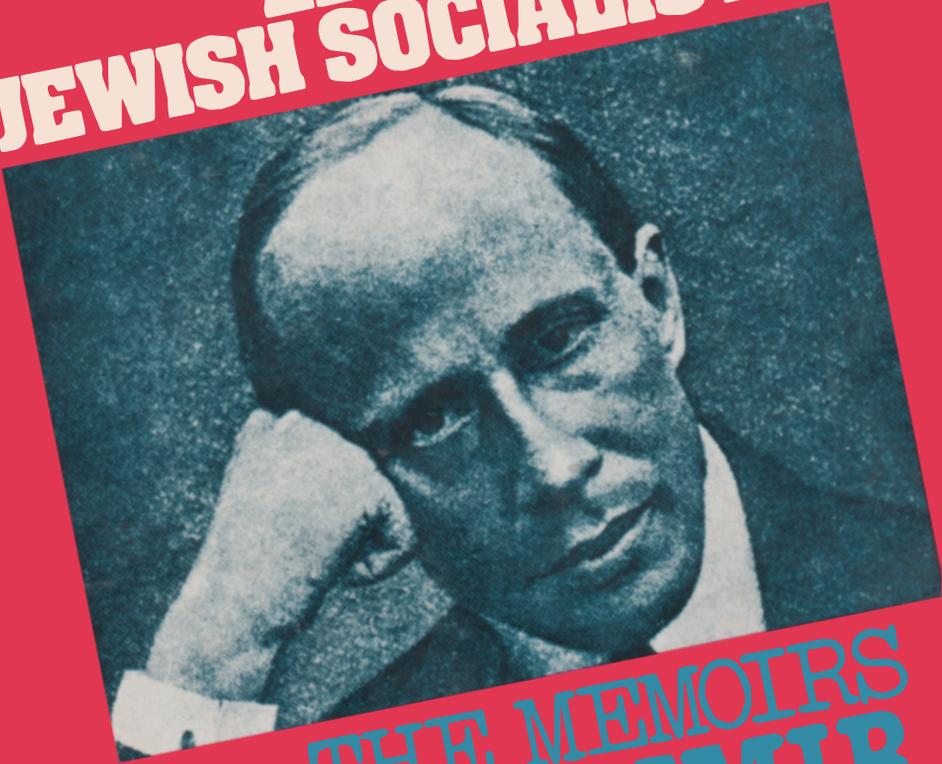


**The
LIFE and SOUL
of a
LEGENDARY
JEWISH SOCIALIST**



**THE MEMOIRS
of VLADIMIR
MEDEM**

Translated and Edited by
Samuel A. Portnoy

VLADIMIR MEDEM

*The Life and Soul
of a Legendary
Jewish Socialist*



Medem at the time of his arrival in America, January, 1921

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Translator's Note

In transliterating from the Yiddish, a language based upon the Hebrew alphabet, I have followed essentially the form prescribed by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York. Exceptions occur with respect to names of persons and words widely used and understood in their distinctive spelling. For the convenience of the reader accustomed to the English-language practice, I have also introduced capital letters, as in the names of Yiddish newspapers, despite the absence of capital letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

In memory of my parents, Joseph and Pauline Portnoy, whose social ideals, and lives dedicated to their fulfillment, inspired my wish to translate from the Yiddish the memoirs of the sublime fighter for human brotherhood—Vladimir Medem.

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Introduction

During a conversation with a colleague on the way to a conference of academic specialists in Slavic studies, I had occasion to mention that I was engaged in the translation and editing of the Yiddish-language memoirs of Vladimir Medem. “Vladimir who?” came the response—a surprising one, since I was certain that all specialists in the history of the Russian revolutionary movements of the past century, and of the Marxist movement in particular, were knowledgeable about the Jewish role in general, and especially about the contribution of the Jewish Labor Bund and its leading figures.

My colleague’s response was confirmation that I had made the proper decision when I undertook the task of bringing to light the memoirs of one of the leading figures in the Jewish and Russian revolutionary movements, a figure unfortunately neglected in the ample and growing English-language literature on various aspects of the subject.

The spur to the translation of Medem’s memoirs, which were published in 1923 in a two-volume Yiddish edition titled *Fun mayn lebn* (*From My Life*), came from a basic professional and intellectual decision reached during the past decade. This decision was compounded of two elements: a determination to concentrate my research and writing efforts on the Jewish role in Russian and Eastern European social movements; and to utilize, in the process, the grossly underutilized if not wholly neglected sources—substantial, often indispensable—in the Yiddish language. Hence my initial plan to embark upon the translation of a work from the valuable store of memoir literature in Yiddish.

But why Medem, and not one of a score of other individuals whose memoirs in English would also enrich the literature and help round out the picture of the Jewish contribution to the movement for political freedom and social emancipation in the Tsarist “prison house of nationalities”? Because Medem had become a palpable

presence in my consciousness. Because the name and face of Medem had etched themselves in a special way in my memory.

I had seen Medem's face—among other memorable figures of labor and socialist history—hanging on the classroom walls of the Yiddish secular schools of the Workmen's Circle, the Jewish labor-fraternal order built by working-class immigrants and dedicated to the preservation and perpetuation of the social ideals which constituted the spiritual baggage of those immigrants: *frayhayt*, *glaykhhayt*, *un briderlikkhayt* (freedom, equality, and brotherhood). I had absorbed this trinity of ideals as a pupil in the elementary and secondary schools of the Workmen's Circle, toward the upbuilding of which my parents had devoted decades of untiring, selfless effort. In that inspiring corner of the world of our fathers, a world—and a corner—illuminated so memorably in Irving Howe's book, I learned about the dedication to those same ideals of the Bund in Tsarist Russia and independent Poland. Indeed, veterans of the Bund, of which Medem was one of the earliest leaders and a seminal figure in the development of the Yiddish schools in Poland, had been largely instrumental in launching that particular school movement in the United States. (Medem's picture, it might be noted, still graces the premises of Yiddish secular schools. I saw it in Paris in 1973, along with his bust, in the classroom and library of the school sponsored by the French equivalent of the Workmen's Circle.)

During my childhood and adolescent years of intense social awareness, I had also heard and seen the name Medem in connection with an extraordinary institution—the renowned Medem Sanatorium located in the vicinity of Warsaw. Before it was consumed in the Holocaust, together with all of its youthful residents, the sanatorium, in its pleasant bucolic setting, was the salvation—physically, morally, and culturally—of thousands of Jewish children. It had been aptly named when it opened three years after Medem's death, for one of his most distinguishing marks was an abiding concern for the total well-being of the children of Jewish poverty. I was one of the fortunate American children (our hardships were as nothing compared to those of working-class children in Poland) who listened with awe to the reports about the work of the Medem

Sanatorium, and derived particular satisfaction, when, together with my classmates, I would solicit funds for its upkeep.

But I was unfamiliar with (or had I simply forgotten over the years?) those details of Medem's life which had made him a legendary figure in his own time. Indeed, the inscription on his tombstone in the Workmen's Circle cemetery in New York, where his mortal remains are interred, quite appropriately, next to those of another lover of, and one beloved by, the Jewish common folk—Sholom Aleichem—reads: "*Di legende fun der yidisher arbeter bavegung*" ("The Legend of the Jewish Labor Movement"). And the more I progressed in the translation, the more intrigued I became with that life—so multifaceted, so multicolored, so profoundly integrated, so sentient and utterly humane; the more I came to appreciate why Medem enjoyed the admiration and love of Jewish workers and ordinary *folksmenshn* (and the respect of ideological adversaries) in New York, in Poland, in Argentina, and the world over; and why they were plunged into the deepest sadness upon receiving word of his untimely death in New York while on a fund-raising mission for the relief of the masses of Jewish poor in Poland. For having learned by then, from his memoirs, of Medem's origins, of his "return" to the Jewish people, they mourned him as a *ger tsedek*—a "righteous convert"—the rare designation for those more-than-nominal converts to Judaism whose fidelity and dedication to the Jewish people are of an exceptionally high order. (Medem's assimilated, thoroughly Russified, Jewish parents had him baptized at birth in the Russian Orthodox Church. They themselves—following in the footsteps of the older children—were to convert, not long before their deaths, to Lutheran Christianity.)

It was no formal conversion (Medem was a "freethinker"), but a gradual ethnic "homecoming," as he explains, in which a "major factor" in his shift from a Russian, nominally Christian, environment to a wholly Jewish one was "the direct influence of the Jewish workers' movement." Yet a strange one was Medem: at the very time that a growing number of assimilationist Jewish *intelligenti* were joining with their non-Jewish social kindred to move *into* the radical and liberal groupings within the Russian body politic, Medem, who had

laid down the burden of the Cross and should logically have joined the movement of other *intelligenti*, deliberately chose to take up the mountainous burden, as it were, of the Star of David. His awareness of the sufferings of the Jewish proletariat—thrice oppressed as Jews, workers, and non-Great Russians—and his conviction that the Marxian-socialist road would lead to the emancipation of the Jewish masses together with the oppressed non-Jewish peoples of the Russian Empire, became the dynamic underpinning of Medem's thought and conduct. And the building of a political movement whose *Weltanschauung* represented the integration of Jewish and democratic socialist ideals became Medem's lifelong passion. That movement was the Bund.

The territory of the Bund—its *rayon*—was the Pale of Settlement, a vast geographic indignity juridically confining, constricting, and daily humiliating over five of the six million Jews within the Russian Empire. Cataclysmic forces were at work within the Pale, shaking the old and shaping the new in Jewish life. The problem of primary concern to the Bund—the shift in allegiance to a revolutionary socialist movement on the part of the Jewish proletariat—involved substantially greater upheaval in the lives of the recruits than had the shift of the leaders from Populism to Marxism.

“The Jewish worker had placed his hope in God, in the Messiah, in Rothschild, in all manner of good and pious people, but not in his own powers,” wrote A. Litvak, pioneer publicist of the Bund and one of the small company of so-called semi-*intelligenti* which opened the road to the masses by hastening the transition to Yiddish in the educational and agitational work of the organization. Having waged and won the struggle with himself—with his own passivity and fears—the worker found himself engaged in struggle with family and the communal “establishment,” both religious and secular. The Jewish worker, turning revolutionary, was proclaiming his repudiation of a system of institutionalized timidity and artful obsequiousness, justified by the pillars of the Jewish community as the best means of averting the wrath of the regime and officialdom, *nachal'stvo*. The prayers of the rabbinate for the health and welfare of Nicholas II; its self-serving genuflection before the Jewish bourgeoisie—a caste with all the vulgarity of the parvenu; its concern

for the preservation of social distinctions in the very synagogue itself—all these exacerbated the hostility between plebeians and clerical leadership. The synagogue itself became an arena of conflict.

There were additional struggles—in the economic, political, and cultural spheres: against the efforts of Christian workers to freeze Jewish proletarians out of mechanized factories; against the manifestations of anti-Semitism of a more violent nature; against the nationalist Polish Socialist Party and the cosmopolitan-assimilationist Polish Social Democrats; against the *Iskra* tendency in the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party; against Jewish groups of various kinds: Zionists, liberals, assimilationists, Hebraists, creatures of Zubatov's "police socialism."

In the struggle for Jewish hearts and minds, the Bund found itself engaged at an early date in a particularly stubborn confrontation with the Zionist movement. The rise of both movements at almost the same time was a reflection of the spirit of national self-awareness, modernism and secularism sweeping the Jewish arena. While Zionism drew on deeper wellsprings of inspiration in Jewish history, Bundism responded to the pressing needs of the Jewish masses in the here-and-now. The encounter between these two forces in Jewish life involved a variety of aspects and elements: Yiddish versus Hebrew; secularism versus clericalism; uncompromising political struggle against the Tsarist system versus adaptation to it, or, in the manner of Herzl, direct collaboration with it in an effort to have the regime disgorge its unwanted Jews; economic and social conflicts of Bundist workers against Zionist employers; and finally, the belief that Jewish emancipation would be a concomitant of the freedom of all oppressed nationalities in a democratic Russian socialist society, versus the Zionist view, which, in its unalloyed disdain for the diaspora, equated Jewish freedom and emancipation with the territory of Palestine.

What, then, was there about the Bund which drew the masses, moved them to prodigies of effort, held the allegiance of tens of thousands, indeed, even after they had moved to American shores? Parallels from the ample store of Clio spring to mind. The Bund combined, at once, an active belief in the aforementioned, prophetic-millennial ideals of freedom, equality, and brotherhood. In fervor

and self-sacrifice, its youthful adherents evoked an image of the ancient Maccabees and the later Marranos, fiercely loyal to the Jewish nation (or to their conception of it) and tenacious in holding to the faith. Finally, like latter-day Carbonari, their fellowship of the hunted provided them with the spur to bear the conspiratorial life with fortitude. They wore their membership in the underground movement like a badge of honor. (The very title of the Bund anthem, *Di shvue* ["The Oath"], sung with arms interlocked and in a spirit of deepest reverence, evokes the mood of the time.)

News of the Bund's founding in 1897 spread swiftly. "Committees and groups of the Bund arose in various cities and towns of the Pale like mushrooms after a warm rain," recalled John Mill, one of the leading pioneers. Greetings came from foreign Social Democratic organizations; *Vorwärts*, official organ of the German party, alluded to what was very much on the minds of the Bund pioneers, when it wrote, "In the birth of the Jewish Labor Bund we perceive the first step toward the creation of a union of the all-Russian proletariat, an all-Russian Workers' Party."

And verily, within six months, the efforts of the Bund—without which the new party could not have been created when it was—were crowned with success. Of the nine delegates who gathered in March 1898 for the founding of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, three were from the Bund—including the only worker present. It was more than coincidence that the birth of the RSDWP took place in Minsk, a stronghold of the Bund and temporary seat of its Central Committee. The class-conscious Jewish workers were giving tangible expression to their internationalist ideals.

It was in the city of Minsk, his hometown, that Medem entered the life of the Bund in 1900. An aura of romance, mystery, and fascination enveloped the personality of Medem from the beginning of his organizational activity. The people in the Bund movement had an insatiable curiosity about his origins and evolution. To begin with, his was a memorable character development. As a child and youth, Medem was reared in a loving, intellectually stimulating home environment in which his inclinations and predispositions took shape. These were in turn refined and filtered through a maturing mind and mellowing spirit, until they flowered in the abiding traits of the man:

modesty, which lived long and intimately with self-doubt; an unquenchable desire to savor experience; the impulse toward self-denial verging on something akin to asceticism; a spirit of acute compassion to the point of heartache—"perhaps the most powerful sensation of my life," noted Medem. And there were other arresting traits: concern for moral purity; a feeling for justice and a positive revulsion toward all manifestations of injustice, brutality, and unfairness; a distaste for the posturing and elitism encountered in the emigré political world; a fertile sense of humor and ready risibility; and running like an unbroken thread through Medem's youth and adulthood, indeed central to his *joie de vivre*, was his appreciation of beauty, his esthetic perception.

Medem swiftly became a party "activist," *i.e.*, a full-time party worker and local leader in Minsk. The activity, he recalled, proceeded with zest and freshness and total dedication. "I truly reveled in the sensation and derived great pleasure from it."

But the Jewish revolutionary movement was more than a socialist movement; it was a *social* movement *par excellence*, imbued with a strong personalistic character. At the organization's ineffable *vecherinkas* (soirées where Bundists let their hair down and their spirits run free), Medem would give voice, in brief "inspirational," to his inner feelings and his hopes for the movement. They were elevated feelings and hopes, derived in no small measure from the character and spirit of his comrades—the Moyskhes and the Hillels. The qualities Medem most admired in others were often his very own or those to which he aspired. Thus an older woman comrade was "compassionate," an "endearing personality of extraordinary kindness" who carried "a distinctive mark of asceticism, of selflessness and moral purity."

Emotion and sentiment alone, however, did not exhaust the quality of Medem's fidelity to the Bund. There was also a vein of iron in him, traceable perhaps to his proud, "aristocratic" Russian background. In defense of the party's rights and interests; in the striving to achieve a socialist society, struggle was necessary. The nature and the outcome of the struggle would be influenced by two factors: the organized structure of the Bund and its ethnic character.

With respect to organization, the outstanding feature and greatest

pride of the Bund, observed Medem, lay in its genuinely democratic, mass character, and its steady orientation toward the masses. But the truly distinctive nature of the organization was its singular, its unique, character as a *Jewish* revolutionary workers' movement to which adherents were drawn by two separate but qualitatively equal motives and impulses: class feeling and consciousness of being a Jew. The segregation of the Jewish people within the Pale had established at once the preconditions for a Jewish proletariat and a Jewish Marxist party, and the basis for a national program of the Bund consistent with and reflecting the multi-ethnic character of the Russian Empire. (Indeed, the articulation of this program was to become one of Medem's major contributions to the movement.) The critical point is that the RSDWP, at its inception, had acknowledged the distinctive character of the Bund and its role as spokesman for the Jewish proletariat within the Empire.

But it was precisely against a growing threat to this very character and role of the Bund that Medem was sounding the alarm and the need for struggle. The RSDWP was in a parlous state. Destroyed on the leadership level shortly after its launching, it represented an organizational-ideological vacuum which Lenin (newly arrived in Europe from Siberian exile and armed with certain *idées fixes*), Plekhanov, Martov, and a handful of others were preparing to fill as early as 1900, with the launching of the newspaper *Iskra*. An elite group, in short—the *Iskra*-group—was seeking to erect a new party “from the top down.” Medem's fear of the consequences of such a trend had even taken shape in a dream—the fear of a self-appointed intellectual vanguard minus a following; a staff without an army. “A workers' movement cannot be created from the top down [but] must arise from below . . . from the bottom up,” said Medem to a group of comrades in the summer of 1900. “The task of the leadership *intelligenti* is only to illuminate this massive current . . . to remove obstacles, to help, to serve.” This was central to the prevailing philosophy of the Bund. “The broad working masses were still far removed, not only from revolutionary consciousness, but even from simple political interest,” explained Medem, adding: “However, the *intelligentsia* was impatient. [Here Medem could not resist one of the infrequent—but most telling—generalizations in his memoirs.] The

intelligentsia is ever impatient. It balked at taking, step-by-step, the long road of the working masses.”

While Medem was fully preoccupied with political problems, he lived in the shadow of a personal tragedy. He had contracted an incurable illness—nephritis—while at the University of Kiev. But a reserved Medem makes only passing references to it, and generally dismisses it with an air of nonchalance. (Miraculously, he survived for twenty-five years.)

It was at the university that Medem had received his baptism under fire, as it were. Eighteen ninety-nine was the year of large-scale strikes and demonstrations in Russia’s universities. Together with hundreds of others, he was expelled and arrested, and sent home to Minsk “under police supervision.” His political activity was a guarantee that he would again be arrested. He was; but by a meticulously executed ruse, Medem succeeded in escaping abroad. Instead of five years in Eastern Siberia, there opened before him five years of unexampled freedom and fulfilment in Switzerland—the classical land of political asylum and the magnet during those halcyon days for thousands of Russian-Jewish youth, students in particular, craving freedom and educational opportunities.

His destination was the Jewish “colony” at Bern. It was Minsk—or any Eastern European *shtetl*—writ large; and its political component a kaleidoscope of radical and revolutionary groups and Jewish factions, a picture of the Russian underground movement on a broader and infinitely freer canvas. He entered a warm and congenial environment in which he came “under the wings of dear, devoted people . . . good friends, intimate friends.” Medem swiftly rose to a position of leadership in the Bund’s many-faceted operations, and in this febrile society, with its mass of people thrown together “like so many berries in a basket,” Medem reciprocated the warmth and loyalty of scores of friends and party comrades with a vast love and affection of his own.

For the denizens of the colony, politics superseded academics. “The fires of partisan struggle,” he recalled in memoirs suffused with nostalgia about those early days, “raged furiously and without cessation.” There were SDs, SRs, and SSs (Zionist-Socialists). On the turbulent political waters, the Bund had to negotiate its way, above

all, between the Scylla of Zionism—which at that early date seemed to offer a utopian formula and escape from the categorical imperative of struggle at home—and the Charybdis of *Iskra*—with its unrealistic gospel of ethnic assimilationism and its politics of monolithic centralization.

Medem began early to sift out his feelings about the big and medium-sized political guns. His emotions ran the gamut from awe and admiration (for such as Ansky and Chernov) to disdain and contempt (mild for Zionists such as Syrkin and Weizmann—despite ideological differences he remained on close terms with rank-and-file Zionists; and acute for men like Lenin, Trotsky, and Zinoviev). And the youthful, still somewhat naive Marxist enthusiast experienced something of a rude awakening when he looked upon the faces of revolutionary “titans” and saw egg on top of the warts.

Medem was not impressed by Lenin when he went to a lecture of his in Bern:

From what I had previously heard about him I envisaged a towering revolutionary, both important and imposing. . . . But what I saw was an animated little individual . . . with a clever face but not an intelligent one. He was reminiscent of—the comparison sprang instantly to mind—a crafty Russian grain dealer. . . . He spoke smoothly and with a quiet, dogged forcefulness; drily, without embellishments and without enthusiasm.

(Among its other virtues, Medem’s memoirs constitute a useful source of Leniniana—not to speak of Plekhanoviana and Trotskyana—based upon his close personal interaction with and observation of Lenin over the years.)

Surface mannerisms, of course, were of less concern to Medem than the content of Lenin’s program and the politics of *Iskra*. Medem drew together present and future in offering a composite picture of both. Lenin brought to bear two major qualities of character, observed Medem: an “imperious will” and a “pronounced distrust of people.” With respect to the former, he had all the earmarks of “a born dictator.” As to his second trait, notes Medem,

he doesn't believe you. When you speak to him he looks at you with his small eyes—in a kind of sidelong glance—and with a cunning, devilish smile, as if to say: "There's not a word of truth in what you're saying! Oh well, go on; me you won't deceive."

These two traits of Lenin's were "strikingly reflected in the spiritual face of *Iskra*," observes Medem, adding: "And the organizational plan of *Iskra*—that was 100% Lenin." In building the party from the top down, and bypassing the local leaders and working masses, the handful of emigré Iskristis would thus assure their hegemony in the party from the outset; and Lenin would assure his domination over that handful. "Fifteen years before he became dictator of Russia," says Medem, "Lenin had already established a miniature dictatorship within the limited confines of an illegal party."

The memoirs also provide an opportunity to measure Medem against Lenin in a broader sense, in their contrasting personalities, on the score of their distinctive "chemistries." Although political activity was the dynamic core of Medem's life, he was anything but a political animal in the manner of a Lenin. He apologized to no one for his romantic and sentimental inclinations (one notes the frequency with which this nominal freethinker finds himself using the Yiddish-Hebrew word *neshome*—soul). He could hike to a Swiss mountaintop and relish the natural beauty—while, in contrast, the initial response of a Lenin, after an arduous climb to the summit of a Swiss mountain, when his climbing companion was ready to wax eloquent over the view from the summit, was: "The Mensheviks really mess things up." Medem could unashamedly respond with marked sentience to classical music ("When . . . I heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time . . . it was among the great events of my life"), while a Lenin, in conversation with Gorky, remarked that "I can't listen to music too often [because] it affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid nice things and stroke the heads of people who could create such beauty while living in this vile hell."

Other profound differences suggest themselves. A dream of Medem's turns into a nightmare when the political leader finds himself way out front (the symbolic "vanguard"), turns around, and

sees no mass following. Can one conceive of a Lenin experiencing a similar dream? a Lenin obsessed precisely with the notion of a vanguard party of professional revolutionists, of all-knowing Marxist *intelligenti* acting in the capacity of surrogates for the unstable, undependable, unpredictable masses with their supposedly limited horizons. Medem knew the history of the French Revolution. A democrat in his every fiber, he felt nothing but revulsion toward Jacobinism. Here was a corollary of his deep concern with a party of, by, and for the masses, in which the “Democracy” in Social Democracy was to be cherished as much as the “Social,” in which socialism without democracy was inherently impossible. Against this outlook stood Lenin’s apotheosis of that very Jacobinism compounded of elitism, disdain for democratic principles and practices as mere “bourgeois democracy,” and the readiness to eschew morals and ethics while pursuing any and all means to an end. (Unhappily, in the Russian revolutionary tradition, Lenin had his forerunners—men like Nechayev and Tkachev.)

Then there was Medem’s agony over the sufferings of the Jews—tangible, identifiable victims of pogroms, of other forms of anti-Semitism including discrimination on the part of Christian workers—yes *workers*—all this in stark contrast to Lenin’s preoccupation with theoretical abstractions and categories, to the extent of minimizing the seriousness of anti-Semitism and even rationalizing small-scale pogroms because of the ostensible lack of class-consciousness among non-Jewish workers. Here, in fact, was the nub of the matter. For Lenin, the overriding concern was with the emancipation of *humanity* and the *proletariat*, while the personal and ethical components were central to the socialism of Medem and the Bund. In their value system, influenced no doubt by the Jewish ethical-spiritual tradition as filtered through the rationalist membrane of a secular political and social movement, the key was the emancipation of the *human* and the *proletarian*.

The difference was made clear in an intellectual encounter between Medem and Trotsky, an ally of Lenin in the *Iskra* struggle against the Bund. In the wake of the Kishinev pogrom in 1903, Medem embarked on a far-ranging lecture tour on the subject of anti-Semitism. It included a heated debate with Trotsky in

Karlsruhe—one of those hours-long affairs beloved of the emigré disputationists. Trotsky's feisty character rose to the surface after Medem "dared" to direct some caustic remarks at the Russian Social Democrats—the Iskristi—for having "constantly neglected the important task of fighting anti-Semitism." Trotsky advanced the standard Iskrist view that fighting anti-Semitism "in *particular*" was unnecessary, that a rise in the "general awareness" of the broad masses would obviate the need for making the Jews "a *special* subject of discussion." Small wonder that Medem was deeply pained by Trotsky's bland argument from theory and not from life.

Against the background of the Holocaust and the shocking unconcern of the "civilized" world, the reader is moved by Medem's references to Kishinev—and his poignant aside. (His observations were penned, let it be recalled, in the year 1921!)

The report of the Kishinev slaughter filled everyone with horror. In trying to recapture those days, one is struck by how tremendously callous and apathetic people have become since then. Nowadays hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives are snuffed out in terrible pogroms—and nothing happens; the world remains calm and indifferent. But at that time people had not yet become "accustomed" to such things. The gruesome event [the pogrom took "only" 45 lives] literally shook the world.

While the Bund reacted to Kishinev with the swift and effective organization of Jewish self-defense bodies capable of offering impressive resistance to the *pogromchiki*, Lenin and the *Iskra* group were preparing a political pogrom of sorts against the Bund. The Second Congress of the RSDWP met in London in July 1903. Medem was a member of the scandalously underrepresented Bund delegation (it spoke for 25,000 members, while the remaining elements of the party constituted fewer than 9,000 members). It was the moment of truth for the Bund. The rigging and manipulation by Lenin and *Iskra* of a compact majority made the result a foregone conclusion; where the Bund was concerned, all Iskristi—the future Mensheviks and Bolsheviks—were granite hard. (The crystallization of the two tendencies began at that very congress.) The men who were impatient

to give history a shove through the instrument of a super-centralized vanguard party could not abide a democratic mass party like the Bund, with its insistence upon a federated RSDWP reflecting the ethnic realities of Russia. The demand of *Iskra* was: "Assimilate—or get out!" When the Bund was defeated on the decisive issue—the reaffirmation of its status as the Social Democratic organization of the Jewish proletariat, with no geographic restrictions on its sphere of activity, and as "the exclusive representative within the party of the Jewish proletariat"—it announced its withdrawal from the congress and the party. "We had taken our step with a heavy heart," recalled Medem. "Unity was to us a sacred thing. But . . . fanatics of a barracks-centralism had desired to suffocate the Bund [and] we wished to live."

The London Congress was not the last encounter between Medem and the RSDWP. As a delegate to the International Socialist Congress at Amsterdam, Medem fought stubbornly for the Bund's place in the Russian socialist sun. In 1906 he represented the Bund at the Stockholm Congress of the RSDWP, which voted to reopen its doors to the Bund; the revolution of the year before had generated a groundswell of support for Social Democratic unity. Ironically, it was Lenin, the eternal vote-counter and now interested in stealing a march on his Menshevik rivals, who favored the Bund's admission. With a flexible memory, it was easy to forget about his earlier clamor against Bundist separatism, chauvinism, nationalism. (At a later date he would reserve the title "bourgeois liberal" for Medem.) By 1907 Medem was sharing the spotlight with Lenin on the presidium of the party's second London Congress.

Medem recalled the Amsterdam Congress of the International with particular delight. It was his first involvement on a new plane of socialist organizational life; and he was spellbound by the famous personalities and proceedings alike. His characterization of Jaurès is a literary gem. The impression made upon him by that legendary figure of international socialism is one, wrote Medem, "which will not fade from my soul as long as I live." He was "a human personality of genuine historic greatness."

From his new base in Geneva, where Medem had moved in connection with his work on the Bund Committee Abroad, he followed

with rapt attention—and a growing sense of frustration—the stirring developments of Russia's sublime "Fifth Year." The discomfiture of Medem and his comrades in emigration over their inability to play a part in the transcendent events grew steadily. It reached a climax in October when the Bund's Sixth Congress convened in Zurich just as the revolution mounted to a crescendo. The counter-revolution, attended by a wave of pogroms, followed swiftly. Numbers of Jews on the periphery of the movement abandoned their socialist ideals; others rallied to the party of Zionist-Socialists, a movement built—in Medem's words—"on a foundation of despair."

Medem hastened back to Russia at the first opportunity. Moving are the passages in his memoirs dealing with his reflections at the moment of leaving Switzerland and Europe—a moment of stock-taking and a broadening of his outlook on life. The preceding part of his life story, he observed, dealt largely with "social matters"; his "personal life" was subordinate.

[But] those were years rich in substance, colorful years. If for no other reason than my having journeyed about a great deal. . . . I obtained an abundance of impressions in the social sphere; and I had innumerable personal experiences. . . . The lovely mountains engaged my being profoundly; a substantial part of my soul remained among the beautiful Swiss lakes. . . . With eyes and ears wide open I absorbed the new and the beautiful. . . . My whole attitude toward life became permeated by a certain artistic element, endowing even pain and suffering with a luminous blossoming of beauty. . . .

And transcending books, paintings, and music, there was the most consequential: people—living human souls who unfolded before me, who lived with me and with me drew upon the timeless treasures. . . .

Those were rich years. I said farewell to them in a mood of subdued sadness. But the time was right for saying farewell, not only from an external standpoint—because of the events in Russia—but also from inner considerations. The trials of living had multiplied during the recent past. There were many serious personal matters. A great weariness had set in. It was time to write finis to the four-year period. And I craved change. I knew that the life awaiting me in Russia would be hard and somber. But it was necessary; I simply had to plunge into a new current!

Medem's life in Russia did indeed have its "hard" and "somber" aspects during the years of revolutionary ebb. Yet despite a drop in the level of expectation, and despite the waning of the messianic spirit that was so pronounced during the pre-1905 period, Medem continued working and growing and still proving that selfless dedication to the cause was not incompatible with the quest for personal fulfillment.

The years were interlaced with joy and sadness. Pleasure and spiritual satisfaction were derived from such experiences as the spectacle of revolution triumphant in Vilno, in the course of which Medem addressed a tremendous mass meeting in the city circus hall; far-ranging lecture tours (1,000 turned out to hear him at the University of Odessa); the "peculiar sense of liberation" on simply leaving Russia; writing for and collaborating with comrades on the Bund press (the realization of a "daring dream" he had, during a pensive moment in Bern only a few years before); a reunion in the warm and intimate home of a sister; hearing Russian as only Muscovites can speak it; visits to cities at home and abroad to drink deeply yet again at the fountains of culture.

And then there were the elements of sadness and distress: the spectacle of counterrevolution in that very same Vilno; a first look at the environs of his beloved Minsk from the window of a train taking him abroad—the first look after "long, long years," and the last look until Medem would see it again from behind the bars of a prison train; the inability to write an article on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Bund, during the depths of the political reaction ("To write just for the sake of writing, to coin phrases one doesn't feel, is falsehood, and I am incapable of it"); the desperate recourse by certain revolutionary elements to expropriations and terrorist assaults, expedients that prompted Medem to lament how "the revolution had begun to substitute its great mass treasure for sanguinary small change"; Rosa Luxemburg in action at the London Congress of the RSDWP in 1907, where her inveterate hostility to the Bund—so typical of the assimilated Jews in the movement—led her to skirt the thin edge of anti-Semitism in order to score a polemical point. (Medem's pungent vignettes of the leading lights at that congress

contain the salt-and-pepper that historians prize. Indeed, the memoirs are studded with unforgettable cameos of the famous and notorious—from Alexinsky to Zinoviev.)

Then—where does one locate, in the categories of human emotion, the sensation of loneliness and the evocation of longing—those special and seemingly central ingredients of Medem’s life? The “pull . . . homeward” in the midst of a bustling Moscow; “the silent yearning for the twisted, squalid little Vilno streets and for the poor, unkempt Vilno Jews”; the longing for Minsk as he peered from the train window with “restlessness and anguish.”

What had been intended by Medem as a brief trip abroad in 1908 became, during this zenith of the repressive Stolypin regime, an absence of five long years. In the memoirs, Medem moved swiftly over the years 1908–11 because, in his words, “each one was sufficiently like the next.” One is reluctant to accept such a statement at face value. For someone with Medem’s zest for life, it can only be attributed to weariness; his capacity for evoking sentiment must have been running down. Alas, he was a very sick man at the time of writing, and one suspects he was mustering his last ounce of intellectual energy and moral fervor to bring the memoirs to their emotional climax: his prison experiences.

Before turning to that saga of the human capacity to suffer and will to survive, an observation is in order about something that Medem alludes to only in passing. In 1912 he submitted his first article in Yiddish (albeit still written in Latin letters) for the Bund press. It was an occasion of some consequence in the life of an individual for whom the love of the Yiddish language was an integral part—a vibrant, inspirational part—of his love for a people to whom that language was a veritable soul force. In four short years Medem would begin to write only in Yiddish. From that first piece until his untimely death, Medem’s outpouring in *mame-loshn* (“mother tongue”) was reminiscent of floodwaters bursting through a dam. He gushed forth with vast literary creativity in an idiomatic Yiddish that made the aficionados to-the-language-born simply marvel. And, let it be noted, the form and content of his platform Yiddish were equally impressive. In both capacities, Medem was destined to become the

authoritative spokesman for a vital segment of Jewish life in Poland.

For reasons not wholly clear (see chapter 75 and its footnote 1 of the memoirs), Medem returned to Russia in 1913, the occasion of the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty. It was a time when rumors were rife about a possible amnesty. He was not unaware of the danger of arrest. (He later recalled the quip made at the time by his skeptical comrade, Rafael Abramovitch: "You might as well start sewing a big sack, Uncle; it will serve you well traveling by the *étape*.")

Medem was back on Russian soil in the month of June. Five days after his arrival at his brother's home in Kovno, he had the sack on his back. There commenced a twenty-five-month period of imprisonment which became a torment of body and soul, as Medem was moved, in shackles, and in a seemingly endless shuttle, from Warsaw to Orel to Smolensk and back to Orel. Living as he had been from the beginning with knowledge of the pitiless verdict issued by the physician—death from uremia—Medem in prison had to draw upon his last reserves to remain alive.

The nature of this experience, its moral and spiritual impact, amply explain why Medem felt impelled to devote a number of his most vivid chapters to his prison odyssey. Indeed, both his earlier and later incarcerations were the subject of moving descriptions of Tsarist prison life—of the systematic humiliation, brutalization, and degradation of human beings. Yet Medem never became brutalized himself, never lost the capacity for sympathy, for gratitude, nor the ability to respond in a sentient way to gestures of human kindness even by those from "the other side of the barricades."

Despite his own sad situation, Medem was capable of studying and reacting sardonically on occasion to the behavior of others who shared his fate. The prisoners were being readied for shipment to another place of incarceration. Medem looked on with amazement at a wild free-for-all over . . . shackles. "A struggle over shackles? But why? Were the people afraid that the iron jewelry—heaven forbid—might not suffice? Indeed no! There was more than enough iron to go around. It was simply this: everyone sought to grab a lighter piece."

But all this was only a depressing prelude. On May 3, 1915,

Medem received the final verdict in the Warsaw courtroom: loss of all rights and four years of *katorga* (hard labor). Here is his reflection upon that moment:

So it was all over. I had earlier hoped that I'd wind up with "nothing more" than loss of all rights and banishment to Siberia. But no, on top of it there came the four years of *katorga*. Actually I had already reconciled myself to this possibility in advance; I was prepared for any eventuality. Thus I was now quite calm, really quite calm. Perhaps somewhat listless. That, yes; a quiet sadness settled over me, as if a mantle of fog had enshrouded the whole world and life had lost its sparkle, its hues. Not *my* life particularly, but life in general. Remarkable how this beautiful, zestful, multi-colored life, this life to which access had just been foreclosed to me for an almost indefinite period, this life that may have seemed in fact even more enticing, more glowing, was—despite everything—not like that at all. On the contrary, it turned pale and gray; longing vanished; the desire to live grew weaker; one's wishes dissolved. And calmly I rode "home"—back to prison, to await what was to come.

What came, happily for Medem, was a *deus ex machina* in the form of the German army. It was the Great War, and the Russian army was being driven back on the Polish front. With only a handful of prisoners not yet evacuated to the east by the frantic Russian authorities, Medem lived through weeks, days, hours of horrible suspense. Finally, on August 4, the German army penetrated Warsaw, and on the following day Medem and a corporal's guard of inmates in the prison hospital stepped out into freedom.

The very title of Medem's memoirs—*From My Life*—suggests that Medem in no sense intended to write a definitive autobiography. He was, for one thing, too far from his sources in Europe. His wife, Gina, is conspicuous by her absence (this was obviously Medem's intention, for reasons suggested in the editorial footnotes). Finally, there were eight remaining years in Medem's life. Although he affirmed that the life he began to lead after 1915 was, in the social and political spheres, "richer in content and of greater interest than in all the preceding years," he was reluctant to write about it, noting at the

close of his memoirs, "The events in which I played an active part are still too fresh; and the time to write about them has not yet arrived."

But the angel of death, whose wings Medem had heard rustling above him during the last imprisonment, determined otherwise—alas—when it snatched away Medem's golden pen. [In view of those events, of that very active part, and of the massive source material bearing upon them, it is my intention to complete a substantial study of Medem's colorful and consequential last eight years.]

It is hoped that the present work from that pen, as noted earlier, will enhance the knowledge of the subject in the scholarly community. Aside from the scholarly community, the English edition of the memoirs should be warmly received by thousands of Medem admirers who were touched by his magnetic personality or who—in the case of the younger generation—have come to know and cherish his role in the cause of social justice and Jewish culture.

My inclusion of footnotes has been prompted by several considerations: to clarify certain doubtful terms or expressions; to elaborate upon relevant social and political matters with which the reader may be unfamiliar; to shed light upon certain features of Medem and aspects of his life that were either omitted or too briefly touched upon; and finally, to convey a bit more of the *Zeitgeist* which found expression in the memoirs.

The *New York Times* gave Medem's death one sentence in the obituary column, misspelled his name, and simply stated that Medem was "a writer on Socialism." But he was incomparably more than "a writer on Socialism." At his funeral service on that cold, forbidding day in January 1923, B. Charney Vladeck, managing editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, eulogized Medem as

not only the standard of the Bund but its standard-bearer . . . not only a theoretician [but] a leader in the finest and most beautiful sense of the word.

Never, under any conditions, did he think of himself. The Jewish worker—that was his career. And like a mother fighting for her children, he fought for his Bund with tooth and claw, with the last drop of his blood. With pen and tongue, at congresses and committee meetings, in sickness and in health. . . .

He was a man. He was a personality. He was a world.

Much—very much—will yet be written about him here and abroad. His own memoirs are a worthy memorial to his activity.

It is with a feeling of profound intellectual and spiritual satisfaction that I commend these memoirs to the reader.

Sincere appreciation is extended to my brother, Dr. Isidore Portnoy; Jacob S. Hertz, historian of the Jewish Labor Bund; Hillel Kempinski, indefatigable director of the Franz Kursky Archives of the Jewish Labor Movement; and Mrs. Thelma Spangler, secretary of the Department of History at Florida Atlantic University, for their assistance of an editorial, stylistic, and technical nature.

And to my wife, Evelyn, my heartfelt gratitude for her moral support and patience.

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Preface

VLADIMIR MEDEM! A remarkable name in the history of the Russian freedom-struggle in general and of the Jewish workers' struggle in particular. Many are the engaging personalities in the gallery of heroes and martyrs produced by this history. Medem is one of them. Yet in a certain sense there is no one quite like him. His figure occupies a distinctive place.

We can identify heroes in the revolutionary struggles of all countries. But the Russian struggle fashioned characters that can scarcely be found anywhere else. The history of the *narodniki* (the Populists) of the 70s and of the *narodovoltsi* (adherents of the People's Will movement) of the 80s breathes the very spirit of legendary times. Aristocratic children abandoned palaces and luxury, dressed in peasant clothes, mingled with village folk, and spoke to them about freedom and fraternity. Despotic authority filled the prisons with them, exiled them to Siberia, tormented them, hung them. Yet new knights of freedom took their places and continued their wonderful work. Then a group of young men and women arose to confront the gigantic power of Russian tyranny. They displayed acts of heroism which aroused Europe and America.

Only from this kind of world, infused with this type of spirit, could emerge someone of the nature of Vladimir Medem. His was the genuine Russian idealism of that age of heroes. He, too, was a *narodnik*, but of a distinctive sort.

Raised as a Christian and an aristocrat, Medem, like many Russian aristocrats, became enthused over socialism during his student years. Russia is a land inhabited by many nationalities; and his con-

cern, like that of all socialists, extended to every nationality without exception. Yet one of them bore a weightier yoke than all the others: the Jewish nationality. For every tread of the Tsarist boot upon a Russian, or even upon a Pole, the Jew found himself thrice trampled upon. Medem felt this deeply. Two facts merged in his thinking: that his father and mother had been born Jews, and that the oppressed Jew was someone thrice oppressed. A singular thought had begun to crystallize in Medem's mind. A new flame burst forth in his consciousness—a love of those thrice-tormented inhabitants of Russia.

As a socialist, he evinced particular interest in Jewish workers. His attention was drawn to that element in the revolutionary struggle which carried the banner of the Jewish Labor Bund. His feelings and thoughts matured rapidly, and as a consequence he devoted the remainder of his life completely to the Jewish proletariat.

Had Medem lived in the 70s, at a time when there was as yet no talk about a special category of Jewish proletarians, he would have been a *narodnik* in the Russian manner of those years. He would have learned how to speak like a Russian peasant; he would have dressed in the clothes of the Russian village; he would have set out to mingle with the Russian agrarian. Now he became a *narodnik* of a new stamp.

This Russian *barin* (gentleman), possessed of an extraordinarily attractive and luminous visage, and aristocratic in appearance and manners, undertook to learn to speak Yiddish, and plunged into the dangerous, self-sacrificing activity required for agitation among Jewish workers in Jewish cities and towns.

At first his speeches to the Jewish masses were delivered in Russian, but gradually he began to speak to them in their own tongue. I remember the profound impression upon us in New York when we were told how Medem delivered his first Yiddish speech at an election rally in Kovno.

So great was the interest in this *ger* (convert to Judaism) of ours, and so abiding the respect and affection in which he was held, that they transcended the bounds of the class struggle. Jewish merchants, stubborn opponents of our movement, used to rush to listen to this legendary hero, their hearts vibrating with reverence.

He approached the Yiddish language with the same vigor with which he approached the entire struggle. He mastered our tongue with remarkable thoroughness. He spoke and wrote our Yiddish with beauty and richness—indeed with greater richness than many “born” Jewish writers and speakers.

Only the accent was something he could not wholly master. His pronunciation would frequently betray him in the very midst of a flow of magnificent oratory. Yet for me this was always a source of pleasure, as though one wished somehow never to forget for a moment the wonderful story of this man.

We are accustomed to hearing—too often, unfortunately—about Jews who are ashamed of their own origins, about Jews who seek to forget their mother tongue. Here we had a completely opposite phenomenon. Someone from the “upper crust” was learning our language and becoming one with our life in order to fight for our workingmen and women.

I once made the observation that although Medem was one of us, he simultaneously gave the impression of being a figure apart. This is because such a distinctive personality was a rarity among us—as though he had been enveloped by some particular Divine Presence and was possessed of a peculiar spiritual coloration of the type that can be depicted only in poetry.

He spent the whole of his adult life in this struggle for the Jewish workers. Ever full of courage and with noble self-respect, he evoked admiration even among the dark forces of the Tsar’s minions.

He languished in prisons for years on end, until the prisons undermined his health and hastened his untimely death.

During the last few years of life, Medem was the Bund and the Bund was Medem. In those brief few years which he spent among us in America he was with us in body, but in spirit he still remained with the Bund in Russia and Poland.

As I complete this introduction to his memoirs, it is pleasant to recall that the author of these lines was the one who suggested to Medem the idea of composing such a work. It was in Warsaw in the year 1919. He liked the idea, and he promised to begin. But a substantial amount of time elapsed without his having written anything. Later, after he had come to us in America, I reminded him again; and

this time he set to work. He wrote his reminiscences for the *Jewish Daily Forward*, where they ran almost a year. It was our expectation that the reminiscences would thereupon appear in book form. But none of us suspected that, before this consummation, our American movement would be stirred to its depths by one of the most amazing funerals which the populace had ever seen—the funeral of Vladimir Medem.

The book is now completed. I welcome it as one of the priceless pearls among the treasures of our history.

Abraham Cahan
New York, June 4, 1923

1.

Between Two Worlds

MY MOTHER WAS seated on a chair in the dining room. Next to her stood a tiny old Jewish woman. I remember her name; Leah (or Leyke, as she used to be called in our home). They were engaged in a lengthy conversation. I can't recall what it was about; and it's not really important. But I do remember that they were conversing in . . . *Yiddish!*

I—a boy of about six or seven—hovered about my mother. I could hear Leyke constantly addressing her as *madamechka* (little madam), and my mother responding in *zhargon*.¹ I was beside myself with indignation and resentment. Really, how could something like this be possible! A cultured and intelligent lady, the wife of a Russian “general” no less, speaking in *zhargon!* Truly scandalous! I could scarcely wait for my father to get home. I knew this sort of thing would not happen in his presence. His footsteps were, in fact, soon audible; and Leyke hastily disappeared into the kitchen. I breathed a deep sigh of relief: the house had once again become genuinely Russian.

Leyke used to show up at this “Russian” house each Friday in order to prepare fish in the Jewish style. True, it was not toward evening (the customary time among Jews), but Friday morning or afternoon. Yet it did represent an echo of earlier “Jewish” times, a vestige of Jewishness that had faded away. Such traces declined in

1. Yiddish—the language of the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe. *Zhargon* later came to be used as a term of opprobrium by Hebraists and Jewish “assimilationists.”

number and character with each passing year. Our home became progressively transformed into an authentically Russian one—not only in the matter of language, but also with respect to the whole substance of life. During my earliest childhood years, the marks of Jewishness had been only relatively pronounced; later on, even these were entirely effaced.

It was presumably in this subsequent period that rumors arose to the effect that my parents (or at least one of them) were genuine, native Russians. But this was nothing more than a legend.

By origin my parents were Jews—real “kosher” Jews. As a matter of fact I believe that my father was a *kohen*.² His birthplace was Shavel, in Kovno *guberniya* (province). He later settled in Minsk. My mother came from Vilno. I never met my father’s parents, and I have absolutely no knowledge of them. Concerning my father’s own generation, however, it was engulfed by a veritable epidemic of conversions. And the same applied to my mother’s family. Nearly all of my uncles and aunts had become Christians; and there are already some among the younger generation who are totally unaware of their Jewish origins.

To understand what happened, it should be kept in mind that this epidemic among us had commenced—or in any event had been in preparation—long before. My father, for example, was born in the year 1836. While still a young lad he entered a Russian gymnasium, and later the Saint Petersburg Military-Medical Academy. Upon completing the Academy studies he became a military physician and moved into a Russian environment as a matter of course. He parted with traditional Jewish life very early; or he may never have known it at all. And to the extent that he did experience any impact of Jewish life, it was borne on markedly assimilationist winds. This was the period of the sixties, the springtime of Alexander II’s reign. The attitude toward Jews was liberal, and Jewish society itself responded to it with a passionate urge to coalesce with the Russian people. The typical Jewish *intelligent*³ considered himself a Russian. And what was there to bind him to Jewishness at that time? Religion? It had run its course. The idea of nationality? It had not yet emerged. So that

2. A lineal descendant of the ancient Hebrew high priests upon whom there devolved various hereditary religious privileges and responsibilities.

3. Member of the intelligentsia; intelligenti, plural.

people became, or at least desired to become, genuine Russians. Such was the nature of the whole environment. People wished to forget their Jewish origins. And in fact they gradually did proceed to forget.

But then came something of a transition. The political springtime ended. Once again there followed years of reaction, of pogroms, and anti-Semitism, especially after the ascent to the throne of Alexander III. And along with the political persecutions, Russian society's hatred of the Jews began to flourish. The situation had changed. No matter how strongly one wished to forget having once been a Jew, the surrounding environment would no longer permit it. The reminder was forthcoming at every turn: "You are a Jew." And to the Jew these words were at once accusation, insult, disparagement: "It is a disgrace to be a Jew!" "How shameful that you're a Jew!"

And one actually did begin to feel ashamed of his Jewishness—ashamed of it and concerned to hide the shame.

This psychology of shame over Jewishness, and secrecy about Jewish origins, was highly characteristic of our whole milieu. I still remember it quite vividly from my childhood years. I recall the constant discussions about someone or other: "Do they or don't they know he's a Jew?" I recall that among many of our relatives the very word "Jew" was *treyf*⁴, and its use strictly forbidden lest the servant girl—heaven forbid—should hear it. A type of Aesopian language evolved, with its particular expressions which could be understood only by the initiated: instead of "Jews" the word "Italians" was used, or *iz nashikh* (one of ours). These terms would be accompanied by a knowing smile as if it were all a kind of joke, but the background of the joke was something quite serious. In our household this fear never assumed its most extreme, bizarre forms. We were, for all that, still too proud. Yet the feeling did exist. And I well remember how I was deeply permeated by it even while still a youngster. I bore my Jewish origins like a heavy burden. It was shameful to me, a humiliation, a kind of secret disease; nobody must know about it. And if people happened to know of it, they should (if they were really decent and friendly individuals) feign ignorance, like someone pretending to be unaware of a hunchback or of a lame leg so as not to cause a cripple anguish.

And this was the actual reason I used to become so exercised

4. Nonkosher, hence an unmentionable.

upon hearing my mother converse in Yiddish with the old Jewish woman, Leyke. Every word served as reminder of the ugly disease: “You’re a Jew, you’re a cripple.” And I didn’t want to be a Jew; and I didn’t consider myself a Jew. And I used to parrot what I heard from the adults: “We are Russians.”

Such, then, was the sentiment which prevailed in our environment. It opened wide the path to conversion. If Jewishness was little more than a hidden affliction, then conversion served as the final and most radical cure. It was a mere formality, a final rung on the ladder.

My parents ascended that rung quite late. My father converted when he had already reached the advanced age of fifty-six, and only a few months before his death. Why did he do it? And then only at the close of his life? He could no longer hope for a “career” in the actual sense of the word; indeed, my father had already attained to a career by then. He was one of the most prominent individuals in our city—a divisional doctor and almost a general. (He held the title *statsky sovietnik*,⁵ that is, a rank between colonel and general.) He was, in fact, precluded from becoming a full-fledged general because of his being a Jew. But this was not the reason for his conversion. The way I understood it from the discussions among the grown-ups (I was then a boy of thirteen), a vicious move of some kind had been launched at the time against Jewish officials, and my father was in danger of losing his position. It would have meant simple ruination, because he did not engage in any private practice. Old and sick at this time, he could not even dream of starting anything like a new life. Hence his decision to convert. He adopted the Lutheran faith.

My father, let it be said, was a decent, educated, and intelligent person. It was painful for him to go through the conversion, formality—an empty and superficial ceremony without an iota of inner feeling—which may account for an awakening of interest on his part in the Christian faith as such. I remember him, sitting with the Scriptures, the Christian Bible, in hand, immersing himself in it and deriving satisfaction from the interesting things which he came across. Yet at the same time he would also delve most eagerly into the

5. Councillor of State, a high position in the Tsarist civil service.

Old Testament, especially into Prophets. I don't know whether his interest was religious or primarily aesthetic and philosophic.

My mother's conversion took place a bit later, immediately after my father's death. She was severely ill at the time and the children prevailed upon her to do it. It was, they assured her, the wish of the deceased. She yielded—most reluctantly and with considerable heartache. Were it not for the stubborn coaxing of those around her, she certainly would not have converted.

The children were all Christians by then. My sister had converted almost simultaneously with my father, in order to marry a Russian. My oldest brother had long been a Russian officer—and perforce a Christian. Two other brothers also converted. (I had not even noticed when and how the latter occurred, so little did it figure as a subject of conversation.) A characteristic detail: all of them became Protestants—Lutherans. In general, most Jews who converted used to adopt the Protestant faith in preference to others. A Protestant missionary had been operating among us in Minsk. A former Jew himself, he concentrated on this job in particular. Why the preference for Protestantism? Did the Protestant creed have some superior convincing power as against, for instance, the Russian Orthodox? Was there about this faith perhaps an inherently greater power of attraction? Not at all. The conversion process among the Protestants involved fewer ceremonials and fewer technical, external difficulties. So people would become Lutherans. And that was how our whole family gradually turned Lutheran.

I remained the sole exception: not Protestant, but Russian Orthodox.

2.

The Little Christian

I WAS THE FIRST Christian in our family despite the fact that I was the very youngest—the “baby.” At the time of my birth (in July 1879), my parents made the decision: “We’ve suffered enough on account of our Jewishness; let at least our youngest son be spared the hardships!” And they had me baptized in an Orthodox church a few days after birth just as if I had been born into a Russian Orthodox family. They themselves were still Jews, and were to remain Jews for a long time.

I—an Orthodox boy—was raised accordingly in a Jewish, subsequently half-Lutheran, and eventually completely Lutheran family. I felt absolutely no contradiction between my Orthodox faith and the Jewishness of those around me. What’s more, I remained convinced for a long time that my father was already a Christian. It was only a few years before his real conversion that I learned he was still a Jew. Our family used to observe the Russian holidays. On official feast days my father even attended the Russian church, so that my religious life was able to develop in complete freedom, without man-made obstacles of any kind. And I must say, religion played a very important part during my childhood years.

I was still a very young boy, perhaps five years of age, when I was taken to church for the first time. A soldier brought me there. Inasmuch as my father was a military physician, and my older

brother an officer too, we always had a soldier in our home (a *denshchik*—an officer's servant, or batman). These soldier-servants were always my closest friends. (In general, I had a tremendous affection for the company of servants; it was impossible to drag me out of the kitchen.)

I don't know whether he was directed to conduct me to church, or whether we would casually enter one during a stroll. Yet I know that it made a strong impression upon me. Minsk was the capital city of the *guberniya*. It was a bishop's see, and the church ceremonials conducted with the bishop's participation were invariably lovely and inspiring, as attractive to the eye as they were fetching to the ear. The dark-gold icons, the burning lamps and tapers, the stern and austere priests in vestments of rare beauty, the mystery-laden ceremonials, the stirring, velvety bass of the *protodiakon* (archdeacon), and, above all, the singing of the choir! It is difficult to describe the total beauty of Russian Christian singing, with its serious, distinctive, elevated harmony.

It held me spellbound. I could not see the singers themselves, for they were hidden behind the pillars—or, perhaps, because I was simply too small. The voices, which floated up from some mystical source of holiness and splendor, seemed possessed of an arcane quality.

The impression was overpowering. Arriving home, I tried to imitate what I had seen in the church. More than once I pulled a blanket from a bed, drew it over me in the priestly manner, concealed myself somewhere beneath a sofa so as not to be observed (after all, the singers at church were also invisible), and let loose with frightful noises. And when asked, "What's all the shrieking about?" I would reply, "It's a choir." I loved this particular game very much.

The more I attended church and the more familiar I became with all the particulars of Christian ceremonial, the greater was their appeal for me. To the question as to what I wished to be when I grew up, I used to answer that I wished most of all to become a bishop.

The whole thing was largely a surface experience in those years. I do not recall having had any true, consciously religious feeling at the time; it was more of an aesthetic impression. Or perhaps it may have been largely a case of . . . the little lad is having fun.

But then I entered the gymnasium, and with it there commenced a more conscious existence.

I was enrolled in the gymnasium—in the preparatory class—at the age of nine. During the first year I was still quite pious and straightlaced. Virtually nothing remains in my memory of that particular year. I do know, however, that the gymnasium priest was very pleased with me and showed great affection toward me. I can still recall a scene in which, after the completion of the day's studies, I read the appropriate prayer aloud. (In the gymnasium a prayer would be read in each class at the start and at the close of the day's studies.) The priest, who chanced to be present, pointed toward me and commented to the teacher: "That child is blessed of God." I heard it and I was deeply moved.

But the following year, when I had advanced to the first grade, something akin to critical thought awakened in me. I had two chums at the time—Russian youths, children of families friendly to my own. We used to spend all our free time together. I don't know how it came about, but I recall that in the very first grade we had already begun to engage in discussion of religious subjects. On one occasion we decided to deal with the matter in writing. Each of us was required to pen a kind of treatise, thereby expressing his opinions in a resolute form. The subject was Christ and the Resurrection. I argued that Christ was not God; that he was a human being like all other human beings; that he was born and died like everyone else. But since he was a person of rare spiritual purity and attractiveness, his teachings and memory found themselves, after his death, awakened to new life in the hearts of his disciples. That was how the Resurrection ought to be understood.

Of my two friends, one wrote a brief defense of official Christianity; the other agreed with me. This was my first written disputation. I was all of about eleven years old at the time.

Somehow, with that disputation our critical faculties suddenly became exhausted. Then, unexpectedly and with equal suddenness (I don't know how or why), we, the two heretics, plunged over to the opposite side. We were seized with a burning, passionate religious faith. We became fanatical Christians. We believed as the simple Russian peasant believed. We took up the whole Orthodox faith in its

every jot and tittle, without doubts of any kind, without criticism of any kind, indiscriminately, nonselectively: the complete works—blindly, naively, devotedly.

A new content had entered my life: God. The Christian God had three forms; they joined together and constituted a single whole. This was the mystical Christian belief in God's trinity. I offered obeisance to, and quaked in the presence of, the old strict God the Father who ruled over the world and punished the transgressor. I felt myself strongly burdened with sin and guilt; my previous heresy had been, after all, a tremendous sin. On bended knee I implored the old God to forgive such transgressions and to spare me the punishment of eternal suffering. Oh, how I shuddered at the prospect of being denied a share in the world to come! I used to have a tremendous fear of thunder and lightning during those years. It seemed to me as if they would kill me before I succeeded in purifying myself and washing away my sins. And whenever a storm came up I would hide somewhere in a corner and unloose a flood of impassioned prayers, supplicating the ancient, great omnipotent God to have mercy on my tortured little soul.

But there was also another God—the Son, the second form of the holy trinity—the young, compassionate Christ; the martyr of the long, blond hair and sad, sympathetic blue eyes. He had sacrificed Himself in order to redeem fallen mankind from sin. His death on the cross had been the salvation of us all. He served for me as the leader on the path of moral cleansing. This was the proximate, the intimate, the kindly God—God the friend.

The third figure was the Holy Spirit. To a child's mind it represented something vague, incomprehensible, evanescent. Yet, even while offering my prayers to the stern Father and to the radiant Son, I still experienced the sanctity of the spirit which pervaded my atonement, my striving, and my love.

The church and its ceremonials became truly sacred to me. Our gymnasium had its own chapel for pupils and teachers—indeed it was located in the gymnasium building itself. Yet the place was unsuitable; it was reminiscent rather of a large hall. Very bright, neat, and clean. A church, however, ought to be dark and mysterious. The religious spirit cannot tolerate sunlight; at most perhaps a thin little

ray stealing through a mere slit of a window, stretching like a fiery current from one wall to the next, blending into the flame of a gilded icon, and accentuating even more vividly and solidly the encompassing darkness of the high walls and concealed corners. A church must be mystical.

But I was fortunate. Our chapel was just then in need of some repairs. We were taken, consequently, to an ordinary church in the city. Here was a real church, the way a church ought to be.

We attended church twice a week: Sunday morning and Saturday evening. The Saturday service appealed to me most. First, because it was evening; second, because there was no school the following day; and finally, because the prayers were, in fact, lovelier. Incidentally, the service contained numerous Jewish elements (prayers). Naturally I did not identify them as Jewish at that time. The tapers glowed; the priest—inspired and serious—drifted about. The old Slavonic words had such a sublime and glorious ring. Even without grasping their essence or understanding them at all, the very resonance itself possessed incomparable beauty. I used to depart feeling cleansed, purified, becalmed. . . . What supreme good fortune.

And then the major holidays! The great springtime holiday, Pascha—Easter, the Christian Passover.¹ Its arrival was preceded by the seven-week-long “Big Fast” with its sacred and sad final week. The Christian world was engaged in purging itself as it prepared for the holiday. It was a time of repentance. The priests dressed in black mourning vestments—black velvet with silver adornment, as at a funeral. Mournful was the sound of the songs. The people fell to their knees, genuflecting, their foreheads touching the ground. Next they approached the priests, confessed their sins, and received absolution. They came away purified and ready for the mystical ceremony, prepared to receive the flesh and the blood of Christ Himself. According to the Christian faith, it was bread and wine which became transformed into the actual blood and flesh of God Himself. And after the cleansing through confession came the partaking of the sacred food. One can readily imagine the kind of impression this made upon the mind of a child.

1. The Russian word for the Easter holiday, *Pasch* or *Pascha*, is derived, through the Greek, from the Hebrew, *pesah*, from *pasaḥ*, to pass over.

And then came the final week before Easter, the great days of mourning, with the recollection of Christ's suffering, each day representing a new station. First, his seizure by the Roman soldiers and the hypocritical kiss of his own disciple, the traitor, performed so that the soldiers would recognize Him. Then the torturing. And then his crucifixion. He dies and is buried. (A kind of coffin was actually set up in the church; and in it lay the picture, painted on linen, of the deceased young God.)

Finally the holy night arrived. Until the hour of twelve the church remained plunged in darkness and sorrow. Doleful sounded the chanting. The coffin was lifted and carried away. Then suddenly the whole church found itself bathed in the brightness of hundreds of tapers. An illuminated file of priests appeared in white-and-gold vestments, their faces aglow.

"Christ is risen!" rang forth the good tidings. "Truly risen!" responded the crowd. The bells chimed forth with a joyous dance sound; the choir offered jubilant, celestial song. People kissed; eyes glistened; candles glowed. The Resurrection! Holiday of spring!

When summer came and we repaired to a vacation residence somewhere in the city's environs (Minsk was surrounded by extensive, beautiful woodlands), we used to pray to our God in the absence of a church and without a priest, in the midst of holy nature's vastness.

In the quiet early mornings, the two of us (the other one-time heretic and I) would take to the woods and post ourselves beneath two pine trees. At a distance from each other in order not to disturb the isolated communing of a small human with the great God, we prayed—prayed not in the formal language of prayer but with our own simple, childrens' words. From what I can still recall, thirty years later, of my childhood prayers beneath the big pine tree in the woods, I believe that I constantly supplicated God to forgive me my sins—and that was my main prayer. I also distinctly remember how my prayer left me strangely unsatisfied. I found myself incapable of investing it with adequate fervor: I was somehow unable to render the phrase "I implore You" with a sufficiently intense quality of supplication. I had a peculiar feeling that it was not the real thing. It was as if someone, seeking to wind a watch whose spring was broken, continued to wind and wind while the watch stem failed to mesh on

the inside, and so was unable to get at the essence of the problem. Even in later years, by the way, I never learned how to supplicate—not only God, but man as well. I detest it to this day.

I have already indicated that mine was a fanatical and a blind faith. Not only had I forgotten all my doubts; I was simply incapable of imagining how anyone could question the correctness of the religious verities, let alone be a complete nonbeliever, an atheist!

Yet the very environment in which I lived was quite indifferent toward religion. I'm not referring to the gymnasium *nachal'stvo* (authorities), with their official observance of the official faith. We found the teachers alien, distant, hostile; the school was no school but a form of *katorga*.² In the spiritual sense it had no influence upon us whatsoever. But at home and in the families of acquaintances there prevailed a nonreligious feeling among all the grown-ups. This was utterly incomprehensible to me.

How often had I tortured my brain with the weighty question: How could adult, mature, intelligent people be so blind and deaf to the great religious verities? How could it be that individuals, by nature not evil, should not feel within themselves the urge toward repentance, toward cleansing themselves of their sins, toward becoming morally fulfilled and deserving of the life to come? How could people be so preoccupied with the trivial affairs of a petty, mundane existence, forgetting that this particular life is no more than a momentary episode; that after it follows death; and that beyond death there comes the opening into all that is true, great, holy—a share in which must be earned. Anything less would mean eternal pain, eternal anguish, eternal suffering—unlimited and without surcease!

