

1890-1914: The Golden Era of the Bund in the Russian Empire

Abstract

This article provides an overview of the Bund from the establishment of its precursor organization in 1890 until World War I. First it takes into account the historical conditions that led to the rise of a distinct Jewish socialist movement in the Russian Empire to then focus on its three spheres of activity: (a) economic difficulties, as a Jewish workers' movement engaged in union-organizing and strikes, (b) political challenges, as a Jewish revolutionary movement working to overthrow the Tsarist system and (c) national obstacles, as a movement fighting for Jewish civil rights and Jewish national autonomy, the advancement of Yiddish language and culture, and the organisation of Jewish self-defense against pogroms. Appended to the article is the translation of an early Bundist pamphlet, *The Town Preacher* (1895), which presents the movement's ideas in a simple, popular form, based on the story of the single strike of Jewish tobacco-workers in Vilna.

Keywords

Bund, Socialism, Jewish National Autonomy, Yiddish Culture, Jews in the Russian Empire

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The ideas and values of the political left are experiencing something of a resurgence in the United States, and in the American Jewish community in particular. The Bund is now often invoked as a model and inspiration, and as the precursor to the presidential campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders. Because he is a Jew on the left, Sanders has even been described as a Bundist (Meyers 2019; Scott 2020). As a historian, I believe it is necessary to urge people not to make facile equivalences between the past and the present, and to point out the particular conditions in Imperial Russia 120 years ago, that led the Bund to flourish. The Bund embraced a particular synthesis of socialism and Jewishness which can inspire, but I doubt it can be recreated today.

I will divide my comments into four sections: I'll begin with the conditions that led to the emergence and flourishing of the Bund in Tsarist Russia, and then offer observations on the Bund's activity in three spheres: economic struggle (as a workers' movement), political struggle (as a revolutionary movement), and national struggle (as a Jewish movement). My chronological framework will be from 1890, when the precursor to the Bund, "the Group of Jewish Social Democrats in Russia", was founded, until the outbreak of the First World War. I have separated out these three spheres of activity – economic, political, and Jewish – for analytic purposes, although in real historical time they were often intertwined. I believe it is fair to say that until 1901, the pre-Bund and Bund gave priority to economic struggle; from 1901 to 1906 it gave primacy to political struggle; and from 1907 on, it concentrated much more of its attention on Jewish culture and Jewish affairs.

First, I will begin with some background information. According to the census of 1897, there were 5.2 million Jews in the Russian Empire, constituting slightly more than 4% of the total population. Their residence was largely restricted by law to Russia's Western borderlands, known as the Pale of Jewish settlement (בשומה סוּחַת, черта оседлости, *Cherta osiedlosti*), and the Kingdom of Poland. While in Russia as a whole Jews were a rather small minority, in the major cities of the Pale of Settlement and Russian-controlled Poland, such as Warsaw, Vilna, and Odessa, they constituted a third of the local population. In numerous towns (*shtetlekh*), Jews constituted a majority of the inhabitants (Stanislavski 2008).

It is important to bear in mind that in the Russian empire Jews were distinguished from Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, and others, not only by their religion (Judaism as opposed to Catholicism or Russian Orthodoxy), but also by numerous other features – language, dress and appearance, culture and lore, economic position, and legal status. The level of Jewish acculturation to Russian or Polish was quite moderate compared to other European countries, and assimilation – the loss of Jewish markers and Jewish self-identification – was very limited. By the late nineteenth century, Jews increasingly perceived themselves as a national group, with its own history and culture. This self-perception made sense in a multi-national empire such as Russia, whereas it was never very strong in ethnically homogeneous states such as Britain, France, and Italy (Polonsky 2010: 3-39).

There were two crucial factors that led to the appearance of a distinct Jewish socialist movement in the Russian empire. The first factor was the rise of a Jewish socialist intelligentsia that, while acculturated to Russian, did not fully assimilate, and retained its ties to Jewish society. Arkady (Aharon) Kremer, often dubbed

the father of the Bund, was the son of a religious but enlightened schoolteacher, who taught in a modernized Jewish elementary school. Arkady went on to attend college in St. Petersburg, where he was drawn into socialist ideas and activities. He then returned to his native territory to spread those ideas among Jews. It was people like Arkady Kremer that founded and led the Bund (Arkady 1942).

