

1 *The New Immigration*

Of the three Jewish immigration waves, the second, the one in the decade 1904-1914, was the most decisive. This immigration exceeded the first, begun in 1882, not merely in quantity, but, more significantly, in quality. The numerical difference can be summed up in two figures: about 800,000 to about 1,200,000 immigrants. The qualitative superiority can be attested to by the great upsurge in every sphere and sector of Jewish society during the second decade.

The small Jewish community before 1882 and the first mass immigration—a panicky exodus from Russia—the mental and occupational equipment of the immigrants and their harsh welcome here were dealt with thoroughly by the author in a previous work.* For the purpose of the present work it is perhaps sufficient to recapitulate very briefly the helplessness of this crude and backward mass that poured largely into the new expanding clothing industries, though they were not really people of *sher, nodel un eizen* (scissors, needle and flatiron); and the persistent but futile attempts of the handful of young intellectuals and advanced workers in the immigration to raise the low standard of living of the newcomers to the general American level. The sweatshop, a danger to themselves and a menace to others, withstood every challenge, spontaneous and semi-organized. The schisms and feuds among the radical intellectuals and their utter inexperience doubtlessly contributed to the perpetuation of industrial chaos.

* *Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 1882-1914*, chs. 3 & 16, Trade Union Sponsoring Comm., 22-24 West 38th St., New York 18, N.Y.

On the educational and political sector, the situation was less hopeless. There a small articulate minority could register advances. At the end of the century, the numerically insignificant Jewish labor movement could boast of two dailies, the *Abendblatt*, organ of the Socialist Labor Party, and the *Jewish Daily Forward*, mouthpiece of the opposition; an anarchist weekly, the *Freie Arbeiter Stime*; and the monthly *Zukunft*.

Illuminating as a cultural expression of this dismal period was the burgeoning of a Yiddish literature and, particularly, a vibrant labor poetry. America was its soil. Poetry was a powerful lever in awakening the human dignity of the hapless victims of the sweatshop. As an organic part of the struggle for a humane and decent life this poetry was a uniqueness of Jewish labor.

SUPERIORITY OF NEW IMMIGRATION

The dangerous impasse of slums, backwardness and threatened stagnation was broken by the sudden jump in the number of arrivals that started in 1904 and lasted, with small interruptions, until World War I, termed the second mass immigration.

The beginning of the high immigration curve was a consequence of the pogrom in Kishineff, Bessarabia, April 1903, organized by the Russian authorities to siphon off popular discontent over the debacle of the war with Japan in the Far East. This pogrom, after more than two decades of physical safety, was viewed by many Jews as a warning that it was time to leave Russia behind them.

The succession of pogroms, more numerous and more horrifying than in the early 80's, that rolled over the Jewish Pale in October 1905, timed to the day after the Czar was forced by the revolutionary upheaval to grant a Duma, confirmed the worst fears of those who had left. The mass pogroms ended the short honeymoon days of the revolution and shattered the ardent hopes of the Jewish youth.

The utter defeat of the revolution in 1906 and the subsequent official anti-Semitism and reaction led to a Jewish exodus on a larger scale than that in the 80's and 90's.¹ (The last and largest pogrom of the period was the one in the industrial city of Bialystok, Byelorussia, June 1906, in which over 200 Jews were killed.)

The higher intellectual level and the political consciousness of the new immigration was perhaps more decisive than its sheer nu-

merical weight. Together they revitalized the entire Eastern European society. Every sector, including the Orthodoxy, was infused with new blood; every ideological trend gained new adherents.

The partial industrialization of the Pale in Russia after the turn of the century had opened the ghetto to Western influences, releasing dynamic forces that changed the centuries-old pattern of life. It produced a Jewish working class which, in turn, created a labor and Socialist movement. This new working class was well represented in the immigration. Among the arrivals were thousands of young men and women who had been active in underground revolutionary work in their home towns, had fought in the *selbstschutz* (defense units) against the pogroms, had seen the inside of Czarist prisons or been exiled to Siberia. Transplanted also was quite a sizable intelligentsia of all political groupings. People who had participated in labor Socialist affairs came from Rumania, Galicia and Hungary, too.