In fear and trembling I even posed a question to myself: How will it be when I myself become a grown-up, an adult? Might I not become like all the others? Might not the overwhelming clamor of petty living consume me as well, obstruct my vision, plug my ears, dull my faith, tear from my heart that great love and great dread of a just and stern God?

And I answered myself: No, it could not be! For I was capable of perceiving so very clearly, strikingly, manifestly, the dreadful

2. Penal servitude under forced-labor conditions; figuratively, unspeakable drudgery.

magnitude of the error they were committing. It was as if I were standing on a high mountain in air that was free and pure, under a radiant sun, and I were peering down upon them all in the deep dark, swampy nether depths. And I already knew that when one became an adult life tended to pull one gradually, step by step, into that swamp. But precisely because I knew this in advance, and precisely because I knew it was a swamp, I would not allow myself to be drawn in. It was only necessary to remain conscious of it, to be ever vigilant and not permit oneself to sink down.

This was my way of thinking thirty years ago. Today, however, I am one of that host of nonbelievers upon which the boy of twelve had looked with such horror. Yet, in one respect the boy was right: he did not permit himself, after all, to be dragged into the mud. And if he relinquished his childish faith in a celestial God, he did not remain without a faith even as an adult. . . .

But I did not have such a belief in mind at that time. I was concerned then with the actual faith, and the actual world to come, and actual religion. Moreover, I tremendously regretted, nay, more than regretted, I was literally tormented by the fact that the attitude of the people close to me was one of such dreadful indifference toward this most consequential matter. There would surely come a time and they would die—all of them, one after the other—with no time for expiation, for purifying their souls, for making peace with the great and stern God. And they would die as they had lived, preoccupied with mean and petty dailiness, covered with the grime and squalor of sins by the thousand. And just as they had lived in blindness, so would they blindly roll down into the terrible murky abyss of eternal punishment! What a frightfully cruel prospect! How can one save them? What can one do? Something must be done; one cannot simply stand helplessly by. For they were just blind, while I, I had my eyes open. How could I look on while the blind moved ever closer to the rim of the abyss? It was my obligation to stop them, to warn them.

The thought pained me deeply. I felt a burning obligation, but I lacked the audacity to fulfill it. Indeed, I sensed that the adults would make sport of the little boy who presumed to moralize to them; and I was unable to do so.

I was tormented particularly by concern over my father, for he had become seriously ill, deathly ill, just at that time. The illness persisted with intervals of temporary improvement for over half a year.

And during the whole period I suffered with the thought and fear: What if he should die before he makes atonement? And another thought: Why do I not go to him and fulfill my duty to open his eyes? . . . But I failed to do so.

I remember the day my father died. It was in the middle of winter on January 30, according to the Old Style Russian calendar,³ in the year 1893—one week after my sister's wedding had been celebrated with much fanfare and rejoicing. I was seated in my gymnasium class. Suddenly, I observed through the glass panes in the door a teacher's assistant in the corridor peering into our room. And I felt an instant pang. I sensed that something tragic had occurred. The door opened. The assistant entered, walked over to the teacher, and whispered something in his ear. I now knew for certain that it was a calamity, and that the calamity was associated with me in particular. "Medem," I heard the teacher's voice, "get your satchel and go home."

I took my satchel and walked out to the corridor and down the steps to the entrance hallway. Waiting for me there was the messenger from home, Kolya, the son of our cook. "Come on," he said, "it looks very bad for your father. The pastor has already arrived."

I felt as though I were lost in a fog. But the closing words sounded to me like veritable harbingers of salvation: the pastor (the Lutheran minister, that is) was there! Oh, in that case all was well. Of course a dreadful tragedy was being played out. My father was dying! How heartbreaking, how sad! But the pastor had arrived. He would tell him everything that needed telling. There would be atonement. My father's soul was saved!

We hastened along. One street, and then another, and here already was our house. I dared not ring but entered through the kitchen. Kolya disappeared somewhere. The kitchen was empty. Not one of the servants (we had four) was anywhere to be seen. It was strangely silent as I moved toward the hallway which led to the rooms, when a figure suddenly appeared before me; it was one of our

3. The Julian, or Old Style calendar, was used in Russia prior to February 14, 1918. Pope Gregory XIII introduced the New Style calendar in 1582. During the nineteenth century, the Julian calendar was twelve days behind the Gregorian. The spread was thirteen days in 1900–1918.

distant relatives. He had been crying. “Volyechka,” he asked, “when did father die?” I ran through the rooms. My mother was seated on a chair, her voice raised in lamentation as she wept bitterly. The whole household had gathered around her. My father was dead.

He had died suddenly—without a sigh, without a groan. His heart stopped and he went to sleep. And the whole business about the pastor whom they had ostensibly managed to call in time had been concocted from beginning to end. The pastor had only arrived for the funeral.

I can see before me our spacious, handsome parlor with its covered mirrors and its candles and greenery. My father, dressed in his military uniform, lay on the large table. His face was calm, literally smiling. Yet I have no recollection of having prayed either at his deathbed, nor while the corpse lay in the house during those somber days, nor during the dreadful moment of his being carried from his home, nor at the solemn ceremony in church, nor even at the hardest and most terrible moment—upon the return from the cemetery to the desolate, orphaned house. Yet, I may have prayed after all. I absolutely cannot remember.

I was listless and depressed, and had become extremely nervous. I recall that before the cover on the coffin was closed for the last time, all the children and relatives walked over to offer their farewells to the deceased, kissing him on the hand or forehead, but I didn’t want to— I simply could not! I, a thirteen-year-old boy, was afraid of the corpse—of my own father. And when they tried to lead me over anyway, I broke away tearfully and remained standing to one side.

In keeping with the custom among Christians, the corpse was brought in the evening from home to the church. It would remain there overnight. Not until the following day would the solemn ceremony take place—with prayers, with song and organ playing, followed by the procession to the cemetery for the burial. I can still see before me the final, solemn moment of the church ceremony. The pastor chanted the closing prayer for the deceased. Our pastor in Minsk at that time was a German named Ernst Kluge—a singular individual, who even superficially appeared to stand out from other people: tall and pale, with a black beard and wonderfully deep, soft, noble dark eyes, eyes reminiscent of those who are said to be “not of

this world.” Indeed, much was recounted of his great spiritual magnificence, of his pure, sterling soul. It was he who offered the prayer as he stood before the open casket in his long, black pastoral robe and lifted his white hand out of the broad dark sleeve, intoning—in his remarkably beautiful, touching, and calm yet resonant voice—the prayer’s lovely, quiet wish to the deceased: “May God bless you and keep you.” And the deceased, with his placid, smiling face illumined by the sun, lay in the casket before him. And it occurred to me: He can hear the quiet words of the prayer while the long rest of eternal peace settled upon him and the eternal brightness enveloped him with its white wings.

Then we filed out into the street. A large crowd had gathered. And everything was the same as at all big funerals.

My fervid religiosity, if I am not mistaken, had already passed its zenith by then and its downhill course had begun. Gradually, over the next few years, my religious feeling steadily faded away, and the spirit of criticism, of doubt and denial, simultaneously awakened once more. As to how it evolved and what I experienced along the way, no traces remain in my memory. I can recall only a single discussion on this subject which I had with a friend when I was already in the upper grades of the gymnasium and the sobering-up process had ended, or was near to ending. We talked about atheism—nonbelief—the sober, clear view, and how it represented a rare luxury, a spiritual riches. And I alluded, in that connection, to a passage in Pushkin’s famous work *Skypoy Rytsar’* (*The Stingy Knight*) in which he observed that riches are garnered in suffering and pain. I used the words at the time in the sense that I too had occasion to suffer (to suffer inwardly, that is) in the course of creating for myself the luxury of nonbelief. And my friend had consoled me with some words of compassion. Still I cannot remember any real suffering as such. During the last few years of my gymnasium life not a shred of belief remained. My religious stage was over.

Yet one observation is in order. Although I had relinquished my religion, there remained with me permanently an aesthetic interest in churches and in church services, and an affection for Orthodox church song. At a later date when I arrived in Kiev to study at the university, the first thing I did was seek out the churches and cathedrals;

and it occasionally happened that while walking to the university of a morning for the purpose of attending an anatomy lecture, I would end up instead in some church which I had stumbled across along the way. Indeed, many years later, when I was already a party activist of long standing and a member of leading bodies of the party, I sought to visit the local Russian Orthodox church in Geneva, Switzerland, on the occasion of the late service during the night of the Russian Easter. But I was not admitted because I had no invitation from the consulate.

I see that I'm getting into my later years. I have only done so in order to close out the subject of religion. Now I can return to recollections of my earliest childhood.

3.

At Home

ONE OF MY FIRST recollections—perhaps the very first—was when I was about three years old. It was evening and I lay in my small bed. Hermina was seated somewhere in another room. Hermina, a Baltic German woman, had been especially employed to take care of me: to supervise me; to play with me; and in order that I might, incidentally, learn German. (She was replaced by a Frenchwoman several years later.) I was tremendously attached to Hermina. While lying there in my bed I suddenly began to sob uncontrollably. Hermina came running over. “What’s wrong?” I continued crying. “Are you in pain? Are you feeling sick? Say something!” The bitter weeping persisted. Amid the whimpering and hiccuping of the child in tears, the stammered words broke through with great effort: “. . . if you should go away . . . and if mother should die. . .”

This was what tormented the young lad when, of a quiet evening, he would ponder the future. Two frightening prospects: Hermina’s leaving, mother’s dying; the two people who were for me the dearest, most loving in the world.

The attachment to Hermina was no more than a passing episode. Hermina actually did go away not long after and . . . that was that; I forgot about her rather quickly. But my mother would always remain what she had been at the time, during that evening long ago when the

three-year-old child wept at the thought that she might, God forbid, die someday.

My mother was the central figure of my childhood, and when I refer to my childhood years, I am really referring to my mother.

I was the youngest in the family. It was, of course, well established that the youngest child should constantly gravitate to the mother. She was the only person, in fact, with whom I was truly close at that time. The other children in the family could not serve as playmates, if only because they were no longer children. The youngest of my brothers was eight years my senior; the oldest, about sixteen or seventeen. They were already grown-up or half-grown-up while I was still a little shrimp. But one's mother is always close—a comrade—even if she's forty years older.

As for my father—that was something else again. One stands in fear of one's father. First, he was a male, and for a male one always showed respect. In addition, he was stricter, busier, more serious. And the main thing: my father was something of a distant figure, seen far less often; one who appeared only during mealtimes. The rest of the time he was either at his post or occupied in his study, into which no one would venture.

But when my mother found herself at a loss in dealing with my caprices (after all, I was the youngest and pampered aplenty), there was a final recourse—calling upon my father. And he used to come and administer the proper treatment. No blows, heaven forbid; at no time in my life have I ever been beaten by anyone. Rather, he would give me a verbal dressing down, the effect of which was nothing short of monumental. I grew frightened, confused, soft as a kitten, and shed copious tears. In a half hour, my father, moved by pity, would approach me once again and proffer some words of endearment or read me a lovely passage in a book. I knew very well that my father loved me with all his heart and that he was by nature a decent, compassionate human being, and I reciprocated his love, although still fearing him—a fear which loomed like a wall between the two of us, precluding the emergence of a truly ardent and intimate friendship.

Where my mother was concerned, however, I felt no fear. I simply loved her, without complications. There were frequent occasions, to be sure, when I grew angry at her, and when, even more frequently, I

sorely tried her with my escapades. But then I would always regret it deeply (although never to her face, a thing I was unable to do), and I would promise myself never to cause her any further anguish. But the promise remained . . . well, just a promise . . . and by the following day it was the same story all over again.

My mother was an invalid. I cannot remember what she actually looked like before she became ill; yet I know that she had been very pretty. This was how she appeared to me in old photographs. And even in a later picture which has remained in my possession, a picture taken when she was already fifty years old and gravely ill, one could still discern the traces of her early beauty.

She was ailing seriously. It was an extremely rare affliction, and carried the Latin designation *paralysis agitans* (Parkinson's disease; *tsiter paraliz*, in Yiddish). Its first symptoms appeared when she began to find difficulty in walking. Then her hands would start to quiver, not continuously, but only in response to even the slightest exertion. Step by step, slowly yet relentlessly, the illness grew more severe. When I was about six years old, my mother was still capable of undertaking a major trip abroad and one to Moscow. But within three years a wheelchair had already made its appearance in our home. My mother still managed to walk, albeit with considerable difficulty. Most of the time she had to be moved in the wheelchair. And before many more years had elapsed, she could no longer even stand up. Her illness was attended by great suffering which she surmounted with extraordinary patience, all the while preoccupied with minor and major concerns, always centering upon us, upon the children. From her place in the wheelchair she retained a firm hold over all the threads associated with the running of a home. She still remained in charge even later, after my newly married sister and her husband continued living with her. (My father had died just at that time, and there was an understandable reluctance to part with my mother.) And she maintained the major supervisory role even with respect to the grandchild born a year later. Her wheelchair was the center of the household.

And little Volya, as I was called (a diminutive of Vladimir), revolved about her constantly. I was, so to speak, forever under her wing, like in a warm, cozy nest. Thus I grew and took note of the life around me.

Mine was a respectable and well-ordered existence. My parents

could claim no wealth of any kind. Yet my father did hold two fine positions: one as a military physician, the other as chief medical officer on the Libau-Romny railroad whose main terminus was in Minsk. His salary was not especially large, but the cost of living was very low in those days and we lived rather well. We always had a pleasant, sizable flat of five or six rooms. We entertained numerous guests, and ate and dressed well. And each summer we used to journey to a *dacha* (country house). In fact, I was born while my parents were staying at a summer residence in Libau. In later years we would regularly spend the summers away from the city: a few times at Maiorenhof, a summer resort on the Baltic coast, and, among other places, in a village not far from Minsk, and at Druskeniki, along the shores of the Niemen in Grodno *guberniya*.

Our acquaintances during the early years were largely, if not exclusively, Jews—from the affluent and educated intelligentsia of Minsk. An attempt was made at the time, in our home, to organize something like a circle for group reading of the classic works of literature. I recall an evening when the circle foregathered in our living room. One acquaintance, whose name escapes me, read a selection aloud from Heine or Goethe. I can still see a dignified old matron sitting there shaking her head to the cadence of the poems. It was Pauline Vengerov who, many years later, wrote a book in German titled *Memoirs of a Grandmother*. The Vengerovs represented one of the most intellectually brilliant families in our city. The children of this elderly lady subsequently acquired considerable renown: the son, Semyon Vengerov, is a well-known historian of Russian literature and author of the massive biographical dictionary of Russian writers; the oldest daughter, Zinaida (my sister's schoolmate), is also prominent in the field of Russian literary criticism; and another daughter, Isabella, became a talented pianist.

There was something markedly characteristic in the fact that within this circle only German authors were read, and only in the German language. German served as the vernacular, so to speak, in the genteel-intellectual environment of our city. But the environment generally was assimilationist through and through. I can recall a few physicians, a journalist (the editor of a daily paper which had begun to appear in Minsk), and so on.

In addition, my mother's parents used to drop in on us. They also

lived in Minsk, in a flat of their own. They still observed Jewish customs, I believe, and maintained a kosher kitchen. I felt a deep love for my grandfather who was an exceptionally warm-hearted individual, and I still remember well how his trimmed mustache stung my face whenever he kissed me. My grandmother was a sterner type, though her relationship with me was also decidedly pleasant. Whenever she came to see us she would invariably present me with a large copper coin (a five-kopeck¹ piece) which she used to pull out of the substantial black leather purse she always carried with her.

It seems to me that even in our home, at least in the earlier years, we were not totally indifferent to the Jewish holidays. I have no personal recollection of this, but I did find an allusion to it in a diary kept by one of my brothers. After describing a certain event, he observed: "It was on the eve of a Jewish holiday; our rooms were being cleaned."

I was all of two when the big pogroms took place in southern Russia. They were swiftly followed by the notorious "Temporary Regulations" concerning Jews—the Exceptional Laws—which persisted for thirty-five years and were associated with the name of Count Nicholas Ignatiev. The name Ignatiev was very familiar to me, and I knew that it stood for a kind of specialist in the persecution of Jews. We used to have a little dog at the time named Zhivchik. Once, while we were walking in the city, I remember how Zhivchik had angrily leaped upon a Jew. Terribly upset over it, I gave the dog a piece of my mind: "Zhivchik . . . you cur . . . you Ignatiev!" I must have been no more than four at the time. The child's turn of phrase evoked much laughter. It made the rounds and was cited as an example of the sort of *khokhem* (sage) little Volya was.

1. A kopeck is a unit of monetary value in Russia equal to 1/100 of a ruble. At that time it amounted to about a penny.

4.

The *mizinikl*¹

TRUTHFULLY, HOWEVER, I was far from a sage. Able, yes; I learned to read, for instance, in just a few days—literally while playing. I had received a new set of blocks on the sides of which were printed the letters of the alphabet. I would arrange them in the forms of words, and I soon had the thing down to a system. In later years I also showed aptitude for study; it came very easily. But a *khokhem* I was not. Quite the contrary: I was a very naïve lad, more naïve than I should have been for my age, and it was forever easy to fool me; I always trusted people.

I remember once being taken to a photographer. To get me to sit still, the photographer told me to focus on the cover of his camera, and he added: “Now look closely. You will presently see a little railroad train run out.” I sat there wide-eyed. In due course the picture-taking was finished. But I remained seated, waiting for the train . . . And I’m still waiting for it . . .

On another occasion several childhood friends came to visit me. They were supposed to depart by evening, but under no circumstances would I let them leave. Finally, the oldest of the boys said to me: “Watch, I’m going to take this box (a little round paper box) and insert this piece of paper in it. I will now shut the box and place it

1. The youngest male child in a Jewish family.

here on the dresser. If you go to sleep right now, you will find, when you awaken in the morning, that something remarkable has happened: the piece of paper will have turned into a piece of real gold.” I believed him and went to bed. When morning came I leaped up—and found the sorry bit of paper.

These are fairly minor and trivial episodes. Still, they in particular have remained, not without reason, etched in my memory over the course of three-and-a-half decades. They were, presumably, not isolated incidents, but rather frequent occurrences which were intimately associated with the whole of my life at that time. Yet I cannot recall a single instance of my mother being included among the deceivers.

I was a delicate child, pampered and capricious, and frequently alone and bored. Oh, how often I used to hover about my mother and pester her with the same inquiring refrain: “Ma . . . a . . . a . . . ma, what’s there to do . . . oo . . . oo? Ma . . . a . . . a . . . ma, what’s there to do . . . oo . . . oo?” But this was only during the winter. In the summer there was so much running to do, so much playing and carrying on, that even the long summer day proved too short.

I was a typical *mizinikl*, self-centered and full of whimsy. Yet, for all that, I wasn’t bad. I was still possessed of compassion and goodness. A case in point is the story of my little lambs.

I had a tremendous affection for lambs; not real live lambs—I had no contact with them—but the small manufactured ones, the toys. Vast numbers of these lambs would appear in the shop windows each year, prior to the Russian Easter. Among the Christians, the lamb was a symbol of Christ Himself—an innocent sacrifice—although the religious aspect held no special interest for me at that time. I loved the dear, kindly little white animal for no particular reason. Such lambs used to be bought for me, but they were mostly of a rather commonplace sort, fashioned from some nondescript white material. However, there were also lambs of a finer quality, with fur that was genuinely shiny and soft as silk. I always dreamed of such a lamb.

And on this hangs a tale. A certain holiday had arrived; indeed, I believe it was the Russian Easter. I awoke early in the morning and

insisted, right then and there, on getting dressed in my holiday outfit. But since this was not permitted I became dreadfully angry. I wept and created a din. Just then my grandmother entered the room and set something down on the table near me. I continued to cry. "Stop," she told me, "look at this. Now what can it be?" But I was angry and wouldn't look. With a sweeping motion of my hand, the "something" fell to the floor. I heard the thud . . . and experienced a sudden pang in my heart! There, sprawled on the floor, lay an extraordinarily beautiful little lamb. It was precisely the kind I had long dreamed of, with real white fur, gentle, and lovable. The dear little animal had broken a leg in its fall. I saw myself as a real criminal. It was just as if I had maimed a living creature, and a feeling of deep anguish and profound pity for the little cripple welled up in my heart. Over the span of many months—perhaps even years—I felt guilty about it and suffered for my sin. I remember how I once, long after the event, placed the small limping lamb on a table, sank down on my knees before it, and begged its forgiveness for the grave wrong I had committed. I was by then already a sizable boy of perhaps nine or ten.

In general, I would periodically experience attacks of acute, poignant compassion. Strange thing: I explicitly recall two such instances and both were associated with holidays, with the time when people would be spruced up, arrayed in their finest, and wearing a satisfied look. On one occasion (it again coincided with the Easter season), we had taken a stroll and we sat down on a boulevard bench. Some old man seated himself near us. Neither a beggar nor a cripple, the old man appeared, in fact, quite content. But precisely because of his evident sense of well-being and his festive bearing, I was suddenly overcome by such heartfelt pity for him that it required considerable effort on my part to avoid bursting into tears.

Another time something similar occurred. I was getting ready to take a walk with Ivan, our *denshchik*. It was also a holiday and Ivan had draped a bright blue kerchief around his neck; he must have thought it appropriately attractive for the holiday occasion, but to me it just looked ugly. And once again I was seized by a feeling of pity for Ivan. I experienced this sensation many times. Just when

someone would appear to be pleased and lighthearted, I would detect within myself that inexplicable, piercing emotion of pity attended by pain so dreadfully acute that no other emotion can rightly be compared with it. My very heart, it seemed, was rent by sharp teeth. And even years later, upon the merest recollection of that first impression, the same sensation would return again and again. It was perhaps the most potent sensation of my life.

5.

My Mother's Illness

IN CONSEQUENCE OF MY mother's illness, I experienced a different kind of sorrow and anguish. These were no mere attacks of acute pity but rather a persistent pain which endured for years, like some kind of spiritual toothache. Indeed, no actual feeling of pity was involved. Pity may be extended to someone else; but my mother was so close, so deeply commingled with my own life, that her illness became my affliction. And I bore this affliction, year in and year out, with longing and sadness and with a silent hope: perhaps salvation will come after all.

What could be more natural and commonplace than a walk with one's mother in the street? All the other children had experienced this. I—had not. And I dreamed—perhaps more than about anything else—of how glorious it would be with my mother healthy and both of us able to leave the house together, hand in hand. I found the prospect so utterly joyous, and it made me so incomparably, radiantly happy, that I could not begin to think of what I would have been willing to sacrifice in order to realize it. And while my mother's health turned progressively worse, my yearning grew ever more powerful and glowed more fiercely until it became clear, at first to the adults and then also to me, that the dream could not and would not become a reality.

Toward the end of the 1880s, when efforts of physicians would prove unavailing, recourse would be had to something quite new

and uncommon. The famous hypnotist Feldman happened to be visiting our city just then. Knowledge of hypnotism was still in its infancy in the broad circles of Russian society. Feldman, who used to stage public demonstrations, created a big stir. It seemed as if some sort of supernatural power were at work. Imagine! One person puts another to sleep, and then becomes his lord and master whose every command must be followed by the subject. The hypnotist can prick the subject with needles, telling him it doesn't hurt—and it doesn't. He can command him to forget everything that has happened to him—and he will forget. He can do anything he wishes with his subject. Could he, perhaps, also cure my mother?

Attempts of this kind had actually been made. Feldman, accordingly, was invited to see my mother.

At the outset he performed a test to ascertain whether the patient would respond easily and with success to hypnosis. On this occasion the following test was made: Feldman put my mother to sleep and gave her a hypnotic command, as follows: "Tomorrow, at a quarter after four in the morning, you will get up from the place where you will be at the time. You will enter your husband's study, seat yourself at the desk, and write a letter to your son Sasha in Saint Petersburg. Then you will ring and give the letter for mailing to whomever comes in. But now you are to awaken and completely forget that I have told you to do anything. Awaken."

My mother awoke and remembered nothing. The next day arrived. All of us were ready and waiting impatiently for the designated hour. My mother happened to be sleeping in the parlor. Suddenly, unexpectedly, she awakened; it was a half-hour before the designated time. (A misunderstanding had evidently occurred: the hypnotist had told her "a quarter *after* four" and she probably heard it as a "a quarter *to* four.") For a minute or so we did not grasp what it meant. My mother rose from the chair, stood on her two feet, and proceeded to walk. Walking, by that time, had become a real trial for her; she required someone's assistance. Now, however, she called no one, waited for no help. She suddenly began to move as if propelled by some force: she left the parlor, entered the study, sat down at the desk, and started to write. To the best of my recollection, she had by that time been unable to write because her hand trembled so. But this time she did succeed in writing a short letter which read more or less

as follows: "Dear Sasha. Come home immediately. I wish to see you."

Then she rang the electric bell which was located on the same desk. It had been arranged in advance that I, instead of the servant girl, should wait in the adjacent room and enter as soon as I heard the ring. I went in. My mother handed me the letter and told me to take it to the post office. Then, pale and exhausted, she lay down on the sofa and fell asleep.

The test had succeeded brilliantly, and it was decided to proceed with the curative treatment itself. I vividly recall the evening it commenced. I had no separate room of my own at the time; my bed was located in my mother's room. It was a fairly large room, divided in half by a long heavy curtain. One part represented a kind of small parlor; the other part was the actual bedroom containing our two beds. My mother, the hypnotist, and several other persons were in the parlor. But I was not allowed to stay; I was told to go to bed. I moved behind the curtain. Sleep, of course, was out of the question. I was tremendously excited: there, just a step away, behind that very curtain which I could touch with my hand, something awesome and tremendously important was about to unfold. Everything hung on its outcome. For me its importance was greater indeed than anything in the world. My ears were attuned to the slightest rustle. I could hear the calm but firm voice of the new miracle man. The great transformation; the tremendous, shining marvel was at hand. I lowered myself to my knees and, at the very moment the test began on the other side of the curtain—the test involving a hypnotic suggestion aimed at a cure—I in my bed prayed to the great God above to give succor and to have mercy. Exerting all my strength, I prayed—prayed from the deepest depth of my heart as only a child can pray who seeks to save a mother.

My mother remained ill.

6.

Music

MUSIC OCCUPIED no small place during my childhood years—and not only then. I have already mentioned our vacations at places like the seaside town of Maiorenhof (where we spent three summers at a *dacha*), and Druskeniki, where summer visitors were provided with a large park in which an orchestra performed twice a day. I used to seat myself in the front row right next to the orchestra and drink in every note. My memory of Druskeniki is particularly vivid in this connection. I well recall the conductor (his name was Eban) and how he stood on the podium facing the audience. I can still see his face and prominent gray-black beard. Seated immediately in front of him, I would hold a small stick in my hand and conduct in time with him. To this day I can still remember the complete melody of one of his own compositions which he used to play at the time. It was called *The Druskeniki Mill*.

Music also filled an important place in our home. Two of my brothers are excellent musicians. The youngest, Alexander, that Sasha to whom my mother had written the “hypnotic” letter, was already playing the piano brilliantly as a young boy. He subsequently became a professor at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. Although my oldest brother, Paul, did not become a professional musician, he too possesses extraordinary musical abilities. A talented pianist, he could also play virtually every musical instrument. He had a whole storehouse of instruments: a violincello, a trumpet, a harpsichord, a

small Russian flute, a concertina—anything his heart desired. And he played them all. Paul, incidentally, is also a splendid dramatic artist as well as an exceedingly fine photographer.

A number of people with musical talent used to visit us. There were evenings devoted to quartets and chamber music. Well-known artists would sing. It was quite a life. I, too, had a desire to play something. I was still at a most tender age (about four or so) when I prevailed on my family to buy me a small violin, not a real violin, just a toy. Yet from the very outset I was certain I could produce miracles. I gathered up the audience of adults and solemnly proclaimed: “I will play so as to move you to tears.” And I began. And tears did in fact proceed to flow, but not from the listeners; they came from me. The violin scratched and scraped. It was a miserable disaster.

Nevertheless I did have a feel for music. I was once present at a musical evening during which my brother played a rhapsody by Liszt. I was asked: “How do you like his playing?” I replied: “It seems to me he played it too rapidly.” And it turned out that I was right; the grown-ups also felt that it had been played too fast.

I began to study the piano at the age of eight. My sister was my first teacher. It proved to be a thankless job. I don’t know whether it was a case of the music inducing nervousness or whether I was by nature a capricious youngster (I’m afraid it was really the latter). But I do recall that my sister experienced no end of difficulty with me. I scrapped with her continuously. I was reluctant to follow directions and indulged in all manner of high jinks. In the end she would drop the whole thing and break off “diplomatic relations” with me. I, in turn, would feel regretful. What to do? Go to her and ask forgiveness? That I could never do; not under any circumstances. Instead, I used the written approach and sent her little notes. Peace followed and the lessons would resume—until another blowup, with another war, another little note, and another armistice. The realization finally dawned on everyone that nothing could be accomplished with my sister as teacher. There was no alternative but to find an outside teacher for whom I would have the necessary respect. Indeed a certain military bandleader was retained. The man wore a uniform and had an inordinately long mustache. These impressed me, and I

learned. I made fairly good progress, but then came the summer. We left for a *dacha* on the outskirts of the city, and I began to grow lazy. It's unfortunate that the requisite means were not applied to overcome laziness. I was left alone; and I stopped learning. I deeply regret it.

7.

My Earliest Political Impressions

THE DOMINANT POLITICAL sentiment in our home was a moderate liberalism. Echoes of the 60s were evidently still alive, echoes of the period Russian liberals used to call the Era of Great Reforms which was associated with the name of Alexander II, when serfdom was abolished.

Among us, a particular charm attached to the name of Alexander. A large portrait of the Tsar hung in my father's study. While still a child I often gazed upon the face which seemed to me possessed of a rare nobility and beauty. I always heard him spoken of with great affection and respect. When he died—an event I myself cannot remember, since I was only a year and a half at the time, but which I heard about later—his death was deeply lamented within our social circle, and the ladies dressed in mourning. I also recall, if somewhat hazily, my mother saying that she had a kind of premonition of the catastrophe immediately before his death. For three days running she had seen a black coffin in her dreams. This story influenced my childish imagination very strongly.

Revolutionary sympathies were nonexistent in our home. We were extremely loyal. If I'm not mistaken, my older brother had been

directed toward a military career out of fear of the revolutionary “pestilence.” He completed the gymnasium at the close of the 70s—the very time that the terrorist movement of those days had reached its highest intensity. My family had no desire to send him to the university where he might become infected with revolutionary ideas, hence the decision to enroll him in a cadet school. He graduated as an officer and remained one for several decades.

I recall an incident from my later childhood, when my youngest brother was in the upper grade of the gymnasium. He had a schoolmate, a certain “L”; a tall, thin fellow with a peculiar nasal quality in his voice. This chap had presumably been stung by the bug of revolutionism and felt the impulse to engage in a bit of agitation in our home. Aside from the military *denshchik*, we also had another servant, Lavrenty. One morning the fellow latched onto the servant and proceeded to question him: “Do you know, Lavrenty, why Alexander II was killed?” I’m not sure how my father got wind of it, but he promptly learned of the heretical discussion and soundly berated the young man. He was immediately sent packing and forbidden ever to return.

With respect to my own thoughts on the matter, a strange notion raced around in my head: that the Tsar had been killed by none other than the enemies of the people—the landowners—who were angry with Alexander II for having freed the serfs. And this prompted me also to arrive at certain deductions regarding his heir, Alexander III. The year was 1887. We were spending the summer in Druskeniki and I had become friendly with a lad of my own age whose name I can’t remember. He was the son of a Russian engineer. One day I felt a desire to engage him in conversation about politics. I had heard something somewhere about a new reform of sorts on behalf of the peasants which, though regarded as a necessity, had not been implemented. Accordingly, and with an air of great authority, I informed my friend that the Tsar would most happily have carried out the reform, but was unable to do so out of fear of being killed just as Alexander II had been killed. The lad told his father about the conversation. The father grew terribly frightened: “What kind of talk is this! Talk about killing the emperor, no less!” So he hastened to complain to my father and a considerable uproar followed. I received a sharp rebuke and strict orders not to meddle in politics. And I did, in fact, leave the Tsar alone.

8.

Summer Life

I ALWAYS LOVED summer best. Summertime—that was really living; winter was largely an interlude between summers. And even now, while I'm in the process of refreshing my memory and looking back at the road I have traversed, I see before me, first of all, those few dozen summers. So supremely vivid, bright, and colorful, each with its own physiognomy, each with its special configuration and distinctive charm. They were life's visible milestones, and the gray winters were little more than passages between, monochromatic and monotonous.

For a child, the summer was ever a time of new impressions, of a richer, more interesting existence. To begin with, one traveled, and traveled, indeed, by train. Naturally one stood at the window. In Russian railroad cars, a kind of wide pipe ran beneath the windows. I used to perch myself on a section of pipe so that my head reached just to the window ledge. And there I would stand and peer out, gazing interminably at the new, wide world.

As I have indicated previously, we used to travel to various places: to the sea, to the Niemen river, or simply to a village; in fact I spent three whole summers at the seashore. But little has survived in my memory; and when I do recall something, I'm not quite certain whether it was real or whether I saw it in a picture. One thing however remains clearly etched in my memory. It was July 15, 1888. July 15 (Old Style) was Saint Vladimir's Day as well as my very own

personal holiday. (Among members of the Orthodox faith it is not birthdays which are customarily celebrated but one's Saint's Day—the so-called *imeniny*.) And that year it also happened to be quite a special holiday, a general holiday: it coincided with the nine-hundredth anniversary of the day Prince Vladimir baptized the Russians in Kiev. The holiday was accordingly commemorated with parades and ceremonials; and the major ceremonial involved the Blessing of the Waters.

This observance traditionally occurred once each year, on January 6, the day of Christ's baptism. (During the customary baptismal rite, the individual is immersed three times in water.) As a remembrance and symbol of the day, a cross would be dipped into the water, thus "sanctifying" it. Then the crowd would be sprinkled with the water. Believers used to pour the water into flasks and take it home. The ritual was always conducted along the river bank. Because of the winter and the frozen river, a sort of window used to be hacked out of the ice and the cross dipped into the water. The service began with a massive, solemn procession from the cathedral. Soldiers were arrayed on the streets and music played. The chanting choir, the golden church banners gleaming brightly, the priestly vestments—it was all very lovely. But on this occasion the whole affair was conducted in a special way. It was summer; there was no river involved; and in the absence of the little window chopped from the ice, the priest's golden cross was lowered into the vast, sweeping, boundless sea.

I was tremendously impressed; here was the sea, no less, being consecrated! The very thought left me genuinely spellbound. The proceeding had something biblical about it, a quality reminiscent of the earliest days of creation when the spirit of Almighty God hovered over the dark waters. I sensed most vividly the power of that spirit, the power of holiness. Above, shone the sun; below, the broad waves unfolded, and the sea rustled and murmured quietly and calmly, like a vanquished lion stretched prostrate at the feet of its lord and master. And I stood at the shore, addressing in my thoughts the spacious, blessed, noble waters to which had fallen the honor of being present at the moment of the great sanctification.

A few weeks later we departed. On the final day we repaired to

the sea for our leave taking. It was a stormy day, a harbinger of autumn. We ascended the long, high, wooden pier which reached far into the water. We cast a few small coins into the sea, as was the custom, and made our adieux to it. For me the water was no longer a dead object; it had become a living creature—a blessed creature and a dear friend—and my heart was truly heavy. Indeed, to this day I have somehow never been back to those places.

Before leaving, we also went into the woods and picked tiny wildflowers which smelled of resin and which we fashioned into wreaths. Already in those days I found parting with summer deeply painful. Parting has always been distinctly difficult for me; but leaving the summer place and returning to autumn drabness and a long, cold winter was doubly difficult, as during the endless winter months, I longed terribly for the green summer days. I still recall a four-line poem which I wrote a few years later, as a child's naïve evocation of yearning. Translated into Yiddish, the little poem reads something like this:

Summer, come, hurry back.
I implore you with all my heart.
And bring warm breezes with you.
For I am suffering a lot.¹

The summer of 1887 in Druskeniki was especially eventful. It was there that I had the conversation about Alexander III. The big eclipse had taken place there. In truth, I only witnessed the darkness proper and no sun, because the sky was covered with clouds. Still it was a great event. I saw a mad dog in Druskeniki that year. I observed the cracked earth there; actually, I thought it was some kind of volcanic eruption. But the explanation was really much simpler:

1. Transliterated from Medem's Yiddish, which he translated from his original Russian, the little poem reads as follows:

*Zumer, kum gikher tsurik,
Ikh bet dikh gor hartsig.
Breyng varime luftn mit zikh,
Vayl ikh layd gor shtark.*

the summer had been very hot and the soil was largely clay. The excessive dryness induced the formation of a mass of crevices resembling old bark.

It was there I beheld the large, sweeping, incomparably lovely Niemen river and the small, swift, noisy, animated stream, the Rodnichanka. And there I cast eyes upon a hundred-year-old pine, gigantic and incredibly thick. It was called the Grandmother. Another pine—the Grandfather—was thinner but even taller. I occupied myself with gymnastics there, and even won a prize for climbing a tall, smooth, slippery pole. There we scampered after moles. And it was there I saw Cossacks for the first time.

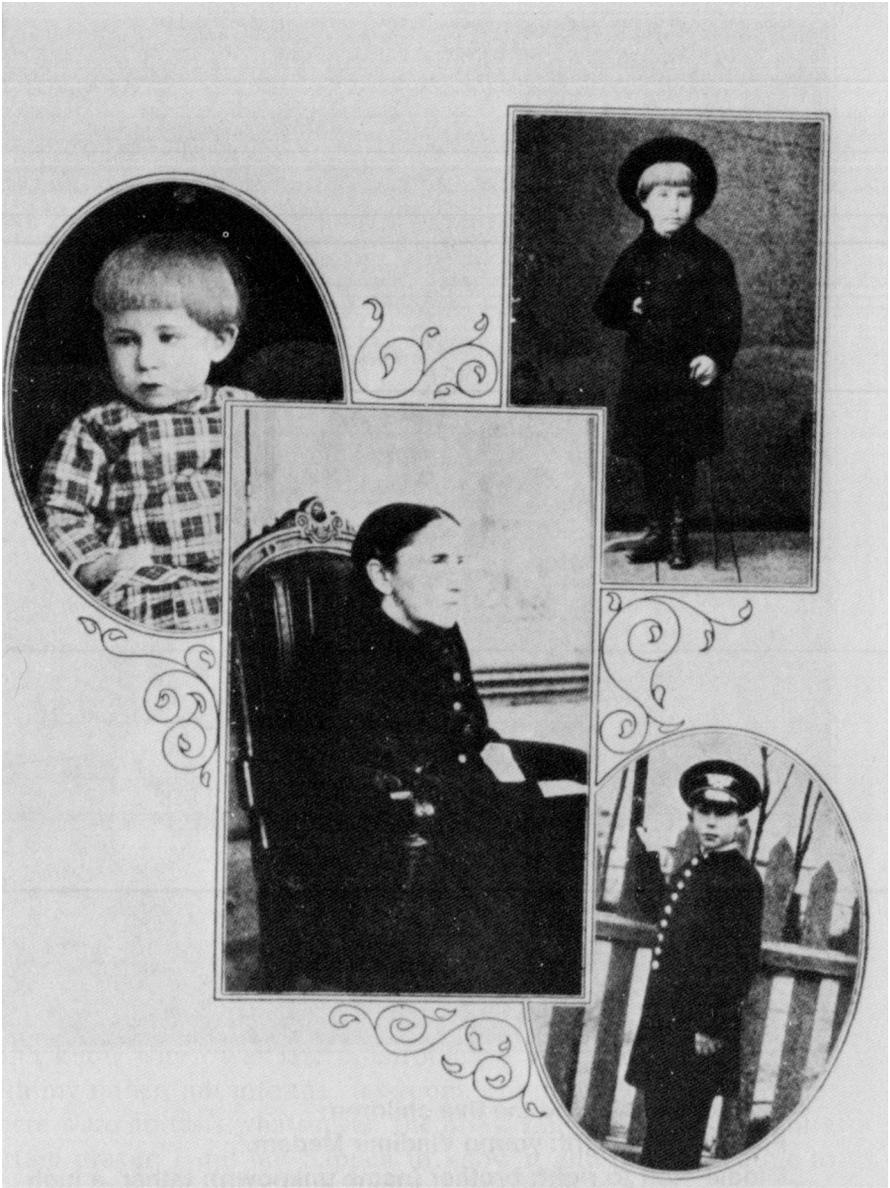
The Cossacks—this was perhaps the most important event of the summer. For several days in a row they passed through the town. They would appear on the opposite side of the Niemen, cross the water on a ferry, and exit at the other end of town. I had never seen Cossacks before except in pictures. Naturally I spent whole days at the ferry, gazing upon their horses, their lances, and their *nagaikas* (thick, tightly-twisted Cossack whips). On that occasion, a certain feeling welled up in me for the first time about which I should like to write.

The Cossacks would arrive in small groups, a few dozen at a time. I was unhappy about this. I wanted them to arrive in no fewer than large masses. I used to stand at the ferry and gaze endlessly in their direction, toward the far side of the river, where they could be seen approaching in the distance. I waited for long periods and wondered: When will the mass finally draw up? At times it seemed as if it were finally approaching; a long, thick column appeared to loom in the distance. But the column was quickly disbanded and, instead of the solid stream, there were only some measly driblets.

To this day I can still savor the feeling I had at that time: the thirst for the greatest measure, for fullness beyond limit—and the fear that the flow might become exhausted at any moment; and the bitter regret, in fact, when it swiftly petered out. I frequently experienced such fear and disappointment during later years as well.

The summer in Druskeniki and the summer at the seashore were the last summers of my “free” phase. Within a year I would become a *gymnast*.² It meant the start of a new life. And even the summers would take on a markedly different flavor.

2. A male pupil in the gymnasium; fem; *gymnastka*.



Childhood pictures of Medem ("Volodya") in Minsk, with mother Rosalie (during period of her severe illness)



Medem's father and the five children:

Front—lower right: young Vladimir Medem.

Middle—left to right: brother (name unknown); father, a high official in the Russian medical corps; brother, Alexander (Sasha).

Rear—brother, Pavel; sister

9.

I Attend the Gymnasium

AUTUMN ARRIVED. WE had returned from our summer residence and one day my father suddenly called me over (I was nine years old at the time) and informed me that he would be taking me to the gymnasium on the following morning. This bit of intelligence descended upon me like a bolt from the blue. It had never dawned upon me that I, too, would someday be required to attend the gymnasium. I had felt so good, so peaceful and snug, protected under my mother's wings. Then suddenly I had to start going there—to that massive, elongated, remote structure with its hundreds of strange, unfamiliar boys; with strict teachers; with a thousand new and unaccustomed things to face. Hardly a bold lad from the start, I was seized by something akin to terror.

My father personally escorted me to the gymnasium that first day. The school year had already been under way for a few weeks. I don't know why I was late in enrolling. I was conducted, together with my father, not into the classroom, but into the teachers' room. There were no tests whatsoever: the priest simply asked me about a certain prayer. I did not happen to know it and he directed me to learn it. This was the occasion of my first misunderstanding. The priest had said to me: "Memorize this for the coming class." I thought: Now that's a strange individual! What indeed could this be, his assigning me something *now* for the coming class? There's all of a year until the coming class! So of course I didn't learn it; and of course the priest asked me for that particular prayer on the following day. I was utterly confounded. It turned out that what he had meant

was not the following year but the next class lecture. My embarrassment was intense.

In general I felt somewhat less than blissful during the first few days. One of the main difficulties was that I, unlike the other boys, was not yet wearing the prescribed regulation clothing. All the boys were attired in black-and-gray cloth jackets, long trousers, and gray military overcoats with silver buttons. I, on the other hand, was still dressed in ordinary clothes. I wore short pants, buttoned up shoes, on account of which I was referred to as "the girl," and a blue overcoat with gold buttons. These attracted everyone's attention and I became the object of some teasing. Dejected though I felt, I was determined nevertheless to remain steadfast and not allow myself to be wronged. One boy approached me in the courtyard and said, pointing to my buttons: "You're a golden one, you are!" presumably considering this a big joke. But I retorted instantly, in the spirit of tit-for-tat, and pointed to his buttons: "And you're a silver one!" I considered my response an even bigger joke and I was very proud of it. As I have already noted, I was not one of the world's great *khokhomim*.

During the early days I found myself extremely bewildered. At a session of the Russian-language class, for instance (this was in the very beginning), we were required to copy down from dictation a brief story of some kind. I was so confused that the words recited by the teacher reached my ears all jumbled together in a strange sort of mishmash, and the Lord only knows what kind of outlandish things I recorded in my copybook. But this didn't last long. I took myself in hand very swiftly. After all, I did possess some considerable abilities, and in short order I became the leading pupil in the class.

Nevertheless, during the whole nine years I attended school, the gymnasium remained a real affliction, a form of divine punishment; and not only for myself, but for all of us. The onetime Russian gymnasium was no true educational and instructional institution in the modern sense, but a kind of state administrative agency in which the overriding concern was a military-type discipline. Most of the teachers were individuals totally lacking in pedagogical ability, thoroughly devoid of any love of their calling or of the children, and without any broad outlook and fundamental education whatsoever.

Just officials . . . nothing else. We had no love for them. Quite the contrary, they were our enemies, our oppressors. We were their slaves.

Our city was part of the Vilno school district. The district had a reputation throughout Russia as the harshest and most rigorous. Life in the gymnasium was rendered particularly difficult at the time I was in the third grade, when we received a new inspector. His was the task of supervising the conduct of the pupils; he was “Minister of Interior and Chief of Gendarmes” of the gymnasium. The name of this master of ours was Nicholas Grigorievich Kosakovsky. He was not very old and he was extraordinarily handsome. His voice was mild, his movement soft, his eyes dark and velvety, reminiscent of a large black tomcat. He was the terror of the whole gymnasium, literally the bane of our existence. The rules of the gymnasium were weighted down with all manner of proscriptions, and he enforced them with cold, dry iron precision. We knew that he would never forgive a thing. And though he never shouted, all of us used to face him with fear and trembling. We despised Kosakovsky from the depths of our hearts, and he surely knew it.

In later years, after my completion of the gymnasium, he became a district inspector. He traveled throughout the provincial cities administering the examinations, and he was especially concerned with asking the kinds of questions that were beyond the capacity of even the best and most capable pupils. A large number of young people fell victim to his cruelty. He literally shattered their lives.

Not until many years later was the background to this cruelty exposed. After his death a sensational article about Kosakovsky was written by a prominent Vilno neurologist who had previously treated him. It created a big stir. Indeed, because of the article, one of Kosakovsky’s sons—a young officer—challenged the physician to a duel, alleging that he had maligned the memory of his late father. The physician, it seems, disclosed that Kosakovsky had simply been a sick human being; a sadist. The cruelty, the tormenting of the children, had provided him sexual gratification! Such an individual had been master over the souls of hundreds and hundreds of children.

If the inspector was a subdued savage, the director, Gavril

Fyodorovich Vasiliev, was a real volcano. By nature not really a bad fellow, he greatly relished power and glory. In his capacity of supreme ruler of the gymnasium he considered himself a miniature god. His outstanding feature was—his shouting. Despite the many years which have elapsed since that time, his thunderings still resound in my ears. Vasiliev's main arena was the hallway. The doors to the classrooms ran along both sides of this very long and wide corridor which extended the whole length of the gymnasium. Gavrilka, as we used to call him, would appear in the corridor each day, and as soon as he mounted the stairs every one of the 400 boys already knew: "He's here!" The corridor was laid out in such a fashion that the least sound carried readily. And like the thunder of a hungry lion in the wilds, his shouts echoed from one end of the building to the next. Not only did the pupils shudder, but the teachers as well. In retrospect, there was a great virtue in this, for Vasiliev's arrival was invariably known in advance; and it was always possible to stop the horseplay in time and become as peaceful as pussycats. And if Gavrilka, by some miracle, occasionally failed to shout, we had still another type of warning. He used to carry a big assortment of doodads on his watch chain that tinkled at his every step, like so many little bells. Thus the tinkling, like his screaming, could be heard from the farthest point, and the necessary precautions were taken in time.

In the upper grades, Vasiliev used to give Latin lessons. He even attempted to introduce a little erudition into these lessons and to tell us the sort of things which were not included in the textbook. But his primary virtue, in our eyes, lay in the fact that he came to class very late and, sometimes, not at all. This always constituted a truly festive event.

The remaining teachers were, by and large, persons of little consequence; and our attitude toward them was one of marked disdain. They all had separate nicknames. The teacher of Russian literature was known among us as Mikhalka. It was said of him that he had not read a newspaper in several decades. The mathematician was called Konoval; the historian, He-Goat; and another historian acquired the kind of name among us which cannot be made public under any circumstances. From the foregoing one can readily see the kind of respect in which we held our educators.

And, truthfully, in the sense of education—and even of instruction—the gymnasium offered us virtually nothing. Any individual who was content with the official teaching was clearly a student who departed the gymnasium precincts a pronounced ignoramus and a coarse personality. We retained not one iota of affection for the school. I used to awaken each morning in a mood of utter disquiet, with a feeling of having to complete a weighty measure of forced labor. The lessons consisted largely of the instructor calling upon us in sequence and of our having to respond to the so-called lesson. The person who correctly memorized what had been assigned the previous day would receive a good *otmetka* (mark) ; for anyone who had not, the consequences proved ugly. And it's strange: none of us, from the first pupil to the very last, was ever certain that he knew the lesson properly, and we lived in a constant state of fear.

The identical scene was repeated five times a day. The teacher entered the room. Everyone stood up and sat down again. He opened the large record book containing the class roster. He scanned the long list in search of a victim. There followed a tense moment while thirty lads, with baited breath, sat waiting for him to call upon someone. They engaged in various calculations. One teacher followed the alphabet, hence it was possible to know presumably where one stood, and to maintain the requisite calm. But no; from time to time he intentionally called a name out of alphabetical order, and the results would be unpleasant. Another teacher used to scan the room and simply select people at random; this compelled everyone to remain on tenterhooks. And we continued in this state for the whole hour, just waiting, waiting impatiently for the ring of the large bell in the corridor which would announce an end to the fright and the gloom. And if a boy happened to own a watch, he became the continuous object of whispers from all directions that conveyed a single question: "How much time is left? How much is left?" Until the bell, that is.

Ours was a real prisoners' mentality, the mentality of individuals constantly waiting for their freedom, counting the years, the days, and the minutes remaining until salvation. In the very same way that we counted the minutes until the end of each lesson, we also counted the hours remaining until the end of the school day, the days left until the Sunday break, the weeks until the more important holidays, the

months until the close of the school year and the lengthy summer vacations. And hovering over all of these was the ceaseless longing for that distant—so very distant—bright and beautiful day when all the suffering should finally come to an end; when one would be parting company for good and all with those detested walls, and walk out of the prison into the wide, free world.

Our attitude toward our teachers was that of prisoners; we looked upon them as our oppressors. Deceiving them or causing them aggravation was considered a worthy act. This was precisely the soil from which the earliest feelings of comradeship and unity sprouted among us.

Having emerged out of such unhealthy ground, these feelings at first evoked grave doubts in me, and even a degree of resistance. I remember once taking a walk with my brother Alexander who had completed the gymnasium during the very year I moved up from the elementary school to the first grade. While conversing on various matters, he undertook to enlighten me about the precepts of comradesly morality. “If something should happen in class,” he said, “if someone has been cutting up, has done something that’s forbidden, he must not be ‘exposed’ under any circumstances. Should you be questioned about it by the teacher, you must say that you know nothing at all. Otherwise you’re a squealer, a *fiskal* (informer), a *suka* (bitch); and that’s the most shameful thing and the greatest sin.”

Such was my brother’s line of reasoning with me, but I found it quite absurd. I was still imbued with the clear, simple, straightforward morality of the Ten Commandments. One dare not lie, after all! And truly, how can anyone deceive someone else, be he even a teacher? It’s just plain ugly!

Nevertheless I fell in very quickly with the spirit of concerted action and comradesly conspiracy. I protected our fellowship just as loyally as did all the others. But I must confess that the aversion to lying remained with me always; and not only because of the Ten Commandments. It was simply an inner, instinctive repugnance—as toward a snake or a frog.

Yet our hostility toward the teachers was by and large of a more passive sort. What we pulled on them was nothing stupendous; there were no really major escapades. In the lower grades we were general-

ly very quiet and fearful. And if, in the upper grades, a little bottle of whisky was sometimes brought into the classroom, or if a card game took place under the table while a lesson was in progress, well, this was the very most we allowed ourselves within the four walls of our prison. The barracks discipline oppressed us with all its massive weight, preventing even the birth of a really audacious thought. The atmosphere was stifling; initiative was paralyzed.

In the gymnasium we simply pined away. And even beyond its four walls, out on the street, we were in constant danger of falling into the hands of our dear custodians; if the button on a coat were unbuttoned, or if someone set out from home a half hour late, all these were crimes that demanded punishment!

Our real lives were at home.

10.

Galinyevich's House

WHILE I WAS MOVING up from first to second grade in the gymnasium, my father rented a new dwelling. It was nothing like the previous one, and life in it took on an altogether different appearance. Our former apartments had in fact, also been quite respectable, but the new one was genuinely lordly. It was "Galinyevich's House."

Galinyevich had been the *golova* (mayor, literally, head) of Minsk, and very rich. His brother inherited the house upon his death, but didn't care to live there. He moved into another house, a small one; and he put the large house up for rent. It was later purchased by the succeeding mayor, the wealthy Polish count, Chapski. It was one of the loveliest houses, if not actually the loveliest, in all of Minsk.

Through the main gate one entered directly into a very large courtyard which resembled the courtyard of an aristocratic estate, as wide and spacious as a whole city square. In the middle of the courtyard, directly in front of the house, stood a small circular garden planted with lovely roses. It was flanked by two tiny houses, the residences of the gardener and several officer acquaintances; and just beyond the little garden, facing the gate, sprawled the large, attractive wooden house in which we lived. It included a magnificent ball-room with a beautiful parquet floor of genuine oak, a rarity in those days; a large dining hall; an attractive study for my father; and a

whole series of bedrooms. The house contained a variety of hallways, as well as little chambers with nooks, stairways, a bathtub, and other amenities. The ground even had an orangery; true, it was virtually bare, only a single lemon tree remaining from the old days. From the ballroom, one could walk out onto a veranda that was extraordinarily wide and long. Steps ran down to a spacious garden. The garden was a veritable delight. One section was planted with the loveliest flowers—the gardener maintained a greenhouse there. Another section was filled with fruit trees. And a third was just a park. The total area extended a great distance both in depth and breadth, and covered virtually a whole city district. It was bordered on three sides by no fewer than three streets. One side of the garden ran the length of Lake Swisłocz, on the far side of which was located the large city park, the *gubernatorsky sad* (the Governor's Garden). Seated on our veranda during summer evenings, we could hear the music from the city park and observe the fireworks.

One may readily imagine the degree of pleasure that a youngster would derive from a house and a courtyard of this kind, and above all from the beautiful, spacious garden within which one could do so much running and playing. When a friend would come over, there was an opportunity for games; if no friend showed up, there was the cook's son. In any case I could always count on my good and devoted friends, our dogs. We had no fewer than three dogs at that time. There was an old dog we inherited from the former housekeeper, a large, magnificent Newfoundland (a water dog) named Toomri. Another dog, Lady, belonged to my brother; it was a white hunting dog. The third one was my very own. I acquired it as a puppy and raised it in the orangery. When full-grown it had the appearance of a rather commonplace, albeit democratic, street mongrel. Moreover, someone had apparently broken one of its legs, and it remained a cripple. Still I was tremendously attached to my Castor (that was what I called him), and I loved him no less than I did his aristocratic comrades. With these dogs I would dash about the garden, engage in warfare with neighboring dogs, tease the cats, perform various tricks. But one thing I strongly regretted: Kolya (the cook's son) had greater influence on them than I. Toomri, big as a bear, used to respond to his slightest gesture, yet there was more warmth in his friendship

toward me. We also kept a cow for a time. Chickens clucked about the courtyard, and one room held a bird in a cage.

But it was the dogs that played the major role. They occupy a rather significant place in my memory, far greater than the few lines I have devoted to them. Jewish boys, for the most part, never had such experiences—especially in the larger cities. A Jewish boy would be hostile toward a dog; he either feared it or he felt obliged to fling a stone at it. Such behavior was most improper; and I am extremely pleased that I numbered friends not only among humans but also among dogs. This subject is hardly as trivial as some may think.

Along with the change of house went a change in social relations. Until that year visitors to our home were primarily Jewish acquaintances. As recently as the previous year, my sister had been in line to marry a Jewish physician; but then she turned him down. I don't know whether it was simply coincidence, or whether my parents, after deliberation upon the matter, intentionally wanted to find a gentile husband for her. With the move to new quarters, the house became filled with gentile acquaintances. This was the very time we became rather friendly with a certain prominent family which happened in fact to live very close to us; our gardens were adjacent to each other. He was an engineer—Verkhovsky by name—one of the higher officials of the same railroad on which my father served. Gleb, his younger son, had been my schoolmate ever since first grade. This was the same boy with whom I had shared those heretical ideas about Christ and with whom I jointly prayed to God later, beneath the pines of the Minsk woods. The Verkhovsky family also had several older children, including a daughter who was betrothed, so the house used to be full of young people. There was likewise a betrothed girl in our home. And my brother, the officer, had a score of friends and colleagues. Accordingly a large circle of mutual acquaintances became interlinked: officers, students, young officials; a circle which constantly frequented one of the two houses. The scene was of a perpetual buzzing and swarming, as in a beehive. Music, song, recitations, dances, games, amateur theatrical performances. Life was joyous and carefree.

Ordinarily I, too, derived my share of delight from all the jollity and clatter. Yet one thing used to hinder my pleasure; I was an ex-

ceedingly shy lad and far from daring; and it was a genuine ordeal for me to enter a room full of unfamiliar people. Care had always been taken in our household that I should behave properly and conduct myself in accord with the precepts of social courtesy. Theoretically, I knew all the rules very well: the procedure for greeting a visitor, how one shuffled the foot and nodded the head. I knew that one must not be the first to extend the hand of welcome, but must wait for the other party to do so.

This was all well and good in theory; but to bring it off in practice was not so easy. I enter a room in which ten or fifteen strangers are seated. They're engaged in conversation and are totally oblivious to the little *gymnast* circulating about them and at a loss for what to do. Should I approach someone? The individual is chatting away and doesn't see you. Should I not approach him? The individual might take offense. A pretty dilemma! I therefore attempted to arrange things so as to place myself in the room in advance, before visitors arrived. Thus the entering party would have to make the first move in the matter of greetings. Still, this approach did not always prove successful.

At the time I strongly regretted the inability of adults to comprehend the agonies a bashful child was forced to suffer during the welcoming ritual. Then and there I vowed that when I should myself become a grown-up, I would always be the first to greet children, in order that they might not suffer as I had suffered.

Whoever has not experienced it himself simply cannot imagine the distress associated with a child's feeling of shyness and lack of boldness. I suffered from it even in the upper grades of the gymnasium. In Minsk we had a small city park in addition to the large, Governor's Park. It was situated in the heart of the city and was filled with people every evening. I used to stroll along its lanes very often: and even when I was not strolling, I had occasion to pass through several times a day. But the lanes were graced with long rows of benches on both sides, and the benches were solidly packed with people who sat and gazed at the passerby. And when I chanced to be one of those passersby, I used to feel the stares of the seated people. I felt, literally, as if stones were weighing me down, or, more correctly, as if ropes were binding me hand and foot—my legs in particular. I would

lose all control over my legs. I had a sensation of being unable to propel myself forward at a normal gait; as though my legs were carrying me along with peculiar movements resembling those of an inebriate. To an outsider it was probably not noticeable; or maybe it was. But inwardly I had the feeling of physical constraint and awkwardness. In later years, as an adult, I recall an incident during which I observed a little girl walking across the courtyard. The girl was a member of that same bashful species, and she must have felt as if people were staring at her. She didn't really see us at all, because her back was turned to us as she moved. Yet I distinctly observed how that very back responded to our glances by a reflex action, becoming hunched up as if seized with a cramp. And the girl actually moved along with such erratic, twisted, and peculiar steps, that I should have responded with laughter had I not recalled my own childhood years and my own anguish then. For myself, I was cured of that particular affliction only after leaving the gymnasium.

I felt far more comfortable in the company of the servants. I spent a lot of time with them, and most willingly. And I believe they also had a liking for me. In this connection, incidentally, I had many to choose from. We ourselves employed at this time no fewer than four people: a cook (an elderly woman, Pani Mikhalina, who had worked for us for many years and who became a virtual member of the family); a servant girl; a *denshchik*, into whom I would pound, why I don't know, nothing but geography and astronomy; and another servant. In addition, the officers who lived in the same courtyard had two *denshchiki* of their own. I was forever dashing over to them and dining with them on *kasha*, a gruel made of buckwheat or other small grains, and rendered animal fat which they used to bring from the barracks. To this day I can still savor the taste of that particular *kasha*.

11.

My Comrades

WE WERE NOT YET living in Galinyevich's house at the time, and I was a pupil in the preparatory grade. One morning some visitors came to us: new people whom I had never seen before. An older man, his wife, and their children. Someone beckoned to me and led me up to a young fellow, tall, lean, of dark complexion, slightly older than myself. Someone said to me, "This is that Misha"; and to him, "This is that Volya." Our acquaintanceship was thus effected.

To tell the truth, I had never heard of "that Misha"; and Misha, I presume, had heard just as little of "that Volya." Yet in no time at all we became the warmest and most intimate friends.

Misha was my second cousin. He had just arrived directly from Siberia where he had been living with his parents. Why they left Siberia I don't know, but what I did know was this: they arrived with five children and had experienced grave hardships, cares, and anxieties. Misha, age ten, was the oldest; the youngest child, a daughter, was perhaps a year old.

Misha became, in fact, my first and closest friend. We often spent the short winter days and long winter evenings together. And when the summer came—my first summer as a *gymnast*—Misha joined us for a lengthy stay at the *dacha*.

We didn't travel far from Minsk on that occasion, but rented a summer house on something like a farm in the immediate outskirts of

the city. It went by the peculiar name of Lyudamont. The house was large, unusually large. The place had a garden, a bit neglected; a lake; broad fields and swamps on all sides; and nearby, a military camp. To us as boys the military camp was, of course, the major attraction. Imagine, two whole regiments! And we were able to observe the various exercises: the marching, the parades, the firing. What could be more interesting? And it goes without saying that we would imitate everything most ardently. We also struck up friendships with the soldiers and were initiated into our basic military "education." Directly adjacent to our house stood the buildings which contained the clothing and food supplies for the soldiers. Whole wagonloads of biscuit-filled sacks used to move out of the place. The two of us were forever hanging around, and were occasionally treated to this soldiers' "delicacy." Anyone who has ever served in the Russian army will doubtless recall those biscuits: black as pitch, encrusted with mold, and tough as granite. It was utterly impossible to bite into them in their dry state; hence the need to soak them first in water. And we would actually soak the biscuits in water and gnaw away in the full spirit of self-sacrifice. And we loved it. The main thing, I suppose, was not the taste itself but the sensation of eating real soldiers' biscuits, the very same biscuits eaten in war. It made you feel like someone special, like an adult.

Incidentally, I recall in this connection how I once considered the particular manner of an individual's eating as a sign of adulthood. I'm not referring to deportment at table, but to the motions of the mouth proper. While still quite a youngster, I used to observe that among adult males (only the men!) the mouth moved during eating in a vertical direction: from the top down and from the bottom up. They ate, as it were, from "the heights"; while I, for instance, used to eat transversely. And when, as a little shaver of five or six I once had occasion to dress up as an adult, the very first thing I did was pick up a piece of bread and proceed to chew it from "the heights"—evidence that I was a grown-up.

Playing soldier—this is the kind of disease to which every child succumbs, like measles. I experienced the other diseases as well; indeed, measles, too, and collecting postage stamps, and playing fireman. I was a frontiersman penetrating the untamed forests of

America and a vanisher into the underground caves of India—all of these (excluding the measles) during the first three grades of the gymnasium; and all of these (again excluding the measles) shared with Misha. Together with him I also lived through the most dangerous affliction of all, the most dangerous because it sometimes remains chronic, a lifetime affliction: writing poems.

That particular summer we were struck by the writing plague. As a rule we used to describe the beauties of nature; and the two of us would do it in the same fashion. I was seated in my room one evening, writing; Misha was in his room, also writing. I had scarcely finished when he came dashing in to me; he had also completed something. I read mine and he read his. And it turned out that his poem fit perfectly as a sequel to mine, both in form and content. We were literally beside ourselves. In truth, the two poems resembled playing cards: they could have been mixed and shuffled at will and very little would have changed. It was all a rather ordinary piece of childish dabbling.

