

THE EXODUS FROM GALICIAN MITSRAIM: THE UNEMPLOYMENT OF JEWISH WORKERS IN BORYSLAV – AND THE RESCUE CAMPAIGN OF 1897-1899

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Abstract: This article analyzes the rescue campaign of unemployed Jewish workers in 1898-1899 in the Galician oil industrial area. The professionalization of the oil industry and reforms, connected with new safety requirements in the last decades of the 19th century, led to mass unemployment of unskilled, mainly Jewish workers. The catastrophe of the workers aroused the attention of prominent Vienna political leaders, including Theodore Herzl and Saul Raphael Landau. An analysis of the information campaign in the Galician and Vienna Jewish press shows how its leaders, mainly Vienna philanthropists and intellectuals, used the case of Boryslav's Jewish workers to support socialist or Zionist theories about the Eastern European Jewry. At the same time, the campaign exposed a lack of understanding of the local Galician context and the inability of local elites to react adequately, which led to utopian and non-effective aid projects.

At the Second Zionist Congress in Basel in 1898, the head of the Zionist movement Theodore Herzl spoke as the representative of unemployed Jewish workers in Boryslav. The catastrophic situation of a few thousand workers, who had lost the possibility of finding a job, attracted the attention of various philanthropists and activists from numerous Jewish organizations. In particular, the situation of the Jewish workers allowed Zionist organizations to demonstrate the capabilities of the movement and try to bring its ideas to life. This article attempts to show how a wide range of newspapers and philanthropists assigned identities to the workers, constructed on the basis of new ideologies, and to demonstrate the balance between the national and social variants of the rescue campaign, based on the example of attitudes toward the workers.¹

The problem of the unemployed workers of Boryslav has previously been a matter of interest for research on the socio-economic history of the oil region, for example in Yaroslav Hrytsak's doctorate (1986) and Alison Fleig Frank's *Oil Empire* (2005). The German researcher Teresa Andlauer (2001) was one of the first to try to explore the issue from an ethnic perspective. Robert Wistrich (2007) wrote about the connection of Zionism in its early stages with socialism and about the relations between Saul Raphael Landau and Theodore Herzl, which is related to the issue of workers in Bo-

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ryslav. In this article, I would like to show both the cultural and the social dimensions of the problem. The main sources for my research include the press, particularly Zionist (the German-language *Die Welt* and *Der Jüdischer Arbeiter*, published in Vienna, and the Polish-language *Przyszłość*, published in Lwów), the local Drohobycz press (the German-language *Drohobyczer Zeitung* and Polish-language *Kurjer Drohobycki*), and the Hebrew-language newspaper of orthodox Jews *Mahziqey Ha-Dat*. One of the fullest descriptions of Boryslav workers appears in Landau's work *Among the Jewish Proletarians* (Landau 1898) and his memoirs *Storm and Pressure of Zionism* (Landau 1937). The official decrees of the Krakow Committee for Mining as well as reports on Galician Diet (Sejm) meetings were additional sources which contributed to the research from the local government point of view. Reports from the Second Zionist Congress helped to understand the problem in the light of the newly emerging movement under the leadership of Herzl.

A new stage in the Boryslav oil business

The oil and ozokerite extraction industry in Boryslav began to develop from the 1850s, when Ignacy Lukaszewicz and Jan Zeg invented a method of oil refining as well as its use as fuel for kerosene lamps. The mass extraction of oil started from the 1860s in Boryslav and spread to the territories of Mrazhmitsa, Schidnytsia, Tustanovytski and Volanka. During the first stages of the industry (1860-1880), most of the firms were rather small (there were 73 large and 779 small entrepreneurs in 1873 in Boryslav) (*Sprawozdanie Wydziału krajowego o naglej potrzebie uregulowania przemysłu naftowego*, p. 1). The form of the industry changed in the 1880s and 1890s, when small firms were gradually taken over by large companies. In 1885, there were 41 large and 86 small enterprises, while five years later there were 59 large and only 30 small enterprises (Hrytsak 1986: 81). Jews constituted the majority of the participants in the ozokerite industry, both as big entrepreneurs or overseers and as workers (Hrytsak 2006: 282. NB: there are no reliable statistics; however, from non-statistical sources we can assume that the majority of overseers were Jews). Among the large Jewish factories one should mention the Goldhammer, Gartenberg and Lauterbach refinery (*Sprawozdanie Wydziału krajowego o naglej potrzebie uregulowania przemysłu naftowego*, p. 1). The end of the 1880s marked the beginning of changes in the oil and ozokerite extraction industry, which harmed the activities of Jewish small entrepreneurs. The introduction at the beginning of the 1880s of large companies such as the Galician Credit Bank, Landbank and the French Company can be seen as the start of modernization of the industry and the end of Jewish business as one of the consistent elements of the economic portrait of 19th-century Boryslav.

