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# Introduction

## *The Jewish-Socialist Nexus*

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1890: New York City's knee-pants workers go on a general strike, forcing their bosses to sign union contracts for the first time. 1892: an anarchist attempts to assassinate one of America's leading industrialists. 1916: eight hundred workers assemble in a Philadelphia hall to hear a Yiddish lecture on "Revolutionary Motifs in World Literature." 1919: an up-and-coming labor lawyer is elected to the New York State Assembly on the Socialist Party ticket, only to be expelled, along with four other Socialists, a year later. 1929: a Los Angeles judge sentences five women to San Quentin for flying the Soviet flag at a summer camp in the San Bernardino Mountains. 1947: the Communist Party USA calls for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. These disparate events provide glimpses into the long, complicated involvement of Jews in American socialism, a history in which class conflict, political repression, revolutionary fervor, and universalistic visions of humanity collided into and intermixed with faith in American democracy, striving for economic success, and commitment to Jewish group solidarity. Along the way, Jews redefined who they were, as both individuals and a community, as they joined with like-minded people of all backgrounds to remake American society. What produced this convergence between Jews and socialism? And what were its ramifications? The story begins in the late nineteenth century.

As a distinct phenomenon in the United States, Jewish socialism came into existence in the 1880s with the birth of the Jewish labor movement.<sup>1</sup> The movement arose from the masses of Yiddish-speaking Jews who immigrated to the United States from the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Romania between the 1880s and 1920s. Numbering more than two million, they crowded into America's major urban centers, where they encountered harsh working and living conditions. Long workdays, low pay, mistreatment by bosses (usually other immigrant Jews who had worked their way up), dirty sweatshops, and substandard dwellings provided the ingredients of collec-

tive hardship. In response, many immigrants took to protest and self-organization, building a movement that had, at its inception, few antecedents in eastern European Jewish life.

The Jewish labor movement encompassed an array of trade unions, political parties, and voluntary associations centered in New York City, home to the world's largest Jewish population, but active in cities across the country. Organizationally decentralized, the Jewish labor movement was also ideologically diverse. Within its ranks, proponents of various brands of socialism—social democracy, communism, anarchism, and left-wing versions of Jewish nationalism—vied for popular support. They often differed fiercely and occasionally violently with one another, but Jewish socialists of all persuasions occupied common ground in their desire to create a cooperative, egalitarian society, freed from poverty and bigotry.

The Jewish labor movement was arguably the largest upsurge of activism in American Jewish history. Although we cannot determine precisely how many joined its ranks, statistics provide some measure. A quarter of a million Jews belonged to the socialist-led United Hebrew Trades, an umbrella organization composed of union locals (especially, but not only, located within the garment industry) with predominantly Jewish memberships. The socialist daily *Forverts*, the most widely circulated Yiddish newspaper in the world and a powerful actor in American Jewish life, boasted more than two hundred thousand readers in the years following World War I. The Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle) fraternal order counted eighty-seven thousand members at its peak in the 1920s.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the realm of formal institutions, an untold number of individuals marched in parades, participated in rent strikes and consumer boycotts, crowded around soapboxes, and flocked to celebrations and fund-raisers for one cause or another.<sup>3</sup> How many of those men and women considered themselves dedicated socialists or just casual participants? Historians will never know exactly. What we do know is that tens of thousands of immigrant Jews accepted the leadership of radicals, joined organizations they founded, and absorbed many of their ideas, not so much as doctrines but as “a whole climate of opinion that cemented, both socially and intellectually, a Jewish world in turmoil,” to quote the historian Moses Rischin.<sup>4</sup> In deed and thought, Jewish radicals challenged established customs, ways of thinking, and dominant institutions within the Jewish community and American society broadly.

The Jewish labor movement did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged in cooperation with the general American socialist movement, which, in the nineteenth century, was dominated by German immigrants, the most numer-

ous immigrant group to the United States between 1840 and 1890. Germans imported two main schools of thought from their country of origin. One was social democracy, which had developed a formidable theoretical literature stretching back to Karl Marx. In its broad outlines, social democracy held that class conflict, advanced by unions and labor-based political parties (the relative importance of each was a matter of debate), would lead to the abolition of capitalism through either revolution or gradual social transformation (another matter of contention). The other, less popular, school of socialist thought was anarchism, which, in the German case, grew out of social democracy. Anarchists rejected social democracy's emphasis on practical organizational work and instead proclaimed violent confrontation—not at some future point but immediately—the best method to topple capitalism. Anarchists also differed from social democrats in the ideal society they wished to create. Whereas social democrats sought to harness the means of production under the control of a strong state, anarchists wanted to destroy the state altogether and replace it with decentralized forms of government and economic production.<sup>5</sup> Anarchism and, to a greater extent, social democracy exerted strong influences on late-nineteenth-century immigrant Jews, despite the fact that few of them had any prior exposure to socialism in their countries of origin. (Not until the 1900s did socialism become a mass movement among Jews in eastern Europe.) German immigrant socialists, most of them Gentiles, provided ideological tutelage and, beyond that, financial assistance and organizational models to immigrant Jews.<sup>6</sup> They helped to launch the Jewish labor movement and link it permanently to broader American labor and socialist organizations.<sup>7</sup>

The Jewish labor movement reached mass proportions during the first two decades of the twentieth century, coinciding with socialism's greatest successes in U.S. history. During this time, the Socialist Party, founded in 1901, emerged as the political focal point of American radicalism, encompassing a number of ideological currents from agrarian populism to Marxism to anarcho-syndicalism. The Socialist Party reached far beyond German immigrants. At its high point in 1912, the party had almost 118,000 members across the country: native-born Americans and immigrants, blacks and whites, proletarians and farmers, members of the middle class and the poor. Eugene V. Debs, the party's leader, garnered 915,000 votes, or 6 percent of the popular vote, in his 1912 presidential bid. Socialists scored twelve hundred election victories across the country and controlled a number of city governments, including those of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Butte, Montana; Flint, Michigan; and Berkeley, California. The Kansas-based Socialist newspaper

*Appeal to Reason* was, for a time, the most popular political weekly in the United States, with a peak circulation of 750,000. In the realm of organized labor, Socialists controlled a number of important unions, including the Brewery Workers, the United Mine Workers, the International Association of Machinists, and the predominantly Jewish International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).<sup>8</sup> Such advances boosted the confidence of Jewish radicals. As immigrant outsiders, they understood that they could not go it alone; their ultimate success or failure depended on the fortunes of socialism as a whole. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, many thousands of Jews had reason to believe that a socialist society could be achieved in their lifetimes.

