and opponents of all dictatorship, including the Communist dictatorship. They were executed because the Comintern could not afford to permit them to remain alive and return to Poland after the war. They were condemned by political opponents, who squared up old political accounts with them in secret chamber proceedings on trumped up charges without a chance of a fair, honest trial!

But the Communist dictators were not satisfied with the mere taking of the lives of Erlich and Alter. The same hand that decreed their death also decreed the destruction of their characters. These two lifelong fighters for liberty and democracy were to be blackened forever as Hitler allies and Nazi supporters. Communist stooges and Comintern Quislings everywhere began to defame and

besmirch their characters. Moreover, anyone who would dare raise his voice in protest against the murder of Erlich and Alter was to be blackjacked into silence by the charge that he was destroying allied unity, that he was hindering the war effort.

But the hundreds of thousands of workers, liberals and democrats who worked side by side with Erlich and Alter in the international labor movement will throw these vile charges back into the teeth of their executioners. The Comintern stooges who have the brazen effrontery to excuse the killing of Erlich and Alter on the ground that they were Nazi spies or tried to incite the Red Army to force a separate peace with Hitler have no respect for the intelligence, or regard for the feelings, of any decent human being. Just imagine for yourselves—Erlich and Alter fleeing from devastated Poland where their co-nationals, the entire Jewish population was literally slaughtered by the Nazi fiends—imagine that Erlich and Alter would be working for Hitler, that they would be trying to break down the morale of the Red Army for Hitler's benefit!

Nor can we, American labor men and democrats, accept the cold-blooded alibi that the execution of Erlich and Alter was a matter of Soviet domestic policy and does not concern us. If the Soviet Government expects to be taken seriously as a collaborator with the democratic countries in the establishment of a new world order based upon justice, decency and respect for human rights, it should show respect for these principles in its own policies and actions at home.

Erlich and Alter were Polish refugees in Russia who fled from the Nazi invaders, seeking safety from certain death at the hands of the Gestapo. But instead of an asylum they found a Soviet prison and a firing squad. The Comintern would not forget that Erlich and Alter were its ideological opponents while they lived and worked in Poland, and the Comintern achieved their destruction.

But we, too, shall not forget nor forgive this black crime.

War is brutal, and war demands a terrific price in lives and sacrifices. Some may be inclined to say: why, the killing of Erlich and Alter is but the loss of two more lives among millions of others, why get excited about it? Is now the time to protest against the act of an ally, be it ever so ugly and brutal?

To these we say: Our appreciation of the valiant struggle of the Russian armed forces to drive the Hitler hordes from the Russian homeland will not, should not, lead us to condone acts of brutal injustice committed by the Communist dictators, such as the execution of trusted leaders of democracy and democratic labor organizations.

And let me remind those who raise the point that this is no time to protest against the act of an ally. In 1918, we had, in California, the famous case of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings. They had been condemned to death on charges of having been responsible for the explosion of a bomb in San Francisco during the Preparedness Day parade in 1916. Well, in 1918 several big protest demonstrations were held in the city of Leningrad [*sic*] in favor of Mooney and Billings, and that was at a time when we were in the midst of a war and Russia, though it was forced into the Brest-Litovsk treaty, was in fact our ally. Under the pressure of that protest, President Woodrow Wilson intervened in behalf of Mooney and Billings with the Governor of California and their sentences were commuted and they were ultimately vindicated. It was those protests that saved their lives. We have a right and a great moral duty to voice our protest, to shout out against a crime even if committed by an ally. The murder of Erlich and Alter, we declare, is an act which cheapens life, degrades the very ideals for which we are fighting in this battle to preserve civilization and, in the long run, is injuring the prestige of Soviet Russia, which is our ally in the struggle against Hitler.

Friends and comrades:

No power on earth can bring Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter back to life; how well we recognize this in this moment of great sorrow. But no power on earth, we declare, shall succeed in besmirching the nobility of their lives, their reputations or their character. As free American citizens, as workers and as democrats, in registering our fiery protest against their execution we shall assert and reassert to the end of time our unshakable belief in their innocence and their stainless idealism. Erlich and Alter died as martyrs. They died because even at the price of life itself they would not renounce their convictions, the principles of a free

democratic world. This is our tragedy, this is our loss: this is their undying glory.

HON. FIORELLO H. LA GUARDIA—MAYOR, NEW YORK CITY

Mr. Held, Ladies and Gentlemen

. . . During the past nine years I have very often received protests about one group or another, and very often the protest comes from people who are the loudest in claiming the right of expressing their own opinion. (*Laughter*)

Maybe I am a funny guy, but I believe in freedom of speech. I believe in it—not only for what I want to say, but what the other guy wants to say, too. (*Laughter and applause*) And that is the test of the freedom of speech. . . .

Now, I received a great many communications about this meeting, and to me it is very clear. I don't like persecution in any country, even my own. (*Applause*) That is all there is to it. . . .

I remember the time, before this war, when it was difficult to say a word on behalf of the Soviet government, and as a congressman, I introduced the first resolution for the recognition by the United States of the Soviet Republic. (*Applause*) Now, the true friends of Russia, who are trying to make that country understood, were a larger number of our countrymen who are somewhat shocked to know of the treatment of Erlich and Alter. First, they were in their own country, champions of labor, pioneers of the rights of labor. Some of you who know the history of Poland know that it wasn't easy.

I knew Poland thirty-nine years ago when, as a young man, I was in the diplomatic service of our country. I knew Poland under the Hapsburgs. I knew the prejudice that existed in that country. I knew that to be a pioneer in Poland of the rights of labor requires real courage, and when I welcomed the head of the Polish government-in-exile down at City Hall, I told him openly, frankly, and publicly, that we expected, first, to protect Poland, restore all of its rights, and that we also were expecting Poland to respect the rights of all minorities in her country. (*Applause*)

Therefore it comes to me somewhat as a surprise and with

sorrow that two great labor leaders were executed. If someone says, "Being the Mayor, what interest is that of yours?" my answer is, "It is the same interest in the protection of human rights as it was when I received resolutions from Russia when I was trying to protect Sacco and Vanzetti." (*Applause*)

You know, it is sort of funny. When we started out as liberals we started out to defend the rights of anyone, whether we liked them or not. Now we are becoming sort of specialized liberalists—defend anyone that is with you, never criticize those who are with you, and oppose the other guy.

That is not the liberalism that I have dedicated my life to. . . .

Tonight we are met here in sorrow to mourn the loss of two great natural leaders, men who struggled and contributed so much to the cause of labor. Their country was invaded, and as an accident of this invasion, they were taken. Perhaps they did express their views. So what? All governments could protect themselves against these two men. They might have been separated from the others. Their voice might have been muted. We can't understand why they were liquidated. It is hard to understand.

No one has expressed greater admiration for the courage and valor of the Red Army than I have. No one has sought to explain to the people of America the purpose and sincerity of the Soviets. Therefore I say that we deplore—we deplore this incident. Nothing that any government can do can destroy their memory and their contribution to the cause of labor. (*Applause*)

And so we say, some of us who are real and sincere friends, to the government of Soviet Russia we say, "We are sorry. We are so sorry. Don't do it again."

WILLIAM GREEN—PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

Brothers and Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen:

. . . I want to read to you the official communication I received advising me of the tragic fate of these two noble men. It came as a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. I have never given this letter to the press. I have never made it public, but I am determined on this occasion to read this letter to these noble men and women who are

here tonight. (*Applause*) [Reads letter dated February 23, 1943—the first of the two from Molotov in Moscow via Litvinov in Washington; for the text of the letter, see *above*, p. 166.]

This is the first we knew that these two distinguished men had been executed.

As evidence of this fact I want to read a telegram that I sent to Sir Walter M. Citrine during the month of January 1943, after these men had been executed:

“Sir Walter Citrine:

“Prominent American liberals and trade union leaders are sending a cable to the Russian government asking for the release of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, leaders of the labor movement in Poland.

“In connection with the first anniversary of this war between Russia and Germany, it would be of great significance if the trades unions of Great Britain would do likewise in our mutual behalf.” (*Applause*)

In addition to that a telegram was sent to the Russian government on or about the same time, signed by myself and a number of others representing labor, liberal organizations, and others, to the Soviet government [*sic*]. It was addressed to Commissar V. Molotov, Commissar of Foreign Affairs.

“It is now more than a year since Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were rearrested in Kuibyshev. Most prominent representatives of freedom-loving people throughout the world, and prominent representatives of British and American labor have requested their release in vain. Today, when universal public opinion is united in the condemnation of Nazi criminals who are murdering in cold blood the entire Jewish population of Poland, we renew in the name of justice and humanity our request for the release of these outstanding, courageous fighters against Nazism and fascism Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich.” (*Applause*)

When that telegram reached the Soviet government, Erlich and Alter were no more. We did not know it. We received word on February 23rd that they had been executed sometime in December, through the communication I just read to you.

It occurred to me you would be interested in that information. I am glad to give it to you for the first time, and in receiving it I

know how deeply touched you are because I passed through the same experience when I read that letter on about February 23rd.

Now, when news of this unfortunate occurrence reached me, I immediately took steps to correct what I considered a grave injustice. Through various channels I sought, first, to find out why Erlich and Alter had been rearrested, and what the charges against them were. Here, as I stated a moment ago, I was confronted with an insurmountable obstacle, for although the Russian government in the past had evidenced a lively interest in the internal affairs of other nations, it does not recognize the right of another government to intercede or seek information concerning aliens held in Russia.

Further alarmed by this development to which I referred, I joined with the friends of Erlich and Alter in this country and in Great Britain in appealing to the Russian government for the release of these two Polish leaders so that they might be brought to America, and I read you the telegrams. . . .

I feel very strongly on this subject. I feel that a great injustice has been done. I feel that murder has been committed by the Soviet government. (*Applause*)

We are talking about the postwar period, the creation of a new order and a new world, the application of the Atlantic Charter in spirit and in letter. We are demanding that the common man, the middle man, every man should be free, and that the persecutions of minorities and the injustices throughout the world must cease forever. (*Applause*) We are demanding that the foundation of a new world structure shall be well and securely laid, and that upon that foundation a new superstructure shall be created that will guarantee and protect the world in peaceful living and peaceful pursuits, and that no more shall we fear the threat of war in any nation throughout the world, for all these noble objectives are subjects that we are going to place on the table when we sit around the table to discuss peace. Labor's voice must be heard around that table. (*Applause*) But now we can add to the agenda one more subject, and that is that at the peace table we must demand that the murderers of Erlich and Alter shall be brought to justice. (*Applause*).

DR. REINHOLD NIEBUHR—UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Mr. Chairman, Comrades, Ladies and Gentlemen:

A judicial murder has been committed. Of all forms of murder, judicial murder is the worst because it puts the sanctity of government behind the caprice of power.

Now, it isn't only in the totalitarian countries that judicial murders can be committed. Even when we live in a democratic country and have all the judicial processes protected by all the democratic checks, there are occasions when judicial murders are committed, and we protest against them, and there is no way of preserving democracy without this protest. We remember Sacco and Vanzetti, for instance.

If we protest against judicial murder in our own country, we have just as much reason to protest against it in an Allied country, even though it is desperately important to preserve in war and in peace the alliance between these great nations which are now fighting Nazism.

It would be foolish for us to abrogate this democratic right of protest against injustice, particularly the injustice which involves murder. Mr. Carey has already pointed out how foolish it is to say, "My country right or wrong," and one might observe it is particularly foolish if it isn't your country. (*Laughter*)

I believe that we are fighting this war for many causes, but primarily we are fighting for two objectives: one is to achieve a stable peace, and the other is to maintain and to extend democratic justice.

