

**O**UR brief sketch of 75 years of Bund history scarcely does justice to its richness, especially in its early formative period. While many Jewish socialists and revolutionaries joined the socialist parties of their countries, rather than a specifically Jewish party, many talented Jews in the Yiddish-speaking world of East Europe looked to the Bund for a socialistic solution of social problems in general and the Jewish problem in particular. After surveying some of the main lines of Bund history, we may now offer some observations in light of what the intervening history has done to Bund principles and viewpoints.

Within the international socialist movement the Bund has pursued an independent line on some issues, sometimes supporting the left and at other times the right in the movement. But its categorical anti-Communist position and its organizational tie to the reformist side of the international movement has in effect placed it on the right. Thus, during the Cold War the effective politics of the Bund was pro-imperialist, despite expressed anti-imperialist sentiments, since the Bund supported the position of the capitalist-imperialist powers. This was apparent immediately at the beginning of the Cold War when the Bund held that the Soviet Union was the greatest danger to world peace. The Bund's position tended to be obsessively anti-Communist by its refusal to recognize that, despite the monstrous distortions of socialism that had occurred in the Soviet Union, its socialist economic base still justifies the reasonable possibility of correction toward a humanistic socialism.

So rigid is the Bund's attitude that the leading Bundist ideologist, Dr. Emanuel Scherer, could refer at the 1972 conference to "our principled socialist opposition to communism in all

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its forms—Russian, Chinese, and Cuban, and others," because they are "dictatorships." To grant the existence of a socialist base in these countries is not the same as endorsing all their policies uncritically. But for a socialist to reject them all absolutely, as the Bund does, is to harbor utopian illusions about the human possibilities for ideal conditions for the transition from one social system to another. It is to pursue a pure socialism in the spirit of the quest for the Holy Grail.

The language of Bund statements is as uncompromising as ever in its rejection of capitalism and desire for socialism, but the actualities of its affiliations are reformist. Furthermore, the Bund's "activities" are, so far as this writer can tell, wholly verbal, and where they act in concert with Jewish fraternal and labor groups, entirely reformist, if not, at times, conservative. There is a certain pathos in the remark of Scherer, in his 1972 report of a Socialist International meeting he attended, that "the problem—perhaps the greatest of all socialist problems ('the building of a new classless society')—was not discussed at the congress." The Bund's hopes are with

### Some Final Observations

By LOUIS HARAP

an ideal socialism, its practice with reformism.

*The Bund's brand of anti-Communism* is one indication of the rigidity and old age that hover over many aspects of its policy statements. Its allusions to socialism have the ring of a ritual remote from dense contemporary actuality. Another sign of rigidity is an apparent inability to adjust to the new situation created by establishment of the Jewish state. The sectarian mentality that goes with doctrinal rigidity is shown in the connotation of disapproval of and detachment from Israel in the Bund's official attitude. It is not the severe and deserved criticism of some Israel policies that is here meant, but rather the lack of any sense of a positive development of Jewish history in the creation of a Jewish state, notwithstanding its serious problems and dangerous policies. The 25th anniversary of Israel article in *Unzer Tsait* (May-June, 1973) coldly points to "achievements," as well as to justified criticism, but the article is pervaded by a tone of reserve.

More serious, even, is absence of

any sense of political differentiation within Israel itself. As a state, Israel is class-divided like any other, as the Bund well knows, and political parties and opinions range from left to right. Bund statements give little sense of awareness of such differences, and almost sound as if Israel and the Zionist movement are a single lump of reactionary opinion and action. There is little recognition of the fact that there are significant sectors of Israeli opinion which concur in the criticisms made by the Bund itself, those opposed to annexationism and discriminatory treatment of Arabs, critics of the growing gap between rich and poor, and advocates of alignment of Israel with anti-imperialist forces on a world scale.

A sign of the rigidity on this point, as we mentioned earlier, was the antagonistic response of the Bund leaders to Dr. Emanuel Pat's suggestion in 1950 that the Bund drop its negative attitude toward Israel, that it should "support forces of democratic socialism" there. The Bund youth leader Chil Spiegel echoed this point in 1972: We should, he said, "support progressive elements in Israeli society." But there is no evidence of a basic change of attitude yet. One need not yield any criticism of the exploitative, nationalistic, chauvinistic and expansionistic sectors of Israeli opinion and policy when one supports those elements in Israel which oppose these tendencies and those forces which are genuinely working for socialism there. They are weak enough without being deprived of more than occasional verbal acknowledgment of their existence.

