

2017

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### Recommended Citation

Zaslawsky, Zoe (2017) "Jewish Labor and Ideology: Comparative Histories of Poland and New York," *Vulcan Historical Review*. Vol. 21, Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol21/iss2017/6>

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# Jewish Labor and Ideology: Comparative Histories of Poland and New York

by Zoe Zaslowsky

AT THE turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world experienced a boom in industry and with it, a profound devotion to efficiency in production. This massive industrialization meant the emergence of factories packed with workers who were valued only for their labor and seldom treated with dignity. In this era, two cities hosted not only deplorable working conditions with the consequence of arduous lives for workers but also groups of laborers determined to better their lives and the lives of future generations. These two cities, located in opposite hemispheres, grew labor movements within the textile industry that sought similar goals and were both influenced by their shared faith in Judaism. One city, Lodz, Poland, struggled amidst political turmoil while its working Jews developed (and competed with) labor movements. At the same time in New York, New York, specifically the Lower East Side, Jews became the labor movement leadership. Both cities' movements have differences, but because of their shared faith and the problems associated with it, the two shared strikingly similar obstacles and accomplishments. By analyzing the beginnings of the two Jewish labor movements of both Lodz and New York, the important events within the shared formative years of their movements from roughly 1890-1905, expose the similarities, differences, and significances of each labor movement.

Lodz, Poland once stood as a fairly small Polish city with virtually no Jewish population. In 1793, the Jewish population of Lodz totaled 11. Even twenty years



Map of The Pale of Settlement 1835-1917, Courtesy of Litwack Family History

later, the Jewish population remained minuscule at 259, but in 1897, the Jewish population had reached 99,000.<sup>1</sup> What accounts for this massive Jewish population growth? The Polish territories themselves, also called Congress Poland and the Kingdom of Poland while under Russian rule, had a relatively small population of seven million in 1816. However, industrialization and urbanization hit Poland incredibly fast. By 1897, the total population had ballooned to nearly 20 million. The rise of this population can be attributed almost entirely to immigration, rather than internal growth. Several factors encouraged industrialization in Poland, thus instigating population growth. First came the decision of the Russian government to reduce tariffs imposed on Poland; less barriers for trade and a greater demand for industrial goods “led to the mechanization of Polish textile production in the 1850s.”<sup>2</sup> This change in trade policies ultimately created a more favorable environment for Poland than for cities in Russia to industrialize, and the growth of Russian railways provided a vehicle for trade. Then, in 1864, Russian serfdom became illegal which introduced a large labor source of landless peasants in search of work. An additional factor encouraged the growth of industry: the memory of Poland’s failed attempt to assert its independence from Russia in 1830. Polish nationalists thought if the people of Poland enjoyed the better life that financial security brings, independence would become a more re-

“ AS ONE AMERICAN-JEWISH TRAVELER SAID OF THE FACTORIES OF LODZ: THEY RESEMBLED “SOME OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN BUSINESS CENTERS.”

alistic possibility in the future. Poland quickly developed an allure for those wanting to enter industry as either employees or business owners, especially as the textile industry experienced acclaim “as one of the most important industries.”<sup>3</sup> As industry grew, it needed a center to cluster around and sprout from, and Lodz became that center early as it adopted its nickname “Manchester of Poland.”<sup>4</sup>

New York likewise welcomed the booming textile industry after 1860, and in large part, like the growing Polish economy, due to the actions of the federal government. In 1863 when the United States outlawed slave labor, wage labor became synonymous with freedom, and so industry grew sharply. This mirrors the Russian labor force freed from serfdom just a year later in 1864. Transportation, like in Eastern Europe, became commonly used, concentrating populations through urbanization. In 1860, New York’s population sat at roughly 3.5 million, and by 1890, the population had doubled.<sup>5</sup> New York’s Jewish population also rose in part because of the ease of transportation within the United States, but another influence came in the form of outside immigration from Eastern Europe. In 1850, records showed the Jewish population at 16,000, and by

3 L.G. Manitiis, “A Brief Review of the Polish Textile Industry,” lecture in London Section (1945), accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19447014508661972?journalCode=jtip20>.

4 Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski and Christopher Phelps, “An Interview with Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 73 (Cambridge University Press), 106.

5 U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing, Table 1. United States Resident Population by State: 1930 – 1990, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/census/1990/poptrd1.htm>.