In September 1897, the Krakow Committee for Mining, which controlled the Boryslav industry, issued a decree with new rules about the extraction of ozokerite, movement around the territory, the length of the working day and security rules for workers. The decree was the result of a long process of the committee checking the Boryslav mines. Usually, the inspectors decided that almost none of the firms were adequate. These new rules were tragic for small firms, which could not apply them. In particular,

the rules about the distance of 60 meters between mines as well as the prohibition of the use of the basket and rope in deep mines (more than 120 meters) and of the use of dynamite (*Przepisy górniczo-policyjne dla kopalń wosku ziemnego w Galicyi*, p. 220) were impossible for these firms. The law was a catastrophe for small businesses, provoking both mass closure of the firms and unemployment.

The first protests against the law appeared as petitions from Drohobycz and Boryslav in 1897. During the discussion about the petition in the Diet, the Polish oil entrepreneur Stanisław Szczepanowski claimed that the only aim of the law was to increase the safety of the workplace and that the disappearance of small entrepreneurs was the inevitable result, because only large firms could follow all the rules and ensure appropriate working conditions (*Sprawozdanie Wydziału krajowego o nagłej potrzebie uregulowania przemysłu naftowego*, p. 2). The plan was to decrease the number of workers in the ozokerite industry from 4877 to 965 (80%) (Hrytsak 1986: 92).

According to Yaroslav Hrytsak (1986: 142), the general number of workers who participated in the Boryslav ozokerite industry in 1897 was 5896, and in 1900 it was just 1924. According to a report by J. Holobek (1900: 75), in 1898-1899, during the reform process, the percentage of Jewish workers who worked underground was 17-18%. The proportion of Jewish workers in business, according to different research, was between one third and two thirds of the ozokerite mine workers (Najdus 1978: 117). In his essay about Jewish workers in 1898, Landau (1898: 30) mentioned 6000 Jewish workers of a total of 9000 workers, but he did not back up his observations with any official data. The problem of exact numbers was also partly caused by the absence of relevant data from firms as well as the subjectivity of Zionist sources, which tried to show how widespread the problem with unemployment was.

There were a few reasons why Jewish workers were the first victims of unemployment. Historian Natan Gelber (1959: 172) claimed that firms refused to hire workers because of a lack of qualifications, but also because of ethnic superstitions, demanding from workers that they “go away to Palestine.” The professionalization of the industry seems to be the most likely reason, which also explains why unemployed Jewish workers were not able to find a job even in factories owned by Jews. This was the case with the Guttman factory, the director of which refused to accept Jewish workers after a visit to Boryslav (*Mahziqey Ha-Dat*, 3 March 1899, p. 3). The complaints regarding the lack of qualifications were part of the general campaign of the Krakow Committee for Mining, which mentioned in 1888 that most of the workers were unskilled and could not work in technically equipped mines (*Sprawozdanie komisji górniczej o sprawozdaniu Wydziału krajowego w przedmiocie spraw górniczych*, 1888, p. 1).

In 1898, the unemployment of Jewish workers in Boryslav attracted the attention of Jewish organizations in Austria, and particularly in Galicia. Galician Jews evoked interest because of their miserable economic situation, which led them to emigrate. In 1896, Herzl (1922: 535) wrote in his diary that it was possible to gather from 400 to 600,000 signatures under one Zionist petition in Galicia, because “the misery is big and the wish to emigrate is unbelievable.” One of the moments that also attracted public attention was the delegation of Herzl as the representative of the Boryslav workers to the Second Zionist Congress in Basel in August 1898.