The two causes are not in absolute agreement. No political causes are ever in absolute agreement. Everyone knows about politics. Sometimes you have to choose the one over the other, and sometimes you have to choose both. In this case we have to choose both, and we are not going to subordinate one against the other. I am of the opinion that collaboration of the great powers and the small powers with this power is an absolute necessity, and that Russia will have to be included in the United Nations, and that we will have to achieve a decent degree of mutuality between ourselves, the western nations, and Russia. I believe that labor is

poorly served, and I think that Democracy will be poorly served by those reactionary and Machiavellian diplomats who are thinking primarily of establishing now certain strategic vantage points in Europe against a possible struggle with the Soviet Union. We have to require a stable world, but it is a fact that among the nations which have to contribute to the stability of this world there is an equal concern for democratic justice, and it would be a very foolish thing if we went hand in hand to Russia and declared that we will abrogate all of our ideals of democracy and justice in order to form this alliance. (*Applause*)

It is a matter of fact that one of the greatest hazards of this collaboration is that there are so many perverse idealists among us who assume that in every actual and potential point of friction between ourselves and Russia, Russia is always right and we are always wrong. (*Applause*) For that reason I would like to associate myself with Mr. Carey's remarks, though it requires less courage on my part to make them than it took for him to make them. I mean the remarks which suggest that the best contribution—though this is not exactly in his terms, and I assume the responsibility for my own terms—the best contribution that could be made for the collaboration between Russia and America would be the liquidation of the Communist Party. (*Applause*)

In the particular case which has brought us together, a judicial murder has been committed undoubtedly for reasons of state. Now, it is a part of the democratic creed to protect the honor and the life of men even against the state when justice demands it. We know that the Soviet Union did not kill Erlich and Alter because they were Jews. We have to say that for Russia. We know they didn't kill them because they were great labor leaders. We know they did not kill them because they were in league with Nazism or Fascism, because Alter and Erlich were great champions of anti-nazi, anti-fascist social democracy.

Why did they have to kill them? There are many reasons given. My own opinion is that Russia intended to serve notice on the world, in spite of all our protests, that she was not going to tolerate anti-communist opinion in Poland. (*Applause*)

I think that Russia is wrong if she imagines that she can get

away even with that. But it is doubly wrong to kill men in a pseudo-judicial process in order to achieve that political end.

I did speak about the Moscow trials, but I am going to say a word about them now. I still think the Moscow trials were a fraud. (*Applause*) And I believe that the judicial process which brought the end of the lives of these two great men were taken under the book of the Moscow trials.

Now, I believe very firmly in the necessity of collaborating with Russia in war and in peace for the final establishment of a stable world, and because I believe in that so sincerely, I believe also that all democratic opinion; labor, liberal, and democratic opinion in the whole world will have to hold fast to our standards of justice, and let the Soviets and the world know that this kind of judicial murder will not go unavenged. (*Applause*)

We will continue to honor the memory of these two great men, and we will continue in our efforts until their honor has been cleared, so that these dead will not have died in vain. (*Applause*)

HON. JAMES M. MEAD—Member of United States Senate (New York); address delivered by telephone from Washington D.C.

From the nation's capital I join with you in this symbol of protest against all inhumanities which deny to any person the ideals for which we fight. The business of the Senate and the vital demands of the Truman Committee Investigating the War Effort, prevent my attendance at your meeting.

To Dave Dubinsky, I send personal greetings and congratulations for his zeal, devotion to duty, and untiring efforts on behalf of labor. His leadership has contributed greatly to the present high estate of labor, and this rally, bringing under one roof the representatives of the two major labor movements in the United States, is further manifestation of his determination to fight the forces of darkness.

We raise our voices in indignation at the apparent lack of respect for the dignity of the individual, and the inherent rights of every human being to freedom of expression, by the shocking announcement to the world that these two Poles, long known as commanding figures in the liberal labor movement, were tried and executed in secrecy. (*Applause*)

We have profound respect for the Russian people! We admire the courage and heroism of the Russian soldier! We have a full understanding of the contribution of the Russian nation in fighting Hitler to a standstill! Who can doubt that the history of the world would have been different, that the Nazis would long since have brought England to her knees and overrun all of Europe and Africa, had it not been for the spirit, determination and will to win of the Russian people! Our allies yesterday, today and tomorrow, till victory. In the words of His Eminence, the late Cardinal Hinsley of England: "For Russia we plead daily in our prayers."

An acknowledgement of the part Russia is playing as our ally does not mean, however, that we must close our eyes to these terroristic methods. Healthy criticism of this sort is just as much a part of our democratic freedoms as the right to level criticism at home if we are dissatisfied with any phase of the war effort. The right kind of criticism is animated by a desire for unity—not disunity.

Much as we Americans differ here at home, we present a united front abroad against the enemy. And as a member of the United Nations, if we find fault with a particular individual or group of individuals in another member nation, or with some of their practices or policies, the solid front of the United Nations remains unbroken.

The executioners of these men tell us that they were guilty of aiding Hitler. Their records point the other way. We cannot believe that Polish Jews, whose lives were devoted to the ideals of the liberal labor movement, the very antithesis of the Hitler-dominated Nazi slave state, would aid and abet the common enemy. (*Applause*)

The fifth columnist will point the finger at this meeting as an evidence of disharmony in the United Nations. Our answer is that this is merely an evidence of our democracy, our inherent right to voice disapproval of any action, at home or abroad, which is alien to our conception of right and wrong.

It is my fervent hope that the blood of these two martyrs to the cause of liberty will bring into closer harmony in our war effort all factions and all divergent views in the labor movement. Labor must stand as one in this fight for freedom.

SHLOYME MENDELSON—REPRESENTING THE JEWISH LABOR BUND IN POLAND (address delivered in Yiddish)

The latest report from Nazi-occupied Poland tells of the armed resistance of the Jewish workers to the enemy. The tortured, the weary, whose nearest and dearest have already been exterminated, have risen up and offered resistance to the Nazi murderers. Hundreds of Jewish workers have fallen in the heroic struggle. And more than one of them—though his hands had grown tired and his spirit felt itself sinking—suddenly saw before his eyes the beckoning, yet simultaneously caressing, figures of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. And the arms suddenly found the strength of steel, the visage grew keener, and with confidence renewed, he fought bravely on.

Bloody was the gift presented by the GPU to the Jewish masses of Poland: their decapitated leaders. The devil himself could not have conjured up such a satanic game. Hitler annihilated Jewish lives physically, but he was helpless in the face of the spirit which Erlich and Alter had implanted in the hearts of those masses. Machine guns and extermination columns were unable to overcome that spirit. All this while, at the same time, the GPU, in a prison courtyard somewhere, buried the dead bodies of Erlich and Alter. A scene that fills our hearts with dismay and indignation.

When the time has come, and the Jewish working people of Poland who have remained alive cry out: “Where are our leaders? What have you done with them?”, the red flags with the hammer and sickle will turn pale with shame, and only unconscionable and wicked people will have the *hutzpa* to look the questioners directly in the eyes. This cry will never give the murderers rest!

During the First World War we used to be shaken up by the description of how crowds of people would appear on the battlefields and remove the boots and clothing from the dead and tear out the gold teeth. Nothing would give those ghouls pause as they desecrated a corpse. A similar type of ghoulish job is now being done on the two most illustrious figures of the Jewish labor movement. The Soviet government wishes to rob the murdered of their radiant names, their noble history of struggle, the legendary quality of their lives filled with the exalted fight for a new, blissful, just,

and joyous world. No one is in a position to cast the slightest shadow on the lives of Erlich and Alter. Theirs are multicolored lives glistening with authentic socialist idealism. Nothing will avail the denigrators—neither the administrative office of the GPU, masquerading under the pseudonym of "Supreme Tribunal," nor the little pen worms slithering around in the mud of slander. When their existence has disappeared like some kind of evil dream, the glorious names of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter will still be shining in the world of labor.

Let no one attempt to cover the tortured and bullet-riddled bodies of the two martyrs with the hundreds of thousands of fallen Red Army soldiers. The Red Army, with its heroic struggle, belongs to us all. It derives its heroism, its amazing courage, from generations of Russian revolutionaries. In its veins flows the blood of the Bund hero Hirsh Lekert. The leaders of the Russian revolutionary and socialist movement and the leaders of the Bund instilled in the hearts of its fighters the hatred of social injustice and reaction. Had prison guards not been standing over Erlich and Alter, the Red Army fighters would have received them with joy and adorned them with crowns, because the two leaders, over the course of decades, had forged the will to struggle of the Jewish workers, and awakened and called the international proletariat to wage a decisive battle against reaction and fascism. The fallen Red Army men will receive the souls of the murdered as the most sacred victims in the struggle against Nazism and fascism. Nothing can conceal the murder. All the waters of the world will be unable to wash away the stains on the murderers' bloody hands.

In cowardly fashion the Soviet government concealed the true basis of the indictment against Erlich and Alter. It justified the crime with a shameful lie. What was their real crime? Socialism was for them the only path to human freedom. They envisaged the attainment of socialism only through unceasing, untiring, uncompromising struggle. Their socialism was coupled with deep morality, with honest conscience. They were not only audacious and devoted leaders of the workers' movement, but, at the same time, singular exemplars of the new man about which we dream. Enormous feelings of responsibility; honest beyond measure; proud in battle; passionate love of freedom; respect for the individual;

unaffected idealism—these were the elements of their character. There would be no need for me to depict the personalities of Erlich and Alter for the Jewish working masses in Poland: for them the two leaders were the embodiment of their roots, symbols of their origins. The most heroic moments in the history of the last twenty years of the Jewish masses in Poland, the worthiest struggles against reaction, anti-Semitism, and chauvinism, are associated with the name of the Bund and its two leaders. In the sphere of the international labor movement, Erlich and Alter, as emissaries of the Jewish working class, warned unceasingly of the fascist danger and strove for the working class to be solidified and united in its will, thereby bringing forth its maximum militancy. But they also warned—honestly and courageously—against international communism, which had split and disrupted the labor movement and sanctified fratricide as the best form of ideological struggle. They, just as all of us, did not believe that fratricide, unrestrained dictatorial terror, extirpation of freedom of thought, are merely bad means toward socialism, but rather means that traduce and destroy socialism. Never for a single moment did they lose their profound faith in libertarian, democratic socialism. I am certain that even in the torture basements of the GPU, even in the final minutes before the execution, they did not lose this faith but fearlessly flung it into the face of their killers. In shooting Erlich and Alter, communism fired a bullet into the heart of the international socialist movement. The shots fired into them are a warning that the Soviet Union will regard as a mortal foe anybody who wishes to activate the masses after the war on behalf of a libertarian and democratic socialist world.

All this was done at a time when the world is caught up in the most severe struggle against the greatest enemy of mankind, and when all the democratic forces in the world, together with the Soviet Union, must devote everything we have to the same struggle. Hence this tragedy bears within itself a portent of great and tragic complications after the war. Charged as it is with grave political dangers, this killing is clearly integral to the whole system of physical annihilation—by imprisonment and execution—of all contrary-minded socialists.

The sacred duty devolves upon us to cry out in protest against

the murder and its political essence, and against the spiritual filth which the murderers wish to heap upon the graves. But there rests upon me here today, as the representative of the Jewish Labor Bund, a particularly heavy obligation to convey to you the muted sorrow and indignation of the Jewish masses in Poland who are drowning in their own blood. I bring to you the stormy silence of our brothers and sisters, and may it rise so high as to penetrate the vault of the world.

The Jewish masses of Poland will never forget Erlich and Alter. Thousands of them will, at the point of death, draw the memory of the two martyrs close to their hearts and fondle it, as something most cherished. Erlich and Alter have become symbols of a libertarian-socialist dream, of a libertarian-socialist world. We know that it will be possible to announce the glorious news of the birth of the free world when in Warsaw and in Łódz—and yes, even in Moscow—giant monuments are erected to the two freedom-fighters, bearing the inscription: “We carry, with gratitude in our hearts, the memory of the two dreamers and fighters.” Thousands upon thousands of Jewish workers will then make a pilgrimage to the monuments, and with heads bowed, in quiet concentration, give voice to the song which had so often accompanied Erlich and Alter in life: *Di Shvue* of “loyalty without limit” to the Bund. I bring to you today the glorious red banners, draped in black, of the Jewish Labor Bund.

DR. VICTOR EHRENPREIS—REPRESENTING THE POLISH SOCIALIST PARTY (address made part of the record though undelivered because of time shortage)

Twenty-five years ago a great American President, Woodrow Wilson, declared that what was then known as the World War—and what we know was only the First World War—was being fought in order “to make the world safe for democracy.” He was right. At that time, the world had to choose between democracy and autocracy.

It fell to another great American President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to tell the world that the present war is being fought for freedom. At present, the issue is as between freedom and slavery!