1 Jason Levine, “Virtual Jewish World: Lodz Poland,” *Jewish Virtual Library* (2012), accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Lodz.html>.

2 Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 3.

1900, it had risen to 600,000 or 10% of the New York population.<sup>6</sup> This explosion in growth can be attributed to the waves of Eastern European Jews escaping persecution (though they were universally thought of as Russian by Gentile New Yorkers). These Jews, having a different language, culture, and fleeing an oppressive government, settled mostly in the Lower East Side, the location of 80% of the garment industry and 90% of the factories owned by German Jews already by 1890.<sup>7</sup> The reason immigrant Jews entered the textile industry proves two-fold. For one, they searched for the same job they held in Eastern Europe as they were unaccustomed to search for work in a different field. Also, working for Jewish owners meant they could observe the Sabbath. They joined an already established German Jewish population who were highly assimilated and often incredibly successful business leaders. However, German Jews resided in the Upper East Side. The Jewish population in New York, in contrast to Lodz, would continue to rapidly increase due to a lack of violent anti-Semitism and pogroms that would later encourage emigration from Lodz. By 1920, Jews made up 29% of New York's population; 45% of American Jews lived in the surrounding boroughs.

Just as New York attracted the textile industry to the Lower East Side, Lodz, Poland proved especially well-suited as an industrial center for textiles. Because of its location near a river, its industrialization and urbanization occurred rapidly. In 1840, the population of Lodz stayed at 20,000, but by 1897, it reached nearly

300,000.<sup>8</sup> Jews in Lodz made up 31% of the city's population in 1897.<sup>9</sup> Polish Jews had a long history, dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, of working in the textile industry. This explains why by 1864, "there were more than 50 independent Jewish manufacturers in Lodz," and just two years later, 11% of factory owners in the city were Jewish.<sup>10</sup> However, not every Jew became a proprietor. In 1898, there were a total of 131,371 working-class Polish Jews: 12,380 were industrial workers, while the majority, 119,371 were artisans.<sup>11</sup> There were essentially two types of factories in Lodz: those that were small and employed around 40 laborers at a time and, at the other end of the spectrum, factories that contained over 500 workers within their walls. By 1900, the average number of workers in a Lodz factory hovered at 164, and although conditions varied, they were typical statistics of the time.<sup>12</sup> As one American-Jewish traveler said of the factories of Lodz: they resembled "some of the most successful American business centers."<sup>13</sup> Generally, workers were not treated as poorly as they were in New York; entrepreneurs invested so heavily in technology that factories and the equipment used there were generally considered safe.

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8 Manitus, "A Brief Review of the Polish Textile Industry," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19447014508661972?journalCode=jtip20>.

9 Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892–1914*, 3.

10 Encyclopedia Judaica, "Textiles," *Jewish Virtual Library* (2008) [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0019\\_0\\_19772.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/judaica/ejud_0002_0019_0_19772.html) (accessed December 5, 2016).

11 Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892–1914*, 9.

12 Jan Toporowski, *Michal Kaleski: An Intellectual Biography: Volume I, Rendevous in Cambridge 1899-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

13 Jane Wallerstein, "Voices from the Paterson Silk Mills", (Charleston: Tempus Publishing, Inc.).

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6 Paul Ritterband, "Counting the Jews of New York, 1900-1991: an Essay in Substance and Method," *Papers in Jewish Demography 1997*, 202, accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.bjpa.org/publications/downloadPublication.cfm?PublicationID=2762>.

7 Howard Sachar, "Jewish Immigrants in the Garment Industry," *A History of Jews in America* (Vintage Books), accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-garment-workers/>.

However, no factory limited working hours, and no factory had a sustainable wage system. Though some Jews worked for an incredible amount of hours with little to show for it, many other Jewish workers were refused employment at all by these enterprises. Gentile factory owners, as well as some Jewish factory owners, did not want to hire Jews who refused to work on the Sabbath; religion aside, these entrepreneurs were first and foremost interested in making money and needed a constantly working labor force. For this reason, many Jews were forced into “marginal Jewish firms that were ignored by government safety compliance inspectors, used outmoded equipment, and had abysmal working conditions and wages”<sup>14</sup> or simply remained unemployed. These smaller factories’ conditions were more synonymous with what Jewish immigrants in New York faced.