I didn't limit myself to descriptions of nature. I wrote a poem "To God"—a paean in celebration of the Deity. The poem began roughly as follows:

You are the God, by no man seen.
 A source of endless miracles.
 Honored by me, honored by everyone,
 The radiance, the Lord of heaven and of earth.¹

The translation (from the Russian) is not quite exact; it fails to convey the childish character of the expressions and of the rhymes. But even the translation also makes it apparent that I had no talent for poetry. Still I continued to write—and I did not settle for poems alone. I girded my loins and wrote a novel. That is, it was supposed

1. The Yiddish transliteration from Medem reads:

Du bist der got, fun keynem nit gezen,
 A kval fun nisim on a shir,
 Geert fun mir, geert fun ale mentshn,
 Der glants, der har fun himl un fun erd.

to be a novel. What came out was something else: the complete work covered a single large sheet of writing paper. It was some kind of village tale. A cold winter; a village school; a poor girl; a devoted woman teacher; and the sudden arrival of terrible news—the death of the father. (I can't recall whose any longer, the teacher's or the girl's.) And that was the end of the whole thing. It is really fortunate that I recovered easily from the poetic affliction. In later years I wrote a few more poems and with that the business was finished. Not until I reached the eighth grade in the gymnasium did I write a brief poem dedicated to a girl; but that's quite another story. Moreover, this later poem, I might add, was not especially memorable either.

My other two friends, Gleb Verkhovsky and Arkasha L., did not occupy themselves with such things. They were the comrades with whom I had experienced my religious questionings and my religious enthusiasms. I became acquainted with the two boys in the first grade of the gymnasium, and for years we constituted a real threesome, a triumvirate: in the classical Latin language, “a *collegium* of three men.” And so I had two sets of friendships, two alliances simultaneously: one with Misha and one with the other two fellows. These were two completely separate circles, however; two little worlds, each apart. I can recall no instance when all four of us spent a day or an evening together. As I remember it, Misha never got together with my other two friends. I'm not even sure they knew each other. A wall of sorts had created a cleavage between the two circles, and I was the only one to appear on both sides of that wall.

Gleb and Arkasha were my schoolmates. We were in the same grade. Gleb and I occupied the same bench. But Misha was not a *gymnasist*. To me he was a relation; to them, only an outsider, a stranger. But I suspect, and I may be wrong, that this was not the main factor. I believe a difference in social status and perhaps religion played a part here. Misha was a Jew, and his parents did not belong to the society of the “elect.”

I won't say this played any part whatsoever among the children themselves. I do not even know whether I surmised anything at the time. The childrens' attitudes developed spontaneously, quite automatically, simply as a reflection of what was happening among

the adults. Whatever the case may be, I alone, in short, enjoyed a two-pronged friendship characterized by two distinct contents and sets of interests. Many of the things I had in common with the one I did not have with the other; and vice versa. With my schoolmates, for instance, I had in common my religious and antireligious sentiments; but with Misha I never spoke about these—perhaps because he was a Jew. I do not know. On the other hand, I used to write poems with Misha but not with the other two. And there was a certain split even in games: with Misha, for example, I would play at soldiers, but not with the other two; while I played cards only with them. With him I teamed as Indian conspirator; with them, as wanderer in the cruel forests. Only at fireman did I play with all of them; it held a special place in my affections and was indulged in without limit or letup.

There was yet another difference between the two groups: my role in them. In my relationships with Misha I used to be the one who occupied the top spot and gave all the orders; but in the triumvirate I did not enjoy a privileged position.

In any circle of three or more children, one of them will emerge as the central figure. The other companions show particular affection for this key personality and engage in a silent struggle over precedence, over being closest and most intimate with the leader of the group. In our triumvirate there existed no small degree of democratic equality. Yet, as is the practice in today's world, the equality was merely formal. We did in fact have a central figure, and that was Gleb. He was a very fine chap, a simple Russian soul with a simple Russian face and honest Russian blue eyes. He came from the Kostroma region. Devoid of all guile, Gleb was a most congenial individual. And the principle thing was that he displayed the wholeness of a healthy, simple nature; of a healthy, tenacious stock. We, Arkasha and I, were of a different breed. Arkasha was by then already more urbane, a city type. There was a quality of Jewishness in him. It was even bruited about town that his father had actually descended from Jews, although the person in question emphatically denied it. Among us, Gleb became the bride, so to speak, which accounted for the existence of a feeling of jealousy between the remaining two. Well, I cannot speak with certainty about Arkasha; but as

for myself, I was envious; and it was for me a source of deep regret when the scales of Gleb's friendship would tip more strongly toward the other side.

In connection with this, I lived through one of my most bitter childhood disappointments.

Something had happened which gave rise to a clash between Gleb and Arkasha. And I mean a dispute that became truly heated and was followed by a complete refusal of the adversaries to speak to each other. The state of war lasted for weeks. I was not mixed up in the controversy; I remained neutral and maintained the most cordial relations with both of them. Actually, the affair had one primary virtue as far as I was concerned. I became the exclusive friend—without any competition! Nevertheless, I decided that I must resolve the controversy and proceeded to develop a complete strategic plan to that end. I toyed with the plan for a long while and dreamed of a lovely, pleasant outcome. Suddenly, one fine morning I learned that the two characters had flagrantly deceived me. They had, it seems, already concluded peace on their own well before, and only maintained a pretense of hostility in my presence. Behind my back they had been meeting in the friendliest fashion, laughing at my expense, and at my peace plans. I do not know why they did it; I only know it came as a terrible blow to me. Not because the hostility had ended; quite the contrary, I myself had wished to see the war ended. But that my best friends had deceived me, made a comic figure of me, secretly held me up to scorn—this was a source of deep chagrin. And although we still continued to be good friends, the incident left a profound scar upon my childish heart.

12.

The Close of My Childhood Years

AT THE END OF the year 1893 I moved into the fifth grade of the gymnasium, the beginning of the upper classes. It was the end of my childhood. I would not have felt it quite so strikingly perhaps had it not coincided with a catastrophe which occurred during that very year, an event that constituted a turning point in my life.

My father died.

During the final months, when he was already acutely ill, my father spent more time at home, and I used to see and hear him more frequently. He was an intelligent man and well-read, and when one of his older friends would visit him I happily listened in on their serious conversations. A certain elderly Jew used to drop by at that time; I remember him from those years and also from later on. I don't know if he's still alive. If he is, he would be an old man of eighty or more.

He was a prominent figure in Minsk, a certain J. Hurvich. He held an official government position entitled "Scholarly Jew Assigned to the Governor of Minsk." (There actually was such a position once!) Hurvich was, at the same time, a teacher of Jewish religion in both gymnasiums—the one for boys and the one for girls. (There were only two gymnasiums in Minsk in those days.) The

whole city knew him. His reputation in radical circles was not good. Yet it was always interesting to spend a few hours with him in private conversation. The discussions turned on various subjects: philosophy and religion; Jews and Christians; literature and history. I can't recall their actual content. I do remember the occasion when my father proceeded to describe what he would have done had he been a millionaire. I distinctly recall two of his plans: first he would have created a new theater; the position of the Russian stage left him dissatisfied. I don't know what he had in mind for his new theater. As to his second plan—or more accurately, his dream—I have more precise knowledge. "I would erect," he used to say, "a new church, a temple of a new type, incorporating neither priests nor ceremonials, with religious sentiment induced only by appropriate music and song." This would have constituted the totality of the service.

My father's attitude toward Jewishness I still do not know. I presume he was an assimilationist. Yet he apparently did have a spark of Jewish feeling within him. I remember his description of this minor, yet characteristic, incident. He had been traveling on the train, first class, as was customary. A certain gentile was seated in the same compartment. A conversation ensued. The gentile happened to be a rabid anti-Semite. He detected nothing of the Jew in my father so he proceeded to ventilate what was on his mind, and to berate the Jews. My father let him have his say to the end, but at the moment of departure he announced, with a calm smile on his face: "You ought to know that I too am one of those of whom you spoke. I am a Jew." The *soyne Yisroel* (anti-Semite; literally, "enemy of Israel") became greatly embarrassed.

My father had a considerable library. I used to see in it, among other items, copies of the Russian-Jewish journal *Voskhod* (*Ascent*). To the best of my recollection, my father was a regular reader of this journal. I also noticed in his library the well-known book by the old Jewish writer, Gregory Bagrov, *Zapiski Yevreya* (*Memoirs of a Jew*), with the author's personal inscription.¹ But of all the books in my

1. Bagrov came from a rabbinic family. Shortly before his death (as with Medem's father), he converted to Christianity.

father's possession, there was one which played quite a significant role in my later life. This was the Tanakh (the Bible, or Hebrew Scriptures).

If I am not mistaken, this particular edition was printed in Constantinople, and my father brought it with him on his return from the Russo-Turkish War. An extremely attractive edition, it was bound in yellow morocco leather and printed in two languages. Each page carried the Hebrew text and a French translation, side by side. I recall a certain evening when my father had joined us in the dining room where we used to gather around the samovar. He sat me down next to him, opened the book, and started to read aloud—the French text, as a rule. I'm not sure whether or not he knew Hebrew. It was a chapter from the prophet Isaiah. He read and he lauded the beauty of the thought and language. All this was actually nothing new to me. In the gymnasium we learned many verses by heart, not only those from the New Testament but also verses from the old, from the Jewish Tanakh. We used the Slavonic text in our studies; and even though the method involved memorization by rote, nevertheless, to my ears the Slavonic version of the old Jewish religious books had a ring of tremendous, incomparable beauty. However, in the gymnasium it was all part of Christian religious instruction. But that evening I sat with my father and peered into the Jewish Tanakh, and for the first time the words of the ancient prophet became mingled in my imagination with the queer, unfamiliar, incomprehensible letters of the Hebrew book. Thus, what I experienced that evening was forever etched in my memory.

Years passed. I reached young adulthood. And when my interest in Jewishness awakened, my father's old Tanakh came to play a large, perhaps the major, role. I developed an urge to read the text of the venerable book, not in a French or Slavic translation, but precisely in the Hebrew original. And the book in which I first began to master those quaint, incomprehensible Hebrew letters was that Constantinople Tanakh of my father's, in the yellow morocco-leather binding. But that came much later.

My father died and I was left with a feeling of severe guilt. People invariably have such feelings upon the death of someone close. We imagine that we have neglected to fulfil our obligation during the in-

dividual's lifetime. We imagine that we have failed to offer timely displays of merited love and warmth. And the feeling tortures and torments. Because it's too late, because it's in vain. Still fresh was the recollection of how my father used to come to me bringing some kind of gift. To this very day I remember one particular time most vividly: it was the morning of Easter Sunday. He came up to me while I was still in bed and gave me a little purse made of mother-of-pearl. It was in the shape of an egg and held several small new silver fivers. (Silver fivers were a rarity in those days.) And I failed to thank him with the appropriate heartiness. I was shy and unresponsive. When someone dies such remembrances tend to become vivid and pungent, pricking like needles.

My father died and the joyful, satisfying, tumultuous life in Galinyevich's house came to an end. Our financial resources grew exceedingly slim. We were forced to leave the large house and move into a more modest one. A whole stage of our lives had come to an end.

I have no basis for saying that the new stage was an unhappy one. But the first one—that earlier time—was remembered as something distinctively light, gay, sparkling. And later, whenever I passed Galinyevich's house, I felt a sharp, searing ache in my heart. It was a yearning for the years of childhood that were gone forever.

Parting with recollections of childhood is difficult. I have recorded only a small portion of what I remember. Many scenes still untold pass before my mind's eye. Some, indistinct and hazy, others, plain and palpable, just as if I were seeing them before me on a luminous, white cinema screen. I cannot resist; I must record a few more little scenes.

A warm, sunny, spring day. My mother is seated on the veranda of Galinyevich's house. I pace about the garden. The summer vacations are just beginning. My heart is buoyant and cheerful and the apple trees are in bloom in the garden. White apple blossoms against the blue spring sky—nothing lovelier in the world! I break off a twig in bloom and inhale. How sweet the odor! A thousand times sweeter, a thousand times more exquisite than the dearest, most captivating rose. And holding the sweet white flowering twig, I scamper up to my mother on the veranda and show her the beautiful blossoms and ask her to smell. What joy and pleasure to be shared. And then I dash

back to stride some more about the sunny summer garden. That is all. A fleeting moment, a nothing. But I can still see that scene before me as though it were only today or yesterday, and not thirty years ago. And to this very day the white twig of an apple tree in bloom represents for me the loveliest thing in the world.

Another day. Three o'clock. We're seated in the dining room. Visitors arrive. There is tea drinking and dipping into preserves. My mother calls me over and asks me to bring her something. A commonplace thing, one would imagine. But on this occasion she does it with such an endearing smile, and her simple words are spoken in a tone of such ineffable warmth and tenderness, that I suddenly feel a massive wave of happiness and love welling up in my heart, so forceful and ardent as to simply drown me in its lustrous billows. A small, transient episode—yet I can never forget it.

And a third recollection, this one from the very earliest days. I am still a very young child. The time is the evening of the Sabbath, the time for baths. I am sitting in the bathtub and being washed by the cook or the servant girl. Then she lifts me from the tub and wraps me in a large, thick, warm bedsheet. She wraps me up completely, from head to toe, so that I should not catch cold, and carries me thus enfolded through the hall, past the other rooms, and into my bedroom. She lays me down in the warm, familiar bed and covers me with the warm blanket. Tucked in, I close my eyes and fall asleep like a bird in a soft nest with the soothing sensation of warmth and well-being.

Such was my childhood.

My father died in midwinter, and my mother became gravely ill. Abed with a high fever, she wrestled with death. Not until the end of winter did she recover. The large house which had once resounded with gaiety became desolate and sad. Life turned quiet and somber. Especially trying were the long, interminable, winter evenings.

All of us would seat ourselves around the samovar in the big dining room. A large hanging lamp shone above the table. But adjacent to the dining room was the large parlor, that same parlor in which the dead body of my father had lain on a large table not long before. The parlor was empty, cold and black, and it seemed as if it still carried an air of death. I was already a grown boy, yet I was afraid to enter the

parlor in the evening. And I suspect that not only I, but the grown-ups as well used to avoid it.

During the daytime, the “liquidation” took place. My father left no financial estate of any kind; he had lived on his monthly income. A few debts remained to various shops in which purchases had been made on credit. Thus creditors began to appear and there followed some rather unpleasant scenes. The decision was made to sell my father’s library. It contained a large number of medical works; also an assortment of old journals, and who knows what else. A small part was kept. (The Constantinople Tanakh stayed.) A book dealer bought up the remainder by the pound.

Then came the packing and our move into a new house. Missing in the new house was the luxuriousness of the previous one; but withal, it was a rather nice, comfortable place. The house was of wood, quite roomy, and ours alone. It was located on Skobelevsky Street. My sister, who had just been married, and her husband continued to live with us. A child was born to them within a year. I shared a room with my two older brothers. The third was studying in Saint Petersburg. Subsequently one of my brothers left for Kovno; and still later another one married and moved into his own quarters. But during the early years we were all together.

The most conspicuous thing upon entering our new home was a spacious anteroom, larger than any I had ever seen in other houses in the city. Two sizable cabinets had been placed in the center of the room facing the entrance door—a buffet and a bookcase. These divided the room in two. In the rear section behind the cabinets stood two massive old trunks extending the length of the walls: our familiar old-style trunks, the likes of which I never saw anywhere in later years. They were large, thick, heavy, wooden receptacles, perhaps four feet high and as long as a bed, that held the winter items. They stood on small wooden casters to facilitate their movement from one place to another. The *denshchik* had slept on one of them in earlier years. Each spring, the elaborate ceremony of packing away the furs took place. It was handled by a specialist in such matters, an elderly Jew, Sender by name. He would take the furs, hang them on a long line in the courtyard, and beat the dust out of them with a thin, flexi-

ble stick. Then he poured mothballs over them and packed them away.

Beyond the trunks, a door led to our room—the boys' room—which I shared with my two brothers. My brother-in-law used to come in each morning to wash, because our room contained a special kind of washstand, a truly comfortable one. Not simply a stand plus a basin, but a certain type of apparatus with a pipe from which water gushed as from a fountain. So my brother-in-law would appear in our room for his morning ablutions, all the while humming some kind of melody from the Russian church service, in his rather pleasant voice. There were other rooms: a large combination parlor-dining room; a room for my brother-in-law and sister; a room for my mother; and a room occupied by a distant relative who served as housekeeper. A servants' room was located next to the kitchen. In later years, after I had already become active in the movement, I would enter the house late at night by way of the kitchen. And the one who would open the door for me was that same elderly cook who had worked for us in Galinyevich's house and even earlier, dear old Pani Mikhalina.

This was my last domicile in Minsk. I lived in it, with interruptions, for over eight years, until I bade it a final farewell. In that house I had spent the closing years of the gymnasium; and to it I used to return during my vacations as a university student. I began my revolutionary activity while living there, and there I was arrested a few times. From this house I fled abroad. And there is where my mother died.

We quickly grew accustomed to the new house. It was a cozy place and we came to love it. And gradually our life at home again turned spirited and joyful. To be sure, things were not as hectic as at Galinyevich's, but life was pleasant enough.

Living in one place for eight years is no trivial matter. I developed a really close attachment to the house on Skobelevsky Street. When, in subsequent years, the circumstances of life were to carry me to the distant outland and I would feel a powerful longing for home, it was a longing not just for Russia, and not simply for my native town, but precisely for that house which was to me the focus and the embodi-

ment of home and youth. And when I learned, after I had already left, of the family's departure from the old nest and its relocation in some new and unfamiliar house, I really felt for the first time like a truly homeless wanderer. My most beautiful dream—that I would someday return to the place where I spent the radiant years of youth—had come to naught. I had lost my home.

13.

My First Literary Setback

THE OLD-TIME RUSSIAN school was, in a certain sense, a kind of upside-down phenomenon. Individuals who later became significant Russian writers had a reputation of being very poor pupils in the gymnasium; and they encountered the most pronounced difficulty in —of all things—Russian language and literature as it was studied in class. Conversely, where a pupil was highly successful and rose to the top of the class, it was an indication that he would have no aptitude in life for anything and was destined to become an average, run-of-the-mill individual.

Happily, I was unaware of this singular maxim during those years, else I should have fallen into the bleakest pessimism. For I had, in fact, done well in my studies; indeed, I was for years the leading pupil in class. And I had the greatest success in none other than Russian language. I would be called upon, even publicly, at the evening literary gatherings sponsored by the gymnasium, to give recitations from the works of the Russian classical writers; and my written work was frequently held up before the class as a model. There was no limit to the number of actual fivers which used to descend upon me.

By fivers I don't mean, of course, the coin; I refer to the class-

room grades denoting pupil achievements. Whenever a pupil was called upon to recite, or had his written work examined, the teacher would mark down in his record book a figure from one to five. Five meant very good; four, good; three, satisfactory; and one—a *kol* (a stake or a post), as we used to call it—was really bad, catastrophic; and in the class as a whole it would show up only once in a blue moon.

As noted, I generally received fives, sometimes fours; I never received anything below a four, I believe, at least in the lower grades. Consequently I should have had the saddest prospects for the future.

That's how it was until the fifth grade. In the fifth grade we began to study the history of Russian literature; and quickly, in a matter of a few weeks, we were given our first written assignments. Actually we had written Russian *sochineniyas* (compositions) even before, but they were largely descriptions of happenings in nature. Now we were assigned an altogether different topic: "The Significance of the Christian Preachers in Old Russia." Our instructor in Russian literature was Mikhalka—the one who had never read a newspaper. A dull, limited individual, he found himself incapable of developing the interest of the class in his subject, and an established routine evolved for polishing off the written assignments. The pupils would proceed to one of the three bookshops in Minsk (all three were on the *gubernatorske gas* (Governor Street), borrow a few textbooks (there were, aside from the official textbook by Smirnovsky which we used in class, several others with a bit more content), and copy out whole sections of them. But my impulse was to complete the assignment a different way; I had no desire to copy. I wished to do the writing independently, from my own head. And that is what I did. As the top pupil I was certain I could do it well. I submitted the notebook on the appointed day and waited calmly for a fiver.

Several days went by. The teacher finally entered the classroom with the pile of notebooks under his arm and commenced to distribute them. One pupil after another received his notebook and his grade. The pack grew thinner, but my notebook had still not appeared. Well, I thought, he's leaving me to the end. Probably the best piece of work; hence his wish to read it aloud as an example. And then indeed he finally turned to me. He began to read it line by line,

word by word, and—he laughed. He made utter sport of me. He derided me venomously, mockingly, pitilessly. My every thought appeared ridiculous to him; my every expression repulsive, horrible. And he continued reading and talking and joking while the whole class was convulsed with laughter. And when I got back my notebook it was full of red strokes and markings and on the bottom a big, thick, red “stake.” I had received a one!

I was crushed. I—the top pupil who had never received anything below a four—I received the “stake,” a rarity even for the bottom-most lunkhead. It was a dreadful blow, a real catastrophe. I didn’t know which way to turn: I didn’t have the courage or the strength to go home and face my mother. I felt that I had been profoundly wronged, that I had suffered unjust, unmerited abuse.

When I remind myself of it today, I am well satisfied. It would have been far worse had I received a five. That would have meant, in effect, that I would not become a writer. For the teacher was really quite an ignoramus, without an iota of literary taste. Anything transcending the limits of official babbling literally agitated his nerves, and his indignation over my piece of writing was actually a sign that I did not confine myself to the official clichés but had shown a modicum of personal style. Mikhalka’s “one” was therefore a real certification to writing. But I didn’t grasp this at the time and my hurt was deep.

For the second assignment I received a two. After that I began to pilfer from the textbooks and managed a three—and there it remained.

14.

My Brother-in-Law Zhaba

MY SISTER MARRIED a gentile—Pavel Iosifovich Zhaba. He was a Russian from Moscow serving in our city as an employee of the railroad. Actually a Pole by descent, at least on his father's side, Zhaba had become thoroughly Russified. His grandfather had even participated in the Polish uprising of 1831, and his father had been involved in the uprising of 1863, for which he was punished: his estate was confiscated and he was deported into deepest Russia. There is a station in the vicinity of Brest-Litovsk called Zhabinka, the original site of the family's landed property. Zhaba's father later settled in Moscow where he married a Russian girl. The children accordingly grew up as Russians, with no ties at all to Polonism. My brother-in-law did not understand a word of Polish, and even harbored a dislike of sorts toward the Poles—an attitude not uncommon in certain quarters of Russian society.

I became very strongly attached to Zhaba, and he too felt a deep affection for me. We were close friends and spent considerable time together. To a lad like myself, the company of this very tall, attractive, and high-spirited young man was a real treasure. He had about him also much of the boy, a fact which tended to draw us still closer together. For instance, he had an enormous affection for all sorts of military parades and Christian ceremonials. As for myself—it goes

without saying. The very appearance of a parade somewhere in the city made it absolutely impossible for me to sit at home; I simply had to dash over and take a look. And he too would be there. If some species of grand duke or a certain big general happened to be passing through our city, I had to run to the railroad station for a look at the creature. And Zhaba was also present. If a fire broke out in the city, well, naturally, I had to scamper to the scene at all costs. Whom should I find there? Zhaba, of course. And invariably nowhere else but up front. I, a little *gymnast*, was denied such a singular honor; poor me, I was compelled to drift about behind the chain of police and soldiers, among the common herd. But Zhaba passed through everywhere, and nobody interfered with him.

How did he manage this? There was nothing to it. He moved around with the expression of someone especially invited: self-assured, audacious, and firm. Tall, and with an imposing figure, he sported a hat from a uniform. That was all he needed. Thus, during a parade, he would post himself next to the grand marshal, no less; at a fire, alongside the chief-of-police; and at a church service, cheek by jowl with the governor. When it turned out that I too might benefit from his privileged situation, I seized upon the opportunity with the greatest of pleasure. And if there happened to be nothing at hand in the way of an extraordinary occurrence, we simply roamed about the city or sauntered to the outskirts. We used to go to the baths together, or to a church, a cemetery, the Polish *kostël* (Roman Catholic church). And Zhaba made himself comfortable everywhere. About the *kostël*, in fact, I remember how we once set out for the place and entered just as the whole congregation was engaged in singing. So Zhaba, standing at full height there in the middle of the *kostël*, proceeded to sing. What? Why? Without recognizing or understanding a single word, he sang, for no particular reason, as though he had been a denizen of the place for decades. I was utterly abashed, and it was all I could do to pull him out into the street.

We once climbed to the roof of the big Orthodox cathedral—the *sobor*. What drew us to the roof? The church was in the process of being completely rebuilt, and a high wooden scaffolding had been erected on all sides of the structure while the work was in progress at the top. Of course the whole church was surrounded by a fence and

no one was allowed to enter. But Zhaba was nothing if not audacious. He went in without asking anyone, and I along with him. We crawled up to the very summit and inspected the work, while the people all around us assumed we were some kind of *nachal'stvo*, or supervisor, and treated us with the utmost deference. Zhaba felt like a fish in water. We reached the roof just as a worker was engaged in setting golden stars into the blue tin of the cupola. Zhaba stopped right next to him, looked on a bit, shook his head, and issued a command: "Insert those stars more thickly!"

That was my brother-in-law. I myself was far from daring, and his resolute demeanor impressed me tremendously. Besides, it was a delight just to spend time with him. We talked about thousands of things and sang without letup. There was always singing in our home: Zhaba, my older brother, and I. No standing up and singing for a special purpose, but singing simply for its own sake, a purely casual thing. Zhaba would be seated and suddenly break into a church melody of some kind, or into a folk song. Which meant, of course, that I had to chime in with the second voice. When my brother happened to be present (he had a feel for things musical, and it mattered little whether he knew a song), he promptly joined in as the third voice; and there would be a whole trio making music. Zhaba had a pleasant voice; we other two had no singing voices at all. Yet we sang, and it gave us great pleasure. But the principal result of my relationship with my brother-in-law was an interest in political matters.

My brother-in-law was a liberal. In later years he moved still further to the left. In 1905 he was to become the leader of the great railroad strike in our city of Minsk. He was arrested on that occasion, tried, and sentenced to two years in a fortress prison. But during his earlier days, Zhaba had been a more moderate individual, a liberal and a constitutionalist. Deeply interested in politics, he undertook to awaken a similar interest in me. I had, as a matter of fact, already begun to delve into newspapers. Indeed, what I used to read were not the political articles, but other items, easier ones. Zhaba drew my attention to the fact that the most important part of the paper was neither the feuilleton nor the story, but precisely the lead article, the editorial. Hence, I really tried to read the editorials, but

comprehension was difficult. Some years later I came across an unforgettable expression in a fictional story, voiced by an ordinary person who had undertaken to read the political articles in the newspapers. "I cannot begin to understand them," he said. "They seem to be a continuation of something earlier—and I don't know the beginning." Such was also my impression. Names, words, and events which had gone before floated about in dizzying profusion; no attempt was made to explain, on the assumption, perhaps, that the reader was already knowledgeable. But I was not; and I hadn't the vaguest notion of what it was all about. Like a pupil who has missed his class lessons over a period of several months and who returns to find his classmates discussing a variety of things with which they have become familiar in the interim, but which are so much Tatar¹ to him.

Those political articles were Tatar to me. Moreover the Russian press during those years of harsh, relentless censorship, maintained a studied vagueness, so that a degree of acumen and reading between the lines was required in order to grasp meanings. A tepid, liberal newspaper, *Novosti* (*News*), used to come to our house. Exceedingly cautious, it completely omitted all reference to matters of Russian politics. The editorials were engaged in advice to the outside world: one day it was concern over Italian finances; the next, English colonies; and the following day a ministerial crisis in France. The whole business was absolutely incomprehensible to me. And the style of writing proved so boring that, notwithstanding Zhaba's counsel, I developed a strong distaste for editorials forever after. To this day I cannot rid myself of the affliction. It is easier for me to write an editorial myself than to read a published one.

I learned far more from Zhaba's conversations with me. He himself was no republican, at least not during those years. He showed great respect for the Emperor, yet he would say to me that even the best emperor could not know everything that went on in the country. An emperor governed with the aid of ministers who did whatever they wished; hence the numerous abuses, the prevalence of injustice, the ubiquitous acceptance of graft—a system without decency. It was

1. Gibberish, or completely incomprehensible—as, in English, "It's Greek to me."

essential therefore to keep an eagle eye on the ministers, something which could be done only by a parliament chosen by the people. To bring it to pass, a constitution was necessary.

It was all very simple and very clear; it made ready sense to me and I became a supporter of a constitution.

Still and all, I liked the Emperor. It was at the very time that Alexander III lay dangerously ill, in the town of Livadia.² Daily bulletins concerning the state of his health were posted on the streets. Both my brother-in-law and I followed the course of the illness with bated breath. The image of an emperor was surrounded in my imagination by a tremendous aura of romance. To me there was something mysterious about the person: removed and distant from all of us, elevated, indeed, towering above the clouds. Actually I didn't know whether he was good or bad. As a rule, I heard only favorable things about him, since nothing adverse was allowed in print and his smallest virtue was trumpeted to the skies. But this was of no consequence. The very phrase "The Emperor" sufficed to set the heart aquiver with reverence and devotion. And each day, with pounding heart, I would hasten into the street to read the bulletins concerning the Emperor's illness.

I was grieved that the Emperor was sick and wished, from a sense of duty, for his recovery. But at the same time I detected within me another kind of feeling, a sensation that had something of a criminal aspect about it. Although I sought to dispel this feeling, it persisted, and I could not cast it off. Involved was that same thirst for the fulfillment, the realization, of the maximal experience which I had entertained years before, in Druskeniki, when the Cossacks passed through. I regretted then the Cossacks' moving in small formations; I yearned for larger masses, the greatest throngs, the fullest measure, and the highest level. It was a purely innocent emotion at that time. Now I had a kindred sensation, although in a different sort of way. I felt that the illness of the Tsar was a vital occurrence, an event of significance; yet, I thirsted for even greater events, events of still larger consequence, and excitement. I detected a mounting wave of dramatic suspense, and I wanted the drama to unfold with full force.

2. A resort town in the Crimea, later the site of an imperial palace.

I craved truly strong impressions. I felt. . . I feared to say it even to myself; I was a lad of fifteen and a strong believer in spiritual purity and goodness; still, I felt that if everything should end satisfactorily and the Emperor should recover, it would constitute . . . a disappointment. It was with such mixed emotions that I scanned the bulletins.

Then came October 20, 1894. The latest bulletins were exceedingly negative. Word was already out that all hope had vanished. We waited hourly for the decisive report. And it arrived. It was late in the evening, around ten o'clock. My brother-in-law was away from home; he had gone to his office to do some routine late work. I waited. He finally arrived, pale, agitated. He entered the house and in a grave voice pronounced the brief, solemn words: "The Emperor has died." The room grew silent.

I was deeply shaken. I pictured a city convulsed from top to bottom. I had a vision of streets filled with people and huge solid crowds stretching across the city from end to end, in a state of subdued sadness and concealed anguish. I imagined that all life had stopped; and that the prevailing mood was one of deep despondency.

In the morning I went to the gymnasium. I brought with me no books of any kind; it seemed inconceivable that the usual, commonplace lessons would be scheduled. Yet the street was a picture of everyday calm and regularity. Small groups clustered about the late bulletins encased in large black borders. But life proceeded normally. The shops were open. When I arrived at class I was bitterly disappointed to discover the lesson was about to begin.

I felt heartsick. First, I was profoundly grieved by the apparent indifference. How could we devote ourselves to workaday study in the light of what had happened? Second, I had undertaken on my own responsibility to come without satchel, books, and other equipment, for which I could be severely punished. But within half an hour all classes were canceled. We were lined up in the courtyard of the gymnasium—Christians and Jews alike—and were conducted to the big cathedral for a requiem mass. Once again I experienced disappointment. The crowd of boys carried on and behaved poorly; the fellows could not begin to understand, could not sense the totally sacred character of the moment. They proceeded to shove their way

into the thick crowd, laughing and whispering all the while; and the behavior of the Jewish pupils inside the Russian church was just as unruly as that of the Christians. One friend, observing my chagrin, whispered to me as he pointed at the buffoons: "There's real Jewish impudence for you!" This remark naturally afforded me very little pleasure and served to spoil my mood even more.

The following day we were brought together in the gymnasium chapel where we, the pupils of the upper grades, swore an oath to the new Emperor, Nicholas II. But no appropriate feeling of solemnity was generated on this occasion either.

The newspapers were speedily filled to the brim with poetic descriptions of the majestic funeral. I devoured every word. At the time, I also read a lengthy article in a certain monthly journal devoted to the policies of the late Tsar. The journal, as it happened, was a reactionary one. I failed, however, to differentiate in such matters; my attitude toward the printed word was still one of unlimited confidence. After I completed the reading of the solemn paean of praise, I noted in my diary (I used to keep an occasional diary): "Now for the first time I comprehend the true dimension of our loss. I previously mourned Alexander III as a human being; now I must mourn him as an Emperor." I was a terribly naïve and sentimental young fellow.

With such a spiritual makeup, I understandably had no sympathy whatsoever for the revolutionary movement. Actually I knew nothing about it. What I did know was this: There existed at the time—or there had previously existed—some breed of mysterious individuals who killed Alexander II. To me this was appalling. First, because it was murder; second, because it was directed at the Emperor.

I had never heard anything about a workers' movement. It's quite amazing: I hadn't the slightest inkling about its existence despite the fact that it had already emerged and developed in comparative strength in our city during those years. In my imagination the word "revolution" bore a purely political and terrorist character. I had no idea that it had any relationship with the social deprivation of impoverished masses. Had I known this, my attitude would perhaps have been different, because I did have a certain, albeit rather

primitive, social awareness. I was tormented in fact by the thought of poor people in the world. I saw them on the street—the beggars—and felt a need and an obligation to help them. Still, I hadn't the least notion of any kind of connection between this human poverty and those revolutionary "criminals" who would "speak against the Emperor" and who wished to kill him.

Just at that time I chanced to read Turgenev's famous "counter-revolutionary" novel (to use today's expression), *Nov' (Virgin Soil)*.³ The author presented, as we all know, a caricature portrait of a young revolutionist, Nezhdanov, who had decided to "go to the people" in order to spur them to a revolutionary uprising. He changed into peasant garb and repaired to an inn to conduct his agitation. But the peasants turned a deaf ear to his exhortations, seized him, and handed him over to the police. As a contrast to the revolutionary dreamer, the author delineated a different character in the novel, one reflecting his own sympathies, Solomin, the preacher of slow, gradual progress. Along with the author I was wholly on the side of Solomin. I recall how, in a diary insert at the time, I gave young Nezhdanov a real piece of my mind. He had, I wrote, "seized hold of various social democratic (!) ideas" and begun to nurture fantastic plans. (I had picked up the phrase "Social Democracy" somewhere, but alas I knew not what it was!) The thing that impressed me most strongly was the fact that the peasants had rejected him. I retained a distaste for that kind of revolutionism for a very long time; and even in later years, when I heard about a different type of revolution, about the labor movement toward which I had grown personally sympathetic, my imagination failed to conjure up any relationship at all between the latter and that earlier revolutionism of the Nezhdanov type. I considered the two wholly different and separated by a profound abyss.

My identification with moderate liberalism lasted for quite some time. True, the childhood love for the Emperor gradually faded. But I was still very far from a republican in disposition. And the surface interest in the Tsar and his surroundings remained very strong. I have

3. The story is based on the events of the so-called "Mad Summer" of 1874, when scores of youthful Populists poured out into the countryside to bring the message of socialism to the peasants.

indicated elsewhere how tremendously enamored I had been of military parades and the like. I visualized the Tsar as someone enveloped in the utmost splendor and solemnity. But what was there for me to see in our city? The sum total of our military forces were two ordinary infantry regiments and an artillery brigade; we lacked even cavalry. But in Saint Petersburg, amid the whirl and swirl of life, there were all manner of dazzling and interesting things: grand dukes and grand duchesses; famous generals, beribboned and bemedaled; guards regiments of all types—the hussars in their red uniforms; the cavalry guards attired in white, with gold helmets and gold cuirasses; and more of the same—so very much more! And all centering upon the Emperor and because of the Emperor! What rich stuff for a boy's fantasy!

Then came the year of the coronation—1896—that was for me a genuine holiday occasion. Minsk lay astride the main railroad line connecting Moscow and the outside world via Warsaw. Through our city passed all kinds of “high notables” who were to participate in the coronation festivities. The station was located some distance away, near the very outskirts of the city, but I, sparing neither time nor energy, was constantly on the run to the station, and spent hours there. Entranced, I beheld scores of “big shots”—important people. I saw the Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand and the present king of Sweden and a high Spanish representative. They were accompanied by splendid Russian guards officers; while from Warsaw came substantial deputations of the local guards regiments. I devoured it all with my eyes: it was sheer ecstasy!

Coronation day in Minsk proper was celebrated with an especially large parade. My brother-in-law and I, without a by your leave, as was Zhaba's wont, climbed way up to the city clock, whence we observed the ceremonial march, sounded the clock bell, and shouted “hurrah!” All this was no longer done out of enthusiasm but in a spirit of plain frivolity. I was already sixteen years of age.

I had a habit of daydreaming. I would quietly begin to fantasize about something; the fantasy would grow and progressively expand, as I experienced a whole sequence of events with the greatest clarity and in the most elaborate and transparent detail. My dreams in those days were military-monarchical dreams. I imagined myself as a

military figure, serving in the guards. This is not to say I really seriously entertained such a plan, heaven forbid! I merely dreamed it. I was arrayed in a beautiful uniform with equally lovely sword and spurs, and, riding on my horse, I was the very picture of a dazzling officer. And then something happened: the very Emperor himself gazed at me; I performed a favor of sorts for him, whereupon he took a liking toward me, called me over, and asked: "Pray tell, what do you think of my government? How's life in my country? And what shall I do to set everything aright?" And I, Vladimir Medem, proffered the Emperor a reply that was both clear and daring; I said all that had to be said; and I became his adviser. . .

To make the reason for my interest in things military a bit more comprehensible, I should note that I spent a considerable amount of time around a military environment. For several summers in a row I visited my brother in military camp near Bobruisk, and stayed with him through the summer months. Indeed I even participated—twice, no less—in a formal military march of my brother's battery from Bobruisk to Minsk. The march lasted ten days. I traveled on horseback through fields and woods and villages, by an old dirt road harking back to the days of Catherine II. I lived the real military life. During those journeys across the fields on the beautiful tall horses flanking the heavy artillery pieces, I remember how we used to encounter peasant wagons along the way, with their small, pathetic horses. I would gaze down upon them from the height of my saddle and feel proud and strong. Yet it was something more than mere pride: it was the sensation and consciousness on my part of being a tiny element in a great, powerful collective—that force which was moving together with me in closed ranks, with swords, with artillery—hundreds of individuals forged into a single mass. And I must say it was a rather elevated feeling, this constituting an integral part of a mass force.

In later years only the content changed; the feeling itself persisted.

Books, Questions, Moods

I HAD AN UNFORTUNATE habit. Instead of reading books I gulped them. I would flip the pages, cast a fleeting glance, capture the essence of a page in a few seconds, and resume leafing. This method enabled me to read a lot, but remember very little. Actually it was not reading at all, but merely a superficial nibbling. Things changed somewhat after I moved into the upper grades. I got hold of a book (I cannot recall the author's name) on the subject of how to read books. It pointed out that it was necessary, in order properly to digest a book, to read it all of three times in a row, each time paying attention to something else: the first time to general content; the second to the idea; the third to the form. (It is quite possible that the book was not exactly as I have described it, but it was roughly along those lines.) In any case, I was duly impressed. This does not mean I undertook to carry out these prescriptions to the letter. However, I did attempt not only to examine the books, but to study them as well. And I had occasion, at the same time, to familiarize myself with more serious works.

The first book of this type contained the writings of Vissarion ["Vissarion the Furious"] Belinsky, the great Russian literary critic, on Alexander Pushkin and other topics. Anyone familiar with Belinsky's writings knows that they do not possess a narrow, merely literary character. His writings had a veritably encyclopedic

quality—brilliant, thrilling, youthfully vibrant, passionate—from which sprouted the most sublime and profound thoughts touching the diverse branches of human life and the many-sided human spirit. Belinsky literally awakened me. It was precisely as if a door had opened to me, as if a curtain had been raised. And I saw before me—questions.

Questions, questions, and more questions! A lengthy series of question marks had begun to sprout, one after the other. And from each question mark there issued, like a branch from a tree trunk, a second; and the second gave rise to a third. . . I had begun to think.

From Belinsky himself I was unable to discover the answers; he merely provided the spur. I proceeded to search among others: I searched without system, guided by no one, seizing hold of whatever might incidentally come to hand. I thus turned to a book that happened to be in our home: John William Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*. I derived much from this book which in its turn served to stimulate new questions. I don't recall the circumstances, but I very quickly took a plunge into natural science, carefully studying a few books on physiology. By this time, I had already begun to realize that such random skipping about would produce nothing very fruitful. I tried on several occasions to draw up a systematic plan of reading based upon a logical sequence. But I felt quite helpless and nothing came of it. Yet there was virtue in having undertaken to read and think seriously.

I also turned with greater earnestness toward literary subjects. I delved more deeply into the Russian classical writers. Mere nibbling at their works no longer sufficed. I read them attentively and seriously, and occasionally formulated my impressions in the style of a diary. During those days I came to regard belletristic literature for the first time not just as simple entertainment, but as something of deep consequence. There were times, I recall, when one or another grown-up would ask, after witnessing my absorption with a novel for hours on end: "Perhaps you ought to turn to a more serious book?" I deplored such an attitude and ignored their advice. Many a work of belles lettres appeared to me a richer source of ideas and provided a stronger impulse toward independent thinking than did a dry, scien-

tific treatise. This response was quite normal and understandable; and it preserved me from an arid intellectualism.

Elsewhere I have indicated how my religious feelings gradually exhausted themselves when I was in the upper grades of the gymnasium. I still continued to attend church each Saturday night and Sunday morning, but I did it under duress: all Russian Orthodox pupils were required to attend church. A stringent checkup was conducted and punishment was meted out to anyone who failed to show up. This involved real suffering in the upper grades. I used to be dreadfully bored; it took so unconscionably long. To pass the time, I occupied myself with . . . arithmetic: I used to multiply large numbers by heart.

The lectures on religion in the upper grades were excruciating. We received a new priest at that time, Father Yuroskevich. He was destined to play something of a role in Russian political life about ten years later, as a deputy in the Third Duma, where he belonged to a faction of moderate reactionaries, the so-called Nationalists. A fairly intelligent person, he used our class lessons as an opportunity for conversing with us on various subjects, topics both religious and political. I sat in the front row, virtually under the eyes of the priest. He often stared at me while he spoke, and I received an impression that he would have liked to hear my opinion. But since I considered everything he said to be false and decadent, I dared not speak. Instead I sat there with eyes downcast, gritting my teeth, in silence.

A certain legacy from my earlier religious sentiments lingered on for a while: an inclination of sorts toward asceticism, a striving to deny myself creature comforts and diversions. I recall having once categorically refused to attend a certain concert or theater performance, and how it was utterly impossible for those at home to divine the basis for my caprice; it was even suggested that I acted out of niggardliness. Actually, I was simply behaving in accordance with a notion that I had no right to entertainment. For the rest, I cannot say whether it still represented an echo of a religious tradition or whether it was the initial awakening of my social conscience, a sense of justice forbidding light-hearted enjoyment while there were people in the world suffering from poverty and want and denied all pleasures. In any event, it turned out to be only a transient episode.

But another feeling persisted much longer: my concern for moral purity. Although I wouldn't know today just how I envisioned such purity at that time, I did know then. And I staunchly believed in it. I can still recall this infantile example: From time to time I would walk up to a mirror and seek to ascertain, after peering into my own eyes, whether they still revealed an expression of a pure and virtuous human spirit. And I remember my heartache when I once imagined that I was losing this particular expression.

A New Friend

WHILE I WAS IN the fifth or sixth grade I acquired a new friend—Alexander Eliasberg or Sashka, as we used to call him among ourselves. He was a year older than I and one grade above me, but he was inclined toward laziness and consequently had to repeat a class for another year; so I caught up with him. A vacancy in our triumvirate had arisen a little earlier; Gleb Verkhovsky and his parents had moved from Minsk to Vilno. Sashka replaced him in our friendship union.

Sashka was not only older than I; he was also far more mature and well-read. During his years at the gymnasium, this son of well-to-do Jewish parents (his father owned a bank on Zakharev Street), had already traveled extensively and discovered the world. While he was in the upper grades at the gymnasium he made a lengthy trip abroad. He read widely, mastered the German language thoroughly, and had an appreciation of modern literature and art. Even at that early date he developed a fine feel for the aesthetic. In later years he settled in Germany where he attained considerable prominence in the field of literature as a translator and writer and has remained there to this day. His comradeship meant a great deal to me.

Sashka became my warmest and most intimate friend. We spent all our free time together.

How do two lads dispose of time on their hands? They ramble

about the streets or, if the weather is warm, they sit on a stoop or in a park and . . . talk. Or they embark upon a stroll out beyond the city limits. Our favorite place was the Lutheran cemetery. We would enshrine ourselves in our magnificent Minsk "streetcar," a "horsecar" drawn by two pitiful nags, to which a third horse was added on uphill grades. A little boy dressed in outlandish oversized boots used to ride this third horse and urge it forward all the while with shouts and lashes. The horsecar brought us as far as the railroad bridge. There we shifted over to the railroad line and proceeded on foot alongside the tracks. Sauntering by the tracks was actually one of our most beloved pastimes in Minsk; indeed, I myself had covered, in all four directions, substantial sections of track along our city's two railroad lines. The cemetery was located not far from the line. It contained my father's grave topped by an attractive stone monument, with a bench beside it and a cast iron fence surrounding the whole gravesite. On the fence hung the wreaths encased in large tin containers covered with glass. It was on that bench that we used to sit and talk.

What constituted the subject of conversation of two semigrown boys? Anything in the world, a world large and full of questions and reminiscent of those beautiful, delicate mists before sunrise. The discussions drifted off into the soaring, distant heavens. And one's soul was touched by the breath of the infinite, the exquisite lofiness of the great secrets, the sublime mysteries of a vast world.

My memory retains little of the specific content of the discussions we had during our meanderings along the rails and in the streets. Only a general impression remains, and a few specific episodes. I remember one thing, however, with the starkest clarity; and I could point out precisely the street and the place on that street where the conversation occurred. Sashka had somewhere picked up a belief of sorts from the realm of the philosophy of nature, to the effect that the whole world was alive: not only that which was considered "alive" in the ordinary sense of the word but also things that were "dead." He drove the point home with a certain expression which struck me as tremendously absurd. "Just what is meant by 'Everything is alive?'" I asked with a smile of incredulity. "Does a stone, pray tell, also live?" Sashka commenced to interpret. I don't know whether I understood him correctly, nor even whether he himself clearly understood the

whole thing. Yet new and tremendously broad perspectives had in fact been opened up.

On another occasion—it was a time when I had already begun to free myself from religious belief—he brought me a book by the Danish writer Jens Jakobsen. It was a novel titled *Nils Lyhne*. In it two young people were discussing religion. One of them voiced the thought that the world was the repository of a colossal current of love—the love of God—flowing from millions of human hearts toward the heavens. The current emptied into heaven and was dissipated. But imagine what would happen, he observed, if this colossal current were to empty, not into heaven and into the jurisdiction of a distant unknown God, but if it turned rather toward the earth, in the direction of human beings—for the welfare of people, on behalf of people. How tremendous would be the creative force of this great surge of vibrant human love!

This particular idea struck me as a veritable revelation, and it left the most profound impression on me.

But I derived even more from my new friend in another regard, in the matter of literary and artistic education. It was a time when literally scores of new works and new authors and all manner of beautiful things revealed themselves to me. Sashka's leading author, his most beloved, was Heinrich Heine; and this identical love soon infected me. Small wonder: youth must become enamored of Heine because his works represent the very essence of youth itself. I don't know whether we were affected more by his youthful leaps of capricious, unexpected wit, or by the sublime and fiery passion of a towering human soul. Everything of his afforded us pleasure. I can remember being simply dazzled by a short love poem in which the poet pulled an old pine tree up by the roots, dipped it into a volcano, and wrote with the burning pen on the black night sky, "Agess, I love you." Today, I see nothing singular about the imagery; but at that time it possessed an indescribable grandeur and beauty. Another work of Heine's had a truly electrifying effect—the familiar poem about a sad young man seated along the seashore and asking questions: about the world, about life, about man's origin and destiny, about the meaning of it all. The poem remains serious and sad up to the end. The end, however, reads: "The sea roars and the waves

thunder . . . and a fool waits for an answer." This unanticipated transition is truly magnificent, expressing as it does the complete Heine, his sum and substance.

Then there were his writings about the gods of ancient Greece. We knew those old Greek gods well by name; we were, after all, pupils of a classical gymnasium, who were tormented from the third to the eighth grades with the Greek language and Greek writers. It was a purely mechanical thing, memorized from the beginning to the end of an assignment—and that was it. If I did develop a love for ancient Greece it came, not from those Greek studies, but from Heine's German works, which really opened up a world of beauty for me.

A new door to beauty was opened a bit later, this time in Russian. I believe it was in 1896 that there appeared a new translation of Homer's *Iliad* into Russian by the Russian author Nicholas Minsky, and Sashka introduced me to it. I brought it along to our summer place, where I used to lie in the midst of the beautiful tall grass and devour the magnificent lines of that immortal work.

Sashka also had books of a different kind, by new, modern writers. Thanks to him I became acquainted with works of Gerhart Hauptmann, Knut Hamsun, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, and others. I drew upon some modern works from another source, the contemporary Russian monthly journal *Severny Vestnik* (*Northern Messenger*), which was devoted especially to the latest, most modern literature. We read the magazine at home. My sister, in particular, was drawn to it; and I too derived much from it.

Sashka received a few German illustrated periodicals from abroad: *Die Jugend* (*Youth*), which at that time represented the last word on modernism in painting; and the renowned humor weekly, *Simplicissimus*. I devoured them with the greatest interest; and some of the pictures in those old issues of *Die Jugend* remain vivid to this day.

Yes, I read and saw so many other and such varied things, but citing specifics—the names, the books, the journals—has little point or importance. Of consequence was the new spiritual atmosphere that they engendered. Mere words cannot adequately convey the actual essence of this particular way of sensing and perceiving.

The door which had opened before me led to a new world, the

world of more refined artistic experiences. It is an exceedingly important stage in the life of a young person, as if new eyes were just opened, and new tastes just born. The soul becomes enriched and more receptive, and begins to absorb through these newly opened windows for the first time the colorfulness and beauty of a young, fresh, vibrant, artistic creation. New strings begin to sound, delicate, deeply hidden, intimate strings. It is the springtime of the soul. It is a serious and important matter. Whoever considers it merely some species of “bourgeois” luxury, the pastime of a satiated individual, has no concept of the nature of human life and the human soul. I am, in large measure, grateful for this awakening to my friend Sashka.

But we were young lads absorbed not only in serious things; schoolboys must skylark, and Sashka was quite a prankster. That corpulent, heavysset fellow had peculiar inspirations and engaged in some really wild escapades. Late at night, we would flit about the silent, sleepy little streets (itself a tremendous sin by the rules of the gymnasium), and Sashka would indulge one of his primary pleasures: smashing gates. The courtyards in our city were closed off by large gates, adjacent to which were small doors. Sashka would remove the doors, drag them with much effort and strain for several dozen feet, and cast them over a fence into someone’s garden. Had we been caught at that enterprise we would certainly have been expelled from the gymnasium; but we were never caught.

Still more shocking were the plans we toyed with. The center of our city included a small park, the so-called “boulevard.” In the middle of the boulevard stood a fountain with a statue representing a nude boy and a swan. The statue was of bronze, in natural color, and not at all unattractive. A similar statue can be found in Warsaw’s Saxon Gardens. The keepers of our city’s taste got the bright idea of enhancing the beauty of the statue. They hired a painter who went to work on the statue, using, as a matter of fact, natural colors: the swan was painted white with a yellow beak; the boy, rose-colored; and the fig leaf adorning the boy, green. It was a monstrosity—a constant offense to our outraged sensibilities whenever we passed the profaned fountain. Thus, for quite a while, we entertained a plan to rectify matters: we would select a dark night, procure the needed paints, and work the whole statue over in such fashion as to require the removal

of all the paint. But we were unable to effectuate it. No matter how dark the night, there were always a few human specimens rambling about near that particular fountain. It was the nocturnal marketplace of several poor, woebegone prostitutes. Horrible figures—old, dirty, ugly—they circulated there in the dark, selling their dreadful “love” for a few *kopecks*. And when, on occasion, they approached one of us, we felt a cold chill run down our spines; and with fear and loathing we turned away from the repulsive creatures as from a spider or a serpent.

The gymnasium *nachal'stvo* looked with jaundiced eye upon our friendship. Sashka was in bad repute among the teachers: lazy, albeit very capable; a scamp; and to top it all, a Jew! Hence their fear that he might have a deleterious influence upon me. But to no avail. He remained my best friend through all of the last years of the gymnasium.

As to the matter of his Jewishness, he was not the only Jew with whom I associated. The longer the time that passed, the more Jewish did my environment become.

A Little Jewishness

GRADUALLY, IMPERCEPTIBLY, MY surroundings began to take on a Jewish coloration. True, the adult visitors to our home remained largely Russian. But my close friends in the upper grades were almost exclusively Jews. Sashka was not the only one. Another fellow with whom I spent no small amount of time was Yashka Kaplan. We were destined to become really close friends later on, during our university years. I used to drop in on him at home quite often. This was a home which already bore a pronounced Jewish, middle-class stamp. Sashka's home was also typically Jewish; indeed it was a place where Jewish customs were observed to such a degree that Sashka feared to travel on the Sabbath lest his relatives—heaven forbid—learn of it, but the home had a more “aristocratic” flavor, as evidenced by the fact that the language of discourse was primarily German. I had no contact with the family; when I entered Sashka's home I swiftly repaired to his room which was completely separated from the others. Only accidentally might I encounter and greet his father or mother in the vestibule or hallway. At Kaplan's place, however, it was different: more democratic, more informal. A picture of Baron de Hirsch¹ hung on the wall. One would sometimes hear

1. Maurice, Baron de Hirsch (1831–1896), was a renowned philanthropist born in Munich. He was highly esteemed by the Jewish masses in Russia.

Yiddish spoken. I recall an occasion when my visit happened to coincide with the visit of two of their friends, a young man and woman, who sang Yiddish songs. I believe they were selections from Avrom Goldfaden's productions. The Yiddish by that time no longer grated on the ear.

There were a number of other Jewish friends with whom I associated and who used to visit me at home. It developed quite automatically: of the thirty-odd pupils in my class, the seven or eight Jews were the more intelligent. The intellectual level of the others was rather low. I naturally felt more comfortable among the Jews. My comradeship with Jewish people attracted notice at home. My older brother joked about it good-naturedly. "Go ahead," he would say. "One of your Ginzburgs has just arrived, only I can't tell whether it's Kaplan or Eliasberg." This was meant only in jest. I encountered no interference.

I also came to know several Jewish *gymnasistkas*. The acquaintanceship was established on the street, and it involved quite an experience. There was a custom in Minsk of strolling, after class let out, along two streets in the heart of town. Every city boasted such places, specific streets for promenading: the area of leading shops and crowds, the focus of life. This section in our city of Minsk began at the "boulevard." A confectioner's shop owned by a man named Shening (and later, by Vengzhetsky) was located there, at the intersection of two streets; it had long been the sole confectionery in the city. That shop was the starting point: people set out from there heading down Zakharev Street to the next corner, where they made a right turn into the other major street—Governor Street. The strollers proceeded to the end of Governor Street as far as Levin's shop. Then the process would be reversed. And so it went, the crowd shuttling back and forth. The whole business covered about three blocks, a stretch which, indeed, came to be known by the names of the termini: "From Shening to Levin." It was the area where "all Minsk" congregated, and Jewish Minsk in particular. Movement along the sidewalks became impossible on the Sabbath owing to the crush of the festive crowds.

That was where we used to spend an hour almost daily, and where girls of the gymnasium also promenaded. We would move in one direction while they moved the opposite way. The result—mutual

avoidance, but also a mutual eyeing of one another. After completing this routine five or six times in a row we headed home. Among the girls, their number included one dark-complexioned charmer who became the focus of our attention. Actually, a few of us already knew her and sometimes approached her and walked her home. But, not I. I was afraid, fearful of being at a loss for conversation. To accompany a girl in a state of total silence would have been scandalous and shameful. So our movements continued in that fashion for a long while: she proceeding one way, I the other; both of us casting glances and finding the time rather well spent. I finally mustered up all my courage, mentally rehearsed a conversation, and introduced myself to the girl. Success. I actually walked her home and stood chatting with her at the stoop. It was most pleasant. One of my Jewish friends, I should add, had been helpful to me in this matter.

During that period I had two other Jewish friends of an altogether different type. No gymnasium pupils, they were just ordinary street boys, the sons of a Jewish shopkeeper whose small shop was located in the same courtyard as my home. They would drift aimlessly about the courtyard all day until their mother appeared and drove them into the house. The older one had a peculiar name, Mitshe; the younger one was called Avrom-Itshe. I can still hear their mother's strident tones as she called them in, drawing out their names: "Mi-i-tshe, Avrom - I-i-i-tshe!" When this didn't work, the father, a small, broad-shouldered, black-bearded man would drag himself out of the shop; and there would issue from his bass voice a peremptory "Into the house!" that was enough to bring them scampering home for "study." In a few minutes the little house resounded with the music of Mitshe's studies.

I greatly enjoyed the company of those two boys. Although I was already quite grown up, I still found considerable pleasure in children's games like *klipka*, *polyanka*, and others. And when I grew too big for such pastimes, I turned to "cultural work." I started to teach the boys how to read and write Russian, and I also undertook to teach them some of the decencies. Like most Jewish boys, they were very dirty and bedraggled, especially the younger specimen. Hence my request that they show some concern for cleanliness. When

this proved unavailing, I would take scissors in hand and cut and clean Avrom-Itshe's jet-black fingernails.

Thus I found myself increasingly associating with Jews. Yet under no circumstances can I say that I myself had already begun to feel like a Jew and to regard myself as one. I had not yet begun to confront at that time the question of my own Jewishness, and not even after the first sizeable clash in our city between Christians and Jews.

It took place, I believe, in the year 1896, around the Passover season. The two of us—Sashka and I—happened to be wandering about the streets at the very time a report was circulating through the city of an encounter between Jews and soldiers in the market square. We headed in that direction. The clash itself had already ended: it involved some kind of confrontation between a shopkeeper and a group of soldiers who sought to abuse him. Other Jews took the side of the shopkeeper; the soldiers had their supporters; and a real donnybrook ensued. By the time we arrived the shops had closed. The Jews were standing about, pale and distraught. Whole detachments of soldiers, weapons in hand, paced up and down, casting eyes in all directions and fearing a possible attack. They had evidently been warned that the Jews wished to stage a pogrom against them, hence the desire on their part to counter with a threat against the Jews. I observed members of one detachment slamming the bolts of their rifles and shouting at the top of their lungs, "Load rifles! Load rifles!" Another detachment suddenly charged down the length of the street, as in an assault. I still recall, vividly, seeing a soldier in the rear rank bending down while on the run, seizing a stone, and hurling it through a window. The pane shattered. The sound of breaking glass produced an instant response of screams and weeping from the Jewish women and children.

I left the marketplace in a state of shock. It goes without saying that I was wholeheartedly on the side of the Jews.

Another clash erupted—not a physical but a social one, so to speak—in the gymnasium itself. Our gymnasium was generally a place where one did not feel any atmosphere of overt anti-Semitism. The teachers were rather decent. (The first anti-Semitic scandal actually took place a year after I graduated from the gymnasium.)

Among the pupils, Jew-hatred manifested itself very rarely. True, I recall one instance in which a pupil from an upper grade suddenly approached me and said: “Medem, *zhid parkhati* (‘dirty Jew’)!” But such cases were rare. The first real clash occurred when I was approaching the end of my gymnasium studies.

It had been customary for the students themselves to decide the sequence of the final examinations (the specific day for each subject). The matter was not complicated; details were generally agreed upon with ease. But one issue evoked considerable disagreement. The gentile pupils had, among the several subjects, an examination on religion; the Jews did not. Accordingly, the Jews proposed that this particular examination be scheduled in the middle of the others, thereby enabling the Jewish students to have the opportunity of using the few days set aside for the subject as a time in which to prepare for the other examinations. But the gentile pupils said no. “Why should the Jews enjoy the privilege of having a few days more than we? The religious examination should be relegated to the very end, so that no one will benefit from those extra days.”

This was hardly a comradely gesture on the part of the Christians. Why should they really have cared if the Jews might benefit from the few days? There was nothing in the nature of competition about the examinations. No harm whatsoever would befall the Christians should a Jew successfully complete them, especially since the doors of all universities were open to Christians in any case, while a Jew had to complete the examinations very successfully in order to qualify for entry into the University of Saint Petersburg or Moscow. Still, they remained adamant and succeeded in their wish. The disagreement between the two sides grew sharp and assumed a highly passionate form. Two distinct factions took shape in the class, a condition which almost led to the complete rupture of relations between their members. Three gentiles lined up with the Jewish faction; naturally, I was one of them. All the rest were on the other side. Things reached such a pass that the traditional joint banquet, sponsored annually by the senior class immediately after graduation, was dispensed with. We, the opposition, arranged a banquet for our *minyan*.² The majority faction arranged a banquet for itself.

2. A reference to the minimum number—ten—of Jewish males above the age of thirteen required for the conduct of public worship.

This was my first involvement in a Jewish-gentile collision and it served to render the last few weeks of our gymnasium life rather ugly. But even in this conflict I did not yet feel myself a Jew. I had joined with the party which, in my opinion, had justice on its side—and that was all.

18.

Theater

MINSK HAD A THEATER I used to attend. And when a boy attends the theater he gets caught up in the theater madness. This was certainly true in my case.

Love for the theater literally pervaded the atmosphere in our home. I have earlier described my father's dream about a theater of his own. My oldest brother had impressive dramatic talent. He even entertained the thought for a time of exchanging his military uniform for the role of professional actor. He surely would have occupied a respectable place on the stage; but he passed it up, satisfying himself with amateur productions. My other brother had—for seven years, I believe—been a student at the University of Saint Petersburg, from which he never graduated for the very reason that he devoted virtually his full time to the theater. A good example had thus been set for me. My first visit to the theater took place when I was a child of about six. I had spent several weeks in Moscow at that time, together with my mother and sister. There I was taken to a matinee in the "Large Theater." The program was a ballet, "Pharaoh's Daughter," a fantastic thing, with thousands of effects that impressed me tremendously. A lion appeared on stage; I can still see quite vividly the lion being shot and falling from a bridge. Even more striking is my recollection of the scene in which a prisoner was conducted to a large

basket of flowers out of which leaped a snake. The snake bit him in the chest and he fell dead. Then there was a monkey and a black prince and a girl who hurled herself into the Nile river, and similar things. It was unadulterated pleasure.

After that I didn't set foot in a theater for a long time, although several minor amateur performances were presented in our own home, on one occasion especially for children. And I also acted. Then came "the great day," with the building of a genuine, permanent city theater in Minsk. Opera was presented during the very first year. The season opened, as was the custom, with the famous classical opera *Zhizn Za Tsar'ya* (*A Life for the Tsar*). Today, in view of its content, it can no longer be presented. This is a great loss from an artistic standpoint, because of the incomparable beauty of the music. But another production had a greater impact upon me—*The Demon*. That this old opera by Anton Rubinstein is far weaker musically hardly fazed me at all. The importance lay in the content and in the external aspects, *i.e.*, the demon; the angel grappling with the demon and driving it off; the Caucasian mountaineers with their dances and battles. All of this was vastly interesting, and I became a fiery "partisan" of that particular opera. I would argue with my friend Gleb and seek to convince him that *The Demon* was unexcelled for interest. He countered with the opinion that *Faust* was even more beautiful, Faust who in the first act turned from an old man into a youth, a rare feat! But I would rejoin that the demon, at the opera's end, went to hell, something even more "thrilling."

In general, the total image of the demon impressed me tremendously, and I sought to ape him. In Act I he stood on the mountain and damned the world. So I climbed a mound in our garden, struck the corresponding pose, and sang in the deepest possible voice (old Rubinstein would have turned over in his grave): "Hated world, accursed world!!!"

Then a dramatic troupe arrived and I witnessed a historical drama called *Vasilisa Melenteva*. I imitated Tsar Ivan the Terrible with his pointed staff which he drove into the feet of his intimates. These were all childish amusements; I was about twelve or thirteen years old at the time. In the upper grades things were different. I had already begun to familiarize myself with dramatic literature, to read a

little Shakespeare and a little about Shakespeare. A superficial, childish interest in theater steadily gave way to a genuine concern. I began to comprehend and to appreciate this art form as such. My colleague, in this regard, was Yashka Kaplan. I used to sit with him on a bench in the Governor's Park and recite whole passages from *Hamlet* and other works, or, in fun, engage in extensive dialogues, singing à la opera. It's hard to tell which one of us sang worse. Naturally, each of us dreamed a bit about becoming an actor. During those years I participated in a number of amateur productions. But I was comparatively modest. Almost all young men ordinarily dream about such heroic-dramatic roles as leading lover or leading tragedian. I had no such ambitions. I warmed to the roles of humorous oldsters, and performed them well, I believe.