The second factor was the rise of a Jewish urban working class or proletariat, which sold its labor to small or medium entrepreneurs in the garment industries, leather, tobacco, sugar, printing, and other spheres. The Jews of Eastern Europe underwent rapid urbanization in the late 19th century, and the newly arisen Jewish proletariat, like other proletariats, lived in extreme poverty, insecurity, alienation, and physical exhaustion (Trunk 1960).

It was the encounter between these two groups, Jewish socialist intellectuals and Jewish workers, that gave birth to this movement. In the 1890s, the intellectuals came to realize that Jews were not by definition a petty-bourgeois group of profiteers and exploiters, and that there existed a large class of Jews who were impoverished and exploited. Jewish workers for their part, were open to socialist ideas for a number of reasons. They were largely literate, with some schooling behind them. Many of them were declassée craftsmen and traders, or the children of declassée families which migrated to the cities from *shtetlekh* in search of work. The latter were painfully aware of the indignity and injustice of their situation (Lederhendler 2008).

Since most Jewish workers in Russia were fluent and literate only in Yiddish, the socialist intellectuals needed to spread their propaganda in the Jews' mother-tongue. Until about 1905, the use of Yiddish by the Bund was mainly utilitarian and instrumental – the movement's top echelon conducted its internal deliberations and theoretical discussions in Russian. When addressing Jewish workers, the Bund needed to translate and simplify socialist ideas, and adapt them to Jewish cultural terms: capitalism was compared to Egyptian slavery, the Tsar was Pharaoh, government officials were Hamans (the evil minister in the Biblical Book of Esther), and the rights of the worker were inscribed in the Bible in institutions such as the day of rest, the Sabbath.

On the other hand, the early Bundists needed to combat some deeply ingrained conceptions in Jewish society. First, they needed to introduce the idea of class conflict into a relatively tight-knit community. Since most Jewish workers in the late 19th century were employed by Jewish entrepreneurs, the Bundist activists needed to shatter the myth of universal Jewish brotherhood and solidarity across class-lines. And secondly, Bundist propaganda needed to combat the widespread phenomena of fatalism and passivity among Jewish workers. The intellectuals needed to persuade the workers that wealth and poverty were not preordained by God but were the products of a socio-economic system; that change of the economic and political order *were* possible through collective action (Mendelsohn 1970).

All of this needed to be accomplished underground, since even labor unions, let alone political parties, were outlawed by the Tsarist regime until 1905. The Bund had an intricate network of safe-houses, secret meeting places, and mobile, concealable printing presses. The organization was built on a conspiratorial basis. Most leaders were known by code-names (Noyekh, Lonu, Esther).

The conditions of danger and idealism created an aura of mystery, drama, and self-sacrifice in the movement. Generally speaking, between the 1890s and 1914, Bundist propaganda was much more successful among young people, in their teens and twenties, than it was among the middle and older generations.

And now to some observations about the three spheres of Bundist activity.

Economic struggle: The Bund's greatest early successes were in organizing clandestine labor unions from the ground up – beginning with an individual shop or factory, and eventually uniting many groups into a city-wide trade organization. In the city of Vilna (today Vilnius, Lithuania), which was the Bund's capital city and nerve center, there were 24 Jewish labor groups in 1894, with approximately 1,000 organized Jewish workers. By 1905, the number of organized workers had grown to 3,000, and constituted the majority of Jewish proletarian workers in the city. In the years 1895-1896, there were 56 Jewish strikes in Vilna, and the workers won concessions in 75% of the cases. The Bund's greatest strength was grass-roots organization. In early 1905, the Bund had 23,000 members, whereas its parent organization, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party had 8,400 members (Schapiro 1997).

