

SOME years ago I happened on a scholarly article on the Bund and became deeply interested. I wrote the author inquiring about other studies on the subject, but his reply indicated that very little had been written in English. There was, however, a large literature of historical and memoir material in Yiddish, for many major and minor figures in the Bundist movement have written their reminiscences in Yiddish. Now in recent years the situation has changed in this, as in so many other phases of the Yiddish-speaking past. The widespread return to Jewish self-awareness on the part of many in the United States second and third generations as a result of the Holocaust and the creation of Israel has led some scholars of those generations to focus their attention on movements of the Yiddish-speaking parents and grandparents.

For we now have three documented, scholarly studies which together cover much of the history of the Bund from its origins down to its virtual end as a European movement after World War II. The scope of Ezra Mendelsohn's *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia*\* is broader than the Bund itself, for the Bund was only one organization of Jewish workers in the Russian Pale of Settlement, though a central one, and the book ends with the outbreak of the revolution in 1905. The other two deal specifically with the Bund. Henry J. Tobias' *The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905*\*\* is a detailed, meticulous, extraordinarily interesting history of the organization from its beginnings to the end of the

\* Cambridge (England) Univ. Press, 1970, 180 pages, indexed, \$8.50.

\*\* Stanford Univ. Press, Palo Alto, Cal., 1972, 409 pages, indexed, \$16.50.

## The Jewish Bund

### Revisited: 1.

1905 Revolution, and is an impressive work of scholarship. The Bund history from World War I to the end of World War II is covered in Bernard J. Johnpoll's *The Politics of Futility: The General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland, 1917-1943*\*\*\*

The history of a movement like the Bund has deep ramifications into not only the history of the Jews under Tsarism but also of the labor and socialist movements in all Europe. We cannot in our day gain a proper perspective on this movement without examining what effect the momentous events of the intervening three-quarters of a century have had on the basic premises of that movement. In the following series of articles we attempt an historical sketch of the movement, together with some critical observations.

#### 1. Roots in the Jewish Labor Movement and the General Socialist Movement

Toward the end of the 19th century the Jews in Tsarist Russia lived

\*\*\* Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1967, 298 pages, indexed, \$8.75.

### A Chapter in Russian Labor History

By LOUIS HARAP

in a huge but restricted area, the Pale of Settlement, in the Northwestern and Western parts of the Russian Empire, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Like Russia itself, this region was beginning to emerge into capitalism. Restrictions on living areas for Jews were increased so that by the end of the century they were in the majority urban and formed, for instance, 52% of the urban population of Byelorussia and Lithuania.

Small numbers of Jews broke away from traditional ghetto limitations of religion and culture and formed the Haskalah movement, which scorned Yiddish and laid stress on Hebrew as the cultural language of Jews. The Haskalah also led its votaries into the cultural, political and intellectual stream of Europe. Many abandoned Yiddish altogether and became devoted exponents of secular Russian literature. Many of these assimilated intellectuals became socio-political radicals and joined Russian radical movements.

When the tentative proposals made throughout the 19th century for return of the Jews to Jerusalem crystallized in the organization of the

World Zionist Organization in 1897, the same year as the Bund itself was begun, many Russian Jews joined. Both of these movements, Bundism and Zionism, were material signs of the entry of the Jewish people into the modern world and their participation in the current ideologies of nationalism, trade unionism and socialism in a capitalist world.

The book of Ezra Mendelsohn, who now teaches at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, traces the origins of the Jewish labor movement from its primitive, but militant beginnings in the Pale. Any study of this labor movement, however, impinges on all the main economic, social and cultural trends in the Jewish community, and Mendelsohn brings out the relevant connections in this excellent study.

He used to the full the original source material available in the Bund Archives in New York City, which has the most voluminous collection of primary material on the Bund in the world. Indeed, all three books under consideration here are grounded in this indispensable resource, which was fortunately rescued from Nazi destruction in Berlin, transferred to Paris, where it was barely saved once again, and finally reached New York.

