

*The Jewish  
Labor*

**Bund**



**Bulletin**

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November-December, 1951

## HENRYK ERLICH and VICTOR ALTER — IN MEMORIAM

The messages we received on the tenth anniversary of their death are arranged in alphabetical order.

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- C. I. O., *Philip Murray*, President.
- C. I. O., *James Carey*, Secretary.
- Cooperative Commonwealth Federation of Canada.
- French Socialist Party, *Guy Mollet*, Sec'y Gen.
- I. L. G. W. U., *David Dubinsky*, President.
- International League for the Rights of Man, *Roger Baldwin*, Chairman of the Board.
- Jewish Labor Committee, *Adolph Held*, Chairman.
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- Social Democratic Party of Denmark, *Hans Hedtoft*, Chairman.
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- U. A. W. (C.I.O.), *Walter P. Reuther*, President.
- United Hebrew Trades, New York
- Workmen's Circle National Executive Committee

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- Karl A. Wittfogel, Seattle, Wash.

## OUR TWO MARTYRS

Ten years ago—in December 1941—the Soviet Government ordered the arrest of our comrades Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter in Kuibyshev. It was their second arrest by the blood-drenched Stalin regime. The first occurred immediately after the

terror—but their death helped to expose the bloody decay of the Soviet regime.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were murdered as leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund, as leaders of Jewish labor in erstwhile independent Poland. They



HENRYK ERLICH



VICTOR ALTER

Soviet occupation of the eastern territories of Poland in September, 1939. Having been infamously condemned to death, Erlich and Alter found their sentences commuted as a result of the Polish-Soviet treaty, and in September, 1941, they were freed. They were again imprisoned several weeks afterward, never to be seen alive again.

All the protests were in vain, all appeals by labor leaders throughout the world, by the entire international Socialist camp, by the leading statesmen of the Western Democracies, were neglected. Only 15 months later we received the tragic news of Erlich and Alter's execution from the Communist hangmen themselves.

They were put to death ten years ago, behind a Soviet prison wall. They were assassinated like so many other innocent victims of long-lasting Soviet

were put to death in the most tragic moment of Jewish life, at a time when the Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland, with the underground Jewish labor movement in the lead, were engaged in a heroic struggle against the Nazi henchmen, when they were preparing for armed resistance which later caught the hearts of the entire world in the historic uprising of the Warsaw ghetto. At that time, even as Hitler was preparing for the Jewish population crematoria and death factories, Treblinkas and Majdaneks, Belzec's and Oswiecims, Stalin, on the other hand, struck against the Jewish popular masses decimated, martyred, yet bravely fighting in Poland by murdering their leaders and exalters, their symbols and preceptors, the teachers and guides of the heroes and fighters in the ghettos. The salvo against Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter was a salvo directed into

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the very hearts of the Jewish masses, a salvo into the entire Jewish life of Poland, and a foretaste of the mental and physical liquidation policies being carried out during the past years by the Soviet dictators and their flunkies with regard to Jewish life in all countries of Communist-dominated Eastern Europe.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were murdered as democratic Socialists, as responsible and well-known leaders and co-builders of international libertarian Socialism. Their execution—at a time when the Socialist and labor movement all over the world was most actively engaged in the war against Fascism and Nazism—was a declaration of war against the entire camp of democratic Socialism.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were throughout their lives deeply attached to the country of their birth and of their public activities—Poland. Their murder was also a blow to the freedom of that country, an act of terror and an example of the dictatorial practices now prevalent throughout Poland.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were carriers of the lofty ideals of freedom, democracy, progress, and respect for the individual. Their murder was a shameless derision of these ideals.

The martyrs' deaths of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter symbolize the fate awaiting all free men who may fall into the hold of the bloody Soviet dictatorship. Today, at the tenth anniversary of the cruel Soviet murder of our two leaders, teachers, and comrades who had been beloved by tens of thousands of people and who are now the immortals of the Bund, the Jewish labor movement, and the entire camp of international Socialism, in these difficult, painful days, we bow our heads at the unknown graves of our two martyrs.

Their names are inscribed in the history of the struggle for liberty and for socialism. Their sacred memory will outlive their murderers. Their lives, their struggle, and their martyrs' death will exalt all those who will follow in their noble footsteps. And years later, when the murderers and all other tyrants and dictators will be recalled in contempt, the names of our two Bundist leaders, Erlich and Alter, will shine even more brightly, with those of the best, noblest, and most sacred representatives

of the invincible, universal ascent toward liberty, equality, peace, and the brotherhood of men.

## I

**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 10th 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 LABOUR 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.

Released eventually in September 1941, they at once set about organising a Jewish Committee to continue their long fight against Hitlerism. But a few months later they were again arrested and brought before the Military Collegium of the Soviet Supreme Court. Here, in order to besmirch their good name and, by striking at the leaders, to discredit and destroy the whole Jewish Socialist Movement, the fantastic accusation was brought against them of "trying to persuade the Russian soldiers to make peace with Germany;" and they were summarily executed. 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.

### CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS James Carey, Secretary

Ten years ago I pledged that American workers would never forget the heinous execution of two great democratic labor leaders, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Today, a decade later, their sacrifice is still in our minds; and again I pledge that American workers will always remember these two great men.

Now, ten years later, we can at least derive one consolation from their murder at the hands of Soviet authorities: their deaths called attention to the anti-democratic, anti-humanitarian policies of the leaders of the Soviet-Russian dictatorship. We who protested the execution of Erlich and Alter, and who were berated because of our criticism, today can take satisfaction in recognizing that the brutality and the amorality of the Soviet regime are fully known to the peoples of the world. Toward the dissemination of that knowledge, two great men, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, sacrificed their lives. We shall never forget it.

### 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"

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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.