Rigidity is also evident in Bundist thinking about Jewish survival. The formulas and proposals over the years have remained constant despite the drastic changes undergone by society since the Bund first projected its program three-quarters of a century ago.

Bundist statements show no signs of the need to analyze in depth the implications for the problems of assimilation and promotion of Jewish culture brought about by changes in the objective situation.

To what extent do objective factors press toward assimilation, to what extent voluntary elements? How can Jews living freely in the midst of our own overwhelmingly non-Jewish cultural and environment withstand total assimilation? What sort of Jewish cultural environment is compatible with survival in a society free from inhibiting anti-Jewish activity or pressure? Most immediately, how can one define Jewish culture in languages other than Yiddish or Hebrew? Indeed, is there any future for Jewish culture in the U.S. in English? One cannot fault the Bund for not supplying a satisfactory answer to these questions, which no one has done as yet. But the Bund has virtually failed even to recognize the existence of the problem.

**The Bund attitude toward Yiddish** is an example of rigidity. The Bund rose and had its being for about 50 years in the midst of a Yiddish-speaking community of some millions. But since 1946 or so, that situation has changed. The original mass constituency has been reduced to a small minority of world Jewry, and most of these are of the older generation. Bundists now live among Jewish communities in various countries—mainly the U.S.—where Yiddish is read and spoken by a shrinking minority of Jews.

The problem of saving Jewish culture is thus more complex than it was in the Pale or even in 1939. It is no longer wholly comprehended in the Yiddish language alone—as the Bund seems insistently to assert—but in the many languages spoken where Jews live. Is a non-Yiddish Jewish culture

acceptable to the Bund? Judging from its official pronouncements, the answer must be negative. The problem seems to be presented by the Bund as an alternative between Jewish culture in Yiddish or no Jewish culture. A caution here: the word in Yiddish for “Yiddish” and “Jewish” is the same, *Idish*. As the Bund intends, these seem to be virtually identical. The 1972 resolution on Jewish (*Idish*) culture states categorically: “It is unconditionally necessary that a broad and intensive propaganda campaign be organized regarding Yiddish (*Idish*) which should make clear for Jewish (*Idisher*) society the national-creative significance of Yiddish (*Idish*) and Yiddish (*Idisher*) culture—creation for a genuine and full Jewish (*Idish*) life.”

One welcomes a campaign for the survival and spread of Yiddish as one would do with respect to Hebrew, if the latter is void of chauvinism or the denigration of Yiddish. But the Bund conceives the promotion of Yiddish to be the alpha and omega of its cultural task for a Jewish culture, and it is here that the Bund’s rigid Yiddishism is apparent. If anything is clear about the future of Jewish culture, it is that the problem of its relation to the language (English, e.g.) of the dominant culture must be dealt with. This the Bund not only has not done but is apparently unaware of, except perhaps in its youth movement. Yiddish is increasingly being taught in the high schools and colleges of the country. This is a positive development, but it does not solve the cultural problem for Jews.

It is significant that Bundist youth leader Chil Spiegel actually raised the problem of Yiddish as the Jewish cultural vehicle before a youth conference called by the Bund in June, 1973. “We must fight,” he said, “for a more secure and creative Jewish (*Idisher*)

existence in all lands where Jews live. In that connection we must seriously consider the question: is a creative Jewish (*Idish*) life possible without the Yiddish (*Idisher*) language? And if we decide that this is not possible—my opinion is that it is not possible—then what are the practical consequences of this? I believe that Yiddish can still be rescued and refreshed; and with suitable efforts Yiddish (*Idish*) can fill out the threatening creative emptiness of Jewish (*Idish*) life.” While Spiegel believes Yiddish the indispensable vehicle for a viable Jewish cultural life, at least he recognized the existence of the problem. However, this awareness does not seem lively among the old guard of the Bund.

**Whatever the Bund’s attitude toward Yiddish**, its assertion of the policy of national cultural autonomy seems to have become less insistent in the post-war period. In the 1972 resolution, references to autonomy are a little vague. The resolution urges the strengthening and democratization of Kehillas (where?) and securing their non-religious character. Further, the resolution “considers the principle of cultural-autonomism as a basis for the proper development of Jewish life.” What this amounts to is simply an independent Jewish effort to organize itself for the promotion of Jewish culture.