The Bund's strike activity had its critics, even among Jewish socialists. Many of them argued that Jewish shop-owners with 10-15 employees were themselves on the brink of poverty, with a miniscule profit margin. They were hardly barons of capitalism. The Bund, critics said, was pitting workers against paupers (Borokhov 1923). But the Bundists saw the economic struggle not as an end, an objective, but as a means, as a training ground to teach Jewish workers that collective action could lead to the improvement of their lives. This experience would motivate them to apply the lessons of collective action to the larger arena of Russian politics.

Political Struggle: Needless to say, the Bund was an integral part of the larger Russian socialist and revolutionary movement. Indeed, the Bund helped found its parent organization the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1898, at a clandestine conference held in Minsk, a very Jewish city in the heart of the Pale of Settlement.

In the territory of the Pale, the Bund was at the forefront of political protest activity. Between 1901 and 1903, Bundists held 260 public protest meetings, twelve of which drew crowds of more than 1,000 people. 4,500 Bundists were arrested by the Tsarist authorities between June 1903 and June 1904 (Tobias 1972).

The Bund's most important vehicle for spreading anti-Tsarist and revolutionary ideas was its underground press and pamphlet literature. Bundists mastered the art of operating clandestine, portable printing presses, which moved from city to city, and distributing copies that went from hand to hand¹. Forty issues of the movement's central organ "Di arbeter shtime" (The Workers' Voice) were published illegally between 1897 and 1905. The movement also smuggled into Russia its second central newspaper "Der yidisher arbiter" (The Jewish Worker) and scores of pamphlets printed by its foreign committee in Zurich and London. At the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Bund issued its first proclamation in 200,000 copies – 120,000 copies in Yiddish, 40,000 in Russian, and 40,000 in Polish (Hertz 1972).

¹ A sample of an early Bundist pamphlet (in translation) is provided as an appendix to this article.

It is important to stress that the Bundists engaged in political protest both as socialists, and as Jews, since the Jewish worker suffered in both respects. The Tsarist autocracy was both despotic and anti-Semitic. The demand for equal civil rights for Jews was a point in the Bund's political platform from the very outset.

In fact, the Bund enjoyed much more popularity in the Jewish community for its political struggle to bring down the autocracy, than for its economic struggle on behalf of the Jewish working class. The vast majority of Jews in Russia had no sympathy or loyalty toward the Tsarist regime, and many petty-bourgeois and middle-class elements in the Jewish community respected and admired the Bund for the things it was doing to combat Tsarism. This popularity reached its peak during the Russian revolution of 1905 (Ury 2012).

Jewish movement: The Bund was a Jewish movement not only in its ethnic composition, and in the language of its propaganda. After a few years of reluctance and hesitancy, the movement came to embrace a Jewish national platform, and engaged in Jewish social and cultural work.

First and foremost was the Bund's declaration in principle in 1901 that the Jews were a nationality, and that in a future democratic Russia, Jews should be entitled to national-cultural autonomy. To Bundists, autonomy meant that Jews should run their own schools and cultural institutions with funding from the state budget. Associated with this idea was the demand for Yiddish language rights. In areas of compact Jewish residence, Yiddish should be recognized as one of the languages of municipal governance and state administration. The Bund did not look forward to the Jews' assimilation into Russian or Polish society or anticipate the merging of the Jewish proletariat into the larger Russian or Polish proletariat (Frankel 1981: 171-257).

This national position was the underlying reason for the conflict that arose between the Bund and the leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1903. Vladimir Ilich Lenin and Yulii Martov (the leaders of the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the RSDLP) both denounced the Bund for its "nationalist separatism". The veteran Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov declared that "a Bundist is nothing but a Zionist who is afraid of sea-sickness." That is, Bundists wanted Jewish self-government, and a distinct Jewish culture in their own language – but they wanted it in Russia, not in Palestine, in Yiddish, not in Hebrew. The Bund seceded from the Russian Party in 1903 over this issue and related issues but returned to the larger party in 1906.