Although the class struggle in the Pale was an aspect of that in Tsarist Russia, it had several special features. The factories were for the most part manned by non-Jewish workers, while Jewish workers were mostly artisans who worked in small shops. Cigarette and match factories were worked by Jews, but otherwise factory owners, even if they were Jewish (in 1898, one-third of all factory owners in the area were Jewish), were reluctant to hire Jews, for several reasons. Anti-Semitism posed difficulties in the joint presence of Jewish and non-

Jewish workers, and observance of the Sabbath by the Jews created production problems, especially if Christians were also employed. The Jews were therefore in the great majority artisans, and formed a majority of all artisans in the Pale. They were tailors, weavers, shoemakers, carpenters, bakers, butchers, bristle-makers, and many more. By 1898, however, 20% of all factory workers in the Pale were Jewish. The Jewish artisans worked and lived under frightful conditions. Their work-day was 16 to 18 hours; pay was desperately low; they were housed in terrible, crowded slums.

It is no wonder, then, that Jews began to organize in primitive ways at first to fight for remedies. Over the next few decades, hundreds of thousands simply moved physically out of this intolerable oppression and squalor by emigrating to the United States. Those who remained behind participated in the ubiquitous strike movement. While the earliest strikes, we know, occurred in Vilna and Bialystok in the 1870's and early 1880's, these beginnings are still obscure. But by the 1880's socialist propaganda had already begun to penetrate the Pale, and socialist intellectuals were at work. "An organized labor movement," writes Mendelsohn, "... developed only when the Jewish socialists among the intelligentsia had established contact with the proletariat."

**Jewish workers had a head start** over the non-Jewish because they were already organized in artisan guilds, which were several centuries old. With the intensification of class struggle (with Jews on both sides of the class division) and the entry of socialist intellectuals into the arena, the guilds were supplemented by forms of organization better adapted to an

industrial society. The workers formed "kassy," self-help groups which provided strike funds as well as welfare and cultural services, and which finally developed into a primitive form of labor union. This movement was as yet limited to a small sector of the Jewish working class.

In the 1880's and early 1890's, Jewish radical intellectuals organized study "circles," whose aim was to train cadres of workers who would be converted to the revolutionary movement and become its exponents among the workers. The circles also were a form of adult education in science, Russian literature, and finally in revolutionary ideas. Large numbers of workers regarded the circles as an educational institution and let revolutionism go, and some emigrated after receiving a broad education.

By the 1890's, however, it became evident that the circle program was not achieving its goal. George Plekhanov, most influential revolutionary of the period, observed in 1892 that "History is not made in the circles, but among the masses. . . . If the Russian socialists wish to play an active role in the coming Russian revolution they must become agitators."

Under his influence a profound change was effected—the focus of activity was shifted from education alone to agitation among the masses. Two pamphlets published in 1894 by Bundist pioneer leaders Samuel Gozhansky (*A Letter to Agitators*) and Arkady Kremer (*On Agitation*, written with the help of Julius Martov, later Menshevik leader) exerted great influence in spreading the new strategy not only among Jews but among the revolutionaries of all Russia.

While the educational circles continued, effort was concentrated on the

heightening of class consciousness among the workers by mass organization and struggle for the improvement of wages and working conditions. Mendelsohn observes that "the program of agitation formulated in Vilna [by Gozhansky and Kremer] was the greatest single contribution the Jewish Marxists of Byelorussia-Lithuania made to the general social democratic movement."

A most important consequence in the Jewish community of this new policy was the active, conscious participation by socialist intellectuals in the mass movement and in the creation of a full-blown Jewish organized labor movement. The way was not easy, however. Some serious opposition to domination of the workers' movement by intellectuals was met, but did not basically affect the progress of the movement. One further momentous consequence of the new policy was the realization by intellectuals that communication in Yiddish was an elementary, essential condition of agitation among the Yiddish-speaking workers. The intellectuals had tended to feel contemptuous toward the "jargon," as Yiddish was then invidiously called, and some even did not know Yiddish. Not only did they learn to read, write and speak the language, but their view of it and of Jewish survival underwent a profound change as a consequence.