Gone is the earlier effort—obviously inappropriate for the U.S. and other bourgeois democracies—for national cultural autonomy as the formal election under governmental auspices of a representative Jewish assembly for the allocation of funds and resources for the cultural life and development of the Jewish community. While the Bund may claim that it has continued to assert the essence of the principle, this modification from governmental to

voluntary form is an extremely important change as a practical matter.

It will be recalled that it was on this principle as a governmental and party matter that the Bund broke with the RSDWP in 1903, and this principle was on a level of importance to the Bund with socialism itself. But today, in actual fact, the Bund has the kind of national autonomy that Lenin asserted in 1903 was to be recognized by his party. In other words, no barriers are placed before the Jewish community to its internal organization within the framework of general national life. The Bund’s assertion of the principle of national autonomy has become a ritual, rather than a seriously operative part of Bund policy.

When the Jewish Students’ Bund in 1971 published one and only issue (to date) of a paper directed at youth in English, *The Other Way*, its editorial summary of Bund principles did not even mention national cultural autonomy. The more realistic statement was: “Both Yiddish and Jewish secularism are weakened—mostly because of the Holocaust—but they are still vital to progressive Jewish life, to promote both is still a great and urgent aim.”

The question arises, did the Bund make a mistake in clinging to its principle of national cultural autonomy? Have events in the past half century shown that the Bund devoted itself in principle to the form, rather than the substance, of its viewpoint? Because of its insistence on this principle, Lenin called the Bund “nationalistic.” But Bundists will point to their history as an implacable enemy of “nationalism,” especially in their decades-old struggle against Zionism, and their espousal of internationalism. The Bundist claim, especially with respect to Israel and its relation to the Arabs, is not without foundation. But in several respects the Bund position can be said to be nationalistic. One is its

Yiddishism, that is, its absorption with communication and cultural expression in Yiddish that inhibits the Bundists from perceiving the language situation of Jews in the U.S. and other bourgeois democracies. If the Jews are to be equal and free participants in American life, and not a separate enclave, their dominant language must be English. This is by no means to say that Yiddish should not be encouraged to survive as a second language and one vehicle for cultural expression. But to exclude English as a language of Jewish cultural expression, as the Bund seems to do, has something in common with the Zionist exclusion of Yiddish as a cultural vehicle. In its insistence on Yiddish alone as the national language of the Jews the Bund has not completely extricated itself from the Yiddish-speaking community from which it sprang almost a century ago.

*There is an extremely serious expression of nationalism in the Bund in this country, namely in its failure to locate Black Liberation on the American scene and to place this issue at the center of its program in the U.S. where it belongs in a socialist group. This failure is evidenced in the fleeting mention of racism and the Negro Question, by a word, where it appears at all, in Bund pronouncements of policy. This almost exclusive preoccupation with Jewish issues to the neglect of central problems of American society as a whole is a form of nationalism. There is no article on the problem in any number of *Unzer Tsait* in the past two years, and almost no mention of it at all.*

In the report to the Fifth World Conference, the reporter from New York mentioned that the Negro Question and the "Negro Revolution and the Jews" were among the topics of discussion at party seminars and meet-

ings. But no resolution or even part of any resolution was given over to this issue. If the absence is attributed to the fact that *Unzer Tsait* and indeed the Coordinating Committee are world institutions, and hence not primarily concerned with this issue, except as a "Third World" matter (which is treated in a resolution), then what of the American Bund meeting in 1950? No report or discussion of this question was contained in the main reports or resolutions of this *American* conference. The only mention of the issue was in Dr. Pat's report to the effect that capitalism bears with it the danger, among other things, of "race-hatred, national oppression"—and Pat could here have had reference to anti-Semitism as well as anti-Negroism. In his criticism of the Bund, Pat did not mention neglect of the Negro Question, though he did in passing recommend participation in the fight "for broader civil rights." Nowhere in his report, however, is the Negro Question as such even mentioned.

There is no reason to suppose that the situation is any different today. One might expect more awareness of the issue from Bundist youth sources, but even here one is disappointed, if one is to judge from the English publication, *The Other Way*, which contained a programmatic statement addressed to radical Jewish youth. The question may be more prominent in the actual thinking and activity of the youth than is reflected in this publication, which was probably dominated by the old guard (Scherer is listed as co-editor with Spiegel). For there is no mention at all of this issue in the paper.

