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Beyond Internal Paradigms New Perspectives on the Jewish Labour Bund. Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, 31.05.2012-03.06.2012.

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Beyond Internal Paradigms New Perspectives on the Jewish Labour Bund

On May 31 2012, a group of international scholars gathered at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw for a four day workshop on the history of the Jewish Labour Bund. This was the first academic gathering of Bund scholars for fifteen years, the previous event being the 1997 conference which marked the Bund's centennial.

The workshop brought together pioneering scholars of the field such as Ezra Mendelsohn, Jack Jacobs, Gertrud Pickhan and Feliks Tych, but also a number of graduate students and junior scholars. The event, much like the Bund itself, was transnational in its scope with participants coming from places afar as USA, Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Poland and Scotland. Over the course of the four days, it was plainly evident that the overall mood of the workshop was strongly influenced by its setting in the Jewish Historical Institute, which is situated in the outskirts of the former Warsaw Ghetto. The markings on the floor of the main entrance to the Institute (a result of the flames of the Warsaw ghetto uprising) were a poignant reminder of the events of the mid-twentieth century which so profoundly shaped the trajectory of the Bund both in Poland and in migration. Indeed, until 1939 the board of the Bund would meet regularly in a building not too far from the Institute, and this spatial proximity to the history of the workshop's subject matter brought a particularly moving dynamic to the proceedings.

The workshop took the form of a series of thematic panels of papers by junior scholars and graduate students, with commentaries given by senior scholars in the field. In addition, each of the senior scholars gave an evening public lecture, and at these sessions, which attracted wide audiences, the debate and discussion was scholarly, impassioned and engaging. In his opening keynote address, EZRA MENDELSOHN (Jerusalem) discussed the Bund 'then and now', noting that for some scholars of his own generation - notably those working within the labour Zionist tradition - the Bund were a source of inspiration for the building of socialism in Israel. Mendelsohn observed however that today the Bund are attracting interest as a tradition of anti-Zionist critique. In the second public lecture, JACK JACOBS (New York) offered an analysis of the remarkable rise of the Bund in the interwar years in Vilna, where by 1939 they had become the city's largest Jewish party. This interpretation led to an absorbing exchange between Jacobs and Mendelsohn, which essentially pivoted around the question of how we ought to interpret the Bundist notion of *doikeyt* in light of the mass extermination of Jews in the Shoah.

The workshop also witnessed a public screening of Eran Torbiner's remarkable 2011 film *Bunda'im*, which charts the lives and politics of the last generation of Bundists in Israel. The screening was an unquestionably moving affair, not least because it took place in the very city in which many of the film's activists were born. Torbiner himself was also present at the workshop (along with his colleague Yaad Biran), and both took part in an impassioned debate after the screening about the nature of Bundism and its relationship to Zionism and the state of Israel in particular.

The core essence of the workshop however, lay in the six panels of papers given by graduate students and junior scholars. A feature of these papers was a pioneering transnational focus which captured the Bund in migration in a global context. FRANK WOLFF'S (Osnabruck) contribution, for example, conceptualised the Bund as a transnational social movement, showing how Bundists literally took *doykeyt* wherever they went. However, Wolff also demonstrated the extent to which Bundist practices in contexts such as Buenos Aires and New York differed sharply and were very much dependent on the localised contexts and the networks which were established. DAVID SLUCKI (Melbourne) continued the theme of the Bund as a transnational phenomenon, showing in his paper how Bundists managed to survive in migra-

tion after 1945. Countering the narrative that the Bund was simply destroyed in the war, Slucki drew upon the examples of Melbourne, New York, Israel and France to show that the post war story of the Bund is also one of survival. What bound Bundists, he argued, was a shared history, memory, language and a transhistorical sense of belonging. Despite this, Slucki, like Wolff, also stressed the importance of the local contexts and the extent to which they influenced the practices of Bundists in migration in the post war period. The workshop's transnational focus was further developed in MARTYNA RUSINIAK-KARWAT's (Warsaw) exploration of the relationships between Bundists in Poland and the United States after 1945, and also by SANDRINE MAYORAZ (Basel), whose paper analysed the activity of the Bund in Switzerland between 1897 and 1917. Drawing on her work in the Swiss archives, Mayoraz showed that migration to Switzerland was a crucial means for Bundist revolutionaries to consolidate and build a support base for the struggle against tsarism.