The new policy establishing the link between intellectuals and workers signaled a cultural development among the Yiddish-speaking masses which brought Yiddish into the modern world and into literature. This entire movement was the cultural outcome of the basic need of the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe to defend themselves against the aggrandizement of Jewish employers under the pressures of the open market.

Socialist intellectuals and writers

communicated with the masses in Yiddish; a press, pamphlets and books in Yiddish provided educational and agitational material for the movement; libraries of Yiddish books were attached to the "kassy" and other groups, and proved a substantial medium for enlightenment of the workers. Much of this activity was illegal and had to be conducted clandestinely.

The new policy of agitation proved highly successful. As the 1890's wore on, the strike movement of the Jewish workers gained such momentum that even the less advanced and less organized workers were drawn into it. The influence of the élite "kassy" extended far beyond their own numbers. (A moving picture of the strike movement of the time can be found in the I. L. Peretz story, "A Weaver's Love," published in 1897, and in English translation in *Jewish Life* for March, 1954, reprinted in *"Jewish Life" Anthology*, pp. 13-29.)

Gozhansky had discovered that a law passed under Catherine II limited the working day to 12 hours, and this gave legal sanction to a widespread campaign for a 12-hour day, much as the agitation for an eight-hour day was then a rallying issue in the U.S. This became the central issue of the Jewish labor movement.

The Jewish workers' movement in Russia at this time was so much farther advanced than the non-Jewish, thanks to the "kassy," that Plekhanov was prompted to declare in 1896 that, "From a certain point of view the Jewish workers may be considered the vanguard of the labor army in Russia." (Plekhanov, however, became an intense enemy of the Bund later; in 1900, Lenin was led to characterize one of Plekhanov's anti-Bund speeches as "indecent.")

Since most Jewish workers were em-

ployed in small shops, their strikes usually embraced few workers and their gains were precarious. Ber Borokhov, a founder of Socialist Zionism, once estimated that during this period two-thirds of the strikes in which Jewish workers engaged had 50 or fewer strikers. Sometimes Jewish employers would exploit antagonism of Jew and Christian by hiring Christian strike-breakers. But there were also occasions of cooperation of Jewish and non-Jewish workers in strikes.

"The Jewish labor movement," writes Tobias, "was not the creature of the Bund. The Bund and the workers' movement were not synonymous." What the Bund did, however, was to endow that part of the labor movement under its influence with a sense of direction and political awareness.

Tobias provides us with the most comprehensive account in English of the origins and development of the Bund until the end of the 1905 Revolution and he elucidates the relationship of the Bund to contemporary movements such as Zionism and to contemporary political parties. While Tobias is distinctly friendly toward the Bund, he is not uncritical. He leads the reader skillfully from the early unfocused fusion of radicalism and nationalism to the sharp definition of its position in 1903, and to the Bund's creditable performance in the 1905 Revolution.

## 2. From Formation, 1897, to Crisis, 1903

The birthplace and center of the Jewish labor movement was Vilna, which, not fortuitously, was also the cultural and religious center of East European Jewry—"the Jerusalem of Lithuania," as it was called. It was here that the socialists and intellectuals who founded the Bund were cen-

tered. In the early 1890's, they had formed the Jewish Social Democratic Party and were ideologically very close to the Russian Social Democrats under Plekhanov's leadership. The intense strike movement, spurred on by the socialist intellectuals' policy of agitation, and the cohesion developed in the course of these struggles, in addition to the educational efforts among the Jewish masses, led to the formal founding of the Bund in 1897.

The clandestine meeting in Vilna of 13 representatives from Vilna, Minsk, Warsaw, Bialistok and Vitebsk launched the organization under the leadership of such pioneer-intellectuals as Arkady Kremer and Vladimir Kosovsky, together with some workers and "half-intellectuals" (the name given to those who had not completed their formal education) developed by the movement. The full name of the organization was "The General Jewish Workers Union (*Bund*) in Russia and Poland" (Lithuania was added later), but the group was everywhere known as the "Bund." The alliance between Social Democratic intellectuals and the workers forged over a decade of struggle was thus formalized and confirmed.