A number of factors thus converged to render socialism a potent force among immigrant Jews: the sudden appearance of a large and rapidly growing Jewish working class, the early support of German radicals, and the general growth of socialism in American society. One could cite other factors. There was the leading role played by left-wing intellectuals, idealistic men and women who established the Jewish labor movement and shaped it in a socialist mold. Another factor was the predominantly Jewish composition of the garment industry in New York City, the locus of the Jewish labor movement. On the Lower East Side in 1897, 75 percent of the workforce in clothing manufacturing was Jewish. Over time, a greater number of non-Jewish immigrants, Italians especially, entered the garment industry, but Jewish bosses and employees continued to predominate. In this mostly Jewish context, the socialist message of class against class resonated strongly. As Eli Lederhendler has argued, Jewish workers tended to believe that "it was not their Jewishness but their status as immigrant labor that determined their plight. They were therefore willing to see Jewish issues as subsidiary to class issues."<sup>9</sup> Yet another factor was the absence of traditional structures of Jewish communal authority capable of acting as a restraining force. Unlike Catholic priests, rabbis lacked any real power to check socialism's strength. Intellectuals, activists, and labor leaders thus enjoyed a wide-open field in the Jewish community. And, finally, most immigrant Jews were relatively young and eager to learn new ways of thinking and behaving, which further worked to the benefit of socialists. For all these reasons, and probably still others, socialism found fertile soil in urban Jewish neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

Although a product of American conditions, the Jewish labor movement evolved within a transnational context. Organizations, publications, individuals, and ideas moved from country to country, following Jewish migration patterns. During the 1890s, New Yorkers helped give rise to the Russian

Jewish workers' movement by shipping thousands of Yiddish publications to their comrades hampered by censorship in "the old country."<sup>11</sup> After the collapse of the 1905 revolution, thousands of Jewish revolutionaries came to the United States and transplanted new ideologies to their adopted home. Members of the Bund, Russia's first Jewish political party, founded in 1897, were the most numerous.<sup>12</sup> The Bund's program combined Marxism with a form of Jewish nationalism demanding the right of Yiddish-speaking Jews to govern their cultural and educational affairs, or what the Bund called "national cultural autonomy." Less numerous but still significant were the socialist-Zionists. They agreed with Bundists that Russian Jewry constituted an oppressed nation but believed the problems of anti-Jewish violence, discrimination, and poverty could only be solved through the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Other Jewish socialist parties wanted to establish a Jewish homeland wherever feasible, not necessarily in Palestine, and/or full-fledged Jewish communal autonomy in Russia, not just in the realm of culture and education (as the Bund would have it) but in all communal affairs. Finally, some revolutionaries rejected independent Jewish politics altogether. In the name of "internationalism," they opted for all-Russian parties that advanced no specifically Jewish goals and subsumed the problem of anti-Semitism under the larger struggle against capitalism and autocracy. Such internationalists (a label that should be used advisedly given that many Bundists and socialist-Zionists also laid claim to internationalism) argued that the removal of legal restrictions on Jews within a framework of equal rights for all Russian citizens would lead to the demise of anti-Semitism. "Internationalists" regarded Jewish political parties as reactionary and accused them of perpetuating divisions between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>13</sup> Whatever their differences, members of all these parties swelled the ranks the American Jewish labor movement and introduced new ideas, all the while reinforcing connections between Jews across national boundaries.

Jews were one of many immigrant groups involved in American socialism, but they played a particularly significant role in it during the first half of the twentieth century. They joined socialist unions, voted for radical parties, and read left-wing publications in numbers far out of proportion to their fraction of the general population. As early as 1904, 60 percent of New York City's Jewish voters—more than twice their percentage of the city's overall population—in largely Jewish assembly districts cast their ballots for Socialist Party candidates. Between 1908 and 1912, Jews made up 39 percent of the Socialist Party's membership in New York City, the party's largest demographic component. By 1918, the major needle-trade unions—the ILGWU,

the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), the United Cloth, Hat, and Cap Makers' Union, and the Fur Workers' Union—endorsed the Socialist Party. And between 1914 and 1920, Jewish voters elected nineteen Socialists to city, state, and national offices, thus consummating “a successful political marriage,” to quote the historian Melvyn Dubofsky, between the Jewish labor movement and the Socialist Party.<sup>14</sup> Jews, in short, formed the backbone of New York socialism.

Few other immigrant groups contained a comparable number of Socialists during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Italians constituted only 3 percent of the party's New York membership, and Irish immigrants only 1 percent. Indeed, socialism scored no significant “material political gains outside of New York's Jewish precincts,” as Dubofsky has found.<sup>15</sup> This is not to suggest that socialism was entirely alien to other immigrants but to note its limited appeal. The predominantly Irish Boot and Shoe Workers Union, for instance, rallied behind the Socialist Labor Party (a forerunner of the Socialist Party) in New England during the 1890s. This alliance, however, lasted only a handful of years before the shoe workers turned in a conservative direction typical of most Irish trade unionists.<sup>16</sup> To cite another example, the Socialist Party's Polish federation numbered less than eighteen hundred members nationwide in 1913, and in Chicago the circulation of the sole Polish-language Socialist newspaper was just eight thousand, not even one-third that of the city's leading Polish paper.<sup>17</sup> Italian immigrants formed hundreds of anarchist groups around the country, but this vibrant sub-culture, whose members participated in countless labor struggles, constituted a small minority within the overall Italian community. By the 1920s, the Red Scare and the upsurge in nativism left Italian immigrant radicalism “profoundly crippled” and soon eclipsed by fascism.<sup>18</sup> German immigrants, the standard bearers of socialism in the nineteenth century, represented the major exception among European immigrants in the United States. Yet Germans ceased playing that role after 1900 when immigration from Germany greatly declined and no longer included large numbers of socialists. As of 1910, Germans made up just 23 percent of New York City's Socialist Party (the second-largest group after the Jews), and the circulation of the German Socialist *Volkszeitung* stood at fifteen thousand, a small figure compared to that of the Yiddish *Forverts*.<sup>19</sup> Pockets of German ethnic socialism survived, most notably in Milwaukee, but most German-Americans had come to situate themselves squarely within the political mainstream by World War I. Finnish immigrants provide a final point of contrast. No group surpassed the Finns in their enthusiasm for radical ideologies. The Socialist Party's

Finnish federation was the party's first and largest foreign-language organization, with 12,600 members in 1913. Furthermore, Finnish radicals developed an all-encompassing social and cultural life fostered in Finnish Halls, a wide network of consumer and farming cooperatives, and a solid Finnish-language press. According to one historian, between 25 and 40 percent of Finnish immigrants identified in some way with the Socialist or Communist parties.<sup>20</sup> Yet the Finns, a small community numbering some 177,000 permanent residents located mainly in mining areas of the upper Midwest, exerted a mainly regional influence.<sup>21</sup> Immigrant Jews, by contrast, outnumbered Finns more than tenfold and settled in major cities close to centers of economic and political power. Sixty percent of Jews lived in Chicago, Philadelphia, and, above all, New York, where they numbered 1.75 million, or almost 30 percent of Gotham's population by 1914. Jews, furthermore, dominated New York's readymade-clothing industry, the largest part of the city's manufacturing sector, and its pro-Socialist trade unions. Jews' large numbers, concentration in major cities, and predominance in a key industry meant that they occupied strategic economic and geographic positions, which served to magnify their already significant presence on the Left.