The role of Saul Landau in the information campaign

Saul Raphael Landau (1870-1943), journalist and one of the leaders of the Zionist movement, became one of the key figures drawing attention to the situation of Jewish workers in Boryslav. In 1896 he made a trip to Galicia and Russia to observe the condition of the Jewish proletariat. In Galicia he visited Boryslav, Stanislavov and Kolomyia, publishing his travelogue in 1897-1898 in the magazine *Jewish World* and the Zionist herald *Die Welt* (Frank 2005: 117). In 1898, his essays were published as the book *Among Jewish Proletarians*. Landau described the participation of Jewish workers in the ozokerite industry, the kinds of jobs they did, work and living conditions, and paid specific attention to the crisis and problems of unemployed workers. In his book, he claimed that all of the Jewish workers in Boryslav were Zionists, quoting those who said that they were ready to go to Palestine to escape the desperate state and hunger. Some of the workers even asked the chairman of the Zion society whether they had enough time to rent their apartments out before winter came, because land in Palestine was waiting for them. The strongest argument for their Zionist affiliations mentioned by Landau is a signed petition to the Basel Zionist meeting in 1898. Some 750 families, which included more than 4000 people, claimed their readiness to go to Palestine and paid the membership fee to the Tarnow Ahavath Zion society (Landau 1898: 36).

The Landau travelogue is one of the few existing descriptions of Jewish workers in Boryslav, and researchers quote it quite often (Gelber 1959; Andlauer 2001; Frank 2005; Wolff 2010). However, it is important not to forget the ideological context of the book, because it helps to challenge some basic claims proposed by Landau. The portrait of the Jewish proletariat in Boryslav, loyal to socialism or even Zionism, seems to be reliable until one looks more closely at the specifics of the early Boryslav industry. Then the picture painted by Saul Landau appears to become rather artificially constructed.

First of all, the concept of “workers” should be problematized. Were Jewish workers in Boryslav, as well as Ukrainians or Poles, aware of their professional identity, or were they rather united through religious communities (Hrytsak 2006: 282)? Landau did not mention the situation with the overseers, who had also become unemployed (*Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung*, 29 July, p. 6).

To understand the image which Landau tried to show the reader, we should look carefully at his ideological development. Saul Landau joined Theodore Herzl in the early stages of the Zionist movement. However, in his activities, Landau tried rather to combine socialism and Zionism. In 1898-1899 he published the newspaper *Der Jüdischer Arbeiter*, dedicated to the problems of Jewish proletarians. His cooperation with Herzl started in 1895, and in 1897 Landau became the chief editor of the Zionist herald *Die Welt*. He took this opportunity to promote his own ideas and overcome the ignorance of the existence of Jewish workers which existed in Austrian Zionist circles (Halpern and Reinhartz 1988: 234). Saul Landau proposed his own solution, different from the ideas of non-Jewish socialists. Together with another sympathizer of the socialist movement, Natan Birnbaum, Landau criticized the attempts of Galician social-democrats like Ignacy Daszyński to evoke the class consciousness of the Jewish workers and join the other nations, which would have caused assimilation (Wistrich 2007: 130). According to Landau, the situation of the Jewish workers was specific because they suffered twice: as

Jews and as workers. Cooperation with the Polish workers movement did not help them to overcome anti-Semitism and inequality. We can see this way of thinking in *Among the Jewish Proletarians*: “Social democracy has nothing to offer to Jews (...).” Professor Ludwig Stein was absolutely right when he said (quoted in Landau’s book): “one can overcome economic limitations, but not racial. Thales weavers or bristle sorters can rebel against their Jewish directors and get from them the basic things, work and food. Jewish workers from Boryslav cannot expect this from Christian entrepreneurs” (Landau 1898: 37). Such a complicated situation, according to Landau, meant that the inevitable solution to their problems was Zionism. Only political Zionism together with socialism could help them as Jews and as workers.