The Bund had a secret press, disseminated illegal literature and helped build and give direction to the Jewish labor movement. Although the Bundists firmly believed that they needed a separate party to advance their socialist aims among the Jewish workers, they also fervently believed themselves to be part and parcel of the Russian Social Democratic movement. The Bund tended, however, to reject alliance with the Polish Socialist Party, which they regarded as at best indifferent to equal rights for the Jews and at worst anti-Semitic.

So close was the Bund to the Russian Social Democrats that it was the host for the founding congress of the

Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP) in March, 1898. The autonomy of the Bund within the party was acknowledged, though not too clearly defined. Both the Bund and the RSDWP were badly hurt later in that year by the wholesale arrests of their central committees.

The Bund revived relatively quickly from the effects of this decapitation, thanks to the rapid assumption of leadership of such workers as David Katz, who had been trained by the intellectuals. Essential help came from the Foreign Committee, created in 1899 by John Mill, one of the original 13 organizers, who had slipped through the Tsarist dragnet and escaped abroad. The Foreign Committee raised money abroad and managed an elaborate smuggling operation with which they sent back into Russia numerous pamphlets, leaflets, newspapers, and periodicals. Local Bund organizations carried on demonstrations, strikes and leafleting after the arrest of the central leadership. Within a year the Bund had not only recovered from the effects of the arrests but had even spread to new cities.

From the beginning the Bund confronted opposition and obstacles of various kinds from within the Jewish community. There was an initial anti-intellectual opposition to the shift of emphasis from the circles to agitation. Some circle members, of whom the leading one was Abram Gordon of Vilna, an engraver, led the opposition to leadership by the intellectuals, who were charged with anti-democratic attitudes towards the workers. Gordon and others held that the workers must first be educated before they can be liberated; education, he thought, not agitation was the prime need. This type of opposition, however, could not resist the forward pressure of the mass move-

ment promoted by the Bund, and was short-lived.

*The obstacles put up by the Tsarist autocracy* took several forms. There was, first, the incitation of anti-Semitism and pogroms; promotion of antagonism between Jewish and Christian workers; use of Christian workers as strike-breakers, and recruiting of hoodlums to attack strikers. The retaliatory violence that broke out was at first deplored by the Bund in accordance with the Marxist principled opposition to terrorism. However, in order to guard workers against attack during pogroms, strikes, demonstrations and meetings, the Bund in 1902 authorized the setting up of self-defense groups.

When on May Day, 1902, 20 Jewish and six Polish workers were arrested at a demonstration and whipped, one Jewish worker and member of a self-defense unit, Hirsh Lekert, shot and wounded the new Vilna governor, von Wahl; on May 18 Lekert was arrested and hanged on May 28. These events aroused deep anger among Jewish workers; Lekert became a folk hero and his spirit of resistance has been since celebrated in various literary forms.

Although the Bund then came perilously close to sanctioning terrorism, the provision passed in 1902 permitting "organized revenge" was rescinded by the Fifth Congress the next year. However, self-defense against pogroms and violence against workers in strikes and demonstrations continued to be organized by the Bund. This tradition of self-defense was to become one of the sources drawn upon by rebels in the ghettos under the Nazis.

For a time a threat was posed by the government in the form of Zubatovism, an extraordinary instance of infiltration of government into the

labor movement. It had been the agents of S. V. Zubatov, chief of the Moscow secret police, who had made practically a clean sweep of the Bund and RSDWP leadership in 1898. Zubatov himself had been a radical and a circle member who became an informer and rose in the secret police hierarchy. With his inside knowledge of the movement and its objectives he was able to project a program designed to attract workers and divert them from political activity. He accepted the need to make economic concessions to the workers as a fact of life.