Gradually, the Bund engaged in more and more on-the-ground Jewish social and cultural activity. In 1904 and thereafter, as the pogromist movement spread across Russia, the Bund organized Jewish self-defense units, or fighting units (*boevyie triady*), that trained Jewish youths to shoot, and that engaged in street battles against pogromists. It was not uncommon in 1905 and 1906 for Bundists to provide armed security outside of synagogues on major Jewish festivals. The Bundists themselves, needless to say, did not attend the services, but felt a sense of responsibility toward those Jews who did (Lombroza 1992).

After 1905, when greater freedom of assembly and press was allowed, leading Bundists were active in Yiddish educational and cultural endeavors. They formed the backbone of the faculty of the Vilna Jewish Evening School, which provided Jewish workers with the equivalent of an elementary school



Fig. 1. An elections poster of the General Jewish Labour Bund hung in Kiev, 1917. Heading: "Where we live, there is our country!". Inside frame: "Vote List 9, Bund". Bottom: "A democratic republic! Full national and political rights for Jews!". Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundposter1918.jpg>.

education in Russian and Yiddish. They led similar adult educational activities in Warsaw and Łódź. Bundist publishing houses printed poetry, prose and dramas by major Yiddish authors (including I. L. Peretz and S. An-ski), mainly but not exclusively on social issues.

In principle, the Bund advocated for secular Yiddish culture as the basis for a new type of Jewish identity. In their Yiddishism, Bundists were quite monolithic and doctrinaire. At the 1908 Czernovitz conference for the Yiddish Language, the representative of the Bund proposed a resolution that "Yiddish is the only national language of the Jewish people. Hebrew is a historical monument whose revival is a utopia" (see e.g. Fishman s.d.). In their secularism, there was a range of opinions. While all opposed supernaturalism and rabbinic authority, they differed on the boundary between Jewish religion and Jewish culture. Many leading Bundists supported the secularized celebration of Pesach and Chanukah as holidays of freedom and struggle against oppression. In 1911 the Bund adopted a resolution that Russia should recognize three legally mandated days of rest – Sundays for Christians, Saturdays for Jews and Fridays for Muslims. Not working on Saturday, the resolution declared, was a Jewish cultural tradition (Fishman 2005).

The Bund's synthesis of socialism and nationalism may strike contemporary observers as odd, but in eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th century, this was actually commonplace. The Polish Socialist Party and the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers' Party struggled for both national liberation and social revolution, and for the reconstitution of their nations on the basis of socialist and progressive principles. The Bund adopted a similar posture.

The period before World War I was the Golden Era in the history of the Bund: when the movement was young, idealistic, heroic. And it left a strong imprint on all subsequent Jewish movements of the left – from labor Zionism and the labor movement in Eretz Israel to the American Jewish labor movement in the early 20th century.

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Appendix: The Bundist Pamphlet *The Town Preacher*

The following is an abridged translation of a popular Yiddish pamphlet published by the Bund in 1897, the year of the organization's founding. The booklet was composed by Shmuel Gozhansky (1867-1942), the movement's most active labor organizer and Yiddish pamphleteer in the 1890s. Gozhansky, who bore the code names "the teacher" (Yiddish: *der lerer*) and "for us" (Hebrew: *lonu*), was arrested in 1896 and spent six years in Siberian exile.

The Town Preacher circulated at first in hectographed form, and was subsequently printed in Lwów, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where censorship was not as severe as in the Russian Empire. The pamphlet was smuggled into Russia and bore a falsified cover-page that presented it a story-book printed by the Jewish publishing house "Rosenkranz and Shriftzetser" in Vilna (for more on *The Town Preacher* and Gozhansky, see Tscherikower 1937).

The pamphlet recounts events surrounding the strike at Edelstein's tobacco factory in Vilna in August 1895. It uses these events to offer an introduction to the idea of class differentiation and class conflict in Jewish society. It agitates for Jewish workers to struggle against their economic exploitation.