In those years the theater boasted a famous Italian actor named Rossi. I had heard and read about him, especially about his rendition of Shakespeare's *King Lear*— a play which always possessed a special attraction for me. Posters suddenly blossomed on the streets announcing a guest appearance by Rossi in Minsk and, indeed, his presentation of *King Lear*.

I don't know whether everyone has had this kind of experience, but I believe it must be fairly common: to wake up one morning, open one's eyes, come alive again, and grow suddenly aware of a special joy coursing through one's soul. Something long-awaited is imminent. In the midst of the drab sequence of colorless days, a spot of brightness is shining somewhere, whether far off or near, it is still in the future. And from this point there radiates such light and joy as to suffuse one's very soul. Awaiting the great celebration, it appears to represent the approach of a supreme moment of one's life, endowing the coming days and weeks with a fullness of meaning and content.

At that time, this was for me the anticipation of Rossi's coming. I awoke early. It was still dark. A vision unfolded before me of long hours of oppressive suffering at school. Then suddenly my soul brightened and I felt buoyant and joyful. A sense of expectation quickened within me; there was something to look forward to: Rossi was coming!

Incidentally, a secondary prospect was also in the offing just then:

a concert featuring the young pianist Joseph Hoffmann had been announced. He was very famous in those years, and remains so to this day. I awaited him with exactly the eagerness that I did the Italian tragedian.

The denouement was disappointing. Hoffmann came, I heard him, but I failed to derive the extraordinary raptures I counted upon. Why? I really don't know. Hoffmann was certainly not at fault. Presumably I was not capable of adequately receiving musical impressions that evening; such things do happen. But as regards Rossi, *he* never showed up at all; and I was destined, in fact, never to see him.

Along with the love of theater, I also experienced the gradual development of my critical faculties. The renowned Adelheim brothers were the first to elicit critical resistance from me. Provincial Russia, and I believe America too, became well acquainted in those years with this particular duo. They had a smattering of talent; no less, in any event, than the average provincial actor. But for someone of more highly developed artistic taste, their old-fashioned style of acting, their shouts, and their cheap effects were simply intolerable. At the same time, there arrived in Minsk a Ukrainian troupe, headed by the famous actress Zankovetskaya, that was of an entirely different school. These people were not only vigorous and healthy talents of consequence; their acting was unaffected, sincere, and realistic. Accordingly I had a basis for comparison. My sympathies were wholly with the Ukrainians, and I resolved, then and there, to do a whole article on the subject for the small newspaper which used to appear in Minsk. I actually wrote the article. In it I counterposed the two species of actors: one which sees in the play nothing but a medium for declamatory effects; the other which strives to embody living human types. To an actor of the latter category, a monologue or dialogue on stage is not a device for revealing pride in the sound or flexibility of one's voice, but represents an attempt to give expression to the words appropriate to the individual whom he is supposed to portray.

I failed to submit the article to the newspaper. I don't know why. Most likely it didn't satisfy me.

19.

Beneath the Pines of Home

THE WINTERS WERE thus solidly filled: school, books, friends, theater; but summers were of an altogether different order. Summer meant woods and fields.

From the time we left Galinyevich's house until my completion of the gymnasium, I spent not a single summer in the city. For two summers I stayed with my brother at military camp; and during two summers all of us occupied a *dacha* on the outskirts of the city. Even while we were living at Galinyevich's and had access to the large garden, I still managed to visit a summer residence for weeks on end. Indeed, during ordinary times in the city the woods beckoned constantly, and I happily retired to them.

It took roughly three-quarters of an hour to go from our house to the nearest forest. I had to cross open fields under a scorching sun, but this didn't stop me. There is a certain power that draws one farther and farther, a compelling force that will not let go. I used to tread the silent trail through the woods, beneath the old, tall pines; or follow the railroad track hemmed in by two high walls of green—those same familiar pines again.

It was a case of walking without design; of walking for the sake of walking; of being driven by an inexplicable something into an ever deeper penetration of the verdant sea of trees. I walked for the sheer

joy of it. I would stop briefly at a railroad guard's house for a glass of cold milk (there was an aversion to such milk at home), and for a healthy chunk of black peasant bread baked on oak leaves. How tasty it was, savoring of the most exotic delicacies! Strong and rejuvenated, I would press onward.

Nature in the environs of Minsk is impoverished: broad pine woods, sandy roads, occasionally some birch, swamps from time to time, a rare hillock, sweeping fields, small lakes, and still more pines, pines without end. How poor, how devoid of effects; it had to be powerfully loved for one to find in it a modicum of beauty and charm. I loved it.

In modern man the love of nature is rarely direct, natural. To a greater or lesser degree he attaches to it a literary quality of sorts, views it through the eyes of one or another author. My education in this respect came from Russian literature. It is difficult to find a literature anywhere in the world as intimate with nature, as close to it, as the Russian. This was already evident among the old classical writers. But they were made distasteful for me precisely during the years they should have been of greatest importance, because they were studied in the gymnasium; hence the superior influence of those writers who were passed over by the gymnasium. Here Turgenev held first place. Turgenev opened and brought alive for me the woodland, the field, and the meadow. He taught me to see them, to feel their scent, to breathe in their very soul. But he was able to do this only because the woods were truly my woods; the meadow—my meadow; the field—my field. They were home, Minsk: a personal possession. How often and how powerfully, during later years in far-off beautiful Switzerland, would I long for the simple pine in the plain woods of home.

Nature was close at hand even in the city itself. Strange how, ever since leaving Minsk, I have sought the genuine springtime, the springtime of home, but have been unable to find it. Of what does this "genuineness" of spring consist? It is difficult to say: perhaps in the rivulets formed by the melting snow, leaping through the streets on their downhill course and leaving them bright and clean, scoured free of the residue of sand and silt. There happened to be no sidewalk alongside our house, which was situated on a hilly street. While the

rivulets leapt gaily, we boys would dig a kind of basin in the sand and construct various canals and dikes. The scornful waters tore through our walls of sand, rushing onward, down toward the river. And this was springtime.

Or a few years later, when I had already ceased playing among the rivulets, seated on the porch of our house, I could hear the crowing of young roosters far off in the distance, on the very outskirts of the city. All winter there had been no sound of them; now they were crowing—a singular noise from their unfledged little voices. And this was springtime.

Then came the Passover season, and warmth, and the changeover into spring clothes. The sun shone; the streets were strangely dry and clean, not the dusty streets of summer but a special quality of dryness, a festive, sunny dryness, the first after the snows of winter. And this was springtime.

And then the examinations, when one had to sit and study all day. The month of May departed and the lilacs stopped blooming, and spring was over; but it had been.

Never, while abroad, did I see such springs. Or was it perhaps not spring at all—but youth?

20.

On the Threshold

WE MOVED UP TO the eighth—the last—grade in the gymnasium. And just like prisoners serving out the final months of their sentence, we waited for the day of our liberation. The day moved steadily closer; another month, another week, and we would be rid of the despised gymnasium; freedom would come.

Freedom would come. But then what? One was, after all, entering the grown-up stage, receiving a “certificate of maturity.” Next comes the need to select a path in life. But whither the path?

This much was clear and self-evident: From the gymnasium one moved on to the university. Yet, here was the rub: It was necessary, while still a callow lad, to select—and promptly—a profession, a lifetime occupation. The Russian university had no procedure, for instance, like that in the American college, where students are required to embark upon definite professional preparation only after having obtained a general education during the first few years. The Russian university was divided into four sections, “faculties,” strictly separated from each other, indeed separated from the very first day of study. Each faculty had its particular subjects; each led to a specific profession. A youth of about seventeen thus found himself standing at a crossroad, faced with having to decide the question early. I found myself torturing my brain even before I had finished the gymnasium: “What shall I become?”

The four faculties were the juridical, the philological, the physicomathematical, and the medical. It was also possible to attend, aside from these, one of the special technical institutes for the training of engineers. Ninety percent of my class prepared to enter the juridical faculty, which meant that they would end up either as attorneys or officials. But I had no desire for this and not even an interest in it. Nor did I wish to enroll in the philological faculty for the study of languages. To begin with, it held no attraction for me in general. Moreover, after having completed one's studies, what would one become? A teacher? To me this was a horrible prospect. And entering a technical institute to become an engineer was out of the question; I simply had no interest in the field. What's more, the profession was in bad standing among us—a place for people in pursuit of the fleshpots. To enroll in the physicomathematical faculty for the study of natural science? That, yes; to that I was strongly drawn. But one had to live; and that faculty did not prepare one directly for a profession. In the absence of finances, I could not permit myself this luxury. Which left only one alternative—the study of medicine.

In truth, I had no particularly great urge to become a physician. But I reasoned that the medical faculty had, after all, a close relationship to natural science in general. I would see how things turned out: if I showed the requisite talents I could perhaps become a scholar, a professor, and devote myself in fact wholly to that which interested me above all else—to natural science. Should this prove impossible, then the profession of physician was surely best. It offered the opportunity for genuine, substantial service to suffering people. I decided to enter the medical faculty, the only one in my class to select this path.

The spring of 1897 arrived, and with it the final, the major examinations. They were carried out with great pageantry, not in the classroom, but in the spacious, attractive hall used only for exceptional presentations. We were required to dress in our holiday best. A whole commission no less, headed by a special representative from Vilno, sat at the large green table. The subjects and requirements of the written examinations were also forwarded from Vilno in sealed envelopes which were opened in our presence by the director himself.

It was solemn and impressive; and our nerves were strung exceedingly taut.

I personally had nothing to fear; I was one of the best pupils and was not threatened by any danger of failing. Only with respect to Russian literature did I find myself still in a state of some turmoil. It was not wholly precluded that Mikhalka might dignify me with an ugly little trick at the last moment. But everything went off without a hitch. The "honor" of the gymnasium required that someone should finish with a really fine certificate and receive a gold medal. I was the first and the most suitable candidate for these. (Another person might perhaps have been eligible, but he was a Jew, hence "unsuitable.") In order not to spoil the perfect certificate, I received a "fiver" even in Russian literature.

But not everyone had such good fortune. I remember one pupil in our class, a fellow somewhat older than the rest of us, who was no great expert in Greek. The examination, moreover, had dragged on all day, and the fellow happened to be among the last; it was already close to midnight when his turn came. He was completely shaken after a whole day's wait and the great strain on his nerves. When a variety of questions (many of dubious relevance) were put before him, he was unable, alas, to come up with the correct answers. So he was given a mark of 2. Verily, not knowing Greek grammar was of course proof perfect of immaturity. In short, he failed: according to the practice, a 2 in any subject was sufficient to deny anyone the certificate. He would have to repeat the grade for another year.

It isn't difficult to imagine the catastrophic nature of this experience! The individual is already standing at the threshold hoping to become free, to be rid of the despised gymnasium within a few weeks, then a few days—when, suddenly, everything comes to naught. One is forced back to the confining study bench for another long, interminable year!

The young man pleaded with the teacher for mercy; he cried like an infant—but to no avail. *Nachal'stvo* remained unyielding.

How can one adequately describe the hate and anger that welled up in us against those wooden souls with the golden buttons, and particularly against the teacher of Greek. I returned home utterly

crushed. On the following day I could not study. Instead of preparing for the other examinations, I fled into the woods, way out beyond the city, where I collapsed in the grass and lay for many hours—overcome by that feeling of dull weariness and indifference normally brought on by a great misfortune. The gymnasium was really making sure that our parting impressions of it should be even uglier and more unpleasant than they were.

The final day came at last. We polished off the last examination, received the certificates, and, barely out of the hall, proceeded with dispatch and trembling to rip from our caps the hated symbol of our enslavement: the two silver leaves with the letters MG (Minsk Gymnasium) in the center. Then we rushed home to change into civilian clothes.

Oh, the joy of that first appearance in town dressed like free individuals with new student hats! We were liberated people, without fear of the accursed inspector. We made a dash through the streets, descended into Governor's Park, stopped off at a restaurant, and drained a couple of glasses of whisky. We promenaded past the gymnasium and, beneath Kosakovsky's windows, let loose with some earthy Russian expressions. Free at last! After nine years of imprisonment! Glorious day!

Then we held a banquet. We got good and drunk, staged another *hulyanke* (spree) with a smaller circle of close friends at Sashka's home (his parents were away), and there got drunk again. Then, suddenly, everything grew strangely silent and a bit somber. The great celebration was ended. The student years commenced. Yet the old specter of the gymnasium continued to haunt me for a long time, a very long time, for decades, not during waking hours, but in my dreams. I had dreams—scores and scores of them—that I was once again a *gymnast*, rushing to school, coming late, or coming inappropriately dressed, or minus books, or with lessons unprepared. About a quarter of a century has elapsed since the last time I crossed the gymnasium threshold, yet such dreams have recurred to this very day—to this very day!

21.

Kiev

I LEFT FOR KIEV IN the autumn of 1897. I had actually intended to enroll in the University of Moscow, whose medical division was the finest in all Russia. But as it turned out, I submitted my application too late and there was no more room. I had to settle for the University of Kiev. There were relatives in Kiev: an aunt (my mother's sister), an uncle, and their three children whom I already knew. My aunt met me at the railroad station and we rode out to their home.

It was noon of a hot day. The sun was pitiless. I had the impression of having arrived in an entirely different country: alien, unfamiliar, like nothing I had ever seen. I could sense being in the south. The white walls glistened under the rays of the sun; attached to the windows were green shutters which I had previously observed only in pictures of southern climes. The shutters were made of individual narrow boards with slits between them that could be opened or shut as desired. Through the hot, sun-drenched streets moved large, heavy wagons loaded with watermelons. Atop each mound of watermelons sat a Ukrainian wearing a fur hat and shouting without letup: "*Kavunoy* ("watermelon")! *Kavunoy! Kavunoy!*"

The whole picture—pavement, houses, people—seemed strange and bizarre. The very air had a quality different from that of Minsk; there was something distinctive in the touch of the wind on my face. The city's smell was new. I sensed clearly: I am abroad.

We arrived at my uncle's apartment where I was given a very hearty reception. Within our family the ties among relatives, even among the distant and little known, had always been exceedingly warmhearted. I became one of the household from the very first day. But I could not live with them; there was no space. A room was found for me in the same courtyard and I moved in.

The room was tiny and unprepossessing. A typical student's nook: a bed, a chest, a table—and nothing else. The room was situated high up, the view from the window unobstructed by other houses. There was a garden of sorts close by the house. And beyond the trees, indeed directly opposite my window, stood the large Mikhailovsky cathedral with its lovely white walls and gold cupolas. The scene itself was quite attractive. Yet how dreadfully somber was that lonely, strange, empty little room!

For the first time in my life I was away from home. Waking in the morning to face those four bare, alien walls, I would be overcome by a dreadful longing, a passionate and painful longing for home, for my mother and the warm atmosphere of home. It tugged at me with tremendous force; it tormented and tortured. . . The homesickness persisted for a long time.

I went to the university the very next day, another scorcher. During that summer I was fearful of the sun; on hot days I had frequent nosebleeds. And whenever I had to go out on a sunny day I was oppressed by the fear of renewed bleeding. On the street, and burdened with such fear, I had a certain feeling of constraint: my head would be held in a kind of special, cautious attitude; every movement was measured. The sun's heat and fear of the sun itself affected my very brain, enveloping it in a kind of haze.

Such was my condition upon arriving at the university for the first time. Aside from this, there was the general state of confusion induced by all the new impressions, and the fact of being green and bashful.

I entered on the ground floor, where I found only clothes-racks and coats. As I proceeded up the stairs toward the floor above, I encountered students, heard voices. There should have been nothing unusual in that. But the thought suddenly struck me: those were the

old students, while I was completely new. Did I have the right to walk into their midst? I stopped, ashamed to inquire, and I returned home. I felt that I had been in something resembling a dream state; at least that's how I imagine it now.

I finally entered the *sanctum sanctorum* and began to attend lectures. Still, owing to my unfortunate shyness, I experienced great discomfort. I was all alone. Actually, several schoolmates from Minsk, including also my good friend Yashka Kaplan, had arrived together with me. But all of them had reported to the juridical faculty while I remained isolated, among strangers. I made no acquaintances, and would not dare to approach anyone with a question about anything. Helpless and groping in the dark, I attended the lectures without eagerness and with diminishing frequency. Furthermore the lectures were very boring and really not worth attending. For the rest, there existed an old rule: the incoming student does not occupy himself with learning during the first year. The first year is for enjoyment. Learning would come later.

My environment—aside from my family relations—consisted of those few schoolmates and the Minsk *landsmanshaft*.

The student body was already organized at this time; not all of it, but the better part. And the cornerstone of the organization was represented by the *landsmanshaftn*. The university was a center which drew masses of young people from far and wide and from a great variety of cities and towns. Thus every fair-sized city, or a whole region, was represented by a *landsmanshaft*. In Kiev we had a *landsmanshaft* representing Kiev itself, and also one for Kherson, Chernigov, the Crimea, etc. There existed, in addition, a special Polish organization which was under the influence of the Polish Socialist Party. The *landsmanshaftn* were generally nonpartisan. Their functions were quite varied. They concerned themselves with mutual aid, with education, and with special student matters. They also doubled as instruments for political action whenever it was called for. The *landsmanshaftn* were illegal and met secretly in private homes. But, in special cases, they were instrumental in convening large mass meetings in the university proper. This was done without permission; and the university *nachal'stvo* was helpless in the face of it. The *lands-*

manshaftn were highly centralized, with an elected central body called the Bundesrat (Central Council) of United *Landsmanshaftn* and Organizations.

The Minsk *landsmanshaft* promptly welcomed me into its ranks. There I felt comfortable, at home. True, my shyness had not abandoned me even there, and during the first year I never opened my mouth at meetings. But that was of no consequence. I had entered, after all, upon an intimate environment, in which the spirit of comity became even more pronounced when the close of a formal meeting was followed by songs, poetry readings, or just conversation over a glass of tea or whisky. The people were extraordinarily friendly, and I was delighted. And then, for the first time in my life I witnessed large mass meetings. One of them was especially interesting and typical of that period.

A dispute of some sort had erupted in one of the classes. I can't recall what it was all about; that in itself is unimportant. Matters came to a head when a certain individual started to whistle. There followed a loud retort from someone else: "*Zhydovsky svist!*" ("Jewish whistling!") The audience caught it. An uproar swiftly ensued. An anti-Semitic catcall in a student environment! This was something unheard of in those halcyon days! The student conscience found it intolerable. The culprit was seized, placed in the defendant's dock and tried. The trial ran for two days. On the first day it involved a closed meeting of the particular class in which the incident had occurred. The following day a mass meeting of the whole university was convened. There were angry speeches. The young anti-Semite received his due. The Russian student body of those days was marked by great beauty and nobility of spirit.

Another big meeting had a more pronounced political character. A monument had been erected in Warsaw honoring the great Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz. The Kiev Central Council of the *landsmanshaftn* arranged a large gathering for the purpose of demonstrating the solidarity of the students with the oppressed Polish people. This was the first time I heard oppositional political speeches. It was a solemn and beautiful moment. The speakers included representatives of various nationalities, Russians, Georgians, Armenians. A number of Jews also spoke, but not as representatives

of the Jews. The last speaker was a Polish socialist; he delivered a strikingly revolutionary speech, inspired and forceful. For reasons of caution he concealed himself behind a bench, so that he could be heard but not seen. A score of Polish friends—proud, attractive youths—sat around him, a living wall to conceal him. I gazed upon them with respect and admiration. They impressed me tremendously during those years. I loved the Poles.

A few Russian patriots, future Black Hundreds,¹ also tried to address the meeting. A small minority, they were incapable of spoiling the pleasant mood. The meeting closed with an appropriate resolution which was transmitted to Warsaw. The whole event had an unforgettable impact upon me.

The first year as a university student ended very quickly. Actually it was not really a year but only a few months. During the month of January I came down with typhus. After a few weeks in the hospital, I went to stay with my aunt. By the time I recovered it was already spring and the end of the school year. I returned home for the summer vacation.

1. The Black Hundreds were reactionary, anti-Semitic groups which flourished during the period of the revolution of 1905 and which enjoyed the favor of the regime.

22.

My Mother's Death

WE SET OUT FOR A summer residence a few versts¹ from the city. We had scarcely arrived when my mother became seriously ill, growing weaker with each passing day. Two doctors came out from the city day after day, only to nod their heads. Even they were at a loss to identify her condition. It was an ominous sign; and hope of a cure steadily diminished.

The catastrophe drew nearer, with slow but steady tread: the fearful specter of my mother's death, that which had made me shudder in my earliest childhood. The spirit of imminent death pervaded the house.

I would head for a small woods not far from our *dacha* and wander aimlessly beneath the trees. The dread, solemn strains of Beethoven's funeral march rang in my ears. Death was standing at the door.

My mother sensed that the end was near and she longed to return to the city, to the familiar surroundings of home. Her wish was granted. It was impossible to take her by carriage because of the poor road. We arranged for a special stretcher equipped with handles and covered by a type of canopy and curtain. Porters were hired to carry her to the city. We walked alongside. Our sad procession, moving

1. A Russian measure of distance, one verst being equivalent to about three-fifths of a mile.

across the sweeping fields, was reminiscent of a funeral. Yet, life still flickered.

It was evening when we reached home. My mother could barely speak. The doctor arrived, took her pulse, and retired to a corner. "It looks bad," he said. "She will hardly survive the night!"

Although my mother was scarcely able to speak, her last words, uttered with difficulty and in agony, were words of concern and care about us, the children. She lived like a martyr; she died like a saint.

Evening came. My mother lay silently on her bed. Her deep, dark, lovely eyes were fixed upon us. They gazed with pain, with yearning, with a quiet, terrible yearning.

I can find no words to describe that yearning. In his *Verses in Prose*, Turgenev offered a picture of someone in the throes of death: something fluttered and beat in the depths of his eyes, like the wing of a bird brought down. . . . That is it.

The Germans have a colloquial expression: "To suffer death." A famous German author once used it in describing the death of his mother. She had suffered death—silently and calmly. But nothing in the world can compare with the fearful suffering of a soul compelled to part with life.

Death came in the morning. My mother fell asleep, ceased to breathe. Her face relaxed and turned marble-white and comely, as in the beautiful years of youth.

The quiet death of someone beloved is like a solemn religious observance. And whoever stands as a silent witness beside a deathbed must feel the sacredness of death. The accumulated love of a lifetime wells up from the heart like a wave. The vast love and the overwhelming, eternal gratitude.

Then comes the immense, numbing weariness that settles upon the brain like a gray cloud. The dull weariness of overwhelming misfortune. My mother is gone.

It had come to pass—the loss of what was dearer to me than anything in the world.

And life continued.

23.

My Second Year at the University

THE SUMMER ENDED and I returned to Kiev. I went back with a resolve to abandon medicine and transfer to the juridical faculty. It was a course of action that had been strongly urged upon me at home throughout the summer, primarily because of my poor health. Typhus had brought on a kidney disorder, and the physicians counseled me strictly to avoid all exertion, to follow a rigorous diet, to go to sleep at a reasonable hour, and to remain off the street during poor weather; otherwise, I was told, the consequences would be swift and ugly. The point was impressed upon me that I would be unable to tolerate the arduous practice of medicine. Still I resisted for some time; and I don't know whether I would finally have taken the proffered advice had it not been for the intervention of someone who had great influence upon me. I refer to Gregory Gershuni. (In a subsequent chapter I shall write at length about this interesting and lovable human being who became a famous leader among the Socialist Revolutionaries a few years later.)

Gershuni had just then arrived and settled in Minsk. It was during the early months of 1898. He appeared at our home soon after his arrival, and became a frequent visitor and close friend of the family. He was in fact a distant relation on my father's side. I used to visit

Gershuni almost daily, and spent many hours with him. He too urged me to give up medicine, first, again because of my poor health; and second, because of another consideration. He observed how the student environment had awakened in me a certain interest in public life. "You probably wish to participate in communal activity," he said to me. "The medical faculty will not offer you any preparation for this. You will, however, obtain such preparation in the juridical faculty. It's the natural road to a political calling. Look at European life and you will see that the majority of significant political leaders are, in fact, lawyers."

This was an important, and influential, motive. But at the same time there was something else which influenced me: I had become greatly disappointed in the power of medical science. My mother's terminal illness, the helplessness of the physicians, their inability to discover the precise character of her illness, let alone to overcome it, all of this served to prejudice me strongly against the whole physician's craft. Hence my decision to drop medicine.

I traveled to Kiev with my friend Yashka Kaplan. We rented a small room not far from the university, on Kreshchatik, Kiev's main street. We roomed together the whole academic year. Student life was homey, cheerful, and absorbing. A student was a privileged individual in those days, treated with cordiality by the whole surrounding environment. Even the police showed great respect for him. If the years of the gymnasium were filled with a longing for the day when freedom from the hated school yoke would finally be attained, the feeling in the university was precisely the reverse. I anticipated the end of my magnificent student years with something like dread. Real life would then begin, difficult and colorless, with its sorrows, anxieties, and hardships.

I obtained my earliest notion of Social Democracy at this time, and witnessed with my own eyes a number of Social Democratic activists, thanks to my roommate and through his intercession.

During the spring, while I was still sick and abed at the home of my relatives, Yashka Kaplan used to visit me and we would chat. A casual reference was made to Social Democracy; and in connection with it Yashka mentioned the name of Karl Marx. I had not the slightest inkling yet about Marxism. But I had heard that one—

Marx by name—had written a book titled *Das Kapital* (*Capital*). My friend's remarks, accordingly, were somewhat difficult to comprehend. "What, pray tell, is the connection between Marx and Social Democracy?" I asked him, adding, "The socialists are opposed to capitalism while Marx, in fact, wrote a book about the development of capital. The two don't jibe somehow!" "No," replied Yashka, "that's not how it is. True, Marx did indeed write about capital. But he showed that evolution leads with historical necessity to the condition wherein capitalism, after reaching its highest stage, must of itself lead to its own opposite, to socialism. Socialism is its natural continuation, its consequence."

Yashka explained it to me in a few brief words. I grasped the sense and essence of it then and there, in a split second; and it was a tremendous revelation for me. I had previously looked upon socialists as a handful of dreamers, harboring fantastic plans and seeking, by artificial means, via bombs and assaults, to bring about some sort of overturn. Now I suddenly learned of the existence of a totally different type of socialism—no fantasy, no dream, but a necessary and meaningful outgrowth of the whole of human development. It changed my entire attitude; I quickly felt that it was something which had to be welcomed and acknowledged. In the autumn I commenced the study of political economy, another step. And then I encountered living Marxists.

My friend Yashka had established contact with the local activists. By the middle of the academic year he was already involved with their circles.¹ In the beginning, our apartment was used for party purposes. On one occasion I returned home and found a stranger in our room, a Jewish man of about thirty with a dark beard. He was seated at the table, head resting on his hands, asleep. Yashka arrived a bit later. The man awakened and they began to converse. There were allusions to unfamiliar names, including the name of some sort of

1. From the days of the Stankevich and Herzen circles in the 1830s, members of the intelligentsia and of various radical and socialist groups had recourse to this intimate form of organization because of the repressive Tsarist system. The transition from the conspiratorial circle to mass action came in the closing years of the century, with the spread of the Social Democratic movement in general and the Jewish Social Democratic movement—the Bund—in particular.

“Bund.”² Just what it was I did not know; nor did I know the identity of this individual. But I grasped that something was afoot which involved forbidden revolutionary matters. It was only years later, in Switzerland, that I came to know the man and to learn who and what he had been. He was Mark Vilter, an old Bund militant, who had earlier worked in the illegal printshop in Bobruisk where *Di Arbeter Shtime* (*The Workers' Voice*), the central organ of the Jewish Labor Bund at that time, was turned out. The sweeping arrest of the Bund leadership occurred during the summer of 1898. The members of the Central Committee and the printshop were seized. Mark Vilter eluded arrest. At the time I first saw him in Kiev he was living under a pseudonym in a small town not far from Kiev, where he directed the operation of an illegal printshop of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP).³ He would visit Kiev periodically and use our apartment as the place of rendezvous with a representative of the Kiev Committee.

This particular representative was also a frequent visitor to our modest quarters on Kreshchatik. He was destined to become famous in Russia many years later, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Many a street in Petrograd and in provincial districts bears his name. He was murdered a few years ago in Petrograd by an opponent of Bolshevism. This was Michael Uritsky.

A small individual—physically short, indeed tiny, with a trace of a mustache—Uritsky had a peculiar gait. He waddled from side to side, rolling from one foot to another. He spoke extraordinarily softly. He would sit down at the table with my friend and proceed to

2. The Bund (the Yiddish word for association or union) was the abbreviated name of the first mass Social Democratic party organized in Russia in 1897. At its Fourth Congress (May 1901), the Bund adopted its final name: The General Jewish Workers Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. The name persisted until the fall of Tsarism and the decomposition of the once unified empire.

3. The English form—Russian Social Democratic *Workers* Party—seems more appropriate than the frequently used Russian Social Democratic *Labor* Party. The latter suggests a broadly-inclusive, Anglo-American type movement of a reformist-socialist, trade union character. In contrast, and in the context of Tsarist Russia of the 1890s, Russian Social Democracy projected an underground revolutionary party of workers. The founders of the party took pains to emphasize precisely the word “workers” as the basis of the party and *the* bearers of the revolution.

speak in his near whisper. His words gushed forth in a torrent, without letup; it was just like a string of tiny round beads. Many things were beyond my comprehension at that time. Yet I recall how he used to speak about contemporary Marxist writers. So-called Legal Marxism had, a few years earlier, blossomed forth in Russia of all places. Prominent Social Democratic figures had rushed into print in the legal press and other literary media and mounted a struggle against the *narodniki*, the old-time socialist current of Russian "Populists" that still remained from the 70s. Adapting themselves to the conditions of censorship, the Legal Marxists were compelled "to speak with half a mouth." But the audience had learned well how to read between the lines, and their writings had tremendous success. The writers included George Plekhanov (under the assumed name of Beltov); Lenin (under the names of Tulin and Ilin); Julius Martov; and many others. I learned about them from Uritsky's conversations, and read many of their writings.

It was a time, as already noted, of intense ideological struggle between the Marxists and the Populists. The Populists did not believe that capitalism would be able to develop in Russia; they based everything upon the peasant. The Marxists, on the contrary, sought to prove that Russia would follow the same course as Western Europe, and that the bearer of the revolution was the working class.

Frequent discussions took place in Kiev, where both tendencies were strongly represented. Yashka once invited me to such a discussion. I don't know whether I understood much of it at the time. I recall how one man—a Marxist speaker—kept harping on a certain letter by Eduard Bernstein. I had not read the letter and did not know who this Bernstein fellow was. Then I recall how one particular Populist, with long unruly hair and a massive beard, became terribly agitated, shouting and demanding a reply to the question: "Is a village carpenter a proletarian or a nonproletarian?" I personally had previously harbored certain sympathies for the Populists. The whole of Russian literature on which I had been nurtured was permeated with sympathy toward, and interest in, the peasant above all; talk about the worker was rare. Populist sentiment, accordingly, had the character of a natural tradition. But the heavy blows of Marxist criticism gradually demolished that tradition.

As early as the summer, while I was still in Minsk, Yashka had

suggested that I become a dedicated activist and take a circle under my wing. The proposal struck me as rather quixotic. How could I? I had scarcely come into possession of a few words about socialism, and I should go to work already? Impossible! I still had numerous doubts. While still feeling my own way in the dark, and without the slightest preparation, was I, in such a condition, supposed to go out and teach others? No. I had too great a sense of responsibility and too much modesty for such a step. I emphatically refused.

Incidentally, with reference to my modesty I might observe that I was, indeed, truly a very shy youth, wholly wanting in self-confidence. I remember how my uncle in Kiev had once praised me in my presence, stating that I was a bright young man. It amazed me tremendously. What basis was there for calling me bright? And I didn't know whether to believe him.

Yashka had bought himself a civilian coat (all of us at the university had to dress in uniform) and a big black fur hat, and dashed off to the circles while I remained on the sidelines. I did, however, plunge wholeheartedly into the student movement.

The progressive student circles were focal points of a pronounced movement and turbulence in those days. True, the student felt free and very much at home in the surrounding urban atmosphere—a veritable darling of society. Yet, in the university proper, the air was fetid and stifling. The government had already pressed its heavy fist down upon the universities years before, nullifying academic self-government and adopting methods of all kinds for transforming students into obsequious pupils. It introduced a system of discipline, appointed inspectors and assistant inspectors, invoked ludicrous regulations, and safeguarded itself by means of spies. It was an echo of the general regime prevailing in the country, but in the universities they had to contend with intelligent, vibrant, libertarian, idealistically inclined youth, for whom protest was an imperative.

From time to time, in fact, there erupted so-called student disorders. Large meetings were organized; students walked out and demonstrated in the streets. Then the Cossacks arrived. Scores were arrested and many were expelled from the universities and deported from the large cities. Things would calm down for a while. But in just a few years the same story was repeated all over again.

During the year 1898, there was a sense of the arrival of a new

outbreak once more. The system of inspection had grown too overbearing. It was impossible to maintain calm any longer. Yet this was the thinking of only the small active groups; the large mass was still in a state of somnolence. What should be done? How shall the mass be aroused? How to proceed?

We used to show up at the university every day but rarely attend lectures. As a rule, we sat in the corridors chatting, whispering, drafting plans. Inspirations were often exceedingly naive and childish. Someone would propose that a large red flag be hung from a front window of the university; the police, unable to tolerate this, would arrive to establish order. But there existed an old tradition that forbade the police from transgressing, by their presence, the university's precincts. Thus, if they should in fact appear, it would give rise to great turbulence; the students would not be at a loss for an appropriate response. Such plans used to surface during our conversations, but they were largely in the nature of sport and no one actually took them seriously. The real impetus came from Saint Petersburg.

24.

We Strike!

ONCE A YEAR the universities of Russia customarily organized their own celebrations. Each city would set aside its own day for the event. In Saint Petersburg the observance fell on the eighth of February.

The University of Saint Petersburg arranged the usual pageant in 1899. It took the form of a large solemn gathering, an official convocation, with official visiting "dignitaries," official sermons, and so on. But after the convocation the students filed into the streets. It was in no sense an organized demonstration; the crowd merely left the building and poured into the streets in solid numbers. Yet this act itself—the movement in a compact mass—was a crime. Police and Cossacks swiftly appeared.

During those years students enjoyed an almost privileged status, and commanded a certain respect. In the event of a demonstration, police or Cossacks would of course be called out, the demonstrators would be surrounded, led off to jail, and finally released. Still, efforts were made to be courteous and to avoid inciting the throng. This time, however, it was different. The Cossacks set upon the crowd quite unexpectedly. Raising their terrible *nagaikas* above the heads of the festive youths, they commenced to beat them—fiercely, pitilessly—as only Russian Cossacks could.

A storm of indignation broke out in Saint Petersburg and spread with lightning swiftness across the whole of Russia. Delegates from the Saint Petersburg student body fanned out to the universities in the provincial cities in order to arouse a general protest movement. The provinces responded at full blast; our Kiev was the first.

The Student Central Council called a gigantic meeting in the largest auditorium of the university. The Saint Petersburg delegate, a tall, swarthy young man with a deep, pleasant, unruffled voice, delivered a report to us on the events in that city. He spoke calmly, deliberately, and to the point. Yet the whole assemblage throbbed with indignation. And with a great surge of enthusiasm the Kiev student body resolved: "We hereby launch a protest movement."

As already noted, student protests were nothing new in those years, but on this occasion they assumed an altogether novel form and character: it was decided to call a strike.

In later years the strike would become virtually routine. Indeed, as a form of political protest and political struggle it emerged as a daily phenomenon. Actually, although the strike was something quite new on this occasion, there had been previous discussions about strikes—about workers' strikes. Saint Petersburg had experienced such large-scale workers' strikes only a few years before. But those strikes were of a purely economic nature. A political strike was a generally unknown entity. It had been attempted only once, in a small, far-off country, in Belgium; and the number who knew or heard of it was small.

Thus we, the young students, were the ones who mounted the first political strike, in the year 1899. I don't know how we hit upon this particular idea: new and significant ideas invariably come to light suddenly, their origins unknown. It may have arrived at the time, ready-made, from Saint Petersburg. In any event the new step had been taken.

The large meeting had no sooner ended than we proceeded—the chairman leading the way—down the long corridors of the university, determined to translate our resolution into action. Lectures were still in progress in various halls. The announcement of the freshly adopted decision was made to the students; the professors, willingly or unwillingly, ceased lecturing. Things continued in this fashion day

after day, and not without occasional clashes thanks to the presence of a group of active strikebreakers. Highly repulsive characters, they voluntarily dubbed themselves Nationalists. Such people were unquestionably found at a later date in the ranks of the Black Hundreds, a movement which actually flourished so strongly in Kiev. I despised them wholeheartedly, and came to regard the very word "nationalist" with genuine horror. Those gentlemen were stubborn opponents of the strike. At one point they even barricaded themselves in a lecture hall and a clash almost followed. But their influence in general was slight; and they were looked upon as scoundrels.

The strike lasted for months. It was a vibrant, fascinating period. I found myself drawn into the very hub of the movement. I had gotten rid of my shyness by then. True, I still did not dare to step forward at large meetings, but I was no longer afraid to speak up in the *landsmanshaft*, where they elected me to the Central Council. I thus entered the circle of leaders.

The Council used to meet daily. Its sessions extended late into the night. We deliberated on the existing situation, and measures were adopted for maintaining the spirit of the crowd at the appropriately high level. We issued a daily hectographed bulletin which carried the latest reports on the course of our struggle. The whole of student Russia was on strike—approximately 30,000 persons.

From time to time we would reconvene the large meetings. Those were truly festive occasions. To comprehend the utter charm which a mass meeting held for us during that period, one would have to transport oneself back to the spirit of those years long gone. The very word *skhodka* (a meeting or assembly, frequently conspiratorial) carried magnetic power. There was something genuinely beautiful and engrossing about the whole experience. I can still remember the large lecture hall with its long benches arranged in semicircular rows—one row above another, all the way up to the balcony, like a giant amphitheater, and the place filled to capacity by a thousand strong, all youthful, vigorous young people, brimming with enthusiasm and completely serious. The seriousness of tone was characteristic of those assemblages; there was never any buffoonery, never any laughter. It was altogether inspiring, and made

the more memorable by a score of gifted and interesting speakers.

Many of the personalities still loom vividly before my eyes; many of the voices still resound in my ears. There was one, Nosalyevich, the best chairman we had. Pale, suffering from a lung affliction, he had a gentle, sickly, colorless voice; yet, that voice had about it a certain quality which actually enabled it to be heard in the farthest reaches of the hall, and which endowed it with the capacity to penetrate souls deeply and endearingly. A special magic lay in the movement of his hands. Nosalyevich was able to calm the whole audience with a solitary gesture. He held it spellbound, directing it as a conductor would an orchestra.

Then the speakers. Our most attractive speaker was a young student from Kherson, Vladimir Shab. Tall and slim, and attired in a bright blue shirt under a gray *tuzhurka* (an everyday coat), he appeared to me to be the authentic embodiment of oratorical talent. Shab had a marvelously attractive voice—deep, sonorous, fluid. His language was flawless and colorful, with a solemn power of inspiration. It was a controlled fire, devoid of shouting, of hysterics, but such that, even years later, I could feel the echo of that particular oratorical force reverberating in my heart. Shab might have become a really great orator. What happened to him I do not know.

Still on the scene in those days was the “Old Guard,” i.e., the older students in the fifth year of medicine who were treated with the greatest deference. One of their number served as chairman of our Minsk *landsmanshaft*—Yakov Frenkel. Hardly outstanding as a speaker, he was nevertheless a human being endowed with a crystal-pure soul, and compassionate beyond measure. We came to regard him as someone almost sacred. Another veteran did rank, in fact, among the finest speakers, not of the fiery, but of the sagacious kind. Small in person, with a strangely wrinkled face, he was all brain—a truly Jewish head. Whatever he said was unalloyed gold. His name was Ansheless. He is no longer alive. Many other engaging personalities made their appearance on the platform; I cannot enumerate them all. The Kiev student body was very high on self-esteem, and there was really something to be proud of.

Things proceeded in this fashion week after week. At first we were left undisturbed; our adversaries were satisfied merely to keep us under surveillance. We knew this, although it concerned us very little.

We used to arrive at the university daily in order to counteract any attempt to break the strike, with its consequent effect upon the crowd. But gradually the broad mass did begin to waver, while the *nachal'stvo* simultaneously hit upon an idea.

One morning we arrived at the university to find the gates locked: the university had been shut down. This was a severe blow—and a danger. The university was, after all, the only place where we could meet with the broad mass of students and keep it under our influence. True, we were linked to the chosen leadership through the network of *landsmanshaftn*, but they constituted only a minority. It was essential to remain in continuous contact with the general, unorganized student body. This opportunity was denied us by the closing of the university. Clearly, special means would have to be adopted to rekindle their rebellious sentiment. We resolved to take to the streets. We called upon the organized element to gather at the entrance to the university, to assemble there and not to disperse. Arresting us meant inciting the mass. We would then gauge our subsequent moves.

The decision was reached during the late hours of the night. We didn't manage to notify everyone. Only a few hundred persons showed up. But this was sufficient for the police. The military quickly appeared. Soldiers arrived at the spot in long columns. A command was heard. The columns split, elements moving to the right and to the left, forward and to the rear. Within a few minutes we were surrounded on all sides by flashing bayonets. Still, the military behaved quite decently and beat no one.

The ring was closed, and we were led off to prison. I was under arrest for the first time in my life.

We entered the prison. This was the special facility for particular categories of prisoners (the *arestantische rotes*) on Bibikovsky Boulevard, not far from the university. We passed through the prison gates with youthful pride and a certain feeling of satisfaction. Our hearts pounding, we scanned the thick walls, the bars, the new, strange surroundings. That particular prison had been completely empty at the time, and we settled down to a rather cozy existence. There was no question of a strict prison regimen. We carried on to our hearts' content: we sang, played, and spent the time in good-humored high spirits. So passed the first day.

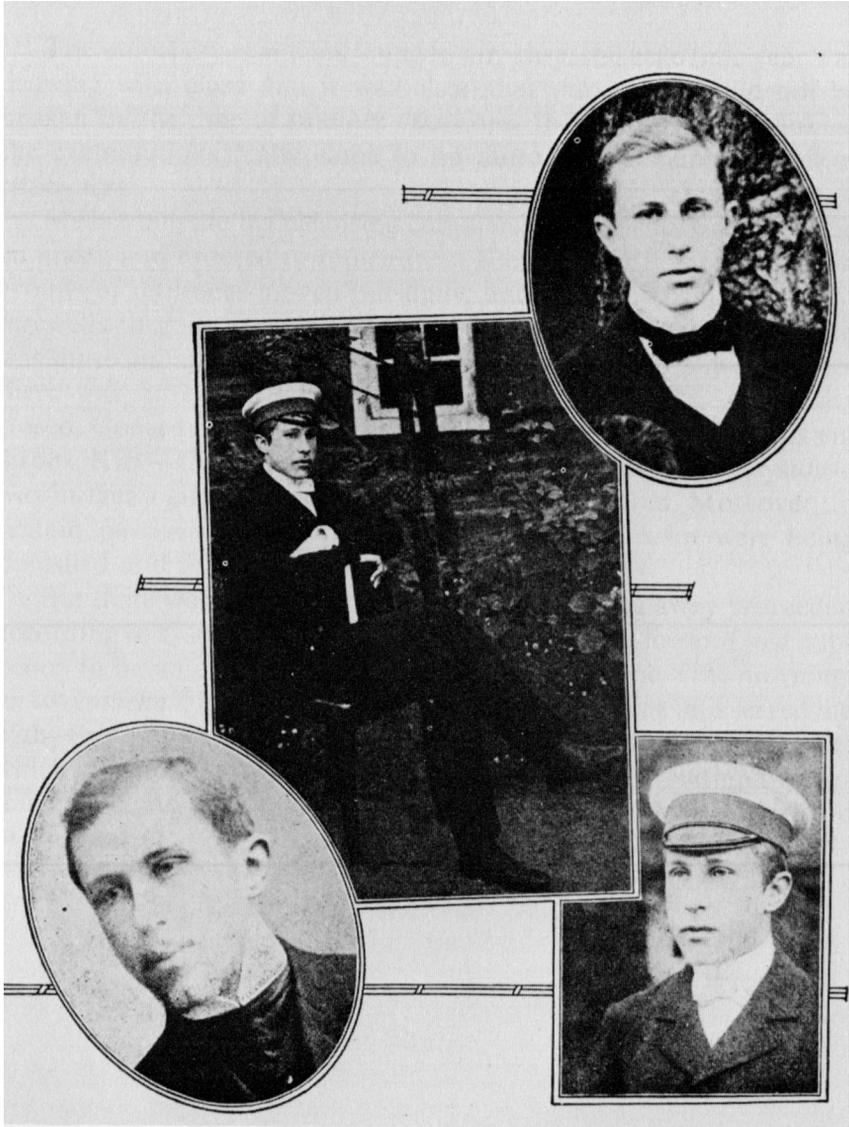
The next morning there began a tension-filled period of waiting.

We were certain that a fresh throng, learning of our arrest, would swiftly gather on the morrow for a new demonstration, and that they too would be arrested and brought to us. Our impatience grew with each passing hour. It became progressively quieter in our cells. As we sat and waited breathlessly, we cocked our ears for every sound that penetrated to us through the prison gates from the city beyond, from freedom.

Then suddenly we heard it: a bustling, a stir, keys clanging, voices shouting, footsteps resounding on the stone floor—and a new wave poured in upon us. Hundreds of fresh comrades. Naturally, everything grew livelier and still more joyful. And thus we served out the second day.

The visits of the “high muckamucks” began in the evening. General Novitsky, the famous Kiev gendarme, was first to arrive. An attractive man, with a head of gray hair and a dark mustache and—a big fool. He addressed the prisoners, delivering the kind of speech which elicited from us paroxysms of laughter. Among other things he advanced the view that the street demonstrations were greatly to be deplored because of the possibility that there might just happen to be sick and pregnant women on the street who might become frightened and suffer terrible aftereffects. Obviously such talk failed to move us and Novitsky was compelled to exit without having achieved any results. Then the governor of Kiev, Trepov, arrived. He delivered no sermons but merely asked to speak to a delegation from our group, with which he proceeded to haggle. He promised to free all of us without reprisals on condition that we promised to desist from further demonstrations. I don’t know what came over our delegation, but it made the promise. True, it was given with mental reservations and various quibbles; yet, in essence, it represented the required promise.

When we learned of it we grew exceedingly indignant. A big meeting was promptly called in the prison yard. The air was filled with arguments, charges, and countercharges. But the die had been cast: the reply had been given. Most of the crowd took the side of the delegation. We were compelled to leave the prison whether we wished to or not. We did so with considerable heartache.



Upper right: Medem at age 17; Center: as student at University of Kiev (1898); lower right: expelled student (1899); lower left: as émigré in Geneva

The university remained shut. In any case, the academic year was drawing to a close and it was clear that the strike would not be broken by the time of summer vacations. Indeed the number taking the examinations really came to no more than a mere handful of characters.

Meanwhile the big cleansing commenced. Students were expelled en masse and ordered to return from Kiev to their home cities. New groups of returnees moved out daily; and each day brought with it farewells to good friends and comrades. I was still untouched, and was quite unhappy about it because I had not a stitch of work to do; there was little with which to occupy oneself after the university closed. Consequently, we drifted aimlessly about the city and its environs. Kiev—the parks, the Dnieper, the surrounding countryside—was in fact a city of superb beauty. Still, I was bored. Moreover, to remain passive and immobile when all of one's own were being punished and sent away was highly unpleasant.

But there was no cause for concern. The sending away proceeded according to system: first the upper classes, then the lower. I just happened to be among the lowest. My turn finally came. One morning, an *okolotochnik* (police inspector) appeared before me and served me with the notorious *prokhodnoye svidetel'stvo* (transit certificate) which affirmed that I was obliged to depart from Kiev within twenty-four hours and return home to Minsk *pod nadzor* (under supervision of the police).

And I rode home.

25.

Back Home

DISMISSED FROM THE university and ordered back to my “place of domicile,” I thus became a resident of Minsk once again. I was no longer a schoolboy, a *gymnasist*; I was a student,¹ and, what’s more, an expelled student, a “sufferer.” This was an assured admission ticket to the company of intimates in the radical and socialist circles. And I drew close to them very quickly.

My friend Yashka, who could most readily have helped me gain entree there, was absent from Minsk. He had actually been sent out of Kiev a few days before me, and to Minsk, in fact. But Yashka was promptly arrested and was returned to Kiev—to prison. He remained there all summer. I had another comrade from Kiev, however. He too came from Minsk but graduated from the *realshule*² rather than the gymnasium. He studied at the politechnicum in Kiev; and he also belonged to our group there. We were drawn to each other and became fast friends. His name was Ilyusha (Ilya) Vilenkin. Through him, I also established a close friendship with someone else: with

1. The term “student” referred specifically to individuals enrolled in the universities.

2. The secondary school whose curriculum, stressing subjects other than the classics, did not prepare its graduates for matriculation in the traditional university.

Yitskhok Teumin. Teumin was not only substantially older than either of us, but he was far better read and had experienced much more. He had already been to America and to Switzerland, had seen the world, spent time in prison, and enjoyed a relationship to the movement.

At that particular time he happened to be taking no direct part in the movement. I believe Teumin was at odds with the organization on certain matters, a fact which drew him to us even more strongly, for we were not inside the movement either, but were still floating around the periphery. Hence the three of us floated around together.

I cannot recall why I, for one, had not yet wished to enter the organization at that juncture. Presumably I still did not feel sufficiently mature for it, and my conscience would not allow me to perform in a half-baked fashion. Yet the desire to do something was still present. A fantastic idea took shape among us: to publish a workers' paper, an illegal one, of course. It was a foolish notion. Of the three of us Teumin was the only one who could write. Ilyusha had never written anything; and the totality of my literary "productions" at that time consisted of a manifesto to the student body written in Kiev wherein I proposed some sort of plan for reorganizing the student organization. The manifesto had been considered by the Central Council and turned down. Nevertheless we resolved to issue the newspaper, and what's more, completely on our own, without the knowledge of the city organization. We embarked upon the planning stage. Now that the editorial staff was already "perfected," the sole difficulty centered on the question: "How shall the paper be printed?"

One morning Teumin said to me: "I've spoken to a certain worker I know; he will provide us with the necessary technical assistance. Let's go see him." So we set out.

It was the first time in my life that I visited a worker's apartment. My attitude toward the workers was a highly romantic one in those days. The concept "worker" was shrouded in my imagination with a kind of mystical veil. After all, the worker was the bearer of the revolution, he came from the class that must free the world; he was the oppressed, suffering, fighting hero; the "Prometheus in chains." I felt within me a singular kind of regard for this species of human be-

ing. Encountering a figure on the street with work-blackened hands, I would step aside and make way for him, in a childishly demonstrative gesture of respect. And now, for the first time, I was on the verge of meeting that enigmatic personage, indeed in his very home! How terribly interesting!

I pictured myself being conducted somewhere along a dark, run-down street into a grimy, unkempt building. Imagine my amazement—and even disappointment—when I entered a room that was not a whit more impoverished and in no way worse than the kind of student’s room in which I myself had lived in Kiev. It was light, clean, attractive, decently furnished, and not at all “proletarian,” but reminiscent rather of the intelligentsia. The occupant of the room, Grisha Shakhnovich, was in fact one of the more highly skilled craftsmen, a locksmith in a large factory. During our lengthy conversation it became evident that he was readying an apparatus for us on which to run off the paper. It was not intended to be a true printing facility; it was a hectograph. We warmed to the plan and requested Grisha to proceed with its execution. But the whole thing fizzled out; the paper never saw the light of day. It was just a youthful fantasy.

Simultaneously, we agreed to embark upon a thorough study of political economy, and to do so, indeed, as a trio. We procured books and decided to compose research papers. Teumin was supposed to write the first one, which he actually did. But with that our collective learning came to an end. Our plans had somehow gone awry. Still, each of us continued to study and read separately. As for myself, that was the summer I turned toward Marx and set about studying meticulously the first volume of *Capital*.

No single book, at least in those years, made such an incomparable impression upon me as *Capital*. I had already become familiar with the essence of Marxism. Now the whole structure stood revealed before me.

I use the term “structure” advisedly. For me it was a truly glorious and enchanting edifice, erected of pure steel. The iron force of the logic, the wonderful architecture, the rare harmony of ideas—all of these offered me not only tremendously rich food for thought, but genuine aesthetic satisfaction, the kind derived from a masterful work of human artistry. I was able, perhaps for the first time, to

grasp and evaluate the consummate beauty embodied in logical human thought. There was genuine satisfaction in following, step-by-step, the course of that brilliant system of thought; in observing how one brick was laid upon another, how one part grew from another and became integrated, in turn, into the rest; ideas, thoughts, spreading out and ascending ever higher, toward the ineluctable, solid conclusion. I know of only one work in the realm of world literature that can compare with *Capital* in this respect—the famous *Ethics* of the renowned philosopher Spinoza. As to content, the two have nothing whatever in common. Spinoza moves on the highest ethereal plane, while Marx has both feet planted on the sinful earth and derives his complete material from daily existence. But one encounters the same incomparable force and logic in both books, the same architecture of steel—and the same acute Jewish mind. Familiarizing myself with *Capital* was for me the supreme event of that summer. Henceforth I became a confirmed Marxist.

By a strange coincidence, another interest and sentiment of mine grew stronger just around that time: the nostalgia for Jewishness. Were I to be asked—indeed I have been asked—how I became a Jew once again, I would be compelled, unfortunately, to reply: “I simply do not know.” For it was no sudden transition, no leap, no conscious decision. It came of itself, gradually, by degrees, so that I myself scarcely noticed it. I can only identify the two terminal points: my childhood years, when I considered myself a Russian; and the later period, the time of adulthood, when I considered myself a Jew. Both points encompassed a whole series of years during which I changed slowly, imperceptibly.

Not long ago, Avrom Liessin recalled a conversation of ours in the year 1906, after this process of mine had long been completed. He put the same question to me at that time, i.e., How and why did I become a Jew? I replied: “I felt a longing to return home.”³

I can recall one episode associated with that longing. It occurred, believe, in 1899, the very year I returned from Kiev, or perhaps

3. There is a particular poignance in this phrase. J. S. Hertz, historian of the Bund, told the translator of these memoirs that Medem's dying words, in Russian, were: *ya khachu domoy* (“I want to go home”).

slightly earlier. The precise time is not important. In the Kiev student environment, differences between Christian and Jew were nonexistent. The Jewish question, as such, had not even arisen within the radical circles to which I belonged. It's true that a certain student used to come to me—actually not to me but to my neighbor—and indulge in some kind of babble about Theodor Herzl's *Jewish State*, which had appeared not long before. The young man was quite a bore, however; and his words made not the slightest impression upon us. A purely internationalist spirit, perhaps even a cosmopolitan spirit, prevailed in the *landsmanshaft*. Our ranks numbered both Jews (the majority) and gentiles—Russians and Poles. And there was no feeling of difference.

But there did exist within the Kiev student body a special Jewish institution, the Jewish students' dining facility. I cannot exactly characterize the nature of that facility. I may have been there only once, and possibly not at all; I can no longer remember. Yet I know that that particular dining center, like student dining places in general, was not simply a place to eat, but also a kind of spiritual gathering point. Jewish students would come together there and engage in agitation during the time of the student disorders. To some degree it functioned as the place where public opinion was shaped. It served as a substitute for a club.

I had heard about all this while I was still in Kiev. But as far as I can recall, it made very little impact upon me then. However, a bit later, after arriving back in Minsk, I reflected upon that specific matter with a kind of deeply felt regret. The feeling was almost one of envy. I thought: here were my Jewish comrades who had an association of their own aside from the general student one, while I had none. It was as if I were standing before a closed door behind which all was congenial and warm. I suddenly felt homeless . . . and was seized by the craving for a home. And that home—that home was Jewish life.

The sensation of envy signified that I was still outside the fold; it was an indication that I had as yet no feeling of being a Jew. Yet it expressed simultaneously an awakening desire to become one with those to whom I felt myself drawn. This is all I can remember of that moment. But something else had occurred around that time: I

developed an urge to study Hebrew. This particular notion was not, as one might think, an echo of that "longing to go home," to which I have alluded above. It was of an altogether different order.

The interest I developed in the Hebrew language was not national in character but aesthetic: I had a desire to read the Bible in the original. The Bible was for me, however, not a special Jewish book. I have indicated elsewhere that it had been a part of Christian religious instruction in the gymnasium and that my affection for it could be traced to the religious years of childhood. Religious feelings had long since departed, but the interest and love for the old Book remained. The thought suddenly struck me: How nice the biblical words must sound in their own language! Why this thought should have entered my head just at that time I cannot say; but that's what happened. I recalled the old Constantinople edition of the Bible from which my father had read me chapters of Isaiah. The Bible had begun to assert a tug; hence my decision to undertake the study.

There was no need to look for a teacher. I already had one at hand, the older of the two Jewish lads (Mitshe and Avrom-Itshe), the sons of the neighboring shopkeeper and my good friends. I said to the boy: "I'll teach you Russian and reckoning; would you do me a favor therefore and teach me Hebrew?" He agreed, feeling a pride in his mission. The instruction commenced.

I started out, as a matter of fact, with that old copy of the Bible; and we proceeded to read from Genesis. Mitshe showed me the letters and taught me the pronunciation. It was not necessary for him to translate it for me because the book itself contained a French translation. The study site was reminiscent of the ancient Greek philosophers, in the open air; indeed, in our courtyard. Thus we read a few chapters, but not without great effort and pain. Such study, however, was rather too elementary for me. I wished to learn in a more systematic fashion, and I asked Mitshe about the acquisition of a book on grammar. He undertook to enlighten me about grammar, although, to tell the truth, I strongly suspected that Mitshe himself had less than adequate knowledge of the nature of grammar. In any event he was unable to explain it to me, which strongly undermined his reputation as a Hebraist in my eyes. Our studying, consequently, began to drag and soon came to an end. So I actually ended up learn-

ing no Hebrew. Yet there was a residual effect, a very important one, whose full scope I was able to estimate only later. For I had, withal, become familiar with the alphabet, thereby obtaining the key to the Yiddish language. Despite my very poor reading ability at the time, I had taken the first step.

I thus proceeded in various ways and for various reasons to draw closer to Jewishness. I should add that my friendship environment in Minsk was then almost exclusively Jewish; and Teumin, with whom I spent a considerable amount of time, was someone with pronounced national feelings. He came from a traditional Jewish family and was very familiar with Jewish life. I suspect that my friendship with him also had a certain influence upon me: Teumin loved Jewish life, and love has contagious powers.

Aside from the foregoing, an additional major influence should be noted: the direct influence of the Jewish workers' movement, to which I soon adhered. But that came somewhat later.

26.

Yom Kippur

I ANTICIPATED ARREST throughout the summer. Arrests of the leaders of the student organization had already begun in the spring. I knew I was also on the list, but I had no idea why I, for one, should be left unharmed during the whole summer. It was not until autumn that I was apprehended and taken to prison in Kiev.

The moment happened to coincide with Yom Kippur, and Teumin and I attended the synagogue together. I remember that particular evening very well. I had earlier been sauntering aimlessly about the streets. Minsk was a Jewish city. The shops were closed. The streets were empty, dead; a passerby was a rarity. But one figure did become etched in my memory, a strange-looking officer of the so-called Grodno Hussars, a cavalry regiment of the Russian guards stationed in Warsaw. He was attired in a quaint uniform I had never seen before: a bright-green coat, raspberry-red trousers with silver stripes, and a lengthy sword which dragged along the pavement. He walked down the empty streets, his figure serving only to accentuate the city's extraordinary holiday appearance. One could sense, amid the gray dusk and the overpowering silence, that this was not a day like any other.

Then I met Teumin and we set out for the synagogue square. I had already been to a Jewish house of worship in Kiev on several occasions; but that was the large, new-style synagogue, with

“European” trappings, a choir, and wealthy Jews in top hats. Now, for the first time, I entered a genuine old-fashioned synagogue.

At first we visited the large synagogue. I was instantly overcome by a new and unfamiliar atmosphere, with all its distinctiveness and its enormous power of enchantment. The synagogue differed markedly from a Russian church, whose large, immobile, solemn audience was accustomed to stand silently; where all the reciting and singing were done exclusively by priest and choir on behalf of the congregation, and performed in harmoniously disciplined, measured tones. But here I entered upon a boiling, seething sea. Hundreds upon hundreds of worshippers were engaged in prayer, each individual imploring his God forcefully, loudly, with passionate urgency. Hundreds of voices soared heavenward, separately, each for itself, without coordination and without harmony. Yet all of them flowed together into a single gigantic, surging current. Weird as it may have sounded to “European” ears, it was nevertheless tremendously impressive. There was an extraordinary enchantment about the whole thing—the rapture that is always inherent in a great mass soul aflame.

Then we went on to another, smaller, house of worship. Indeed I believe it was a *hasidic shtibl*.¹ There, too, I found myself engulfed in the seething current of hundreds of voices. But one voice—the voice of an old gray cantor—lifted itself high and piercingly above the loud rumbling of the mass. It was neither singing nor speaking; it was weeping, a genuine weeping which gave expression to the burning tears of an anguished heart. The cantor’s supplication was completely devoid of solemnity; it had none of the rigorous harmony characteristic of Christian prayer. It was rather a truly oriental plaint welling up from a tormented heart, the cry of an ancient transgressor, weeping and wailing lamentations to his old venerable God. A great beauty reposed in all of it.

I went home. The gendarmes arrived during the night and I was

1. The place of worship of the Hasidim, members of a sect of Jewish religious enthusiasts established in eighteenth-century Poland, and characterized by mysticism, evangelical pietism, and a renunciation of formalism in Jewish religious life. Its appeal was largely antiintellectual, and initially directed at the uninformed workers.

taken to prison. While seated in my cell, at the very break of dawn, I again heard the identical strains of wailing Jewish voices: the Jewish prisoners had gathered in one cell and were praying. Then, in short order, I was called out and sent off to Kiev in the company of two gendarmes and placed in the Lukianov prison.

There is not much to tell about my first imprisonment. The political section was filled with student youth and we were treated unusually well. To be sure, we were assigned to separate cells, but the cells were open nearly all day long and it was possible to visit freely. The occupants of the whole cell block would take their constitucionals at the same time. We played and sang together. The authorities treated us with courtesy and civility. My brief stay in prison was a real pleasure. I remained there no more than two weeks, and then I returned to Minsk to await the verdict.

Gershuni and His Circle

OUR CITY HAD ALWAYS been rich in absorbing personalities. The most interesting individual at that time, in point of fact, its central figure, was Gregory Gershuni.

Gershuni, as previously noted, arrived in our city at the beginning of 1898. He had been a student at the University of Kiev a few years before (this was prior to my time there), and completed the pharmacist program.

In Minsk, Gershuni opened a chemical and bacteriological laboratory for conducting various medical analyses. He became acquainted in short order with the whole of the liberal and radical intelligentsia, and was received everywhere as a most welcome guest. His ability to establish friendships among a broad variety of individuals was quite extraordinary. It was the kind of talent that distinguishes the born community leader. Whomever he encountered, without exception, felt congenial and well-disposed toward him. Gershuni knew how to speak to people and about what.

He was still a young man, about twenty-five years of age, but he appeared older because of his pronounced baldness. Of moderate height, solidly and broadly built, Gershuni had a small, pointed, darkish-blond beard, and sharp, alert blue eyes. Ever ready with a quip, animated, jovial, wise and tactful, he was possessed of boundless energy and unusual practical skill, and he had a great

capacity for influencing others. His home served as a real focal point, forever bustling and alive with people, especially with our youthful student company.

Immediately upon his arrival Gershuni became a maker and shaker in the communal life of Minsk.

The party of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), in which he subsequently played the role of practical leader, was still in its organizational stage. I had the impression that Gershuni was not yet a party man during 1898 and 1899.¹ He devoted himself extensively at that time, and even a year later, to so-called "legal activity," and in connection with the latter he emerged as a truly central figure. Wherever work of any kind was in progress for the benefit of society—there one could find Gershuni. When, for instance, a newly formed group of culture disseminators nursed an idea about an improved Jewish school, naturally, via the Russian language, as was then customary, Gershuni was numbered among them. Evening courses for adults were established, I believe, under the auspices of the medical society, and featured lectures on natural science. Gershuni initiated the courses and directed the whole activity; indeed it was he who delivered the first lecture. I can still recall the subject: air. When it came to organizing an evening celebration of the Hanukkah festival for Jewish children, it fell to Gershuni to arrange the affair. Gershuni was always present at the weekly meetings of the literary society in Minsk, where lectures on literary subjects were followed by discussions. It should be noted, incidentally, that this particular society was one of our city's most attractive features. The very cream of the local intelligentsia was drawn to it—gentiles and Jews alike. The high-level discussions, and the conversations which fol-

1. The party was formally established in late 1901. While the Marxists, whose views were enunciated with polemical pungency by George Plekhanov, saw in the flowering of industrialism and a capitalist economy the precondition for the emergence of a large, concentrated, potentially revolutionary proletariat, the SRs simply condemned industrial capitalism for its manifest, unmitigated evils. Despite a growing concern with the problems of the exploited factory proletariat, the SRs rejected Marxist determinism and placed their faith in the peasantry as the guarantors of a future socialism.

lowed during intermissions, transformed the society into a genuine spiritual center of the cultural life of Minsk.