Jews further differentiated themselves from most other immigrants by their long-term ties to socialism, even during periods when the Left as a whole was weak. This became evident in the 1920s, when the Socialist Party entered the decade nearly decimated by political repression and internal schisms, from which it never fully recovered.<sup>22</sup> In 1920, the year Republican William Harding won the presidency on a promise to return America to "normalcy," a remarkable 38 percent of Jewish voters cast their ballots for Debs, a percentage ten times greater than his overall national vote.<sup>23</sup> True, in later years, the Socialist Party failed to maintain comparable electoral strength among Jews, but the Jewish labor movement's major institutions—the *Forverts*, many Arbeter Ring branches, and the needle-trade unions—remained loyal to the Socialist Party during this otherwise conservative decade.<sup>24</sup> Jewish labor donated large sums of money to the Socialist Party and to myriad causes beyond the immigrant-Jewish world. When the party could no longer afford to maintain its radio station, WEVD (named in honor of Eugene V. Debs), the *Forverts* assumed ownership. When the party decided to launch a weekly newspaper in English, the *Forverts*, the ILGWU, and the ACWA began funding *The New Leader*.<sup>25</sup> And when the party's national office faced insurmountable operating costs, the Yiddish daily once again came to the rescue with a monthly \$500 subsidy. "[W]ithout this help," writes one historian of the Socialist Party, "it is doubtful that the office could have remained open."<sup>26</sup>

African American labor leaders also discovered that they could depend on Jewish labor for financial and moral support. The garment unions readily admitted black workers and encouraged their organizing efforts. At the ILGWU's 1922 convention, to cite just one of many examples, the union donated \$300 to the *Messenger*, the esteemed radical black labor magazine, and praised African American women, who had entered the waist and dress trade in significant numbers since 1917. Such support to black workers, Hasia Diner writes, "departed quite dramatically from the traditional practice of American organized labor."<sup>27</sup>

The ILGWU and the ACWA also distinguished themselves by their innovative approach to unionism. Whereas most American trade unions sought merely to protect the bread-and-butter interests of their members in terms of wages, length of workday, hiring procedures, and the like, the ILGWU (with 88,000 members in 1924) and the ACWA (with 110,000 in 1929) pursued a broad agenda. Viewing their organizations as instruments of social change, the major garment unions built medical clinics, workers' banks, vacation centers, summer camps, cooperative housing developments, and extensive educational programs for their multilingual memberships.<sup>28</sup> For these experiments, *The Nation* magazine commended the garment unions and their "Jewish socialist theories" for giving "fresh hope to those who believe that labor organization is essential to a modern democratic society."<sup>29</sup> Strictly speaking, the garment unions were not "Jewish," inasmuch as their memberships, especially outside of New York City, included a growing number of members from a variety of immigrant and racial groups. In Chicago, for example, Jews comprised only 25 percent of the eight hundred members belonging to the ACWA's Coat Makers Local. Even so, Jews continued to play the leading role. The "active members were overwhelmingly Jewish," and a "strong Jewish labor consciousness continued to hold sway over an ethnically diverse constituency," as Lizbeth Cohen found in her study of the Chicago working class.<sup>30</sup> The garment unions, in other words, retained a Jewish character even as their ethnic composition changed. This corresponded to the self-perception of Jewish socialists as "tone setters" for the American labor movement. In the words of David Shub, editor of a Yiddish weekly allied with the Socialist Party,

[Jews] are better acquainted with social-political questions than the average leader of American unions, they have a broader view of labor politics than the average American, and they are also better acquainted than the average American with the history of the socialist and labor movements in



other countries. Every radical and progressive movement in America will be able to recruit its most inspired and enthusiastic adherents from the Jewish masses for a long time.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, many American labor leaders and union activists did not share Shub's viewpoint. They looked upon Jews not as inspiring visionaries but as troublemakers out of step with the spirit, customs, and authentic purpose of American labor. Such perceptions all too often contained anti-Semitic overtones, but that did not always hold true. Some American labor leaders viewed Jews as simply misguided. As John Frey, editor of the *International Molders' Journal* and an important official in the American Federation of Labor, wrote to Benjamin Schlesinger, the ILGWU president, in 1920,

You are aware from conversations with me that I have an interest in the large number of Hebrew workers affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. I have not been in agreement with some of them on more than one question, but I felt that this disagreement was due to the fact that the trade-union movement itself did not appeal to them in the same way that it did to me. . . . Many of the Hebrews of my acquaintance were more familiar with the various political, social and economic theories which have been advanced for the welfare of mankind than they were with the practical lessons to be learned from trade-unionism and they looked upon trade-unionism as something which had little more than passing value.

I have believed that, if some of the unions composed largely of Hebrews became familiar with the history of trade-unionism, the conditions under which it developed, the methods it adopted and the sure and certain things which it accomplished, this would be beneficial as it would lead them more and more to give attention to the practical considerations so far as their terms of employment and conditions of labor were concerned.

There is something very active and eager in the Hebrew mind . . . a greater willingness perhaps to study and to analyze than we find among some other peoples, and the danger is, and in fact has been so far as my observations go, that the mental activity has been given over more to the speculative than to the practical.<sup>32</sup>

Frey's perspective, representative of the American Federation of Labor's mainstream, posed a problem to Jewish socialists. Jews could remain "tone setters" only for so long. If the majority of American workers could not be persuaded to choose Schlesinger's view over Frey's, then what would become

of socialism? It would either remain narrowly “Jewish” or disappear altogether. Thus, while Jews and the American Left grew inextricably intertwined during the 1920s, this provided no cause for celebration, for it reflected socialism’s overall weakness. Shub, for one, recognized this predicament.