It is the Four Freedoms which are to be defended from whatever quarter they are being attacked. And, in our opinion, this is the angle from which we should approach the problem with which we are confronted as a result of the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

We Polish socialists knew Erlich and Alter better than anyone else outside their own party. We witnessed all their fruitful activity in the Polish labor movement for twenty years.

With deep respect we bow before the memory of Henryk Erlich. His contribution towards socialist theory and socialist political thought will forever remain a living testimony of his achievements. A fearless leader of the General Jewish Workers Union of Poland, Erlich was one of the first to realize that the place of the Jewish workers in Poland is side by side with their Polish comrades. He knew that the Jewish workers have nothing to expect from fake unity with other Jewish groups. He knew—above all—that Poland, and not any dreamland—wherever it might be located—is the home of the Polish-Jewish worker. And accordingly he acted and led those who had confidence in him.

Those Polish socialists whose main interest was in trade-unionism, will never forget Victor Alter. He was predominantly occupied with economic problems. While Erlich was leading in the political field, Alter was one to give his thought—first of all—to the day-to-day standard of living of the Jewish workers of Poland. Economic interests being tightly interwoven, any improvement that the Jewish trade unions were able to win for their membership benefited the whole working class of Poland. It is from this point of view that we have to approach the exceptionally high standing Alter had in the Polish labor movement as a whole, without regard to sectional grouping. But, while eager to fight for any immediate improvement of the workers' lot right now, Alter was planning for a better economic and social future for them, for a future which would not be fettered by class prejudice and vested interests. His achievements in that field will remain a living memory.

The Polish labor movement as a whole has lost two men whose services were urgently needed, both now and in postwar Poland. There is no use to extend ourselves on the circumstances of their tragic death. We all know what they were, and we all know how to

appreciate such actions by a brutal dictatorship. Great is our grief over the death of two beloved comrades who have been wrested from us in a tragic hour. Great is our anger because of the circumstances of their death. Great is our indignation over the way in which they have been smeared after their death by stupid and irresponsible exponents of foreign interests. But our grief and our anger and our indignation should not overshadow the basic issue which is before us. Let us act as they themselves would have advised us to act, if that were possible. They would surely tell us not to forget that we are at war, and that we must fight the enemy, which is Nazism and fascism, by all means at our disposal and with all our strength.

Erlich's and Alter's activities during their short spell of liberty in Russia in 1941 show us the way. Perhaps they knew that a frame-up was brewing when they were working on the organization of a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the U.S.S.R. But they hoped that their work would be helpful for the common cause of those fighting against Hitler—and they did it. Let us honor the memory of the two murdered anti-fascists by what would please them most—by fighting against fascism!

As a Pole, I would not like to leave this platform without stressing that it was an indivisible, democratic, and socialist Poland which was Alter's and Erlich's foremost aim. For such a Poland they stood, lived, and died. This will be kept in memory not only by Polish socialists, but by all Poles.

Selection From Messages
Received by the World-
Coordinating Committee of the
Jewish Labor Bund on the
Tenth Anniversary of the
Death of Henryk Erlich and
Victor Alter

MESSAGES FROM INDIVIDUALS

Alexander Bracke, Paris—Dean of International Socialism

I have always felt warmly about the Bund, which I knew almost since its very beginning, when it was part of an extended system of organizations covering the entire territory of the tsarist empire—Poland, Lithuania, etc.—and which was set up to direct the struggle of workers oppressed with an additional burden. How can I not be filled with respect and emotion when the Bund associates me with commemorating the anniversary of the assassination of two men whom I knew, who fought with me together in the Socialist International, and who always considered me as their friend.

From *The Jewish Labor Bund Bulletin*, New York, November–December 1951.

Yes, these men were assassinated under the most shameful and most perfidious circumstances. Should I blush as I write these words? Consider: Erlich and Alter, two comrades about eight years apart in age, were arrested, sentenced to death after having been tortured, yet never having admitted the accusations invented by the Soviet commissars; later on they were freed, and excuses were proffered to them for the error committed by the police. They were indemnified, pampered, consulted about the formation of a world-wide Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the plans for which they outlined in a letter to Stalin; they were aided in the issuing of a proclamation calling upon the Jewish refugees in the USSR to join the Polish army being formed on Russian soil. They awaited in Kuibyshev Stalin's reply, delayed during the battles near Moscow and the uncertainty of the defense situation.

A telephone call on December 4, 1941, brought them to the NKVD offices, whence they never returned.

We must not simply mourn them. We ought to realize, on the one hand, that the deep sorrow of the Bund is for a murder whose development hinged upon the fluctuations of the Soviet-Nazi war (arrest, sentence, release, and finally the crime); and on the other hand, we must not forget that for a true Bolshevik of the present day, Social Democracy is the foremost enemy everywhere. That much is certain. . . .

H. N. Brailsford, London—Distinguished British Socialist

I am glad that you are keeping the memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter alive. Their execution was a murder which disgraces the rulers of Soviet Russia.

I had the honour of knowing Erlich personally. I had seen him in Warsaw as a beloved leader of the Jewish workers of Poland, in the days before massacre and ruin overtook them. I can recall many talks with him on questions of socialist thought and tactics. I learned to respect his strong, clear intellect, his courage and his unshakable integrity. His martyr's death was a loss not only to the Jewish workers of Poland, but to the international socialist movement. I, an Englishman, am happy to have the chance of joining you in honouring his name.

Fenner Brockway, London—Member of Parliament

I knew Comrades Erlich and Alter in the International Socialist Movement over a long period of years. First they were associated with the ILP in a group of Independent Socialist Parties. Later the Bund joined the Second International and, as a member of its Executive, I frequently met Erlich and Alter. One of my warmest memories is when they attended an ILP Summer School at Letchworth, and my final memory of Alter is a talk with him during a meeting of the International Federation of Trade Unions in London shortly before the outbreak of the war.

But when I think of them it is not as much of these official connections as of the sense of comradeship which grew between us. They were men of great intellectual capacity and of even greater personal integrity. They always acted on principle and they could be relied upon to stand for an unpopular cause when they were convinced of its justice. Again and again on the Executive of the Socialist International they opposed the compromising policies which preceded the outbreak of the world war. . . .

When I learnt that they had been executed by the Communists in Russia I think I was more shocked than by any political crime. In Russia they were organizing the Polish refugees to fight against Hitler and it was an act of appalling human treachery that past differences in the socialist movement should have led to their execution. This was a crime which, alas, we can never forget and which it will be hard to forgive.

James T. Farrell, New York—Distinguished American Novelist

It is with sadness and indignation that I send you greetings in commemoration of the murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in the Soviet Union in December of 1941. Stalin's crime is unspeakable. Along with others, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter are martyrs of freedom. I send you my greetings on the occasion of your commemoration of their memory.

Rev. Donald Harrington, New York—Minister of the Community Church

Anyone who knew of the valiant efforts for a better world of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter could not help but be inspired and

uplifted by the grandeur of their lives. Their merciless and senseless killing by the Stalinists will live in the history of the world as one of its worst infamies. In their blessed memory, let the crusade for freedom, democracy, and justice go on!

*Edouard Heriot, Paris—President, French National Assembly,
Mayor of Lyon*

It is now ten years since Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich have died. Members of the Warsaw City Council, leaders of the Jewish socialist party in their country, they remain in our memories as enthusiastic and devoted men. In deploring their tragic death, I do not wish to miss the opportunity to salute their memory and to assure all their friends that I share their sorrow which ten years have not been able to erase.

Zeta Hoglund, Stockholm—Veteran Swedish Socialist Leader

We of the socialist movement in Sweden remember with gratitude and affection the names of the two Polish socialists Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich who both gave, from the beginning of this century until their tragic death ten years ago, their efforts and energies to the working class of Poland and particularly to its Jewish segment.

I met Erlich and Alter personally at socialist conferences—Alter as early as 1915 in Zimmerwald, and Erlich in 1917 in Stockholm and on several later occasions. Both were exceedingly genial and winning people. Like myself, they belonged to a left trend within the International, but they never associated with the communists. Yet they worked with all their strength for an understanding between the Soviet Union and the democratic powers, and during the fight against Hitlerism, the common enemy, they were in the very frontlines.

Bolshevism has burdened itself with an enormous responsibility towards the working class of the world and towards the future by allowing these men to be murdered. It is a phantastic lie to pretend that these men would ever have served Hitler's purposes. The murder of these self-sacrificing Polish socialists remains an inf-

faceable stigma on the history of the Soviet Union during the very period when she needed and received the support of the workers in all democratic countries in order to save herself from annihilation.

Sidney Hook, New York—Professor of Philosophy, New York University

To those who possessed political understanding, Stalin's monstrous slander of Erlich and Alter, those heroic, Jewish anti-fascist figures, as agents of Hitler, and his subsequent murder of them, revealed the underlying pattern of Bolshevik mentality and practice. It indicated what could be expected of Stalin by a policy of appeasement, pacifism, and unilateral concession. Stalin kept *his* promises to Hitler. But he took the outstretched hands of democratic socialists only to drag them to their execution. Today like yesterday he regards as his greatest enemy not fascist or other reaction but the democratic socialist movement.

U.S. Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota

It is fitting that a group such as yours should keep reminding the world of the Soviet Union's horrible crime in the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

The only crime that Erlich and Alter were guilty of was in acting as a voice of the democratic peoples all over the world in opposing the totalitarian objectives of Soviet imperialism. The murder of Erlich and Alter proclaims in a grim way the fear which the Soviet leaders have of ideas.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to say these words about two great martyrs in the fight for the freedom of men's minds and personalities.

Leon Jouhaux, Paris—Veteran French Labor Leader, Recipient of the 1951 Nobel Peace Prize

Almost on the very day when the working class organized in the free unions receives, in my person, a great reward for its incessant

activities for peace among peoples, liberty, and justice, the tenth anniversary of the tragic disappearance of the two militant labor leaders, H. Erlich and V. Alter, is being observed—two men who dedicated their lives to the same struggle and died in it.

I associate myself wholeheartedly with the initiative of the Bund comrades who undertook to demonstrate their lasting loyalty to the two leaders and to construct a monument to their memory. I knew Victor Alter very well, Erlich less intimately, and I know that neither of them ever doubted the cause to which they had dedicated themselves. A metaphor by Jaures, another great man in the struggle for liberty and the workers' welfare, rings in my memory: "The road is long and it is lined with graves, but it leads toward justice."

V. Alter and H. Erlich will not have died in vain. Their graves lie along the road leading the workers toward truth, liberty, and social justice.

H. Leivick, New York—Famous Jewish Writer and Poet

The more we are removed—in time—from the murder of Erlich and Alter, the more acutely are we aware of the atrocity of the crime committed by the Soviet authorities.

Wounds, even social wounds, supposedly heal with time. There are wounds, however, Cain-Abel wounds, which never heal.

History never forgets the innocent blood of Zechariah, which never ceased boiling—and similarly cannot be forgotten the spilled blood of the innocently murdered, sterling, reproachless Jewish men, socialists and proud fighters, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

Their blood does not congeal.

André Philip, Paris—Member, Executive Committee, French Socialist Party

Among the innumerable martyrs for the cause of international socialism and of liberty, there are those who are particularly dear to our memory. Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter are two of these. After having dedicated their entire lives to the democratic labor movement, they were assassinated in cold blood by the totalitarian

Stalinist regime under circumstances which evoked the indignation and the anger of the entire free world.

Not only were they assassinated, but, in addition, when the growing pressure of international opinion finally succeeded in exacting some details from their hangmen, the latter attempted to dishonor their victims by assertions that they had been convicted as “traitors,” “spies,” and . . . as “Soviet citizens.” Thus Stalin admitted to having annexed eastern Poland, where our comrades then lived, under his infamous pact with the Nazis. As to the accusations of “traitors” and “spies,” one has to realize the significance of these words coming from the mouth of Beria. What it really means is that our unfortunate friends refused to become docile instruments in the hands of the Soviet secret police and to execute obediently their will. This was their only crime. And this also proves that even faced with death they remained true to democratic socialism and to the freedom and independence of their country. In any case, they were always in the frontlines of the struggle against international reaction. In October 1917 they fought at the side of the early Russian revolutionaries; they fought against the dictatorial regimes of their own country—against Pilsudski as well as against the anti-Semitic colonels who were wooing Hitler; they opposed the Nazi aggression and helped to organize the heroic resistance of Warsaw; and when Hitler attacked Russia they were once again beside the Russian armies defending their land: they appealed to their fellow Poles—only a short time previously maltreated by the Russians, scattered throughout Siberia, tormented in the camps, imprisoned like themselves—to forget their grief and to form, under Soviet direction, a Polish Army of Liberation. None of this gained them any consideration whatever. Their souls were not those of slaves—and this alone convicted them. They were true representatives of a revolutionary socialist movement upholding the essential values of our civilization, and this was intolerable to the Stalinist totalitarian regime.