Towards the end of the last century, while still very young—almost children—both were active in clandestine organizations in which Polish students fought czarist oppression in close co-operation with the Russian revolutionaries. Both rose early to prominent places among the leadership of the "Bund," for which Erlich paid four times with the hardships of imprisonment and exile, while Alter, eight years his junior, suffered expulsion from the High School and relentless harrassment by the police. Both played an active part in the 1917 Revolution. The personal qualities of Erlich, who lived in Russia during the exalted period, gained him a seat in the St. Petersburg Soviet, and membership in the Central Executive Committee of the Workers' Soviets. Between the two world wars Erlich and Alter continued the fight in their own country, where they were known and respected both as Jewish labor leaders and as genuine fighters for the solidarity and the liberation of the working masses of Poland. Erlich and Alter enjoyed uncontested prestige in the international Socialist bodies. As time went on and as threats gradually accumulated on the horizon owing to the perils to which Europe was exposed by the dictatorships, Erlich and Alter were among those who at every opportunity denounced totalitarianism, the mortal enemy of liberty, civilization, and progress.

They were among those in Poland who opposed with all their energies the military and police regime of a Beck or a Rydz-Smigly. They were among those who in the press and from the platforms of international Socialism maintained that fascism could not be destroyed without unified action of the working class. They were, in addition, among those—and this quality attains a particular significance in the light of subsequent events—who, while condemning the Bolshevik errors, defended the notion of cooperation between the democracies and the USSR for the maintenance of peace being threatened by the fascist powers poised for the attack.

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 were 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 LADIES GARMENT WORKERS UNION

**David Dubinsky, President**

In their life, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were devoted and heroic fighters in the ranks of Jewish democratic socialism. In their tragic death, Erlich and Alter have become immortals in man's struggle for liberty and decency.

In December, 1941, Erlich and Alter were murdered in cold blood by the Soviet political police. Stalin feared the influence they wielded among the Jewish workers of Poland through their organization, the "Bund," of which they were the recognized leaders, as well as the leadership they would exert in a Democratic Poland.

A decade has passed since this ghastly crime was perpetrated. How few of us then saw its sinister significance or dared to condemn it. How many millions throughout the world now realize that the savage murder of Erlich and Alter was only a foretaste and forerunner of the monstrous crimes the Communist dictatorship has been planning and preparing against all human liberty and history.

Erlich and Alter must not have died in vain. Inspired by their ideals and stirred by their cruel fate, we shall fight on till mankind breaks all totalitarian chains, till humanity is free from all oppression and despotism, till democracy and social justice triumph.

## 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 of 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.

## JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

**Adolph Held, National Chairman**

Ten years ago the civilized world was shocked by the Kremlin's unbelievable act of barbarism. Erlich and Alter were executed by Stalin's hangmen.

Few people found it possible to believe that our ally in the war against Hitler was capable of such a crime.

To us, these men symbolized the struggle for democratic socialism and human justice. For several decades they led the struggle of the Jewish masses of Poland against Fascism and later against the onrushing Nazis. Frequently imprisoned and persecuted by the czar and the Polish fascists, it was irony of fate for them to meet their tragic end at the hands of so-called leaders of Stalin's "Socialistic" republic.

Ten years ago there were few who had the courage to condemn publicly and denounce the murder of Erlich and Alter by the Soviet regime. However, the labor leaders throughout the world, some liberals and the Jewish Labor Committee did not hesitate. They aroused the conscience of the world to this barbarous act.

Now in December 1951, the murderers of Erlich and Alter confront the free peoples of the world with the grim alternative—to resist aggression, slave labor camps, wholesale deportations, and the cultural liquidation of minorities—or to submit to these inhumanities. The Jewish masses behind the Iron Curtain are especially subjected to oppression and persecution; their institutions, traditions, culture and language are condemned to obliteration. The Jewish Labor Committee exposed this cultural and spiritual genocide, and protested through the United

Nations. For over a year the Kremlin keeps silent on the brutalities we cited.

We have no doubt that if Erlich and Alter were alive today, they would urge us not to give up the struggle—just as they did ten years ago.

The ideals of freedom and justice for which Erlich and Alter paid with their lives are the ideals of the free labor movement. Their courage and martyrdom are our heritage and we are dedicated to carry them forward. The memory of Erlich and Alter will ever serve us as an inspiration in the struggle for a world of human brotherhood, social justice, freedom and peace. On this tenth anniversary of the arrest and murder of Erlich and Alter by the Stalin regime, we rededicate ourselves to the great task of safeguarding freedom and civilization, and to the liberation of all who are oppressed and persecuted and martyred, that men everywhere may be free.

## JEWISH SOCIALIST FARBAND

### I. Levin-Shatzkes, *National Secretary*

Henry Erlich and Victor Alter were murdered on the orders of the Bolshevik dictatorship. Two pure souls were extinguished on the senseless and shameless slander of having been cohorts of the Nazis. It was the intention of the Bolshevik authorities to desecrate the aureole of purity and exaltation which surrounded the two leaders in the eyes of the Jewish toiling masses. By physically destroying the two glorious carriers of the Socialist ideals, the Communists sought to destroy the very essence of these ideals.

Yet the Communist leaders, like the hangmen of all time and of all nations, were in error when they supposed that by killing the carriers of the ideal of liberty, liberty itself can be annihilated.

Ten years have passed since the infamous, cowardly murder of Erlich and Alter, and today the Jewish Socialist and labor movement—and not the Jewish alone—experiences the same unending sadness and the same indignation as they did when the dark tidings of their murder were received. This sadness and this indignation serve to clarify even more the ideal of true Socialism, of the struggle which

Henry Erlich and Victor Alter adorned with so much prestige and exaltation.

We shall always guard their sacred memory with love and respect. We shall never forget the murderers and desecrators of our idealistic leaders. Their murder shall forever remain to us an indication and a warning.

## RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

### R. Abramovitch, *New York*

The day of December 3, the day of the arrest and assassination of Erlich and Alter by the Soviet NKVD is a day of mourning for all their friends and comrades. I was both, a friend and a comrade. Together with Erlich I worked in the Bund, together with him I fought in the revolution of 1917, together with him, voted against Lenin and Trotsky at the memorable night of November 7, 1917. In 1918 Victor Alter and myself were arrested in Moscow, on July 21, at a Workers' Conference, and accused of having prepared an "armed plot." We shared the same cell in the prison and escaped by the skin of our teeth execution during the period of "Red Terror."