The pamphlet's center of attention is on the role played by the Vilna town preacher Rabbi Meir Noach Levin (1830-1904) in supporting the manufacturer and condemning the workers. In doing so, the pamphlet articulates a basic theme of socialist propaganda: that the clergy is allied with the capitalists and Tsarist authorities in suppressing the working masses. At the same time, the pamphlet does not attack the Jewish religion itself. It even quotes a verse from Psalms at one point to characterize the manufacturer.

The Town Preacher closes with an argument that the Jewish proletariat will serve as the vanguard of the entire Jewish people in the struggle against its persecution by the Tsarist regime.

The pamphlet is written in a simple, folksy style, employing many traditional Jewish expressions and phrases.

The Town-Preacher: A Story About Jewish Life (1897)²

In the late summer of 1895, there was a strike in the largest cigarette factory in the city "N". The strike broke out because the manufacturer began to hire women to "stuff" the cigarettes. He explained that he did this because he planned to enlarge his factory. But the workers understood his true intention – to hire women to replace the male workers in his factory. He calculated that, first of all, women's labor is much cheaper than male labor; and secondly, that it is much easier to boss around female workers than male ones, since they are more obedient than men. And what's better for a manufacturer than cheap, obedient workhands? True, in the interim, he paid the same wages to women and men. But history has shown in many other cities that it wouldn't be for long. In other cities, a short while after the women were hired,

² *Der shtot-magid*, reprinted in "Yivo Historishe Shriftn", III, 1937: 721-730 (translated by David E. Fishman).

the female cigarette workers began to earn less and less, until they actually earned less money at cigarette stuffing than they had back when they were just cigarette packers.

All of this was known to the workers. So they walked out on their jobs. The female workers also understood how important it was for them that male workers continue to work as cigarette stuffers. Because the cigarette-packers were sub-contracted by the cigarette stuffers, not by the manufacturer, and the less the stuffers made the less the packers would be paid. So, they also joined the strike against hiring girls as stuffers.

As usual, the discussions then began: the manufacturer summoned the workers and declared that he did not, God forbid, have any evil intentions, and that he was not going to lay off anyone. But the workers were determined not to return to work until he fired the girls working as stuffers. So the manufacturer, seeing that things weren't going well, sent out emissaries to other cities to find female workers. And meanwhile, he began to use the old, tried, home remedies: The factory manager posted a notice in the factory announcing that whoever did not appear for work would be arrested and tried for resigning from work without giving the boss two weeks advance notice.

The police then began to arrest whomever they found. But it didn't make a difference. The whole city began to talk and debate about the matter. Some people held that the workers were rascals. How dare they give orders to the manufacturer? He's entitled to hire whichever workers he wants to. Things went so far that the preacher, who in this city occupied the rabbi's position, involved himself in the affair³. He claimed that the police commissioner had asked him to make peace between the workers and the manufacturer. The preacher summoned the workers to meet with him, but of the 200 workers involved – both men and women – only a few older ones appeared at the meeting. The rabbi rebuked them, saying that striking was against the law, and that with their current strike they were bringing harm to all the Jews in Russia, because the state would begin to look upon all Jews as rebels. In addition, he literally swore to them that the manufacturer did not, God forbid, intend to take work away from the men, and would not lay off anyone.

But neither the rabbi's rebuke, nor his promises, had any effect. The workers remained firm. Then the rabbi decided to give a sermon in the great synagogue on the matter. He cooked up a kasha of quotes from the prophets, *tana'im* and *amora'im*⁴ – which led all the way to the tobacco factory. Then he became agitated and began to curse all the workers, while screaming, waving his arms, and so forth. The synagogue was full of people, including workers from the tobacco factory and from other crafts. All the workers got up and left their seats.

Suddenly, the sound of whistling echoed through the synagogue. All the workers were hissing and booing the rabbi. "Rabbi, you must have gotten a 25 ruble note for that sermon!" one voice called out from the crowd.

³ In Vilna, there was a longstanding tradition that no one held the title of rabbi of the community. Instead, the preacher was informally recognized as the highest religious authority.

⁴ *Tana'im*: rabbinic sages of the Mishna, from the first to third centuries; *amora'im*: rabbinic sages of the Talmud, from the third to fifth centuries.