No phenomenon better indicated both the persistence of radicalism among Jews and its simultaneous isolation within American society than the rise of the Communist Party. Inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution, the Communist Party resulted from a series of splits within the Socialist Party between 1919 and 1921. The early Communists wanted to create a “vanguard” party that would prepare the most militant workers for an imminent seizure of power and the establishment of a “dictatorship of the proletariat” modeled after Soviet Russia. The party, in reality, fell far short of sparking a revolution and counted only around twenty thousand members during the 1920s. Around 90 percent of the members were immigrants, and among them Jews and Finns once again stood out. The party’s Yiddish-speaking section hovered around two thousand members, second in size only to the Finnish section, but that figure hardly conveys the extent of Jewish involvement with Communism. To begin with, Jews joined other foreign-language branches (Russian and Polish, for instance), as well as English-speaking ones. Moreover, Communism’s influence extended well beyond the precincts of party organizations. The Communist Yiddish daily *Di frayhayt* reached a readership of twenty to thirty thousand, a higher circulation than any other Communist newspaper, including the English-language *Daily Worker*. Jewish Communists built a network of summer camps, schools, cultural societies, and even a housing cooperative in the Bronx that, all told, encompassed tens of thousands of Communist Party members, sympathizers, and their families. Of greatest potential consequence was the Communist-led insurgency that nearly took over the ILGWU during the mid-1920s and succeeded in gaining full control over the Furriers Union.<sup>33</sup> Communists, in other words, commanded wide support among Jewish workers, including many who did not join the party. Communism’s promise to put an immediate end to capitalism, imperialism, and all forms of inequality tapped into utopian longings and fervent emotions evident among immigrant Jews since the early labor strikes of the 1880s. At the same time, however, Communists introduced previously unknown levels of invective in their battles against the Jewish labor movement’s established leadership, causing tremendous bitterness and unbridgeable divisions. Furthermore, the Communist Party’s blind loyalty to Soviet Russia, a source of prestige during the early, heady years of the Bolshevik Revolution, eventually discredited it and ensured Communism’s

marginality within the Jewish labor movement. By 1930, it became clear that Communists would not win over most Jewish workers, even as a hard core of Jewish Communists formed a highly organized, Yiddish-speaking subculture that persisted for decades. They, along with the Finns, proved to be the Communist Party's most dedicated supporters over the long term.<sup>34</sup>

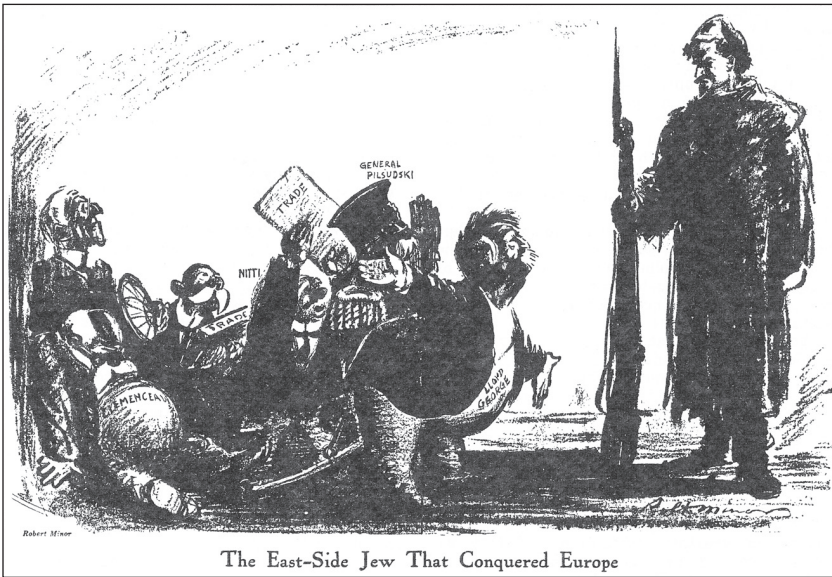
Our discussion of Jews and radicalism has, so far, focused on immigrants, but the story does not end with them. Socialism also held strong appeal for second-generation, American born or raised Jews, and this served to differentiate them once again from other ethnic groups, including even the Finns, who generally failed to pass on radical political beliefs to their English-speaking children.<sup>35</sup> Immigrant Jews were unique in their ability to bequeath a radical legacy to the next generation, whose members played an increasingly prominent role across the terrain of the American Left. The second generation did not displace immigrants altogether, but its growing presence signaled a shift in the composition of the Left following Congress's decision in 1924 to cut off mass immigration from Europe. After the nation's doors all but closed, the number and proportion of second-generation Jewish socialists (in the generic sense of the term) grew markedly into the 1940s.

Differences between the generations were substantial. To begin with, most of those who came of age after World War I did not work in sweatshops or factories. Many, in fact, were students, college-educated professionals, and would-be professionals who found their career paths narrowed or blocked by the Great Depression and anti-Semitism.<sup>36</sup> Of course, Americans of any number of ethno-religious backgrounds turned leftward during the "red decade" of the 1930s, when socialism enjoyed its second great upsurge in twentieth-century America. What differentiated second-generation Jews from other Americans was their disproportionately high numbers on the Left, a phenomenon already witnessed among Yiddish-speaking immigrants. In part, this continued disproportionality resulted from a disturbing rise in hostility toward Jews between the two World Wars. Already in the 1920s, Jews suffered growing discrimination in employment, higher education, and myriad social arenas, but these restrictions grew even tighter during the Depression and were accompanied by occasional, yet alarming, outbreaks of violence. Escalation of anti-Semitism within the context of the general economic crisis skewed Jews leftward. Whereas many white Americans could and did respond to the Depression by moving to the political Right, no Jew could make common cause with the assorted isolationist, fascist, and anti-Semitic groups—the Christian Front, the German American Bund, the America First Committee, the Silver Shirts, and on and on—that gained significant follow-

ings during the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> While the political Right was patently inhospitable to Jews, the Left held a special attraction. In a socialist organization, one's Jewish background carried no stigma. Anybody with talent and motivation could excel as a writer, orator, theoretician, or organizer and do so for the lofty goal of creating a new America, where outsiders from all backgrounds could one day enjoy equality. This was a powerful ideal for children of immigrants, such as Irving Howe, whose roots were "loose in Jewish soil, but still not torn out, . . . lowered into American soil, but still not fixed."<sup>38</sup> Hostile to all forms of bigotry, socialism offered a universalistic solution to a specifically Jewish predicament.

As Howe's comment implies, American-born radicals differed from immigrants with regard to their Jewish identity. Members of the second generation certainly possessed an awareness of their roots in Jewish families and communities, but they viewed Jewishness as merely part of their backgrounds and of little relevance to their political identities.<sup>39</sup> Rarely did they join self-defined Jewish organizations. With the important exception of socialist-Zionists, American-born radicals usually viewed Jewish affairs as a parochial distraction from the class struggle and other matters of seemingly larger significance. This desire to escape Jewish particularity had antecedents in the immigrant experience. During the early years of the Jewish labor movement, activists used to unfurl banners declaring, "We are not Jews, but Yiddish-speaking proletarians," lest they be mistaken for Jewish nationalists. Still, those "Yiddish-speaking proletarians" participated in entirely Jewish organizations, so that their internationalism amounted to a statement of ideals, not an actual break from the bonds of ethnicity. In any case, such negations of Jewish identity diminished over time, often in direct correlation to persecutions of Jews in Europe. After all, railing against Jewish ethnocentrism hardly seemed the most appropriate way to respond to a pogrom. But among second-generation Jewish radicals—American raised, English speaking, removed from Europe—the desire to trade Jewish ethnicity for the international proletariat ran strong during the interwar period. Not until they confronted the full dimensions of the Holocaust did Irving Howe's generation undertake their own reassessment of Jewish identity.<sup>40</sup>