We who have always been careful to distinguish between the fundamental qualities of the Russian people and the barbarism of their rulers, we who have protested against the Moscow trials ought to point out tirelessly to international labor that Stalinist crimes like those to which Erlich and Alter fell victim represent a

particularly odious form of counterrevolution. It is thus important that democratic socialism defend the memory of our friends until the time when the free workers of the whole world will have liquidated by themselves every Stalinist influence within their ranks.

Thus, as they did when they were alive, Erlich and Alter serve the cause of human liberty among us.

*Arthur Schlesinger, Cambridge, Mass.—Department of History,
Harvard University*

On the tenth anniversary of the death of Erlich and Alter, let them stand before us as symbols of a whole world in bondage beyond the Iron Curtain. The best way to celebrate their memory is to work to end the tyranny which murdered them.

Upton Sinclair, California—World-renowned American Novelist

The murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in the Soviet Union is, or should be, a lesson for every Socialist, every Liberal, every Democrat, and every true lover of freedom throughout the civilized world. Murder is what Stalin and his Politburo intend for all of us, and all of us have to do all we can to save ourselves while we are still able to do something.

MESSAGES FROM ORGANIZATIONS

American Federation of Labor—William Green, President

When Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were deprived of their lives by the authorities of the Soviet government in 1941, those of us throughout the nation who believe in freedom, liberty, and democracy were deeply touched and filled with sorrow because of their passing. The murder of these two brave defenders of freedom was resented when their deaths occurred and has been resented ever since. On the anniversary of their deaths we cherish within our memory the great sacrifice they made and the great service they

rendered in the promotion of freedom, liberty, and democracy. They still live within our hearts and affections.

We commemorate the tenth anniversary of these murdered martyrs with an increased feeling of devotion to the cause which they represented. Let all the friends of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter join in paying them a silent tribute of devotion upon the celebration of the anniversary of their deaths in the month of December of this year.

British Labor Party—Denis Healey, International Secretary

On the tenth anniversary of their execution by the Soviet Government, we, as members of the great international Socialist community are proud to pay homage to the memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, beloved leaders of the Jewish Socialist Movement "Bund" in Poland.

These great Polish Socialists, whose long and honourable record of service, integrity, and loyalty to our common cause won the esteem of their international comrades, and whose tireless efforts to better the miserable conditions of the Polish workers had earned them the love and gratitude of the toiling masses of their countrymen, were among the many Socialist and Jewish leaders to be arrested and imprisoned by the Russian political police following the Soviet occupation of Poland in 1939. Despite repeated appeals for their release by the American and British Labour Movements, they were kept in prison for two years. . . .

In the eyes of the Soviet judges their crime—one which the Soviet regime could not and cannot tolerate—was that they were men of fearless and independent mind, Socialists not afraid to declare openly their belief in freedom nor condemn personal dictatorship and totalitarianism in whatsoever form. And it was from the teaching and example of Erlich and Alter and others of like calibre that the Jewish workers who so gloriously defended the Warsaw Ghetto drew their inspiration.

Ten years have now passed since this crime was perpetrated by the Stalinist Government; but unfortunately the policy of the Russian rulers has not moved in the direction of true democracy. The Soviet system of spiritual enslavement and political servitude

has been clamped down still more firmly on the Russian people. The refusal of their rulers to co-operate in the work of peace, thus dashing the people's hopes of an end to war among the nations, is a crime against humanity. But the memory of men like Erlich and Alter will always have an honoured place in the annals of Socialism, in their country's history, and in the hearts of the Polish workers.

Congress of Industrial Organizations—Philip Murray, President

The entire world was shocked by the death of two great Polish trade unionists, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, at the hands of the Soviet Russian authorities in 1941. The utter callousness of the Soviet dictators in putting to death these splendid figures shocked the world in 1941.

Today, a decade later, we hold in high honor the memory of these two noble men, and on this anniversary we pledge once again to redouble our efforts in behalf of democracy for the freedom-loving people of the entire world. Erlich and Alter are democratic symbols whose memory decent men and women everywhere honor and cherish.

Cooperative Commonwealth Federation of Canada—National Executive Committee

The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation of Canada pays tribute to the memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. The martyrdom of these two Polish comrades is a landmark in the struggle of democratic socialism and for the freedom of mankind from tyranny, whether it be of the fascist "right" or the communist "left." Their execution, and the unrelenting persecution of social democrats, by a power which has professed the socialist faith, should convince the world of the vast gulf which separates democratic socialism from the tyranny which reigns in the Soviet empire.

The memory of Erlich and Alter will long remain among democratic socialists everywhere, as the struggle in which these two gave their lives continues with new strength.

French Socialist Party—Guy Mollet, Secretary General

There is something so painful and so tragic in the fate of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter that no human being worthy of that name can recall it without succumbing to stupor and uneasiness. . . .

It would have been, so to speak, in keeping with the cruel logic of events, had these men, whose lives had been wholly dedicated to an ideal, been called upon to make the supreme sacrifice and to fall under the blows of fascism, reaction, the avowed enemies of the people.

It was, however, the Bolshevik NKVD which arrested Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in 1939. It was a Bolshevik court which pronounced against them the monstrous sentence, without the slightest basis in fact, like the accusation itself. And it was Bolshevik hangmen who assassinated them.

Alter and Erlich were neither the first nor the last victims of the Stalinist tyranny. Other names, no less glorious, have since been added to a long list of martyrs—a martyrdom of revolutionaries, of Socialists, sacrificed by an odious sacrilege in the name of socialism, in the name of Revolution; sacrificed, in fact, because their existence and their activities were a permanent defiance and a permanent challenge to the traitors adorned by the remains of socialist revolution which they had themselves destroyed in their own country.

There can be no doubt that Erlich and Alter fell for the true cause of the free workers. They fell because liberty and Socialism are inseparable, because neither can be suppressed without destroying the other, they fell as if to demonstrate precisely the famous saying which Alter himself liked to repeat and which it is impossible not to recall on this anniversary with deep emotion: "Better to die standing than to live on one's knees."

*International League for the Rights of Man—Roger Baldwin,
Chairman of the Board*

I take the occasion to express what I know are the views of this organization, although it was not in existence at the time of the execution of Erlich and Alter.

As opponents of all police states and their summary measures, we condemn not only the execution without public trial (the travesty of justice was not that) of two men whose only crime was their political views, but also the whole system which their martyrdom is shocking proof.

As symbols of Soviet tyranny, their memories will be long revered by all those to whom the struggle for the rights of man under law is a ceaseless obligation.

As Socialists, they join the ranks of those thousands of nameless idealists whose lives were sacrificed to the dictatorial terror which has destroyed every principle of democratic socialism.

We join in commemorating the death of these victims of tyranny.

Social Democratic Party of Denmark—Hans Hedtoft, Chairman

The tenth anniversary of the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter brings to mind the memory of two honest democrats and Socialists, whose personalities were also known and appreciated within the Social Democratic movement of Denmark.

The disclosure of their fate was received with grief and horror. These two courageous and righteous men will live in our memories as martyrs for democratic Socialism, for freedom, and humanity.

We shall always greatly cherish their memory.

Social Democratic Party of Germany—Dr. Kurt Schumacher and Erich Ollenhauer

For decades hopes and illusions were perpetrated as to the community of interests of Socialists and Communists regarding the final aims. The necessary alliance between the Western powers and the Soviet Union against the fascist aggressors strengthened these illusions. For this reason the shock was even greater as the news of the murder of the Socialists Alter and Erlich by the Communists became known in 1943. These two eminent representatives of our sister party, the Bund, were deeply rooted not only in the Jewish masses, but played an important part in the Polish Socialist movement as well. After two years' detention in Soviet

prisons, the two comrades were finally freed. While the Russians were still discussing with them plans for the struggle against fascism, they were rearrested in December 1941, and they never saw freedom again. They, who had sacrificed their lives to the struggle against reaction and fascist terror, were accused of having conspired with the Nazis. A more shameless lie can hardly be imagined. It demonstrated once again that between libertarian, democratic Socialism and the Communist regime of terror there exists only a rift that cannot be bridged.

The German labor movement recalls the stalwart behavior of Erlich and Alter with deep reverence on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of their death. In memory of these, our friends, and of millions of their brethren who had become victims of the equally brutal Nazi terror, it is our sacred duty as decent human beings, as democrats, and as Socialists to combat the dread of totalitarianism on every plane.

In this sense we ask the Bund comrades to accept our sincere sympathy.

Socialist International—Julius Braunthal, Secretary

I knew Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter by reputation for many years, and I had the privilege of meeting them when, on my visit to Warsaw in 1935, we discussed for countless hours the great issues of socialism.

They were the most pure and the most noble of Socialists. To them the socialist message was not an abstract idea but the very purpose of their lives, and the international conception of socialism the essence of their faith.

They were socialists in the true spirit of Karl Marx. They accepted Marx's teachings on the need for revolutionary changes under certain social and historical circumstances. As long as Poland was a Russian province, they worked closely with the Russian Social Democratic Party for the overthrow of tsarism. For his revolutionary activities Erlich was imprisoned three times by the tsarist regime, and when in 1917 the revolution triumphed, he was elected one of the leaders of the St. Petersburg Soviet and a

member of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers' Soviets of All-Russia.

But Erlich and Alter were never Bolsheviks. They aimed at a real socialist society; a society free from the fetters of economic, political, and spiritual oppression; a society, as Marx understood it, "in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all." They were democratic socialists.

But because they were true socialists and true Marxists of flawless integrity, utterly devoted to the socialist cause, trusted and loved by the Jewish workers and highly respected figures in the Socialist International, they were the more hated by the Stalinists. And when the Stalinists got hold of them, they murdered them in cold blood, as so many thousands of good socialists before and since.

Foul murders were committed. Two years later, Mr. Molotov had the audacity to state that Erlich and Alter had been put to death because of "their hostile activities, including appeals to the Soviet troops to stop bloodshed and immediately conclude peace with Germany."

Who among the many thousands, opponents as well as friends of Erlich and Alter, who knew them really believes the verdict to be true, that these very men, leaders of a Jewish working-class movement, had attempted to stop the fight against the Nazis who were slaughtering the Jews?

But we know Stalin's disgraceful methods of slandering the honor of his victims before exterminating them physically; it was first applied to the Bolshevik Old Guard—Bucharin, Riazanov, Rykov, and Rakovski—and later to anyone regarded as suspect by the regime. The monstrosity of this twofold crime surpasses all human comprehension.

The Socialist International renews its homage to Erlich and Alter, who were members of its Executive and who died as martyrs of the socialist cause: freedom and democracy. They will live in the memory of generations to come as victims of a regime which, because it debased socialism, exterminated the good socialists.

Socialist Party U.S.A.—Norman Thomas

It is good that we should observe the tenth anniversary of Stalin's murder of Erlich and Alter. These men were the distinguished

leaders of that heroic organization, the Jewish Socialist Bund of Poland. In all the world, no organization has lost so large a percentage of its members in the battle for freedom. Their leaders, Erlich and Alter, were passionate anti-Nazis. They had been arrested when the Russians, under Stalin's infamous pact with Hitler, occupied eastern Poland. But when Hitler attacked Stalin, they were willing to forgive Stalin's crimes against them and their brethren and to cooperate in the battle against Nazism. Their award, after a brief period of freedom, was rearrest and death. They were martyrs to Stalin's communism. They became symbols of its despotism. If the free world had been sufficiently aroused by the secret execution of Erlich and Alter, it would have learned the impossibility of achieving peace with freedom through the appeasement of Stalin.

In the bitter history of these ten years, it would seem that Erlich and Alter and hosts of other democratic socialists in eastern Europe died in vain. Yet not in vain. If, even yet, we catch fire from their spirit of devotion and from them learn that communism is not a form of socialism but its base betrayal.