But the anniversary of the Erlich-Alter murder is a tragic day not only for their personal or party friends. The mass purges of 1937-38 in Soviet Russia familiarized the world with the tragic and grotesque spectacle of a revolutionary "dictatorship of the proletariat," concentrating on the extermination of every shred of workers' freedom and of the last independent leaders of the working classes. We stopped long ago to be shocked when we saw prominent communist leaders, members of Lenin's Old Guard, publicly "confessing" to have perpetuated the most monstrous crimes against the revolution and Socialism.

When Stalin marched his troops into the Eastern provinces of Poland, in order to achieve one of his goals—the partition of Poland, attacked by Hitler—and to collect the price of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939, the first task of the NKVD in the newly occupied territories, was to locate with the help of its communist informers all the prominent leaders of Polish and Jewish free labor. They

were arrested, shot or deported to Russia. Thus, the two most venerated figures of the Jewish Socialist Bund in Poland—Henry Erlich and Victor Alter, were arrested and brought to the infamous "Inner Prison" of the NKVD at the Lubyanka Square in Moscow.

The treaty between Stalin and General Sikorsky, concluded under the heavy pressure of Great Britain and the U.S.A., included an amnesty for all Polish citizens, deported or interned within the Soviet Union. On the basis of this amnesty, Erlich and Alter were not only released, but for some time treated as guests of the Soviets. They recovered physically from their tortures and immediately began to develop some political activity—always in close contact with the representatives of the Soviet government (formation of a United Front Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee). Together with the Polish Embassy in Moscow they were evacuated to Kuibyshev and given lodgings in a Soviet hotel for prominent foreigners. Suddenly, in the late evening of December 3, 1941, our comrades were urgently summoned to the headquarters of the NKVD for an "important conference." From this "conference" they never returned...

At this moment Stalin was sure that Moscow would not fall to the Germans and that his regime has pretty good chances to survive after all. This was also the moment when at an audience with Stalin and Molotov, General Sikorsky and his aid insisted on the liberation of 15,000 Polish officers, interned by the Russians in 1939 and deported to the Internment camp of Katyn near Smolensk in Russia. But they received a cynical reply which sounded like a cruel mockery: "We know nothing about them."

The mass murder of thousands of Polish patriotic officers on the one hand, the execution of prominent socialist leaders of the Jewish-Polish workers on the other hand, do not fit any more into the pattern of Yezhov purges. It had a different meaning, no less menacing the freedom of humanity than the purges. It was the first warning signal against any illusions as to the future fate of Soviet Russia's neighbors, of all the countries which we

now call satellites. It was the first tangible evidence that after the military victory of the Allies Stalin's Russia will step forward as a candidate for the role of a new Alexander the Great or rather Chenghis Kahn, the conqueror of the World. And so it came. From the tragic night of December 3rd in Kuibyshev, a direct line can be traced to the February days of 1948 in Prague, when the Communists took over Czechoslovakia, or to the nomination of the Soviet Marshal Rokossovsky to the function of military governor of the "Free and Independent" Poland.

The assassination of the Socialist leaders, Erlich and Alter, was a turning point in the history of mankind—the announcement of the third world war at a moment when the second was still at its beginning.

## SOCIALIST PARTY OF ARGENTINA

### Enrique Dickman, Buenos Aires

The monstrous crimes committed by the totalitarian government of Stalin a decade ago against the socialists, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, have completely dispelled the hypothesis—or illusion—that Socialism and Communism, identified as having common ends, could some day unite into one common movement. The deep rift caused by such crimes is so decisive that it has made of the two movements—Socialism and Communism—as economic, political and social forces, separate and opposing organizations in thought and in action.

Socialism, in both theory and practice, is a democratic, evolutionary movement, while Communism is totalitarian and violent. Socialism is evolutionary and complex and is based on the material and spiritual advancement of the working masses; while Communism bases its activities on a succession of brutal, bold, and violent events headed by a fanatic minority, which is working for the benefit of the majority without having this majority participate in these events voluntarily, with conscience of free will.

Socialism is associated with and inseparable from liberty. Without liberty there can be no Socialism. Freedom of thought, speech, press and the right to assemble—these are the basic and funda-



mental freedoms indispensable to harmony and solidarity among a people and among nations.

For Communism, liberty is a bourgeois prejudice. Communism denies liberty to the populace and imposes upon the people the Communist doctrine: One Party, One Press, One Opinion of the government personified in the One Leader; Omniscient, Omnipotent and All-embracing.

In conclusion, then, there is a profound difference in theory and practice between Socialism and conflicting politico-social ideologies relating to and conflicting politico-social ideologies relating to the life of the individual and the collective group and it is indispensable to understand it that way and to adjust one's thoughts and actions accordingly. Any other attitude would be self-defeating and destructive.

### **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 DENMARK**

#### **Alsing Andersen, Deputy Chairman**

The tenth anniversary of the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter recalls to my memory the picture of two brave and honest personalities whom I met several times in the Socialist International between the two world wars.

It is a disgrace that those two strong champions for socialism should fall victims of the barbarous communist violence.

Their martyrdom will strengthen our efforts to realise a socialist world based upon democracy and humanity.

### **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 re-arrested 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 with deep reverence the stalwart behavior of Erlich and Alter 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 dreads of totalitarianism on every plane.

In this sense we ask the "Bund" comrades to accept our sincere sympathy.

### **SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF GERMANY** **Herta Gotthelf, Women's Division**

I remember very well how shaken we were, the small group of Socialists exiled from the Nazi-occupied countries and residing in England, as we learned of the death of Comrades Erlich and Alter,

whose names as stalwart, brave Socialists were known throughout the entire Socialist International.