It may seem dubious, therefore, to include under the rubric of "Jewish radicals" people who rejected Jewish ethnic identification. If such "non-Jewish Jews," to use Isaac Deutscher's famous designation, considered their Jewishness irrelevant, why should historians treat it otherwise?<sup>41</sup> A number of reasons may be cited for doing so. To understand why a disproportionately high number of Jews embraced socialism over an extended period of time,



Cartoon of Leon Trotsky, *The Liberator*, 1920.

historians must consider their ethnic backgrounds: the families, neighborhoods, and communities in which they were raised. Countless young American Jews absorbed socialism at their kitchen tables, in the streets, in summer camps, on school playgrounds, and in working-class housing cooperatives where the atmosphere was thick with socialist ideologies. “Socialism was a way of life, since everyone else I knew in New York was a Socialist, more or less,” the writer Alfred Kazin recalls. “I was a Socialist as so many Americans were ‘Christians.’ I had always lived in a Socialist atmosphere.”<sup>42</sup> Family and neighborhood, in other words, predisposed many Jewish children to the Left, even as socialism’s universalistic vision offered a path—an “exit visa,” in the words of one sociologist<sup>43</sup>—away from the Jewish people. Ethnicity thus served as both a formative influence and a target of rebellion.<sup>44</sup>

A second rationale for including alienated “non-Jewish Jews” in the history of Jewish radicalism is the need for flexible categories. The socialist movement did not divide neatly into discrete Jewish and non-Jewish spheres, even though contemporaries often thought in such terms. Organizations overlapped with one another or were interconnected. One might pay dues both to a Jewish organization and to a non-Jewish one simultaneously. Individuals crossed between Yiddish and English, and sometimes Russian and German. A person with no interest in Jewish affairs or the Jewish people per

se often interacted with other Jews primarily. The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, who lived in New York City for two months in early 1917, illustrates the point. Trotsky always insisted that he was not a Jew or a Russian but “a Social Democrat and only that.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, in New York, Trotsky moved in Jewish circles, addressed Jewish audiences, and frequented cafés popular with Jews, not because he harbored a special desire to associate with them but because Jews dominated socialism in New York. (The fact that many of them could speak Russian provided further common ground.) Understandably, Jews and Gentiles alike identified Trotsky as a Jew, regardless of his own preference. In March 1920, *The Liberator* magazine ran a cartoon of Trotsky in his role as commander of the Soviet Red Army, with the caption, “Trotsky, the East Side Jew that conquered Russia.” Trotsky would have surely cringed at *The Liberator’s* label (and not because he had lived in the Bronx, not the Lower East Side), but the cartoon reflected something important about the intersection of politics and ethnicity in New York. The Left and the Jews were so thoroughly enmeshed that one could not necessarily discern where one ended and the other began. Certain organizations contained so many Jews, and so few Gentiles, that they assumed a quasi-ethnic character. The writer and activist Paul Jacobs discovered this when he joined the Young Communist League (YCL) in the early 1930s. Conversations among Young Communists, mostly children of eastern European immigrants, “were so strewn with the rich Yiddish phrases they had learned from their parents” that the organization acquired a “pronounced Jewish flavor.” This appealed to Jacobs, who had recoiled from his parents’ bland, middle-class, Reform Judaism. Whereas Jacobs’s German-born parents scorned Yiddish, he happily acquired as much of it as he could in the YCL. Communism thereby enabled Jacobs to “reject being Jewish without any feelings of guilt” and, indeed, become more culturally Jewish, in a certain way, by virtue of the company he kept.<sup>46</sup> Rigid divisions between “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” fail to capture such complexities of lived experience.

Finally, many radicals changed their minds about “the Jewish question” over time. Depending on events, circumstances, and ideological trends, an individual might shift directions from one extreme to the other. The Russian Revolution had the effect of pulling Jews toward internationalism, as defined by Moscow, after 1917. Alexander Bittelman, for instance, associated primarily with Bundist émigrés until he became a founder of the American Communist Party in 1919, at which point he renounced the Bund’s Yiddish cultural nationalism. Three decades later, following the Holocaust and the Soviet Union’s diplomatic support for the establishment of Israel, Bittelman

touted Jewish culture and the Jewish state.<sup>47</sup> Albert Glotzer, one of Trotsky's former guards, reached a similar rapprochement with Zionism after World War II.<sup>48</sup> Such trajectories away from and return toward Jewish identification recurred across decades and generations. This back-and-forth dynamic reflected a deep tension between the competing ideological poles of socialist internationalism and Jewish nationalism, both of which had made strong claims on Jewish politics since the nineteenth century. Understanding the long encounter of Jews with the Left is impossible without an appreciation of that tension.

Thus, self-identified Jews and “non-Jewish Jews” should be studied together, not in order to collapse distinctions but because categories of “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” shifted over time and were blurry from the outset. They existed as types in relationship to one another along the same spectrum of socialist politics.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Jews populated the breadth of the American Left, from moderate social democrats to self-proclaimed revolutionaries. Within the Communist Party, they accounted for anywhere between 32 and 45 percent of the Central Committee between 1921 and 1950,<sup>49</sup> perhaps 50 percent of the party's cultural apparatus (those who contributed regularly to Communist-affiliated publications and were members of the John Reed Club, League of American Writers, and National Council of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions), and the “great majority” of party members in New York County, where party membership was highest during the 1940s.<sup>50</sup> Many more Jews could be found in the YCL (which reached a peak membership of twelve thousand) and the constellation of organizations—“front groups,” professional associations, civil rights organizations, and fraternal orders—allied with the Communist Party but formally independent of it.<sup>51</sup> The Jewish People's Fraternal Order, the Jewish affiliate of the International Workers Order, reached a membership of fifty thousand at its peak in the mid-1940s, far larger than any other IWO affiliate.<sup>52</sup> And, finally, there was an unknown number of individuals who never joined a formal organization but identified with Communism nonetheless. “[O]ne never needed to hold a membership book to be a YCL or Party member,” recalls William Herrick, an American-born Jew who grew up in New York City during the 1930s. “I was a Communist, that was my creed, my religion, my blood.”<sup>53</sup> The sociologist Nathan Glazer was certainly correct to point out in 1961 that “no detailed understanding of the impact of Communism on American life is possible without an analysis of the relationship between American Jews and the American Communist Party.”<sup>54</sup>