Spiegel in his speech before the Fifth World Conference did once mention Negroes in his discussion of "inter-ethnic" U.S. life. The Bund principle, he said, of "hereness" (that is, Jews are at home in whatever country

they live, in contrast to the Zionist view that Israel is the home of all Jews) is an "ongoing experiment in inter-ethnic cooperation." If this experiment does not prove that "Jews and Negroes and Puerto Ricans and Italians and others can live together; if racism should thereupon terrorize mankind—then there is no hope for the world," not to mention hope for Israel; and the duty of the Bund is to help make this experiment a success. Later in his speech he affirms that the Bund must struggle against anti-Semitism no more than against "any form of racism." Spiegel's bare, rather detached mention of a primary problem is an improvement, but it hardly does justice to its central importance for the future of the country, and for socialism itself. A few other glancing verbal allusions to the struggle against "racism" occur in the past few years in *Unzer Tsait*, but no more than that.

#### *What future does the Bund have?*

In all his speeches and reports since the end of World War II, Scherer has made a point of mentioning the Bund's "weakness." In accounts of conferences, no figures are given of Bund membership or of circulation of its press, but only the number of delegates and their home city or country, so it is difficult to guess what has happened quantitatively to Bund strength since the Holocaust.

The organization is now a very small part of Jewish organized life, and, like every organization whose main constituency is the Yiddish-speaking generations, it is probably declining as the older generations pass off the scene. By this we do not mean to imply the discredited old chestnut that Yiddish will disappear in five or 10 years. The signs point to continued life for Yiddish in one form or another for some time to come, with perhaps fewer practitioners.

The task of renewal of the Bund by youth recruitment is therefore essential for Bund survival. The Bund has in fact been to some extent a beneficiary of the turn to Jewishness among some radical Jewish youth. Recently there was a report that the Bund had chapters on a half-dozen campuses. In June, 1973, a three-day conference of socialist youth under auspices of the Student Bund was held in New York. It was attended by delegates from more than 10 organizations, not all Bundist, from the West Coast, Chicago, Washington, Boston, Syracuse, New Haven and New York. A follow-up conference was held over Labor Day at the Bund Camp Hemshekh in New York State.

Whether today's youth will carry on when the present leadership passes on, depends, I believe, on whether greater flexibility of outlook is adopted that is more relevant to the needs of the mass of English-speaking Jews in the U.S., and more specific responsiveness to the special problems of the U.S., such as Black Liberation and attendant issues, Puerto Rican, Chicano and Indian demands for equality, a more progressively politicized labor movement, closer cooperation with non-Jewish progressive and radical movements despite secondary differences, and abandonment of the absolute, undifferentiated rejection of "communism."

A reader of these articles familiar with the policies of JEWISH CURRENTS cannot fail to have noticed that the magazine is on common ground with the Bund on a number of issues, though not all. We agree, for instance, that Jewish life and culture should be allowed to develop freely; that Yiddish bears a great cultural and progressive tradition and a rich literature which should be an integral part of the Jewish cultural heritage, and that study of the language should be en-

couraged. Together with the Bund we reject the Zionist thesis that Jewish culture everywhere should be Israel-centered, for we believe that Israel is only one important Jewish cultural center. We agree with the Bund that the existence of Israel does not solve the Jewish Question and that Jews should struggle to establish themselves as equal citizens in every country they inhabit; that all barriers against Yiddish in Israel should be lifted and freer scope given to the language there; that the annexationist policies in Israel are extremely dangerous for the future of Israel itself and all Jews; that all Arab citizens within Israel be accorded full citizenship and national rights in actuality; that peace for Israel can be reached on the basis of the 1967 UN resolution; and that the ultimate federation of Israel with its surrounding Arab neighbors is a desirable eventuality.

We agree with the Bund that Israel and the Zionists have been in error in agitating solely for the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, while virtually abandoning the fight for equal national rights for the majority of Soviet Jews who will not emigrate. And we agree with the Bund that all activities of the Jewish community should, as far as possible, be oriented toward the achievement of socialism, and that it is essential that the Jews work in concert with all progressive non-Jewish groups toward this end.