In exchange for their strictly refraining from struggle against Tsarism, Zubatov offered the workers aid in their economic struggles. Zubatov was cleverly taking advantage of an inevitable tendency among workers—"pure and simple trade unionism," or "economism," as it was called. He promised government help in winning economic gains in exchange for workers' keeping out of politics. The revolutionaries, on the contrary, agitated for economic and political aims in tandem as a basic necessity for protecting the interests of the workers and for the ultimate achievement of socialism.

At the opening of the new century both the Russian and the Jewish trade union movements were gripped by economism, and Zubatov was only exploiting a current tendency by seduction of Jewish union leaders into adopting this policy. This tactic was extremely effective in separating the workers from leadership by the intellectuals.

Zubatov arrested a number of Jewish workers and, while they were in prison, converted them to his notion of non-political, legal unions which would actually receive government help in gaining their modest economic objectives. In Minsk, ex-prisoners of

Zubatov succeeded in 1901 in forming the Independent Jewish Workers Party, and this group had considerable success for several years.

Zubatov's agents tried to operate also, with less success, in other cities. However, this movement declined and died in a few years. It failed to help workers in periods of unemployment; government cooperation was cut off by more repressive policies; and the invidious association with a pogrom-chik government finally discredited the movement among the workers. As a result of the Bund's vigorous campaign against Zubatovist unionism, its political position was sharpened and strengthened and, when Zubatovism was finished, the Bund emerged as a stronger political movement.

*In the new century the Bund also* had a formidable competition among the workers in Socialist-Zionism. Although both movements regarded the Jews as a "nation," the Bundists considered the Jews a nation without a compact territory, that is, as members of a nation scattered over the earth, "a nation without territory." The Zionists believed the Jews to be a nation which should ultimately be gathered into one unit in Palestine; otherwise, argued the Zionists, Jews were in "exile" (*galut*) and could never be free and equal members of their society. The Zionists regarded with contempt the Bundist idea of a Jewish national culture in Yiddish as rooted in a degraded heritage.

The Zionists believed that Jews should concentrate their energies on obtaining Palestine as the Jewish state, and hence should not concern themselves with local politics. The Bund, on the contrary, taught concentration on class struggle of Jewish workers against their employers, also usually Jewish, uniting with the non-Jewish working class, for the ultimate

achievement of socialism. The Zionists thought such struggle by Jewish workers hopeless from the start.

The two movements were thus at head-to-head confrontation. Even Socialist-Zionists like Ber Borokhov tried to prove that the Jewish working class in Russia was in a hopeless position because their labor movement was based on an artisan and not a factory class, and hence that Jewish workers were not becoming "proletarians." Another Socialist-Zionist founder, Nachman Syrkin, excoriated the traditional Zionists, who viewed the prospective Jewish state in purely bourgeois terms.

The Zionist belief that all their energies should be devoted to realization of a Jewish home, and that hence they should not engage in struggle against Tsarism, received a severe jolt from the pogroms. The futile answer of Herzl was to negotiate a bargain with the anti-Semitic Russian Interior Minister Von Plehve: the Russians would release all Jews to go to Palestine under a charter guaranteed by the Tsarist government in exchange for an end to Jewish revolutionary activity (which Herzl could hardly control). The labor Zionists, however, realized that they must respond to the challenge of the pogroms by self-defense and revolutionary struggle, while maintaining devotion to the Zionist ideal. Domestic political activity adopted by the labor Zionists therefore constituted competition for the Bund, since both groups were working among the same segment of the Jewish working class. From the beginning of the century, down to this very day, the Bund has regarded, and still regards, Zionism as its major ideological antagonist. The Fourth Bund Congress in 1901 excluded Zionists from Bund membership. Since then, anti-Zionism has been a major Bundist stated policy.

### 3. *The Bund versus Lenin*

Perhaps the most decisive event in the entire history of the Bund occurred in 1903, when the Bund withdrew from the RSDWP. By this act the Bund crystallized and confirmed its program and objectives for its entire existence.