The preacher became bewildered and forgot his train of thought. It was the first time he had ever faced such a humiliation. It was the first time that the congregation had told him that he should mind his own business. Then a worker got up on the *bimah*⁵ and explained to everyone the true meaning of the strike.

The manufacturer held out for a few more days, and then gave in. The following brochure was composed in connection with the above incident.

The Publishers

The Jewish Workers Against the Jewish Capitalists

Ever since "N" became a city, there has not been such a story, which should agitate an entire city like the story of the rabbi's sermon in the great synagogue concerning the workers in "X's" tobacco factory. Old Jews, with their grey beards shake their heads in pain and anguish and can't calm themselves: "My goodness. This is the kind of story that doesn't pass! *Borukh hashem*⁶, we're old men and not little children. We've been going to this synagogue for 50-60 years, and we never witnessed such a scandal. That the simple masses should mock the town preacher and make him appear ridiculous!"

For the old men, it is indeed an unheard-of story, which makes their hair stand. "How can it be?" they ask. "Aren't Jews still one people, united in the terrible *tsores*⁷ which they have endured for thousands of years in exile? Aren't Jews still all children of one father, with one common faith, with one common Jewish heart? Jews gather on *shabbes* in *shul*⁸, so as to forget – at least for a while – their worldly affairs, forget their *tsores* and suffering, and to pour out their hearts in prayer before God. But look what we have lived to see in our old age! Instead of unity and brotherly love – jealousy and hatred.

Jews should quarrel in a sanctuary! The masses against the town-preacher! What a desecration!"

Yes, this is an unheard-of story. But if we'll think a bit more about it and observe more closely everything that has been happening of late, we'll understand that the story with the preacher is the natural outcome of many sad stories which are unheard of, and which should upset every person with sense in his head. Has it ever been heard of that a preacher should terrify workers in shul, should threaten them with all sorts of afflictions, in this world and in the world to come, only because they've quarreled with their employer? Has it ever been heard of that a spiritual person, who should set an example to the rich people regarding proper behavior toward the poor, should besmirch hundreds of honest laborers, who toil their lives away in factories for a piece of bread? That he should curse and slander elderly Jews who feed their wives and children by the sweat of their brow, without asking for anyone else's charity? To speak about them as of a band of robbers and thieves who should be put in prison?

⁵ *Bimah*: the platform in the center of the synagogue from which the Torah is read.

⁶ *Borukh hashem*: Thank God (Yiddish and Hebrew).

⁷ *Tsores*: troubles (Yiddish and Hebrew).

⁸ *Shabbes*: the Sabbath (Yiddish), *shul*: synagogue (Yiddish).

Did it ever happen in the old days, that a Jewish manufacturer or workshop owner tried, through all sorts of devices, to throw old men out onto the street, men, who have toiled away their whole lives for him? To throw them out just to increase his already large income, through using the cheap labor of women? Did it ever happen in the old days that because of a dispute with workers, the boss turned to the despicable police, and paid them good money so that they should, not in accordance with the law, arrest workers, grab innocent people on the street, and beat them? Has it ever been heard that the head of police and the sheriff should become involved in a dispute between a Jewish boss and his Jewish workers, along with the *gabbaim*⁹ and the preacher? the former – to force the workers back to work with fists, and the latter – to incite the public against the poor workers, to call them with shameful epithets, and pour insults on them, for the sin of not wanting to give in to the almighty rich man?, for the sin of not wanting to starve with their wives and children in the street?

All of these are brand new things, which we did not know about in the past, and which we now see vividly before our eyes!

The workers refused to give in, even when they saw that the manufacturer started looking for replacement workers. All the workers in town who understood their interests supported the tobacco-workers, because they understood that the strike was not just the tobacco-workers' affair, but was the affair of all workers.

The police and the preacher stood shoulder to shoulder with the manufacturer. The preacher, who is of one body and one soul with the wealthy, gave a sermon defaming the impudent workers, and spreading all sorts of lies about them. In that sermon, he lashed out at everything that has in recent years begun to disturb our rich men, including the booklets written for the masses in a plain and simple language.