Spanish Socialist Party—Rodolfo Llopis, General Secretary

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter—two magnificent comrades assassinated by the communists. The long list of socialist martyrs is endless. There were as many comrades murdered by the Nazi-fascists and the communists as there are among the living.

Indeed, the nazi-fascists and the communists are in perfect agreement regarding their hatred of the socialists. Both wish us to disappear, and whenever the opportunity avails itself, they do not shrink from committing crimes. Yet a difference between the fascists and the communists exist: Although they both murder socialists simply because they are socialists, the nazi-fascists do not deny their reasons; on the contrary, they openly profess their hatred. The communists, on the other hand, hate socialists with so savage a fury that they are not satisfied with mere murder—they have to add infamy to their crime: they aim to dishonor their victims. That is the reason why they always profess to have sentenced our comrades to death for being spies, traitors, fascists,

and other similar epitaphs from the wretched vocabulary reserved by the communists for socialists. Once familiar with their methods and their fabrications, one no longer believes their slanders. But unfortunately the stricken cannot be lifted to their feet again. Their honor can be vindicated, but their lives cannot be returned.

The communist procedures are now well known. Erlich and Alter were to be similarly victimized. Yet we know well that they were murdered because they were socialists, and that they died socialists. To be a socialist constitutes an unpardonable crime in the communists' eyes. In our hearts as well as in the hearts of socialists all over the world, the names of Erlich and Alter will always remain pure. Their memory will never be erased. And our admiration for them will ever grow. They lived as heroes, and they died as martyrs.

*Swedish Social Democratic Party—Kaj Bjork,
International Secretary*

Swedish Social Democrats were deeply shocked by the disclosure of the fate of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Information about their trial reached us during the war and was published in our leading newspaper. The monstrous accusations against them were never believed here and gave us further proof that no cooperation between communism and democratic socialism is possible. The names of the two great idealists Erlich and Alter are fresh in our memory at the tenth anniversary of their death.

Swiss Social Democratic Party—Walter Bringolf

In difficult times, during the past world war, the Bund and socialists all over the world lost two stalwart fighters, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Both disappeared in the Soviet Union in 1941, and, as was found out later, were executed. Alter and Erlich were libertarian socialists, enemies of dictatorship, and faithful fighters for the working people. We shall never forget the two worthy warriors for democratic socialism.

*United Automobile Workers of America—Walter P. Reuther,
President*

In life Erlich and Alter served the workers and humanity. Their martyrs' death revealed, as perhaps nothing else could, the monstrosity of the Soviet dictatorship. Among workers all over the world, the memory of that communist crime will render impotent the false propaganda claims of the tyrannical Soviet regime. The groups joining to keep alive the memory of Erlich and Alter, therefore, are serving the cause of humanity and freedom. You are to be commended.

The Erlich-Alter Monument in Warsaw

A BELATED TRIBUTE BY VICTOR ERLICH

Some forty-five years after the world learned of the fate met by Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in the Soviet Union, Warsaw witnessed a moving tribute to their memory and their legacy. On April 17, 1988, a monument was unveiled in the section of Warsaw's Jewish cemetery which contains the graves of the Bund leaders B. Mikhalevich and J. Khmurner and the Warsaw Ghetto fighters A. Blum and M. Klepfish. The inscription on the new tombstone, in Yiddish and Polish, reads: "Leaders of the Bund—Henryk Erlich, 1882, and Wiktor Alter, 1890. Executed in the Soviet Union." Needless to say, this forthright acknowledgment of the long-suppressed truth owed nothing to General Jaruzelski's regime. Short of an outright ban, the Polish authorities did all they could to hinder and discredit the commemoration. (The only mention of the impending event in the official press was a scurrilous reference to some unspecified "cemetery hyenas" in the organ of the Polish Communist Party, *Trybuna Ludu*.) The installation and the unveiling of the monument to H. Erlich and W. Alter was due entirely to the resourcefulness and determination of Dr. Marek Edelman, the sole surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a staunch Bundist, and to the active support of his Solidarity associates. The organizing committee of forty-six prominent public figures linked to Solidarity, e.g., Z. Bujak, J. Kuron, J. J. Lipski, A. Michnik, and A. Wajda, called "everybody to celebrate . . . the memory of the two outstanding representatives of the Jewish

community in the Second Republic of Poland, Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich." The Committee's call was heeded on a scale which exceeded by far the expectations of the few guests from abroad. As Henryk Erlich's grandson, who journeyed with his mother and older brother from the United States to attend the ceremony, has reported, "By noon on a cloudless day over three thousand people jammed shoulder to shoulder onto the overgrown grounds of the Jewish cemetery on Okonowa Street. As dozens of arm-banded marshals from the Independent Students' Union (NSZ) kept order, the crowd listened to speeches and heard messages" from all over the world.*

Marek Edelman outlined succinctly the lives of the two men and pulled no punches in bringing out the political significance of their deaths: "All champions of freedom and justice, all foes of terror, totalitarianism and autocracy who had found themselves within the reach of the Soviet regime were murdered by that regime." S. Nunberg offered a heartfelt tribute to the fallen leaders on behalf of the Coordinating Committee of the Jewish Labor Bund in New York. Albert Shanker, vice-president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., brought greetings from American trade unionists. Zbigniew Bujak, a young and charismatic Warsaw Solidarity leader, averred that he had only recently learned the story of the two Bund leaders. "We had to find a connection to history," he reminded his audience. "And Erlich and Alter are our past." There were messages from François Mitterand; Willy Brandt, President of the Socialist International; the Archbishop Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris; from the German "Greens;" Lydia Ciolkosz, a veteran Polish socialist in London; Lord Plumb, President of the European Parliament and Henryk Erlich's sole surviving son, Victor. A masterful reading of a stirring Polish poem celebrating courage and self-sacrifice concluded the program. Yet the occasion such as this would not have been complete without the strains of the Bundist anthem "Di Shvue" ("The Oath"). Somehow, across the crowded cemetery grounds the voices of the few survivors of the glorious tradition

*See Mark Erlich, "Honoring the Past to Change the Future: Solidarity and the Warsaw Ghetto," *Tikkun*, September 1988, p. 25.

†For medical reasons I was unable to attend the ceremony.

sought each other out and blended in, pledging once more, in the words of the song, "boundless fidelity to the Bund."

This impressive ceremony was not the only event that made April 17, 1988, the landmark date it was. The unveiling of the monument to Henryk Erlich and Viktor Alter was closely synchronized with an official commemoration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The actual date—April 19, 1988—had been preempted by the authorities. Eager to improve its image abroad, the Jaruzelski regime decided on an elaborate celebration of the anniversary. Yet while a number of Jewish dignitaries from around the world hastened to accept the invitation to take part in the state-sponsored event, many in Poland, most notably, Marek Edelman and his Solidarity associates, firmly denied the moral right to celebrate Jewish suffering and Jewish heroism to the regime which had snuffed out Poland's best hope for a life in dignity, and which had never fully repudiated the vicious anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. The organizing committee responsible for the unveiling of the Erlich-Alter monument, summoned its constituency to a massive celebration in memory of Polish Jews.

Once again the unofficial network performed admirably. "On the afternoon of April 17," to quote Mark Erlich again, "a crowd, estimated at 10,000, gathered at the monument to the Warsaw ghetto" to hear Zbigniew Bujak declare that "the loss of Jews to Poland was like the loss of a crucial limb to the whole body," and to listen to Lech Walesa's moving letter, which hailed "the uprising of the monument fighters as the most Polish of all Polish uprisings." "After the speeches, the crowd slowly headed for the Umschlagplatz, the site where Germans rounded up Warsaw's Jews for the one-way trip to the death-camps. . . . Thousands of people walked under the colorful Solidarity banners swaying under the gentle breezes of a warm spring afternoon."*

Much to the embarrassment of the authorities, the official proceedings which took place two days later were eclipsed by this massive tribute to the victims of Hitler and Stalin.

The near-convergence of the two events was emblematic. For one thing, as Marek Edelman has said, it highlighted the murderous

*Mark Erlich, *op. cit.*

nature of “all varieties of totalitarianism.” For another, it pointed up the indissoluble bond between the suffering and the heroism of Polish Jews and the fate of its two leaders, who perished far from Warsaw but whose influence had shaped the stance of many a Warsaw ghetto fighter. Finally, it was singularly fitting that the tribute to Henryk Erlich and Viktor Alter should have been sponsored by the most significant workers’ movement of our time. To say this is not to deny significant differences between the Bundist tradition and Solidarity. The latter, which at its peak spoke for the majority of Poland’s population, is too diverse a movement to be properly labeled socialist. Yet the continuity insisted upon by Zbigniew Bujak remains paramount. It is not simply a matter of commitment to the independent trade unionism that Victor Alter epitomized so brilliantly. It rests also, and still more importantly, on the shared belief in democracy, and a shared dedication to the cause of a free and just Poland, a cause for which Erlich and Alter gave their lives.

THEY WERE OUR BROTHERS

The Public Committee of the 45th anniversary of the Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto appeals to Polish society to celebrate this anniversary. Let it be a day dedicated to the memory of the Polish Jews, of the many centuries during which they lived with us, and of their almost total extermination.

They were our brothers.

For eight centuries the Polish land was our common land, Polish Jews shared the fate of Poland; and their creed, their language, their culture, and their ways of living were a substantial part of the Polish landscape. We express deep regret that this fact was not always recognized and these values not always appreciated in our history. The almost total extermination of the Polish Jews, executed in the name of a criminal doctrine, put an end to the coexistence of the two nations on this land. We suffer deeply that to save our brothers we could do so little as compared to the need.

The Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto has become for the world a symbol of the fight for supreme values—the dignity of human life and the right to choose a worthy death. We, as spokesmen of

independent public opinion, deeply believe that it is our duty to bear witness to the above-mentioned values.

We call the whole of Polish society to the Solidary celebration in memory of Polish Jews. Let the April days be for us an occasion to manifest our mourning for the murdered nation. Let us also hope for the possibility of the friendly coexistence of free people within one state and of free nations in the world.

We invite everybody to join us in the Jewish prayer Kaddish and the Christian prayer Our Father on April 17, 1988. On that day, at 5 p.m., we shall meet in front of the Heroes of the Ghetto Memorial, from where we shall walk, with flowers and candles, to the Umschlagplatz Memorial on Stawki Street.

We also call everybody to commemorate on the same day, the memory of two outstanding representatives of the Jewish community in the Second Republic of Poland: Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich.

As leaders of the Socialist Party Bund, and members of the Executive of the Socialist International and of the city Council of Warsaw, these two men protested officially to the Soviet authorities against the attack on Poland and the annexation of a substantial part of its territory in September 1939. They paid for this with their lives: sentenced to death by the Soviet Special Tribunal and executed in December 1941. Fulfilling our duty to remind the Polish nation of these two eminent citizens, we shall unveil their monument at noon on April 17 in the Jewish Cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw.

Public Committee: Stefan Bratkowski, Stanisław Broniewski, Zbigniew Bujak, ks. Bronisław Dembowski, Marek M. Drozdowski, Kazimierz Dziewanowski, Marek Edelman, Jerzy Ficowski, Zbigniew Gąsior, Bronisław Geremek, Jerzy Holzer, Władysław Jagiełło, Stanisław Jankowski, Krystyna Kersten, Jan Kielanowski, Władysław Klamerus, Tadeusz Konwicki, Wiktor Kulerski, Jacek Kuroń, Andrzej Kuśniewicz, Jan Józef Lipski, Tadeusz Łepkowski, Eugeniusz Madej, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Helena Merenholtz, Adam Michnik, Halina Mikołajska, Leszek Moczulski, Marek Moderau, Jan Mulak, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Teresa Prekerowa, Jan Rosner, O. Jacek Salij O.P., Henryk Samsonowicz, Andrzej Stelmachowski, Aniela Steinsbergowa, Julian Stryjk-

owski, Klemens Szaniawski, Anna Szmalenberg, Anna Szymańska, Krzysztof Śliwiński, Andrzej Wajda, Wiktor Woroszyński, Andrzej Wróblewski, Krystyna Zachwatowicz.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY DR. MAREK EDELMAN

We have gathered today at the Jewish cemetery of Warsaw, a cemetery which is a symbol of the Holocaust of Polish Jews. The stones that stand here are a symbol of the infamy that Hitler's fascism was. They are a symbol of the fight against violence and tyranny, they are a warning for future generations.