As we recall them now, ten years after their execution, this remembrance serves us as a monition to do everything in our power in order to prevent the reign of any brutal dictatorship, be it fascist or Bolshevik, in our countries.

We German Socialists always followed the work of our "Bund" comrades with particular esteem, and we feel the duty to work in our country not only against the Bolshevik dictatorship, but also to fight against a revival of the dark forces of fascism.

## SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL

### Julius Braunthal, Secretary

I have known Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter by repute 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 Czarism. For his revolutionary activities Erlich was imprisoned three times by the Czarist 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 Old Bolshevik 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 reward, after a brief period of freedom, was re-arrest 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 fabrica-

tions, 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 had disappeared in the Soviet Union in 1941, and, as was found out later, 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.

## UNITED HEBREW TRADES, New York

Alter and Erlich embodied the Socialist dream that warmed the hearts and fired the souls of every Jewish worker throughout the world.

The selection by Stalin of these two Socialists was not a mere accident. This cruel murder was an attempt on the part of the totalitarian forces to stifle the determination of the Democratic loving people to fight Dictatorship in every shape, form and manner, whether it be red or black.

The conviction of Democracy, of Freedom, of Liberty is imbedded in the heart of every Jewish Socialist. Alter and Erlich were the symbol of these convictions.

The murder by Stalin of these noble souls was an effort on the part of the Kremlin to kill the everlasting attachment for Liberty that kindled the hearts of the laboring masses.

On this, the tenth anniversary of their death, let us rededicate ourselves to perpetuate the memory of Erlich and Alter by continuing the struggle for Liberty and Democracy.

## WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

**National Executive Committee**

**Leon Arkin, Pres.; Joseph Baskin, Gen. Secy.**

The Workmen's Circle, which is a fraternal labor organization of seventy thousand members and their families, will never forget the murder com-

mitted by the Soviet Communist regime upon Erlich and Alter.

They were the victims of their devotion to the cause of social justice and for a better humanity.

The memories of these martyrs will ever be revered in our midst.

## II

## 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 czarist 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 had always considered me as their friend.

Yes, those 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 developments hinged upon the fluctuations of the Soviet-Hitler 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.

And, since every one of us has a moral responsibility and an obligation to help the workers free themselves, let us emphasize that the respect for a human being is the essence of all liberty. Under all names and within all aspects, totalitarianism, fascism, Hitlerism, personal dictatorship, no matter what it is called, avails itself and can avail itself of but a single method: police and force.

In recalling this lesson at every moment of our conscious activities, we shall honor our dead in a manner which they should have approved of most.

Together with all those who have asserted, assert now, and will assert after we are gone their firm conviction that liberation is conditioned by the clear vision of the future, which the workers can achieve by direct action of their own, let us repeat the watchword so dear to the hearts of Erlich and Alter: Long live Social Democracy! Long live the Socialist International!

### **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 I.L.P. 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 I.L.P. 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.

I will not speak of their brave service to the cause of Socialism in Poland. I visited Warsaw in 1931 and spoke with them at a meeting which their opponents tried to break up. I appreciated then the courage which loyalty to Socialism demanded from them.

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 organising 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.

### **S. CHARNEY (Sh. Niger), New York**

*Congress for Jewish Culture, Chairman*

In contradistinction to other Polish Jews, who were tortured and put to death by German Nazis or Polish fascists, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter,

leaders of the Jewish labor movement in Poland, were murdered by those who consider themselves the only enemies of Fascism and Nazism. How could this have happened? How could it come about that representatives of a government calling itself a workers' and peasants' government put to death, without an honest trial, people who voluntarily and with self-sacrifice dedicated their lives to the betterment and the struggle for freedom of the oppressed classes? This question is in the minds not only of Erlich and Alter's party comrades. No decent man can remain indifferent to this infinitely depressing question. What happened to the two pure and sterling personalities did not happen to them alone. Their tragedy is, after all, part of the world tragedy which we all experience. And if we believe that the misfortune will not last forever, if we want the world to be decent and human beings to be human, then we must not remain indifferent to a system and an ideology which justifies crimes like the murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, and we must not cease to demand of the Soviet Cain, "Where is thy brother Abel?"

**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.

**HENRI FRENAY, Paris**

*Leader of the French Resistance Movement,  
Former Minister of France*

Before the last war, political assassinations were rare occurrences. If they were perpetrated by the order of some government, they were at least arranged through an intermediary: armed assassins were hired. As happened in the case of Jaures, the assassination was frequently committed by a fanatic. In any case, the event aroused the indignation of

all men, be they in agreement with the victim or his political adversaries.

Under a fascist regime, political crimes are not at all disguised—they become a method of government. Having concentrated all power in their hands, modern tyrants are certain of their impunity. Only as a result of defeat in war can Nueremberg gallows be erected.

Distinctions ought to be made among the various assassins who rose to the position of Chief of State. Hitler killed by the simple right of the stronger. His *Weltanschauung* did not even pretend to be serving the cause of Man. He presented himself to the world the way he was, in his entire cold-blooded cruelty. Small wonder that he aroused universal horror against him.

Under Stalin the very same crimes are being perpetrated. He had also killed his old comrades, exterminated his adversaries or those who might have become his enemies. But at the very moment when people are tortured and killed, it is written on Stalin's orders that "Soviet society has created a new man for whom Man is a sacred being, worthy of the most sympathetic attention, of the greatest concern." (*Soviet Studies*, November 1951). Thus to the common-law crimes is added another, even more serious one: the crime against the spirit. The assassin disguises his real features behind the mask of the Good Samaritan. Hundreds of millions of people are being led into error by this delusive mask.

It was this mask which deceived Erlich and Alter and which led them to death, one dawn, in a NKVD dungeon. For those Polish Socialists, lifelong fighters for the working class, the USSR had remained the country of great expectations, the country of the October Revolution. They had not yet come to accept the fact that for Stalin Hitler's a marshal could become an ally, but a Socialist always remained an enemy. At the threshold of the hereafter their eyes were certainly opened: nevertheless they fell victim to a great and tragic illusion.