In the history of this society, Gershuni's name is associated with a certain incident concerning which his behavior was very much in character. Participants in the literary society included both the Russian and the Jewish intelligentsia—only the Poles were not represented. The Russian intelligentsia was comprised almost exclusively of officials—mostly liberal, even radical, individuals. But several persons of a wholly different stripe turned up; and the odor of anti-Semitism began increasingly to assail the nostrils. There were a few instances when membership in the society was denied to an individual because he was a Jew. All of us grew highly indignant over this, and Gershuni decided to seize upon the first opportunity to raise the question. The moment happened to coincide with the death of the renowned Russian poet and philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev. The society dedicated a special evening to his memory. When the speakers were finished, Gershuni took the floor. "No mention has been made here," he said, "of a strange quality possessed by the deceased writer. He was an odd individual indeed; he loved the Jews. As is known, there are 'smart' people who just happen to dislike the Jews; as is known, smart people don't even wish to admit Jews to membership in a literary society. But he, on the other hand, had a different attitude toward them." And more in the same vein. It was a rather cautious speech, somewhat too cautious in fact. I later said to Gershuni that he had left the subject dangling in midair. To which he replied that it had seemed to him in the course of his remarks as though I were winking to him to stop. He was mistaken; I had given no such signal. Yet even the cautious words had a telling effect: the few anti-Semites present sat there literally gnashing their teeth. A big blowup was narrowly averted.

Apropos the subject of Jews, I recall a quip by Gershuni during one of my visits to his house. (I used to go there almost daily.) We were standing at a window when suddenly there appeared on the street an old Jew, his hair a mass of ancient gray, his clothes disheveled, his body pathetically stooped. He was moving along, yoked to some sort of wagon and dragging it in place of a horse. Gershuni

gazed at the Jew and, smiling sadly, observed: "There goes a representative of the 'Nation of Exploiters'."

I don't know whether Gershuni's legal activity represented an end in itself, or whether it was a means of establishing ever broader connections and of enhancing his opportunity for revolutionary work. During his final year in Minsk it had become apparent that he was involved in some kind of underground activity. As a matter of fact, he had never confined himself to the strictly narrow legal channels even before. Gershuni used to help the local movement, the "Red Cross" (this was the rubric under which aid was extended to political prisoners), or the student enterprises whenever and in whatever way he could. In the course of the year 1900, however, one clearly sensed that his activity had come to center about a new party.

This was the period when a whole array of interesting personalities had begun to forgather at Gershuni's house. Preeminent among them was "Babushka" Breshkovskaya.

Gershuni's older brother, Victor, a physician who likewise settled in Minsk at that time and also became one of our close friends, said to me one morning: "You are going to become acquainted shortly with a truly rare individual: an old woman revolutionist of the 70s who experienced *katorga*, returned from Siberia, and is now here. She's the type of person one encounters perhaps once in a hundred years."

He was speaking of Catherine Constantinovna Breshkovskaya, the famous "Babushka," or, as she was subsequently called, "The Grandmother of the Russian Revolution."

I actually met her at Gregory Gershuni's a few days later; and thereafter I encountered her at his home week after week. A handful of select members of the radical intelligentsia would come together there on a specific evening each week for a glass of tea and discussions of the major questions of society and of the revolutionary movement. "Babushka" was invariably present.

A remarkable, a singular woman! We were already familiar with her life story in broad outline. We knew of her place among the earliest pioneers of the socialist movement. The time was the beginning of the 70s, at the inception of the memorable movement, "To

the People.” Scores of young Russian *intelligenti* had surged out to the villages to spread socialist ideas among the peasants. This was the birth of the movement of the so-called *narodniki*, the Populists. And Breshkovskaya was one of the first. Then came her arrest, long years of imprisonment, the famous trial of the 193, the harsh verdict, additional long years of *katorga*, and Siberian exile. By the time she finally returned to European Russia after several decades had gone by, she was already an old woman, a “grandmother”—a tall, attractive figure with a gentle, intelligent face, and white hair. But Breshkovskaya had a soul that was uncommonly youthful, fresh, and vibrant. Despite her fifty-odd years, she was “younger” than all of us in those days. Peppery, given to high jinks, surrounded by a score of girls, she was the actual radiant center of the whole company. When looking at her it was difficult to conceive that this was the same individual who had been subjected to so much and who had suffered so greatly. Yet she revealed not the slightest evidence of a broken spirit, of weariness, of demoralization. On the contrary, one had the feeling of being in the presence of a strong, healthy soul; of an individual from a glorious generation. Here was one of those true greats whose names become part of history, never to be forgotten. She exuded that human warmth and simplicity that characterized the finest prototypes of the Russian intelligentsia. Wholly devoid of affectation, Breshkovskaya was the essence of simplicity and comradeship. I recall how a group of us numbering a few dozen, young and old, once spent a New Year’s Eve together. The gathering took place in the home of the elder Gershuni. There was food and drink, conversation and song. My friend Teumin, who was inclined to fall into a state of *hasidic* exaltation after a few glasses of whisky, suddenly rushed up to “Babushka” and invited her to dance. The old gray-haired woman, her face breaking into a benign smile, rose and proceeded to dance. She danced with such verve that the young women present looked on shamefaced, and felt old and tired in contrast to the white topped *katorzhanka*.²

Breshkovskaya participated regularly in the political conversations that filled the evenings at Gershuni’s. The place attracted a

2. The woman sentenced to *katorga*; a man is called *katorzhnik*.

variety of individuals: persons of the old school and the new; old-time *narodniki*, young Marxists, and also a segment of youth which had been drawn to the Socialist Revolutionaries. We would listen to her words with the greatest respect, yet we could not help but feel that here was someone of an altogether different generation. She was unable to understand us; she was still permeated with the ideas of an earlier time, the period when the socialist movement had deified the Russian peasant, regarding him as the expression of the authentic "people" and the carrier of socialism. We had already arrived at a different conception of socialism. Our attention was directed toward the urban worker, and we based our complete hope on the proletarian movement. All of this was strange and incomprehensible to "Babushka"; she found it utterly impossible to adapt herself to Marxist thought. I recall a highly characteristic reproach that she leveled against us. "If you think so highly of the city worker," she once said to us, "why do you persist in attending the universities? Why do you remain students? Why don't you become workers yourselves? Go into the factories; wield a hammer; become part of that class you elevate to the very heavens. If you don't, then your devotion to the working class is not sincere, not consistent."

The reproach seemed rather odd. To our ears it sounded like a voice from a totally different world. The ideas in question struck us as thoroughly outlandish and antiquated. We spoke an altogether different language, and we were unable to find any common ground. Yet this fact did not prevent us from rendering supreme homage—homage that was nobly merited—to a great revolutionist.

It is worth recalling that the same Breshkovskaya became one of the most prominent and active figures a few years later in the ranks of the Socialist Revolutionaries. She was subsequently arrested again and exiled to one of the most remote corners of Siberia. She returned only after the March Revolution of 1917. Quite recently, she celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of her revolutionary activity. With the coming of the Bolshevik Revolution, Breshkovskaya could find no place for herself in Russia. The current pulled her way over toward the right, and her revolutionary role was spent. Nevertheless, as a human personality she deserves to be numbered among the most beautiful that ever graced the history of Russia.

The Gershuni circle included another interesting figure, Kovalik. An older individual and also a former *katorzhnik*, he, like Breshkovskaya, had belonged to the Populist movement and had played a leading role in it. I believe that Kovalik was even older than Breshkovskaya, for at the time he entered the movement a few decades earlier, he was already a person, as the saying goes, with some status in society; he held the office of *mirovoy sud'ya* (justice of the peace). Along with Breshkovskaya, Kovalik had been arrested, convicted, condemned to *katorga*, and exiled to Siberia. He eventually returned and settled in our city. Strong and solidly built, with a prominent head and broad forehead, a round beard, and clear, tranquil, sapient eyes, he was the personification of wisdom. If Breshkovskaya epitomized a great soul force, Kovalik represented the man of intellect. And I must confess that in my lifetime I have met a sizable number of individuals endowed with wisdom, but rarely anyone who might compare with Kovalik. To be sure, he was not "one of us" either, and our opinions quite frequently differed from his, yet withal he was an extraordinarily sagacious human being.

Kovalik was of the silent breed; he rarely spoke up. While excitement, animation, discussion, and controversy swirled all around him, this big, solidly built man, an eternal pipe in his mouth, used to sit silently, unruffled. Only occasionally would he open his mouth and utter a few words in the course of an evening. But those few gently modulated words carried a greater impact than an hour-long dissertation by the most prominent hothead. They were the equivalent of the sudden switching on of an electric light. The question around which the whole argument had been raging was suddenly illuminated in an unusual and unanticipated way, and the whole discussion took a new turn. All the previous talk appeared somehow superfluous and irrelevant. It was truly amazing.

A certain Bonch-Osmolovsky would also show up at Gershuni's place, albeit less frequently. This elderly man who prominently sported a long beard, was an aristocrat of our *guberniya*, a follower of Tolstoy who actually looked like Tolstoy. It was said of Osmolovsky that he had attempted to introduce a way of life in his village based upon Tolstoy's principles. The steward on his estate—a man called Solomonov—used to put in an appearance as well. He

was a small, bearded fellow with a large crop of unruly black hair. Also a one-time revolutionary activist, Solomonov had become so accustomed to conspiracy that during his trips from Osmolovsky's village to the city, which took a few hours by train, he would leap from the car before the train came to a halt in order to avoid passing through the station. The weekly get-togethers attracted a number of other persons who were older; and us—the younger generation.

The gatherings had no resemblance to real meetings with a chairman and formal procedures for speaking, etc. They were simply visits to Gershuni, evenings spent in tea drinking and conversation that turned largely upon questions of a social and political character. One of the most current topics was: "What, precisely, is the intelligentsia? and what is its significance?" Another topic dealt with the social forces and political currents in Russia. Yet another—and one which had particular timeliness and significance—involved the subject of terror.

This topic acquired its actual timeliness and importance owing to the person of Gershuni himself. As is known, it was Gershuni who became the founder and leader of the terrorist organization of the Socialist Revolutionaries a short time later. While in Minsk, even at that early date, he was already apparently toying with the idea and wished to recruit supporters. Thus, he used to raise the question and we would engage him in discussion. The older people were in agreement with him; he had a few supporters also among the youth. But us Marxists he could not convince. I must point out that Gershuni's basic strength lay not in his capacity for advancing intellectual hypotheses, but in his incomparable practical talents. He was no thinker but a doer. Although Gershuni was a very bright individual, his intellectual prowess appeared the more noteworthy for its practical component rather than for any broad political outlook.

I can no longer recall how, during those days in Minsk, he used to justify recourse to terror. But I do remember a conversation with him a few years later, when he already occupied the top position in the Battle Organization.³ His argument ran as follows: "You repudiate

3. The *Boyevaya Organizatsiya*, or Battle Organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, was established in 1901. Aside from Gershuni, its most prominent leaders were the notorious double-agent Yevno Azev and Boris Savinkov.

terror because it involves assaults by small groups on individual persons—ministers, generals, and the like. You wish the struggle to be conducted by the mass itself. But this is not always possible. So you call the workers into the streets to mount demonstrations; but they are dispersed—by *nagaikas* today, by swords tomorrow, by bullets the following day. The mass will accordingly find itself either unable or unwilling to demonstrate. What happens then? Is nothing to be done? I say there is no other alternative but to kill the individual minions of the existing regime.”

This was Gershuni’s reasoning. I found his points quite interesting. At that very time, Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats were embroiled in a great controversy, the controversy between supporters of terror and its opponents. The opponents contended that terror led to abstention from mass struggle and a concomitant deadening of the mass movement; the supporters, however, denied this completely, affirming rather that they desired terror not *in place of* mass struggle but *together with* mass struggle. My conversation with Gershuni only made it clear to me once again that terror was indeed conducted *in place of* the mass movement, and for me this alone was sufficient to condemn it.

Gershuni remained in Minsk until 1901. He had been arrested suddenly during the early summer of 1900. During the period in question, Minsk and the Bund *rayon* (area of operations) generally, fell within the jurisdiction of Sergei Zubatov,⁴ the notorious functionary of the Moscow secret political police—the *Okhrana*. One of his agents, a young gendarme named Gerardi, was really shaking things up in Minsk at that time. He would seize people right and left,

4. From revolutionary activist in the 'eighties in Moscow, Zubatov turned on his former comrades and, in short order, worked his way up to chief of the Moscow Secret Police Department. Convinced that he had the solution to the radicalization of the workers and the threat from the authentic revolutionary movement, he inspired and actively promoted (in 1902) the idea of “police socialism” (the “Zubatovshchina”). Its aim: to divert the workers from revolutionary activity of a political nature by organizing them into “domesticated,” government-controlled labor groups focusing exclusively on limited economic issues. Zubatov’s effort boomeranged; he resigned in 1903 and was exiled to Vladimir. He reestablished ties with the Police Department in 1905. At the time of the February Revolution in 1917, Zubatov committed suicide.

day and night. And one morning he arrested Gershuni who, from the standpoint of the police, was surely fair game for arrest. Had he not, after all, been tied up in the life of the revolutionary circles? worked in the "Red Cross"? participated in the spiriting abroad of political escapees? (How many of those people had I myself seen in his house!) And much more. But Gershuni was an adroit individual; and the police lacked proof. I later learned that he actually had a certain piece of paper concealed at home which was not supposed to fall into the hands of the gendarmes. They failed to find it however; it had been wedged, if I'm not mistaken, into his microscope. And despite the presence of the gendarmes, Gershuni managed to indicate to his brother where the paper was located and what should be done with it.

Nevertheless he was arrested and sent to Moscow. Zubatov kept him there for two weeks and let him go. Gershuni returned to Minsk. His moment of decision was reached at the beginning of the following year: he sold his laboratory and disappeared. His close friends knew that he had left to devote himself completely to illegal activity. I later met Gershuni on two occasions, in Switzerland.⁵

5. Gershuni's selfless career as a revolutionary made him a legend in his own brief lifetime. (He died in 1908, at the age of 38.) Among the most memorable episodes was Gershuni's escape on October 27, 1906 from a hard-labor prison in Eastern Siberia. By meticulous planning, his prison comrades had him concealed in a barrel of cabbages, which was duly carried by them, under watch of eight soldiers, into the basement of a building outside the prison. Close to suffocation, Gershuni finally succeeded in leaving the barrel and escaping through a prepared tunnel. He reached the Pacific coast and crossed to San Francisco by way of Japan. Gershuni received a tumultuous reception on the East Coast, where he gathered substantial sums for the revolutionary cause before making his way back to Europe and his comrades in the Russian movement. See Victor Chernov (ed.), *Grigori Gershuni, zayn lebn un virkn* (Yiddish) (*Gregory Gershuni, His Life and Influence*) (New York, 1934: Gregory Gershuni Socialist Revolutionary Branch 247, Workmen's Circle).

I Begin My Activity

THIS MUCH WAS self-evident: we three young, expelled students—Yashka Kaplan, Ilyushka Vilenkin, and I—would be entering the movement sooner or later. We had already savored the taste of social activism, and manifestly our place was in the local movement in Minsk. True, certain doubts persisted. I was still not completely clear as to whether the Russian working class was capable as yet of receiving socialist teachings. But I was sufficiently familiar with the movement by then to be definite about the following: with respect to the *Jewish* component of the movement, I knew that it represented a *fait accompli*. There could be no two opinions as to the survival of the *Jewish* workers' movement. And I was already prepared to take my place in it during the winter of 1899–1900.

Discussions were opened between us and the leaders of the local Bund organization, who, if I recall correctly, advanced a proposal that we assume direction of a few circles of retail employees. But we came forward instead with a wild notion, owing to which the matter of our entry dragged on for several months, that represented nothing less than a desire to become full generals from the very outset. Specifically, we requested, of all things, swift admission into the Committee—the highest body of the local movement.

This idea originated, I believe, with Yashka. There may have been some basis for the proposal where he personally was concerned.

After all, Kaplan had already been a party activist in Kiev; he had put in some "service time" and could lay claim to a higher *chin* (rank). But we—the two other callow students—were merely trailing along after him. All of us agreed to stick together and decided to come into the movement only as a threesome enjoying nothing short of equal status. I hit upon a complete theory at the time to justify our stubbornness. This was my reasoning: At issue was the matter of participation in a workers' movement. A worker joined such a movement in order to defend his interests. His place in it was wholly natural, even if he could not serve as a leader but had to settle for being an ordinary "soldier." But with us, the *intelligenti*, it was something else again. We entered the movement not for our own sakes, but in order to be the leaders and guides. If we were not suitable as leaders, it followed that there was nothing for us to do in the organization. On the other hand, if it was considered necessary to bring us in, then it meant we were suitable for playing the roles of leaders; hence we ought to be on the Committee.

Here was a clear case of a boyish sophist argument. Indeed, this naive exercise in casuistry offered the best evidence of how green we were and how wanting in the maturity needed to occupy a real leadership position. The organization's responsible figures appreciated this fully and rejected our request. So we continued to remain on the sidelines.

The three of us were at loose ends, with absolutely nothing to do for another few months. Then a new project emerged in the form of a proposal that I should embark upon activity among the Christian workers of whom Minsk contained a sizable number. The city had large railroad workshops, two immense metallurgical plants, and a number of small workshops that employed Russian and Polish workers and ordinary Christians of nondescript nationality who, in our district, were wont to describe themselves by the well-known expression, locals. No organized movement existed among them. This condition tended to have a deleterious effect also upon the Jewish movement. Because of the absence of a Russian or Polish organization, the Bund constantly nursed the idea during those days of creating a movement of some sort among the Christians. This was the situation not only in Minsk, but throughout Lithuania and White

Russia; and not only at that juncture, but for years thereafter. The agonizing question: "Concerning Activity Among the Christian Workers," never disappeared from the agenda.

As a *goy* I was naturally the most suitable candidate for this assignment, and I set to work. There was no need for me to go far afield in search of contacts. In previous years, unsuccessful attempts had been made to conduct activity among the Christians, but ties with a few individuals still existed and I was put in touch with them. A meeting was arranged.

The designated evening arrived and I set forth with pounding heart. Once again I carried with me the same romantic conception as in the past—that I would come face-to-face with none other than lofty, virile, genuinely "proletarian" figures; horny-handed and grimy-faced, coming directly from work in soiled workingmen's blouses. And once again I was destined for disappointment. The individuals in question were, as a matter of fact, attired in their Sunday best. Their hands were clean, indeed they wore white collars and cuffs instead of blouses. Alas, the only one without a collar and sporting a "proletarian" Russian shirt was me.

I cannot remember what we discussed during this particular get-together. Of my initial encounters with the Christian workers, my memory retains only isolated and insignificant scraps; and even these bits and pieces remain cloaked in a thick haze.

I recall an engagement with one of my new acquaintances, a vigorous, heavy-set metal worker. On one occasion I visited him at his home; on another I met him at the Catholic cemetery. Here was an already class-conscious worker, and my task was to invoke his aid in the recruitment of new people. I remember the unpleasant impression made upon me when he suddenly began to converse about a bicycle of some kind that he intended to purchase. How could a conscious worker toy with such outlandish ideas? I thought. Then he took me to meet someone who was not a worker at all but a "munitions supervisor" in a military establishment. From the supervisor I was passed along to a certain aged gentile who held a position of subaltern in a courtroom or in some other government institution. Next I ended up in the company of a Pole who proceeded to dilate upon the Polish uprisings and the Polish kings.

All of this left me in a state of great confusion. I had pictured the thing in much simpler terms: I would come to the workers, speak with them about exploitation, establish a link, and the operation would be on its way. But it was hardly that simple, and the operation failed to come off.

I also made several visits to the home of a railroad worker. His place was located quite some distance away, beyond the Brest station, on the city's outskirts. I can't remember whether it was autumn or spring, but the weather was plenty cold, and the matter of clothing presented a considerable problem. It was necessary, after all, to adhere to the canons of conspiracy; the workers dared not know my identity and I was therefore unable to approach them in student attire. Well, I did own a short *pidzhak* (civilian jacket) and a hat. But what was I to do about the overcoat? Borrow from someone? At home the question about the masquerade would surely come up. Not even at home did anyone dare to know of my involvement with "such things."

The elder Gershuni, the physician, came to my assistance. I arranged to stop off at his place on the way to the meeting and change into his overcoat. Then, on the way back, I would come by his place again, reemerge as a student, and return home with no one the wiser. This was exactly how it worked out. Attired in Gershuni's sizable brown coat, I proceeded to the location well beyond the city limits, and entered into the company of a group of workers gathered in a truly modest worker's house. One person stepped out to purchase some *monopolka* (vodka), wurst, and herring. A discussion took place, but we still made no headway.

After the summer of 1900 I already had a regular group of about three or four young workingmen. Vilenkin and I constituted a team of two in our work with them. They were fine chaps and our relations were quite friendly, yet success continued to elude us. A certain feeling of alienation kept us apart. I remember how we once came to see the young man at whose home we used to meet. We found him sitting there with a friend, and both were dead drunk. So we departed. They later told us that it was all a put-up affair; they had really been completely sober. Why the game? They were having fun! Whether this was true or not I don't know. Then another unpleasant incident oc-

curred. The apartment which had served as our meeting place proved unsuitable, and the fellows could not come up with a better one. We decided therefore to rent a special apartment where we might gather undisturbed. One of the young men was supposed to rent it and move in. I provided him the money for it. Then I waited. Days went by; weeks went by; the apartment failed to materialize and the young man disappeared. In the end it turned out that he had run through the money and was ashamed to show up.

That was how it went during the whole of my time in Minsk. In our activity among the Christians we accomplished nothing of a substantial nature. The fault, I believe, was our very own. Without a modicum of experience, we actually had not the slightest idea of how to conduct organizational work. It was really a most demanding task and it required great skill. Small wonder that the two of us, green youths, proved incapable of successfully prosecuting this particular work.

The only tangible achievement was a proclamation for the First of May. The local Committee of the Bund gave me the assignment to draw it up—in Russian, for the gentile workers. I did so. The comments about it were highly favorable. I had attempted to write the leaflet as simply and colloquially as possible, so that even the least developed worker would grasp it; and I think I succeeded. To avoid frightening away the public, we issued it in the name of a nonexistent “Minsk Workers’ Committee.”

Minsk had no underground printshop at that time. Hence our need of a hectograph. But where to obtain one? Its possession was strictly illegal in those days. To purchase one ready-made was out of the question; it had to be home-made, and this required considerable talent. What to do? We approached Gershuni, himself something of a chemist with a whole laboratory at his disposal. It turned out that he had an excellent formula for making a hectograph. Indeed he placed his apartment at our disposal for a whole day. First he sent his servant off on a spree until evening. Then, under his direction, we processed the hectograph and wrote and printed the sheets. The hectograph proved to be exceptionally good; and we long exulted over the superlative formula Gershuni had given us.

With the bundle of completed proclamations tucked under my coat, I set out late at night for my rendezvous with a worker in the Governor's Park. I turned the bundle over to him. That was the first leaflet I had ever written.

May 1, 1900, coincides with the start of my literary activity in general. Among the organs of the Bund appearing at the time was *Der Veker* (*The Awakener*), issued by the *Bershter Bund* (Bristle Workers' Alliance) with which Yashka Kaplan had some connection. He suggested I write a couple of articles for the May Day issue. I did so. If I'm not mistaken, one article was entitled, "The First of May and Socialism"; the other, "The First of May and the Political Struggle." Naturally I wrote them in Russian and they were translated. The issue, in festive garb, on red paper, carried my articles. It would be interesting to glance once again at those first literary efforts of mine, but I have never seen them since.

Thus, to all intents and purposes, I was already in the movement for a number of months. But I still held no official membership in the Bund. This hardly made sense. Shortly after the First of May I formally entered a party organization.

29.

The Movement

ON A BEAUTIFUL SUNNY day in May, Yashka and I passed through the streets of Minsk on the way to the woods. To reach the appointed spot we were forced to traverse the whole city. This particular woods, whose name I can't recall, was located not far from the railroad line in the direction of Vilno, about three or four versts from the city.

We were dressed in civilian clothes and carried walking sticks. Yashka wore a black hat, I a green one; he was short and animated, and had a prominent Semitic nose; I was pallid and thin, and looked like a gentile. Excited, impatient, nervous, and curious—we were on our way, for the first time, to an official session of the Minsk organization.

Only two of us, of the trio which we had constituted until then, were setting forth on this occasion. Our friend Vilenkin had been arrested shortly before, and upon his release a few months later he promptly became involved again in political activity. But now, at the very moment of our debut, he found that he was unable to be with us.

We finally reached the woods. The representative of the Committee opened the session. We had become members of the *razborka*.

What manner of creature was the *razborka*? The appellation was unique to Minsk. The same structure went by different names in other cities: *agitatorskoye skhodka* (agitators' assembly), "center,"

“organization,” and the like . In later years they began to call it “the collective,” a title by which it is designated in Poland to this day. The *razborka* was the central body representing all segments and groups of the party in Minsk. The entire organization was divided according to trades. Each trade chose a trade committee that provided leadership in the economic struggle. A higher body within each trade, the *skhodka*, conducted political activity in the trade and also exercised a supervisory role over the trade-union movement. In addition, each *skhodka* selected a delegate to a general city center. This body of representatives from the various trades was the *razborka*, which used the power of cooptation at its discretion to add members from the outside. Both Yashka and I were actually admitted in this fashion, since neither of us were delegates nor were we employed in a trade.

The *razborka* with its several dozen members constituted the local party “parliament,” so to speak. Another organ was needed however, an administration embodying the executive power. This requirement was filled by the Committee.

The Committee was the “ministers’ cabinet” of the city organization. Highest among the secret institutions, it was chosen in fact by the *razborka*; but the results of the election were never reported. The Committee also enjoyed the right of cooptation—of adding to its number a few more individuals drawn from the body of still highly conspiratorial *intelligenti*, persons who did not even attend the *razborka*. Only a single intermediary was known to be a member of the Committee. The identity of the remaining members was shrouded in deep secrecy. This clandestine body used to stir the imagination of the party members no end. I remember how a young fellow once voiced the wish quite seriously that he might live long enough to experience the joyous moment of peeking through a crack in the door at a session of the Committee.

For the time being we were not admitted into the Committee, despite our earlier ultimatum requesting it. We settled for the *razborka*.

The first meeting of the *razborka* that I attended, in May 1900, numbered several dozen persons. They were almost exclusively young workers and included three girls. There were two somewhat older and already experienced activists; the intermediary “Khatshé”

(a one-time weaver, I think), and Albert Zalkind, the *intelligent*.

I can still recall the subject deliberated upon at that session, a subject, incidentally, which happened to be rather important and interesting: Circles or Mass Agitation?

At the beginning I could not understand what all the bickering was about. Some of the people present argued long and vehemently for the creation of circles in which party members would be taught political economy and be provided with the requisite general development. But others emphasized the need to conduct broad agitation among the masses. To me it seemed as if the whole dispute was futile, since both aspects were surely indicated: circles for the more solid individuals; mass agitation for the wider audience. Then Albert took the floor and in a lengthy speech clarified the issue. I now understood that the question was not quite so simple, and that two distinct tendencies were involved here.

Echoes of a conflict associated with the name of a former Opposition were apparently still being heard within the organizations of the Bund in general, and particularly among us in Minsk. That Opposition had emerged a good bit earlier, as far back as the start of the 90s, at the very inception of the mass movement. Up to that time the circles represented the sum and substance of the movement. Brighter workers would be selected, assigned to circles, and led through a whole course beginning with Russian grammar and conversations in the natural sciences and ending with political economy and Marxism. And that was all. With the subsequent emergence of a mass movement, it was expected of the more intellectualized workers, those already "tempered" in the circles, that they would take their places among the masses in order to organize and engage in widespread agitation among them, and to offer leadership in strikes. But a number of them balked and refused. Circle activity had made of them something of a caste, and having cut themselves off from the mass, they began to regard it with condescension. Unable to conceive of anything other than the circle as having the least significance, they had come to look upon the circle as an end in itself.

This was the original Opposition whose resistance was broken after a time. The more dedicated people became agitators and activists among the masses. Still, the old "Opposition" would flare up

periodically and endeavor to give renewed currency to its distaste for work among the masses. And it was this remnant of those earlier sentiments that became the subject of concern in Minsk just then. In his speech Albert attested to the harmfulness of such feelings, and called for energetic activity among the masses. And the audience responded favorably.

From that day forward I became an official member of the organization. I entered heart and soul into the movement. A party activist needs a conspiratorial name. So I adopted the name Michael and a surname Vinitsky. True, it wasn't necessary to have a surname in the company of the Jewish workers; people addressed each other by first names only. But because I was also involved with gentiles, it was absolutely essential that I carry the added surname; hence I became "Michael Vinitsky." I did not specifically select these names out of the clear blue sky; there was some calculation in my choice. To begin with, I wanted them to serve for all occasions. Hence they must be neither distinctively Russian nor distinctively Jewish, but suitable for both a Jew and a gentile. It was furthermore essential to take into account a small conspiratorial detail: initials had to correspond with the letters on . . . one's boots! Otherwise, someone might get suspicious and the consequences could prove ugly. This was the consideration that served as the basis for my selection of the names.

My two friends resolved the matter much more readily: they simply took names they liked. Yashka Kaplan assumed the name Vladimir and Ilyushka Vilenkin became Sergei. Actually, people knew all three of us well and were familiar with our real identities.

Our activity proceeded with zest, with freshness, and with joy. Although the times in general were politically dead, there had emerged among us on the political level a singularly attractive and uncommonly large movement. Our force of youthful militants plunged into the work among the masses with total dedication. A wave of strikes began. We conducted recruitment activity on an extraordinarily broad scale. And the number of organized workers reached a thousand. For a city like Minsk, where the total number of Jewish workers consisted of a few thousand, this, especially under conditions of illegality, was a tremendous success.

We, the *intelligenti*, were precluded from participating directly in

the mass agitation. Our contacts were limited exclusively to the activists. Nevertheless we enjoyed the closest ties to the whole movement.

It was a fellowship of lively and warm-hearted young people with whom we swiftly became intimate friends. The sense of alienation we experienced during our encounters with the Christian workers was entirely lacking. I cannot say whether our feeling of being totally one with close and kindred spirits actually had something to do with their being Jews in particular, or whether it was because they happened to be individuals of a higher intellectual level. The fact is that relations here were markedly different, characterized by a powerful spirit of friendship and fraternity.

We were especially close to the three finest chaps in the *razborka*. First there was Peysakh, whose real name was Mezshevetsky. Still a young man of no more than nineteen or twenty, he had already been in the movement a number of years. He came to us from Vitebsk, where he had been a pupil of Avrom Amsterdam, the deceased pioneer of the Bund. A vibrant youth with large fiery dark eyes set in a narrow pale face, Peysakh was the embodiment of zeal and drive. He was a supremely attractive mass orator who hurled himself into agitation among the masses with the thirst of a famished desert wanderer lunging toward a source of fresh water.

Hillel (Rosenblum), a boot stitcher by trade, was the second: slightly older, calmer, more phlegmatic, yet possessed of a rare geniality. In his every word could be detected a pristine and beloved human soul imbued with devotion and seriousness.

The third was Moyshke, the bristle worker (or possibly brushmaker). He was a small fellow and really quite young, even lacking a moustache. More taciturn and matter-of-fact, disinclined toward visible display of enthusiasm, and with a skeptical smile, Moyshke was withal a wise and energetic person, equipped with a keen eye and adept in practical matters. He subsequently advanced to the honored position of intermediary between the Committee and the *razborka*.

I can still recall the occasion when about ten of our closest people came together at a little farewell banquet for one of the comrades. In the course of a humorous speech which I delivered at the banquet, I

referred, in fact, to Hillel and Moyshe, alluding to a conversation I had had not long ago with an assistant prosecutor who, as it happened, was the tenant in a room in our apartment which we were renting out. This prosecutor—who, of course, had no inkling that I was connected with the movement—proceeded to unburden himself on the subject of socialists. He advanced the trite observation that all socialists could be divided into two types: first the odious misleaders, and second, the foolish misled. Nothing else. I reported these words to my comrades, and observed: “You can see right here in this small room how we offer living proof of the falsity of that prosecutor’s view. Here before us we have Moyshe, the wise skeptic, and Hillel, the beloved human soul—the former is not a misleader and the latter is not a fool. Let us therefore be comforted and of good cheer: with wisdom ours, and with devotion ours, the future too will be ours.”

The banquet in question took place at the home of a woman comrade who was also a most endearing personality. Her name was Merel. Hardly in the category of the very young, she had a face that was at once serious and stern yet which radiated extraordinary kindness. Attired in black, she resembled a compassionate nun. She carried a distinctive mark of asceticism, of selflessness, and moral purity. Whenever I encountered her my thoughts invariably turned toward a comparison with the leading revolutionary women of an earlier time, with a Sophia Perovskaya or a Vera Figner. Indeed, there was something about her that called to mind those sublime figures of the Russian Revolution.

Although I have only referred here to a few of my comrades, all the others, without exception, were filled with the spirit of dedication. And I must say that these young people, ordinary workers, proved highly intelligent and very knowledgeable both with respect to current practical questions and matters of principle. Working with them was a source of genuine gratification.

The type of the “professional revolutionist,” the person sustained directly by the party, was still rather uncommon at this time; such persons were, presumably, associated with the Central Committee, but among us in the Minsk organization there was not a single “professional.” Every activist had to provide for his own bit of bread. When some work was available, he or she could eat more

regularly; when, alas, there was no work, the activist would have to go hungry.

Needs were modest in the extreme. I recall how Peysakh, during one of those jobless interludes, calculated that he could manage quite well with a steady income of three rubles a month! But he had no such income. Yet, like all the rest, he was energetic and happy.

In a very short time I became deeply involved in the life of the movement, and in a few months I was admitted to the Committee, together with my two friends Kaplan and Vilenkin.

During the early period, the Committee consisted largely of older *intelligenti*, most of whom had left prison not long before. They were compelled to take stringent precautions and even stayed away from the sessions of the *razborka*. In addition to Albert Zalkind and Khatshe, the Committee also included Zhenya Hurvich, a woman activist of long standing, widely known in Minsk, of whom I had already heard years earlier. She was a woman of superior intellect and education, and also prominent in the literary world as the translator into Russian of the first volume of *Capital*. Incidentally, one should not speak of her in the past tense; Zhenya Hurvich is still alive and has remained active in the Bund movement.¹ Another member of the Committee was Boris Frumkin. Also an old activist, he had the reputation in Minsk of being a great sage. We, the younger people, used to approach him with the utmost respect. Diminutive in stature, Frumkin was a soft-spoken, genial man. Many years later I found him still engaged in political activities. In the recent past he became a Communist, I believe.

I can recall only a single meeting that we held together with these old-timers. The place was a small forest near the Brest railroad line, not far from the bishop's summer residence, Antonovka. And I recall two problems we discussed: one concerned the publication of an illegal newspaper, the other had to do with whether Zionists should be

1. A dispatch in the New York *Jewish Daily Forward* on August 20, 1922, reported the arrest of Zhenya Hurvich in Minsk by Soviet authorities, for adherence to the Jewish Labor Bund. Her arrest was followed by exile to Siberia and years of persecution. The *Forward* (*Forverts*, in Yiddish) is today the largest Yiddish daily newspaper in the world. Founded in 1897, it still retains a strong labor and Social Democratic orientation.

admitted into the trade-union organizations. Concerning this, I don't remember what decision was reached.

The composition of the Committee changed swiftly. Some members left to go elsewhere, while others were forced to drop out of activity for conspiratorial reasons. Of the old-timers, only Boris Frumkin was left, the remainder consisting of younger persons: we three young students, and three workers from the *razborka*: Peysakh, Hillel, and Moyshe. We thus became the big decision makers in the movement and a broad field of activity opened up before us.

Our work proceeded feverishly. The main center of agitation was the so-called *birzha*. In each city a special street was designated as the site where the agitators would come together with the crowd. As soon as ties were established with a fresh contact in some workshop or other, an arrangement with the individual would follow: "Come to this particular street in the evening." Once on the *birzha*, the new prospect would be subjected to spirited proselytizing. In Minsk it was actually located in the very heart of the city, on Governor Street, not where the "respectables" used to promenade, but on the opposite side of the street, where the workers swarmed and bustled about nightly. Elsewhere I have noted how we, the *intelligenti*, did not have the opportunity to participate directly in mass agitation. To begin with, it would have violated the canons of conspiracy; we were too well known in the city. Furthermore we had no command of the language. Still I used to walk past the *birzha* frequently and cast a glance in the direction of our "boys," observing how they moved about in the company, now of one individual, now of another, silently but with fervor confiding to him the mysteries of the new Torah. The *birzha* literally teemed with hundreds of persons every night, all of them youthful worker types. It was possible to identify among them, on the one hand, the familiar faces of activists; and on the other, the new, zestful people at the initial stage of imbibing the fresh, wonderful teachings.

The *birzha* was thus the vital hub of the movement, a kind of substitute for a club, a meeting-hall, or a newspaper. It was the place where the undifferentiated mass became transformed into individuals, and the individuals into a purposeful phalanx.

To a casual passerby nothing might have seemed out of the or-

dinary: a street like any other street, a stroll like any other stroll. Clustering in tiny groups that never stood still, our people—just like the youthful promenaders across the street, from the “better” families—would move back and forth, back and forth in pairs or at most in threes. One person met another who, in turn, exchanged a few hurried remarks with a third. They were soon in motion again, engaged in what appeared to be little more than aimless strolling back and forth, back and forth. Only a perceptive observer would have surmised that there was a distinctive quality about this crowd, something which set it apart from the one on the other side of the street.

I confined myself to the role of passerby, obviously neither speaking to nor greeting anyone. Even such passing by had already joined the category of things prohibited, and I indulged in this luxury only rarely. I used to meet with our people, accordingly, at other locations. In the summer the *razborka* held its sessions in the woods, generally during the daytime on a Saturday. Once, in fact, I ran into a situation fraught with ugly consequences for me precisely because of the Sabbath. I used habitually to carry a walking stick. To get to the woods it was necessary to pass through the Jewish streets. Thus, while walking with this appurtenance one fine Saturday morning, I suddenly observed two young men wagging their fingers at me in disapproval. And I could hear one say to the other: “Why don’t you take away his stick and lay one hard on his head; that will teach him to carry a stick on the Sabbath!” Happily it remained only an intention.

By the way, it should be noted that our movement at that time was in great disfavor among Orthodox Jews. Hooligan elements—the “nice boys” seeking an opportunity for a little encounter—were incited against our people. A few clashes actually occurred between Jewish reactionaries and our comrades. It was a time when our organization had to seriously weigh the question of defense against such toughs. I knew that these “slugger” also numbered quite a few workers, and I warned our comrades to avoid running afoul of them for they were really our own people who would sooner or later come over to us. And this actually happened. In virtually every city those “nice boys” evolved into rather stalwart and devoted comrades.

Their hooliganism had been nothing more than the initial expression of a very healthy urge to struggle that was still blind and inchoate, and merely seeking a form in which to express itself.

Naturally, when winter came we could no longer use the woods. It was necessary to meet in a residence somewhere. The quarters of the bourgeois *intelligenti* were unavailable to us because they would have attracted attention. "What are workers doing in a bourgeois home?" And we had no married workers with quarters of their own: everybody lived with "someone else."

Hence we contrived to find some kind of elderly woman in whose home one of the comrades boarded. She would, as a rule, be quite unaware of the exact nature of the fellowship which forgathered on her premises, but there were times when she must have had at least a glimmer as to the purpose of the meeting and was willing to place her home in jeopardy. It was always a risky business, yet we were never caught. We once held a meeting in a residence of this kind, situated on a street off the beaten path. It happened to coincide with a Jewish holiday. At the height of the meeting the door suddenly opened and a policeman entered. The crowd, however, remained calm. The moment the visitor appeared, everyone took to singing and dancing. It was a holiday, after all, and people were surely entitled to pass a few happy hours together! He left without incident.

I thus had the opportunity in those days of coming into a substantial number of workers' homes, and not only in the course of attending sessions of the *razborka*. Occasionally, there were impromptu visits to friends, and there was also the need to be present at other types of meetings. We had, for instance, a special literary group of young people, most of them so-called semi-*intelligenti*, endowed with certain literary talents. Then we had a special set of propagandists. And we occasionally sponsored a *vecherinka* (a small evening banquet) that would be held, of course, not solely for the purpose of conviviality, but to give us an opportunity for speeches and toasts as well.

These banquets generally took place at an old inn on the city's outskirts, not far from the Russian cemetery. I well remember that inn: a small wooden house with a few small rooms, low beams, several small grimy oil lamps. Although the place was crowded and

stifling and hot, it was also alive, a scene of boundless merriment. There was conversation and a bit of revelry, but all within bounds and free of wantonness. There were speeches; sometimes brief lectures. Then a little whisky appeared followed by toasts. Each toast began with the words, "I drink to the time when. . . ." Once, during the same evening that we were holding a *vecherinka* at the inn, a Zionist gathering—a big legal affair—was taking place in a lovely hall in the heart of the city, which prompted a worker to offer this toast: "I drink to the time when we will be able to assemble in that attractive hall and when the Zionists will have to betake themselves to the old inn on the outskirts of the city." It was a naive quip and the crowd laughed. Today, in Russia, it has become a virtual reality. . . .

The toasts would in turn be followed by songs. The songs were not the ones that are sung today, although we did have a song at that time called *Di Shvue* ("The Oath").² But it was not *Di Shvue* of the present-day Bund which was written a few years later, by Ansky.³ The earlier *Shvue* opened with the words: "Let us place our right hands across our hearts." It consisted of several parts, each with a different melody and I subsequently learned that one of the melodies was derived from a German folk song about Andreas Hofer, hero of the Tyrolean people. Some of the lyrics were quite lovely, in part a mixture of Yiddish and Russian: "We are the proletariat, which means *rabochii narod* (working people)." It concluded with, "shout

2. *Di Shvue* became, and remains, the official anthem of the Bund.

3. Ansky (Shloyme-Zaynvil Rapoport), for whom Medem retained the deepest feelings of affection, lived a most eventful and creative fifty-seven years. Breaking early in his youth with traditional Jewish ways and beliefs, he became associated with the cause of Jewish enlightenment and modernization—the Haskalah. In the process, he learned Russian, mastered several artisan skills, and joined with the Russian radical intelligentsia in the Populist movement, "To the People," a forerunner of the SRs, to which he later adhered. Ansky served for a time as secretary to the renowned Populist, Peter Lavrov. In 1918, two years before his death, Ansky was one of the SR delegates to the ill-fated Russian Constituent Assembly.

After the turn of the century, a period which coincided with a great surge of Yiddish cultural creativity, Ansky followed in the footsteps of the closest friend of his youth, Chaim Zhitlovsky. He became active in various phases of Jewish secular life, and in the sphere of Yiddish literary expression he gained prominence as a dramatist, poet, and dedicated folklorist.

narod: vperiyod (forward), *vperiyod, vperiyod!*” We also sang a number of Russian songs, among them, “The Song of the Gladiator”: *Trudno, bratsi, nam zhivyotsa* (Our life, brothers, is hard); and others. It goes without saying that we didn’t have an organized chorus. The members of the group would press together in a tight circle, facing each other, while everyone conducted with his hands. It was a beautiful and heart-warming experience.

In the matter of singing, the bristle workers rated as experts. They were the cream of our movement, so to speak; the first to create a special organization in their trade, the Bristle Workers’ Bund, which covered the whole *rayon* of the Bund. A few of their groups were located in small towns adjacent to the frontier; accordingly, they played a very important conspirative role. They engaged in smuggling illegal literature into Russia and escapees out of the country. The leading activist among the bristle workers was a man known only as Abram, a tall, attractive young man and exceedingly skillful. I managed to meet him only a few times, then he left. A number of other activists remained: Orey Futer, Motke Kasel, with his pale, intelligent face and prominent, narrow, extraordinarily vigorous mouth; Itshe Mayr, with his large, protruding mustache. I once spent an evening in their company, during which they sang various songs and harmonized in a truly artistic fashion. Their group also included a very young fellow, Motke’s brother. He was attempting to write poetry at the time, and was admitted into the literary group. People would smile and say of him: “A peculiar chap! When he comes to a meeting in the woods he behaves so differently from all the rest. Everyone is interested in the meeting while he, accompanied by a friend, strides about in a dream state, babbling strangely about trees, about birds.” This young lover of nature later became, in fact, a prominent Jewish writer, Dovid Kasel.

Over and above all the meetings, gatherings, and banquets, I found it necessary to meet with individual activists every single day to discuss current matters of a practical nature, to transmit something, to receive information. It was customary to meet in teahouses. We used to gather regularly, indeed, almost daily, at Slepyan’s teahouse on Governor Street, in fact, right next to the *birzha*. We had to go into a courtyard and up a few steps to get inside. The

teahouse was a modest facility consisting of two little rooms. The proprietor, strongly sympathetic toward the movement, saw to it that one room should be reserved especially for us. Slepian's teahouse was a genuine haven, a place in which we felt comfortable and safe. Not only did we transact all our business there, we also dropped in just to spend a pleasant hour over a glass of tea. Moreover, we were able to receive visitors from other cities at Slepian's teahouse.

Such visitors didn't come to us very often. The connections between Minsk and other cities were poor at that time. Greetings rarely arrived even from the Central Committee of the Bund. True, the rules of conspiratorial practice were adhered to very strictly among us in those days. A single individual constituted the link to the Central Committee, and he kept his role secret even from the other members of our Committee. Yashka Kaplan, our "Minister of External Affairs," was exceedingly strict in this regard, which accounts for the fact that I did not, for example, have the privilege of meeting a member of the Central Committee during that period. Only once did I meet someone from the Central Committee, yet even he was not a member of the Committee but only a messenger who came to report that the Central Committee had decided to set up two illegal printshops specifically for the purpose of helping the local organizations in their publishing efforts. He suggested that we make use of these facilities. The messenger was a short man with a tiny beard and soft warm eyes whom I also had occasion to meet in later years. He was known throughout the party as Khayim *Tate* (Father Khayim).

The visitors we received at Slepian's place were not the bigwigs of the movement. There was the time a comrade—a Russian worker—arrived from Kharkov. We had arranged to meet him at the teahouse, but for some reason we came late and what we encountered was a scene of turmoil. Our comrades were visibly agitated, whispering, and saying something about "administering a beating." They had, it turned out, sized up the visitor as a spy; they simply could not conceive that someone with such an obviously gentile physiognomy could also be a comrade.

Another visitor came to us from Homel. A young Jewish fellow, just as young and just as naive as we were then. But we were the representatives of the old and large Minsk organization, while Homel

was a small city and its movement was a latecomer. He made a show of great respect toward us and we had a patronizing attitude toward him, the more so when it appeared that he needed a hectograph, while we, of course, had Gershuni's unique formula. We gave it to him, all the while boasting about its singular virtues. The young man hung upon our every word and memorized the formula, and we were all very pleased. Years later we met again and recognized one another. He is living today in Warsaw, and is secretary of the editorial board of *Lebnsfragen* (*Problems of Life*).⁴

This was a period when every city of some size established its local organ, and in the fall of 1900 we began to publish a newspaper of our own. One attempt had already been made in Minsk, before I entered the organization, to issue a publication called *Der Minsker Flugblettl* (*The Minsk Bulletin*). But if memory serves, it ceased publication after the first issue. We later started it up again, under a new name: *Der Minsker Arbeter* (*The Minsk Worker*), and two issues appeared during my time there. Naturally, it was a small and rather modest newspaper; a few articles, a feuilleton, a page of correspondence dealing with local life—and that was all. I recall the articles I wrote: an editorial in the first issue titled *Der Vinter Kumt* ("Winter is Coming"); and an article in the second issue about the working day. In addition I wrote a biographical sketch of old Wilhelm Liebknecht who had just died. Solomon Rabinovich, a railroad dispatcher and at present a proofreader for the *Jewish Daily Forward*, wrote a belletristic feuilleton, a tale about a Zionist employer, I believe.⁵ Vilenkin used to gather and edit the correspondence from the various workshops.

4. The reference is to Victor Shulman. Medem was the chief editor of *Lebnsfragen*—the official organ of the Bund—from its reincarnation (it had appeared briefly in 1912; see *infra*, pp. 481–84) as a Warsaw weekly in 1916, through its emergence as a daily in 1918.

5. The struggle between Bundism and Zionism waxed feverish over what would today be called "the hearts and minds" of men. The emotional impact of the confrontation was heightened when the exploited workers of Bundist persuasion found themselves pitted against Jewish employers whose religiosity-cum-Zionist-partisanship only served to exacerbate the ideological and spiritual conflict, the more so when such employers had recourse to the police and gendarmes during strikes or other labor protests.

I am not in a position to estimate the literary value of our output, but it afforded great satisfaction to writers and readers alike, and we were wholeheartedly absorbed in the undertaking. The editorial staff, in keeping with tradition, was a collective enterprise. The whole Committee examined each item, word for word. I remember a communication that Vilenkin read to us, describing how the employees in a certain workshop had made some kind of demand to which the boss's wife issued some sort of reply. Boris Frumkin, quite a wit, asked of Vilenkin: "Why, pray tell, the wife of the boss? What about the boss? Is he having a baby?" To which Vilenkin, in a state of high dudgeon, responded: "How can anyone laugh and make light of such a serious matter!"

There was a story associated with the editorial in the first issue. As a rule it should have been written by the oldest and most skillful among us—Boris Frumkin. And he did write it, as a matter of fact. While I cannot recall the exact title or the content, I know it dealt with the tasks of the movement and of the organization. We read the article at a meeting of the editorial staff. I didn't like it. It was not what was called for. How our organization ought to operate and the tasks it should set itself were internal questions, of interest only to the initiated, to those already inside the movement. What we needed was a newspaper for the masses—indeed, for those broad masses who were still on the sidelines, still unaware of the movement; for them it was necessary to write differently and on other subjects—not about the movement, but about their immediate lives.

This was the view I expressed, and the comrades agreed with me. Frumkin's article was rejected. In its stead I wrote the article I referred to earlier, "Winter is Coming." In a highly popular fashion, it described the hardships that winter brought to the workers. It concluded on the note that unity was necessary through common effort, in order to win a better life. The editorial in the second issue (about the working day) was likewise of a popular character.

I would not have alluded to this minor editorial episode had it merely been a passing matter. But it was not a passing matter. A whole school of thought was involved.

30.

“*In di gasn, tsu di masn*”¹

I ONCE HAD A DREAM that I found myself on the large square in Minsk, the *sobornaya ploshchad* (Cathedral Square). It was the location of the governor's residence, the courthouse, and various bureaus. An uprising was in progress; the government institutions were to be stormed, and a massive crowd had swiftly begun to advance. I was running in the lead as fast as I could. Then, suddenly, I had a sensation that all about me was emptiness and silence. I glanced around: I was standing alone. The whole crowd had come to a halt far, far behind me. And I awoke.

A dream is only a dream. Still it never left me, for the dream was actually a picture, a reflection of reality. It symbolized the dramatic destiny of the one-time revolutionary intelligentsia in Russia. The revolutionary Russian intelligentsia had charged forward more than once to storm the fortress of Tsarist domination, striding ahead under the full momentum of its total energy, and looked about it; it was standing alone. The assault was repulsed, and the fortress held firm. And the huge crowd remained far behind—asleep, immobilized.

Plekhanov once observed, signaling thereby the emergence of a new doctrine: “The Russian revolutionary movement will be vic-

1. “In the streets, to the masses.”

torious as a workers' movement or it will not be victorious at all." This was the cry of the revolutionary Columbus seeing land for the first time after prolonged wandering. This was the cry of the revolutionary intelligentsia beholding finally that mass power to which it could repair and on which it could rely. The carrier of the revolution had been discovered.

Nevertheless, for the time being it remained a force on paper only. The Russian worker was still far removed from revolutions, still slumbering. Strikes flared up from time to time, but that was all. Groups and committees would be formed, but they were small in size and without firm, deep-seated ties to the mass. Although the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was launched in 1898,² it existed for years in name only. Here was the phenomenon once more of the intelligentsia and selected individual workers. It was the same troublesome dream again.

I delivered a brief talk on that very subject during the summer of 1900. The occasion was a little banquet attended by a group of the closest members of the *razborka*, and held aboard a *lodka* (a small boat) on the lake. We rowed out beyond the city, and my remarks were made as I stood leaning up against an oar. The Russian Social Democratic movement, I said, was in the process of being expanded "from the top down." It derived its membership from an elite element; it originated with the intelligentsia. And the intelligentsia deigned to step down to the masses, wishing to transmit its ideas to them ready-made. But this was not the correct approach. A workers' movement cannot be created from the top. It must arise of itself,

2. It should be noted that the Bund, only months after its own launching, and deeply concerned about the need for a Marxist party embracing all the ethnic elements constituting the polyglot Russian Empire, played a vital role in the organization of the RSDWP. "For the Jewish Social Democratic groups, and particularly for the Vilna pioneers, an all-Russian party was a must. They had accepted that notion when they first started their work and reached the conclusion that their own success rested on the success of such an organization. The importance they placed on a united party can be seen in the yeoman service they rendered to build it." Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia (From Its Origins to 1905)* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 75 and ch. 7.

from *below*, from the depth of the worker mass and from the life of the workers. In a word, from the bottom up! This is the authentic, the essential, the most tangible movement. And the task of the leadership *intelligenti* is only to illuminate this sweeping current, to enhance its clarity, to remove obstacles on the way, to help, to serve.

Such was my idea. Something like a debate ensued. There were no disagreements about the fundamental proposition, but I do recall a few people arguing that the present movement already did, in fact, constitute a movement "from the bottom up." This was the view pressed with particular fervor by Peysakh.

When we pulled in to shore a few hours later, Peysakh stepped from the boat and started up a sandy knoll, crawling, losing his balance, falling, creeping some more, and shouting at us with a look of satisfaction: "From the bottom up!"

In essence we were both correct, particularly as far as the Jewish movement was concerned. Two currents could be identified: the ideas of the *intelligenti* proceeding from above to the masses; and the upward thrust of the masses from the depth of the workers' movement. But constant care had to be taken that the two currents should meet, coalesce, and not pass each other by, since passing each other by would have represented a danger to both: to the intelligentsia, which might again remain a staff without an army; and to the mass movement, which might again wander off in wrong directions. The Jewish workers' movement actually did avoid these dangers; the Russian movement, however, continued for a long time to remain weak and fragmented. What we discussed on that occasion was an echo of the opinions and sentiments prevailing among Russian Social Democrats.

In the ranks of the Russian Social Democrats there existed a school of thought that bore the name Economism. The overriding concern of the Economists was summed up in the question: What is the best possible way of bringing to life a mass movement among the backward, nonconscious, general run of workers? A brochure titled *On Agitation* had appeared several years before; it originated, indeed, within the circles of the future Bundists. Its author—Alexander (Arkady) Kremer—was the most prominent Jewish activist of that

period, and one of the founders of the Bund.³ But the brochure also had a great influence upon the Russian comrades; it served, in fact, as the progenitor of the current of the Economists, and contained these words:

The mass of the people is drawn into the struggle, not by intellectual hypotheses, but by the objective logic of deeds, by the course of events which impels it to the struggle. Justification [of this necessity] must come to be felt at every turn, must constantly bore into the brain of the worker, and be discernible in all of the smallest things. Achieving political power is the primary task of the fighting proletariat. But this task can present itself to the working class only when the economic struggle will patently reveal to it the impossibility of improving its life under existing political conditions; only when the aspirations of the proletariat will come directly up against today's forms of political life; only when the current of the workers' movement will be joined with a political force, only then will the moment of transition from the class struggle to a stage of conscious political struggle have arrived.

The task of the Social Democrats is therefore continuous agitation among the workers on the basis of existing practical needs and demands. The struggle to which such agitation gives rise will accustom the workers to defend their interests. It will heighten their courage, create among them a belief in their own powers and a consciousness of the need for unity, and finally pose for them the more important questions that require solution.

3. Kremer was one of the three members of the Central Committee elected at the Founding Congress of the RSDWP. "Soviet historians, particularly those writing from the 1930s on, have found this first congress a touchy subject. They have difficulty accepting it as the founding of the Russian Communist Party for three reasons: only one of the [total of nine] delegates became a 'true' Bolshevik; Peter Struve wrote the party manifesto [within a year he began shifting away from orthodox Marxism and by 1902 had become a card-carrying Liberal]; and Lenin had virtually no influence on the proceedings. In addition, the Bund's role has made the congress suspect for the Communists. Nevertheless, Lenin accepted the assembly as the first party congress, as did succeeding congresses, and both the Bundists and the Bolsheviks used it as a legal reference point for discussion and maneuver." *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77n. For Kremer's extraordinary life and role, see *Arkady—zambukh tsum ondenk fun grinder fun bund—Arkady Kremer (1865–1935)* (Yiddish) [*Arkady—Essay*

The thought was clear enough: the workers' movement was born of the day-to-day, specific needs and requirements of the mass. Our primary task was to organize the workers for struggle on behalf of these particular needs, i.e., of their economic demands—increased wages, a shorter working day, better treatment, etc. Only later would the great current of the mass movement, having surged upward from this base, perforce join together with the opposition to the government; and it would become convinced, from the practice of its daily life, that the government is an enemy. Only at that juncture will the possibility have been established of involving the mass in a far-reaching political struggle. But the start had to be made with the initial, the preparatory stage.

The reverberations of this idea were felt strongly throughout Russia. Indeed the origin of the term Economist could be traced to this projecting of the economic struggle to the fore. During my period of activity in Minsk, the prevailing sentiment in Saint Petersburg was that of the Economists; and it was reflected in *Rabochaia Mysl* (*Workers' Thought*), the paper issued by the Saint Petersburg Committee.

A segment of the Russian activists went somewhat too far. Having begun with the economic struggle as a first stage, they subsequently got carried away with themselves to the point of adopting a truly extravagant idea—that the worker should not occupy himself with politics at all, not even in the future. This notion was to be found in a brochure published abroad at the time under the title *Credo*,⁴ but it was an extreme opinion entertained by only a tiny number. No one among us, among the Jewish worker-activists, went that far. The Jewish workers' movement, substantially more developed than the Russian, was even then closer to the political struggle. Still, it was our belief that the primary task, the creation of a broad mass movement, was not yet fulfilled. Admittedly, we already had a significant number of the more conscious workers with whom we could also talk about political matters, but with respect to mass

Collection Dedicated to the Memory of the Founder of the Bund—Arkady Kremer] (New York: Unser Tsait Pubs., 1942).

4. The author, E. D. Kuskova, was a freelancer and not associated with any of the identifiable factions or tendencies in Russian Social Democracy.

agitation we continued to limit ourselves to economic questions. Our primary concern was the development of the broadest roots among the masses. We really followed the advice in *Credo* which affirmed that the agitator must constantly “mingle with the masses, listen carefully, find the proper point of contact, feel the pulse of the crowd.” He must know the living conditions of the masses, their feelings; and must understand the kind of demands that are capable, under the conditions prevailing at the moment, of uniting the workers around them.

This, indeed, was the constant object of our concern. Because the period was dead in regard to politics, and the primary interest of the masses was, in fact, directed toward economic demands, we found ourselves absorbed with the economic struggle. And we actually achieved the desired result. A genuine mass movement came into being. Its content, to be sure, was marked by a certain narrowness, but we consoled ourselves that this was only a transitory phase. Just let the movement exist; life itself would guarantee its subsequent acquisition of a broader and more distinctly political configuration.

Ever deeper into the ranks of the mass, always together with the mass! This was the dominant motive behind all of our activity.

It was not without good reason that we once used to sing with all our hearts the beautiful old workers’ song which began with the words: “*In di gasn, tsu di masn.*” They were not merely words put to music; they embodied the real meaning and the very essence of all our work. It’s possible that we made mistakes—we were still very young and far from skilled—and we may have been inclined to grope our way blindly. But our desire was a healthy one, and our goal correct.

Sproutings of Bundist Thought

I WAS A MEMBER of the Bund, that is, a “Bundist,” although we were not yet using this expression at the time. Still, I doubt very much whether I had a particularly clear notion about the character of the Bund as a *Jewish* organization, and the role it should play in *Jewish* life.

It is difficult to recapture vividly and in minute detail one’s ideas of twenty-one years ago. In seeking to do so, I find myself up against something hazy. It could be that this haziness actually stems from the fact that my memory is not sufficiently acute, although the ideas were clear enough to me at the time. But certain things were a bit vague even then. Bundist thought had not yet become distinct and precise, since Bundism as doctrine, as a tendency with a particular vision of Jewish life in general and the Jewish workers’ movement in particular, existed then only in its formative stage. It was the period of initial steps.

The historic congress of the Bund that first formulated the national program took place somewhat later, in April 1901, when I was already in prison; and I learned of its resolutions only subsequently, after escaping abroad. My activity in Minsk coincided with what was still a period of searching, of groping in the dark. The literature of the Bund scarcely broached the subject of the national program. Even the few relevant articles which did exist passed by me,

if only because I could not yet read Yiddish. Hence, where I was concerned, there were only feeble sproutings of a Bundist consciousness.

Yes, it is quite difficult to bring back to life one's thoughts of long ago. Yet I can still recall several conversations I had in those days. I remember the time my friend Yashka approached me (this was actually prior to my formal entry into the movement, I believe) with the following kind of question: "What do you think? Are the Jews a nation, or not?" I didn't know how to respond; I had never thought about it. I think I replied, "It depends on what one understands by the term 'nation.' But why do you ask the question?" "Because several of our school chums are nationalists," he answered. "What?" I rejoined. "Nationalists?" "They contend," said Yashka, "that the Jews are really a nation." "Well, even if that's so," I asked, "what follows? What do they propose to do?" He was unable to answer me, and the question remained . . . a question.

Elsewhere I had heard of the existence of Zionists. They were making a noticeable stir in our city at that time, but their plans did not arouse the slightest sympathy nor the least interest on our part. In sum, with respect to a Jewish *national* question I lacked a clear understanding. But the Jewish workers' movement was quite another matter. The conclusion I arrived at then was crystal clear regarding the special and unique character of our movement.

I recall the following incident associated with the *razborka*. We had attempted, as I already indicated in an earlier chapter, to conduct activity among Christian workers. The *razborka* displayed great interest in this particular activity and awaited the results most anxiously. The subject was on the agenda at virtually every meeting, and we were forever being importuned and interrogated: "Well, what's happening out there among the gentiles?" We would render a report, and the report would be consistently unimpressive. And our people were dissatisfied. On one occasion the whole subject came up for discussion and decisions were reached on how to carry on this work. I took the floor and stated: "Comrades, do not get yourselves mixed up in these things. You are an organ of the *Jewish* workers' movement in our city. You may ask for information about developments among the *goyim*. We've been providing it, and will continue to do so. But you cannot adopt any decisions on the matter because it's

none of your affair. Just as the Jewish movement is a distinct and independent one, so must the movement of the Christian workers be distinct and independent. There must be a division of labor.”

My response was not accidental. We three students had actually been toying then with the idea of creating such a distinct and independent organization. We wished to form a separate Minsk committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party—and it almost happened. In those days the Russian party as such really existed only on paper. The Central Committee which had been selected at the congress of the party in 1898 was arrested a few weeks after the congress, and no new one had been chosen.

Consequently, it became the custom in the party that a group of comrades wishing to launch a new party organization in a given city was required to obtain the approval of two existing local committees. We turned to the Kiev Committee of the party and to the Central Committee of the Bund. We informed them of our desire to establish a committee of the party in Minsk, and requested their approval. The Kiev Committee quickly replied that it had no objection. But the Central Committee of the Bund was in possession of more solid information on the matter. It knew that a real organization of Christian workers did not yet exist in our city, and that the whole thing was simply an enterprise of three young students. Hence it replied that we would have to wait a very long time, and our aspiration remained unfulfilled.

But that’s neither here nor there. I’ve recounted this minor incident in order to show that we clearly understood by then that the Jewish movement was something quite separate, and this was actually the earliest sprouting of the Bund idea.

I recall a conversation we had a bit later, in the year 1901, on the subject of the distinctiveness of the Jewish movement. It took place after our arrest. We came together behind bars, in one cell, where we discussed exhaustively, among other things, the real nature of our movement. I attempted on that occasion to draw up something of a balance sheet. “Our movement,” I said, “has two singular characteristics: the first is a consequence of the fact that we have very few workers in the large factories. Most of our people are employed in small and even tiny workshops of artisans and manual workers. The

second characteristic of our movement derives from the fact that our workers are Jews, children of the Jewish people. The Jewish worker is thrust into the movement by two driving forces: first, by his class feeling; by the consciousness of being a worker, exploited, compelled to struggle for a better life jointly with his brothers; the second force, however, is his sense of Jewishness, the consciousness of being a Jew. Who is to say which of the two forces has the stronger impact?"