Today, as we unveil the monument to the two leaders of the Bund, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, this cemetery becomes a symbol of the infamy of all varieties of inhuman totalitarianism the world over.

Henryk Erlich was born on May 5, 1882 in Lublin. Already as a high school student he became the leader of the General Organization of Jewish School Youth in Russia, Erlich entered law school in 1902 and joined the Bund the following year. He was arrested for the first time for taking part in socialist demonstrations in May 1904 and expelled from the university. Erlich continued to study law in Berlin and, in 1905, returned to the Kingdom of Poland. He then became one of the editors of the illegal Bund organ *Nasze Hasła* ("Our Watchwords"). He graduated from law school in 1908, and in 1909, after returning to Warsaw, he resumed his activity in the party. Following his arrest and expulsion from the Kingdom of Poland he spent some time in Paris, after which he returned to Russia. From 1912 onwards, the Bund's Central Committee entrusted Erlich with collaborating with the Social-Democratic delegates to the Fourth State Duma; he also represented the Bund within the Menshevik Organizing Committee. In 1913 Erlich joined the Bund's Central Committee. He soon had to put in some time at the Butyrki prison in Moscow. During World War I Erlich published the weekly *Yevreyskiye Vesti* ("Jewish News"). He was the author of the appeal to the people of Petrograd, published in 1917, calling for the overthrow of the tsarist regime. That same year the Tenth Conference of the Bund elected Erlich the Bund's

representative to the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

After the Revolution's victory in Russia Erlich opposed the concept of "dictatorship of the proletariat." He co-authored the Bund's declaration protesting the overthrow of the Provisional Government and read it at the Congress of the Soviets in Petrograd, where he also offered, in the name of the Bund, a declaration concerning the independence of the Polish state.

During the interwar period Erlich was one of the leaders of the Bund in Poland. He was a member, as well as chairman, of the Central Committee. He represented the Bund in the Warsaw City Council. One of the outstanding journalists in the Bundist press, he edited the main party organ, *Naye Folkstsaitung*, and contributed to numerous other publications. Erlich also represented the Bund at numerous international congresses. When the Bund joined the Socialist International in 1930, Erlich, together with Victor Alter, represented the party in the Executive Council of this organization. He collaborated actively with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). He took part, as a delegate of the Bund, in the PPS Congresses in 1934 in Warsaw and in 1937 in Radom. As a lawyer he often appeared in political trials.

Victor Alter was born on February 2, 1890 in Mława. He was a student at the W. Górski Gymnasium in Warsaw, from which he was expelled in 1905 after being arrested for organizing a school strike. In 1911 he finished his engineering studies in Ghent. During his stay abroad he worked closely with the United Organization of Bundist Groups affiliated with the Bund's Foreign Committee in Geneva. After his return to Warsaw in 1912 Alter began his activity within the ranks of the Bund. He was arrested in 1913 and after some months in a Warsaw prison was exiled to Siberia. He escaped from Siberia and, until the beginning of World War I, remained in Belgium and in England, where he worked and took part in the campaign against military service. In March of 1917 Alter left for Russia. In Kiev he was elected to the Bund governing body. He took part in the Eighth Conference of the Bund in Petrograd, where he was elected a member of the Central Committee. In 1918 Alter participated in the Conference of Workers' Delegates, which the Soviet authorities disbanded. Alter was arrested. After his

release, he returned to Warsaw and assumed a leading role in the Polish Bundist organizations. A member of the Bund's delegation, he took part in the Third Congress of Socialist Organizations held in 1921 in Moscow, where, once more, he was arrested. After the Bund joined the Socialist International he represented the party, together with Erlich, on the International's Executive Council. Besides, he was, until 1939, one of the most active figures in the Poland's socialist movement. He headed the National Council of Jewish Trade Unions and represented Jewish trade unions then in the Central Committee of Trade Unions in London and Paris. Like Erlich, Alter was elected several times in a row to the Warsaw City Council. He was also active in the cooperative movement. An outstanding speaker and the author of numerous publications dealing with politics and economics, he represented the Bund on the editorial board of *Pismo Codzienne* ("Daily Journal"), organ of a group of Bund and PPS activists. Alter also became editor and publisher of the biweekly *Myśl Socjalistyczna* ("Socialist Thought").

On September 6, 1939, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter left Warsaw for the East in order to continue the fight against Nazism. On September 17, the communist rulers of the Soviet Union, acting in concert with Hitler, administered the last blow to the Polish state. It was then that Victor Alter, as a representative of the Bund, along with some PPS figures, drafted a letter to Stalin urging him to fight German fascism. In October Alter and Erlich were both arrested and imprisoned in Moscow. As a consequence of the Sikorski-Mojski pact they were both released in the autumn of 1941 and decided then to establish an anti-fascist committee to mobilize public opinion in the West in support of combating Hitlerism and increasing the delivery of arms to the Soviet Union. But in December of the same year they were once more arrested and sentenced to death on the basis of false accusations. The only truth contained in the verdict was that they were members of the Executive Council of the Second Socialist International. Thus the Russian communists proclaimed a death sentence for all socialists.

The communist authorities, from the very beginnings of their existence, destroyed, in order to remain in power, millions of their own citizens, they sold Republican Spain to the fascists, they

destroyed and murdered in their own ranks people who harbored independent thoughts. All champions of freedom and justice, all foes of terror, totalitarianism, and autocracy who found themselves within reach of the Soviet regime were murdered by them.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter are no longer alive. But their ideas live on, and today in Poland organized libertarian movements have emerged; the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) has paved the way for the workers' movement, *Solidarność* Solidarity, which, in truth, was strangled seven years ago, but which lives on notwithstanding all the obstacles and builds the foundation for a new and just Poland, offering equality to all working people regardless of their origin.

We are happy that as a consequence of the unveiling of this monument honoring them, Henryk Erlich's and Victor Alter's memory shall not perish.

LETTER FROM WILLY BRANDT

Dear Marek Edelman,

Your invitation has moved me deeply. For many reasons I regret, as I had let you know, that because of a trip to the United States I cannot come to Warsaw to be present at the unveiling of the memorial for Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

It is not only for the memory of these two famous leaders of the Bund that we should recall the circumstances under which they came to die. Their death hit our socialist movement as a whole. The names of Erlich and Alter are representative of the many brave Jewish socialists who since the end of the last century carried an important organization of Jewish workers struggling for political and social liberation in tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe. Their share in bringing forward the ideas of socialism as part of the Socialist International is unforgotten. And we feel that the ideas of the Bund are still an element in Poland's as well as our international movement's progressive heritage.

For me there are two more reasons to remember what happened in Warsaw in 1941, and what is linked with the names of Henryk Erlich and Viktor Alter. They came to death when leading underground operations to free their country from Nazi aggression. The

struggle and the exterminations of the Warsaw Ghetto which we remember in these days is an unforgettable element in this fight. But then, despite their tragic experience, Bundists were among the first who helped German Social Democrats to reorganize their political work after Germany was freed from Nazism. Rarely has anything in our movement ever come up to the mark of humanity that Bundists showed towards their comrades in other countries.

It is the very ethos of democratic socialism which is defined by the names of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

STATEMENT BY ALBERT SHANKER, VICE PRESIDENT, AFL-CIO

Forty-five years ago, William Green, the President of the American Federation of Labor, spoke at the memorial service held for Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich. In speaking of the tragic injustice done to these two great leaders of the General Jewish Workers Union, he said, "When the time comes, when victory is won, we will move Heaven and earth to expose the hidden facts of their deaths, to clear their names, and to give them their rightful place in history as heroic martyrs in the cause of progress."

I am here to join Marek Edelman, the heroic fighter of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a man who to this day carries on the spirit of the General Jewish Workers Union, to fulfill that pledge. I bring the greetings of the President of the AFL-CIO, Lane Kirkland, who greatly wanted to be here with you today.

Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich were well known in the American labor movement for their indomitable spirit. As trade unionists, they fought for the rights of working people in general. As leaders of the Jewish community, they warned of the danger to all of Poland posed by Hitler, and the need to garner the strength and will to defeat his evil plans. As democratic socialists, they had a vision of a more humane and just world in the struggle against the rising tyrannies of that dangerous era.

When, in September 1939, Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich, escaping from the advance of the Wehrmacht, were first arrested by the advancing Red Army from the East, and again in December 1941 when they were rearrested after they had on their release

offered their services in the fight against Hitler, American labor leaders such as William Green and David Dubinsky did all they could to find out the whereabouts of their Polish trade union brothers.

In February 1943, Ambassador Maxim Litvinov finally informed William Green of the fate of Alter and Erlich. They had been summarily executed by order of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court—we found out later that it was in December 1941—on the ludicrous charge of “spreading defeatist propaganda” and “[appealing] to the Soviet troops to conclude peace with Germany.”

That such a calumny would be used made the injustice done to them all the more odious. Alter and Erlich were unalterably committed to the defeat of Hitler and called on Jewish workers to fight alongside the Red Army to achieve that defeat, to save Jews, and Gentiles, from further annihilation.

We know the real reasons why these courageous men were executed: because they could not be bought or cajoled into serving the plots then being laid to force Poland into submission after the war. We know now it was Stalin himself who ordered the executions, just as he ordered the executions of tens of thousands of Poles.

In September 1939, Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich knew the fate that would befall the Jews in Poland and immediately called for the taking up of arms against Hitler’s armies. It was in that spirit that Warsaw’s last remaining Jews rose up on April 1943 in pitched and desperate battle, “to die with a gun in hand.”

Marek Edelman is the last surviving leader of the Jewish Combat Organization to bear witness to those events. It is Marek Edelman to whom I turn to give human courage its true meaning.

Marek Edelman has called for this symbolic Memorial to honor Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich, and to “testify to the solidarity of all union members and workers fighting for their rights and freedom.” It is for their rights and freedom that Poland’s workers today still struggle and I am here to extend that solidarity of all American workers. The AFL-CIO has been constant in its support

of your struggle, and of the free trade union Solidarity, which today carries on the torch of freedom once held high by Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich. In honoring these two men, here, we give them at long last their proper place.

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Index

- Abramovitch, Jacob, 206
Abramovitch, Raphael, 12, 15, 206, 219
Adler, Friedrich, 166
Adler, Jacob, 206
Adler, Shmuel, 79–80
Adler, Victor, 253
The Advance, 214
Ahad Ha'am, 2, 5
All-Russian Congress of Commercial Employees, 14–15
All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets (VTs1K), 17–18, 21
Almi, A., 206, 219
Alter, Izak, 44
Alter, Melanie (Mila) (Mrs. Victor Alter), 45
Alter, Victor, 24–25, 28, 32, 35; arrest in Kovel, 72–73, 79–81, 92–109; in Belgium, 44–46; and Communist International, 46; correspondence with family and associates, 178–93; disintegrated hopes, 57–66; early life, 43–47; in England, 45; execution, 109; imprisonment at 15 years of age, 43–44, 47; in Soviet occupation, 46–47, 70–81; his testament, 161–63; international protests against his execution, 194–208; Jewish union movement, 47; journalistic impact, 50–51, 54, 56, 66, 72; men and thinker, 52–57; Nazism and experience in Soviet Russia, 89–109; personality of Alter, 156–60; Polish years, 43–45, 48–70; public office, 48–50; ranks of Polish bund, 47–52; Russian years, 46–47; alleged Soviet citizenship, 171–77; on Soviet communism, 64–65; in Soviet prisons, 112–13, 131, 136–55; Warsaw evacuation and Nazi occupation, 89–109
Alter, Yisroel, 43
Anders, Wladislaw, 103
American Federation of Labor, 352–53
American Federation of Labor Weekly News Service, 211
Anti-Semitism, 8, 28, 30, 41, 56, 69; *The Golden Calf*, 8; Manifesto of the General Jewish Workers' Union in Poland, 235–46; in Poland, 49–50, 53, 56, 71; Zionism and democratic movement, 253–64
Arbetet, 215–16
Atlee, Clement, 165
Auerbach, Ephraim, 206
Australian Jewish Forum, 223–24
Austrian Labor Committee-New York, 200–201
Austrian Socialist Party, 36