Further out on the left-wing fringe, Jews commanded an even more visible presence in the small Marxist-Leninist parties that grew out of the Communist Party but rejected its authoritarianism and fealty to the Soviet government. These sects rarely numbered more than a thousand members, and usually fewer. The Workers' Party, led by a Polish-born Jew named Max Shachtman, counted around five hundred members, mostly Jews and almost none of them actual factory workers by trade. A Lithuanian-born Jew named Jay Lovestone, a former general secretary of the Communist Party, led a similarly small group of activists and intellectuals, based mainly in the ILGWU. Notwithstanding the small size of the Marxist-Leninist groups, some of them established close ties to unions and exercised influence within broader intellectual circles. They may have been sects, but they were not necessarily irrelevant, and sometimes were even significant, actors in the events and debates of their time.<sup>55</sup>

Yet the largest number of Jews eschewed revolutionary Marxism in favor of moderate forms of socialism. An important part of the Communist Party's appeal in the second half of the 1930s and in the 1940s had to do with its willingness to tone down revolutionary rhetoric and cooperate with liberals and Socialists. The party's slogan, "Communism Is Twentieth Century Americanism," reflected its aim (directed by the Soviet Union) of creating a broadly based, antifascist "Popular Front" starting in 1935. This strategy blurred the line between radicalism and reformism as Communists rallied behind President Franklin Roosevelt and adopted positions that sometimes differed little from those of liberal Democrats. Many members of the Socialist Party also moved toward the Democratic Party. In 1932, the Socialist leader, Norman Thomas, won almost nine hundred thousand votes for president, but, four years later, the party's "Old Guard" concluded that Roosevelt's New Deal reforms, albeit inadequate in and of themselves, nonetheless opened the door to a more expansive social democratic program. Members of the Old Guard broke away to form the American Labor Party (ALP), with the goal of pressuring Democrats to institute a comprehensive welfare state, to increase government regulation of business, and to implement labor and consumer legislation. The ALP's brand of social democracy was considerably more mild than its nineteenth-century forebear, but it possessed real political weight. The ALP (and its successor, the Liberal Party) fielded its own, sometimes victorious, candidates and supported liberal candidates from the two major parties. In doing so, the ALP played a significant role as power broker in city, state, and federal politics.<sup>56</sup> The ALP was not officially a Jewish party, but its strength "rested upon the social base and political culture of distinct New York City Jewish neighborhoods," according to Kenneth Waltzer,



author of the ALP's definitive history.<sup>57</sup> Garment unions donated the bulk of financial and organizational assistance to the ALP (the ILGWU alone gave nearly \$142,000 to the ALP's 1936 campaign),<sup>58</sup> the *Forverts* gave the party its blessings, and Jews provided most of the votes. Between 20 and 40 percent of Jewish voters cast their ballots for the ALP in the late 1930s.<sup>59</sup> In short, from social democracy to revolutionary Marxism, large numbers of Jews found a political home on the American Left during the 1930s and 1940s.

How, if at all, did the disproportionate involvement of Jews on the Left matter? Did they influence or affect left-wing politics or culture, or American society, in any particular way? Based on existing evidence, we can offer several tentative conclusions. First of all, it seems that Jews played a crucial role in maintaining organizational continuity, especially during the "lean years" of the 1920s. No doubt, the Communist and Socialist parties would have existed without the Jews, but would they have amounted to anything more than small, unimportant sects? Could they have marshaled enough money, personnel, organizational capacity, and ties to mass-membership organizations to have been able to mobilize popular discontent during the economic crisis of the 1930s? There is good reason for doubt. What seems clear, though, is that Jews buoyed membership rolls, financed institutions, and granted both the Communist and Socialist parties an important base in organized labor via the needle trades.<sup>60</sup> During the 1920s, when the Socialist Party found itself in disarray, the Communist Party was stuck in near isolation, and the bulk of organized labor was pushed into retreat, Jews kept radicalism alive and functioning.

The literary historian Alan Wald identifies a specific Jewish contribution in the antifascist crusade of the 1930s and 1940s. "What was perhaps singular in Jewish American left-wing anti-fascism was the political form it took," Wald writes. "Jewish Americans called for unified armed resistance [against fascist and colonial powers] among all the oppressed and expressed a sense of sympathy and solidarity with other non-Jewish groups suffering persecution, especially through colonialism and white supremacism."<sup>61</sup> The high number of Jews engaged in the Communist Party's antiracist work during the 1930s and 1940s reinforces Wald's perception. Consider the case of Harlem. Although Harlem was home to Communists of Finnish, German, Hungarian, Italian, and Latin American backgrounds, Jews accounted for the majority of activists involved in interracial work. As Mark Naison has found, "Jewish-Americans provided many of the shock troops around the Scottsboro issue and constituted the bulk of the white administrators and education directors sent in to the Harlem section," and "almost all of the

Communist teachers and relief workers in Harlem were of Jewish ancestry.<sup>62</sup> In far-away Alabama, Jewish Communists played a similarly conspicuous role in organizing African Americans.<sup>63</sup>

Culture can be identified as a third arena in which Jews made a special mark. Jewish intellectuals, writers, and artists enlarged the cadre of cultural workers in the Communist Party and secured the prominence of theater, music, and literature in party life. Furthermore, Jewish Communists and fellow travelers enjoyed access to the art and entertainment industries, where Jews already had a strong presence. Thus well-situated, Jewish leftists infused mainstream popular culture with prolabor, antifascist, and antiracist themes between the 1930s and 1950s, a phenomenon that the historian Paul Buhle has explored at length. If American popular culture became “labored,” to use Michael Denning’s term, then this owes much to the links Jews provided between the political Left and the culture industries.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, the sheer size and political strength of Jewish labor enabled it to play a leading role in social reform efforts. In New York City, Jews stood at the forefront of what Joshua Freeman describes as its unique “social democratic polity”: an ethnically diverse, working-class-oriented political community committed to affordable housing, decent health care, civil rights, amenable labor laws, and access to the arts and education. The ILGWU’s health center, for instance, served as a model of socialized medicine imitated by thirteen other unions serving half a million New Yorkers by 1958. The Arbeter Ring and garment unions provided the seed money for the nonprofit City Center for Music and Drama “to meet the demand for cultural entertainment at reasonable prices.” And, perhaps most notably, the ILGWU and the ACWA built large-scale housing cooperatives, containing some 120,000 residents in nearly forty thousand units, constructed between the 1930s and 1960s.<sup>65</sup> On the national level, the ACWA innovated in industrial organization and industrial relations. As the historian Steve Fraser argues, the Amalgamated and its leader, Sidney Hillman, “prefigured the essential ideological assumptions, programmatic reforms, and political realignments characteristic of the New Deal. On the eve of the depression, the Amalgamated was already a leading exponent of social-welfare liberalism, committed to a policy of state-managed capitalism and to the distributive reforms suggested by Keynesian monetary and fiscal theory. Moreover, it had established working relationships with that broader network of liberal businessmen, scientific management technocrats, lawyers, economists, and social workers, and Progressive political reformers which functioned as a kind of shadow government until it actually assumed power during the ‘second’ New Deal.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Hill-

man served as President Roosevelt's primary adviser on labor issues. Clearly, much more research is needed, but these examples suggest ways in which Jews exercised specific influences on the development of the American Left and American society more broadly.