However, as our critical comments have indicated, the context of our advocacy is within a different frame from that of the Bund. We believe our perspective on American and world problems to be more closely in touch with modern realities than the Bund, which seems to us still tied to the peculiarities of another, more hermetic society. Perhaps its youth movement can bring the Bund closer to current actualities.

### YEVSEYEV OFF AGAIN

NOT only does Y. Yevseyev have his anti-Semitic brand of anti-Zionism published in the 15,000,000 circulation *Komsomolskaya Pravda* for Soviet youth (see p. 15 of our Sept., 1973 and p. 24 of our Sept., 1970 issues), but he now is published in a new magazine for the politically sophisticated. In No. 1, 1974 of *Nautchny Kommunizm* (Scientific Communism), he has an article, "Zionism in the System of anti-Communism," and his "scientific" credentials are warranted by his being presented as "Candidate of Social Sciences" (Ph.D. equivalent).

Quotations will suffice. Having defined fascism as the "most reactionary formation," Yevseyev continues: "One of the varieties of this horrible product of reaction is international Zionism. Compared to German, Italian, Spanish and all other varieties of fascism, Zionism possesses a considerably more widespread organization. . . ." So, Zionism is the most dangerous of all forms of—fascism!

A characteristic technique of the falsifier Yevseyev is to quote that other falsifier, Yuri Ivanov, whose anti-Semitic works we exposed on pages 47 of our June and Oct., 1969 and on p. 55 of our Jan., 1970 issues. Yevseyev repeats the old canard: "According to the Soviet expert Y. S. Ivanov, more than 1,000 periodicals and newspapers in various countries are in the hands of Zionists."

So, "The international communist movement regards the fight against Zionism as *the* most important component of the class struggle of the working class and all toilers against the forces of imperialism and reaction. . . ." (italics added)!

### STEPHEN S. WISE: March 17, 1874—April 19, 1949

THE CENTENNIAL of the birth in Budapest of Rabbi Stephen Samuel Wise is being widely commemorated in the Jewish press in this country, in Israel and elsewhere. We join in these commemorations—but from our own perspective. Most of the anniversary articles have dwelt on his leadership in Zionism (he had been, though a Reform rabbi, a founder of the American Federation of Zionists July 4, 1898) and in the rabbinate (in 1922 he founded the Jewish Institute of Religion). But we of the secularist and non-Zionist persuasions—how did Wise earn our appreciation, applause and solidarity in his lifetime and therefore in the present commemorative tributes?

We remember aspects of his life that are unfortunately going unmentioned by others: That in 1909 he was one of four Jews who joined with Dr. W. E. B. DuBois and others in issuing the call that led to the birth of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; that he fought for justice for the McNamaras, Tom Mooney and Sacco and Vanzetti; that by his espousal or the cause of labor in many strike struggles he built a bridge to labor and was an honored speaker at a CIO Convention; that among the main Jewish leaders he was distinguished for his active struggle against Hitlerism and its American followers; that he believed in coalitions that included the left and thus was a speaker at the Polo Grounds in July, 1943 at the massive reception for Itzik Feffer and Shlomo Mikhoels and in 1944 addressed the convention of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order; that to the end he advocated cooperation between the USA and USSR; that for being so progressive he was smeared as a communist by the Un-American Committee and such reflectors of these committees as the *Jewish Daily Forward*.

Therefore when he died, our obituary in our issue of June, 1949, pointing to our areas of disagreement with him, said, ". . . we had always recognized a hard core of democratic thinking and tradition that manifested itself throughout his life. His stand on labor and his defense of working men's rights was consistent from the day in 1919 when . . . he denounced Judge [Elbert] Gary and the steel barons during the great steel strike. His espousal of the cause of loyalist Spain, his famous attacks on Tammany Hall and his efforts on behalf of Soviet-American friendship during the last war were evidence of a progressive spirit . . . under his leadership [the American Jewish] Congress very often became a tribune against the oligarchy in Jewish life and the wealthy Jews who sought to dominate the Jewish community." Reviewing Wise's autobiography, *Challenging Years*, Joseph Starobin wrote in our issue of March, 1950, "As a world Jewish leader, he made a magnificent battle to save his people from the holocaust of Hitlerism, in some ways anticipating earlier and more acutely than others what the Hitlerites had in store for European Jews."

We trust that when biographies of Stephen S. Wise are written they will comprehend all the facets of his great life and contribution.