"Just imagine," I went on, "an accident happening to someone on the street which requires assistance to the person in question. You turn to a Jewish worker and say, 'Come, let's hurry, let's help; a worker is in need of aid.' I don't know whether these words would have any effect upon him, unless he were, of course, one of the really dedicated workers, a comrade. But should you turn to him and say: 'A Jew is in danger! Let's go and help!' who knows whether this would not have a better effect?"

"The issue therefore centers on where we ought to direct our greater attention in our agitation among the masses: toward the class feeling of the proletarian or toward the awareness by the Jew of his essential Jewishness."

This was how I put the question at the time, merely posing, not answering it. The whole thing was no more than a prison conversation and a prison inspiration. In the final analysis it was the class standpoint that prevailed with me.

I remember another conversation, also in prison. An activist from Vilno, Tsilal Bulkin, had been added to our number. One of the best workers in Vilno, a glovemaker by trade, he was a member of the Vilno Committee. He described to us how activities were carried out in Vilno. Among other things, he alluded to the Yiddish language. What later came to be known as "Yiddishism" was already highly developed among the Vilno people. He told, for instance, how the organization there used the Yiddish language exclusively. Even at the sessions of the Committee, where everyone knew Russian, the practice had been adopted of requiring everyone to speak nothing but Yiddish. This seemed strange to me. I was of the opinion that the Yiddish language should actually be used only when it was truly necessary, at a mass-meeting, even at the *razborka*; in short, wherever persons were encountered who spoke no Russian. But to speak Yid-

dish at a meeting of the Committee simply as a matter of principle, as a demonstration—I didn't consider this correct.

These few individual episodes are all I remember of our attitude at that time toward the Jewish character of our movement. It was still the twilight period.

What then was the status of my personal Jewishness? My new friends, the workers, used to call me good humoredly "the *goy*," and superficially, I still revealed strong marks of the gentile. I continued to encounter great difficulty with the Yiddish language. I already understood Yiddish; hearing it constantly spoken around me was not without its effect. Knowledge also of the German language proved of no small assistance. Yet, many Hebrew words used in Yiddish were still foreign to me, and this produced a great number of difficulties. Nevertheless I was able, quite readily, to grasp the general content of Yiddish speeches. Indeed, I remember hearing then for the first time a reading of a story by Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. It was *Der Kranker Yingl* (*The Sick Boy*); and I understood it very well. The story made an extraordinarily powerful impression upon me. However, I could not speak the language. There was the time I visited a worker who just happened to be away from home. I tried to inquire of the landlady—and in Yiddish no less: "When will he return?" I had uttered no more than those four simple words, and she detected immediately that a *goy* was speaking and responded in Russian. I was likewise unable to read Yiddish, although I ventured to teach myself a little. I did this together with Vilenkin, who was as much of a *goy* as I. We once tried to read a small Yiddish pamphlet. In the course of our reading we encountered the words *porits* (lord or landowner). Vilenkin knew the meaning of the word and he explained it correctly. But he didn't know how to pronounce it. He insisted that it be read "frits"¹—and "frits" it remained. Writing Yiddish was completely beyond me; I only learned it much later.

1. To the uninitiated, confusion in pronunciation of the Hebrew-Yiddish letters "p" [pā] and "f" [fā] may arise because of a dot in the letter p to distinguish it from the letter "f." As to the "o" [ō] in *porits*, the confusion—and mispronunciation—here resulted from the fact that *porits* is a Hebrew, not a Yiddish, word; and in Hebrew vowels are omitted in the written language, sometimes indicated by diacritical marks. Without the assistance of these dots, a person unfamiliar with Hebrew is apt to run the letters together.

Naturally I wrote the articles for *Der Minsker Arbeter* in Russian, after which they would be translated. But even at that early stage I had a certain feel for the Yiddish language. And in writing Russian I utilized the kind of expressions which lent themselves readily to translation into Yiddish. In any event, I was powerfully influenced by the Jewish workers' environment. I cannot state with precision what form it took, but the continuous encounter with Jewish life had a strong Judaizing influence upon me, as did my friendship with Teumin in particular. He was profoundly involved in Jewish life, as in this characteristic instance: his mother had died just then, and he used to recite the Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, for her. Himself a socialist and a freethinker, he had nevertheless given her this promise before her death. And he kept his word. Through Teumin I learned many particulars about Jewish life. Together with him I visited the Old Synagogue during Kol Nidre.² Thanks to him I observed for the first time such things as a traditional Jewish wedding, with a *batkhn*³ and with an *eyl moley rakhamim*.⁴

Still fresh in my memory is the evening Teumin and I walked the Jewish streets, those out-of-the-way, impoverished little streets with their tiny houses. It was Friday night. The streets were quiet and empty, and the Sabbath candles glowed inside the houses. We had been conversing about matters Jewish. I have forgotten the content of the conversation, but I do recall being profoundly stirred by the singular charm of the silent Friday night. And I sensed within me a romantic link with the somber Jewish past; that warm, intimate closeness which someone feels only toward his very *own* past.

This feeling of warmth toward the past has forever remained

2. The prayer recited at the evening service which begins the observance of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

3. A specialist in providing entertainment, often of a maudlin, bittersweet kind, at weddings.

4. A prayer lament for departed parents, hence an element of sadness at an otherwise festive wedding occasion.

coupled in my mind with those tiny houses on the silent streets of a Lithuanian *shtetl*. My feeling in the matter of Judaism was always, as a Zionist might express it, *goles gefil* (diaspora sentiment).⁵ The palms and vineyards of Palestine were always, and have remained, alien to me. This, I believe, is a sign of the fact that my Jewishness is a deep-rooted, living Jewishness, and not a literary fantasy.

As I have noted earlier, I cannot precisely and concretely identify the form in which this “nationalizing” effect of the Jewish workers’ environment expressed itself. It was the subtle influence of everyday life. That life became something near and dear to me, but that life was a Jewish one, and it drew me into its vortex. At what moment did I, clearly and with finality, come to feel like a Jew? It is hard to say. I do know however that when I was arrested early in 1901 and the gendarme gave me a questionnaire to fill out, I inserted under the rubric “nationality,” the response, “Jew.”

And later, after my imprisonment, when I fled to Switzerland and acquired a number of good friends there among, indeed, Zionist female students, they would repeatedly observe: “Medem, you’re a good Jew.” I don’t know what basis they had for such a contention. They were well aware that I was a Bundist and an opponent of Zionism. But in those days the more reputable Zionists still appreciated that Zionism had no exclusive claim on Jewishness.

5. Such an attitude, reflecting the Bund philosophy concerning the Jewish condition and future, was sharply at variance with the Zionist creed based upon the repudiation of the diaspora.

The Hospital

AN EXCEEDINGLY UNPLEASANT, albeit brief, interruption occurred in the very midst of my activity. The month of November arrived, the time of the military *prizyv* (service call-up), and since I had just turned twenty-one I was compelled to report.

The *voinskoye prisutstviye* (the place where recruits were enrolled) was located in a small wooden house on Zakharev Street. I knew the place well. In earlier years, at *prizyv* time, I frequently passed by the house and witnessed a mass of individuals numbering in the hundreds shoving and milling about on the street while waiting for a decision. I was merely an onlooker then; but now I had become a direct participant. I entered the *prisutstviye* on the designated day. The small room was jammed with young men, all of them unfamiliar, I should say all but one, a Russian worker, indeed one of those with whom I used to meet in the course of my attempts to conduct agitation among the Christians. This fellow had not known my name, and I was rather discomfited by the thought that the “conspiracy” might now be exposed. Well, nothing could be done about it. He recognized me, walked over, and proceeded to offer me naive suggestions on how best to escape military service. He mentioned something about holding one’s breath in order to induce heart palpitations. I don’t know whether this advice stood even him in good stead; I for one made no use of it. Moreover I was certain they would release me in

any case. There was no need whatsoever for dissimulation on my part nor for recourse to a bribe, something widely practiced by others. I was genuinely ill. After the “typh” which I had contracted in Kiev a few years before, I was left with a chronic kidney ailment, and it constituted quite a sufficient legal basis for being freed from military service. Yet the procedure as such was most painful. The people would be called, one by one, into a separate room in which the “commission” was seated. Each individual entered the room undressed, naked as the day he was born. He was measured, he was examined, he was pawed, and he then received his verdict. It was ugly and disgusting, and one felt deeply humiliated. But, alas, there was no alternative; it had to be undergone. And I actually went through with it.

Kidney disease is an internal condition; it cannot be identified visually and it requires certain tests. It cannot be taken care of directly on the spot. In such contingencies, the individual is shipped off to a military hospital where he remains for a time until a determination is made whether he’s really ill or simply malingering—which is what happened in my case. I was sent to the hospital for ten days.

More than twenty years have elapsed since that time. In the interim I experienced plenty of hardships, came to know a dozen prisons, moved by the *étape*¹ many times, starved and froze. Yet I must confess that rarely was it my lot to suffer as greatly as during those ten days of confinement in the military hospital.

The suffering was not physical. I was subjected neither to hunger nor to cold, nor was I the recipient of blows, and I had a bed with a pillow and a blanket. And even though my clothes were taken away, and I was given some kind of loathsome prison garb, this too was a minor irritant and hardly the source of my distress. This lay rather in

1. Prisoners—above all the politicals—were sent into interior exile via the *étape*. It was sheer torment, involving movement from one place of incarceration to another by slow stages, frequently in special prison trains (after 1905, known as “Stolypin wagons,” named for the repressive minister of Nicholas II). In chains and manacled, held over in local jails, abused at every turn, prisoners would be collected and moved along toward the place of eventual exile, in which the final lap of this body-and-soul-searing odyssey would frequently be covered on foot. The *étape* system was carried over into the Lenin-Stalin period of the Gulag. See, for instance, *Letters from Russian Prisons* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925).

the totally dismal atmosphere of the hospital. For the first time I felt the full weight of the brutal, vulgar, military discipline. For the first time I sensed what it meant to become nonhuman, of no consequence, a mere ant in the vast uncouth multitude, an ant free to be screamed at, insulted, and abused by any drunken subaltern, and forced to take it and keep silent. I was still very young and still quite pampered by my earlier life, and I found the situation tremendously difficult. But even this was not the worst. The worst were the epileptics.

As was customary, I found myself in the section for internal diseases. The ward was fairly large. It held about twenty beds. The main door opened on a long, wide corridor running from one end of the building to the other. In addition, doors on either side of the ward opened on two adjacent wards. These wards constituted the section for internal diseases. Elsewhere, down the length of the corridor, there were a number of other wards: for persons with eye diseases, skin diseases, and so on.

One section was missing completely in that large hospital, a section for individuals with nervous disorders. Because there actually were such sick people among the young recruits, they were placed with us, in our three wards. It was the ghastliest thing imaginable.

Epilepsy, at least in its acute, severe form, is one of the most dreadful maladies in existence—or perhaps, this may only be my personal impression. But when I used to witness an epileptic seizure, when the victim, screaming wildly, would fall to the floor and begin to writhe in dreadful convulsions, a look of terror on his face and frothing at the mouth, it made a horrible impression upon me. These were the kinds of sick people with whom I found myself confined for ten days and ten nights.

We had half a dozen epileptics among us. No words are adequate to describe my reaction upon hearing the frightful screams of an afflicted individual ring out in the middle of the night and the terrible pounding of a human head, a head striking the cold, hard floor. One of the epileptics happened to be lying near me. He was, as a matter of fact, an acquaintance of mine, a schoolmate no less. In his case the seizures came on very infrequently. Still, throughout the ten days I lived in constant fear and anticipation that the dreadful thing would

happen at any moment. Meanwhile I became acquainted with a young cadet who was confined in a different section, on the floor below. From time to time my sick schoolmate and I would walk down the flight of stairs to visit the fellow. I led the way and the epileptic followed. I used to conjure up a vision of him suddenly experiencing a seizure just as we were walking. I pictured him collapsing upon me in the darkness of the unlit stairway, writhing in convulsions while he lay upon me and slobbered over me with the froth from his mouth. The very thought nearly drove me mad. Once I awoke in the middle of the night in response to a noise of some kind and noticed my friend lying on the floor between our two beds, right below me, heaving and flailing about. I leaped up in a state of dreadful fright and dashed into the corridor, and continued running as far as I could just so that I wouldn't see, wouldn't hear.

But that was not all. One of the epileptics in our ward suffered from an extremely advanced stage of the sickness. His very face was a horrid sight, frightfully thin and pale (a distinctively bluish pallor, especially characteristic of this disorder), with dreadful, insane eyes. He was, in fact, half mad. One afternoon he stood up next to his bed and started to sing. It was actually not so much singing as a kind of chanting, with almost no melody; and there were no real lyrics, just disconnected words, yet words that rhymed. And he sang and clapped his hands to the beat; and the singing continued hour upon hour upon hour, without letup, without interruption: "I was walking on the bridge," he sang, "and I found a little tridge—and this and this and that, and this and this and that!" And on and on, in the same fashion, each "couplet" of this weird song followed by the refrain: "And this and this and that!" While clapping his hands to the beat, he would continue singing and walking about and singing and walking about; and when someone attempted to stop him he grew violent.

He was finally placed under restraint and confined to bed. It was already late at night. Everyone had fallen asleep and the madman had also stopped his singing.

But I could not sleep. I lay in bed with my eyes open. It was quiet. There was no guard in our ward. A small lamp was burning; and the outstretched figures of the sick were barely visible. Suddenly—what was that? From a corner there arose some kind of murmur, a hum-

ming of sorts, quietly, scarcely audible. Then it grew louder and stronger and acquired a melody and a rhythm and words, and it turned into a "song," and once again that sound reached my ears: "And this and this and that, and this and this and that." The madman was back to his singing. And suddenly I noticed that he was getting up. How he managed to release himself from the restraints I don't know. But he arose, stood up on his feet, and began to move. Singing and clapping his hands all the while, he walked around the large room, from one bed to another. Singing and singing. The whole group remained asleep, and I was all alone with the madman. I lay there frozen to the spot; and I shuddered at the thought: "What happens if he comes over to me?"

And he did start toward me!

The beds in the ward were arranged next to each other, with headstoward the wall. But they had not been moved all the way up to the wall; a space between wall and beds provided a passageway. And he moved into that very passageway and drew closer and closer, stopping behind my bed, indeed right at my head. I could not see him. I was afraid to budge. I remained absolutely rigid, listening as he stood directly behind me, at my very head, singing and singing and clapping his hands to the rhythm. And the thought raced through my mind: now he's going to seize the heavy copper pitcher standing on the table next to my bed, he need only extend his arm and he's got it, and smash my skull! But I could not move, I could not jump up. I lay there and waited.

And, finally, he moved on . . . and, finally, the people awoke. A guard was called. Again the madman was placed in restraints and put into bed. He lay there still singing. And that's how it continued for a full twenty-four hours.²

2. A good bit of the mythology associated with epilepsy has been eliminated in recent times through the dissemination of medical knowledge. Yet the cases observed by Medem are still identified with certain forms of epilepsy. In Black's Medical Dictionary (London: A. and C. Black, 1968), reference is made to "the occasional occurrence of maniacal excitement as one of the results of the epileptic seizure. Such attacks, to which the name of *furor epilepticus* is applied, are generally accompanied with violent acts on the part of the patient, rendering him dangerous, and demanding prompt measures of restraint." (p. 325)

Horrible were those long autumn nights in the hospital. I was unable to sleep. I would lie there with my eyes open, in the silence of the hospital's fetid atmosphere, a silence broken from time to time only by the wild screams of someone in the throes of an epileptic seizure. I thought about death. By chance I learned from a physician something which had previously been withheld from me: that my own kidney ailment was not a temporary condition but chronic, and entirely incurable. This struck me like a death sentence. I had already ascertained that one could not live long with a permanent kidney disease, at most no longer, perhaps, than ten years. (Well, the fact that I have already been living for twenty-three years with this chronic illness is really a miracle; and the physicians, as a matter of fact, nod their heads incredulously.) And it is readily understandable that the thought of death should have become especially vivid during those sleepless hospital nights, and that morbid fantasies and reflections should have had free rein in my imagination.

I could hardly wait for the end of the ten, truly *katorzhny*,³ days. Before it was all over I had to submit to yet another good fright. The hospital's head physician, who harbored a particular animus toward the intelligentsia, would hear nothing else but that I should go into service. He refused to acknowledge that I was genuinely ill. Never again would I wish to live through those minutes of waiting for the decision, waiting outside the door of the office within which my fate was being determined. In the end the other physicians were successful in reversing the decision, yet I was not freed completely, but merely given an *otsrochka* (deferment) for one year. Should it then appear that my kidneys were still not functioning properly, it would be a sign that the sickness was really chronic, and I would be free. And with that I left the hospital.

3. From the word *katorga*; thus, days reminiscent of *katorga*.

“Those Shining Days . . . ”

ONCE OUT OF THE hospital I immediately returned, of course, to my prior place and activity. The work proceeded as before, with the old fervor and the old success. Those were difficult times. The political atmosphere was stifling to death. Reaction was in the saddle. The workers' movement represented a kind of island in a vast black sea. Enemies were on all sides. And no support nor help from anywhere. The large-scale peasant disorders were to start only a few years later. The sympathies of the liberal circles would also become manifest much later. In the year 1900 we were all alone, face to face with the cruel foe. The foe was still fearfully strong, and our forces were insignificant.

I recall starting out one morning for a meeting of the *razborka*. It coincided, I believe, with the day set aside for the dedication of a monument in Minsk to Alexander II. On the way, I encountered scores of military personnel heading for the parade. There were long columns of infantry with sparkling bayonets. Artillery pieces rolled along, one behind the other—big, massive, frightening—their metal setting off a noisy clangor. Involuntarily I found myself drawing a contrast between this sweeping, gigantic power residing in the hands of our enemies and the small unarmed cluster of young workers enlisted in our ranks. And my heart felt a bit heavy.

I spoke about this later on, at a small *vecherinka* attended by

about a half dozen close comrades. I mentioned the words of a Russian song we used to sing at the time: *Trudno, bratsi, nam zhiviyotsya na russkiy svyatoy* (“Hard our lives, brothers, in Holy Russia”). We were conducting our activities like so many moles burrowing far beneath the ground. A deep night had settled upon us, and there was no hope of quick victory. As we continued to burrow away in our long, narrow, subterranean tunnel, a small bright spark flickered far, far off, but only at the end of the shaft, a harbinger of the still very distant victory. Meanwhile the road was long and the spark burned low and life itself was a trial. Yet the work went on. And the depressing prospect of that seemingly endless road managed to induce for a brief while—really for no more than a moment—a slight feeling of melancholy. Then, bracing our shoulders, we resumed our activity with new vigor and determination.

Who cared if the road was long and hard? Had we earlier entertained exaggerated ideas about the chances of a quick victory, well, in that event, disappointment might have come, and disappointment leads to despair and a mood of futility. But we harbored no illusions to start with. We were conscious from the outset that, for the time being, we would only be able to lay the initial building blocks for the great emancipation structure. And since we knew that the work was rewarding and necessary and valuable, we gritted our collective teeth and carried on, laboring with that stubborn energy and resolution which needs no special narcotic injections, but is sustained by the consciousness of an obligation fulfilled.

And aside from all of this, we were young, not only according to the passport¹ designations, but in our souls as well. To be sure, if we were to go by our scale of measurement in the Bund at that time, then I entered the movement relatively late. Among us, people were drawn into the movement while still boys and girls of sixteen or seventeen and sometimes even younger.² I, however, was already twenty, closer

1. All Russians were required to carry an internal passport for purposes of identification. (See Medem's reference to the old Russian folk expression: “An individual in Russia was composed of three parts: a body, a soul, and a passport.” *In/jra*, p. 375.)

2. In the history of the Bund, a colorful chapter was written by the organizations of the very youngest adherents of the movement. Arising spontaneously between 1900 and 1905, groups of primarily working-class children in various towns formed

to twenty-one, when I entered the organization—literally an “old-ster.” But on the general human scale I was still truly young, very young, externally as well as inwardly, and on this matter I took rather candid stock of myself. I was never one of those (as the Germans put it) *alt-kluge* (precocious) youths who convince themselves that they are already highly mature, stable individuals. On the contrary, I still felt—and even in later years as well—very much the boy. This stemmed perhaps from my having been the youngest in the family, accustomed to looking at people around me as older, and at myself as the child. It took me many years before I could rid myself of the feeling that I was still not a real adult, many years before I could appreciate that what I was engaged in was really a piece of genuine adult life. This is not to say that I didn’t approach my activity with complete seriousness and conscientiousness; but I still remained incapable of regarding myself as a mature personality.

In any event, during that year I felt exceedingly youthful and high spirited, and I truly reveled in the sensation and derived great pleasure from it. It was a joyous period; I knew it could not last. I knew that arrest and prison (and who could say what else) would soon follow, and that the bright and carefree years of youth would disappear never to return. Yet all this lay in the future; for the present things were radiant, there was happiness. I felt within me the force of youth and it provided me boundless gratification. And even the prospect of future storms which might perhaps have had the capacity to envelop me in a light haze of quiet melancholy, proved incapable of subduing the youthful emotion of vigor and joy. I remember a poem that I particularly love; I inscribed it (or intended to) on my photograph which I gave to a close female friend. It’s a poem by the well-known Russian poet Peter Yakubovich, an old revolutionary activist who had spent long years of *katorga* in Siberia. It also happened to be a poem of youth, which explains why I loved it

branches, under different names, of what came to be known as *Der Kleyner Bund* (“The Little Bund”). As with the Bund proper, the movement of the children (some as young as nine and ten) reached its apogee of fervor and self-sacrifice during the revolution of 1905. See J. S. Hertz, *Di geshikhte fun a yugnt* (Yiddish) [*The Story of a Youth Movement*] (New York: Unser Tsait Pubs., 1946).

so. (I feel impelled to give the Russian text³ of this brief poem. My Yiddish translation is prosaic and fails to convey its real flavor.)

*In these bright days at the dawning of our lives,
Bringing promise of storms and snow,
I send you my picture, as to a sister
and a beloved friend.*

*Night will come, perhaps without a dawn,
And we shall part, and there shall be no
return,
Oh, then, remember at least, from time to
time,
With longing in your heart
Your brother far away.*

Incidentally, on the subject of friendship, this too represented a lovely page from the years of my youth. There were three girls in Minsk, three schoolmates: Rosa, Ginya, and Fanya. I became acquainted with them in 1899, just as they were graduating from the gymnasium and we were arriving as “expelled” students from Kiev. Became acquainted and became fast friends. I am a bit “difficult” in this respect; I do not readily become friendly with new people. But where the other two fellows, Kaplan and Vilenkin, were concerned, things developed rather swiftly and a bit later I too joined the new friendship circle. Three girls and three boys, we drew together and became devoted friends. The three girls represented a complete set, ingeniously grouped as though they had been especially linked ac-

3. The Russian text, transliterated:

*V'eti svetliye dni, na zare
Nashey zhizni, sulaschey nenastye i vyugu,
Svoy portret ya vam shlyu kak sestre
I lyubimomu drugu.*

*Budet noch, mozhet byt bez zari vpered, i
I razstanemysya my, i ne budet vozvrata,
O, togda khot' poroy s'sozhaleniyem v'grudi
Vospominayte dalyokovo brata.*

ording to some prearranged design. Rosa was the soulful one, Ginya, the brain, and Fanya, the stormy, independent spirit. We—the three boys—were also sufficiently different in our natures, so that all of us tended to complement each other and a lovely harmony resulted. Among ourselves, all six of us were on intimate terms of the familiar “thou,” but the friendship was solely platonic. I was exceedingly proud of this. By our example, I used to imagine, we showed that a truly pure friendship could exist between men and women without any other involvement. And when I recall the years gone by, that friendship remains inscribed in my memory as a priceless treasure of youth—bright, warm, and noble.

34.

The Arrest

IT WAS ABUNDANTLY clear to me that I would not have long to wait to be arrested. Some managed to avoid it for years, the strictly “conspiratorial” people who were totally unknown in the city, and who possessed a “kosher” name or at least a “kosher” passport. But I was known; I was, after all, an “ex-student,” an expellee, and that was sufficiently damning in itself. Moreover I had already been arrested once and was *pod nadzorom*, “under police supervision.” So it was self-evident that I would end up in prison at an early date. My residence became the object of an *obysk* (domiciliary search) twice in rapid succession in 1900. Our old cook, the same Pani Mikhalina who had held me in her arms when I was a little boy, was already accustomed to these nocturnal visits. At a ring of the bell she would first rush into my room, awaken me, and break the happy news: “The *paskudnyakes* (blackguards; scoundrels) are here again.”

And because I knew I would be apprehended shortly in any event, I allowed myself from time to time certain minor, boyish indiscretions, as when, for instance, we carried over a student custom actually stemming from the Kiev days of ruffling spies. The students had once engaged in a pastime of sorts of latching onto a spy who was tailing them and reversing their roles—tailing the spy. It is even told, although this may be only apocryphal, that Novitsky, the general of gendarmes, once hauled in two of these student tricksters and

pleaded with them to “stop hounding his people.” We took up this little game in Minsk. On one occasion we tailed a certain character through street after street for quite some time, until he finally managed to disappear. I don’t know whether he was a genuine spy; it could be that he actually believed we were the spies. Another time, however, I really became involved with a genuine spy. We happened just then to be distributing leaflets in the city, and I clearly observed this particular specimen darting, like a creature possessed, from one street to another and back again in search of the distributors. I followed him and persisted in it so long that, losing his patience, he finally approached me and asked what I wanted of him. We engaged in a brief but acrid conversation, and I finally left him alone.

Arrests were continuous. Yet none of this was in any sense what had come to be called a major setback. The organization remained virtually undamaged. The people seized were invariably sideliners—former activists, sympathizers, and the like. Thus, they arrested Gershuni, and quickly released him; arrested Teumin, who was not a member of the organization, and let him go; arrested Vilenkin, before he had entered the organization, and let him go; arrested a few bristle workers, who were also not active, and released them, and so on and on. All this was Zubatov’s doing. The notorious Moscow *Okhrana* official, with whose name is associated a whole “movement,” the *zubatovshchina*, was in the habit of casting his nets widely at that time. The arrests were not prompted by the aim of punishing those arrested with imprisonment and Siberia. No, Zubatov’s object was to turn them into his followers and agents. He would call them in and engage them in hour-long conversations. He argued that he was a friend of the workers and of the labor movement and affirmed that the labor movement was good and necessary. It was the interference of the intelligentsia in this movement that was causing all the trouble. The intelligentsia wished to exploit the workers for their own political ends. The workers should not allow themselves to be misled by the *intelligenti*; they ought to shuck off the revolutionary fiddle-faddle, and after they had become satisfied with a reasonable defense of their daily, material interests, the government would be on their side, protecting them against the employers and permitting their labor organizations.

Such were the sermons with which Zubatov worked on people. He was a clever and crafty man, a skillful psychologist who knew how to uncover the vulnerable element in each of his “patients,” and he made a pronounced impression upon a certain number of them. Some of those arrested actually became his followers.¹ On others—those whom he was unable to convince ideologically—he would work in a more practical manner. He pledged to free them promptly and without asking anything of them. The condition? They must promise not to be active in the movement. And since most of those pulled in were not really active, they would reason: “What do I care; I don’t intend to be active anyhow! So he can have my word and choke on it.” And they would give their word and be released. There weren’t many such cases, but enough to sow widespread demoralization. And this, indeed, was Zubatov’s intention.

He operated in this fashion month after month. And after he had gotten all he needed out of the city, he recalled his emissary from Minsk—the young gendarme, Gerardi, who used to provide him with

1. For an analysis of the Zubatov movement in Minsk and its collaboration with certain Jewish elements, including Zionists, in the struggle against the Bund, see Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, pp. 120–29; 140–47. The notorious role of Manya Vilbushevich, one of Zubatov’s leading agents in the Jewish arena (and a future immigrant to Palestine) was exposed, along with others, when the documents of the *Okhrana* were made public after the fall of the Tsar.

L’Affaire Vilbushevich was destined, incidentally, to run a lengthy course. A pamphlet by David Zaslavsky titled *Zubatov un Manya Vilbushevitch* (Yiddish) (*Zubatov and Manya Vilbushevich*) was published in Moscow in 1923. And Medem found himself directly embroiled with her after he wrote an article for the *Jewish Daily Forward* on December 14, 1921, titled “*A por verter vegn der tsionistisher arbeter delegatsye*” (“Some Words About the Zionist Labor Delegation”). He exposed her past and protested against her membership on a Palestinian labor delegation which was visiting the United States and approaching the Jewish labor movement, among others, for material aid. Vilbushevich retaliated swiftly in a letter to the *Forward* (Dec. 16, 1921) and announced that she was taking legal action against Medem and retaining for this purpose the prominent Jewish figure, Yitskhok-Ayzik Hurvich. (See his letter in the *Forward*, Dec. 23, 1921.) In several subsequent articles Medem focused on the historical background and insisted that it was not a case for a public court, but for a political party “tribunal” (a traditional procedure in such matters), before which he would be pleased to deal with the issue. In the end, nothing came of these exchanges except for the airing of the Vilbushevich story.

the human goods—and gave a free hand to the local gendarmes. The latter set to work at first in the old-fashioned way: arresting and exiling without formalities; the old extermination policy. Subsequently, after they had actually administered the necessary blow to the organization, they brought in Zubatov's followers and directed them to erect their enterprise on the "cleared" ground. But this came later. In the period I am writing about (the winter of 1900 to 1901) there began the simple, traditional arrests. During one of those arrests which involved the seizure of a large group of workers from a certain trade—I can't recall which—the police beat the workers savagely. It was the first time in Minsk that the authorities allowed themselves to beat political prisoners. We were terribly indignant. Out of anger and wrath, Merka actually burst into tears at the meeting of the *razborka*. We decided to issue a leaflet. Boris Frumkin wrote it and we distributed it, although the leaflet failed to satisfy me personally. It lacked the strong language appropriate to the total fervor of our indignation. But when dealing with such beasts in human guise, sufficiently powerful words are really hard to come by.

In midwinter Vilenkin was again arrested together with a number of other people in the organization. And several weeks later I was seized with another batch of active members. On the evening before my arrest we happened to be holding a meeting, or perhaps a *vecherinka*. Several dozen people were present, the very cream of our organization. The gathering took place near the old market. We spent a highly enjoyable evening or, more accurately, night, for it was about three o'clock when I got home. The police were already waiting for me. And within the hour I found myself in prison.

From the outside, the Minsk prison with its four circular turrets looked like a lovely old fortress. It was, in fact, a well-known rule that the most attractive structure in Russian provincial capitals was the prison. But on the inside, the place was dilapidated, filthy, and stifling. The prisons—at least the old-time ones—had about them a distinctive prison odor, and the odor was the first thing that greeted a newcomer stepping behind those hospitable walls.

I was confined to a large cell. I was all alone, as a human, that is. The place held some other living creatures, things with four and even more legs. The mice were having a field day. The very first evening I

was compelled to hang my shoes from a string as high as possible, for fear that the mice would gnaw them to bits on the floor.

Still the treatment was decent. The *nachal'nik* (chief officer) arrived in person and asked me to indicate what I wished to eat; it would be brought to me from town. He recommended especially that I order cutlets. He pronounced the word "cuklets." I didn't want cutlets, however. I wanted *gribenes* (well-browned and roasted bits of fowl skin)! *Gribenes*—these were among my recent acquaintances. I had never seen them in my home, nor even heard of them. It was after I started meeting with workers that I had occasion to eat them several times, and I became a passionate devotee of this really tasty dish. Thus the first thing I requested in prison was goose *gribenes*. The prison official stared at me incredulously, but my wish was fulfilled and I obtained the *gribenes*.

Unfortunately there was not time enough to finish them. I spent two days all told—perhaps only one—in the Minsk prison. The practice of transferring political prisoners from Minsk to Moscow remained in effect even after their "cases" had been shifted from Zubatov back to the Minsk gendarmes. Accordingly, I, too, was placed in a wagon together with two gendarmes. (In those days they did not follow the practice of sending individuals who had not yet been sentenced by way of the *étape*.)

By the following day I was already in Moscow.

35.

Behind Bars

MOSCOW WAS THE collection point at this time for political prisoners from all the northwestern *gubernii* and from other regions as well, such as Yekaterinoslav [now Dniepropetrovsk]. Because the hundreds of one-man cells in the huge Taganka prison were always filled beyond capacity, the newly arrived would be placed in a district police station, an *uchastok*, so I, too, spent the first few weeks in an *uchastok*. I don't remember which one it was among the many Moscow *uchastki*. It was a separate building for prisoners, not very large—about ten cells off a single corridor; and all the cells occupied by our Minsk comrades. Spirits ran high. True, we were all confined in separate cells and never came in direct contact with each other. But we did manage to converse. As it happened, one of our two guards, both of whom were ordinary policemen, simply loved to sleep—and to sleep as in a stupor. He would have been deaf even to the firing of a cannon. This may be accounted for perhaps by his snoring. No ordinary kind of snoring, it was more like thunder. And that monotonous thunder apparently made him totally deaf, so to speak, to any other sound in the world about him.

And so we carried on to our hearts' content. At first we sang songs; then we advanced to singing whole conversations. We continued in this boisterous fashion until late into the night, and, in the process, kept each other from sleeping. It finally reached a point

where I actually wished for our guard to awaken and put a stop to the interminable singing. The way the bunch carried on, no one was able to sleep, and I for one craved a bit of a nap. Alas, to no avail. The only one who actually slept through the incredible din was the very custodian himself.

We were being treated well, and this was the most important thing. It's possible to tolerate just about anything in prison—all manner of physical inconvenience, hunger and cold and filth—if one is but treated humanely. This may be a purely subjective opinion, yet for me it was the first and most important consideration.

I can still remember the time—it was just a few weeks after my imprisonment—when the *okolotochny* (district inspector of police) came to my cell on a certain matter. He glanced at me and said: “You look much better than at the beginning; evidently our climate suits you well.” A meaningless gesture, one would suppose? Yet, the accompanying smile appeared so genial, and the few simple words were so amiably voiced, that I remained deeply touched. I felt as though a warm soothing wave had welled up in my breast; it was almost a feeling of bliss. Prison makes one acutely sensitive to such things.

Finally, one morning, I was placed in an *izvozhik* (carriage) and taken to the real prison, to the big one—the Taganka.¹ Never before had I seen a prison like it. I had previously been the guest at a few large prisons in Kiev; but they were far different. There, a prison resembled an ordinary big building. On the lower floor one would enter upon a lengthy corridor with cells along both sides; on the floor above, a similar corridor and cells, and so on. But what I found here was substantially different. One entered a large four-story structure that extended out from a central point into three wings, like a half-star (or like a cross with a broken shaft) and—there were no stories. The topmost balcony was visible from the very bottom. The place resembled a sizable theater arena, only a very long and narrow one. And narrow, iron galleries ran the complete length of those high, long walls—one atop the other—four levels in all, if I'm not mistaken. Little doors ranged along each gallery—small, heavy, iron

1. The Taganka has had a long service. The prison is cited by Solzhenitsyn as part of the Gulag world.

doors, each with a small round “eye.” The doors opened into one-man cells, *odinochki*. Connecting the galleries and walls with one another were little narrow iron catwalks, seemingly suspended in the air; and vertically linking one catwalk to the other were equally small and narrow iron stairways. The whole area was thus overspread by something like an iron cobweb. Standing in the center, one could see the galleries with the catwalks and the stairs and the myriad tiny doors, one directly adjacent to another, doors without limit, hundreds of them; and along the galleries the guards pacing about; and behind each little door, enclosed in a miniscule cell as in a cage, a prisoner.

I was led into one such cell. Puny; three steps in width, five steps in length, a narrow iron bed welded to the wall. The table—an iron board jutting from the wall; the bench—another board, somewhat lower. A tiny shelf held a copper jug and a copper pot, and a piece of brick for cleaning the utensils. In a corner—the notorious *parasha* (an open, portable toilet bucket). And that was all.

Here I felt for the first time like a real prisoner; a person without a name. Even the guard posted at my door didn’t know my name. Number 249—and nothing else. And there commenced the boring regimen of a prisoner: the wake-up bell in the morning; the teakettle with hot water inserted through the small window in the door; the *poverka* (check-up); the overpowering, deadly silence during the long nights. One’s whole life resembled the slow movement of an immense, rigidly structured machine. The human being became a tiny cog in that machine. The human being was effaced, the number remained; one among hundreds, but separated from those hundreds by the thick iron walls of his cage.

According to the rules, we were required to be strictly separated from each other. Our jailers were not satisfied with walls alone; the prisoners were distributed in such a way that each of the politicals had the common criminals as neighbors on all four sides—to the right, the left, above, and below. This was done to prevent communication by knocking. As is known, a special prison alphabet exists where each letter is represented by a certain number of knocks. A kind of telegraphic connection is thus established between one prisoner and another. Interspersing criminals as neighbors was

designed to prevent this. But it failed. It simply gave rise to a need to knock harder for the sound to penetrate to a third cell. This we did, in fact, by taking up a clothes brush and pounding on the wall, pounding with such force that the calcimine was steadily chipped away and deep grooves were scalloped out of the wall. True, the guards used to stop the knocking from time to time; but we blithely continued. The attitude toward the politicals was quite "liberal" during those years, so that our "transgressions" were eventually overlooked and we were able to communicate to our hearts' content. This was how I became very friendly with a certain Russian Social Democrat from Yekaterinoslav—Cell Number 365. I used to engage in lengthy conversations with him (after one gets used to the knocking technique, it goes like lightning); and there was jesting and laughter. To an outsider, the spectacle would have looked truly weird: someone sitting with brush in hand, banging on the wall and laughing uproariously.

Later, when spring arrived, the windows were opened; and instead of communicating by knocks we did so in writing. Two fellows from Homel were located not far from me. Every five minutes I would hear one of them calling to the other, and the other answering back:

"Itshe."

"Ha?"

And again, after another five minutes:

"Itshe!"

"Ha?" with a typically Jewish lilt.

The Moscow walls had surely never heard the likes of this.

Meanwhile, the aide to the colonel of the gendarmes arrived from Minsk and called me out for a *dopros* (interrogation). He had no solid evidence; the charge was, in part, quite ludicrous. He charged me with breaking a windowpane at a Zionist meeting. As a matter of fact, such an incident had occurred in Minsk. I can no longer remember what it was all about or why, but a few of our lads had indeed "put a wrinkle" in a windowpane. Naturally, I had never been involved in anything so foolish, nor had I even been present. If I had, the whole disturbance would not have taken place. But the gendarme had his "information." There were other items which were no more

telling. Still and all, I received an intimation that the punishment would be severe.

This came to me as a surprise. I had actually long been aware that I would be arrested. Yet I thought I would be released after a few months and—the first time around—be placed for several years under police supervision in Minsk itself. I counted strongly on the return to Minsk. It was only a matter of when—whether a few months later or a few months earlier. And my yearning for Minsk was truly powerful; not simply for freedom, but for the very city of Minsk. I was strongly attached to my hometown.

Then I was abruptly informed: “You will not return to Minsk; you will remain in prison until the completion of the investigation, after which you will be banished to Siberia.”

Here was a harsh blow. I must confess that the information struck me as a great misfortune, and my heart grew exceedingly heavy. For the first time in my life I experienced that unique sensation that follows a particularly severe and, above all, an unexpected blow. It is very difficult for me to express in words the nature of this singular emotion—as though I had somehow become severed from myself, as if a mysterious hand ruptured the thread connecting today with yesterday. In ordinary times an individual is conscious, after all, of a distinct union between today and his life of yesterday and the day before. Then, suddenly, one feels the whole “I” of yesterday departing, being set adrift. The very self has become lost. I am unable to characterize this particular condition more precisely. But it was a most vexing situation, and I felt miserable in the extreme.

True, I responded with nothing like despair. And even during the worst moments, I had no regret. On the contrary, I put the question to myself: “So, . . . arrested! If you were free would you have done the same notwithstanding, and knowing how grievously it would turn out?” And I replied to myself: “Yes, I still would have done it.” But it was galling nonetheless. At least in the beginning. The suddenness of adversity is, of course, always hardest to accept. Having made one’s peace with the distressing thought, one can more readily bear up under it. And I did, in fact, become accustomed to the situation rather quickly; and as I took hold of myself, I felt lighthearted once again.

The more so because I did not remain in the *odinochka* very long,

at most a couple of months. Then I was again ordered to pack my things; again placed in an *izvozchik*; and again taken to a new location—another local police station. This one was the Sushchovsky *Uchastok*. Here I was not assigned to a one-man cell but to a common cell in which my friends from Minsk were also confined. It held Vilenkin and Kaplan and one of Vilenkin's younger brothers; also Peysakh, Solomon Rabinovich, several Minsk workers, and one comrade each from Kovno and Vilno. We really made merry; we sang and talked and engaged in horseplay. It was quite a life.

Then, without forewarning, in the midst of our carefree existence, the authorities appeared and directed me to pack my belongings once again. Why? No explanation. I must depart. Where to? No one could tell me. Oh well, so be it; when an order comes there's no alternative. I bade farewell to my friends and soon found myself riding in yet another *izvozchik*. A thought struck me: Could my relatives perhaps have arranged matters so that I might be sent out to Siberia right away, without waiting for any further investigation? My heart once again had that sinking feeling. Actually, this way I would have been spared a few months of imprisonment and the subsequent journey by the *étape*, itself a piece of real good fortune. But the prospect of going to Siberia all by myself, thousands of versts away, amid strangers, without friends, without acquaintances—no good.

I was taken to the *Okhrana* and brought before Zubatov. Here, indeed, a good piece of news awaited me; I would be going to Minsk. The reason? My relatives had interceded for me so that I could be freed from prison—owing to my poor health—until the completion of the trial. The prison doctor had offered very favorable certification, attesting not only to my kidney ailment (which I really had), but also to the presence of totally nonexistent lung and heart ailments. So I was permitted to go to Minsk and remain there pending the outcome of the trial and the rendering of the verdict. My relatives were supposed to care for me and vouch that I would not escape.

This was how, quite unexpectedly, I came to see my hometown once again.

Before My Escape

ON THE VERY NEXT evening after my arrival in Minsk, I proceeded to search out my comrades of the organization. I turned up at the *birzha*, spotted Moyshke, threw him a quick wink, and arranged to meet him at Yakovlev's. Yakovlev was an old Russian *sakharni-morozhenik* (ice cream seller). He had a tiny outdoor cafe on *magaziner gas* (Store Street) where, even in my school days, I would frequently drop in for a little glassful of *morozhenoye* (ice cream). This is where I now got together with Moyshke. He told me what was going on in the movement. It was really pathetic. Zubatov's followers had reared their heads and a counterrevolutionary agitation was under way among the workers. Our organization was very weak on the score of numbers, and Moyshke asked for my help while I was still about. I knew of course that any real participation in activity was out of the question. The authorities would surely be dogging my every step.

Several days elapsed. I returned home one afternoon to find things in a state of commotion. The reason? It seems that Vasiliev, the *zhandarmski polkovnik* (colonel of gendarmes), had summoned my brother-in-law and given him quite a dressing down. "I freed Medem on your responsibility," he said. "I thought he was going to be sent to a sanatorium for a cure. But, instead, he continues to occupy himself with revolutionary activity. That, I cannot tolerate. I

shall have him arrested again and send him to Moscow.” After considerable wrangling, a compromise was reached: Vasiliev agreed to my continued freedom on condition that I immediately go to my older brother, the officer. It was summer and my brother was stationed at his military camp in Orany. There, under his responsibility, I was to stay put.

In the absence of any alternative, I left quickly for Orany; indeed on the following day.

I had, back in my school days, already visited my brother a number of times at military camp. On those occasions I used to mingle with both officers and ordinary soldiers and feel quite at home. This time, however, I was an internee of sorts, a political “suspect,” and I had, perforce, to keep my distance. Moreover I stayed at Orany only a few weeks. The service period at camp ended and I left with my brother for Kovno—actually, not Kovno itself but the suburb of Shantsy where he lived. Then my brother had to leave for Minsk; and I spent the remainder of the summer with a friend of his, in the city proper. At the end of the summer Vasiliev was prevailed upon to permit me to return to Minsk. The investigation conducted by the gendarmes had already ended by then, and day after day I lived in expectation of the order exiling me to Siberia. From information I received I was scheduled to be deported for five years to Eastern Siberia, to a town called Olyokminsk, in the Yakutsk region.

It goes without saying that I didn’t relish the thought of a trip to Siberia. Escape abroad would have been preferable. But how to bring it off? Vasiliev had, after all, explicitly stated that my relatives would be held responsible in the event of my disappearance. Furthermore, he laid down a condition that they were not even to allow me to leave the house by myself. So we pondered the matter and wracked our brains over a course of action.

Help came in the form of the *prizyv*. I have previously described how I had been called up the year before and had obtained an *otsrochka* for one year. That year was already drawing to a close. The time approached for reporting again. I called on Vasiliev and told him I wished to dispose of the matter before leaving for Siberia. He agreed and assured me that, in the event the order for deportation

should arrive, he would hold it up for a few days in order to give me the opportunity to resolve the matter of military service. Then I reported to the *voinskoye prisutstviye* and announced that I was available for service. But now something unexpected happened. The date for reporting was November 15 and it was still only mid-September. This, I thought, should not constitute an obstacle; surely, if I wished to report earlier, why should they not permit me to do so? But as it turned out, this could only be done if I were a Jew; that is, an official Jew, with a Jewish *metrika* (birth certificate). For a Jew could be called to service in midyear, indeed, for the very purpose of catching him unawares. A gentile, however, had to wait for the legal date. And there still remained about two months until the legal date. It was impossible to wait that long. For once, being a gentile proved a disadvantage!

Yet this didn't end the matter. Vasiliev knew nothing about my setback at the *prisutstviye*. Indeed, I informed him that I had reported and was being sent to the hospital again. Naturally, once in the hospital, I could no longer be watched by my relatives. Their responsibility was limited only to the time spent within their home; it ended the moment I crossed the threshold of the hospital. After that, my fate became the direct concern of Vasiliev. He fully understood this, and had already assigned special guards to watch over me at the hospital.

We now proceeded to carry out a meticulously arranged farce. On a certain evening my brother-in-law brought me to the hospital. He turned me over to the guard at the entrance and went home. I gave the soldier my name and asked whether the order from the *prisutstviye* had arrived admitting me to the hospital. The soldier didn't know. He would have to ask the medical assistant who happened to be away, but who was expected back in about a quarter of an hour. "In that case," I said, "I'll dash into a shop meanwhile and buy something. Be back in just a few minutes." I left . . . and in a matter of hours was already seated on the train and heading for the border.

Still the farce continued. The following day my brother-in-law, bearing a package of goodies, hailed an *izvozchik* and set out for the hospital to visit me. He arrived, asked for me, and, of course, no one had even heard of such a patient. Absent! My brother-in-law took

the package, got back into the same *izvozchik*, and headed straight for the gendarmerie to see Vasiliev. He entered the colonel's office and immediately exploded: "What have you done with Medem? You promised, didn't you, not to bother him until he would dispose of the service matter. I personally brought him to the hospital and now he's not there. What have you done with him?"

Vasiliev was no fool. "I understand the trick," he said. "Medem has fled, and you knew about it." But my brother-in-law continued acting out the comedy and he did it well. In the final analysis there was nothing they could charge him with. Unable to guard me at the hospital, he was consequently safe from retaliation by Vasiliev. As for me, I was aboard the train and on the way out of the country.

37.

Beyond the Border

IN LATER YEARS I had occasion to cross the border illegally¹ more than once. I did it, as a rule, with a passport, either someone else's or a fictitious one, but a passport nonetheless, and, with that lovely little document, one could travel in complete comfort. But it was different the first time, when I traveled in the plain old-fashioned way and had simply *geshvarist* (sneaked across) the border like a smuggler, with all the attendant romanticism and pitfalls.

I left Minsk late one evening in the company of a Jewish smuggler who, for a payment of fifty rubles, pledged to get me all the way to Leipzig. Why Leipzig in particular? Because of the series of checkpoints which stretched for some distance inland from the German side of the border, stations where emigrants used to be apprehended. These seizures ostensibly occurred for sanitary reasons. The emigrants, those traveling without a passport as a rule, would be conducted to a bath, cleaned up, confined to a railroad car like prisoners, brought to Hamburg, and there placed aboard ship and sent off to America. For anyone disinclined to go to America—well, it was just too bad; the alternative involved being sent back to Russia. I really had no desire to go to America and no wish, as the saying

1. It was called in Yiddish: *ganvenen di grenets* (literally, “stealing the border”).

went, “to end up in a bath.” Hence the agreement drawn up with the Jewish man whereby he would travel with me and help me avoid the checkpoints. Beyond Leipzig one could proceed calmly, indeed all the way to Switzerland. And my actual destination was Bern.

We traveled through the night and all the next day, arriving in Ostrolenko on the following day. Detrained, climbed aboard a wagon (a sort of old-fashioned carriage) solidly packed with Jews, and arrived in the town proper late at night. I slept in a Jewish home—the smuggler’s, as a matter of fact. That was truly a night to remember! Everyone slept in the same room. And when I say “everyone” I mean a *Jewish* family; and a Jewish family—that’s virtually a whole town. Wherever the eye fell, there lay bedding and pillows and human bodies and still more bedding and more pillows. As to vermin—well, that was understood. And in the center of the room, in prison fashion, a *parasha*: a large bucket, and open, of course. And the children getting up in the middle of the night. It was delightful!

In the morning I was informed that we would resume the journey only after nightfall, so I suffered through a whole day in the house. I did venture into town briefly, although such lack of caution was risky in a town where every new face was immediately recognizable. Yet, I wished to purchase something for the trip; I had left Minsk with absolutely nothing. I stopped at a store, bought a small basket and a couple of pounds of salami, and deposited the salami in the basket. This was the sum total of my baggage. Back inside the house, I set the basket down somewhere and promptly forgot about it. Toward evening I again stepped outside for a brief spell. When I returned—woe is me! The basket lay on the floor. Next to the basket sat a giant cat licking its chops. And of the whole salami there remained only a few piddling scraps. So I was obliged to travel with the empty basket, and on an empty stomach.

In the dead of night we were directed into a wagon. This time it was really a traditional Jewish covered wagon with a semicircular canvas top, one of those notorious wagons into which humans are stuffed like herrings in a barrel so that it is impossible to tell whose foot belongs to whom. Our wagon actually held fifteen persons. Two Jewish lads (it soon turned out that they were “comrades” from a town called Yanov), an older Jewish woman with a couple of very

young children, and about ten peasants. Everyone but I was going to America.

After setting out from the town in the very middle of the night, we rode continuously until five in the afternoon, by which time we found ourselves deep inside a forest. We stopped, dismounted, sat down on the ground. The wagon departed and retraced its course. We were to continue on foot.

Meanwhile it was still daylight, too early to proceed. We waited. Our Jewish guide had already left after swiftly collecting all the money we had and giving us receipts. "You'll get it back when you cross the border," he said. "It's dangerous to travel with money on you." A pair of gentile smugglers stayed with us. Experienced, nimble men with ferocious looks, one was an old fellow, the other young.

Suddenly—footsteps! Heavy, martial footsteps! A soldier emerged from among the trees. The group became alarmed, but it was nothing. The soldier had come to get paid off—two rubles from each person. He counted our number, picked up his two rubles per head, and left. We resumed our waiting.

Night fell and we started to move. I don't know if those smuggler fellows wished to frighten us or whether we were faced with genuine danger. (We had, of course, squared accounts with the soldier; but then, aside from him, there were others traveling about for "special" purposes.) We moved with extreme caution. Lined up in a long column one behind the other, like so many ducks, we were conducted deeper and deeper into the forest. Suddenly—halt! Someone was approaching. All of us dropped to the ground and lay quietly, holding our breaths. A rider could be heard drawing closer and closer, his robust gentile voice booming out a Russian soldier's song. And still closer he came. But then the song grew steadily fainter, and somewhere off in the distance it was swallowed up in the gentle rustling of the massive dark forest. We rose and pushed on.

The border was by now very close. Our guides had already stopped talking. They confined their orders to hand signals. It was deathly still. Then, in the very midst of the tense silence, the Jewish woman's child began to cry. We froze. The smuggler leaped forward wildly, made a threatening gesture, shook his fist, dropped a solid Russian

curse. "Get that mouth stopped up!" The child became quiet. We moved forward.

Then, quite abruptly, the leader gestured with his hand: Jump! And we jumped. Run! And we ran. The forest had disappeared. We dashed across a field pitted and full of mounds. The night was black; the earth was wet and clung to our feet. Stumbling, falling, rising up again, but propelling ourselves forward all the while in the direction of an isolated house off in the distance and visible by its illuminated windows. Beyond the border at last!

We entered the house, sweating, panting, but overjoyed. The worst was behind us. The guides helped set the mood: "Bring on the whisky! Let's drink to it! We've made it across with luck! Now sit down kiddies and send cards to your relatives telling them how happy you are. Hurry! Hurry! No time to lose! Let them know that we led you well!"

Then we crawled into an attic and fell dead asleep. Only a few hours remained before sunrise.

When I awoke in the morning I was hungry as a wolf. I had gone without food for more than a day. I approached the owner of the house: "What's the chance of a little glass of coffee?" A preposterous request; the owner, a solid specimen of a German with a thick blond Prussian mustache, did not deign even to reply. Again I inquired. He responded with an uncouth expression, and rubbed it in with the familiar *du*.² So I also answered with a *du* coupled with an uncouth expression. We exchanged a few additional sharp words, but no coffee was forthcoming and no bread was forthcoming and a whole orchestra played in my stomach. Happily, the peasants—the America-bound immigrants—had some dried cheese in their possession, and they gave me a small piece. If not for them I surely would have passed out.

Next, a certain Jewish man turned up and began to disburse the money we had relinquished before crossing the frontier. He gave it to us in marks—but he charged us a frightful exchange fee; it was highway robbery in broad daylight! But I stirred up the peasants, an

2. Thou; the condescending form—and contemptuous under the circumstances.

uproar ensued, and the man finally softened and paid out correctly. Then another headache. The man drew from his pocket a batch of soiled slips of paper and handed each of us a sheet. The paper? It was a printed list of stations. What did I need it for? Well, it happened to be the route we were supposed to take in order to avoid falling “into a bath.” But, I protested, it had been arranged that someone would travel with me to Leipzig! And it was paid for! Alas, to complain was utterly futile. “Who’s got the time to travel with you! See here, you’re well enough to travel by yourself.”

Another heated exchange. The German butted in. I exhausted my whole supply of German expletives. But my words fell on deaf ears. And there I stood holding the printed list. I would have to travel alone.

We remained concealed in the attic all day. At nightfall the journey resumed. The distance to the nearest train station was about fifteen versts. I could scarcely stand up. No sleep for four days; no warm food for two days. Again I approached the German: “I can’t go on foot; you must get me a wagon!” “You’ll have a wagon. Let’s first get away from the village. There’s a wagon waiting out on the highway.”

We stepped outside. Ahead of us was the highway, broad and beautiful, smooth as a tablecloth. I had never seen anything like it. But no sign of a wagon. Where could it be? “Don’t talk so much. There’s no time to lose. You’d better run for it or else you’ll miss the train!” And we ran. Madly. Whenever a figure appeared on the road, we had to leap from the highway and hide behind trees; then we continued running. A nice “promenade.” Weary and starved, we covered the fifteen versts in about two hours, and just barely made it. We could see the train approaching while we were still several hundred steps from the station. “Run, kiddies, for all you’re worth!” And we ran some more. In a last breathless lunge we pulled up at the station, bought our tickets, and dashed out to the platform—just as the train was about to leave. I scampered along the platform in search of a third-class car. I could not find one. For one thing, I had been accustomed to the system in Russia, where each class had a distinctive color: first class—blue; second—yellow; third—green. Here, they were all of one color. And on the inside, when I peered through the

little windows, I observed everywhere—cleanliness, neatness, electric lights. Surely this couldn't be third class! So I continued rushing madly about. Finally a conductor asked: "What are you looking for?" "Third class," I replied. "Well, get aboard! It's all third class!" I jumped aboard. The train lurched forward and we were on our way. And I sat there marveling at the Germans, at how their third class was as clean and bright as the Russian first class.

We sped along. The car was empty. In my compartment there were only two others besides myself, the two lads from Yanov. I sat there thinking: What do I say if a policeman should enter and inquire where I came from and where I'm heading? And I didn't even know in which direction the train was going, whether north or south or west. To be sure, I had the train schedule with the list of stations through which I must pass; but they were all nondescript little places I had never heard of: Marienburg, Neidenburg, Allenstein, and so on. I only knew that it was not a direct line but a circuitous route, necessitating about five or six transfers. I could not tell this to the policeman, however. Still I had to know where the train on which I was riding was actually going. I glanced at the walls and my eye spotted an inscription of some kind which mentioned the city of Königsberg. Now here was a familiar name! But I still had to know the nature of the relationship between my train and Königsberg: Was it going toward it or away from it? Just then the conductor happened to enter the car, and I asked him about it. I drew upon my best German pronunciation so that he should not—heaven forbid—recognize me as a foreigner. The conductor took one look at me, led me to the window, and pointed his finger toward a long dark strip of forest extending the length of the train: "That's the Russian border," he said to me good-naturedly. My "fine" German pronunciation had evidently been of little help.

No policeman appeared and we traveled peaceably another few hours until we reached the first station, where we had to change trains.

We stepped onto the platform. The train left. When would the next train arrive with which we were to continue our journey? "In the morning," we were told. It was now close to midnight, the station was shutting down, it was about eleven kilometers to the town, and it

was miserably cold outside. What to do? In the end we managed to obtain permission to spend the night in an empty car. It was my fifth night without any decent sleep.

In the morning we resumed our travels. Another change of train, and still another; riding interminably; turning right and turning left along a twisted, roundabout course—all in order to avoid the checkpoints. I was exceedingly cautious during the whole time and figured that I did not appear overly conspicuous. Once, however, during a stop at a certain station, I entered the second-class waiting room. Passing through, I caught a glimpse of myself in a large mirror hanging on the wall. I could not believe my eyes! After five days of wandering about I had taken on such a scrubby look that I wasted no time in hustling myself, not into the third-class room, but actually into the fourth. And had there been a fifth class, it would have been still more appropriate for me.

I continued onward in this fashion through another night, and yet another, until I arrived at Leipzig and then Frankfurt, from which I proceeded by direct train to the Swiss border. It seemed like a journey without end. I was weary and sleepy beyond description. One thing I still remember well, picking my hat up from the floor every five minutes or so. Apparently I would doze off every once in a while, my head sagging to my chest. Then I would awaken to find my hat lying on the floor. After dutifully retrieving it and restoring it to my head, I would doze off again, and it would again end up on the floor. I kept riding this way hour upon hour.

Finally . . . finally . . . the lovely green mountains of Switzerland came into view. And on the seventh day of my journey I arrived at Bern. I walked down from the station, hastened to the first decent hotel, collapsed, in broad daylight, into a soft clean bed with its Swiss mattress, and sank into a deep slumber.

Alone Abroad

I AWOKE AFTER A RESTFUL sleep and prepared myself a satisfying meal. What next? My going to the city of Bern in particular was not merely fortuitous and without rhyme or reason. To arrive in a strange city, without any friends or acquaintances whatsoever, would have been exceedingly difficult for me. I selected Bern, as a matter of fact, because I did have a friend there; indeed a good friend, Teumin. In earlier days he had been a student in Bern. He left Minsk and again took up residence in Bern only a few months before my arrival. It was to him I was going.

I was unable to procure his address in Minsk. However, I was given to understand that Bern was a small town and that Teumin was well known in the Russian colony. I needed only to stop off at the Russian library; they would tell me how to locate him. The address of the library? A simple matter; any boy on the street could direct me to it.

I inquired at the hotel about the location of the Russian library. But it was a tiny, very modest hotel and no one knew. I was advised to check with the "Information Office" at the railroad station where I would certainly obtain the necessary information. I went there. "Russian library? No, we don't have its address. But you'll find it easily. There's such a mass of Russians; they can be seen all over the place. By the way, you might try the university." I did; but it was

prior to the opening of the school year and nobody was around. Thwarted again.

I strode about the city. Nothing turned up. Bern, in fact, was a small city, and it actually numbered many hundreds of Russians. Yet luck eluded me: I encountered not a one. A whole day went by, and a second, and still nothing.

My situation was becoming desperate. I had always had a fear of loneliness. But here I was not simply lonely. Here I was in a foreign country, thousands of versts from home, tired, weary. What if I should fall ill after the oppressive journey? What could I do all alone? I felt crushed and miserable.

The third day arrived. I decided to rent a room and settle in for the time being; then—well, then I'd think of something. I must surely find someone eventually. I picked up a newspaper, read the room advertisements, and set out in search of a refuge.

I entered a house. There, on a door, I suddenly noticed a calling card with a Russian-Jewish name. A Russian female student. Success at last! I knocked. The owner opened the door: the girl wasn't home. Some luck! I started back toward the stairs. Then, suddenly, I heard them: Russian words! People mounting the stairs . . . sounds of a male and female voice . . . and that male voice had a rather familiar ring. I flew down the stairs. An outcry . . . and we were already kissing. It was Teumin!

One can readily imagine my tremendous elation. To Teumin, my arrival had also come as something of a surprise. He had no idea that I had escaped; he was certain that I was already en route to Siberia. The two of us were beside ourselves. Teumin immediately took me to his place. Then he found me a room, looked after me like a mother, stayed with me day and night, and introduced me to the Russian colony. The place was really swarming with Russians (actually, Jews), which made it all the more amazing that I had to consume all of three days looking for them. The reason? They lived in special sections of the city. Instead of scouting those sections, I had spent the whole time circulating about the steets in the center of town inhabited by the authentic Swiss.

During the first few weeks I literally felt as though I had been reborn. After that terrible sense of orphancy, of loneliness and aban-

donment, I abruptly reentered a warm and congenial environment and came under the wings of dear, devoted people. These were good friends, intimate friends. We used to spend days and evenings together. And the tiny student rooms literally resounded with laughter, song, and frivolity.

The Bern Colony

UPHILL, DOWNHILL. Long narrow streets and alleys. Antique houses decorated with the insignia of one-time artisan guilds. Peculiar walls whose upper stories protruded well out into the street and were buttressed by thick beams, so that walking on the sidewalk was like walking through a tunnel. Then I caught sight of a magnificent Gothic cathedral. And elsewhere I espied an old tower with the town clock. At high noon the bells in the tower would begin to play a Swiss melody, while from a window near the very top a whole procession of tiny figures moved out onto the balcony. And the crowd, necks craning, would stand and gape. At another location I came upon a large, deep stone ditch which held a complete family of live bears. (A black bear was the city's emblem.) And the people moving about the quiet, placid streets were also akin to large healthy bears: slow-paced, calm, stolid. And beyond the attractive parliament building—far off in the distance, yet visible—rose the Alps, their white peaks cloaked in eternal ice and snow. The peaceful, amazingly beautiful city of Bern.

This was the Old City, the old central section. But four wings approaching from four directions had grown on to it, attached as if by thin threads, linked by long iron bridges or connected simply by a few streets: four new quarters of the city. Small modern houses, with flowers and trees, bright and cozy. The Russian colony lived in

two of those small wings—two quarters known as Lenggasse and Matenhof—that constituted the Russian-Jewish ghetto.

On the street it almost felt like being back in a Jewish *shtetl*, except for the absence of dirt, and for the fact that there were no old Jews about, only the young; and in vast numbers. Jewish faces, mainly female, all students, with black oilcloth portfolios under their arms. They still bore the stamp of the small Jewish town. The clothes, the language, their total demeanor—everything was brought along from back there; and the vivacity, the unaffected genuineness—all of it from there. Such was the Bern “colony” of twenty years ago.

Rarely did one encounter a genuine Russian face among the hundreds of young persons, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jews. There was a preponderance of girls, girls who had finished the gymnasium and wished to continue their studies—generally medicine—who came to Switzerland because there was no place for them in Russia. They were, as a rule, the daughters of poor parents who would send them a few dozen rubles a month. Two of them would share a single lunch. Their dress was on the poor side, sometimes even disheveled. Of the men, a sizable number were typical products of the religious schools, *yeshiva bokheyrim*.¹ The University of Bern was very hospitable at this time. No diplomas were required; whoever wished to attend was admitted. Later, the rules became more stringent. By the time I arrived, evidence of graduation from a gymnasium was already requested, but a small number of “old” students still remained, of whom it used to be told in jest that they had submitted, instead of a diploma, a railroad ticket.

There was no love lost for the colony. It was like an island in a

1. During the time in question, many hundreds of young men left the *yeshivas* and plunged into the exhilarating secular world. The process involved a wrenching break with many of the values inherited from the world of their fathers, such as the decided preference for the life of religious study and advancement to rabbinic status, coupled with a manifest disdain for the life of the unschooled artisan-worker (*bal malokhe*). The acuteness of the rupture with the past was most vividly illustrated when literally scores of *yeshiva bokheyrim* consciously shifted from the study bench directly to the artisan's work bench, there to be exposed to the eye-heart-and-mind-opening message of social emancipation propounded by the Bund.

strange, cold, and even hostile sea. The Switzer is by nature conservative, a typical provincial; he dislikes novelty and has his long-established mores and customs. When these customs are breached, he grows angry. Normally a quiet, composed personality, he turns uncouth and brutal when vexed. And clashes occurred.