The Bundist approach to the Jews as a "nation without territory" emerged gradually. The founding intellectuals were in fact assimilated Jews who did not even know Yiddish. It was only after revolutionary activity made it obvious that Yiddish must be the vehicle of revolutionary propaganda and agitation among the Jewish workers that the national character of Jewish culture and Yiddish was borne in upon them. It was Julius Martov (born I. O. Tserdobaum), who in 1895 urged Jewish leaders and agitators after May Day in Vilna that the Jewish working class must fight for liberation, and "that our aim, the aim of the Jewish Social Democrats who are active among the Jews, is to build a special Jewish workers' organization that will educate the Jewish proletariat and lead it in the struggle for economic, civic and political rights." This speech was later to be called the "turning point" of the Bund. Ironically enough, less than a decade later, Martov became an opponent of the Bund's conception of national cultural autonomy.

When the Austrian Social Democrats, led by Karl Renner and others, in 1899 advanced the theory of national cultural autonomy for the various scattered nationalities in the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire (Germans, Czechs, Poles, Jews, etc.), the Bund adapted this theory to its own situation in Russia and Poland. The Jews of Russia and Poland were scattered throughout the Pale of Set-

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## Jewish Bund

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tlement (not to mention the world as a whole!) without a contiguous, compact territorial base. For several years the Bund leaders debated this question until they considered the time ripe for its adoption in 1903 at the Fifth Bund Congress, when they advanced the doctrine of national cultural autonomy as one of the two purposes of the organization. The other aim was devotion to proletarian revolution in all Russia in conjunction with all Russian workers.

What precisely is national cultural autonomy? Some revolutionaries denied that the Jews were a nationality, asserting that they were only a religious group. Most revolutionary theorists, in fact, including some Bundists in pre-1903 days, believed that the future of the Jews lay in total assimilation, so that a program of cultural nationalism was excluded. For the Jews, they thought, would cease to be a distinct group as soon as they were granted full social and political equality as individuals.

The Bund was not so sanguine, however, and held that the prospect for their East European constituency was retention of a distinct national character. The Bund insisted that the Jews be granted full national cultural rights and saw itself as the agency for making good this guarantee. The scheme would be somewhat as follows: over-all economic, political and social policy for the entire people of the state would be determined by the people as a whole; all Jews who wished to be considered such would be registered over the entire country regardless of where they live, since Jewish nationality is non-territorial; the Jews are assigned an autonomous role by the state to cultivate and develop Jewish culture through repre-

sentatives elected by them into an assembly which would manage their cultural affairs independently of the state with funds allocated to it by the state; the Bund considered Yiddish as the Jewish national language; and last, the autonomous cultural assemblies of all nationalities would be organized into a federation of autonomous nationalities.

The Bund conception was spelled out in its newspaper, *Lebnsfragen* in 1916 as follows: "Each country undertakes certain cultural work; it builds schools, high schools, teachers' colleges, museums, libraries, and the like. Should we achieve national cultural autonomy, this work would be turned over to each of the nationalities. Let us assume a country is composed of many nationalities—for example: Poles, Lithuanians and Jews. Each of these nationalities would have to build a separate organization. All citizens on the lists of each nationality would have to join a special organization which would organize cultural assemblies in each area and a general cultural assembly for the country as a whole. These special assemblies would have special financial powers, each nationality would have the right to tax its own members, or the state would distribute, from its general fund, a proportionate part of each cultural budget to each nationality.

"Each citizen of the land would belong to one of these nationality groups; but the question of which nationality organization he should join would be a matter of personal choice, and no one would have any control over his decision. These autonomous organizations would work within the framework of general laws passed by the parliament of the country; but in their own sphere they would be autonomous, and none of them would have the right to interfere in the affairs of the other."