Soviet imperialism has since enslaved many other countries besides Poland. Everywhere the NKVD henchmen have set up execution chambers,

and everywhere our comrades were those who inaugurated these dungeons.

May all Socialists, all free men, study this lesson on the tenth anniversary of Erlich and Alter's disappearance. May they finally understand that nothing can excuse an alliance with assassins. If it be so, the sacrifice of our two Bund comrades shall not have been in vain.

### **A. GLANZ-LEYELESS, New York**

*Prominent Jewish Columnist and Poet*

When Cain killed Abel, the blood of the slain brother cried from the ground. It was but the stilled life that cried.

The Cain of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter committed a far greater crime. With his fratricide he intended to kill the loftiest human dream, the purest Jewish and human creed—the dream and the belief in a just, decent, honest world.

Abel's Cain did not, perhaps, realize what he was doing. In a moment of anger he established death in the world.

Erlich's and Alter's Cain knew exactly what he was up to. He wished to desecrate the dream. He wanted to disparage the creed.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were two proud Jews, two pure men.

For this reason their blood flowed doubly sacred in that fearful hour when the Cain of the Socialist ideal pierced their hearts.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, sons of the most martyred and most visionary people in human history, encouraged and led into the aura of hope Jewish cobblers and tailors, bakers and porters for many years; they encouraged and exalted hundreds of thousands of poor Jewish men. In so doing, their hearts and their hands remained not only uplifted, but unblemished as well. Despite all the most bitter disappointments and most difficult circumstances, they kept up the creed not only in ultimate redemption, but also in Man and his ability to achieve deliverance and a world with neither victims nor hangmen, neither suffering nor murder.

And these qualities—the human dignity and these, their visions—their Cain could not forgive

them. They were in the way of his bleak-Egyptian plans.

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were finally returned to the light whence they had come. Their heroic memory is now firmly entrenched, like a column of sunshine, in the hearts of millions. The time will come when a fully-delivered humanity and fully liberated Jewish people will actually erect for them statues and monuments in the cities of the world.

And as to their Cain—

It is the curse and disagreement of our era, which must be not only discussed, but deeply considered as well.

### **SALOMON GRUMBACH, Paris**

*Member of the Executive Committee,  
French Socialist Party; Member of  
the Executive, Socialist International*

There are war crimes which it is the duty of the Socialist movement to record on a special page.

Ten years have already passed since Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were executed by order of the Muscovite authorities and of a so-called "Supreme Court." Ten years have passed. I close my eyes to recall them better. Erlich with his large, brown, gently burning eyes, his small greyish beard; Alter with his high forehead, his severe mouth, and his kind smile. Throughout many years I used to meet them during Executive meetings of our Socialist International. In discussing the great problems they used to place themselves on the "left," and they defended their attitude with passionate conviction. Two Socialist fighters, two leaders of the Jewish proletariat of Poland, two internationalist Poles.

And it was those two comrades whom the Moscow rulers had the monstrous "courage" to accuse of having played the game of Hitler... The accusation was so incredible that even today I should not believe it, had I not learned it, that ten years ago Erlich and Alter were shot, assassinated... They were Socialists, and until their last breath they remained faithful to the democratic principles and to the humanistic spirit of socialism; no threat could

make them sign "confessions," or betray the cause to which they had dedicated their lives.

Among thousands of dead, victims of the Hitlerite war, whom the Bund will always honor, the names of Erlich and Alter, victims of a barbarous fanaticism no less savage than that under the sign of the swastika, will remain forever the unforgettable.

**J. B. S. HARDMAN, New York**

*Editor, "Labor and Nation"*

Joseph Stalin disposed of the case of USSR vs. the two men, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, easily enough. They were shot to death, and that settled the issue, only leaving it to the Soviet court fixers to adjust the record. But Stalin has not been able to dispose of the case of Erlich-Alter vs. USSR. It remains alive, even though the two men are no longer in the world.

The case of Stalin against Erlich-Alter was brief, pointed, simple: Two men refused to concede, even though physically overpowered, that *might made right*; and, the two men having been silenced forever, there was nothing more to be done about it by Stalin, the party leader and Russia's potentate. The USSR court docket was in the clear.

The case of Erlich-Alter vs. USSR was, however, of a different order, and not so simple. Theirs was an intellectual attack upon an evil in power. It was motivated by neither personal hate nor partisan power-thirst. It represented, in continuity, the age-old, deep-rooted, very human objection to the vicious subversion, by a power-monolith, of the sense of history: the advancing rise of man to freedom of conscience and intellect. The two men voiced, as have millions before and since, humanity's basic urge—an urge that can no more be quelled by firing squads than light could be shut from man's sight by the chaining of Prometheus to the rock, his body exposed to the birds for prey. Vultures may devour men; it is not given them to undo humanity.

The two men, because of their preeminent standing among the peoples of many nations, immensely strengthened the chances of the never-to-cess-untill victorious war for freedom. And now,

a decade since Soviet bullets silenced them, their case, that of history against tyranny, remains impregnable, more powerful. The respect of decent enlightened men and women everywhere for the undying memory of the two warriors is mounting higher, and confidence of victory in the end is stronger.

It is all clearer now than ever before. Time has restored visibility and perspective. Time has also cleared away those immediately environing circumstances of the tragic days of 1941 which then blurred the sight of some honest but deeply disturbed men. The complex compulsives of that time, Russia's expeditious left-handed alliance with the western democracies in the war of defense against Nazism-Fascism and Japanese militarism, no longer interfere with sober reasoning. "Are we fighting Stalin or are we fighting Hitler?" asked a significant leader of those days, greatly shocked by the international-political "tactlessness" of raising the justice-and-humanity issue vs. Russia—for might it not crack the totality of the Grand Alliance? That posing of the issue no longer makes sense, however little, if at all, it ever made. In the ten years since 1941 the governing party autocracy of USSR has belied in action all pretense that it's murders, it's double-talk, it's atrocities and chicanery are but means of self-defense against "encirclement" and "enemies." USSR today is, for all but fools, ignoramuses, and knaves to see, aggression absolute, by the Russian dictatorship elite against all nations and peoples, the Russian people themselves included.