In New York, contract labor quickly became the normal mode of employment for the textile industry. The system created high profits while it viciously disenfranchised the laborer. Contract labor operated with a contractor who acquired “components of garments” that workers then “assembled according to designs. Then finished products were returned to the manufacturers and marketed under the company’s label.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the textile owners stood far removed from the labor process, while contractors, in an attempt to make the biggest profit, forced workers into horrifically long work days for meager wages. The amount of Jews affected, particularly Jewish immigrants, astonishes the historical reader. By 1897, 60% of Jews in New York were employed in the textile industry, and only 25% of workers in the field *were*

*not* Jewish.<sup>16</sup> Although workers experienced shared problems, working conditions in the factories of New York were exponentially more dangerous than in Lodz. Government regulations generally upheld safety regulations in Lodz, but these regulations were virtually non-existent in New York in 1900 because the federal government adopted a laissez-faire philosophy in dealing with business. As a New York state safety inspector reported about the contract labor system:

In New York city, in the tenement house districts where clothing is manufactured, there exists a system of labor which is nearly akin to slavery... The work is done under the eyes of task-masters, who rent a small room or two in the rear part of an upper floor of a high building, put in a few sewing machines, a stove suitable for heating irons, and then hire a number of men and women to work for them.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, “even the most elementary safeguards of health and decency made the garment trades notorious as a ‘sweated’ industry.”<sup>18</sup> To make matters worse, the exploitative conditions did not end after leaving the factories; because of the demands of contract labor and the profits correlating to the finished products and not hourly work, many families brought their work home with them. Journalist Jacob Riis commented on the squalor Jewish immigrants lived in at home: “Every member of the family from the youngest to the oldest bears a hand, shut in the

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16 Sachar, “Jewish Immigrants in the Garment Industry.”

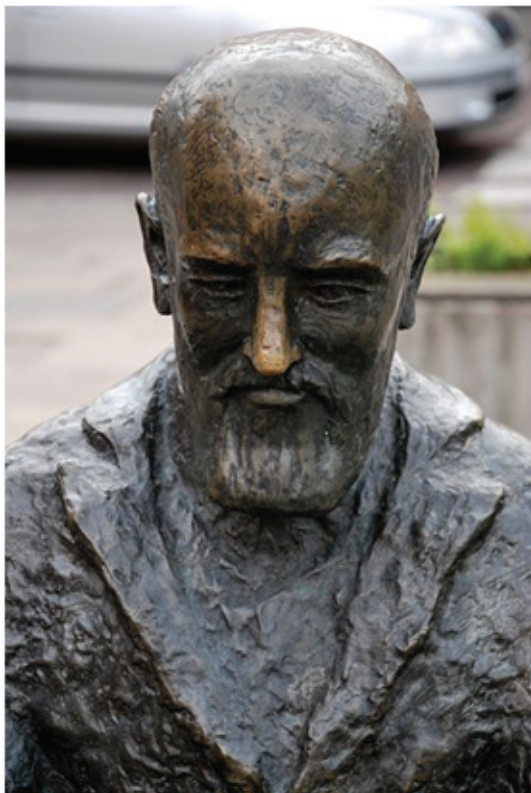
17 Lower East Side Tenement Museum encyclopedia, accessed December 10, 2016, [http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/garment\\_sweat.htm](http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/garment_sweat.htm).

18 Will Herberg, “The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States,” The American Jewish Year Book 53 (American Jewish Committee, 1952), 9.

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14 Ibid.

15 Lower East Side Tenement Museum encyclopedia, accessed December 10, 2016, [http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/garment\\_sweat.htm](http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/garment_sweat.htm).



Bust of Izrael Poznanski, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

qualmy [sic] rooms, where meals are cooked and clothing washed and dried besides, the livelong day. It is not unusual to find a dozen persons—men, women and children—at work in a single room.”<sup>19</sup> While both the Lodz and New York labor force did tend to hold strikes frequently, they protested quite different conditions.