The Bundists came to the Second RSDWP Congress in 1903 with the mandate from their own Fifth Congress not to compromise on national cultural autonomy. At the RSDWP meeting the Bund then proposed that the party be a federation of national parties, of which the Bund was to be an autonomous, separate party. But the Bund was alone on this position in a party dominated by Lenin and Martov, who were jointly editors of *Iskra* and had been polemicizing with the Bund on this issue in that journal. The *Iskra* group, headed by Lenin, held that the revolutionary tasks of the Russian party required one centralized, integrated party and that federation would fatally hinder the aims of the revolutionary proletariat.

**This centralization did not mean,** Lenin held, that the Bund would have no autonomy at all. On the contrary, the Bund had been granted autonomy by the First Congress in response to special linguistic and cultural conditions for winning over the Jewish proletariat. The Bund could therefore have autonomy and still operate under general party rules in a unified party. In order to show that Jews themselves favored Lenin's view, a dozen Jewish delegates at the Congress came out in support of Lenin's program of a centrally organized party incompatible with the Bund's conception of federation.

When the Bund proposal came up for a vote, only the Bund delegates voted in favor. They explained therefore that they must withdraw from the RSDWP under the mandate they had received from their own conference. As they left, Bund leader Vladimir Medem records, "We felt much as if a piece of flesh was being torn from a living body." The Bund's departure was momentous for the

RSDWP itself. In the ensuing debate over membership rules, in which Martov led the opposition to Lenin's proposal, the Bund would have voted in favor of the Martov group, thus giving it a majority. But after the Bund left, Martov was in the minority (Mensheviks) and Lenin's majority (Bolsheviks) won approval for his concept of party membership.

In Lenin's view, the Bund was nationalistic because he held that it subordinated the interests of the Russian working class as a whole, irrespective of nationality, to what it conceived to be the national interests of the Jews. However, Lenin was quite aware that the specific character of the Jewish working class required special approaches. He had published an article in Feb., 1903, critical of the Bund's claim to be an "independent political party." However, he reiterated that the "autonomy" granted to the Bund by the RSDWP "gave the Jewish labor movement all it needed." He itemized these autonomous powers: "Propaganda and agitation in Yiddish, its own literature and congresses, permission to advance special demands in accordance with the common Social-Democratic program, and satisfaction of local needs and demands arising out of the peculiarities of Jewish life." But in every other way, he insisted, "there must be complete fusion with the Russian proletariat, in the interests of Russia as a whole."

This arrangement, he added, affords guarantees against "steam-rolling" on all specifically Jewish matters," while at the same time, "on all matters relating to the fight against Tsarism . . . we must act as a single and centralized organization . . . without distinctions of language or nationality, a proletariat where unity is cemented by having constantly to solve problems of theory and practice, of tactics and organization, in common." Effect-

tiveness would be weakened by having separate organizations, "each along its own track."

*Were the Jews after all a "nationality"?* Like so many Marxists at this time, Lenin believed, following Kautsky, that Jews under emancipation and political liberty would become assimilated and that assimilation is the genuinely democratic solution to the Jewish Question. The Bund program he regarded as retrogressive, divisive, separatistic, destructive of working class unity.

Scrutiny of the evidence shows some unclarity on whether Lenin thought the Jews to be a nationality. Indeed, within a single paragraph of his important 1913 essay, "Critical Comments on the National Question," Lenin calls the Jews both a "nation" and a "caste." In Russia, he wrote, the Jews are "the most oppressed and persecuted nation"; they are "forcibly" kept "in the position of a caste." But in countries where Jews are emancipated, they "are not regarded as a caste." We cannot take as accurate and scientific his usage of "nation" in this passage; whatever Lenin thought of the Jews, he did not consider them a nation in any sense, and his usage in this passage is loose. At most Lenin at times regarded the Jews as a "nationality."