Landau’s relationship to the question of Jewish socialism was one of the most radical in Viennese political circles. Natan Birnbaum hoped, with Landau’s help, to make contact with Vienna’s socialists and receive their support. However, nobody supported Landau’s affiliation with socialism (Wistrich 2007: 136). His radical position on including socialism in the Zionist program finally caused conflict with Herzl, who, despite his compassionate attitude to the workers question, was afraid of political association with socialism (Halpern and Reinhartz 1988: 234).

After his first trip, Landau returned to Boryslav on November 23, 1897 with a lecture about the First Congress of Zionists in Basel. The newspaper *Die Welt* reported that his lecture in the Bikur Cholim prayer house had been attended by 400 people, mostly workers. Landau told them about the aims and tasks of the Zionist movement. He had noticed the large amount of donations in the city and supposed that people in Boryslav were specifically interested in Zionism because of difficult working conditions (*Die Welt*, 5 November 1897, p. 11). Landau’s second visit to Boryslav coincided with the publishing of the law, which is why we can assume that workers knew about the future closure of the mines. After the Second Congress of Zionists another Zionist activist, Leon Taubes from Kolomyja, visited Drohobycz – with a report about the Congress. The local author of an article about this event claimed that Zionism in Drohobycz was important because it made it possible not only to get away from theories, but also to use the ideas for salvation of the workers (*Die Welt*, 26 August 1898, p. 9).

Saul Landau was one of the first people to draw attention and publicity to the problem of the Jewish workers in Boryslav. Landau’s visits and lectures, as well as the activity of the Association of Colonization in Tarnow, had an impact on the workers in Boryslav and made them more aware of the ideas of socialism.

Press campaign

In 1898, the story of thousands of unemployed workers became famous not only in Galicia, but also in Vienna. Jewish newspapers – in German, Polish and Hebrew – started publishing information about the “catastrophe” and calling for help.

One of the first and most active papers in the information campaign was the Vienna Zionist newspaper *Die Welt*, edited by Landau. It was there that Landau’s travelogue about his trip to Galicia (1897-1898) was published, the “Call for help” from *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* reprinted and numerous calls to give offerings and information

about donors printed (which they kept doing until 1903). The first lists of donors appeared in April 1899 (*Die Welt*, 14 April 1899, p. 10).

Landau published information about the situation of the Boryslav workers and about the campaigns taking place at that moment, particularly the donations of Baron and Baroness Hirsch and Gutman, at the beginning of October 1898 in his newspaper *Der Jüdischer Arbeiter*. The newspaper also published two letters from entrepreneurs, Zigfried Lebensart (director of the oil company in Volanka) and Julian Kapellner (director of the mine in Schidnytsia), who recommended hiring Boryslav workers. They both claimed, from their own experience, that Jewish workers were healthy, strong and able for work in the extraction industry (*Der Jüdischer Arbeiter*, 1 October 1898, p. 7).

The herald of orthodox Jews, the newspaper *Mahziqey Ha-Dat*, had perhaps more connection to Boryslav, because a branch of the organization of the same name was located there and the activist of the Boryslav branch, Itskhok Schreiber, was a mine owner. The newspaper, like Landau, emphasized the misery of the workers as Jews who suffered twice, and compared their situation to Jewish workers in Baku (*Qol Mahziqey Ha-Dat*, 10 June 1898, p. 2).

The local press wrote little about the problem of unemployed workers compared to Vienna newspapers. In June 1898, before the congress in Basel, *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* published an article about the problem of unemployment. The author, however, did not mention the word “workers,” writing instead that overseers and cashiers were left without a job. Baron Rothschild was worried about their situation and recommended moving some of the unemployed population to America and the rest to Palestine. According to the newspaper, such a solution arose due to the initiative of Herzl (*Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung*, 29 July 1898, p. 6). *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* used to have the reputation of a moderate Zionist newspaper, dedicated to business, but at the same time it distanced itself from socialism. Perhaps this is why it did not mention the Landau visit, though it did reprint one of the articles from *Der Jüdischer Arbeiter*. The situation changed in 1899, when in February the *Drohobyczer Zeitung* published the “Call for help.” A local reporter decided to check if the information about Jewish workers was not an exaggeration, and after visiting Boryslav, called for help from the “Vienna Alliance” and Baron and Baroness Hirsch to share information to help workers find a new job (*Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung*, 10 February 1899, p. 1).