One Polish-Jewish factory owner, Izrael Poznanski, built perhaps some of the most famous factories in Lodz, Poland, and he embodies the growing conflict be-

<sup>19</sup> Sachar, “Jewish Immigrants in the Garment Industry,” accessed December 7, 2016.

tween workers and owners—the haves and have-nots. Poznanski inherited his family’s company from his father, and became the new head at the young age of seventeen in 1850. Poznanski quickly built a textile empire, investing the huge surge of profits gained from the lack of competition for trading cotton during and after the American Civil War into more land and more factories. In two decades, Poznanski owned every element in the production process of textiles, and the company became “Joint Stock Society of Cotton Products I. K. Poznański.”<sup>20</sup> However, the name may be deceiving: the company never publically traded and remained strictly a family business. Guided almost exclusively by profits, Poznanski envisioned another means to control labor: provide housing for his labor force. The workers’ dwellings relocated next to the factory, and although the living spaces were meager, they were indeed better conditions than much of Lodz.<sup>21</sup> Certainly the living quarters of Jewish textile laborers improved in New York since the contract form of labor was not commonplace in Lodz. Poznanski found this housing terribly convenient as greater Poland began to have more explosive labor conflicts: if workers participated in a strike at a Poznanski factory, he and his family would immediately be fired and lose their housing. Poznanski also infamously constructed his own palace on the grounds of his factory and worker housing buildings; in fact, many entrepreneurs did this. Soon, Lodz proved “dominated by very large enterprises, with their factories and workers’ dwellings, culminating in the factory

<sup>20</sup> “Poznanski Izrael Kalmanowicz,” Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Virtual Shtetl), accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/person/27,izrael-kalmanowicz-poznanski/>.

<sup>21</sup> Irena Popławska and Stefan Muthesius “Poland’s Manchester: 19th-Century Industrial and Domestic Architecture in Łódź,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (1986), 153.

owner's mansion."<sup>22</sup> The juxtaposition of the Poznanski palace with the meager worker housing exemplified an empirical illustration of the larger bourgeois and proletariat conflict festering not only in Lodz but in greater Congress Poland.

The growth of the Polish working class and social unrest from Russian rule joined to encourage a socialist-centered labor movement in Congress Poland. However, conflicting ideologies and a history of anti-Semitism divided the Polish and Jewish workers, which hampered labor movement successes and strengthened Russian control. Although Russian anti-Semitism can be traced back to the Middle Ages and earlier and Russian pogroms against Jews occurred in several waves, "organized anti-Semitism had steadily increased its influence"<sup>23</sup> within the Polish labor movement after 1881. As Polish workers unified under the Polish Socialist Party, Jewish labor groups, particularly the Bund, were seen as a hindrance to the Polish movement. The Polish Socialist Party's envisioned their goal as "a unified class struggle with one enemy: the szlachta [Polish nobility] and the Polish bourgeoisie."<sup>24</sup> However, Marxist ideas did not exist as the only influence on the leadership of the Polish Socialist Party. The first generation born after the failed attempt of Polish independence in 1863, these men were subject to the intense and oppressive Russification imposed on Congress Poland as a result of the revolt. This gave strong nationalistic undertones for their labor movement and subsequently encouraged a strong distrust of the Bund, the Jewish labor movement that was not nationalistic in

nature. The Polish Socialist party listed their demands according to political and economic spheres:

Political: 1. Direct and universal suffrage by secret ballot; 2. Complete equality of the nationalities entering into the composition of the republic on the basis of a voluntary federation; 3. Community and provincial autonomy with the right to elect administrative officers; 4. Equality of all citizens regardless of sex, race, nationality or religion; 5. Complete freedom of speech, press, and assembly; 6. Free court procedure, election of judges, and responsibility of officers before the court; 7. Free, obligatory, and universal education, with the state supplying student stipends. Economic: 1. An eight-hour work day; 2. Establishment of a minimum wage; 3. Equal pay for women for equal work; 4. Prohibition of child labor; 5. Complete freedom of workers' strikes; 6. Gradual nationalization of land, means of production, and communications.<sup>25</sup>

Although many demands seem to be entirely inclusive, the Jews who refused to fully assimilate and recognize themselves as Polish workers first, rather than with a Jewish identity, became targeted. In fact, they viewed the Bund and its leaders as being not only too Jewish, but too Russian in nature. The Bund remained neutral on the matter of the creation of an independent Polish state; meanwhile, a Polish state stayed as the immediate goal of the Polish Socialist Party, which led to hostilities between the two. Although a conflict of ideologies, the idea of Jews as enemies to Polish independence quickly spread to the working class. A Polish official in

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22 Ibid.

23 Theodore R. Weeks, "Polish-Jewish Relations, 1903-1914: The View from the Chancellery," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 40, no. 3 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1998), 235.

24 Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914*, 11.

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25 Ibid., 16.