*Jewish Radicals* comes to an end in the 1950s. This was a decade of crisis for American socialism, when memberships dwindled and leftist ideologies lost their appeal amid renewed economic prosperity, the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the aftermath of Soviet totalitarianism and Nazism. By this time, the majority of American Jews had moved into the middle class, a process that contributed to political deradicalization. Yet the story of Jewish radicalism continued beyond the scope of the present volume. Even during the 1950s, sufficient numbers of Jews retained old affiliations and sympathies so as to provide a bridge to the next generation of radical Jews who appeared in the 1960s.<sup>67</sup> The New Left may be considered a legacy—tenuous in some instances, direct in others—handed down by earlier generations going back to the founding of the Jewish labor movement in the 1880s.<sup>68</sup>

This book attempts to uncover the increasingly remote voices of immigrant Jewish radicals and their children. The documents collected here reflect various perspectives: those of Jews and Gentiles, leaders and rank-and-file activists, outside observers and insiders, and radicals of all sorts. The book's geographic scope stretches from Los Angeles to Soviet Russia, New York to British Mandatory Palestine. The events encompass the obscure and the well-known. Taken together, the documents provide a window onto the world of Jewish radicals. To understand their dreams of equality and happiness for all, to appreciate how these ideals seemed perfectly obtainable, even inevitable, we must turn to the articles, speeches, letters, proclamations, debates, and recollections that Jewish radicals have left behind.

#### NOTES

1. Individual Jews had previously participated in movements for radical social change but they did not create self-defined Jewish organizations. The feminist leader Ernestine Rose (1810–1892) and the abolitionist August Bondi (1833–1907) provide two such examples. Morris U. Schappes, ed., *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654–1875*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 187–194, 324–332, 352–363.

2. Joseph Brandes, "From Sweatshop to Stability: Jewish Labor between Two World Wars," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 16 (1976): 16.

3. Dana Frank, "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests," *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 255–285; Hadassa Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881–1905* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 131–157; Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 69–124; Beth S. Wenger, *New*

*York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 106–127.

4. Moses Rischin, introduction to *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, by Hutchins Hapgood, ed. Moses Rischin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), p. xxvi.

5. On German immigrant socialists, see Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); John H. M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881–1924* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 9–53; Stan Nadel, “The German Immigrant Left in the United States,” in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 45–76; Dorothee Schneider, *Trade Unions and Community: The German Working Class in New York City, 1870–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Elliott Shore, Ken Fones-Wolf, and James P. Danky, eds., *The German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture, 1859–1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

6. An apparently small number of German-speaking Jews participated in the German-immigrant socialist and labor movement, but they did not form separate Jewish organizations.

7. Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 41–49.

8. Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, pp. 98–226; David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967), pp. 1–42; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America: 1912–1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), pp. 1–118.

9. Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880–1920: From Caste to Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 72. As Lederhendler points out, Jews constituted a minority of garment workers in the state of New York (25 percent in 1897) and the country as a whole (just under 40 percent in 1909). For a discussion of tensions between Italian and Jewish women garment workers, see Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 188–194. According to Glenn, Jewish women expressed frustration over their Italian co-workers’ reluctance to go on strike and join unions in the 1900s and 1910s. Glenn writes, “Typically, Jewish women stressed their own militance and class consciousness in contradistinction to the values and behavior of other groups of women. This was a powerful ethnic myth Jews constructed about themselves and outsiders believed about them” (p. 192). In this case, ethnic divisions did not inhibit but rather reinforced a commitment to socialism on the part of Jews. By the 1920s, however, Italians played an increasingly active role in the garment unions, suggesting that socialism’s unifying message overcame interethnic prejudices.

10. For a longer discussion of these factors, see, Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 6–16.

11. Tony Michels, “Exporting Yiddish Socialism: New York’s Role in the Russian Jewish Workers’ Movement,” *Jewish Social Studies* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 1–26.

12. The party claimed more than thirty thousand members by 1903 and was one of the largest in Russia.

13. Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 90–364, 453–560; Jack Jacobs, *On Marxists and the Jewish Question after Marx* (New York: NYU Press, 1992); Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 3–36; Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 125–178; Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish*

Question: *The History of a Debate, 1843–1943*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1994).

14. Melvyn Dubofsky, “Success and Failure of Socialism in New York City, 1900–1918,” *Labor History* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1968): 363; Charles Leinenweber, “The Class and Ethnic Bases of New York City Socialism, 1904–1915,” *Labor History* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 43.

15. Dubofsky, “Success and Failure of Socialism in New York City,” p. 365.

16. Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, pp. 54–97; Leinenweber, “The Class and Ethnic Bases of New York City Socialism,” 43.

17. That same year, the Polish-language federation of the Socialist Party claimed 1,870 members nationwide. Mary E. Cygan, “The Polish-American Left,” in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 159.

18. Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women’s Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 6. Guglielmo stresses the strength and influence of radicalism, especially anarchism, among Italian immigrants. However, given the fragmented nature of the anarchist movement, the generally small memberships of anarchist groups, the often informal nature of participation, and low circulations of anarchist newspapers (none surpassed fifteen thousand copies), it is difficult to assess the extent to which anarchism enjoyed a popular following in the Italian-immigrant community. The sharp decline in anarchism after World War I suggests that it may have been weaker than it appeared before the world war. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–155, 199–229. Likewise, Philip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer provide a wide survey of Italian American radicalism, but their data inadvertently reinforces the impression that radicalism among Italian immigrants was weaker than it might seem. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, “Italian American Radicalism: An Interpretive History,” in *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture*, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), pp. 1–48.

19. Leinenweber, “The Class and Ethnic Bases of New York City Socialism,” 43, 48.

Nadel, “The German Immigrant Left in the United States,” p. 63.

20. Paul C. Mishler, “Red Finns, Red Jews: Ethnic Variation in Communist Political Culture during the 1920s and 1930s,” *YIVO Annual* 22 (1995): 142–147.

21. In 1920, there were 149,824 Finnish-born residents in the United States. Many more, perhaps as many as 350,000, came to the United States between 1883 and 1920, but an estimated 30–40 percent returned to Finland or emigrated elsewhere. Tauri Aaltio, “A Survey of Emigration from Finland to the United States and Canada,” in *The Finns of North America: A Social Symposium*, ed. Ralph J. Jalkanen (Hancock: Michigan State University Press, 1969), p. 65.

22. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, pp. 99–125; Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, pp. 177–233.