Whatever the “Russians” did—their total conduct, their way of life—was decidedly alien and weird in his eyes. Young girls who would leave their homes and travel over a thousand versts to study at a university! Something unheard of; there was nothing like it among Swiss girls. And the way they lived! The goings on! Young men visiting the girls; worse still, girls occasionally dropping in at the young men’s quarters, and sometimes even in the evening. To the Swiss, this was more than going too far; it was absolutely intolerable. So the Switzer would raise a fuss and evict the girl along with the boy. And there was no order and there was no quiet. At night, when everyone else wanted to sleep, the “colonists” would be strolling about in the streets, talking and shouting and singing and whistling beneath the windows of respectable people, and so forth and so on. Endless unremitting complaints. Hence the hostility toward us, and the ever more frequent appearance of the familiar inscription on the doors of houses with rooms for rent: “No Russians!” Or a different version: “No Slavs!” The Switzer, alas, was not very knowledgeable on the ethnic question and believed that curly black hair and a long nose indicated a Slavic national. His knowledge of Jewishness was just as scant. On one occasion a landlady observed: “Of course, all Russians are Jews!”

This was how we lived, an island surrounded by alien people. Relations with Swiss colleagues were very strained even at the university, and close friendships with any of the native residents were rarely seen. In general, we lived a life apart. Although we resided for years in the very heart of Switzerland, we had no notion of what Swiss life was like. Even the language was not learned properly: at examination time, recourse was had to *mame-loshn* (the mother tongue, Yiddish); and to enhance its “literary” quality, an impressive number of Hebrew words would be thrown in. All this gave rise to numerous anecdotes—anecdotes that actually weren’t far off the mark.

Separated from the outside world; surrounded by coldness and

strangeness, we lived a “colony” existence, where the colony was a *shtetl* in itself. People maintained exceedingly close ties with one another, feeling the need to cling together. Only a smattering of individuals held aloof. The large crowd constituted a single mass, a homogenized union of all. Actually, the “large” mass was quite small; the *shtetl* was really a small *shtetl*. It was crowded, yet warm. We were thrown together like so many berries in a basket, so that personality became submerged, but withal it was comfortable and snug. For a period of time, before things would become too constricting, stifling, and dull, I loved this kind of warmth. Homeless, dejected, lonesome people had found a refuge for themselves. I remember what a close female friend, who had spent several years in the Bern colony, wrote upon her return to Russia: “How I long to be *home*—in Bern.”

Colony life was a source of considerable gratification to me precisely because of the feeling of intimacy and mutual affection, the need for which is so powerful. One was forever in the presence of the group, forever in the company of close friends. At noon it was the Russian eating center; in the afternoon there was a quick visit to someone for a glass of tea and a bit of chocolate. The evening was the time for a meeting, a *referat* (lecture), a discussion. *Referatn* were scheduled with great frequency; and when such lectures took place it was simply impossible to remain at home. Thus, one would partake of the lecture and the ensuing discussion, and stay on after the discussion for another hour of song and the enjoyment of good fellowship. Early the next morning the professor of chemistry would invariably open his lecture (it was the first of the day and began at eight) with: “Apparently there was another *referat* in the Russian colony yesterday; the seats are strangely empty.”

The seats at his lectures, sad to say, were unoccupied very often; people needed to catch up on their sleep almost every other day. A Russian doctor who lived in the colony once bemoaned the fact that everyone was getting sick due to the plethora of lectures, since the modest admission price had to be skimmed from their food money. This lament was in the nature of a witticism, but it wasn't voiced altogether in jest. The people, as a matter of fact, would sooner have denied themselves lunch than gone without a lecture.

And aside from the lectures there were just plain gatherings and

other kinds of interaction: a mutual-aid association, a “Fund-from-Lunches-Done-Without,” and run-of-the-mill incidents in the colony, petty conflicts, and bigger sensations—not to speak of the *vecherinki* and the various celebrations. I must confess that although life was short on luster, there was warmth and closeness. And I loved it.

A number of prominent older individuals, the big names, the colony *gdoylim* (notables), stood out amid the gray mass of students. The head of the colony was Professor Naum Reichesberg, a Russian Jew, a socialist, but also a professor at the University of Bern.² In his capacity as an official figure and a renowned personage in the city, the colony was under his wing. People invariably turned to him when hard pressed and in difficulty. But Professor Reichesberg rarely put in an appearance at meetings of the colony. On the other hand, three Socialist Revolutionaries, indeed three of the most prominent, were frequent visitors at the meetings. First there was Victor Chernov, the leader of the party. He and his wife were living in Bern at this time, and his home had a considerable power of attraction for youth. An enjoyable discussion accompanied by a glass of tea from a samovar, no less (a great rarity in Switzerland), in a setting of good cheer and geniality, this was quite something. Chernov’s place was forever literally swarming with young people. He had a fairly competent voice, and following the lectures in the colony, it was he who would do the singing as a rule, while his wife, a charming Russian lady, occasionally broke into a Russian dance.

2. “Reichesberg had left Russia in 1886 to attend the University of Vienna. In 1890 he came to Bern, where he received his doctorate the following year. . . . In 1898 he achieved the rank of *Ausserordinarius* [at the university]. His most popular courses included ‘Social Relations in the Nineteenth Century,’ ‘Socialistic and Communistic Theories,’ and ‘The Workers’ Question Then and Now.’ . . . In 1906 he became *Professor Ordinarius* for Statistics and Political Economy.

“Reichesberg belonged to no political party, although, in the words of the Okhrana, he and his twin brother Julian ‘maintained continued relations with various revolutionary groups in Switzerland, giving them material aid.’ The Okhrana considered him dangerous, but the Russian mission in Bern on occasion even issued passports on his recommendation.” Alfred E. Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland 1914–1917* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), pp. 9–10.

The second prominent SR was Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky. His "profession" was fighting Marxism, and Plekhanov in particular. But the individual with the greatest impact on the colony was Ansky. One of the most interesting and engaging figures in the colony, he was then still in his middle years, about thirty-eight, although he seemed much older. Ansky's hair was already streaked with gray and his shoulders had a pronounced stoop. His intelligent winsome face, with its prominent beaked nose and small goatee, was lined with deep-set wrinkles, symptoms of profound spiritual travail. He gave the appearance of an old, weary man, yet Ansky was as fresh and vibrant as any youth. Forever surrounded by girls; an endless reservoir of brilliant witticisms, anecdotes, stories; warm-hearted and fascinating; beloved of all—he fully merited this universal love and respect.

Social Democracy was represented by the two Axelrod sisters. The older one, Lyuba, was the more notable of the two. Under her literary pseudonym, "Orthodox," she had written a number of essays, primarily in the field of philosophy. A little woman, and no longer very young, with small, intelligent, dark eyes set in a small face of dark complexion, her movements highly animated and her mind so acute as to seem more like a man's,³ her knowledge of socialism far-reaching—Lyuba Axelrod was the most prominent female Social Democratic leader in the colony. Eda, her younger sister, occupied herself primarily with literary matters and subsequently also became a writer. I have learned that she died of hunger in Russia a short time ago. The two sisters were loyal pupils of Plekhanov. Their devotion to Plekhanov was literally *hasidic* in character: he was a real idol to them.

3. Lest the present-day reader jump to unwarranted conclusions, it should be noted that there wasn't an iota of "male chauvinism" in either the thought or feelings of Medem. Indeed, literally scores of women in the Bund—and in other radical movements—had the deepest respect and affection for him, respect and affection that were warmly reciprocated. The very notion of male chauvinism was utterly repugnant to the Bund, a movement which was distinctive for the manner in which women shared in all aspects of organizational life and experienced personal liberation. Medem's comparison of Lyuba Axelrod's mind with that of a man's suggested a quality of "thinking devoid of feminine romanticism or sentimentality." (Letter of J. S. Hertz to writer, Dec. 9, 1977.)

The official representative of the Bund in the colony was Avrum Mutnik, known under the name of Gleb, one of the earliest leaders of the Bund. Other prominent Bund figures would arrive periodically.

The Zionists constituted a separate colony. They operated their own cooking and eating facility and held themselves apart. Still and all, we maintained contact with them, and I personally had close friends among them. Their most prominent figure was Shmuel Rosenfeld who later broke away from the Zionists and became an editor of *Der Fraynd (The Friend)*, but has recently returned to Zionism. In those days Rosenfeld was one of the leaders of the so-called Democratic Faction within Zionism. Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the top leader of the faction and now president of the World Zionist Organization, was living in Geneva at the time, but he frequently managed to come over to Bern. His former fiancée, an extremely likable student, lived there. She was a friend of mine, and regardless of the sharpest disagreements, I kept on the best of terms with her whole circle. I also maintained amicable relations with Weizmann throughout those years. He moved to England a few years later and I never saw him again. Another well-known Zionist was Dr. Kisin, who subsequently left for Eretz Yisroel (then still Palestine). I used to get together with the whole group quite frequently and would drop in on their meetings. But my attitude toward Zionism did not change despite these personal relationships.

Within the socialist colony each ideological current had its organized core, its "circle," and a large body of sympathizers. The Bund enjoyed the broadest measure of support in the colony.

During my very first days in Bern I remember how Teumin would point to one or another individual on the street and say to me: "That's a 'Bundist'." I was still green at the time and, at first, didn't know what he meant. The term Bundist was strange to me; we never used it in Russia. Within the movement proper, in a place like Minsk, for example, or Vilno, people were said to work *in* the Bund; this was self-evident. But what precisely did it mean to be a "Bundist" in Bern, in Switzerland, where there was no Jewish labor movement? I quickly learned to appreciate, however, that here too one could work on behalf of the Bund, by raising funds, publishing literature, preparing individuals for organizational work back home. It was essential,

after all, to have a well-qualified intelligentsia. Indeed, the previous congress of the Bund which took place while I was in prison had decided to focus a great deal of attention upon work among the intelligentsia, and the student colonies abroad provided a ready field for such activity. Located in Bern was a group of highly energetic and devoted activists, and their efforts proved most successful. Bern became a true fortress of the Bund, and many of those who were drawn into the movement at that time later became useful and important workers in Russia.

Once the people in Bern came to know me, I was invited after a few weeks to affiliate with the Bund group. These Bund groups abroad were intensely conspiratorial. Not only were persons on the outside unaware of who was a member of a group, but the very existence of the groups themselves remained a deep secret. And when someone was proposed for admission to the group he was asked: "Would you be willing to enter a Bund group if one were organized?" Naturally, I responded in the affirmative—and embarked upon activity.

40.

Iskra

THE COLONY CONCERNED itself very little with study and very much with politics. Quite understandably. People were arriving from Russia, from that old Tsarist Russia, and stepping into free Switzerland. Back there everything was proscribed; here everything was permitted. Only rarely¹ did someone there have a chance to get hold of anything like an illegal newspaper or a small pamphlet printed on thin paper and smuggled in from abroad. Pamphlets were a great rarity; a pamphlet would be read and passed from hand to hand until it ended up tattered, in shreds. But here, on Swiss soil, it was possible to indulge one's interest to an extraordinary degree: socialist literature, socialist meetings, socialist leaders;

1. Medem would not have questioned the following emendation prompted by his words "only rarely." Notwithstanding the many difficulties in the matter of publishing and distributing underground literature, the Bund established an impressive record. In the early years, thousands of copies of the Bund central organ, *Di arbeter shtime*, and the foreign organ, *Der yidisher arbeter*, were published along with numerous local organs in cities like Warsaw, Minsk, Lodz, Bialystok, and Vilno. Leaflets and pamphlets totalling hundreds of thousands were also printed on the underground Bund presses. Up to July 1904 the Bund issued 73 pamphlets in Yiddish, and dozens as well in Russian and Polish. See Chaim Kazdan, "*Di bundishe umlegale presse un literatur*" ("The Illegal Bund Press and Literature"), in *Di geshikhte fun Bund* (Yiddish) [*The History of the Bund*], G. Aronson *et al.* (eds.) (New York: Unser Tsait Pubs., 1960) I, 258–68.

and everything on the most ample scale. Small wonder that the colony found itself totally immersed in politics. The student mass represented a great reservoir of vital, youthful energy, from which each party grouping and political tendency drew its human material. And the fires of partisan struggle raged furiously and without cessation.

They were sharp, impassioned struggles. But of all the party groupings one in particular—still young, still weak—was the most belligerent: This was *Iskra*.

Iskra is a Russian word meaning "spark," and was the name of a newspaper which had begun to appear at that time. It was more than a newspaper, however. The term Iskrism became the designation of a doctrine, a tendency; and this doctrine was actually and in essence the kernel of today's Bolshevism.

In an earlier chapter I referred to the Economists, that current in Russian Social Democracy which, while groping in the dark, sought for ways and means to penetrate the Russian working masses in depth. The Economists believed that the best course, initially, was a purely economic struggle, that broader political tasks could be set aside for the moment. They had profound confidence in the life-sense of the working masses, and were convinced that these masses, once having bestirred themselves and having been drawn into a movement, would automatically find the correct path and arrive at a broad and thorough revolutionary consciousness. Yet the general mass does not arrive at this consciousness instantaneously, in a single leap. It rises up gradually, from one stage to the next, and the task of the leaders is to advance together with the mass, to move a step ahead without cutting themselves off from it.

The *Iskra* doctrine was something quite different. A group of brilliant Social Democratic writers proceeded to unfold their activity at the very time when a substantial political revival had begun in the circles of the Russian intelligentsia. Large-scale student disorders, even more extensive than those in 1899, erupted once again in Russia at the start of 1901, involving not only a student strike, but also huge political mass demonstrations. After a long interval, the first terrorist act took place: the student Peter Karpovich assassinated the Minister of Public Instruction Nicholas Bogolepov. General Peter Vanovsky,

a military man, no less, was appointed to succeed the murdered minister. Something quite new in the way of punishment was meted out to the participants in the student movement; they were sent into military service as ordinary soldiers. All this produced a great stir in the country. It coincided with the beginning of heated discussions about the urgency of university reform. In short, the petrified political swamp experienced a great churning up, creating a need for some blunt and vehement political language. This was the atmosphere out of which *Iskra* emerged.

The atmosphere acquired its particular coloration from the intelligentsia. The broad working masses were still far removed not only from revolutionary consciousness, but even from simple political interest. However, the intelligentsia was impatient. (The intelligentsia is ever impatient.) It balked at taking, step by step, the long road of the working masses, as the Economists had contemplated. In the eyes of the intelligentsia, of course, the issue was crystal clear: the autocracy was harmful and needed to be overturned! The intelligentsia was certain that it was sufficient to approach the working masses and offer them these simple words, and the masses would respond promptly and go into action.

The very first thing around which *Iskra* launched its activity was an envenomed struggle against the Economists. Plekhanov himself had actually mounted the struggle a few years before; but now it was taken up in a more systematic and highly organized fashion.

"You are not leaders," argued *Iskra* against the Economists. "You are dragging after the mass. But the mass, if allowed to take its natural course, has a habit of losing itself in a quagmire. There is great danger in constantly grubbing about amidst the trivial concerns of the purely economic struggle; it will lead to a condition like that of the English labor movement, with its trade unions which have no desire to become involved in any sort of politics, let alone socialist politics." (This had really been the case in England at one time.) *Iskra* alluded to the persistent inclination on the part of the labor movement to slip down into this morass of political indifference and economic pettiness. But they declared, one dare not give in to it. The broad masses must be led by a powerful hand, and they must con-

stantly have set before them the most sweeping political tasks in their full magnitude.

A certain basis for these claims did, in fact, exist. To the extent that *Iskra* stood forth against the extreme Economists, against those who completely repudiated independent working-class politics, to that extent it was correct. But the extreme Economists constituted a small, insignificant group; the others were engaged in useful and consequential activity. Of course they committed errors, but the essence of their viewpoint was correct: they were most closely attuned to the life of the workers and they endeavored to penetrate into the very souls of the working masses. Whether they managed this well or poorly, the object itself was a valid and vital one, perhaps, in actual fact, the most important and necessary one at that time. Thus *Iskra* shattered what was important and necessary. It set itself above the mass and wished to become its commander. The result, however, was to lose the mass completely and to remain a circle of the intelligentsia, for many years.

The leader and the soul of *Iskra* was Lenin. And although he was surrounded by a group of brilliant writers and first class leaders—indeed, all enjoyed equal rights in a formal sense—he had already, by that time, placed the emphatic stamp of his personal character upon the whole enterprise.

When I saw him for the first time (it was, I think, at the beginning of 1902) I was not impressed by his appearance. Outwardly, he failed to make a good impression. From what I had previously heard about him, I envisaged a towering revolutionist, both important and imposing—one of the “big guns.” But what I saw before me was a little animated individual, short of stature (he is actually not short at all but of medium height; the broad shoulders make him appear short), with a small flaxen beard, bald head, and tiny brown eyes. A clever face but not an intelligent one. He reminded me then, and the comparison came instantly to mind, of a crafty Russian grain dealer. Such was my impression of him.

Lenin was giving a lecture in Bern at the time. He spoke smoothly and with a quiet, dogged forcefulness; drily, without embellishment and without enthusiasm. Incidentally, this is worth noting: there was

one subject about which he used to deliver inspired speeches and evoke great enthusiasm among his listeners; it was, most characteristically, the Paris Commune.

In later years I had occasion to meet Lenin a number of times, and I shall have more to say about him in subsequent chapters. For the moment, I am concerned with the features of *Iskra*; and in this connection it is important to identify two qualities in Lenin's character. These are, first, his imperious will,² and second, his pronounced distrust of people.

Lenin is a man of iron. He has the ability to rule as well as the desire to rule. He knows what he wants. And when he wants something, he goes after it. He stops at nothing. When he wishes to carry out a decision and finds himself in the minority, he is very little fazed. He hits upon what to do, hurls himself upon his opponents with unrestrained fury, and pulls the crowd over to his side. Now he has his majority. Or, if he cannot bring this off, he doesn't shrink from recourse to a few "innocent" tricks by which a majority is created even when it is in fact nonexistent. And if this, too, proves unavailing he resorts to splitting; and then he has a completely free field. One way or another, his will prevails. And in this sense Lenin is really a born dictator.

As for the second characteristic, he doesn't believe you. When you speak to him he looks at you with his small eyes—eyes directed at you obliquely, from somewhat of an angle—and with a cunning, devilish smile, as if to say: "There's not a word of truth in what you're saying! Oh well, go on; me you won't deceive." He is a man who believes no one and confides in no one but himself. Yet, with Lenin this is no case of self-love, no conspicuous display and dangle about of the ego—something quite apparent in many others. Lenin is the precise opposite of Trotsky in this respect; the latter is an "I" person, whereas one never hears the pronoun "I" from Lenin's lips. Still, he believes no one, and when he has the power to rule alone—he rules, not because of his ambition, but because that's just the way it works out.

These two traits of Lenin's character were strikingly reflected on

2. Medem used the expression, *di shtarke foyst* ("the powerful fist").

the spiritual face of *Iskra*: the lack of faith in the working masses; the wish for a firm hand which should lead them lest they lose themselves in a bog—that was Lenin. And the organizational plan of *Iskra*—that was 100 percent Lenin. It was a highly interesting plan.

The question was this: How should the party be built? Where to begin? One would imagine that there was a natural way, actually the only natural way: the workers' organizations evolve out of the struggle of the working masses, grow stronger, become more ramified, link up with each other, unify—and a party takes shape. Lenin's plan however was just the reverse: the start would be made not from the foundation, but from the roof. To him, the beginning was . . . the newspaper, that very *Iskra*, published abroad, far away, by a small cluster of emigrés. The editorial staff of *Iskra* would have its agents in the Russian cities whose task it would be to distribute the paper and establish contact with the readers. And the Social Democratic Party was supposed to arise out of this network of newspaper agents.

What was the rationale behind the operation? Quite simple. There was no confidence in the local leaders and the local working masses. Hence the desire to assure themselves in advance the domination of the party. That handful of emigrés must remain master in the party; and the master within that handful was Lenin. Fifteen years before he became dictator of Russia, Lenin had already established a miniature dictatorship within the limited confines of an illegal party.

Iskrism, as I previously said, contained within itself the kernel of the future Bolshevik doctrine. But the split between "Bolsheviks" and "Mensheviks" took place a few years later, and the two names likewise only appeared in the year 1903. During the period about which I am now writing (1901–1902), the future leaders of Menshevism were on Lenin's side. What's more, with the exception of Lenin, virtually the whole foreign group of *Iskra* consisted of future Mensheviks. The most prominent Iskristis were: George Plekhanov, Paul Axelrod, Julius Martov, Fyodor Dan, and Alexander Potresov (Starovyer).

If Lenin served as the actual tone-setter of the policies of *Iskra*, Plekhanov was its acknowledged spiritual leader, the father of Russian Social Democracy. I saw him for the first time on May 1, 1902, when the Bern colony invited him to deliver an address at a May Day

meeting. I looked forward to that meeting with the greatest impatience. The name "Plekhanov" was to all of us an actual symbol of the Russian workers' movement. I counted on seeing and hearing something out of the ordinary. My imagination conjured up someone of imposing force, leonine, with thundering voice and fiery eloquence, a heroic figure capable of evoking tremors of indignation and rapture. I must confess to a rather childish disappointment. There appeared on the dais a middle-aged gentleman [*sic*], dressed in the most respectable fashion. Actually, Plekhanov's face was very interesting; and his eyes had a quality of rare wisdom and keenness. But the total affect was . . . commonplace. Instead of a thundering oration, I heard, of all things, a most pedestrian introduction. Plekhanov's opening words were: "I left Geneva this morning, took a very poor train which barely moved and which stopped at every station, and I became terribly exhausted. So you will please forgive me if I am unable to speak loudly enough." These prosaic remarks dampened my mood then and there. And the remainder of the speech was also rather tasteless and unimpressive. The very thing which I had anticipated was wanting: an expression of enthusiasm.

Not until years later, after I had acquired a bit more experience myself, did I come to understand that this impression of mine was quite naïve. From my own practical activity I learned that it was not so easy to get up in front of a strange, cold audience (and particularly in a foreign "colony" thousands of versts from the real battlefield) and become impassioned. Actually Plekhanov was a brilliant speaker. But his specialty was not the *Festrede*, as the Germans call it, that is, the speech associated with celebrated occasions, the speech of demonstrations. And whenever an individual undertakes something that does not correspond with his character, the effect is artificial and not felicitous. On virtually every occasion that Plekhanov attempted to speak in an elevated tone, the effect would be theatrical. Also apparent was the influence of the French environment, with its bent toward theatrical declamation. Plekhanov was by nature a man not of emotion but of reason, possessed of an extraordinarily acute mind. And he was most potent in polemic. Plekhanov was unbeatable in a discussion. Such sharpness of tongue and sting-

ing wit I have never encountered in anyone else. But in a May Day address I looked for rapture—and did not find it.

Aside from Lenin and Plekhanov, the colony also had the opportunity to hear Martov. He used to travel from city to city in those days and engage in a struggle with another group of Russian Social Democrats. Known as the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad, it published its own emigré organ: *Rabochee Delo* (*The Workers' Cause*). *Rabochee Delo* was older than *Iskra* and stood closer to the Economists. *Iskra*, consequently, used to mount the most virulent attacks upon it. Two of its representatives—Alexander Martynov and Vladimir Akimov—would journey from one colony to another delivering lectures and defending their position; Martov would follow after them and engage them in debate. Among us, in Bern, it was customary for such debates to run on for several days in a row. Martov was never much of a speaker. He had no voice and no clear diction, hence his inability to make an impact on a large audience. *Iskra* did not enjoy extensive support in the colony at that juncture. It was a newly formed group, while *Rabochee Delo* had been long established. Thus, Martynov and Akimov remained the victors. But the victory was only transient. The sentiment of youth tends to undergo swift change, and within a few years not a trace remained of *Rabochee Delo*. *Iskra* had won after all. True, in the immediate wake of victory it experienced a split of its own, and the old struggle resumed under a new name and under a new constellation of individuals.

Bundism

IN ITS STRIVING to become complete master in the Social Democratic arena, *Iskra* collided with the Bund from the very outset, and an embittered struggle ensued.

Lenin's plan for building the party was "from the top down." The workers' organizations that had previously emerged were to be ignored or erased. It was necessary to clear the ground, and on the vacated area there would then be erected a network of agents charged with the task of executing the orders of the center abroad. In general, this plan was implemented without meeting substantial resistance. The old organizations were, in fact, weak and dispersed; getting rid of them proved easy. But an unexpected obstacle was encountered in one place: the Bund. The Bund organization was the largest and strongest in the country. Spread across dozens of cities and towns, firmly knotted into a powerful collectivity, an integral part of the broadest mass of workers—it was a unified organism, a living body with a tremendous inner life-force, with a distinctive physiognomy and separate requirements. This particular living organism would not and could not allow itself to be dispersed and atomized in order to leave behind a barren ground upon which the agents of *Iskra* would be able to stride about. It was therefore something of a bone in the throat of the Iskrist. And they decided to swallow it or to destroy it at any cost.

It was just then—the time was April 1901—that the Fourth Congress of the Bund took place, one of the most important in its history. This was the very congress which adopted, among other things, a resolution concerning the position of the Bund within the ranks of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party.

The Bund had been one of the founders of the *ruslender partey*, the Yiddish designation for All-Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP).¹ At the Founding Congress in 1898, it had been decided that the Bund would enter the party as an autonomous component. The Fourth Congress went a step further and declared that the party should be built upon federative principles; that it should consist of a series of national organizations—Russian, Polish, Jewish, Lettish, etc., and that all of them together should constitute the general party. This was a totally proper decision. Moreover, it was the only means of creating a truly massive and solid party. But the Iskristis latched on to the word “federation,” and discovered that the word was objectionable and the concept—even more objectionable. (At present, the word “federation” is to be found even in the name of the Russian Soviet Republic. Now it’s permissible!) And a great hue and cry arose about the Bund’s aiming at separatism, about the Bund’s preaching nationalism, chauvinism, and whatnot.

The same congress of the Bund adopted yet another and far more significant resolution. This was the program of national-cultural autonomy within the Russian Empire. It was a declaration that the

1. The question of a name for the party evoked no small amount of discussion at the Founding Congress of the RSDWP. The Bund was greatly concerned that the name should accurately reflect the multi-ethnic character of the Russian Empire, as well as its own distinctive makeup, anti-assimilationist philosophy, and role within the party. In his excellent study, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, Henry Tobias observes: “The Bund delegates advocated using *Rossiiskaia* (all-Russian) instead of the narrower ethno-cultural *Rusaskaia* (Russian), in order to distinguish the entire proletariat of the Empire from the Russian-speaking workers alone.” (p. 78) The Bund prevailed in its desire for the name *Rossiiskaia*, whose Yiddish approximation is *ruslender*. Thus, the adjective “Russian” in the English translation (as in the “Russian Social Democratic Workers Party”) should be understood as synonymous with “All-Russian” rather than “Greater Russian,” the term denoting the (repressive) ruling nationality symbolized by the Tsarist regime.

Jews also constituted a nation. This produced an even greater storm.²

The Iskrist (like the majority of Russian Social Democrats in general) had an extraordinarily feeble conception of the National Question. Totally unconcerned about it, they contended that it was a bourgeois matter altogether. But with respect to the Jews in particular, they had within their ranks a sufficient number of Jewish comrades whose inclinations were thoroughly assimilationist and who constituted the most embittered opponents of the Jewish national idea. The Jews weren't a nation; the Yiddish language was an ugly "jargon"; etc., etc. And by daring to advance national demands, the Bund was merely offering further evidence of its nationalism and chauvinism.

Thus was initiated an unrelenting assault. What's more, the Bund demands had been poorly and incorrectly understood, and still worse were more incorrectly interpreted; and an atmosphere was generated marked by burning hostility and passionate polemicizing. The struggle continued for years and led to a situation in which the Bund was literally thrust out of the party in 1903. But the Iskrist failed to garner the hoped-for success. On the contrary, the "Bund idea" emerged from this particular struggle with enhanced clarity and greater force.

In this atmosphere of polemic and conflict, the spirit of "Bund patriotism" also seized powerful hold of me. Previously, during my activity in Minsk, a question like: "Is the Bund necessary?" would never have entered my mind. It was completely self-evident. Bundism was simply like health; one has it without being conscious of it. But

2. Two examples (of many) from the Iskrist press reveal the basis of that tendency's hostility toward the Bund's position: "The fourth convention of the Jewish Labor Bund is the harbinger of the rise of nationalism in the Jewish social democracy of Western Russia and Poland." *Iskra*, no. 7, Aug. 1901; cited in Jacob S. Hertz, "The Bund's Nationality Program and Its Critics in the Russian, Polish and Austrian Socialist Movements," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1969), XIV, 59. "Essentially the Jews have no national culture (not counting religion and in conjunction with it some customs). . . . The Jews lost their national culture a long time ago and now they are suffering unbearably because the autocratic regime denies them access to Russian culture." *Zaria*, no. 4, Aug. 1902, part II, pp. 47–50; cited in *ibid.*

here in the outland there were persons who did, in fact, pose the question and actually answered it with “no.” This response was to me absurd and foolish and has remained so to this day. Inherent in the hostility toward the Bund was something akin to the envy felt by a sick person toward a healthy one. This prompted me to draw a balance sheet at the time and to conclude that we were healthy. I proceeded, as a matter of fact, to ponder more deeply the essence of the Bund, and the more I pondered the more profoundly committed I became.

Distance occasionally lends perspective. Distance occasionally augments strength of feeling. Thus it was only amidst the Swiss mountains, thousands of versts from the Jewish “workers’ street,” that the image of the Bund loomed before me in all its grandeur and beauty.

The Bund was the resolution in life of that task about which I had once conversed of an evening on board the little boat on the outskirts of Minsk. The overriding question of how to incorporate the two currents out of which the socialist movement must be created—the current of intellectual thought and of workers’ movement—the matter of “from the top down” and “from the bottom up”—this question the Bund resolved. And during those days it was the only force in the whole of Russian Social Democracy that managed to do so.

Why the honor of being the splendid exception fell precisely to the Jewish worker I do not know. But that’s what happened. The Bund was even then already a party and not a conventicle of the intelligentsia. From top to bottom and from the broad strata of the masses below all the way up to the center, one felt within it the pulse beat of authentic, quintessential working-class life. It represented one great body and one great soul. Under the illegal conditions of those years it was the only genuine organization of extensive masses of workers. There were other elements on the scene dedicated to workers’ interests. But the Bund consisted of the workers themselves.

And it simultaneously embodied yet another quality. It was like one vast family. I was struck by a characteristic trait at one of the Bund congresses. Several dozen individuals had arrived from quite an assortment of cities and towns, many totally unacquainted with

one another who were meeting for the first time in the course of the sessions. Yet, when the congress ended, everyone kissed before departing. The expression of brotherhood!

This is merely one feature, one example. The central quality I wish to illuminate embodies a kind of recondite and highly distinctive spirit that prevailed in the ranks of the Bund. Owing to this singular spirit, the Bund became not just a labor party, not simply a mass organization, but truly a living creature with a unique countenance, with its special character, identical with a human personality that is loved and cherished. This collective personality was actually loved, and its countenance was something sacred and precious. The response to the Bund comprehended more than devotion to an idea or a cause; it was literally a personal "in loveness."

Others scoffed at our "Bund patriotism." Again envy! We took pride in our feelings, and with full justification. Those in whom the feeling has remained to this day ought to safeguard it like a priceless treasure.³

3. The ineffable feeling to which Medem alludes, the quality of "in loveness," lived on over the decades and is vividly preserved in the three-volume *Doyres bundistn* (Yiddish) [*Generations of Bundists*] (New York: Unser Tsait Pubs., 1956, 1968). Edited by J. S. Hertz, *Doyres bundistn* is a moving compilation of the lives and political histories of no fewer than 600 among the many thousands whose lives were inseparable from the extended Bund family. Except for those who abandoned the Bund for the Communist movements in Russia or elsewhere, almost all the Bundists appearing in the pages of Medem's memoirs are included in these volumes.

My Life in Bern

I LOVED BERN AND FELT at home there. I had acquaintances at every turn. Twelve years later, in prison and with much time on my hands, I undertook to recall the names of all the friends I had acquired during my year and a half in Bern. I counted over eighty young women and several dozen men. And how many did I forget during the twelve years!

While the large majority were new companions, there were also a number of old friends reaching back to Minsk. These included, aside from Teumin, two of the three girls I have previously described. I visited them each and every day, and they cared for me with the tenderness of sisters.

Yet I was homesick. And how homesick! It was the same acute, mordant yearning which used to torment me occasionally during my student years at Kiev. In those days I knew this much at least: another month, another two months, and I would be back home. But here the yearning was divorced from hope, devoid of any alternative.

I longed for my hometown; I longed for my family and for our old house on Skobelev Street. And when I would walk the streets of Bern of an evening, and observe through a window the warmth in a Swiss household—a dining room with a round table, a lamp shining above the table, the people seated about the table so peaceful and

contented—I felt as though my heart were being constricted by a sharp, savage pain.

I enrolled at the University of Bern. My relatives had actually wanted me to go to Belgium and study to become an engineer. The desire that I should be equipped with a vocation of some kind was in itself quite proper. Still, I was loath to go ahead. And then, at this point, the Bern physician entered the picture.

What happened was this. Soon after my arrival in Bern, Teumin insisted on dragging me off to a doctor. “You’re a sick man. This place has very good doctors. Come on!” At first I balked (I dislike tremendously going to physicians), but finally submitted. The physician’s name is unimportant. Though still quite young, he was one of the finest physicians, an assistant at the clinic. He examined me. The ritual completed, he observed: “What’s there to tell you? Your kidneys cannot be healed. One can live with this disease, but not very long. I once had a friend with diseased kidneys; he barely lived to thirty.”

All this was said with genuine Swiss simplicity and candor. Yet it is easy to understand why I returned home in less than buoyant spirits. And I then said to myself: In that case, the Belgian polytechnicums with the engineering diplomas can go hang! What’s the sense of losing four or five years on those boring things? If I’m destined to live only a few more years at most, I should at least occupy myself during those years with what I love. So I remained in Bern and enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy.

But I was not one of the more diligent students. Generally speaking, such types were very rare during those years. “Colony life” and politics absorbed virtually all of our time.

The political work in which we engaged was of a rather modest nature: we raised money, distributed Bund publications, arranged social functions, led political circles, organized lectures. On several occasions I spoke at meetings and discussions in the colony, with favorable results. But I had not yet ventured to honor the audience with an independent *referat*. I remember a walk I once took through the streets of Bern with Ansky and someone else. We were chatting about sundry subjects when Ansky asked, “Why don’t you deliver a lecture?” I was seized with fright. “A lecture? Who, me? Where do I

come off giving lectures?" And, in point of fact, two whole years were to elapse before I delivered my first lecture in Bern.

One particularly pleasant memory, incidentally, is associated with the name of Ansky. The time was the winter of 1901. We had arranged a celebration to commemorate the appearance of the twenty-fifth issue of *Di Arbeter Shtime*. Twenty-five issues of a newspaper that appeared illegally! This was an extraordinary event under prevailing conditions in Russia, the more memorable because the printing was not done abroad but in a secret printshop within Russia itself. The Central Committee of the Bund brought out the anniversary edition of its official organ in a format appropriate to the festive occasion. Aside from the Yiddish edition, there was also a Russian one—printed in red ink. (The latter was issued abroad, and thus involved a departure from practice.) Inside Russia and among the foreign colonies special evening observances were arranged to celebrate this red-letter-day in the life of the Bund.

The observance in Bern was held at the so-called Schweitzer Bund, the colony's regular meeting hall. Attired in holiday dress adorned with the traditional red ribbon, the members of the crowd exchanged felicitations at the door. It was a truly gala occasion. The audience listened to an address, which was followed by singing and recitation. The place exuded a spirit of cheerfulness and conviviality. Suddenly Ansky appeared on the platform; he had been seated the whole time in a corner, unnoticed. "Comrades," he said, "I've just been inspired to write a poem, and have completed it. I would like to read it to you." And he proceeded:

"In zaltsigen yam fun di menshlikhe trern ('In the salty sea of human tears'). . . "

We sat spellbound. Twenty years have elapsed since that evening but the song remains to this very day one of the most beloved in the circles of the Bund, sung constantly at every Bund *vecherinka*. At that time it also possessed the added charm of novelty. And Ansky read with spirit and beauty. When he pronounced the closing lines: *Zol lebn fun rusland, fun lite un poyn der yidisher arbeter bund* ("Long live the Jewish Labor Bund of Russia, Lithuania, and Poland"), a veritable torrent of enthusiasm welled up, and people were stirred to the point of tears.

Ansky generally manifested the warmest sympathy toward the Bund during those years. Although formally an SR, he was no narrow partisan; and the Jewish feeling which had then begun to glow more powerfully in his heart attracted him to the Jewish workers' movement. He was also the author of the Bund's *Di Shvue* ("The Oath"). Both appeared under the pseudonym "Sinani." Ansky's sympathy toward the Bund grew somewhat cooler later on when differences between the SRs and the Social Democrats became exacerbated over the question of terror. Ansky strongly regretted the expression by the Bund of antipathy toward this tactic of the SRs.

I welcomed the new year of 1902 away from home for the first time in my life. In earlier years I would celebrate it, as a rule, in the company of my family. During the two years before my emigration I spent it at Gershuni's home, in a setting of warmth and joyfulness. Now I found myself a castaway on alien soil, and there is no more painful sensation when one is abroad than absence from an intimate celebration.

Two New Year celebrations used to be held in the colony: first a European, and then a Russian thirteen days later, by the Old Style calendar.

The SRs sponsored a *vecherinka* on the occasion of the Russian New Year. I had no desire to attend, and actually stayed home. It was very sad. But we did observe the European New Year by joining with the Germans.

The German socialists had scheduled the evening's festivities in a large hall located in our "ghetto," of all places. To me—a "greeny"—the whole affair seemed quite weird. Here were robust Germans seated with their wives at little tables, drinking beer. The proceedings on the platform constituted a peculiar mishmash, opening with a speaker delivering a serious socialist address, followed by four characters singing a funny song; then the playing of music; and finally—if I recall correctly—there was even dancing. I am quite accustomed to such things by now, especially since my arrival in America. But at that time, to my Russian eyes and ears, it seemed absurd. We left before the end and went down to the old part of town, where it was customary on New Year's Eve for the big bell in the cathedral to start pealing at the stroke of midnight. Thousands would

gather at the cathedral from all corners of the city to hear the bell ring out. So we went along too, and once again encountered something wild and bizarre. Masses of normally calm, serene Swiss, behaving as though they had been collectively stung by a bee, pranced about the streets. The young had their faces covered by masks; and everyone was shouting—shouting at the top of their lungs, without rhyme or reason. Once again I felt so alone, so desolate and miserable. A celebration amid strangers. . .

We held a small conference around the turn of the year. It was the first get-together of Bund circles from the several colonies. The conference met in Bern, home ground of the oldest and strongest group. A representative also arrived from the Foreign Committee of the Bund in London, Vladimir Kosovsky. The conference decided to establish a unified organization of the Bund groups, and assigned to the circle in Bern the task of setting up a central office. I became the first secretary of the new organization. It lasted until the revolution of 1917, when both the Foreign Committee and the whole Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad were dissolved.

A powerful, and very unpleasant, impression was made upon me by an incident that occurred at the time of this conference. The Bern group had assembled during an interval between sessions in order to dispose of some matter in dispute. I can't recall what the dispute was all about. Our delegate, I believe (I won't identify him by name; let us simply designate him by the letter "B"), had not acted on a certain matter in accordance with the will of the group. The meeting, at which I was serving as chairman, was extremely hectic. I too sought the floor with the purpose, in fact, of speaking against the delegate in question. Relinquishing the chair for the moment to one of my comrades (I'll call him "P"), I proceeded to hold forth. My remarks were blunt, and catcalls and exchanges followed in short order. The delegate's fiancée, who was also a member of the group, became tremendously enraged at "P" for some reason, and showered him with insults. "P" responded with a stinging word. The word had hardly left his mouth when "B" lunged toward him and slapped him in the face. A terrible uproar ensued. "P" was an exceedingly nervous individual. He remained glued to the spot for several seconds, unable to move. Then he fell to the floor, writhing and weeping, and finally

collapsed in a faint. A young woman screamed, "Oh, he's dying!" but he came to and was taken home. He remained ill for some time.

It was the first time in my life that I witnessed a scene of this kind. And it was doubly painful. For one thing "P" was a small, weak man who had already sustained a beating previously at the hands of a student, a hooligan. On that occasion too he had experienced severe nervous shock as a consequence. Hence, with respect to "B" 's behavior (he was a healthy fellow), there was something particularly ugly about this second beating. I also felt tremendously angry over "B" 's permitting himself to assault a comrade—and in the course of a party meeting, no less; and someone, moreover, who occupied the position of chairman. This constituted an insult to the group as a whole. I simply could not imagine anyone being so crude and brutal.

A few hours later, accompanied by the veteran Bundist Gleb Mutnik, I paid a visit to "P" at home. He was lying in bed. As soon as we entered the room, Gleb walked up and gave him a kiss. It was a very tender and beautiful gesture; and it was a source of genuine satisfaction for me. "P" soon became well. But the physician affirmed that his nervous system was severely shaken and that the outcome could be most unpleasant. Some years later, after his return to Russia, I learned that he had become insane while in prison in Odesa, and I was subsequently informed that he had died.

We were frightfully exercised at "B." Right after the conference the group preferred charges against him and he was expelled. I simply could not bring myself to look at him, and I didn't speak to him at all for nearly two years. He was later readmitted to the group.

The whole incident made a horrible impression upon me. Indeed, I almost became ill myself.

43.

Clarens

THE SPRING VACATION in Swiss universities fell during the month of March and the first half of April. People would disperse and spend the month and a half sojourning in various villages. By coincidence, my sister and her son—the eight-year-old Seryozha—arrived from Minsk a few weeks earlier. She was ill, and had left for Switzerland at the prompting of her physicians. She found a place on Lake Geneva and I joined her there for the six-week vacation period.

Now, for the first time, I witnessed the natural beauty of Switzerland. I simply became entranced even while still en route to Lake Geneva. At one point along the way a large body of water rose into view off in the distance. It happened not to be a sunny day: a few clouds; a gentle, cool mist. I suddenly beheld a fantastic sight as the train emerged from a tunnel. Through the mist I discerned several distant, elongated, silver-blue shapes. Clouds? So it appeared. They were enveloped above and below by the silvery mist. But they were not clouds. The silvery mist above was the sky; and the object below, the water. And the “clouds”? They were the mountains on the distant side, while the lake was visible in the depths far below. The route of the train followed the steep, elevated shoreline, skirting the edge all the way. The roadbed descended gradually and passed through the beautiful little town of Lausanne. Then the track doubled back and the train proceeded once again along the length of the shoreline in a

reverse direction. This time it moved at a low level and hugged the very shore, with the water almost lapping at its wheels. We reached Clarens.

Clarens is a shoreside town located on a pocket of Lake Geneva. A string of towns, equally small, neat, and impressively embellished, extends through this corner of the lake: Vevey, Clarens, Montreux, Teritet, Chillon (with the famous Castle of Chillon). The Swiss Riviera. A district full of hotels teeming with guests who congregate there from all corners of the earth. Not far from the shore are low hills that gradually rise higher and higher, giving the appearance of a massive wall protecting the region from the chilling north winds. The whole corner is tucked away as in a cozy, warm nest. And on the hills and mountains nestle small snug villages and large dazzling hotels. The shore below is a scene of endless festivity. The elegantly dressed crowd, attractive shops, restaurants, music. A place for the affluent. But the real beauty resides on the heights beyond, where quiet prevails and the vineyards stretch surrounded by stone hedges. Tiny lizards play in the sun and crawl beneath the stones, apple trees are smothered in a mass of white blossoms, there is a muted song of a brook flowing through the grass; tiny spring flowers push up here and there. Everything has a peculiar softness: the shapes of the hills are soft; the colors are mild, in contrast to the pronounced multicolored aspect of German-Switzerland. It carries the stamp of modest nobility. There is something aristocratic about the whole region, something reminiscent of a genteel, attractive woman who has no need for ornaments and finery. Colors run to silver-gray, to white and blue. The water has a bright silvery-blue sheen. It takes on a rich, deep-green complexion only when one gazes down from the high mountains.

And the mountain line with its incomparably beautiful waterfalls likewise offers an image of rare softness. There is something singularly appealing in the very air itself. On stepping down from the train, one suddenly feels the air suffusing the lungs with a gentle sweetness. On the far side of the lake are the mountain peaks capped by white snow. The white sails of the fishing boats gleam in the silvery water. And the white gulls perch on the rocks along the shore. Between one town and the next, an attractive white villa can be espied, concealed

among tall dark trees—like a Greek palace of old, silent in its proud beauty. And then there are the massive, ancient forests farther up the mountains, and the green meadows, and fields bursting with white narcissi that begin to bloom in the month of May with such magnificence and overpowering aroma—the way they must have bloomed at one time in that paradise described for us in the ancient Scriptures.

For years I would come to this district each spring. I find it the loveliest and most captivating region in all of beautiful Switzerland precisely because of that unexampled nobility which pervades every nook. And I am actually familiar with each quiet nook, where neither footsteps nor voices of visiting tourists intrude.

On a small hill near Clarens is the village of Chaoix. We spent those weeks at a nearby *pension* (boarding-house), a small and modest facility occupied solely by Russians.

The place had almost an exclusively student clientele; in fact, most of the people were my friends from Bern. But one man with whom I became acquainted there turned out to be a particularly interesting neighbor. He occupied a small room below the roof. This was the renowned Vladimir Burtsev.

Burtsev was not yet as prominent then as he is now. He has gained notoriety of late as a renegade from socialism and a supporter of the Denikins and the Wrangels.¹ He became famous about twelve years ago as the exposé of Yevno Azev, and generally as the discoverer of provocateurs. But in the earlier years he was known in the more intimate circles of socialists as an extreme revolutionist and terrorist. Indeed, he had just then completed a term of a year and a half in a British prison, to which he had been sentenced for writing an article urging the assassination of the Russian Emperor. He was the most extreme among all the Russian terrorists. The SRs, despite their terrorism, were too mild for him because, their killings of ministers and other high officials notwithstanding, they refused to carry out the assassination of the Emperor himself. For his part, Burtsev con-

1. Anton Denikin and Peter Wrangel were leading figures among the so-called "White Guard" foes of the infant Bolshevik regime.

tended that it was essential to dispatch none other than the Emperor. And he nursed this thought day and night.

I, of course, had already heard of him, and I pictured him as a rather sinister and hard-bitten individual. But when I came to know him I could not believe my eyes. As an individual, Burtsev was the embodiment of tenderness and benignity, the typical Russian *intelligent*—tall, thin, with an elongated face and a blond goatee. He had a genial smile, a sincere, good-natured manner, and a childlike simplicity. It was quite a spectacle, for instance, when this tall man in his forties, his hands grasping a pair of galoshes, would go dashing after a sick girl and plead with her to put on the galoshes lest, heaven forbid, she come down with a cold. And people ought to have heard this man, in his amiable voice, commenting upon a new species of bomb, which he used to dub “little oranges,” tiny explosives for doing away with Nicholas II. He toyed with this single idea like a child with a plaything. For the Emperor he literally nourished a personal hatred. Yet even this hatred had something of a good-natured quality about it. “You know,” he would say, “there’s a certain children’s toy in Russia: a wooden bear, on both sides of which stand figures of two peasants holding hammers. When the bear is pulled, the two peasants alternately proceed to pound the bear on the head. It’s good to make such toys for Russian children. But in place of the bear there ought to be a figure of Nicholas. Let the tiny tots learn to hammer away at that gentleman.”

Burtsev himself resembled an overgrown child. He used to publish a journal by the name of *Doloy Tsarya* (*Down With The Tsar*); and whenever a new issue appeared, he would awaken in the very early hours, walk down the corridor, and insert a copy into each neighbor’s shoe which had earlier been set outside the door for shining. He was never strong on the score of wisdom. And after Nicholas passed from the scene, there disappeared the primary basis for Burtsev’s revolutionism. He found himself tumbling lower and lower, until he finally tumbled into the swamp of the Black Hundreds. He had always nursed an antipathy toward Marxists and, aside from Nicholas II, the only individual whom he despised in those years was Plekhanov.

My sister ran into some difficulty subsequently because of this

nearness to Burtsev. A half year later I began to receive copies of circulars from my comrades in Siberia which the Russian police authorities used to distribute to the local offices of the gendarmes. They were rosters of "suspicious" persons who should be located and apprehended. Somewhere in Siberia my comrades had found a place where they could obtain these circulars. Thus, I would receive them and pass them on to the Foreign Committee of the Bund which, in turn, made them public. One day (it happened to be several months after we had lived in close proximity to Burtsev) I received a letter from Siberia. I opened it. It contained a copy of a new circular. I began to read it—and suddenly came across my sister's name. And next to it was recorded a notation that she had consorted with emigrants and that she should be arrested the moment she arrives in Russia. She was actually arrested but was released a few days later. In truth, she was far removed from any "guilt." It all stemmed from the fact that spies were constantly snooping and sniffing around Burtsev. It was said of him jokingly during those years that he had an amazing capacity for discovering spies, except that he invariably regarded them as honest individuals. As already mentioned, his career as an exposé of provocateurs commenced only at a later date.

The Lekert Story

SPRINGTIME WAS OVER and I returned to Bern. Life resumed its accustomed course, although I did embark upon some literary work. The summer of 1902 happened to coincide with a general strike in Belgium aimed at winning suffrage reform. The strike ended with defeat for the workers. The Bern representative of the Foreign Committee of the Bund suggested that I prepare an article for the organ of the Committee, *Der Yidisher Arbeter* (*The Jewish Worker*), dealing with the causes of the defeat. I did so, writing the article, as was my wont, in Russian. It was translated and published. Then the Committee proposed that I work on a more extensive literary production, a popular brochure on the Great French Revolution. I struggled with the thing all summer. I completed the brochure and sent it off to London. A response arrived quickly from Vladimir Kosovsky: half the brochure, he said, was good; the other half left something to be desired. The period of the Convention and the Terror looked anemic. He suggested I revise that whole section. But I failed to get around to it, and the brochure was never finished.

During the early days of May all of us became tremendously upset over a dreadful piece of news which arrived from Russia. It was the story of the lashing of the Vilno demonstrators, administered on order of General Victor von Wahl, the governor of Vilno.

A demonstration had been held there on the First of May. A

number of demonstrators had been arrested. They were taken to the police station where they were lashed with whips. A similar occurrence in today's barbarous times, when we have already become accustomed to the most horrible things, would not perhaps leave such a terrible impression. But at that time it was something new. To the best of my recollection, a comparable incident had occurred only twice before in the whole history of the Russian revolutionary movement. On the first occasion—in Saint Petersburg a quarter of a century before—General Fyodor Trepov had ordered the lashing of a political prisoner for failing to remove his hat in the general's presence. The response to it was the attempted assassination of Trepov by Vera Zasulich. A second instance involved the lashing of a woman in a Siberian place of exile during the 80s. In protest against that action, several women political prisoners committed suicide. But those were past events, all but forgotten. And now, after a hiatus of fifteen years, the same acts of violence again. Now the dreadful indignity was visited upon socially conscious worker-demonstrators, members of the Bund.

Several days passed and a new message arrived: a Jewish worker, the shoemaker Hirsh Lekert, had fired a shot at Wahl. Although the shot did not prove to be fatal, the Central Committee of the Bund issued a proclamation which hailed the courageous deed of the young worker. "We breathed a sigh of relief," it declared. And a conference¹ of the Bund decided that thereafter the organization should assume the task, in similar cases, of exacting revenge for the murderous deeds of government satraps.

This was the resolution on "Organized Revenge." It evoked much confusion and passionate discussion in the ranks of the Bund. Like all other Social Democratic organizations, the Bund was an opponent of terror. But the new resolution threatened to overturn its previous position. The supporters of the resolution, to be sure, insisted that their principled position with respect to terror had not changed by one iota. They were still opposed to terror as a means of political struggle, just as before. What they were recommending was

1. The Fifth Conference, which met in the city of Berdichev in August 1902.

not a method for winning political freedom but merely a necessary act of revenge that would provide moral satisfaction to the broadest masses.

This sentiment became extremely widespread within Russia itself, under the fresh impact of that dreadful event. We, on the outside, were more favorably situated. We had the opportunity to weigh the matter somewhat more dispassionately. And all of us appreciated the danger inherent in the new course. I personally turned at that time to a study of the history of the terrorist movement in Russia, and I discovered that the terrorism of the old days had evolved in precisely the same manner—by acts of revenge. The initial signal for the sweeping terrorist movement of the 70s was, in fact, that aforementioned *attentat* (assassination attempt) by Vera Zasulich. A series of other acts also had the purpose of simply settling accounts with one or another Tsarist factotum for his terrible deeds or served as self-protection against spies. But once embarked on, this course acquired a logic of its own and terror became a means of political struggle, a means, moreover, which gradually negated all other forms of political action.

I was highly gratified to learn that our Foreign Committee held exactly the same view. It swiftly issued a special leaflet that contained a warning against the new course. This initiative was not quite proper from the standpoint of party discipline since the Foreign Committee was no more than a representative of the Central Committee and was obliged to follow its directives, and the Central Committee had approved the resolution of the conference. Still the comrades in the outland realized that the resolution had been adopted under the influence of a transitory sentiment, and assumed the responsibility for resisting it. Our people within Russia were actually quite piqued, but in the end they came to appreciate that the “Londoners” were right after all and, a year later, in June 1903, the Fifth Congress of the Bund,² meeting in Zurich, revoked the resolution on “Organized Revenge” unanimously and without debate.

2. The Bund held periodic congresses and conferences. Decisions of the congresses enjoyed priority. While the conferences were only consultative gatherings, the congresses set organizational policy and determined official programs.

In connection with the Vilno event, I had occasion to speak at a large meeting together with Plekhanov. A protest meeting had been arranged in Zurich, and a speaker from the Bund was needed. At that time there were two official representatives in Switzerland of the Foreign Committee of the Bund: Gleb and John Mill, another old-timer and prominent Bund leader. Both, as it turned out, were in Bern just then, but neither of them could go to Zurich, so I was sent. I had even wavered a bit, knowing that Plekhanov would be present at that meeting. It seemed to me preposterous. How could I, a callow student without an official position, appear on the platform together with the venerable leader of Russian Social Democracy? Oh, well; orders are orders. And I went.

Zurich, in those days, was the scene of two separate colonies: the Russian (more accurately, the Russo-Jewish) and the Polish (also, as was usual, including Jews). Hence three speakers were invited. Plekhanov and I spoke in Russian, and Adolf Warski, one of the leaders of the Polish Social Democracy, spoke in Polish. The meeting turned out to be unusually stormy. There was something about Plekhanov: no sooner did he appear at a meeting, than an uproar ensued. Not, heaven forbid, because of his attitude, but owing to the fact that he had stubborn opponents at every turn who lost no opportunity to raise a ruckus. Aside from this, conflicts within the Polish colony also gave rise to stormy scenes. In his speech, Warski, referring to the Polish landlords, had recourse to a rather pungent expression. Polish nationalists responded with a tremendous commotion. The meeting was finally brought to a close only with considerable effort.

A small item: On the trip to Zurich I obtained the address of a comrade, a Bundist, who served there as my "manager," so to speak. It was one Kuba Furstenberg, a Polish Jew, a young man, and anything but a fool. I took quite a liking to him, but in short order he became an ex-Bundist, shifting over to the Polish Social Democrats. Today, however, he is a prominent Bolshevik leader, known as Jacob Ganetsky.³ If I'm not mistaken, he is serving at present as an official

3. Ganetsky was a shadowy figure in the critical year 1917 when, as Lenin's confidential agent based in Stockholm, he helped to coordinate Lenin's return to Russia

representative of the Russian Soviet Republic in Reval [now Tallin, capital of the Estonian Soviet Republic].

Ganetsky, by the way, is far from being the only one with whom the Bund has graced the Bolshevik Party. Among others, Gregory Zinoviev, the present chairman of the Third International, was also quite close to the Bund in the early days. I don't know whether he was a full-fledged Bundist; but he had been a member, I recall, of a Bund discussion circle. He had come from Russia to Bern at that time. A young student, with a round face, watery eyes, and an effeminate voice, Zinoviev was distinguished neither by any particular wisdom, nor by any special abilities. His name was Radomyslasky. His present wife, who has lately become quite an important figure in Russia under the name of Lilina, was also a student in Bern at that time, likewise close to the Bund, and equally distinguished by no particular virtues whatsoever.

I encountered Zinoviev five years later at the [1907] London Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, and was tremendously surprised to learn that he had become an agent of the Central Committee of the party. No one who had known him in Bern in the early days could picture him being able to occupy such a responsible post. He subsequently settled in Paris and became an adjutant of Lenin's. It was then that the Divine Presence in the teacher presumably settled upon the pupil.⁴

via Germany and was alleged to have been one of the several persons who provided German government funds for the Bolsheviks. Ganetsky assuredly helped meet Lenin's political needs by providing his own funds, derived from a war-time business enterprise involving the buying and selling of contraceptives. See David Shub, *Lenin* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 209–14; 243–47.

4. "The tactics which the bolsheviks adopted in 1906 and 1907 consisted of making every effort to discredit the officially elected party leadership among party members. . . . The bolsheviks were supported inside the Petersburg Committee by G. E. Zinoviev whose co-option Lenin had arranged. Zinoviev, a young firebrand who had few scruples and a rare gift for intrigue, soon proved a valuable assistant for work behind the scenes. With his aid Lenin achieved before long a bolshevik majority in the Petersburg Committee, which was scarcely less important than the Central Committee." Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 87–88.

My First Summer in the Mountains

MY SISTER STAYED ON in Switzerland. She took a place in a distant valley nestled high in the mountains. It was a lovely, quiet summer resort. In July I came to spend the summer vacation with her.

I now found myself for the first time in a lofty, isolated mountain region. It had been a five-to-six hour train ride south into the region of French Switzerland. After reaching the small station of Vernayaz, it was necessary to proceed by horse for another few hours. I rented a wagon and set out. We were riding for a quarter of an hour when the thought suddenly struck me: Where are we headed? A mountain loomed directly in front of us. It stretched to the right and left, with no apparent end—tremendously high and sheer as a wall—just a plain wall, with no sign of a break, no way into it. Yet there we were, moving in the direction of the mountain. But I knew that my sister's place could not possibly be situated at the base of the wall because she had written that the ride from the station would take several hours. We had only been riding for fifteen minutes when the wall rose up before our very eyes. Still the driver continued pressing the horse forward. Not until we came to the very foot of the mountain did I notice a road after all, and one running uphill in fact. With long, thin,

serpentine twists, the narrow road shifted a little toward the right, then a little toward the left, and again right and left. We proceeded ever upward, and after dozens of zigzags we finally reached the top. It was only there that the wall split apart. A passageway opened upon a long valley. We descended into the valley and rode on and on until we eventually reached our destination—a place called Trican.

Cradled in the valley among massive mountains, the tiny village of Trican boasts a railroad station today. But at that time, twenty years ago, it was a secluded little nest lost among the towering mountains.

A narrow, elongated valley was framed right and left by mountain chains soaring into the heavens. Far below, where the two mountains met or whence they emerged, was a small lake, a mountain lake, restless, turbulent, its roily waters audible day and night. Our house was situated midway between the lake in the depths and the towering summits. In the absence of a level spot on which to stand (indeed, there was none in the whole valley), the house seemed to be glued to the very mountainside. Thus on one side, the side facing down toward the lake, it numbered three stories; and on the other side, where the windows looked out upon the tall mountain peak, it had only one story. And on a stormy night, when the mountain winds howled and the trees swayed in the woods and the walls trembled, it seemed as if the whole house would, at any moment, break loose from the sliver of mountain to which it clung and go hurtling down into the frightening depths.

The scene: a cluster of village cottages adhering to the mountainside just like our house; a spring with deliciously cold water; and rocks, grass, and forests all around us.

I spent a few joyous months with my sister and little Seryozha. I loved the lad like a son, and he was deeply attached to me as well. Hence I was with him almost constantly. Armed with long sticks, we would stride through the hills, clamber up the cliffs, ensconce ourselves on some ancient rock in the woods, and chat. The boy's brain worked ceaselessly, and he showered me with a continuous stream of questions. Responding to the thousands of questions posed by an eight-year-old child is no easy matter. Sometimes, on a hot afternoon, I would tell him stories. Not my own, to be sure, for I was

incapable of that; but stories by others, and, occasionally, patched together from different sources.

Then my older brother and his wife arrived, and things became still more congenial. Outsiders were few. We lived submerged in a quiet village existence; little village children playing, dancing a roundelay, singing their lovely French songs. The tinkling of cowbells carried down from the hills. In the depths below, the lake murmured day and night. The mountain air was pure and fresh and clear. Occasionally one encountered a cloud. Quite literally, while strolling along a road one would come upon an approaching cloud; and as it closed in on all sides, one was suddenly shrouded in a heavy mist, unable to see a foot ahead. But it passed away in a few minutes and all was brightness again. Glancing back, one could observe the clump of whiteness that had just moved up fading away in the distance like a disintegrating clump of cotton.

A stay in the mountains is beautiful, a fascinating experience. But after a time I began to feel constricted, to feel the mountains pressing. The desire grew to abandon the green walls for broader expanses far away. And I dreamed of the sweeping golden fields of the distant Russian earth. I had spent a few summer months in the mountains. It was there I busied myself with my ill-fated "French Revolution." And there I devoted several weeks to the study of a book that made an extraordinarily powerful impression upon me.

In these reminiscences of mine I am trying to tell about events of my life, not about books. But an exception is called for on occasion. This was the case with *Das Kapital* by Marx; and I must do likewise with the *Ethics* of Spinoza.

I was already familiar with the teachings of Spinoza and with his life, from other books and from lectures by the Professor of Philosophy at Bern, Ludwig Stein. Actually, although scores of people attended his lectures, he was overrated, hardly deserving of all the favorable notice. He was a superficial man, an antipathetic type. I disliked him and finally stopped attending his lectures. Yet, there was one topic on which he spoke beautifully and in a colorful and inspired fashion: this was Spinoza and his life. And when we used to leave at the end of a lecture, we would carry with us that feeling of reverence one experiences upon viewing a sacred object.

I purchased the small work—in German translation, as was my custom. Despite eight years of study of the Latin language in the gymnasium, I hadn't retained enough to be able to read the book in the Latin original. I sat myself down and commenced to study. I use the word "study" advisedly, because Spinoza's *Ethics* does not belong to that class of books which is simply read. It must be "studied" as one would the Talmud. Written in a precise mathematical form, it demands a grasp of every sentence, a probing into each word.

This I did. And I was impressed in the same way that I had been when I studied *Das Kapital* by Marx. It must sound strange: Marx and Spinoza, *Capital* and *Ethics*. One book about earthly economic matters, the other a philosophical work on the highest celestial plane. There can be no greater contrast, one would imagine. And yet I had the identical sensation; I perceived the most sublime beauty of human thought. With respect to this beauty, *Capital* is, indeed, akin to the book by Spinoza; it is a work of iron logic. Each link is added to the next to produce a glorious chain; each particular flows from the next with absolute, iron necessity. One floor is erected upon another with incomparable solidity; and every sentence makes its contribution toward the elevation of a proud structure of unexampled splendor. Tall and firm like the eternal pyramids; sparkling and bright like the white peaks of the Swiss Alps.

One need not necessarily support Spinoza's teaching in its every jot and tittle. Indeed, one cannot in the twentieth century. But a study of the *Ethics* constitutes one of the supreme artistic pleasures that can be derived by a human being who loves the purity, the rigor, and the precision of a sharp and lucid human idea—the powerful force of intense human thought. This is the symphony of human logic. And it is difficult to find a place where the symphony sounds more beautiful than against the soft pure air of the towering, silent mountains.

The Anarchists

UPON LEAVING OUR delightful nest in the mountains, we stopped off briefly in Lausanne, a small city, but lively and bustling. From there I skipped over to Geneva for several days when I learned from the press that a general strike had been declared in that city. It was only a short distance from Lausanne to Geneva, an hour by train, and I went there to observe how the thing was being conducted.

Unfortunately, I could only observe how the thing should *not* be done. The strike was pathetic.

It had begun as an outgrowth of a strike for economic demands by the employees of the Geneva streetcars. The trade unions in Geneva were under the influence then of the anarchists. And it was the fashion among the anarchists to follow the outbreak of a fairly significant strike in a given trade by a prompt declaration of a sympathy strike in the other trades. No account was taken of conditions, of the possibilities of success, of the economic situation. It was simply a chance to strike, to create a stir.