In addition to this globalised perspective, the workshop also demonstrated the significance of localised case studies for the history of the Bund. This was most clearly argued in AGNIESZKA WIERZCHOLSKA'S (Berlin) examination of Bund-PPS relations in the city of Tarnow in the interwar years. Whereas the historiography of Bund-PPS relations has tended to emphasise 1936-1939 as the critical period, Wierzcholska's regional case study showed that joint Bund-PPS socialist clubs were in operation in Tarnow as early as 1933. Moreover, Wierzcholska demonstrated that whereas the Bund was generally weak in Galicia, it was very strong in the case of Tarnow. In a critique of traditional approaches to Jewish-Polish relations, Wierzcholska also showed that both the Bund and the PPS strongly challenged antisemitism in Tarnow throughout most of the 1930s.

Traditional interpretations were also challenged in RONI GECHTMAN'S (Nova Scotia) overview of shifts in the historiography of the Bund in Israeli scholarship. Gechtman's central argument was that Israeli historians have tended to overplay some issues - principally nationalism and the survival of a Jewish nation - at the expense of others which were central to Bundist activists themselves - organisational problems within the all-Russian Marxist movement, the co-existence of minorities, a non-territorial solution to the national question, the struggle against tsarism etc. This touched on a thread which ran throughout the discussions at the workshop: namely, whether the history of the Bund is essentially part of a uniquely 'Jewish' history or, rather, whether the Bund ought to be situated in the larger frame of non-Jewish *and* Jewish histories.

The workshop also offered a number of papers which looked at hitherto underexplored areas. For example, MAGDALENA KOZLOWSKA (Krakow) examined the various practices within the Medem Sanatorium in Miedzeszyn, focussing on the sanatorium's internal organisational structures as well as the social and cultural practices which children and patients took part in. Similarly, YUU NISHIMURA'S (Kyoto) paper explored Bundist educational activities in the interwar period, looking in particular at the role played by Bundists in the Central Jewish School Organisation (know as the Tsicho after its Yiddish initials). Nishimura's paper discussed various "school communities" such as teachers (and in particular female teachers), parents, pupils and the distinctive set of core educational values embodied in the activities of these groups. Both Kozlowska and Nishimura showed, in drawing particular attention to children's committees and other forms of self government in Bundist educational institutions, just how central children and youth were to Bundism in general. In the discussion following these papers, Gertrund Pickhan (Freie University) suggested that future researchers ought to take seriously the study of emotions and concepts such as 'belonging' as central forming components of Bundist educational culture.

Two papers also explored the history of the Bund's involvement in the Jewish Labour Committee (JLC). RACHEL FEINMARK (Chicago) showed how in the immediate post war context, older members of the JLC refused to see America as the new centre of East European Jewry, and instead held onto the notion that Jewish life could be reconstructed in Poland. Feinmark further showed how the JLC, in its rejection of the campaign for mass immigration to America, instead sought to save key socialist leaders and intellectuals from their deaths in Europe. CONSTANCE PARIS DE BOLLARDIERE'S (Paris) paper focussed on the JLC in France between 1944 and 1949, and in particular the extent to which it relied on Bundist political networks in Sweden, America and Italy. Although the JLC was never a Bundist organisation, it nonetheless was strongly influenced by the politics brought to it by its Bundist activists. This, argued de Bollardiere, is evidenced by the JLC's inheritance of the self-help tradition, its opposition to communism, its sense of social justice, and of course its commitment to building Yiddish culture.

Finally, the workshop also had a biographical focus, with MICHAL TREBACZ (Lodz) discussing Israel Lichtenstein, the leader of the Lodz Bund, and JORDANA

DE BLOEME (Toronto) who explored the concept of "international yiddishism" in the life and work of Khayim Shloyme Kazdan, the Bundist leader of the secular Yiddish school movement. In an intriguing paper, SILVIA HANSMAN (Buenos Aires) made use of Bundist Anna Rozental's autobiography to explore the role of women in the Bund. Hansman was initially scheduled to be part of a panel focussing specifically on the participation of women and representations of gender in the Bund, but unfortunately this panel had to be withdrawn.