23. Ira N. Forman, “The Politics of Minority Consciousness: The Historical Voting Behavior of American Jews,” in *Jews in American Politics*, eds. L. Sandy Maisel and Ira N. Forman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 152–53.

24. By contrast, “Through the 1920s, Polish-American socialists saw their newspapers and organizations shrink, fold, or merge.” Cygan, “The Polish-American Left,” p. 169.

25. Ari Kelman, *Station Identification: A Cultural History of Yiddish Radio in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 96; Paul Kessler, “History of the New Leader” (Columbia University thesis, 1949), p. 3.

26. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, p. 186.
27. Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks* (1977; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 200; Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, p. 121.
28. Brandes, "From Sweatshop to Stability," 43–48; Steve Fraser, "Dress Rehearsal for the New Deal: Shop-Floor Insurgents, Political Elites, and Industrial Democracy in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers," in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, eds. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 212–255; Bernard Mergen, "'Another Great Prize': The Jewish Labor Movement in the Context of American Labor History," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 16 (1976): 394–423.
29. See document 21.
30. Lizbeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 47.
31. D. Shub, "Di yidn un di sotsyalistishe bavegung in Amerike," *Der veker*, Sept. 20, 1924, p. 25.
32. John Frey to Benjamin Schlessinger, July 26, 1920, Benjamin Schlessinger Collection, box 1, folder 8, Kheel Center, Cornell University. On relations between Jewish labor and the American Federation of Labor, see Robert Asher, "Jewish Unions and the American Federation of Labor Power Structure," *American Jewish Historical Society* 65, no. 3 (Mar. 1976): 215–227; and Irwin Yellowitz, "Jewish Immigrants and the American Labor Movement, 1900–1920," *American Jewish History* 71, no. 4 (Dec. 1981): 188–217.
33. John Holmes, "American Jewish Communist and Garment Unionism in the 1920s," *American Communist History* 6, no. 2 (Dec. 2007): 171–195; Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, pp. 127–129; Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: Wiley, 1979), pp. 305–325; Stanley Nadel, "Reds versus Pinks: A Civil War in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union," *New York History* 66 (1985): 49–72; Robert D. Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue: David Dubinsky and the American Labor Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), pp. 31–53.
34. A comparison with Polish immigrants is instructive. In Chicago, Poles were the city's largest immigrant community and made up slightly more than 17 percent of the city's population. However, only 6.5 percent of the Communist Party's members in that city were Poles as of 1930–1931. Jews, by contrast, constituted perhaps 16 percent of the overall population yet 22 percent of the party's membership—the largest portion of its membership. Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at Its Grass Roots, 1928–1935* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 40. According to a 1925 report by two Polish Communists, "The Poles in this country . . . are more interested in the church than in class-war. . . . All the large Polish organizations in this country are either clerical or nationalistic." B. K. Gebert and M. Marek, "Problems Confronting [the] Polish Section [illegible] Reorganization," Records of the Communist Party of the United States in the Comintern Archives (Fond 515), microfilm edition compiled by the Library of Congress and the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, reel 15, delo 233, Tamiment Library, New York University. In Los Angeles, according to one Communist source, 90 percent of the Communist Party was Jewish in 1929. Nathan Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), p. 221.

35. “The differences in the development of Jewish and Finnish communism were significant in each group’s efforts to maintain a radical political culture in an English-speaking context. For the Finns, the identity of radical politics with ethnicity made it difficult to maintain the strength of their culture into the next generation. For the Jews, radical politics became an expression of ethnicity and thus helped define ethnic identity even among English-speaking working-class Jews during the latter part of the 1930s. . . . The Finnish-American Communist culture was unable to pass on the political beliefs and values of the Communist movement to the English-speaking generations; the relationship between Finnish language and radicalism seemed too tight.” Mishler, “Red Finns, Red Jews,” pp. 148–149.

36. Thus, Harvey Klehr writes, “Many Jewish teachers, social workers, and office workers, facing the double handicap of discrimination and the Depression, were attracted to the CPUSA.” Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), p. 40. Also see Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 141–160.

37. Henry Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 125–154; Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 428–464; Beth Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

38. Irving Howe interview with Grace Schulman, Feb. 10, 1977, printed in *Society* 45 (2008): 355.

39. Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 27–100.

40. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East Europeans to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 255.

41. Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (Boston: Alyson, 1968), pp. 25–41.

42. Alfred Kazin, *Starting Out in the Thirties* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), p. 4.

43. Zygmunt Bauman, “Exit Visas and Entry Tickets: Paradoxes of Jewish Assimilation,” *Telos* 77 (1988): 45–77.

44. Arthur Liebman, “The Ties That Bind: Jewish Support for the Left in the United States,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (Dec. 1976): 285–321.

45. Quoted in Robert Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976), p. 189.

46. See document 5.

47. See document 65.

48. See document 64.

49. The exception was 1940, when the percentage fell to 23 percent. Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, pp. 45–46.

50. Alan M. Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 180; Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*, p. 221.

51. Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*, p. 220.

52. This amounted to 25 percent of the IWO's total membership.
53. William Herrick, *Jumping the Line: The Adventures and Misadventures of an American Radical* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 1998), p. 78.
54. Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*, p. 131.
55. Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey through the "American Century"* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1994), pp. 150–213; Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999), pp. 105–140.
56. New York's electoral laws permitted more than one party to endorse the same candidate, thus allowing a voter to choose a third party without "throwing away" his or her vote.
57. Kenneth Waltzer, "The American Labor Party: Third Party Politics in New Deal–Cold War New York, 1936–1954" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1977), p. 182.
58. Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue*, p. 156.
59. Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation Jews in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 221.
60. Referring to the Trade Union Educational League, a pro-Communist organization led by the union organizer William Z. Foster, James Barrett writes, "The TUEL built its strongest and most durable movement in the needle trades—the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), as well as the capmakers' union, the fur workers' union, and other smaller unions." James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 126.
61. Wald, *Trinity of Passion*, pp. 181–182.
62. Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Great Depression* (New York: Grove, 1985), p. 321.
63. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 16, 25, 48, 61–62, 128–129.
64. Paul Buhle, *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture* (London: Verso, 2004); Wald, *Trinity of Passion*, pp. 1–45, 74–145, 176–257. Unlike Buhle and Wald, Denning assigns Jews no special place in the "laboring" of American culture; rather, he includes them among other "plebians" (working-class ethnics and racial minorities) who made their way into the center of American culture starting in the 1930s. Among the forty names he lists as examples, half were Jews. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 60–62.
65. Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), pp. 67, 105–124, 129–142.
66. Fraser, "Dress Rehearsal for the New Deal," pp. 212–213.
67. Maurice Isserman, *If I Had A Hammer . . . : The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Judy Kaplan and Linn Shapiro, eds., *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).
68. On Jews and radicalism during the 1960s, see Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians, and the Left* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).