He shared the prevailing view among European Social Democrats that, while Jews under oppression might be differentiated from others, they shed their language and cultural traits after emancipation, become assimilated and lose their "national" character. Even Otto Bauer, theorist of national cultural autonomy, refused to grant Jews a national character because, although they form a "nation" while oppressed because they then have, according to his definition, a "community of fate," they

lose their national character under capitalism because the inevitable effect upon them of the free market is assimilation. All the more will Jews lose their national character under socialism because, wrote Lenin, "the national program of the Marxists" demands abolition of all privileges for any language or national culture. Under these conditions the process of assimilation begun under advanced capitalism will continue "like a mill which grinds up national distinctions." Since the Bund hampered the assimilative tendency, which Lenin regarded as "progressive," the Bund was regarded as reactionary.

He assaulted the concept of "national culture" advanced by the Bund as "a slogan of the Rabbis and the bourgeoisie, a slogan of our enemies." He objected to what he considered the absence of any class content to the Bund's promotion of national culture; it was, he said, an "extra-class culture." He contrasted the Bund concept with the "international culture of democracy and of the world working class movement." This does not mean, he said, that proletarian culture has no national form. For, he added, "we take *from every* national culture *only* its democratic and socialist elements, we take them *only* and *absolutely* as a counterbalance to bourgeois culture, to the bourgeois nationalism of every nation." There are "two national cultures in every national culture," each expressing the outlook and aspirations of its class, and a revolutionary should adhere to and promote the culture of the working class of its nationality. By advocating an undifferentiated concept of "Jewish culture," he maintained, the Bund was in effect advancing the cause of the class enemy, the bourgeoisie, and thus far weakening the cause of the working class.

*(To be continued)*

## Affirmative Action . . .

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now being Black. Of course, when you realize that 80% of building trade jobs are gotten without apprenticeships, it becomes apparent that we are talking about a possible 3% of the jobs.

It is also true that in the field of education, where doors have been opened for Blacks, there are now 727,000 Blacks in colleges compared to 370,000 in 1967. High school graduates between the ages of 20 and 29 have increased to 65% from 54% in this five-year period. Dropouts in ages between 14 and 24 years have declined from 22.8% to 17.5%. We also, however, must recognize that, in addition to the external factors helping to create this situation, the Blacks have sacrificed and fought for these educational opportunities, in the same way that Jewish families have had to do in the past.

But even these improvements are not indicative of the over-all situation. The statistics compare the relative position of blacks and whites since 1967. The figures show that in reality the relative position for blacks has worsened.

The median income for blacks fell from 61% of white income to 57%; \$6,864 for blacks compared to \$11,549 for whites.

7.7 million or 33% of the blacks were below the poverty level compared to 9.0% of the whites or 16.2 million.

Blacks on some form of public assistance rose from 17% to 25% in the five year period. Whites remained at 5%.

10% of blacks were unemployed compared with 5% of whites. But worst of all, teen-age Black unemployment rose from 26.3% to 33.5%. (These census data are cited from

the *N.Y. Times*, July 23, 1973.)

In addition, when we realize that perhaps 90% of the violence perpetrated by blacks is on other blacks rather than whites, and that drug addiction is reaching dangerous levels among blacks in the big cities, we can hardly take the position that all's well and we need no longer be concerned.

But that seems to be the basic question in the Jewish community. Why should we Jews be more concerned than white Christians? Why Black/Jewish relations?

First, I wish to state my own feelings that personal guilt and atonement are not the issue. I do accept the fact that racism is institutionalized and it has been inbred in all whites (Jews included) in our society and that we need to fight it both in the society and in ourselves.

Second, I do not accept the simplistic concept that Jews or building trade workers are going willingly to make sacrifices by giving up hard won positions that they now enjoy.

But having said that we need to go further. Just as the building trades quota system is beginning to break down the exclusion of Blacks from being trained for good jobs, so, too, efforts (including quotas) must be used to break down educational and professional exclusions.

It is the height of cynicism for Jews to insist on strict merit criteria for Blacks, knowing full well that educational and cultural deprivation has tied one hand behind their backs. It also becomes apparent that "strict merit" is still being used to perpetuate racist policies of exclusion.

The Nov. 29, 1972 statement on Affirmative Action by the Jewish Community Relations Committee of Greater Philadelphia was an expression of this equivocation. On the one hand they state that "the evidence is