1903 reported “A hostile attitude toward Jews crops up noticeably not only among individuals, but also during workers’ assemblies that almost openly call for a beating of Jews.”<sup>26</sup> The Russian government essentially only benefitted from the groups violently colliding, but eventually violence would be re-directed against the government.

In New York, no nationalistic movement and no memories of a repressed revolt fueled the labor movement, but a disparity in wealth certainly existed.

Although the federal government remained mum about the labor policies that kept workers in utter poverty, their horrific lives were painfully obvious, and change proved imminent. In some ways, the intellectuals behind the New York Jewish movement used a similar process of energizing Jewish workers as their Bund brothers, notably with their implementation of Yiddish, but New York Jews united under much calmer political conditions. For the New York Jewish intellectuals to be successful in inciting the Jewish workers, they had to understand the Eastern European immigrants, who found themselves in a drastically different political, economic, and cultural world. Once they understood the life concerns of the Jewish immigrants, New York Jewish intellectuals were able not only to attract a group of followers but also to



1903 Copy of Forverts, Courtesy of Tenement Museum

effectively unite them under socialist ideals. Jewish immigrants’ “spiritual confusion, insecurity and normless” brought on by the shocking new way of life in America allowed “fervent young radicals the opportunity to establish predominant influence among the Jewish workers in the formative period of the Jewish labor Movement in the United States.”<sup>27</sup> However, in Poland, unification of workers proved difficult and challenging to focus only on a labor movement

while political unrest remained so visible: something the New York movement did not have to face.

Jews founded the Bund in Vilna between October 7 and October 9, 1897. In explanation of the main reasons for founding a Jewish specific labor movement, a response of historical anti-Semitism threatened Jewish life but also predicted that a labor movement not centered around Jews would leave Jewish freedom compromised to other groups’ interests. Although conceived mostly by intellectuals, the importance of the party lay in shifting the focus to the Jewish working class. This same form of conception, described as top-down, with intellectuals influencing workers (rather than bottom-up with workers beginning the movement themselves) also reflected the beginnings of the New York Jewish labor. Although typi-

26 Weeks, “Polish-Jewish Relations, 1903-1914: The View from the Chancellery”, 241.

27 Herberg, “The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States”, 10.



cal with the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party, the direction of the New York Jewish movement did not follow normal American labor movement patterns. The Bund reached the working class by abandoning Russian as the language of the movement and instead utilized Yiddish; in 1897, 94.9% of Jews in Congress Poland identified

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YEARS.

Yiddish as their mother tongue.<sup>28</sup> The first step in gathering support for a Jewish labor movement: produce all propaganda in Yiddish and make it the official language of the movement. This essentially took the movement out of the elite’s hands and transferred power to the Jewish working class. As one Bundist remarked: “The switch to Yiddish in fact signified [the birth of] an autonomous Jewish workers’ movement.”<sup>29</sup>

Much like the leadership of the Bund, leadership of the New York Jewish labor movement recognized the importance in utilizing Yiddish in all propaganda.<sup>30</sup> To fully understand this similar decision in adopting the language of the worker, it is important to note that before 1890, New York Jewish intellectuals was rarely used Yiddish for several reasons. For one, the Jewish community (generally from Central Europe) already inhabiting New York when masses of Eastern Europeans arrived were

typically Americanized so few spoke Yiddish. Also, the Jewish intellectuals in New York, around 800-1,000, spoke Russian and felt “the Jewish vernacular lacked comparable prestige as a language of culture and education...”<sup>31</sup> However, perhaps inspired by the Bund’s success in disseminating Yiddish propaganda, one famous newspaper in 1897, *Forward* (or in Yiddish, *Forverts*), became “the most popular Yiddish daily and among the most popular foreign-language newspapers in the United States.” Notably seen as a “general interest daily” instead of a specific party organ that welcomed various opinions, the paper essentially became the umbrella for all Jewish thoughts about the labor movement.<sup>32</sup> This universal quality, and a focus on Jewish rights rather than focusing solely on labor party plans, explains the paper’s extreme popularity. However, even with Yiddish being utilized as the vehicle to incite the working class, not all immigrants were equipped to understand the American vocabulary of the labor movement. Terms such as “trade-union,” “surplus value,” and “exploiter,” among others, were foreign to new immigrants. The founder and editor of *Forverts*, Abraham Cahan remembers, “Many of our workers could barely read unvocalized tests. Not only did we have to teach them in our writings how to think, we also had to teach them how to read our writings.”<sup>33</sup> Although the immigrants had difficulties in understanding some aspects of the language, the paper proved to be largely successful in disseminating ideas. Yiddish in the New York movement, just as in the Lodz movement, established itself as integral to success in the movement’s formative years.