The Erlich-Alter case vs. USSR will be disposed of when resurrected democracy of, by and for the Russian people will write finis to the latest Mongol period of their history. If civilized human history is to continue, freedom must be restored and reinvigorated.

**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 sense-



less 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 ineffaceable 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. To-day 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 10th 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.

**HYMAN D. LANGER, Los Angeles**

*Pacific Coast Director, ILGWU*

Deceased on December 8, 1951

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter are martyrs in the struggle for a Socialist world in a very special sense. They did not fall under the onslaughts of the Czarist police. They survived the Pilsudski terror. They stayed alive even in the face of Hitler's juggernaut. They were imprisoned and then murdered, treacherously and secretly, by Russian people they had finally come to accept as allies—by the Stalin regime to which they, and many who followed them, were ready to extend the hand of comradeship, despite their previous opposition to that terroristic regime.

There were many people who demanded that Stalin be forgiven anything during the 1940's because the Communists appeared to oppose Fascism.

There were many diverse groups among those who sang hysterical hosannas to everything Stalin did, and defamed his opposition, however based on fact it was. We can dismiss the out-and-out Communists. They were supported, however, largely by people who supposed themselves liberals, anti-Fascist and pro-democratic. And, of course, there were many

who would not criticize an ally during war—no matter what that ally did—unless it happened to be Great Britain.

There were a brave handful of men who wanted to tell this story of Soviet betrayal and treachery. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, experienced in dealing with the Communist plots and maneuverings and understanding the nature of Communist dictatorship, immediately raised a cry of outrage against those who destroyed Erlich and Alter. In the face of threats, abuse, calumny, and even tacit, though none-the-less official, Government disapproval, President David Dubinsky led the Carnegie Hall meeting protesting and mourning the callous murder of two new Socialist and labor martyrs. President Dubinsky's courage must be recorded in the annals of sincere men who never faltered in their opposition to the Communist terror. In those days, such fortitude was the mark of exceptional immunity to villification.

And this is the epitome of the tragedy of Erlich and Alter—that it took such courage to mourn the murder of two famous leaders in the cause of brotherhood, democracy, and freedom. Never was the line drawn so clearly. Never was it so impossible to choose more than one side. Never was betrayal among the totalitarians, among people who should have been liberals, so evident. They sold out our principles to the monstrous fraud of Communism. They went over to the enemy of democracy as surely as did any pro-Fascist. We suffer from their defection. When reaction is determined to come back completely, to dominate every phase of our lives, to wipe out the progress of the past two decades, our camp has been weakened by desertion. The hopeful aspect, though, is that many who abandoned us know now that they were in the service of treachery. The final triumph belongs to Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

**VICTOR LAROCK, Brussels**

*Editor of "PEUPLE"*

We associate ourselves wholeheartedly with the homage paid by the Bund to the memory of Henryk

Erlich and Victor Alter on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of their death.

These two heroes of Jewish and Socialist resistance against totalitarian oppression will live forever in the memories of men of good will of all races and in all democratic countries.

Victor Alter's personal ties with Belgium make the commemoration of his sacrifice particularly moving to us.

May the example of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich inspire everywhere on earth the will to resist tyrannies, whether fascist or communist.

### **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.

### **ABBA P. LERNER, Chicago**

*Professor at Roosevelt College*

The memory of Erlich and Alter will remain dear to all lovers of Freedom, Democracy and Justice. Their martyrdom will continue to serve the cause of Humanity and of Truth until it is honored by appropriate monuments in Warsaw and Moscow.

### **MAX LERNER, New York**

*Columnist, New York Post*

Ten years ago it had become clear to me that the treatment of Erlich and Alter by the Soviets was

proof that Totalitarianism could be as brutal on the Left as on the Right. Now, ten years later, we must cherish the two names as symbols of a possible democratic society for which they gave their lives, and for which we must continue to work both at home and abroad.

### **DANIEL MAYER, Paris**

*Former Labor Minister of France*

Ten years ago, in the night of December 3, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, the principal leaders of the Bund, disappeared after having called at the offices of the Soviet secret police in Kuibyshev. They were executed soon afterward.

The curious circumstances of their arrest and of their death are still in everybody's mind.

Erlich, born in 1882, knew the tsarist prisons well. He was one of the heroes of the revolution of February 1917. Member and one of the leaders of the St. Petersburg Workers' Soviet, he became later, in a free Poland, in the period between 1919 and 1939, a member of the Warsaw City Council as well as one of the most popular orators and one of the most informed theorists of the Jewish working masses.

Victor Alter, eight years his junior, was both economist and man of action. Likewise a member of the Warsaw City Council, he was continually active in recruiting and organizing his comrades for the struggle against the regime and against fascism.

In 1939, both called for an alliance between the democracies and the Soviet Union against Nazism. They were nevertheless arrested by the Red Army, and accused of having prepared anti-Soviet sabotage activities.

They were condemned to death, later released and, exceptional and unbelievable as it appears, they received the official apology of the Stalin Government for having been ill-treated and for the "errors" of which they were victims. This happened in September 1941, during the darkest days of retreat of the Red Army.

Men of action above all, Erlich and Alter seized the initiative to create a world-wide Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. They called upon the Jewish

refugees in the Soviet Union to join the ranks of the Polish Army then forming in Russia. Being internationally known, they were asked to appeal to American labor to speed U.S. aid to the USSR.

Five weeks later they were re-arrested, and in another three weeks they were put to trial and sentenced as Soviet citizens, after which the Polish Embassy received a parcel containing their personal belongings. It was not before the end of February 1943 that the Russian rulers confessed the execution of the two martyrs, which had taken place more than a year earlier—in December 1941.