Baldwin, Roger, 355–56
Banko (Polish police chief), 96
Bauer, Otto, 12, 36, 253
Beck, Joseph, 259–60
Belina, Josef, 200
Ben-Gurion, David, 261–62
Beria, Lavrenti, 95, 100, 105, 124, 167; appealed to for freedom of Alter and Erlich, 183–85
Berman, Leybetchke, 73–81, 87–88
Bernstein, Eduard, 253

- Bialostotzky, B. J., 206
 Bickel, Shlomo, 206
 Billings, Warren, 330
 Birencwajc, 8
 Bismarck, Otto, 60
 Bjork, Kaj, 360
 Blekhnman, Sheyndi (Mrs. Moses Erlich), 1
 Blit, Lucjan, 154
 Blum, A. (Abrasha), 92, 362
 Blum, Leon, 165, 209, 253
 Bnei Moshe Society, 2
 Boreisha, Menahem, 206
 Borodulin, Lazar, 206
 Botashansky, Yankel, 222
 Botwinick, B., 206
 Botwinick, R., 206
 Bracke, Alexander, 345–46
 Brailsford, H. N., 165, 346
 Brandt, Willy, 363, 370–72
 Bratkowski, Stefan, 366
 Braunthal, Julius, 357–58
 Brentano, Lujo, 12
 Bringolf, Walter, 360
 British Labor Party, 199–200, 353–54
 British Socialist Party, 45–46
 Brockway, Fenner, 347
 Broniewski, Stanislaw, 366
 Broniewski, Wladislaw, 95, 156
 Bujak, Zbigniew, 362–66
 Bukharin, Nikolay I., 296
 Bund Fighting Organization, 44
 Butyrki, 99

 Cahan, Abraham, 202, 206
The Call, 211–12
 Carey, James B., 165, 201
 Central Committee of Trade Unions, 369
 Chaikin, J., 206
 Charney, Daniel, 206
 Chernov, Victor, 244–46
 Chkheidze, Nicholas, 274–75
 Chmelnitsky, Melekh, 206
 Churchill, Winston, 5, 174
 Ciolkosz, Adam, 204
 Ciolkosz, Lydia, 363
 Citrine, Walter M., 165, 204, 333
 Communism, 46, 61–63; attack on
 Bund, 31–32, 34; and Henryk
 Erlich, 17–21, 24–25, 31, 34, 38–40;
 and Moscow executions, 295–304
 Communist International, 46, 59
 Companys, Luis, 322
 Congress of Industrial Organizations, 35
Congress Weekly, 214–15
 Cooperative Commonwealth Federa-
 tion of Canada, 354
 Council (Soviet) of Soldiers' and
 Workers' Deputies, 17–18
 Cripps, Stafford, 165, 328
 Czapski, Jozef, 159

 Dallas, George, 204
 Dan, Fyodor, 21, 253
 Dantis, Mordechai, 206
 Daszynski, Ignacy, 29
Day, 205
 De Brouckere, Louis, 166, 204
 Demblin, Benjamin, 206
 Dennen, Leon, 214
Der Fraynd, 220, 224–26
Der iker fun bundizm ("The Essence
 of Bundism"), 38
*Der kamf farn revolutsyonern sotsi-
 alizm* ("The Struggle for Revolution-
 ary Socialism"), 38
Der Tog, 220
Der Veg, 222
 De Tarde, Gabriel, 177
 Deutsch, Julius, 319
Di Presse, 222
Di Shtime, 222
Di Tsayt ("The Times"), 12, 15
Di Yidishe Melukhe ("The Jewish
 State"), 262
Di Yidishe Tsaytung, 222
 Dobbs, A. J., 200
 Drobner, Boleslaw, 80–81
 Drozdowski, Marek M., 366
 Dubinsky, David, 337, 372; attempts
 to free Erlich, 164; protesting
 executions, 201–202, 327–31
 Dubnow, Simon, 2, 23, 112, 260
 Dubnow, Sophie (Mrs. Henryk Er-
 lich), 10–11, 14, 20, 112

- Dyen' ("The Day"), 14, 36
 Dzierzanowski, Katimierz, 366
Economic Anti-Semitism in the Light of Statistics (Alter), 56
 Edelman, Marek, 362–66, 371–72; honoring victims of holocaust of Polish Jews, 367–70
 Eden, Anthony, 174
 Ehrenpreis, Victor, 342–44
 Einhorn, David, 206
 Einstein, Albert, 165–66, 328
 Eisenberg, 33
El Sol, 216
Emes, 96
 Epstein, Melech, 206
 Erlich, Alexander, 20, 38–39
 Erlich, Gitl, 3–4
 Erlich, Henryk, 67; arrest in Brest-Litovsk, 93–109, 137; correspondence with family and associates, 178–93; early life, 1–19; education, 2–12; execution, 109; flight from Warsaw, 81–88; impact as journalist, 12, 14–15, 21, 24–25, 32, 34–38, 51; imprisonment in Soviet occupation, 71–81, 164–70; international protests against his execution, 194–208; interrogations in Soviet prisons, 110–35; Nazism and experience in Soviet Russia, 89–109; 1939 arrest by GPU, 73–81; personality of, 156–60; Poland, activity in, 23–28; public office, 28–29; Russian years, 12–20; alleged Soviet citizenship, 171–77; Warsaw evacuation and Nazi occupation, 89–109
 Erlich, Mark, 364
 Erlich, Moses, 1, 4, 21–22
 Erlich, Sheyndi (Blekhman) (Mrs. Moses Erlich), 1
 Erlich, Sophie (Dubnow) (Mrs. Henryk Erlich), 10–11, 14, 20, 112
 Erlich, Victor, 38–39
 Evans, Lincoln, 200
Farband-Shtime, 221
 Farrell, James T., 347
 Feinberg, L., 206
 Fimen, Edo, 51
 Finkelstein, L., 206
 Fishman, Jacob, 206
 Fogel, J., 206
 Fogelman, Lazar, 206
Folkstsaytung, 32, 34–35, 38, 50, 70, 118, 123
Foroys, 221–22
 Foshko, J., 206
Free World, 212
Freie Arbeiter Shtime, 219
 French Socialist Party, 355
 Frugoni, Emilio, 223
 Frumkin, Esther, 15
 Garvi, Peter, 215
 Gasior, Zbigniew, 366
 General Jewish Labor Bund/Workers Union *see* Jewish Labor Bund
 General Workers' Delegate Council of Poland, 28
Gerekhikayt, 221
 Geremek, Bronislaw, 366
 German Social Democracy (S.D. Party), 16, 36
 Gilinsky, Shloyme, 87
 Gillies, William, 165, 200
 Glanz-Leyeless, A., 206
 Glatstein, Jacob, 206, 217
 Gliksmán, Jerzy, 94
 Gliksmán, Yisroel-Volf, 43
 Golden, Clinton S., 165
 Goldenberg-Meshkovsky, Yosif, 18, 277
 Goldman, Albert, 213–14
 Goldmann, Nahum, 260
 Goldstein, Bernard, 32–33, 226–27
 Gordon, Hirsh Leyb, 206
 Gottesfeld, Khone, 206
 Green, William, 109, 209, 352–53, 371–72; attempts to free Erlich, 164, 166, 168–69; disputing Soviet citizenship of Alter and Erlich, 173–74; protesting executions, 201, 328, 332–35
 Greenberg, Hayim, 206
 Greenwood, Arthur, 165
 Grodzensky, Shlomo, 206, 218
 Gross, Naftoli, 206
 Grosser, Bronislaw, 6–13, 42

- Grosser, Nikodym, 11
 Grosser, Slawa, 10–11
 Grunbaum, Yitzhak, 261–62
 Gutgeshalt, Hersh, 94
 Gutgeshalt, Miriam, 94
 Gutman-Baltikaklis, Moyshe, 96
 Gutman-Zelikovitch, Berl, 181
- Hardman, J. B. S., 165, 214
 Harrington, Donald, 347–48
 Hart, J., 27
 Healey, Denis, 353–54
 Hedtoft, Hans, 356
 Held, Adolph, 164, 202
 Henderson, Neville, 249
 Heriot, Edouard, 348
 Hersch, Liebman, 15
 Hillman, Sidney, 164
 Himmelfarb, Hersh, 75
 Hinsley, Arthur, 338
 Hitler-Stalin Pact, 40, 247–49
 Hodes, Leivik, 182
 Hoffman, B., 165
 Hoglund, Zeta, 348–49
 Holzer, Jerzy, 366
 Honigwil, Ludwik, 80–81, 96, 137–38
 Hook, Sidney, 349
 Horowitz, Isaac, 206
 Humphrey, Hubert, 239
 Hurwitz, Kh. H., 206
 Huysmans, Camille, 166, 200, 204
- Ignatiev, Nikolai, 289
 Information Bureau of Revolutionary
 Socialist Parties, 58
 International League for the Rights of
 Man, 355–56
 International Socialist congresses, 35–
 36
Israelitische Wochenblatt, 260
 Iwinska, Esther, 24–28, 96
- Jabotinsky, Vladimir, 261–62
 Jagiello, Eugeniusz, 13
 Jagiello, Wladyslaw, 366
 Jankowski, Stanislaw, 366
 Jaruzelski, General Wojciech, 362, 364
 Jaures, Jean-Joseph, 160
 Jewish Agency, 260
 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, 104–
 106, 185–90, 344, 346
 Jewish Colonization Society, 45
Jewish Daily Forward, 205, 217, 219–
 20
Jewish Frontier, 214
 Jewish Labor Bund, 1, 5, 12, 57, 59,
 61, 67, 71, 196, 265, 285, 371
 Jewish Labor Committee, 207–208
 Jewish Question: appeals of Alter and
 Erlich, 190–91; essence of Bundism,
 265–70; Zionism and democratic
 movement, 253–64
 Jewish Underground Labor Movement
 in Poland, 194–98
 Jewish Unions, 64
 Jewish Workers Union (Bund), 196
 Joffe, Charles, 206
 Johnson, Alvin, 165
 Jouhaux, Leon, 209, 349–50
- Kahan, Tsvi, 206
 Kamenev, Lev Borisovich, 64, 296–98
 Kantorovitch, N., 206
 Kaplan, Don, 206
 Katz, Joseph F., 206
 Kaufman, M., 206
 Kautsky, Karl Johann, 160, 253
 Kellogg, Paul, 165
 Kener, J., 220–21
 Kerensky, Alexander, 14, 19, 281
 Kersten, Krystyna, 366
 Kessner, L., 206
 Keynes, John Maynard, 55
 Khazanovitch (NKVD agent), 106–107
 Khinoy, Mark, 206
 Khmurner, J., 362
 Kielanowski, Jan, 366
 Kingdon, Frank, 165
 Kirkland, Lane, 371
 Kissin, I., 206
 Klepfish, M., 362
 Kollontai, Aleksandra, 277
 Konwicki, Tadeusz, 366
 Korneichuk, Alexander, 137
 Korneichuk, Wanda (Wasilewska),
 137–38
 Kosover, M., 206
 Kossovsky, Vladimir, 15, 182