After all these curses, insults, and lies, should anyone be surprised that he was answered with whistling? For the *shul*, the whole story was indeed a disgrace. But the disgrace lay not in the fact that the workers began to whistle. The disgrace lay in the sermon that our dear preacher gave. Isn't it a disgrace for a synagogue to be made into the tool of a manufacturer, who wants to seduce his workers into acting in such a way, so that he can get richer, so that more of their hard-earned pennies can fall into his thick and dirty pockets? If the highest-ranking religious functionary in "N" can make the *shul* into a little marketplace, to conduct all sorts of despicable business, then the worker who publicly estimated the sum of his broker's fee was absolutely right.

When religious functionaries consider it proper, for the sake of the bosses, to bring the capitalists' battles into *shul*, must the workers be silent? The workers must speak out against these loyal servants of capital and show them that the workers are no longer a herd of quiet lambs, who can be driven as one wishes. The workers stand, and from now on will always stand, firmly in defense of their interests!

Yes, Mr. Manufacturer and his loyal servant Mr. Preacher. You transported our battle from the factory to the *shul*, and from there, throughout the entire city. We thank you for that. This day has been a very useful one for us. On this

⁹ *gabba'im*: synagogue officials.

day, we acquired the support and friendship of all of those masses who previously stood far apart from us. Even more. On this day we began to prevail. For only a few days later, "x" gave in to our demands. It is as the verse says, "He has dug a pit and hollowed it, and fell into the ditch which he made" (Psalms 7:16). The Capitalist dug a ditch for the workers, and then fell it himself.

When the capitalists want to threaten the workers by importing quiet, obedient, hungry workers from other cities, what do you think happens? We become acquainted with these workers, explain to them how our interests are tied with theirs, and they immediately go back home to their towns. And they leave with new ideas, ideas about the unity of all workers in their struggle against the bosses and spread these ideas further.

Now, after the strike, all Jews can see that there is no longer *one* Jewish people, in which all live peacefully together, but that the Jewish people is divided into two classes, and that there is hatred between.

What are the reasons that our Jews now battle against each other?

There was once a time when all Jews were almost equal with each other. Some were a little richer, some were a little poorer, but the difference was very small. Then, all Jews were either agents between the landlords and peasants, small merchants, or storekeepers. All Jews made a living from the same professions, and when an evil decree was issued, it struck all Jews. In those days, Jews had the same *tsores* from the land lords and government officials from above and faced the same hatred from the peasants below.

But then serfdom was abolished, the railroads were built, trade expanded, factories were established, and the make-up of the Jewish people changed. Rich Jews found it possible to obtain even more money through credit, to make bigger business, and get much richer. And the poorer Jews found it impossible to compete with the rich merchant and manufacturer. The railways made it possible to send merchandise over long distances and in large volume, but that was beneficial only to the rich ones. The poor merchants found it ever more difficult to compete. And a new, indispensable thing emerged, called capital. The small merchants and craftsmen disappeared and were forced to begin selling their labor to the rich. And that is how a new class of workers came into being.

Are there any workers whose fathers were also hired hands? Very few. And there is virtually no one around whose grandfather was a worker. In one generation, there emerged a class of people forced to sell their labor to those people who have capital; and there emerged a whole class of people who live off of other people's labor, off of sucking the blood of the people who don't have capital.

Most capitalist's parents were also small merchants, storekeepers etc. In the course of 50 years the Jewish nation was divided into capitalists and workers. What kind of common interests can these two classes have?

As the number of workers has grown, and their condition has become worse, they have begun to understand that things can't go on this way, that they must see to it that their intolerable conditions be improved, that they must struggle. But the more we workers realize our interests, the more the capitalists grow to hate us. So much so that they forget that they are persecuted Jews just like us. They ask for help in struggling against us from our former common enemy – the Tsarist government and the police. The capitalists

themselves tear apart the bonds which used to unite all Jews. By tearing apart those bonds, they prove that the two Jewish classes – capitalists and workers – do not have any common interests.