But the Communists were not content merely to announce the horrible and useless murder of the two Bund leaders. They attempted to cast slurs upon the honor of their victims by accusing them of subversive activities and by proclaiming them cohorts of Hitler—they who were Polish, they who were active labor leaders, they who had always been anti-fascists, they who were Jews!

These attempts were futile.

The truth, as always, asserted itself. Documents arrived refuting the accusations and pillorying the murderers.

And today, not only the Bund members all over the world commemorate the anniversary of the two martyrs' death, bereft and sorrowful. All Socialists, all those who love liberty, ponder, deeply moved, of these two men, whom a similar fate has united forever in the grateful hearts of the working class.

### **TURE NERMAN, Stockholm**

*Member of Swedish Parliament*

*Noted Man of Letters*

The murder of the two Socialist veterans Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich by the Soviet imperialism was not only proof of the tragedy of the Russian revolution, which was transformed by Stalin in a brutal imperialist and counter-revolutionary tool. It was also proof of the tragedy of international Socialism. Such injustice could not be accepted anywhere without all Socialist forces as well as free men everywhere rising in protest. After the two world

wars, no reaction is visible no matter what happens. In the east such a measure of oppression and terror is perpetrated that one is simply unable always to react, and this very lack of activity is the darkest spot in our position, since it indicates that the rights and sentiments of freedom become paralyzed.

Socialism is and must be international-minded—"The International carries happiness for all." Surely the day will yet arrive when humanity will regain the sentiments of right and freedom. Alter and Erlich will live in the memory of mankind, among the martyrs for the common cause of Socialism, freedom, and humanity.

### **JACOB PANKIN, New York**

*Justice, Domestic Relations Court*

Both Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were exceptional men. Each dedicated himself to the service of man. Each sacrificed himself to the limit to make the world a better place for all men to live in.

I knew Erlich intimately. I knew Victor Alter. It was my privilege, yes, and honor too, to have served with them at Socialist and International Labor Congresses. Both were highly respected, each esteemed.

I carry in my memory a visit to Warsaw and a meeting with Erlich in his editorial rooms. I carry in my memory also a recollection of a discussion with Victor Alter. He and I did not agree on means to the end that both of us sought. Our objective was the same. Only the road which was to carry us to that objective was envisioned a little differently.

Two great souls, two victims, two martyred men. Russia when liberated will erect monuments to their memory. Their memories will be revered for a long time while the memory of Stalin and his cohorts will be cursed.

### **PROFESSOR S. PERLMAN, Wisconsin**

*Professor of Economics*

*The University of Wisconsin*

After this lapse of time, what stands out next only to the shameful of the crime itself is the willingness of most of us then to attribute it not to the very nature of a regime that glorifies amorality

so long as it is done "for the revolution's sake," but to explain it away almost as an inadvertence. The best way to make some amends for our past blindness is to weave our own indignation against brutality and injustice around the images of these two men who lived not for themselves but for all suffering humanity.

### **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 intollerable 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 the Stalinist crimes like those to which Erlich and Alter fell victim represent a particularly odious form of counter-revolution. 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.

### **MARCEAU PIVERT, Paris**

*Member, Executive Committee  
French Socialist Party*

Ten years ago Erlich and Alter were assassinated. They were two eminent leaders of the magnificent Jewish Labor movement in Poland.

I knew both of them personally. I met them during the most tragic period of fascism's rise in Europe and of the first attempt of underground resistance against it. With Eldo Fimen, Victor Alter established a clandestine anti-Nazi radio transmitter. I met them again during the tragic months when the Stalinists and the fascists crushed the unfortunate Spanish republic. I saw Alter repeatedly before and

after his trip to Spain. We spoke for the last time in July 1939 in Paris when he discussed the threat against Poland. Although they were never blinded by Soviet propaganda, Erlich and Alter always appreciated the attempts of the Russian people to build a new world on the ruins of czarism. It was Erlich who, in 1920, vigorously protested Marshal Pilsudski's attempts of military aggrandizement at the expense of the Soviet Union. He was imprisoned for his opposition to the Polish military clique. After the Wehrmacht and the Red Army occupied Poland in 1939, Alter and Erlich were imprisoned and sentenced to die. Paradoxically, it was owing to Hitler's aggression against Russia that they regained their freedom. Under an agreement between the Polish government in exile and Stalin, all Polish prisoners held by the Soviets were granted an amnesty. Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich were offered apologies for the "errors" committed in their case. After fourteen months of imprisonment, the two leaders were honored by the Soviet authorities and invited to take up the thread of their political activities by organizing the Polish and Jewish refugees in Russia into an anti-Nazi resistance movement. They were asked to prepare a draft proposal of a world-wide Jewish anti-fascist committee. It was Beria himself, Chief of the NKVD, who discussed the matter with them. One night in December 1941, they were summoned by telephone to the NKVD offices in Kuibyshev, whence they never returned. Erlich was sixty years old, Alter fifty one.

It was not before February 23, 1943 that, in final reply to innumerable inquiries and appeals by prominent trade-union leaders, famous men of learning, and leading personalities of the Western World, Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, informed William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, that Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter had been convicted and executed for compliance with Hitler.

In the course of numerous meetings and innumerable articles, intellectual and Socialist leaders all over the world cleansed the martyrs of the infamy that their hangmen attempted to place upon their names.

Ten years have now passed. The memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter remains sacred, the crime remains as horrifying as when it was committed. The murder points an accusing finger at the Stalinists as the most dangerous fanatics of counter-revolutionary terror. All their activities condemn the Communists, and their complicity in the crime is established by the slanders they spread about their victims.

For this reason it suffices not to pay homage to the martyrs. From their devotion to the cause of Socialism and Liberty, one should gain the political strength to protect the workers from the influence of the two victims' monstrous and cynical hangmen.

#### **HARRY ROGOFF, New York**

*Editor, Jewish Daily Forward*

What is most shocking in the murder of Erlich and Alter by the Soviets is the fact that it was committed at a time when the Soviet Government was seeking aid from Democratic countries and making gestures of friendship to Democratic and Labor Organizations the world over.