Although the Bund unanimously agreed on the

28 Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892–1914*, 8.

29 Ibid., 39.

30 Herberg, “The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States”, 6.

31 Tony Michels, “Speaking to Moyshe”: The Early Socialist Yiddish Press and Its Readers,” *Jewish History*, (The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere, 2000), 53.

32 Ibid., 69.

33 Ibid., 63.

decision to draft Yiddish as the official language, the groups had immense difficulty agreeing on much else. For instance, the Bund proclaimed that there should be an “insoluble bond” between their group, all proletariats, and Russian labor movements while at the same time refusing to join any other labor movement; “this dualism was to be the cause of ideological oscillation throughout the whole of the Bund’s existence.”<sup>34</sup> The Bund did not only separate itself from general labor movements; it also rejected other emerging Jewish labor movements’ platforms (for example, those that promoted Zionism or other forms of Jewish autonomy). Specifically, the Bund would not formally request Jewish autonomy for fear of Polish or Russian reaction, something other Jewish groups felt enormously important.

Unlike the Bund’s difficulties in uniting, the leading New York Jewish labor movement, United Hebrew Trades (founded on October 9, 1888), was able to consolidate varying ideologies with a fair amount of ease. Of course, Jews in New York did not face the issues of nation that plagued Poland, but just as every movement emerges, differing ideologies break off and threaten efficacy. A group of Jewish intellectuals and a major leader in the Jewish movement (though not Eastern Euro-



United Hebrew Trades and Ladies Waist and Dressmakers Union Local 25 march in the streets after the Triangle fire, Courtesy of Kheel Center

pean), Samuel Gompers made the decision to make the labor movement specifically Jewish in nature. The goal of United Hebrew Trades (UHT) hoped to successfully organize Jews into unions. Jewish workers were notoriously known for their inability to unionize. They enthusiastically participated in strikes, but they “did not possess the tenacity or discipline necessary for enduring labor organization,”<sup>35</sup> most likely due to the world they were escaping. In Poland and Eastern Europe, entering unions remained unestablished as a reality for workers because

<sup>34</sup> Encyclopedia Judaica, “Bund,” *Jewish Virtual Library* (2008), [https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0004\\_0\\_03730.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0004_0_03730.html) (accessed December 1, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Herberg, “The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States”, 6.

they would immediately lose their job and housing. New Jewish immigrants were often lamented for their individualism, but perhaps memories of violently feuding labor movements in the East kept them from committing to entering a labor union. However difficult the task would be, UHT seemed the best organ to accomplish the goal. The group consolidated unions from all fields, from Jewish actors, bakers, cap makers, choral singers, etc. Unlike issues with the Bund, UHT saw little resistance to organizing only Jewish unions. The biggest critic of this move, Samuel Gompers himself, felt uneasy organizing unions purely on religious criteria. Not simply a religion in New York during this time, Judaism proved to be a way of life. Workers observed the Sabbath, spoke Yiddish, and many new Jewish immigrants sought to preserve their traditions. Additionally, though no history of Jewish pogroms or virulent anti-Semitism existed in New York, anti-Semitism and xenophobia did rear their heads, especially against Russian immigrants. Therefore, Jews had a certain special interest compared to the general labor force, and Gompers soon recognized “to organize Hebrew trade unions was the first step in getting those immigrants into the American labor movement.”<sup>36</sup> The UHT saw immense success; it typically acted as a protective agent for various Jewish unions by lending advice and dealing with employers but also organized an impressive number of strikes. Throughout its existence, UHT remained a socialist organization. In fact, *Forverts*, to gain support for this founding fundamental principle, translated *The Communist Manifesto* to Yiddish for the Jewish workers to read. However, not every union accepted a radical, socialist approach and those that did not met with great condemnation by UHT. A statement printed in 1909 by UHT reflects its frustration with the

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36 Herberg, “Jewish Labor Movement in the United States: Early Years to World War I”, 505.

garment industry:

It is not true, as the press committee states, that the Jewish labor unions are not quite ready to go hand in hand with the radicals. Among all the Jewish unions one will find a strong radicalism. The cap-makers union has, in their fundamental principles, recognized socialism, the bakers’ union recognize socialism and these strong unions stand one hundred per cent with the United Hebrew Trades. The only union not recognizing socialist principles is the garment workers and when this union was investigated, it was found that instead of doing good, it was just the contrary, that it did a great deal of harm to the union by being conservative and following the program of all the American conservative unions.<sup>37</sup>

Textile unionism, in fact devolved from radicalness, and with the new surge of Bundist influence who fled pogroms in 1905, this development became troubling for the labor movement. Starting in 1909, the textile unions noticeably lost their influence. Perhaps, this announcement of failure by the UHT helped to regroup the textile industry because quickly under the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, militancy and radicalism were brought back to the workforce. In a sense, the UHT created Jewish unions, and although not entirely successful in radicalizing them to socialism, the resurgence of these ideas came from Eastern European Bundist leaders and would ultimately revive the Jewish labor movement in New York.

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37 United Hebrew Trades, Foreign Language Press Survey (National Endowment for the Humanities), accessed December 5, 2016, [lps.newsberry.org/article/5423972\\_2\\_1731](https://lps.newsberry.org/article/5423972_2_1731).

In Poland, the Bund believed that political reform prevailed as the best way to empower the Jewish proletariat. Strikes in Poland were a common reaction to the labor system but were met with such violence from Russian officials that the working classes' efforts proved unsuccessful. The Bund then developed a new plan to protect the Jewish proletariat: action through political means. However, the antagonism between socialist parties, increasing fervent nationalism, general social unrest, and anti-Semitism culminated in the violent Polish revolution beginning in 1905 and created a war zone in Lodz. A leader in an independent Polish labor union remembers the violent clash of the Polish Socialist Party and the Bund well: "...there was sharp conflict between the nationalists and socialists, with armed struggle between them in the factories. On Piotrkowska Street, [the same street Poznanski's factories were located] ambushes after work. Yes, it was absolutely incredible! ...during the period of degeneration of this revolution, there were a lot of assassinations, workers killing workers..."<sup>38</sup> By 1907, 260 police officers and 800 workers were killed in the violence with 2,800 people wounded.<sup>39</sup> The anti-Semitism between the two groups proved deadly, and "the perception of many Poles that in 1905-1907 their Jewish neighbors fought not for 'Polish' rights but for special 'Jewish' rights, separate from and possibly in conflict with 'Polish' rights" spurred a new wave of pogroms.<sup>40</sup> Jewish workers immigrated in droves to America. Although the Bund could not exact workers rights by 1905, the Bund would

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38 Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski and Christopher Phelps, "An Interview with Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski", 109.

39 James A. Mallory Jr., "American Perceptions of Poland During the Revolution of 1905," *The Polish Review* 35, no. 2 (University of Illinois Press on behalf of the Polish Institute of Arts & Sciences of America, 1990), 128.

40 Weeks, "Polish-Jewish Relations, 1903-1914: The View from the Chancellery," 242.

go on to influence American Jewish labor movements.

In conclusion, both the New York and Lodz Jewish textile labor movements had impressive beginnings. In Lodz, Poland, competing labor groups, anti-Semitism, and intense nationalism all became difficult factors for the Bund to contend with. Meanwhile, United Hebrew Trade's biggest obstacle lay in maintaining a radical, socialist nature in America, where history had not welcomed socialism as a theory as in Eastern Europe. New York's Jewish labor force found themselves in working and living conditions worse than their Polish counterpart, but while Lodz's workers had marginally better physical conditions, many more were forced into unemployment and abject poverty. Both movements formulated in a similar fashion: top down, rather than bottom-up movements, with intellectuals directing the causes. Both groups of intellectuals began their movements' propaganda in Russian, but each quickly realized in order to empower the working force, they must speak the workers' language of Yiddish. Finally the two movements collided after 1905. The Bund's attempts to empower the Jewish worker came to an immediate halt at the beginning of the incredibly violent 1905 Polish revolution. Meanwhile in New York, United Hebrew Trades lost its radical voice and had little success for its Jewish textile workers. After 1905, United Hebrew Trades found the revitalization it so desperately needed: Bundists escaping war-torn Poland. The varying differences and similarities in the formations of the movements help to explain the important influence of Judaism while also highlighting the great significance each movement created, culminating in an intersection of movements that greatly influenced Jewish labor rights.

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