We should not be alarmed by this, because only through our struggle against the capitalists have we come to realize our true strength. Only through hatred of capital did we cultivate our love for our suffering brethren. Only through struggle was our consciousness raised. Should we regret that we have lost the love of our Jewish millionaires, when instead we have acquired the love which unites us with Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian workers – in short, with the workers of all lands?

If you talk with one of our educated Jews, he'll say to you: "You are pointlessly tearing apart the bonds of friendship with the Jewish capitalists. You are, after all, bound together by the oppression which all Jews suffer equally from the state: all Jews are prohibited from living in Russia proper, all Jews are denied various rights. Therefore, all Jews should unite to secure various rights, rather than struggle against the manufacturers for a shorter workday or wages". The preacher will add tearfully: "Brothers, one must be concerned not only with oneself, but with *tovat ha-klal*¹⁰. By struggling on your own behalf, you are inciting the state to pour out its anger against all Jews. You are making things worse for all of us. Why do you forget the entirety of our holy people?" These Jewish patriots think that while struggling against the capitalists, we won't be able to achieve anything for all of Jewry.

But this opinion is false. We've seen that the Jewish capitalists have never attempted to secure any rights for the Jews. They merely bribe the officials and policemen to disregard certain laws – that's how the capitalists get whatever they need. The preacher is wrong: the quieter we will be, the more we bow our heads in submission, the more the government will trample on us. [...] The preacher has exposed the fact that for the Jewish capitalists, the Jews' rightlessness is in fact advantageous. Because if the Jews are a cowardly, harried people, it will be easier to exploit them.

But no! We understand that all those voices who wish to pacify us, are shouting out of fear of our united power. We know that through our struggle against the Capitalists, we are also bringing closer the day of our common liberation, and of equal rights for all Jews.

Why did so many small storekeepers support the strikers at the tobacco factory, as did so many others who have no economic interest in the strike, or should even oppose it? The answer is: these people sense that some sort of force has awakened in the Jewish people, and they realize that the attainment of a better future for Jews depends on that force. And they are right. [...] Through struggling with the capitalists, we are becoming a force; and our force will in time become so strong that we will use it to struggle for all the rights which we are denied.

Let us ask all those skeptics: Would you have believed a year ago that the workers would prevail against the manufacturer "X"? Everywhere, Jewish workers are beginning to go out and struggle; they are beginning to organize

¹⁰ *tovat ha-klal*: the welfare of the community.

themselves everywhere. When the Jewish workers in all Jewish cities and towns will be united, we will have the kind of power which we can't even imagine now.

True, that force will not be enough to battle against the Russian state. But we will have reliable co-strugglers: the Russian, Polish and Lithuanian workers. Together we will struggle to attain all the rights we are lacking – the rights to strike, to form unions, to gather, to write, publish, and speak whatever we want to. We will be supported by our friends when we will begin to demand the elimination of barbaric laws which refuse to recognize us as equal human beings, equal to all other peoples in the world. We will begin to demand the elimination of tyrannical laws which have imprinted on our tired, drawn faces the mark of pathetic slaves, who can be derided and mocked by any idiot, and be trampled upon with impunity. In the struggle for our rights, our force grows – and we are the only force which will be able to secure equal civil rights for all Jews.

We workers occupy the lowest position in society. Therefore, we won't secure the elimination of the inhumane anti-Jewish laws only for ourselves. When we, the workers, will cast off the heavy chains which enslave the entire Jewish nation, the chains will also fall from those Jews who sit on our backs and press upon us with the heavy weight of their moneybags.

We have begun to struggle for our freedom and equal rights while we still have torturers on our backs. We have done so, not so that we should have to continue carrying them on our backs. No! But having inhaled the fresh, healthy air of freedom, we will cast them off of us with greater ease.

Pay attention, capitalists! The more you weigh down upon us, the more you dig your nails into us, the greater will be your downfall, the more terrible will be your debacle!