When rumor of the execution of the two famous Socialist leaders first reached the outside world, very few gave it credence. Even the most brutal act of atrocity must have some motive. None could be found for this one.

However, two years later, the Soviets officially admitted to this shocking crime, and we at last knew what the motive was. It was part of a policy to begin a war on Democracy, after the war against the Nazis was won. Looking back on the execution of Erlich and Alter, we can now put it down as one of the first steps in the Cold War which has plagued the civilized world since the end of World War Two.

#### **JULES ROMAINS, Paris**

*Famed French Novelist and Essayist*

I am happy to associate myself in the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the death, caused by totalitarian oppression, of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter.

**DAVID ROUSSET, Paris**  
*Distinguished Journalist*

Soviet Russia shall have played a special part for at least two generations. The October Revolution exemplified the social hopes of an entire century. It has aroused the greatest sacrifices and the most violent passions. Scores of thousands of people all over the world have sacrificed their lives for it. Even its socialist opponents considered the Soviet Union as one of the strongholds of world socialism. The disagreements were interpreted as being of a different nature than the social contradictions separating the socialist and the capitalist worlds. Even when the Stalinist regime revealed its true face, both by the accumulation of crimes over the course of years and by granting of new privileges, a strong feeling of solidarity persisted among a great many people. There resides, in my opinion, the reason of the Erlich-Alter case. Those Socialists of the left, those intransigent anti-fascists, despite their previous experiences, despite their most striking disagreements with the Communists, did not, however, consider the Soviet Union on a par with the reactionary and fascist states. When the struggle against Hitler forced them to seek a base of operations in the eastern part of Poland, they were imprisoned by Soviet Russia. Their drama is the drama of their generation and, to a certain extent, of ours. It is also an experience — an extremely valuable experience — for those who, even today, in spite of and against everything, think of Russia as still representing, even in decay, in certain respects a proletarian state. The drama of Erlich and Alter and their death illustrate in a striking manner the truth, seemingly incontestable, that the Soviet Union is in no way related to any manner of a proletarian state, that she represents not only a new form of social exploitation within a framework of a new hierarchy, but that this social exploitation is in the present society without comparison the most cruel and the most reactionary imaginable. This is doubtless one of the most important lessons to be learned from the lives and the death of Erlich and Alter.

**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.

**Z. SHNEOUR, New York**  
*Distinguished Jewish Writer*

The martyrs' death of H. Erlich and V. Alter was but a symptom. Coughing is not an illness in itself, only a symptom of a pulmonary condition. A rash is but a sign of poison in the blood-stream. The doing-away with the two Jewish popular leaders should have shaken world Jewry more than it did at the time. Most Jewish and non-Jewish men, writers, and public figures had attempted to convince themselves that it was all a "mistake of the Soviet police," that it was, supposedly, a case of the Jewish Communists in the Soviet Union being overanxious to bring a sacrifice for their pockmarked deity, Stalin... Now, when all Jewish writers in the Soviet Union are no longer heard from, when all Yiddish dailies, publishing houses, schools, and theaters are closed, a babe in arms should be able to recognize that it is part of a system of extermination directed from the towers of the Kremlin, a pattern which culminated in propaganda against the "cosmopolites," who in czarist times were called simply "zhidi;" and in putting an end to the great, inflated plan named Birobidzhan.

And it would be a mistake to think that this is the end. Many more bitter disappointments await the few million modern *Marranos*, the Jews in the Soviet Union. Woe to them — when the Stalinist regime taunts the entire civilized world; and even more suffering awaits them when the accumulated wrath of all peoples within the Soviet Union will finally explode in uprisings and revolt. The remainder of the persecuted and suffering Jewry will be the first to be attacked.

The publication designed to commemorate the anniversary of the December murder of ten years

ago ought to remind the Jewish and non-Jewish world that the martyrs' death of Erlich and Alter was but a symptom of the disease which is called Stalinism. We may expect countless more persecutions and hardships behind the Iron Curtain—and perhaps even on our side of it. At least we Jews ought to keep it well in our memories, together with the remembrance of the Erlich-Alter anniversary. Better late than never.

**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.

**H. P. SORENSON, Copenhagen**

*Lord Mayor of Copenhagen*

When I, as Editor-in-Chief of the "Social-Demokraten," announced the news of the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, its laconic

form made a paralyzing impression on me. Today, ten years afterwards, I remember these two great international Socialist personalities with reverence. Their fight for the Socialist idea, for that freedom and justice which the Bolshevik state cannot tolerate, has earned for them an honored and enduring memory.

**DOROTHY THOMPSON, New York**

*Noted Columnist*

There is no good talking about Peace as long as states kill their political opponents. Terror is perhaps the lowest form of war, for it is war against the helpless and unarmed.

**KARL A. WITTFOGEL, Seattle, Wash.**

*Professor of Chinese History,  
University of Washington*

It took many months until the world learned of the cruel fate that ten years ago befell Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. It took many years until the world understood the principle they died for. The message of their martyrdom is as simple as it is timely: Life is not worth living if, after having fought the monstrosities of Hitler, we submit to the super-totalitarianism of Stalin.

## ERLICH ALTER MEMORIAL

10th ANNIVERSARY OF THE MURDER OF

### HENRYK ERLICH AND VICTOR ALTER

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13, 1952

1:00 P.M.

New School for Social Research

66 West 12th Street, New York

*Convened by*

Jewish Labor Bund in New York

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Forward Association

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Socialist Party in U.S.A.

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**PROGRAM**

1. Addresses by *William Green*, *David Dubinsky*, and representatives of the Jewish Labor Movement in the U.S.A.
2. Messages from the Socialist International and from Socialist Parties abroad.
3. *Workmen's Circle Chorus*, conducted by *Lazar Weiner*.
4. *C o n c e r t* — *Arkadie Kouguell*, pianist-composer and *Alexander Kouguell*, cellist.