The newspaper emphasized that the most important thing was not financial aid, but the possibility of finding jobs for the unemployed Jews, and called for solidarity from their “brothers in faith.” *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* did not mention the role of Landau and Herzl in bringing attention to the problem.

Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung tried to avoid any contacts with socialism. For example, it criticized the May 1st demonstration and recommended that Jewish workers stay at home and celebrate Shabbat. The participation in the walking march from Boryslav to Drohobycz was considered too dangerous, especially for Jews (*Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung*, 10 March 1897, p. 5). In May 1899, a representative of the Krakow Committee for Mining, Jogann Holubek, visited Boryslav. Five hundred workers met him, with demands of work and bread, reporting that the new law was the reason for their unemployment and calling for its abolition. *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* asked Jewish workers to be calm and not to rebel (*Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung*, 21 April 1899, p. 1).

The other local newspaper – the Polish *Kurjer Drohobycki* – also mentioned the unemployment of workers in 1899. The newspaper criticized the “French Company” for monopolization of the industry and noted that this had left thousands of workers and small entrepreneurs unemployed; however, it did not mention their ethnicity (R. 1899, p. 1). The Jewish newspapers (*Drohobycter Handels-Zeitung* and *Przyszłość*), on the other hand, did not give a report on the fate of non-Jewish workers. The reason for this can be found in the report of W. Feldman, who said that it was the Jewish workers who were in the hardest situation, because people from villages could find jobs in other places or return to farming (Feldman 1899: 119).

The help of organizations and rescue committees

The first calls for help were related to philanthropists, who usually took care of the Jewry in Galicia: Baron and Baroness Hirsch, David Ritter von Guttman and the “Alliance Israelite” in Vienna. Financial offerings, however, could not help in this case. The next stage was looking for another place of work. However, not every firm agreed to accept non-qualified workers. For example, the co-owner of the Moravian-Austrian coal mines David Guttman, after sending an engineer to Boryslav, refused to accept workers for his metallurgic factories. The Lwów newspaper *Mahziqey Ha-Dat* claimed that this was not right, because the engineer had asked for the recommendation from the same entrepreneurs who fired the workers (*Mahziqey Ha-Dat*, 3 March 1899, p. 3).

During the Second Zionist Congress in Basel, Theodore Herzl addressed the congress as the representative of the Boryslav workers, who had sent him a letter. Telling a story of mass unemployment, he emphasized that the main reason for this was not just the law about the required distance between mines, but in general, it was about the centralization of industry and the exclusion of small, mainly Jewish entrepreneurs. Herzl emphasized that Jewish workers wanted to work, and work “in the form not usually associated with Jews” (*Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des II Zionisten-Congresses gehalten zu Basel vom bis 31 August, 1898*, p. 48).

Special rescue committees were created in Galicia. The committee in Boryslav, created by the secretary of Baron Hirsch’s foundation, Mr. Fridlaender, was led by Mayor Kornhaber, and included the principal of the Jewish school and two workers (Gelber 1959: 172). A similar committee was created in Lviv, also, as mentioned in the newspaper *Przyszłość* by the initiative of “non-Galician” circles. The ideas of rescuing the workers varied: sending them to Palestine, helping them to emigrate to America or finding positions at other Jewish factories in Galicia for them (*Przyszłość*, 20 May 1899, p. 121).

Of the local organizations, the most active was Ahavat Zion, a group of Tarnow Zionists. They promoted the idea of sending workers to Palestine, and, as Landau mentioned in his memoirs, after the failure to find jobs for workers in Galicia, emigration seemed to be the only appropriate solution (Landau 1937: 164). In April 1899, members of Ahavath Zion held a meeting in Boryslav, attended by 200 workers. The latter openly spoke of their wish to go to Palestine and work there even for a small salary. In June, the committee started to gather money to move the workers to Palestine (*Przyszłość*, 5 June 1899, p. 126). This situation coincided with the creation of the first Galician colony,

“Makhnaim,” which was the place intended for the resettlement of one hundred workers’ families.