- Kot, Stanislaw, 102, 108, 166, 191–93
 Krepliak, Jacob, 206
 Krupskaya, Nadezhda, 284
 Krylenko, Nikolai, 10
 Krzycki, Leo, 165
 Kshesinskaia, Mathilde (dancer), 275
 Kulerski, Wiktor, 366
Kurier Warszawski, 262
 Kuron, Jacek, 362, 366
 Kusher, M., 223–24
 Kusniewicz, Andrzej, 366
- LaGuardia, Fiorello, 201, 331–32
 Landau, Leyb, 80
 Lang, Harry, 206
 Lassalle, Ferdinand, 60
La Vanguardie, 216
Lebensfragen, 42
 Lehrer, Leibush, 206
 Leib, Mani, 206
 Leiper, Henry Smith, 165
 Leivick, H., 206, 350
 Lekert, Hirsh, 340
 Lenin, Vladimir Ilich, 306, 311; a profile, 273–84
 Lepkowski, Tadeusz, 366
 Leshchinsky, Jacob, 206
 Levin-Shatzkes, I., 206
 Levy, Louis, 200
 Libin, Z., 206
 Lieberman, David, 206
 Liebknecht, Wilhelm, 160
 Linder, N. B., 206
 Lipski, Jan Jozef, 362, 366
 Lirik, A., 206
 Litvak, A., 15
 Litvinov, Maxim, 109, 209, 333, 372; alleged Soviet citizenship of Alter and Erlich, 173–76; detention of Alter and Erlich, 166–69
 Llopis, Rodolfo, 359–60
 Locker, Berl, 200
 Lorain, Melanie (Mila) (Mrs. Victor Alter) 45
Lublinter Shtime, 72
 Lustiger, Jean-Marie, 363
- Madej, Eugeniusz, 366
 Maimon, Ben-Zion, 206
 Maisky, Ivan, 165, 174
Man in Society (Alter), 54, 66
 Margoshes, Joseph, 206
 Margoshes, Samuel, 206
 Mastek, Mieczyslaw, 140
 Mazowiecki, Tadeusz, 366
 Mead, James, 201, 336–38
 Medem, Vladimir, 12, 23, 25; a profile, 285–91
 Medvedev, S., 310
 Melamed, M., 206
 Mendelson, Shloyme, 87, 182, 202, 339–42
 Menes, Abraham, 206, 218
 Merenholz, Helena, 366
 Michnik, A., 362, 366
 Middleton, James, 165
 Middleton, J. S., 200
 Mikhalevich, Beynish, 15, 24, 42, 85, 362
 Mikhoels, Solomon, 100
 Mikolajska, Halina, 366
The Militant, 213–14
 Minkoff, N. B., 206
Mir Kumen On (“We Are on Our Way”), 137
 Moczulski, Leszek, 366
 Moderau, Marek, 366
 Mollet, Guy, 355
 Molotov, V. M., 90, 333; alleged Soviet citizenship of Alter and Erlich, 173–76; detention of Alter and Erlich, 166, 168–69
 Mooney, Tom, 330
Morning Journal, 205, 217
 Morrison, Herbert, 165
 Mukdoni, A., 206
 Mulak, Jan, 366
 Murray, Philip, 164, 166, 212, 328, 354
Mysl Socjalistyczna (“Socialist Thought”), 5, 369
- Nadir, Moyshe, 206
Nasze Hasla (“Our Watchwords”), 9, 367
 Natanson, Kazimierz, 107
 Natanson, Stanislaw, 107
The Nation, 210

- National Council of Class Trade Unions, 47–48
 National Council of Jewish Trade Unions, 369
Naye Folksdaytung, 72, 368
 Nazism, "On the Eve of War, 1939," 247–52
Neuer Vorwärts, 250
The New Leader, 213
New Republic, 209–10
New York Post, 210
 New York Trade Unions, 201–203
News Comment, 216
 Niebuhr, Reinhold, 165, 202, 335–37
 Niger, Shmuel, 206
 Nogin, Viktor, 277
Notes on the Revolution (Sukhanov), 17
Nowe Pismo ("New Journal"), 50
Nowe Zycie, 51
 Nowogrudsky, Emanuel, 180
 Noyakh, *see* Portnoy
 Nunberg, S., 363
 Nurok (Rabbi), 104
- Oklulicki, Colonel, 103
 Olgin, Moisseye, 15
 Ollenhauer, Erich, 356–57
 Onyszkiewicz, Janusz, 366
 Opatoshu, Joseph, 206
 Orzech, Mauricy, 28
 Osherowitch, M., 206
- Pankhurst, Sylvia, 46
 Pearl, Philip, 211
 Peshekhonov, 281
 Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, 274–76, 368
 Philip, Andre, 350–52
 Piassetzky, Godl, 85
 Pilsudski, Josef, 28, 30–31, 49, 51, 59, 122
 Pinsky, David, 206
Pismo Codzienne ("Daily Journal"), 50, 369
 Plumb, Lord, 363
 Polak, Oskar, 166
 Polish Communist Party, 362
 Polish Socialist Party, 13, 44–45, 50–51, 267–68, 368; and Nazi occupation of Warsaw, 89–109
 Polish Underground Labor Movement, 198–99
 Portnoy, Yuzef-Noyakh, 23, 67, 90, 182
 Post, William, 206
 Prekerowa, Teresa, 366
Proletarisher Gedank, 220–21
 Provisional Council of the All-Russian Republic, 19
 Prystor, Aleksander, 98
 Puzak, Kazimierz, 90
- Rabochaya Gazeta* ("The Workers' Paper"), 21
 Raczynski, Edward, 166
 Radek, Karl, 47, 232
 Rafes, Moyshe, 15, 17
 Ressler, Benjamin, 206
 Reuther, Walter, P., 361
 Ribbentrop, Joachim von, 90
 Rogoff, Hillel, 206, 219–20
 Rolland, Romain, 162
 Romer, Tadeusz, 109
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 165, 328
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 342
 Rosenfeld, Hersh, 206
 Rosenfeld, Sh., 206
 Rosenthal, Anna, 182
 Rosner, Jan, 366
 Rozanov, Vladimir, 18
 Rubinstein, Tsvi-Hirsh, 206
 Rusanov, Nikolai, 18
 Russian Revolution and Moscow executions, 295–304
 Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, 5, 13, 17–18, 20, 266–68, 273, 275, 285, 357
 Rydz-Smigly, Edward, 300
 Rykov, Aleksey Ianovich, 296
- Sacco-Vanzetti case, 53, 212, 332, 335
 Salij, Jacek, 366
 Salutsky-Hardman, J. B., 202
 Samsonowicz, Henryk, 366
 Scherer, Emanuel, 51, 182
 Schlesinger, Arthur, 352
 Schumacher, Kurt, 356–57

- Schwartsman, Ephraim, 213
 Schweid, Mark, 206
 Severin, Alf, 200
 Shakhno (Reb), 84
 Shanker, Albert, 363, 371–73
 Shapiro, Sonya (Dina Blond), 14
 Shatzky, Jacob, 206
 Shefner, Baruch, 206
 Sher, Z. 206
 Shertok, Moshe, 260
 Shlianpnikov, A. G., 310
 Shneur, Zalman, 206
 Shpizman, L., 206
 Shtarkman, Moshe, 206
 Shub, David, 206
 Shuster, Zachary, 206
 Shveber, Sarah, 182
 Sikorski, Wladyslaw, 106–108, 166, 174
 Sinclair, Upton, 352
 Skobelev, M. I., 281
 Sliwinski, Krzysztof, 367
 Slobodkin, Isaac, 4
 Smirnov-Gurevich, Emmanuil, 18
Social Democracy and the National Question (Medem), 286
 Social Democratic Party of Denmark, 356
 Social Democratic Party of Germany, 356–57
 Social Democratic Party of Poland, 45
 Socialist International, 58–59, 357–58
 Socialist Party of Poland, 267
 Socialist Party of the United States, 36, 358–59
 Sokolov, Nikolai Dmitrievich, 14–15
Sotsialisticheski Vyestnik, 215
 Soviet Russia: international protests against execution of Alter and Erlich, 194–208; “On the Eve of War, 1939,” 247–52
 Spaak, Paul-Henri, 166
 Spanish Civil War, 51
 Spanish Socialist Party, 359–60
 Stalin, Joseph, 310; appeals to free Alter and Erlich, 183–85; Hitler-Stalin Pact, 40, 247–49; and Jewish anti-fascism, 104–109; and Moscow executions, 295–304
 Starzynski, Stefan, 49
 Steinsbergowa, Aniela, 366
 Stelmachowski, Andrzej, 366
 Stewart, Eleanor, 200
 Stout, Jonathan, 213
 Streicher, Julius, 262
 Strykowski, Julian, 366–67
 Sukhanov, N. N., 17
 Sutherland, Mary E., 200
 Swedish Social Democratic Party, 360
 Swing, Raymond Gram, 165
 Swiss Social Democratic Party, 360
 Szaniawski, Klemens, 367
 Szmalenberg, Anna, 367
 Szymanska, Anna, 367

 Tabachnik, A., 206
 Tcherikover, E., 206
 Thomas, Norman, 165, 358–59
338 News, 213
 Tomsy, M. P., 296
 Topolski, Felix, 102
 Trade Union International, 48, 204
 “Trial of the Sixteen,” 64–65
 Trotsky, Leon, 296, 306, 310
 Trunk, Isaiah, 206
Trybuna Ludu, 362
 Tseretelli, I. G., 281
 Tsivion, B., 206
 Tunkel, Joseph, 206
 Turkow, Marc, 222

 United Automobile Workers of America, 361
United Auto Worker, 212–13
Unser Shtime (“Our Voice”), 25
Unser Wort, 222–23

 Vandervelde, Emile, 160, 253
 Volkovisky, Aaron-Arkady, 100, 104, 135
 Vyshinsky, Andrey Y., 108

 Wajda, Andrzej, 362, 367
 Walter, James, 200
 Warsaw, monument to ghetto uprising, 362–73
 Wasilewska, Wanda (Mrs. Alexander Korneichuk), 80, 137–38

Wasilewski, Leon, 80–81
 Wasser, Chaim (Meier), 47, 182
 Weber, Simon, 206
Wecker, 218
 Weinberg, Joseph, 165
 Weinreich, Max, 206
 Weinstein, B., 206
 Weizmann, Chaim, 260
Wiener Arbeitsgemeinschaft, 58
 Willkie, Wendell, 165, 170, 328
 Wilson, Woodrow, 330
 Winograd, M., 206
 Workmen's Circle, 206–207
 World Jewish Congress, 260
 Woroszyński, Viktor, 367
 Woytinsky, V. S., 277
 Wroblewski, Andrzej, 367

Yarblum, Mark, 260
Yevreyskiye Vesti ("Jewish News"),
 145, 367
 Yiddish Writers and Journalists pro-
 tests against execution of Alter and
 Erlich, 204–206
Yiddisher Kemfer, 218
Yugnt-Bund "Tsukunft," 92

Zachwatowicz, Krystyna, 367
 Zalowitz, N., 206
 Zdanowski, Antoni, 51
 Zetser, Sh. Ts., 206
 Zibert, Gershon, 28
 Zigelboym, Shmuel, 204
 Zinoviev, Grigory Y., 64, 296–98, 301



We Shall Never Forget *the* **Murder in Cold Blood** *of* **ERLICH and ALTER**

Ten years ago HENRYK ERLICH, member of the Executive Committee of the Labor and Socialist International, and VICTOR ALTER, member of the Executive Committee of the Trade-Union Congress, were secretly murdered by the dictators of the USSR. One year later the news of this dastardly act was blandly released from behind the Iron Curtain, and was made known by the American Representative of the General Jewish Workers Union, internationally known as Bund.

ERLICH AND ALTER, leaders of the Bund, had devoted their lives to the ideals of Freedom, and the welfare of workers everywhere. That was their death warrant when they fell into Stalin's hands. They are the symbols of the vast army of martyrs who have gone to their graves on orders from the Kremlin murder machine.

Today, in reverence and devotion, we salute the memory of ERLICH and ALTER. In their names we re-affirm our undying pledge to continue our crusade side by side with all democratic forces until the evil menace of Communist tyranny and every other kind of totalitarianism will perish, and victory of Democracy, Freedom and Justice is finally assured.

REMEMBER ERLICH AND ALTER

Signatures

William Green, *President*,
American Federation of Labor

David Dubinsky, *President*
International Ladies Garment
Workers Union

Jewish Labor Committee,
Adolph Held, *National Chairman*

Jewish Daily Forward,
Alexander Kahn, *General Manager*

Jewish Socialist Verband,
N. Chanin, *Chairman Administration Comm.*
N. Galt, *Chairman National Executive*,
I. Levin-Shatzkes, *National Secretary*

Norman Thomas, *Chairman*,
Socialist Party, U. S. A.

Philip Murray, *President*,
Congress of Industrial Organizations

Louis Hollander, *President*
New York State, CIO

National Executive Committee
of the Workmen's Circle,
Leon Arkin, *President*,
Joseph Baskin, *General Secretary*

Alex Rose, *President*,
United Hatter, Cap and Millinery
Workers International Union

World Coordinating Committee
of the Bund
Emanuel Nawagrudsky, *General Sec'y*,
Dr. Emanuel Scherer, *Exec. Committee*,
Room 305, 175 East Broadway, N. Y.