THE "GREAT UPHEAVAL," 1907-1914

The impact of the new immigrants was felt immediately. Industrially, they extended the occupational range of Jewish labor, winning the struggle for the right to work in trades of their skill; the rapid growth of the Jewish neighborhoods being a contributing element. But their most significant accomplishment was in the original Jewish trades, the garment and allied industries. There they formed the shock troops in the victorious assault on the evil fortress of the sweatshop. Out of their ranks came the second layer leadership in the round of great strikes that basically changed labor-employer relations. Their vigorous youthful enthusiasm swept the lethargic majority out of the shops.⁺¹

In this short but heroic period—and heroic it truly was—lasting from 1907 to 1914, all major Jewish trades were plunged into grim industrial warfare.*

By their militancy and perseverance, the cloak and suit workers in 1910 wrote a new chapter in industrial relations. Louis D. Brandeis had learned a great deal since the garment strike in Boston, 1907. The famous Protocol of Peace of 1910, of which he was the prime

* For a description of the major strikes, see Melech Epstein, *op. cit.*, chs. 21 and 22.

architect, notwithstanding its naive dependence on inherent goodwill among men, fashioned a new instrument, conciliation and arbitration, to replace what he called the "law of the jungle, strikes and lockouts." Since then conciliation and arbitration machinery—collective bargaining—have become an integral part of modern industry.

However, the Protocol of Peace and similar early collective agreements did not usher in industrial peace. It took another decade of recurring strikes and lockouts before the issue was ultimately resolved, in favor of the unions.

PROSPERITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fed by the vast human stream, the Jewish press grew and prospered. As a labor paper, the *Forward* was the greatest beneficiary, attracting the largest portion of the newcomers. In 1906 the paper could triumphantly announce a paid circulation of 60,000, the biggest in the Jewish field. In 1907, on its tenth anniversary, the circulation reached 72,000. The days of hand-to-mouth existence and dependence on *shnorrerei*—fund-raising—were over. The paper was yielding a profit, and in the early 20's it proudly announced an ABC circulation of nearly 200,000, including a separate *Forward* published in Chicago. The *Forward* building, completed in 1908, towered above all others on the Lower East Side. It housed the headquarters of the United Hebrew Trades, the delegated body of Jewish unions, the Workmen's Circle, the Jewish Socialist Federation and others. One seventy-five East Broadway became the symbol as well as the brain and nerve center of Jewish labor throughout the country.

Jews in New York, similar to most foreign-born, had always voted for the Democrats. Anticipation of Tammany's "small favors" and fear of reprisals by its office-holders were two prime factors.

The Socialist vote in the Jewish neighborhoods was negligible. For years a hundred additional votes on election day were cheerfully interpreted by stalwart Socialist writers as a sign of the "forward march" of Socialism. Conversely, a comparable loss impelled them to seek consolation in Socialist election gains in Western Europe.

The seemingly barren political field started to show green patches at the end of the first decade. And a few years later the Jewish neighborhoods on the East Side of Manhattan and in Brownsville, Brooklyn, were the first to loosen the tight political grip of Tammany

Hall. They elected and reelected a congressman and an assemblyman. Obviously, the two election victories were not achieved solely by the votes of the newest citizens. But the latter were the active campaigners, the doorbell ringers and, what was perhaps even more telling, watchers at the polls.

The Jewish Socialist Federation, formed in 1912, the Poale Zion Party of the Labor Zionists, organized in 1905, as well as the smaller groupings issued their own publications, sent out lecture tours and raised funds for various causes here and abroad.⁺² And while the Bundists, the Labor Zionists and the other tendencies were ideologically poles apart, and kept up a running fight for position and influence, they had a common denominator—a basic democratic attitude and a higher regard for cultural values, both general and Jewish. Labor Zionists worked for the election of Socialist candidates, and they, the former Bundists and the anarchists cooperated in the urgent task of Jewish relief and rehabilitation during and after World War I.