At that moment, the conflict between Landau and Herzl began to intensify. According to Landau, the Vienna organizations led by Herzl started to attack the leader of Tarnow’s Ahavat Zion and Landau himself (Landau 1937: 65). The problem of the rescue campaigns was the lack of coordination with others and also conflict between Galician and non-Galician organizations. Besides that, there were smaller internal conflicts inside the Galician rescue committee connected with financial issues.

An interesting issue is the lack of help from Drohobycz entrepreneurs. The representative of Tarnow’s Ahavath Zion criticized the rich people from Drohobycz, who had earned their fortunes due to Boryslav, but did not want to participate in the rescue campaign. Vienna philanthropists, such as Ritter von Guttman, asked: “Where are the Drohobycz people?” (Ovn 1899: 3).

This inactivity may be a sign of the fact that the local capitalists did not perceive Jewish workers as brothers in faith, at least not as members of their own community. The situation of the unemployed workers went beyond the traditional forms of communal philanthropy and rich local members of the community neither had nor understood the mechanism of how to deal with it.

The rescue campaign, inspired by Saul Landau and Theodore Herzl, started in Vienna. Local organizations joined only in 1899. Galician Jews mainly approved of their status as the object of the rescue, but not the active doers. The majority of the help was contributed by Vienna philanthropists, who had the resources at their disposal.

The rescue campaign aimed to help Jewish workers, as “brothers in faith.” In its “Call for help” in February 1899, the *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* turned to the Jewish newspapers, requesting they share the information among Jews, who were to help the workers because of their common “religion and nationality” (*Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung*, 10 February 1899, p. 2). However, large entrepreneurs such as David von Guttman were guided first and foremost by commercial interest and did not agree to help the Jewish workers simply because of the ideology of brotherhood. For such entrepreneurs, Boryslav workers, with their limited skills, were not real workers, and the feeling of ethnic solidarity was not enough to motivate them to help.

As a result, the most effective campaign was organized by the Galician Credit Bank and the French Company. Around 500 workers and 300 family members and their families found other jobs in the regions. The Baron Hirsch foundation helped to send 350 families to the USA (Frank 2005: 137). According to the decree of the local starosta, in May 1899 unemployed workers were deported from Boryslav to the villages from which they had come (Hrytsak 1986: 94).

The comparison of the situation of the Boryslav workers with the exodus from Egypt appeared for the first time in a book by Saul Landau. The author quoted the workers: “We work harder than our parents in Mitsraim.² It is time for us, our God, through the new Moses to take us from the Galician Mitsraim” (Landau 1898: 34). In 1899, *Drohobyczer Handels-Zeitung* started to use this metaphor (yatsat mitsraim in Boryslav) (*Drohoby-*

² Mitsraim (hebr. מצרים) – Hebrew name for Egypt.

cher *Handels-Zeitung*, 24 March 1899, p. 1). The Zionist rhetoric overcame the socialist one, though the plans of the Zionists did not materialize.

The appearance of the Boryslav workers in the public discourse became possible because of new ideologies, such as socialism, because of Landau and Galician socialists and Zionism, and because of Theodore Herzl and Ahavat Zion from Tarnow. For Vienna intellectuals, the example of Boryslav's Jewish workers was a challenge to the idea that Jews could not work productively: this is why they avoided mentioning the Jews who worked as overseers and cashiers. At the same time, the problem of the Jewish workers in Boryslav allowed them to show the practical dimensions of Zionism and socialism and the usefulness of the ideologies. In Landau's writings, Boryslav's Jewish workers appear as proletarians with class consciousness and devoted Zionists. In their campaign, however, Landau and other intellectuals did not try to see the complexity of the problems of the Jews involved in the oil business in Boryslav in the period of modernization of industry. The lack of understanding of the context led to utopian rescue projects, where the Galician Jewry were used as an example to help support socialist/Zionist theories. The catastrophe with workers' unemployment exposed differentiation of the Jewish community in Boryslav and Drohobycz and the inability of the latter to address the challenges of the industrial era.

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