Overall, the workshop brought together various strands in current Bund related research, including the local, national and transnational; the centre and periphery; the personal and biographical. What is more, it demonstrated that there exists a new generation of researchers who are bringing to bear new research perspectives and methodologies to the study of the Bund. There were perhaps three standout features of the workshop which ought to be noted: Firstly, what was most striking was the extent to which the range of topics in Bund related research has been broadened. This is perhaps most evident in the shifts in geographical foci of Bund related studies. If, in 1984, Jonathon Frankel emphasised transnationalism by stressing the centrality of New York in the trajectory of the Bund, the new generation of scholars at this workshop have now placed Argentina, Australia, France, Switzerland and indeed Israel on that map. Secondly, as demonstrated in a number of the workshop's papers, the post-1945 period is now being established as an important part of the history of the Bund- though we should note that this did not pass without some dispute, for during the Roundtable discussion towards the end of the workshop Ezra Mendelsohn raised doubts about the viability of this new periodisation in Bund studies. Thirdly, another striking feature of the event was the youthfulness of the participants and the international appeal which the Bund now seems to have.

Although the workshop made the unique and welcome contribution of placing the Bund in a transnational context, there was however one 'context' which it was not analysed within: *Marxism*. Indeed, what was missing from the workshop was any serious engagement with the Bund's unique contribution to (and complex relationship with) Marxist theory and practice. This was all the more surprising given the centrality of Marxism to Bundist activists themselves. Moreover, there was surprisingly little discussion concerning the complexities of the Bund's position on the 'national question'. In other areas of scholarly research, non-territorial approaches to national autonomy are beginning to receive considerable attention. Is it the case that the 'national question' has been sufficiently explored in Bund studies? It is of course true that this topic was studied in depth by previous generations of scholars, but one wonders about the extent to which our understanding of more 'traditional' areas of Bund research such as this might be transformed by the new perspectives and approaches on display at this workshop.

What seems certain, however, is that the future of Bund studies is secure, and this is in no small measure thanks to this excellent workshop. We can only hope that a similar event is held in the near future.

Conference Overview:

keynote Lecture

Ezra Mendelsohn: The History of the Bund Now and Then

Panel I: Program Matters and Social Practices

Frank Wolff (IMIS, Osnabrück University): From Vilna to New York and Buenos Aires. The Bundist Doykeyt in the Age of Great Migrations

Roni Gechtman (Mount Saint Vincent University , Halifax): A Solution that Would Benefit Only the Jews? The Bund's National Program and the East European Nationalities

Commentary: Ezra Mendelsohn (Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

Panel II: Bundism And Educational Work

Magdalena Kozłowska (Jagiellonian University, Kraków): "In Sunshine and Joy"? -the Story of Medem Sanatorium in Miedzeszyn

Yuu Nishimura (Kyoto University): Bundist Educational Activities: Creating "New Culture" and "New People"

Commentary: Gertrud Pickhan

Panel III: The Bund And The Jewish Labor Committee

Rachel Feinmark (Univ. of Chicago): When 'here' is 'over there': The Jewish Labor

Committee, the Bund, and the Preservation of the Jewish Labor Movement in Europe

Constance Pâris de Bollardière (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris): The Jewish Labor Committee and the Bundist movement in France, 1944-1949

Commentary: Jack Jacobs

Public Lecture

Jack Jacobs: The Bund in Vilna in the Inter-War Years

Panel IV: Bundist Biographies as a Resource for the History of the Bund

Michał Trębacz, (University of Łódź): An archetypal bundist - Israel Lichtenstein, the leader of Łódź's Bund organization

Jordana de Bloeme (York University, Toronto): Khayim Shloyme Kazdan and "International Yiddishism"

Silvia Hansman (IWO, Buenos Aires): Pages from a life history: the radicalization process of Anne Rosenthal

Commentary: Gertrud Pickhan

_Panel V: Local Histories or Central Issues?

Sandrine Mayoraz (Basel University): The Jewish Labor Bund in Switzerland

Agnieszka Wierzcholska (Freie Universität, Berlin): "A Socialist Conscience and a Jewish Heart" - Bund, PPS, and Yiddishkayt from a Microhistorical Perspective

Commentary: Ezra Mendelsohn

Panel VI: Bundist History After 1945

Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat (Warsaw University): The Relationships of Bundists in Poland and Abroad in the Post-War Era: Poland and the United States

David Slucki (Monash University): The Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: A Reappraisal

Commentary: Feliks Tych (JHI, Warszawa)

RESEARCH ON THE BUND: DIFFERENT GENERATIONS - DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES?

A Round Table Discussion with Gertrud Pickhan, Jack Jacobs, Ezra Mendelsohn, Feliks Tych, (Introduction: Frank Wolff)

Public Lecture

Feliks Tych: Rosa Luxemburg's standpoint towards the Bund

Public Lecture

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (New York University) Rising from the Rubble: Creating the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. An Illustrated Program

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