MUTUAL AID AND EMOTIONAL RADICALISM

The new immigration proved to be the greatest single factor in the rapid development of the fraternal movement, that played a conspicuous part in Jewish labor and in the community generally. The Workmen's Circle (*Arbeiter Ring*), for mutual aid and fellowship, initiated by a dozen young workers in 1892, met with a meager response. As late as 1903, the order totaled 27 branches with a membership of only 1,500. However, in 1904–1905, many of the new immigrants began flocking to the WC, finding in it the most appropriate medium for their social and cultural expression. The majority of the branches were formed on the basis of *landslite*, people from the same home towns.

Symptomatic of their radical mood, some deemed it beneath their revolutionary dignity to affiliate with a body providing life insurance, sick benefit and burial. Besides, they were too young to think of sickness and death. And, their attention still fixed on the old country, they formed *landsmanschaft* societies with the fashionable addition of "revolutionary," to support the struggle at home. Called for the most part *Revolutionärer Untershtitzung Verein*, these so-

cieties were also valuable instruments for keeping them banded together here.

Ezekiel Lifshitz, a founder of the large Grodno Branch 74, tells of the relief activity of the *verein* and the difficulties he and a few others encountered in persuading his *landslite* to join the WC in 1906:

" . . . and when one heard of the strike in the well-known Shera-shefsky's tobacco factory in Grodno, the *verein* immediately sent \$500. And when the news arrived that the people there were preparing to resist a pogrom, \$1,500 were sent for the defense group, quite a sizable amount of money at that time when one remembers that most of the members never earned more than \$10 or \$12 a week."

The majority of the *Grodner* were unwilling to belong to the WC. However, "after much persuasion, 28 young people agreed to form a Grodno branch of the WC. . . . The WC sent a charter with the number 69. But it soon became known that this was the number of a branch that had been dissolved by the executive for building a *shul* or for organizing a *minyán* on the Holy Days. "When we heard this, we were shocked. The idea of us radicals accepting such a *posul* number! We were ready to give up. But the committee yielded immediately and gave us the number 74." *2

In the decade 1905-1915, inclusive, the WC was multiplied more than seven-fold. It reached nearly 50,000 in the last year, surpassing the fondest dreams of the founders. Its branches, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, became known as the Red Cross of organized labor. Through the persistence of the membership, the leaders, men of the previous immigration and pure-and-simple fraternalists, committed the order to a wide and systematic educational program that included a publishing house and a family monthly. In the smaller towns the branches were islands of radicalism in a sea of conservatism. Another decade and the WC numbered about 86,000 members.

Culturally, the second mass immigration caused an upsurge that lasted until the late 30's. New vitality flowed into every phase of cultural expansion. New magazines appeared, new literary trends emerged—the *yunge* and the *insichisten*—and many books of a new crop of American Jewish writers as well as translations of European authors were published. The Jewish theater found at last a dis-

cerning audience. Younger artists, headed by Maurice Schwartz, were given the opportunity to rise above the morass of the *shund* (trash) of Second Avenue. These were the "Golden Years" of the Yiddish Art Theater.

The cultural appetite of the youth was not limited to Jewish fare. One could see them filling the English evening classes and the local libraries, crowding the top balconies of the better plays and Carnegie Hall, the summer concerts in Lewisohn Stadium in New York and in other large cities, often foregoing their supper for the price of the ticket.

But all this animation and excitement could not hide the rising dissatisfaction, even resentment, among the more crusading young radicals with the industrial setup in the country, the relationship in the community and the spirit and practice of the trade unions and the Socialist movement. None of these fitted in with the mental image of America they had carried with them across the seas.

It might be added that though the radical sector represented numerically but a fraction of the several hundred thousand young adults in the immigration, social concern and zeal enabled them to project themselves into the center of the scene. They made history in their own small way. And, after all, history is made by such articulate minorities.