When I reached Geneva the city was in a state of turmoil. The strike on the streetcars had really taken effect. Only rarely did a car go by, and then it would be guarded by soldiers. Cars were occasionally stopped and their windows broken by rocks. Street urchins scampered about singing a special song whose melody came from a

popular French folk song; the lyrics lampooned the director of the streetcar lines. I attended the strike meetings and listened to the fiery speeches delivered in the typically florid language and theatrical style of the French. One of the meetings turned into a demonstration. I marched with the demonstrators. It was evening. The streets were poorly lit. Suddenly a detachment of cavalry appeared. (The strike had prompted the republican government to mobilize the armed forces.) The cavalymen charged into us, flailing away with their sabers and threatening to crush us with their heavy horses. The crowd moved back, but the way was also blocked on the opposite side, where another detachment of soldiers seemed to have sprung out of thin air—infantrymen armed with rifles. We were being squeezed between two living walls, both of which were driving the crowd; there was no way to escape. Panic ensued. People rushed wildly toward doorways and gates. Fortunately, the military stopped and opened a pathway in its ranks, enabling the people to leave. They departed like whipped curs.

Then began the arrests of the strike leaders. I attended new meetings at which the same speakers called upon the crowds to return to work. They held forth with the same turgid rhetoric and in the same theatrical style as before. And the whole thing amounted to a fire of straw—a real anarchist achievement. The strike was lost.

I returned to Lausanne, where I had an opportunity to listen to a famous anarchist, Sébastien Faure. I had previously heard him speak in Geneva. I derived much pleasure the first time, not only from the speaker, but from the audience as well. A French meeting is always interesting because the crowd is so animated. At a German meeting the audience used to sit at the long table, drink beer, and remain silent. Once in a rare while somebody shouted “Pfui!” Then the meeting closed, on order of the chair, with three shouts of “*Hoch*”; and that was the end of it. But the French audience was alive—seething, turbulent, noisy. No bystander the Frenchman, but a participant; especially when a debate was in progress. And Faure happened, in fact, to be involved in debate. Like many anarchists, he used to conduct a special campaign against the Almighty. He traveled about giving lectures designed to prove that God did not exist. Appearing against him were Protestant clergymen demonstrating

that God did, indeed, exist. Faure was a highly attractive speaker and very witty. The clergymen accordingly came out looking rather sad, and the audience used to gloat.

I, too, found his presentation satisfying—once, twice. But when I went to hear him a third time I grew bored. Actually it was as well done and humorous as before, but in the final analysis I perceived that it was flat and devoid of philosophic depth. I had observed this more than once among French orators and writers. French thought and language has this quality about it: it has the capacity to present a matter with the greatest clarity and explicitness, so that the most ordinary of mortals is able to grasp it. But he retains only the externals, while the essential core is lost. In this respect I much prefer the Germans. Their thought has less brilliance and is more ponderous perhaps, but it has, withal, substantially greater profundity and honesty. Naturally there are exceptions among the French. I shall later have occasion to deal with one such exception—the immortal Jean Jaurès. But Faure was not among these exceptions. And although he ranks among Europe's finest and most brilliant speakers, in the end I found listening to him distasteful and dull.

47.

Bern Once More

AUTUMN CAME AND I returned to my Bern. In October 1902—exactly five years after the formation of the Bund—we celebrated its anniversary in all the colonies. We staged a jubilant meeting in a large hall in Bern. I delivered the *Festrede*. Then the representatives of various parties came forward with greetings. It is characteristic of that time that greetings to the Bund were offered by the representatives of both Polish parties—the Polish Socialist Party (PPS¹) and the Polish Social Democrats. In Munich, where I also had occasion to give the anniversary speech, the famous Polish Social Democrat, Marchlewski (Karski), made an appearance that evening. These gentlemen were rather genial toward us at that time, a time when the PPS had renewed its activities after a lapse of several years. It was quite feeble; the Bund in Russia gave it substantial support and assistance. Later on, after they had come to stand on their own feet, they began to fight the very same Bund. How wise was the man who observed that a favor is never forgiven! In addition to Zurich and Munich, I also brought my anniversary speech to Karlsruhe, in South Germany. I was accompanied on this trip by Teumin and the Levin sisters, two young women who made a musical contribution to the evening's festivities. (One of them is at present Zinoviev's wife.) A

1. The initials stand for Polska Partja Socjalistyczna .

humorous incident is associated with the trip. Teumin, who was in need of a suitcase, had approached a student friend and asked her to lend him one. She readily complied. But in broaching the subject, he had recourse to a highly secretive tone (the conspiratorial fashion of the time). The young woman was certain that Teumin was off to Russia, no less, on an important secret mission. Picture her great disappointment when he returned after two days and it became apparent that he had been, not to Russia, but merely to Karlsruhe.

Shortly after the anniversary we had a big debate in Bern with the Zionists. It was an event that shook the whole colony. There had been smaller debates on previous occasions, but this time the Zionists wished to mount a general assault. An announcement was made concerning a lecture to be delivered by Chaim Weizmann. And two other Zionist speakers arrived together with him: Dr. Berthold Feiwel, a German Jew, a poet and writer (he had translated into German, among other things, a number of poems by Morris Rosenfeld), and an individual named Tsvi Aberson, who regarded himself as the theoretician of the "Democratic Faction."

As for us, we were compelled to settle for our modest local talent; our sole reinforcement came from a comrade in Karlsruhe, a young student who, though not too bad a speaker, was not in any case among our leading people. Thus we mobilized our rather limited resources and entered the fray. It lasted three whole evenings.

It opened with a lecture by Weizmann. I don't know what kind of speaker Weizmann is today. I have neither seen nor heard him in a long time. On that occasion, at least, he did not excel with any particular oratorical gift. He spoke in a slow, even fashion, somewhat drily; indeed, he was a bit dull. Weizmann was apparently seeking to assay the role of "diplomat." He weighed and measured his words, and he kept himself under studied control. As to the lecture itself, it was a tremendous disappointment. The colony had been accustomed to lectures that were impressive and penetrating—lectures of solid content. But Weizmann spoke for about half an hour, and, just when everyone thought that he had concluded his introduction and was now warming to the essence of his presentation, he stopped to acknowledge that he had said all that he wanted to say. It seemed almost like a mockery, and the audience was terribly indignant. We

asserted that the lecture was no lecture at all; that there was nothing to which to respond; and that there would be no discussion. But the next Zionist speaker, Aberson, stepped forward and “saved the situation.” He proceeded to sermonize. His speech, full of the most incredible and fantastic things, did have some content nevertheless, and offered substance for discussion.

The debate was joined. We went at each other for three evenings in a row. It was extremely turbulent. Weizmann’s partisans, in the main young *galitsianer*²—future rabbis—behaved in a most disorderly manner. Unable to prevail amid the raging crowd, one chairman after another was compelled to relinquish his conduct of the meeting. I believe that the last chairman, the one who held on to his position to the end, was Ansky. The discussion’s high point was reached on the third evening, when three general spokesmen were selected for each side. Of all the Zionist speakers, the German, Feiwei, had the greatest impact. He was a poet, and found recourse to poetic allusions. Pale, with shining dark eyes, he concluded his address and collapsed in a faint. It left some of the girls deeply shaken. As usual, however, both sides won; each side carried the day with its own people. The majority of the colony, of course, was on our side.

I vividly recall the words with which Weizmann concluded his final speech. For the present, he said, we are engaged in a struggle with each other here, in Switzerland, far from our actual arena, from the Jewish masses. But the time will come and we will meet there, in distant Russia; and then we shall truly engage each other in a struggle, in head-on confrontation. And history will render its verdict upon us.

To this day, Weizmann has not fulfilled his pledge. Instead of going to Russia he went to England, where he became first, a good chemist, and then an interceder with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour.

Aside from large public discussions with the Zionists and the SRs, we had small, closed-discussion circles for our own people. Among the many and varied subjects deliberated upon, the national question occupied a place of honor. I personally had already begun to develop

2. Jews from Galicia, in Austrian-Poland.

a burning interest in the national question during the preceding year. The initial impulse had been given by the resolution of the Fourth Congress of the Bund, the resolution which formulated the program of national-cultural autonomy. Still, it constituted little more than a projection; it was hardly a clear and definitive answer. Indeed, the ones who had drafted the resolution itself were still groping in the dark. The formulation left much to be desired; the theoretical justification had not yet been adequately elaborated. The only pamphlet on the subject had been issued at the time by the Central Committee of the Bund. Written by Vladimir Kosovsky, it bore a polemical character and hardly exhausted the subject. The socialist literature of other countries was, with rare exceptions, completely silent on the national question. The great fundamental works by Karl Renner and Otto Bauer appeared only later. I felt a pressing need to arrive at a firm viewpoint, a genuine socialist perspective on this major and intricate problem.

I had come from Russia without any clear insight into the subject, carrying with me only a variety of feelings that still required, on my part, purifying and distilling and submission to the stringent test of scientific Marxist thought.

As far back as my student years in Kiev, I had retained a sharply negative attitude toward nationalistic aspirations and appetites. I passionately hated the very word "nationalist." On the other side, the assimilationist school of thought, especially in the form in which it exulted in the columns of *Iskra*, had aroused profound distaste in me. Besides all this, I had imbibed, in the drab little Jewish streets of Minsk, a warm feeling for Jewishness; but in the maturing of a deeper awareness, the foregoing represented as yet only raw material.

With respect to the struggle being waged in the Jewish bourgeois press between nationalism and assimilation, I believed both sides were wrong, that both were wanting from a socialist standpoint. Socialism had to rise above both positions. Socialist thought had to employ other concepts altogether; it had to utilize a wholly different yardstick in measuring phenomena. I used to become angry listening to the argument of nationalists: "Whoever is not with us is an assimilationist"; and to the argument of the assimilationists: "Whoever is not with us is a nationalist." There must be, I thought, still a third

ground, not simply a kind of middle-ground between the two, involving a bit of sampling from the one and a bit from the other; there must be, indeed, a fully independent third area, *above* the other two, clearly situated on a different level of social thought and feeling. And that third position began to take shape in my mind at this time. But I was still completely unable to formulate it clearly and distinctly on paper.

All this related to the general theoretical approach to the national question. Simultaneously, I expended great effort in pondering the concrete political demands of the national program. This program, which had been thrown together in somewhat ambiguous form in the resolution of the Fourth Congress of the Bund, had begun to acquire progressively clearer and more finished contours in my mind, and in the discussions we conducted in our small circles I would constantly defend and delineate this program. It turned out to be necessary to defend it not only against outside people, for even in our own ranks there was not yet a sufficiently firm and clear understanding among everyone. It was a case of having taken only the initial steps, and there was still plenty of faltering.

The Kishinev Pogrom and its Aftermath

BERN HAD BECOME my second home for a brief period. Not the real thing of course; merely an ersatz home. Yet there was something about it that had at least the semblance of a home. This, however, did not last long—scarcely a year and a half. And then I took up my walking stick again. Indeed, it was during my very last months in Bern that the city became especially dear to me, not because of the city per se, but because precisely at that place and time a floral wreath of loveliness and suffering, of longing and joy, had become entwined about my life. A deep affection is engendered for a city where one has experienced the sublime and the beautiful.

It was just then, as a matter of fact, that I remarked to a close friend that the entire content of my life consisted of activity in society, the romance of certain intimate personal experiences being only a frame embracing that content, embracing and illuminating it with its rays. The frame had then made its appearance.

I cannot, nor do I wish to, write about these private matters. They are too personal, hence my reluctance; and I cannot, for to do so would require the talent of an artist. Were I an artist, I could fashion a novel of it, but I am no artist—and instead of writing the novel, I lived it. Bern is where it began, and Bern has remained precious.

In addition, there were friends—more precisely, female friends—

and a great beauty reposed in that friendship: the beauty of life as such and the beauty of art. We were greatly preoccupied with modern literature, primarily German works. My friends were also very musical and assisted me in uncovering the treasures of music. This, too, is perhaps only a frame for an activist in society, but it is tremendously important nonetheless. And when, for instance, I heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time, and certain operas of Wagner, they took their place among the great events of my life.

Spring of 1903 arrived and I left for Clarens once again. I spent six weeks there—six weeks filled with beauty. But I did not go back to Bern. In setting out for Clarens I had no intention of leaving Bern entirely. The decision to do so came only later.

Why? Did I not love Bern? Yes, but I had the feeling that I was growing stagnant in the small-town atmosphere of the colony, that I was headed nowhere, and I had no desire to remain fixed in one spot.

I have never cherished any ambitions, aside from those, perhaps, of my childhood years, and never thought of a "career," even in its most noble sense, in the political party sphere. But for all my modesty, I still felt it would be a shame to retain permanently the role of a sort of "colony busybody." In my more daring dreams I had even set my goal on becoming a writer someday. In any event, I felt there was still a great deal of learning to do, and a need for a great deal of self-development to which the atmosphere in Bern was not conducive. I sensed that I was literally going to seed, and I was overcome by real fear. It was then I said to myself: try something else; try a change of locale. I decided, accordingly, to go to Munich.

Why, indeed, Munich? For no special reason. The city had been highly recommended; lots of culture, and quiet withal, a place where one could study, congenial, friendly, and "liberal"—for an immigrant minus a legitimate passport this was a major virtue. So I went there.

Life in Munich proved to be quite pleasant. But my stay turned out to be anything but a long one: at most, perhaps a month and a half.

News arrived of the Kishinev pogrom.

The report of the Kishinev slaughter filled everyone with horror.

In trying to recapture those days, it is easy to see how tremendously callous and apathetic people have become since then. Nowadays, hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives are snuffed out in terrible pogroms, and nothing happens; the world remains calm and indifferent. But at that time people had not yet become accustomed to such things. The gruesome event literally shook the world. It was a terrible blow, and individuals with frail nerves became depressed. Many simply lost their heads and fell into a state of despair and helplessness. Many proceeded to reexamine their opinions and programs. For a segment of Zionist-inclined youth, it was the decisive factor in a spiritual crisis. Until that time the Zionist movement had been strictly “loyal” and apolitical. As recently as the previous year, one of the leaders of the Russian Zionists, the attorney Rosenbaum, had declared at the Zionist congress in Minsk: “We are more than loyal”—more than loyal with respect to the Russian Tsarist government! The pogrom, which had been carried out under the wings and with the assistance of Russian government agents, opened numerous eyes. It sparked a feeling of political protest within the left-wing of Zionist youth. The radicalization of the left-Zionists had begun. The Kishinev pogrom was the birth-date of socialist currents in Zionism. With respect also to other elements that had been comparatively indifferent to problems of Jewish life in those days, it was a thrust impelling them more closely toward Jewishness.

Naturally, it had a tremendous impact as well within the ranks of the Bund, but for us it represented no turning point. Where we were concerned, the pogrom simply exposed the role of the Tsarist government before the broad masses, and thereby served to confirm once again the correctness of our revolutionary work. For us it meant that a new task had now been added to our previous ones: “Self-Defense.”¹ The slogan was issued and action taken to implement it. Moreover, to all of us this new task was clearly not something separate from our general revolutionary struggle, but, on the contrary, simply a new form of our previous activity that had to become linked inextricably to our political struggle. It involved, on the part

1. In Russian, *samooborona*, a central element of which were the organized “battle squads” (*boevie otriady*).

of the Bund, no repudiation of any previous attitudes whatsoever. We held our ground firmly, and our role as initiator and leader of the Self-Defense strengthened the influence of our movement even more.

The suggestion was made to me at the time to visit several colonies and deliver a lecture on the most recent events. I repaired to the large, attractive national library at Munich where, for several weeks, I studied all the literature I could find on anti-Semitism. The first part of my lecture dealt with the general causes of anti-Semitism; the second part was devoted to the special conditions in Russia; at the close I spoke of the tasks and shortcomings of the Russian socialists. I gave this lecture first in Munich, then in Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, and Berlin.

I had an interesting encounter in Karlsruhe. Arriving there in the morning, I was met at the station by my comrades. They told me of their plan to hold a small discussion prior to my large public lecture in the evening. The discussion, open to members of the Social Democratic groups, would center upon the national question and would involve a political dialogue with a recently arrived, prominent young Iskrist. The man? Upon hearing his name I remembered. About a year and a half before, I had served as leader of a circle in Bern composed of young female students. One of them had told me about her brother, a very able young man and an exile in Siberia at the time. It was he who had just arrived from Siberia. The girl's name was Bronstein, at present the wife of Kamenev, the prominent Russian Communist. Her brother? the now-famous Leon Trotsky.

We set out for the encounter. Not far from the house in which the discussion-debate was to be held, I observed a small group of persons on the opposite side of the street heading for the same place. "There he is," someone said to me. He was a tall, slim young man with long hair and wearing yellow shoes. The yellow shoes struck me as rather too conspicuous; in those days such shoes were simply not worn in our circles. He resembled his sister. True, her eyes were dark, his light gray; but both had something about their faces which made them look like birds of prey. It was more striking with him because of his distinctive mouth—large, curved, mordant. It was a terrible mouth.

The exchange lasted several hours. One of my comrades from Karlsruhe launched it with an enunciation of the national program of

the Bund as adopted at the Fourth Congress in 1901. Then Trotsky offered a detailed critique, to which I gave the response. I can no longer remember the details of the debate, but I do recall that it was conducted vehemently and that both sides, as usual, left feeling satisfied with themselves. I must confess that I developed a dislike for the fellow at that time, and I have reason to believe the feeling was mutual. It was not until evening, however, that interest really mounted and certain characteristics became apparent. Upon the completion of my lecture, a few Zionists took the floor, as did several unaffiliated youths with erratic ideas. Trotsky spoke next. He responded to the Zionists wittily and well. But then he turned on me, taking umbrage because I had “dared” to direct some caustic remarks at the Russian Social Democrats. I had accused them of having consistently neglected the important task of fighting anti-Semitism, and I made no secret of the fact that I considered this a grave misfortune and a serious shortcoming which must be avoided in the future.

Trotsky took up the cudgels for the Russian socialists. First, he said, it wasn't true: they had fought anti-Semitism. For instance, in his hometown Nikolaev a leaflet had even been issued about it years before! And second, it was not necessary to fight anti-Semitism *in particular*. Anti-Semitism was, after all, nothing more than a consequence of the universal lack of consciousness among the broad masses. Hence the need to bring them to a state of general awareness, after which anti-Semitism would fade away willy-nilly. To make the Jews a *special* subject of discussion among the broad masses was superfluous. This justification was highly characteristic. On a subsequent occasion, when I met Trotsky in the company of another prominent activist, David Riazanov, if I'm not mistaken, it became clear that his attempt to deny even to himself the truly severe guilt devolving upon the Russian socialists was nothing more than a rationalization on his part.²

2. Lenin, Trotsky's comrade-in-arms in the *Iskra* group, went a step further and seemed to find justification in mini-pogroms. Writing virtually on the eve of the Kishinev pogrom, he assailed the Bund's Foreign Committee, which cited specific instances of anti-Semitic acts on the part of Christian workers, and with characteristic

Trotsky was already known as a brilliant speaker, and a writer too. But the articles which he wrote for *Iskra* evoked very strong protests at the time. In those days sharp polemics were conducted by *Iskra* against the SRs in general, and against their practice of terror in particular. I suppose no one can really object to a sharp polemic, and Trotsky was, indeed, a sharp polemicist. But he went to extremes. During the preceding year, the young SR Stephen Balmashov had assassinated Dmitry Sipiagin, the Russian Minister of the Interior. *Iskra* touched off a big feud over the person of the young martyr. It undertook to prove that Balmashov had not been an SR at all, but really a Social Democrat. The claim was false; but the Iskristis continued stubbornly to press their view. Balmashov meanwhile received his sentence—and was hanged.³ Still the polemic continued, with both sides in effect wrangling over a corpse, each pulling him toward itself. It was disgusting, and this was not the only ugly thing about it. The whole polemic had left a bitter aftertaste. The author of those articles in *Iskra* was Trotsky.

The literary incident in question was only an individual case, only one example. Yet the example was characteristic of Trotsky's whole

sarcasm declared: "Anti-Semitism [cries the thoroughly aroused Bund's Foreign committee] 'has struck roots in the mass of workers,' and to prove this the well-oriented Bund cited two facts: 1) workers' participation in a pogrom in Częstochowa and 2) the behavior of 12 (*twelve!*) Christian workers in Zhitomir, who scabbed on the strikers and threatened to 'kill off all the Yids.' Very weighty proofs indeed, especially the latter! . . . The behavior of twelve ignorant Zhitomir workers is dragged out as evidence of the link between international anti-Semitism and one 'section' or another 'of the population.' This is, indeed, magnificent! . . . If [the Bundists] had given it a little more thought they might have realized that the social character of anti-Semitism today is not changed by the fact that dozens or even hundreds of unorganized workers, nine-tenths of whom are still quite ignorant, take part in a pogrom." "Does the Jewish Protelariat Need an 'Independent Political Party?'" in *Iskra*, No. 34, Feb. 15, 1903; Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961), VI, 333–34.

3. The hanging took place on May 5, 1902, in the notorious Schlüsselburg fortress (the Russian "Bastille"), after Balmashov turned down appeals by Peter Durnovo, Assistant Minister of the Interior, to petition Tsar Nicholas for clemency. Balmashov was apparently given to believe that the petition would be acted upon favorably.

personality then. He was possessed of an acerbic tongue—a tongue whose influence upon him exceeded that of his reason. He was certainly no fool; quite the contrary, he was even then a person of impressive intelligence. But more potent than his reason was his youthful, unrestrained impulsiveness and, above all, his tongue. I remember a Russian proverb about a man who was merciless even toward his own father for the sake of a *bon mot*. This was applicable to Trotsky, but with a slight difference: what was important to him was not just the word, but the *barbed* word. He was something of a babbler. It was already apparent at that time that the man had extraordinary abilities. He could write brilliantly and speak even better. But he failed to convey the impression of a person upon whom someone could rely. His tongue occupied too prominent a place for that.

He changed greatly in later years, becoming more mature, solid, and serious; but the acid tongue remained.

The Fifth Congress of the Bund

I WAS ON THE MOVE, traveling from Karlsruhe to Heidelberg, from Heidelberg to Berlin, speaking at meetings, taking in discussions. I had intended to return to Munich from Berlin, but just then I received a letter from the central bureau of the Bund groups directing me to go to Geneva. The Fifth Congress of the Bund was scheduled to take place in the near future. The Foreign Committee had accordingly arranged for a consultation in Geneva involving the more prominent comrades outside Russia, for the purpose of considering certain questions and preparing materials for the congress. I was asked to arrive at a designated time and left for Geneva.

About ten comrades gathered at the Geneva consultation, members of the Foreign Committee and a number of other recognized activists who had arrived from Russia not long before. The Foreign Committee was represented by three members: John Mill; Timofey (Dr. Tsemakh Kopelson), one of our oldest activists, and Alexander (Arkady Kremer). It was my first encounter with Alexander, although I had been hearing about him for a long time. He was the central figure of our movement up until the sweeping arrest of the Bund leadership in 1898; a pioneer, a leader, and a tone-setter. Here, on the purely personal level, was a unique and interesting human being. Kremer was a living legend—the subject, in his own time, of a mass of anecdotes. Short of stature and rotund, he had

small intelligent eyes, a thick mustache, a close-cropped beard, and an eternal cigarette in his mouth. He was not very striking on the surface, but concealed beneath the plain exterior lay an extraordinarily acute intellect whose principal quality was its critical, ironic nature. Among his greater satisfactions was the exposure of error, of questionable proof, of false evidence; he would dismiss such proof or evidence with a brusque “pshaw” and a wave of the hand, or dispose of them with a few pungent words. His tongue was like a needle; and his language could be salty—indeed, he was not averse to an earthy “Russian word.”

One might conclude from the foregoing that Kremer was vicious or malevolent. Quite the contrary: here was a soul of pure gold, a soft-hearted, amiable being. Then why the contrast? It was only the hide that was tough. There are occasions when marked toughness and coarseness represent the surface expressions of an underlying geniality and modesty. Actually, this somewhat older, seemingly gruff individual, was in fact rather shy. For instance, he feared public appearances, having convinced himself that he was no orator. Nothing could drag him on to a platform. I recall an episode that occurred somewhat later, in 1906, in Vilno. I was present at a session of the Central Committee when, among other things, a decision was adopted to delegate someone to offer greetings in the name of the Bund to a congress of the railroad employees (one of the most important organizations in Russia at the time). Alexander was proposed. “Are you mad?” he exploded. “*I should go? I should speak? Preposterous!*” But as things turned out, no one else could make the trip, and the Central Committee moved: “Alexander (by that time he was already known as ‘Solomon’) is authorized to go.” He leapt up in a rage and stormed out of the room, slamming the door so hard that the walls shook. But he went. From a directive of the Central Committee there is no appeal. He returned a few days later. “Well?” we asked. “To hell with you,” he replied in his customary manner. “No sooner had I entered the hall, when I was dragged to the platform and told to speak. About what? About anything you please, but speak! And wouldn’t you know it (he added with something of a diffident, astonished smile)—I did speak, and it wasn’t bad at all.” The man was then about forty years old.

I once heard the story of how Alexander had gotten into a fight with Plekhanov. It was still back in the 90s. Plekhanov was in Zurich, and Alexander came from Russia to parley with him about a party matter. They met in a wooded place somewhere on the outskirts of the city. Plekhanov was accompanied by Axelrod and Vera Zasulich. It should be kept in mind that Plekhanov loved the forms of respect and was accustomed to being addressed with considerable deference, whereas, as far as Alexander and respect were concerned—the two were quite far apart. Thus, an argument erupted. Plekhanov grew indignant, and, alluding to a certain subject, declared: “But I said to you it *must* be so.” To which Alexander responded with one of his ironic gestures, and smiling sardonically, quipped: “Listen everybody! *He* has said!” Plekhanov wheeled about and, without another word, stalked off in the company of his comrades, leaving Alexander alone in the woods. They never spoke to one another after that.

Alexander Kremer was a person with unusually funny inspirations. In 1902, when he was already living abroad, he slipped back into Russia illegally on the way to Bialystok, to attend a small conference with a few Russian comrades. All the participants were arrested right after the conference except Alexander, who managed to get away. He was already at the railroad terminal, prepared to depart, when he suddenly observed that he was being followed by spies. His arrest seemed imminent. Still they wavered a bit, apparently not absolutely certain that he was really the “culprit.” Thinking fast, Alexander walked up to the gendarme patrolling the platform, adopted the pose of an ordinary Jew, and proceeded to explain that he had lost his ticket and was without money for another one, and wouldn’t the gendarme permit him to travel free? Observing him in conversation with a gendarme, the spies concluded that this could hardly be the one they were looking for, and they left him alone. Alexander departed without further incident.

He had been staying in London during the years immediately prior to the consultation. It was really because of him that the Foreign Committee of the Bund had to be transferred there, a move that grew out of an incident in 1901. A Russian demonstration had taken place in Geneva, coinciding with the large student disorders of

that year. A crowd marched on the Russian consulate and ripped the Russian imperial eagle from the building. A number of demonstrators were arrested and expelled from Switzerland, Alexander among them. Since he had to go to London, the Foreign Committee relocated along with him.

Among the other activists present at the consultation in Geneva were my two old friends from Minsk, Boris Frumkin and Zhenya Hurvich. (She left for the United States right after the consultation.) Two persons were also there from Vilno, Yuli Lensky—today a Communist and, from what I am told, an aide to the chairman of the *Cherezvecheka*¹—and Max Mazover. In addition, two comrades were there whose names became widely known in later years: Mark Liber and Raphael Abramovich.

I had become acquainted with Liber, already an important leader, a few months before, upon his arrival from Russia. Although not yet a member of the Central Committee since he was considered too young and impulsive, he was nevertheless a professional activist. During his earlier years, Liber had also spent some time in the Swiss colonies, where he was known by the name Isakov. Inside Russia he went by the name Osher at this time.

He was only twenty-three, but he seemed much older. He was exceptionally pale, with a jaundicelike cast to his skin, a black beard, and fiery dark eyes. Although thin and sickly, and tremendously nervous, Liber was possessed of an intense spirit characterized by inordinate energy and dedication. A typical revolutionist, he was a brilliant speaker, and our highest hopes were riding on him. Whatever one may say of him, Liber never became someone who “runs with the crowd.”

After the February Revolution of 1917 he moved to the very fore, occupying a place among the major political figures. Subsequently his emotions carried him way off course. His name became an object of derision in Bolshevik circles. I have, unfortunately, no reliable reports as to how far he shifted to the right. I gather that much of what the Bolsheviks say about him is false. Had he really been the

1. “All-Russian Extraordinary Commission [*Cheka*] to Fight Counter-Revolution and Sabotage,” the first of the Soviet secret political police agencies.

kind of counterrevolutionist they charge him with being, he would not be moving around scot-free. (He was actually arrested several times, but was released each time without a sentence.) Still, there is one thing to which I can attest: Regardless of how far he may have strayed, if he did, his every action will, in any event, always remain an expression of an absolutely honest and deeply sincere conviction.² I number him among the most personally upright individuals I have ever encountered.

I met Abramovich for the first time at the Geneva consultation. He too had left Russia a few months before; and he too was a young person who looked older than his years. He was about twenty-four. Although he had none of Liber's surface luster, he possessed even then a broader, more varied education, and a more profound intellect. He was more self-possessed than Liber, an unruffled speaker (neither of them had yet attained the status of writers) and withal, an individual of iron will and iron determination. Abramovich was at that time less well known in party circles than Liber. Not yet a "professional," he was only a local activist. But within a year he became a member of the Central Committee.

These two individuals were truly the most significant representatives of the younger Bund generation; and a great deal was expected of both of them.

I have already noted that our consultation was designed to carry out the preparatory work of the forthcoming congress of the Bund. The two main items on the agenda were the national question and the relationship of the Bund to the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. The national question was up for consideration owing to the fact that the resolution on this subject, adopted at the Fourth Congress two years earlier, had not been wholly satisfactory and had given rise to rather strong disagreements. But the second item was truly a burning matter because of the approaching congress of the Russian party, a congress being prepared by an Organization Committee [OC] composed of Iskrists.³ Incitement against the Bund had

2. Liber was an adherent at that time of the right-wing of the Bund and Mensheviks.

3. Although the Bund was, in fact, represented on the OC at various times

reached its highest level, and it was clear that the Bund—RSDWP relationship would constitute a crucial question at the congress. It had consequently become necessary to deliberate seriously on the subject of our demands vis-à-vis the party, and to elaborate precise instructions for the Bund delegates.

We spared no effort in addressing ourselves to these two items. I remember sitting with Abramovich in a Geneva garden during break periods and polishing the resolution on the national question, haggling over each expression, refining every word. The resolution was finally worked out and adopted by the conference. I was authorized to prepare a *referat* for delivery at the congress, and I duly proceeded to plan and draft one.

A substantial resolution was also drawn up on the organization question—a draft statute in which our requests were given expression in a whole series of clearly formulated points. The consultation then adjourned, and I hopped over to Bern for a brief visit.

The congress proper convened a few weeks later. All the previous congresses of the Bund had taken place inside Russia. But this time, in view of the extremely intensive activity of the spies, we considered it too risky to jeopardize the organization's very existence. Our consultation had decided that a break in tradition was necessary and that the congress should be held abroad. Having neither the right nor

between April 1902 and the opening of the critical Second Congress of the RSDWP in 1903, this planning body for the congress was actually controlled by Lenin and the Iskristis, who used it as an instrument for outmaneuvering the Bund and rigging the forthcoming congress. In a letter by Lenin's wife, Krupskaya—she was herself actively involved in the rigging process—to a follower in Samara suggesting tactics to be pursued, Lenin added these telling lines: "Your task is to form a committee of *yourselves* to prepare the Congress, to take the Bundist into this committee (sizing him up *from all sides*, NB!), to slip our people into as many [local] committees as possible, guarding yourself and our people [from arrest] like the apple of your eye until the Congress. . . . Be wise as serpents and gentle as doves (with the committees, the Bund, and St. Petersburg)." *Leninskii sbornik*, 8: 239; cited in Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, p. 185. To another one of "our people," Lenin, the tireless tactician, gave the following directive: "With the Bund, be extremely careful and firm. Don't show your cards; leave it to manage its own affairs and *don't allow it to poke its nose into Russian affairs*. Remember that it is an unreliable friend (*if not an enemy*)." *Leninskii sbornik*, 8:257–58; cited in *ibid*.

the opportunity to make that decision (the Central Committee was top dog), we agreed to send Liber to the committee in Russia; his task was to transmit our opinion and seek to have it accepted. The Central Committee did, in fact, accept our advice (it may already have intended to take this action in any case), and the congress duly convened in Zurich. Nevertheless, all the canons of conspiracy were observed in the most superlative fashion. Aside from the delegates and a few comrades who assisted in the organization of the congress, no one knew where it took place; indeed it was still a secret some years later.

Only two other persons, Boris Frumkin and I, were admitted to the congress along with the delegates who came from Russia and from the Foreign Committee. I awaited the congress with the utmost impatience. For the first time in my life I was participating in a congress of the Bund. I had not yet been a member of the organization at the time of the first three congresses; and when the Fourth Congress took place I happened to be in prison. Thus it was not until 1903 that I had the honor and the satisfaction of participating in the convocation of the "party parliament."

When I arrived in Zurich and entered the hall (it was a small room in an "Alcohol-Free Restaurant" not far from the railroad station), all the delegates were already present—about twenty men and a few women. Some were middle-aged, some were younger people. I was one of the very youngest. I had no acquaintances in the group aside from the "foreigners." But no sooner had I entered the room, when I was approached by a tall, slim fellow with a blond beard. He gazed at me, smiling, and asked: "Don't you recognize me?" I suddenly remembered—a few years before, in Minsk, I had once met two young men at the home of the elder Gershuni, the physician. One was a tall young man in a blue blouse; I can't recall the other. They were escaping from Siberia and had ended up, as was customary, in Gershuni's home. Gershuni called me into another room on that occasion and showed me a passport. It was all filled out, with a name and a stamp, and lacked only the signature of the *starosta* (supervisor). "Here is a pen—sign it," he said to me. I signed the name of a *starosta*, and the tall young man was given the passport. That was the tall fellow with the blond beard, none other than the official

representative of the Central Committee, the leading personality in the Bund, the renowned Noyakh Portnoy.

Noyakh was during those years what Alexander had been up to the year 1898, the central axis of the party. Calm and mature, a deliberate speaker who weighed every word, Noyakh was cautious, meticulous, conscientious and dedicated, the kind of person upon whom others felt they could rely, a real leader of an underground party. Today, after well over twenty-five years in the movement, he is still the same devoted Bundist leader he once was in those years long past.⁴

Vitali Yudin (Eisenshtat) was another member of the Central Committee. He was thirty-five years old at the time, a real *zokn* (old man) for those days. Broad-shouldered and heavysset, his face covered by a large dark beard, Vitali had the appearance of a person of status, a condition that served him unusually well in his conspiratorial, illegal life. On a railroad train he would be taken for a merchant. Incidentally, all the members of the Central Committee tried, for reasons of secrecy, to surround themselves with an aura of

4. An altogether different Noyakh Portnoy was depicted by Medem's widow, Gina. Having turned pro-Soviet while the vigorous anti-Communist Medem was still alive (she remained a "true believer" for the rest of her life), Gina Medem conjured up (the words are used advisedly!) a despicable Noyakh and a Medem despising him. Her rambling "autobiographical notes," dripping with animus toward the Bund and democratic socialists in general, were published under Communist auspices in 1950 by a Gina Medem Book Committee in New York, under the title, *A lebnsvog* (Yiddish) [*A Life's Path*]; see pp. 190–92 and *passim*.

Medem's acute bitterness during his last years over his wife's enchantment with the Soviet idyll; his disdain for her political views and level of political understanding; and her predisposition to fantasy and/or outright fiction in the recollection of historical events and personalities, have been affirmed by, among others, David Shub and Jacob Hertz in interviews with this writer on March 19, 1973 and April 19, 1973, respectively. In the whole of his memoirs, Medem has only eight brief references to his wife, all of a purely personal character. During the interview, Hertz observed that Medem's estimate of his wife as a political thinker was manifested negatively by the fact that, although she was a writer, and he was editor of the Bund weekly and daily during the years 1916–1920, he never published anything by her. It was not a matter of propriety or protocol; other husbands and wives (such as Henryk and Sophia Erlich) wrote for the same Bund papers.

respectability. I quickly noticed that all of them wore derbies, a symbol, to me, of the “bourgeois” look.

Two other members of the Central Committee were present, Rakhmiel Vaynshteyn and Yoyne Koygen. The former played a very significant role during the revolutionary years in Russia; today he is a Communist. The latter also became a Communist and at present occupies an important post in the Russian mission in Berlin.⁵

Four of the most prominent individuals were elected to the presidium of the congress: two members of the Central Committee (Noyakh and Vitali) and two members of the Foreign Committee (Alexander and Vladimir Kosovsky). Both pairs alternated as the presiding officers at the sessions.

The item on the agenda about the national question did not occupy much time. I presented my *referat* (in Russian) and, after Liber translated it into Yiddish, a discussion followed. Differences of opinion ran deep. Several speeches echoed assimilationist sentiments: “Under no circumstances will the Jews be able to exist as a nation, and autonomy is absolutely meaningless.” I would say, as a rough estimate, that the supporters and the opponents of the national program split evenly at the congress. Under such conditions it was obvious that no authoritative resolution could be adopted. The question would have to be discussed at greater length in the party press. The Central Committee accordingly moved to have the item

5. With the advent of Bolshevism in Russia and the emergence of independent Poland, the Bund was perforce divided by the new geo-political reality. On the Polish side, the Bund remained united and basically loyal to its democratic-socialist ideals. On the Russian side, however, the Bund experienced a deep split. That portion of the Russian Bund which rejected Bolshevism and held to the traditional beliefs of the movement, suffered greatly from the days of Lenin onward, until the Social Democratic Bundists were driven into flight abroad, or systematically liquidated within Russia. By the time of his death in 1923, Medem was fully aware of the tragic fate of his co-believers inside Russia. But he could not foresee (although in his writings he suggested the likelihood of a development similar to the rampant Jacobinism of the French Revolution) the ultimate fate that would befall those Bundists who had eagerly embraced Bolshevism and collaborated in the destruction of the bona fide Bund movement in Russia. These people were destined to be exterminated almost to a man during the Stalin purges of the 1930s and subsequently. (Rakhmiel Vaynshteyn, for one, committed suicide in prison in late 1938.)

withdrawn from the agenda. The congress approved the motion. What's more, it was even decided to expunge the debate on this subject from the minutes and to make no mention in the report of the congress that the item had ever been on the agenda. The impression would be bad, it was feared, were it to become known that the congress had deliberated upon a matter without reaching a decision.

Another subject which occupied a great deal of time involved the relationship to the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party—more precisely, the place of the Bund within the party—since the Bund had been a part of the Russian organization from the day it was founded.

To the best of my recollection, there were no significant differences of opinion among us. It had been decided as early as two years before [in 1901] that the general party should be a federation of the national organizations. The Fifth Congress reaffirmed its adherence to that view, and a series of points were adopted which gave expression to this idea. Yet we all knew that the large majority at the party congress would consist of *Iskrist*s, who would most certainly reject our draft proposal, hence the need to decide on the concessions to which our delegates could agree. The congress was therefore prompted to draft a minimum proposal along with the maximum proposal, containing those absolutely essential conditions which the Bund could under no circumstances abandon. Should that minimum be rejected as well, then our delegates would be compelled to declare that the Bund withdraws from the Russian party.

Passionate debate attended the elaboration of both proposals. Notwithstanding the embittered polemic conducted by *Iskra* against the Bund during the two preceding years, a number of our people had still not lost a degree of confidence in the leadership of the Russian movement. These comrades argued, in connection with a whole array of points designed to preserve the rights of our organizations: "Why must you preoccupy yourselves with such details? They are quite self-evident; surely no one would be against them. It's superfluous to talk about them." But another element, primarily those living abroad and more intimately familiar with the real intentions of *Iskra*, affirmed that in such matters nothing could be "self-evident." They pointed out that *Iskra* hated us with a passion, that it strove to annihilate the Bund at all costs. If the Bund would remain in the RSDWP, it had to

have guarantees, quite definite and precise, that it would in fact be allowed to live. To rely upon another's justice was naive and impermissible.

Subsequent events showed that the second position was actually correct. What seemed "self-evident" to our naive comrades was to *Iskra* the precise opposite—the greatest sin. Particularly "self-evident" to the latter was the need to adopt every means to end the existence of the Bund altogether.

The two proposals were finally worked out. The more cautious comrades, those who favored precise guarantees, generally prevailed. In addition to the two major questions, the congress adopted, among other matters, a resolution on Zionism; nullified the previous decision on "organized revenge"; and decided that the Central Committee should issue a new, popular newspaper in addition to the central organ, *Di Arbeter Shtime*. Then the group dispersed. The comrades who remained abroad were the ones preparing to attend the congress of the Russian party.

Brussels and London

THE BUND HAD the right to send only five delegates to the party congress: three from the Central Committee and two from the Foreign Committee. The Central Committee sent two of its most prominent members—Noyakh and Yudin. Liber was selected as the third; indeed, he would become the main speaker of the Bund delegation. Alexander and Vladimir were to represent the Foreign Committee. Although there was a strong move to include me in the delegation, there was no room. The five selected were absolutely essential, and sending a sixth was not permitted. So I bade the group farewell and left for a summer place at Weggis, near lake Vierwaldstätter.

I had scarcely been there a few days when I received a telegram: "Leave promptly for Brussels."

It turned out that a way had been discovered, after all, to include me in the delegation. It was arranged that Alexander, who was well known to the Russian activists, should be invited to the congress as a guest with consultative rights only. I was thus chosen to replace him as the other delegate from the Foreign Committee.

I arrived in Brussels about seven in the morning. Alexander met me at the station. The lovely, spirited city of Brussels was still half asleep. We entered a café and ordered chocolate that was served us in a cup as large as a soup bowl. Alexander brought me up to date on developments. The congress was already in progress for several days.

The question of the Bund was placed at the very top of the agenda. Although the adoption of the final resolution would take place later, I did arrive too late for the opening battle. And the clash was very heated. As soon as our delegates made their appearance at the congress, they found themselves up against a real wall of hostility, anger, and resentment. Yudin, one of those who had earlier argued that it was “self-evident,” was almost beside himself. We gained the impression of having fallen into a swarm of our worst enemies. The atmosphere was so heated that there was virtually no conversation among individuals, even privately, during the intervals between sessions.

Iskra had already taken care in advance that the delegates would behave entirely as required. They had been lined up several weeks earlier, while abroad, while the leaders of *Iskra* used the interval for indoctrinating and suitably preparing their people.

As to the delegate composition itself, they saw to it that “appropriate” people would come. The present-day Bolshevik, David Riazanov, who was in the opposition at that time, later wrote a pamphlet about the congress. It dripped bile and witticisms. One chapter of the pamphlet bore the stinging title: *A Congress or a Dragging Together?* (in Russian: *S'yezd ili svoz?*)—an intimation that the desired people were simply dragged together by *Iskra*. Indeed, the delegates from the localities were, with few exceptions, extremely colorless personalities. The figure of a delegate sent from the largest Russian organization—from Saint Petersburg—was characteristic. A young worker (the only worker at the congress, I believe), he never once took the floor and spent the whole time of the sessions opening bottles of lemonade. Whenever one of the opposition would take the floor, he intentionally pulled the corks with a resounding pop. The opposition was very small: The Bund delegation, two representatives of *Rabochee Dyelo*, and one other delegate, a woman. That was all. But *Iskra* was represented by all of its bigwigs, and they called the turns.

The discussion on the Bund was unusually heated. Liber delivered impassioned speeches. Our other delegates also held forth. But it was like talking to a stone wall. A general resolution was adopted which actually determined in advance the outcome of the dispute. Then the

final reading was tabled until the party statute had been considered. At the time I arrived, the draft of the party program was under consideration. Suddenly something unexpected occurred. The congress was expelled from Brussels.

It happened on the third day after my arrival in Brussels, early in the morning. All of us from the whole Bund delegation were still at our quarters. The door suddenly opened and a stranger entered. Who was it? An agent of the police. He wished to know who we were and our reason for being in Brussels. We responded with a variety of cock-and-bull stories. He left; but we had already grasped the nature of the situation. We headed for the session of the congress. Alas—no session. It seems that other delegates had also received “visitors.” Moreover, the Belgian comrades who had helped us organize the congress were notified that the alien brethren would have to depart that very day on pain of arrest.

So we packed our things and set out for London. We left Brussels at noon and spent a few hours in Ostend, where we strolled along the seashore. By the following morning we were already in the British capital. At that time London was the seat of the Foreign Committee of the Bund. Accordingly, we Bundists made our way to the tiny house occupied by the committee and settled in quite comfortably; but I had negative feelings about the city as such.

As a rule I never felt too bad in a large, strange city. I was previously in Berlin, where I had arrived all by myself. Yet I swiftly found my bearings and had no sensation of forlornness. It was later the same in Paris. But in London I felt acutely uncomfortable. There was something unfriendly about the city. People looked upon all strangers with distaste. Street urchins would pursue anyone dressed out of the ordinary, let alone someone with a beard; one might occasionally receive a blow on the head from an apple or a potato. Martynov, the delegate of *Rabochee Delo*, a Jew with a big black beard, had to endure a veritable battle with the young scamps. The city was immense; the walls grimy. It took hours traveling from one end of town to the other. The subway was not yet electrified. Operated by ordinary steam locomotives, the trains used to fill with smoke and the passengers all but suffocated. Unable to find my way, I would ask a passerby for directions—and get no response. On top

of everything, I didn't know the language, and so I always moved about in the company of our whole group. I could not resist the feeling that should I somehow be cut off from the others, I would be totally lost amid the gigantic sea of brick houses. When, four years later, I again had occasion to spend several weeks in London during another congress of the Russian party, I no longer felt quite so helpless; but the first impression was decidedly unpleasant.

The sessions resumed after a hiatus of several days, with initial attention centering on the elaboration of the party program. While this activity was in progress, a characteristic episode occurred. Two delegates had appeared from the Polish Social Democratic Party—Warski and Ganetsky. Their party had not yet united with the Russian party; indeed the delegates arrived for the express purpose of conducting negotiations on unity. They showed up, looked around, and suddenly departed without having achieved any results. They were displeased; I don't recall whether they issued an official statement explaining their action. But I can attest to the real reason behind it: it was the attitude of the party toward the national question. In the draft of the party program that was submitted to the congress by *Iskra*—and the one that was in fact adopted—the point about the national program had been exceedingly thin and watery. The program called for the “right of national self-determination.” The Polish delegates proposed a different formulation, roughly as follows: “The creation of institutions guaranteeing the nationalities opportunity for free development.”

Since I was familiar with *Iskra's* position, I knew it would not abandon its point about “self-determination,” yet I liked the formulation of the Poles. Although wanting in clarity, it was broad enough to embrace autonomy for Poland (which they desired), as well as our national-cultural autonomy. Hence my desire to gain acceptance for that particular point. I asked Warski whether he would support me if I moved that both items be joined, i.e., “self-determination” and “institutions.” His reply was highly characteristic. “No,” he said, “the ‘right of self-determination’ must be completely rejected, because the point could be interpreted by our adversaries [the PPS] in the sense of independence for Poland, and we cannot accept such a demand.” And this was the reason, indeed,

why the Polish delegation departed. I subsequently offered my motion, however. It was defeated almost unanimously. In truth, I greatly envied the Polish delegates for their firmness on the national question. We Bundists gave no character of an ultimatum to our national program, and did not leave the party on account of its rejection—although this was actually thrown up to us later.

But those who leveled the charge against us were unaware that a serious difference of opinion on the matter existed then within the Bund itself, and that our own congress had split right down the middle. Thus we ourselves were lacking sufficient inner firmness at that juncture. It was really most regrettable, but we could not have acted otherwise; we were in a position to stake everything only on those items about which we were certain of the solid, unyielding support of the whole organization. Such an item was the very existence of the Bund itself.

The program was adopted with virtually no changes, just as *Iskra* had proposed it in the draft. Only a few words were added about the right of national languages, and this solely at the request of the Georgian delegates whom it was desirable not to antagonize. There would likely have been very little debate on the other points in the program had it not been for Akimov, a representative of *Rabochee Delo*, who offered over twenty amendments. With rare patience he would submit the amendments to each point, and invariably with the same results: they were sneered at and rejected.

Then came the reports of the local organizations on their activity. The reports were quite anemic, but the Bund report constituted a brilliant exception. In a lengthy address, Liber offered extraordinarily rich material concerning the activity of the Bund. Their great hostility notwithstanding, the other delegates were unable to restrain themselves at the close of his report, and to the accompaniment of loud and prolonged applause, the whole congress hailed the incomparable labors of our organization.

The organizational statute came under consideration next. The statute was drawn up in a typically Leninist spirit: it represented a truly militaristic centralism. But nobody, aside from the Bund delegation and the representatives of *Rabochee Delo*, dared to protest. The future Mensheviks, who were later to mount sharp

criticism, began to grasp the nature of things more fully only after the congress.

A difference of opinion had already become apparent at that time on a matter whose implications were actually anything but trivial. The first item of the statute required every member of the party to participate in a party organization. I cannot recall who first challenged this point; in any event it was one of the future Menshevik leaders. A passionate debate suddenly flared up—a debate centering, in fact, upon what appeared to be a minor issue. The *Iskrists* split, one section speaking out against the other. Lenin defended his position; opposing him were Martov, Axelrod, Leo Deutsch, Potresov, and Zasluch. Plekhanov vacillated between the two sides.

The item was finally adopted. But the unity of the *Iskra* group had been breached; and from that minute rupture there subsequently grew the massive split in the party. Because Lenin's side had obtained a majority of the votes, it soon came to be called the "Majorityites" (in Russian—*Bolsheviki*, from the word for majority, *bolshinstvo*); and Martov's side, which remained in the minority, received the designation "Minorityites" (or *Mensheviki*, from the word for minority, *menshinstvo*). This was the actual content and origin of the designation Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. A more profound ideological differentiation evolved only later. At the point in time with which I am dealing, there was as yet no sign of a serious schism. And when the demands of the Bund came up for consideration, a most beautiful unity again prevailed between the two sides. Against us, all of them were united.

The Bund delegation did everything it could to avoid the catastrophe—withdrawal from the party. In its readiness to make concessions it exceeded even what was permitted under its mandate. In certain respects it transgressed the decisions of the Bund congress; but it felt constrained to do so, for it knew that the Jewish workers believed very strongly in unity with the Russian comrades. Yet there was a final item which it could not and dared not renounce—the one that preserved the very existence of the Bund itself: "The Bund is the Social Democratic organization of the Jewish proletariat unrestricted by any territorial limits; and the exclusive representative within the party of the Jewish proletariat."

This was our ultimatum. The item was placed on the agenda for debate. Liber gave a brief speech. Martov replied. The vote was taken. All the *Iskra* delegates voted as one against the Bund motion. It was defeated; the die was cast. Liber rose and announced: "The Bund withdraws from the Russian party." Silence descended upon the hall. We walked out. It had happened.¹

1. Since so much history would hinge on this matter, it should be noted that the vote of *Iskra's* "compact majority" against the Bund was 41 to 5 (with 5 abstentions). The departure of the five Bund delegates (the Bund, incidentally, with its 25,000 members as against roughly 9,000 in the RSDWP, was grossly underrepresented at the congress), was soon followed by that of two others. Had these remained and joined forces with Martov's "soft-Iskrists" on the question of the requirement for party membership, Lenin's group of "hard-Iskrists" would have been defeated because, of the 44 votes remaining, the latter controlled only a slight majority—24.

Lenin, who would never cease parading as the man of unswerving principle and sworn foe of "compromisers" and "opportunists," found it difficult to grasp why the Bund refused to substitute the numbers game for its deepest convictions. Commenting flippantly on the critical vote, the master of political arithmetic declared: "I cannot understand why the Bund should have withdrawn, things being as they were. They were actually the masters of the situation, and could have had a lot their own way. Most probably, they had binding instructions." "Report on the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P., Oct. 14, 1913" (delivered at the Second Congress of the League of Russian Revolutionary Social-Democracy Abroad), in Lenin, *Collected Works*, VII, 81.

For Lenin, at least, it was clear from his future behavior that more than a technical distinction between two Russian words for "Majorityites" and "Minorityites," emerging from an episodic vote at some political conclave, was riding on the outcome. The future master of mass psychology in the manner of Madison Avenue appreciated the significance of the trade name.

"It was a measure of the tactical ineptitude of Martov and his followers," wrote Leonard Schapiro, "that they accepted this damaging nickname, even at times when their supporters were in the majority on the party committees." Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 52. Trotsky, incidentally, although a "soft-Iskrist" and sharp opponent of Lenin's plan for party membership, out-Lenined Lenin when it came to the Bund. He "lashed the delegates of the Bund into a fury" and caused "one of the stormiest scenes at the congress." Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* [Trotsky: 1879–1921] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 73–74. In the immediate wake of a resolution by Martov which disingenuously sought to undermine the Bund's existence as an effective organization speaking for

It was a dramatic moment and it made a deep impression even upon our opponents. Still more profound was the impact upon us. Our ties to the Russian party had been the most intimate; all of us had felt the closeness of the Russian movement. We all knew that the separation was a severe blow to both sides. We had taken this step with heavy hearts. It was a genuine catastrophe—this breaking of the threads that had connected the Jewish and the Russian proletariat. To us it seemed as though a piece of flesh had been torn from a living body. And the tremendous responsibility weighed heavily upon each of us. In those far-off days separation was not effected as lightly as in modern times. Nowadays parties are ruptured literally as a pastime. One has become accustomed to it; it has almost taken on the character of a sport, or, in any event, of something of a virtue. But to us unity was sacred. Still, we had no alternative. Fanatics of a

the Jewish proletariat of Russia, Trotsky demonstratively announced that 12 Jewish delegates, who had as much of a right to speak for the Jewish proletariat as the Bund, were signing the resolution. "The ploy was obvious: the Iskraites were intent on showing the Bundists—and the congress—that there were Jewish Social Democrats opposed to their position. Liber shouted angrily that those who signed were representatives of a Jewish proletariat 'among whom they have never worked,'" Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, p. 211; see also *ibid.*, ch. 16.

For the Bundists, there was doubtless a special quality to their bitterness over the behavior of Martov. During the 1890s, when Jewish labor militancy was on the rise, and the Jewish Social Democratic pioneers of Vilno were setting the stage for the creation of the Bund, Martov had been crystallizing his thinking about the role of the Jewish working-class movement. At a May Day meeting in 1895 of 40 Vilno activists involved in agitational work, Martov proclaimed the need for "a special Jewish workers' organization which shall become the leader and educator of the proletariat in the struggle for economic, civil, and political freedom." He reminded his listeners that "our democratic rubric—'Everything Through the People'—cannot permit us to expect the freedom of the Jewish proletariat to come from either the Russian or the Polish movement." Cited in Hertz, *Geshikhte fun bund*, I, 74–75. See also John Mill, *Pionern un boyer* (Yiddish) [*Pioneers and Builders*] (New York: Der Wecker Pubs., 1946), I, 157–59; 229–30; *Arkady zambukh*, "L. Martov in Vilno" (Some Reminiscences), pp. 367–71.

Incredibly, within months after this celebrated clarion call for an autonomous Jewish Social Democratic force, Martov performed a remarkable *volte face*: he cast his lot with Lenin and the *Russian* Social Democrats. Leaving the Jewish world, as it were, he embarked upon the road which led to 1903!

barracks-centralism had tried to suffocate the Bund and that we could not permit. We had been prepared for all manner of concessions. But we wished to live. And since remaining in the party signified death, we were compelled to leave. Thus our withdrawal.

The congress continued its work. We remained in London a few more days. Reports soon reached us of extremely scandalous happenings at the congress. After the Iskristis were rid of the "external enemy," they commenced to feud among themselves. The small breach which had opened because of that first point in the party statutes proceeded to grow with the speed of lightning and developed into an abyss. Lenin had bared his teeth. To him it was sufficient that a section of his comrades of yesterday had failed to dance to his tune on even the smallest point of the statute; and—presto!—they had already become *personae non gratae* and had to be cast aside. When the issue arose of the editorial staff of *Iskra*, which was to become the party's central organ, he proposed that its size be curtailed in order thereby to "cleans" it of the "troublemakers." The latter were tremendously indignant; stormy clashes followed; the "Minorityites" drew together. The congress split into two hostile camps. The rift between Bolshevism and Menshevism had begun—for the time being, without any basis in principle. But with the coming of a split, disagreements on principle also readily emerge. And they actually did emerge within a few months.

The Zionist Congress at Basel

I RETURNED TO SWITZERLAND from London. Passing through Basel just when the Sixth Zionist Congress was scheduled to convene, I stopped off for a week as an observer at the Zionist "parliament."

The Zionist movement was in its infancy. Its devotees were still intoxicated with Theodor Herzl's plans, certain that salvation was nigh. The large, attractive hall of the Basel "Casino" was a scene of noise and commotion, reminiscent of the stormy and fervid character of Jewish assemblages. Ecstatic shouting arose whenever Herzl appeared on the platform. Handkerchiefs were pulled from pockets and waved in the air. The leader's every word provoked thunderous applause. It was a typical scene of mass hypnosis. Herzl, it must be said in all candor, knew how to handle the crowd. His bearing was regal, proud, composed. Moreover he was possessed of extraordinary facial attractiveness.

But the proud surface bearing was coupled with a shameful political sycophancy. The congress took place only a few months after the Kishinev pogrom; and Herzl had just come back from Russia, where he conducted negotiations with Plehve.¹ The tone and

1. Viacheslav K. von Plehve was Russian Minister of the Interior during the period 1902-1904. The bane of the revolutionaries and widely regarded as a vicious

language with which he spoke of that hangman—and within the precincts of the very congress itself—were such as to compel anyone endowed with a healthy sensibility to react with indignation and disgust. Yet the congress swallowed it all quite calmly. Only Dr. Nachman Syrkin, the “Socialist,” attempted to protest. But Syrkin,

anti-Semite, Plehve was said to have had a hand in the Kishinev pogrom. He was assassinated in 1904 by the SR Egor Sazonov.

Herzl had two audiences with Plehve in August 1903, as well as related correspondence. In the audience on August 8, Plehve’s observations included the following:

“The Russian State is bound to desire a certain homogeneity among its population. . . . We are obliged to demand of all the peoples which compose our Empire, and therefore also of the Jews, that they look patriotically upon the Russian State as an integral part of their life. We want to assimilate them, and to this end we are employing two means: higher education and economic betterment.” [Herzl’s diary insert reads: ‘I . . . understood all along that he attached much importance to the forthcoming Zionist Congress, obviously because he saw that the Kishinev business was bound to come up there for a frank airing. When that happens I could be in the position of doing him a service by cutting the thing short.’] I am not blind to the fact that the economic situation of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement is bad. . . . *Of late their situation has grown worse, as a consequence of their joining the revolutionary parties.* (My emphasis, S.P.)

“We used to be sympathetic toward the Zionist movement, when it confined its aim to emigration. You do not need to expound the movement: *vous prêchez à un converti* [you are preaching to a convert].

“But ever since the conference at Minsk [the Zionist conference in September 1902] we have noticed *un changement des gros bonnets* [a change in the leadership]. There is less talk now of Palestinian Zionism, and more about culture, organization, and Jewish nationalism. This doesn’t suit us.”

When the fairly knowledgeable Plehve referred to widespread opposition to Herzl in the Russian Zionist movement, Herzl responded:

“With respect to the opposition . . . to my person, it is a phenomenon familiar in its day to Christopher Columbus. When week followed week and no land hove in sight, the sailors on the caravels began to murmur. *Ce que vous apercevez chez nous, c’est une révolte des matelots contre leur capitaine.* [What you are witnessing among us is a revolt of the sailors against their captain.] Help bring us faster to land, and the revolt will end. *Also, the defection to the Socialist ranks.*” (My emphasis, S.P.)

“What sort of help, then, do you ask of us?” [rejoined Plehve]. [Herzl’s diary continued:]

“I developed the three points which I have written down in the abstract of our conversation. [Footnote by diary editor: ‘The abstract of the conclusions reached in

after all, was little more than a comic figure whose words consistently fell on deaf ears. Chaim Weizmann, leader of the "Democratic Faction," declared, in his diplomatic manner, that "some words were uttered which ought better have been left unsaid." This was the sum total of his "protest" against Herzl, the complete fulfillment of his "democratic" obligation.

Yet the congress itself proved exceedingly interesting, full of drama and suspense. The moment of great, of brutal disappointment came when Herzl announced there was no hope of obtaining Palestine in the near future. And when he set forth his Uganda Project, the audience decided to dispatch a commission. The old *Hoveve Zion*² left the hall in tears and weeping. The sessions were interrupted. A vast turmoil reigned. A split seemed imminent.

The Russian faction, which offered the strongest opposition to the Uganda Project, came together in a smaller hall for a discussion of the matter. Syrkin was chairman of the discussion. It was he, I think, who happened to be in the midst of a speech just as the door suddenly opened and Herzl walked in. He wished to talk matters over with the Russian delegates. "Comrade Herzl is here," shouted Syrkin. "Let's hear Comrade Herzl." He strode up to the spot where the "Socialist" stood, completely ignoring his presence. Poor Syrkin disappeared. And Herzl began to plead with the delegates. He spoke very frankly. His words had a ring of desperation. The effect was overpowering; and the people fell in line with him once again. The crowd returned to the session. The congress ended peacefully. It was

the conversation, which Herzl later submitted to Plehve for his ratification, embraced: (1) Russian intervention with the Sultan, in order to secure a charter for colonization in Palestine; (2) Russian financial aid for emigration, with money raised from Jewish funds and taxes; (3) government facilitation of Russian Zionist organizational work.] He agreed to all three points without hesitation. In regard to financing the emigration, he explained, 'I concede that the government should carry it out. But we can take the funds only from Jewish pockets. The rich must pay for the poor.'

'It is an excellent idea,' I said." Marvin Lowenthal (ed.-transl.), *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (New York: Universal Library, 1962), pp. 388-91; 397-403.

2. "Lovers of Zion," the first modern Zionist organization launched by a determined handful in the cities of the Russian Pale during the 1880s.

not until two years later that the split occurred. By then Herzl was already dead.

I remember the day on which the report of his death arrived. It was during the summer of 1904, when I had happened to stop off at Bern while in transit. Standing not far from the Zionist library, I could hear the hysterical screams of weeping women issuing from the place. I must confess that the report had an impact upon me as well. It's true that Herzl had never impressed me as a social leader. I had always considered his "policies" infantile. At the Basel Congress, in the course of his exchange with Dr. Albert Nosig, I saw him as a petty, vindictive polemicist, a role that was totally out of keeping with his majestic figure. Yet that figure itself—I refer simply to the physical personality—had impressed me. And when I heard he was dead, I felt a kind of regret. The incredible thought seized me: How could anyone with such an attractive face die? I cannot account for the source of that queer notion, but such was my feeling.

At the Basel Congress a minor incident took place about which I learned a few weeks later. Herzl had invited Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky, who also happened to be in Basel at the time, to visit him. He expressed a wish to open negotiations with him as the representative of the Bund. Alas, the "leader of the people" did not know that Zhitlovsky was neither a representative of the Bund nor even a member. Naturally he received a reply to the effect that he had approached the wrong party. Herzl failed to obtain the proper addressee; perhaps he didn't even try. What he wished to speak to the Bund about was easy to comprehend; during his conversation with Plehve he had received an intimation that Zionism could count on the support of the Russian government in return for which it must seek to restrain the revolutionary movement of the Jewish workers. Herzl had presumably desired to carry out that particular mission—an indication of his profound understanding of the Bund!³

3. At some point between the audience with Plehve on August 8, in which Herzl asked for his swift help in order, among other things, to end more quickly "the defection to the Socialist ranks," and the Zionist congress at Basel, Herzl apparently came to appreciate that it was Plehve who was establishing the *sine qua non* for such help, *i.e.*, a cessation of anti-government activity by those who were "joining the revolutionary parties." (See f.n. 1, this chapter.) Hence Herzl's decision to contact

After the congress I returned to Weggis, where I wrote a pamphlet about the congress that was issued by the Foreign Commit-

Chaim Zhitlovsky. Because of the highly sensitive nature and negative outcome of his confidential talks with Zhitlovsky (they consumed part of the exhausted and embattled leader's day in the midst of the congress), Herzl did not deal with these talks at the open sessions of the congress; nor did he allude to them even in his diary.

Happily, for the historical record, Zhitlovsky has left a most revealing memoir about his encounter with Herzl—an encounter charged with deep emotional content and the details of which were kept secret at the request of the latter until Zhitlovsky recorded them in January–February, 1915. By then, “after the lapse of over eleven years,” wrote Zhitlovsky, “the matter about which we spoke no longer has any practical significance whatsoever.”

The most salient parts of the Herzl-Zhitlovsky conversations follow:

“The first question [Herzl] asked me was:

‘I have here the honor of speaking to the leader of the Bund?’

‘No,’ I reply, ‘I do not belong to the Bund.’

Both of us are astonished for a second, but Dr. Herzl quickly recovers.

‘It doesn’t matter. You are, after all, the leader of the Jewish revolutionists?’

‘No, not that either. I do not belong to any Jewish party at all. I belong to the Socialist Revolutionary Party, but I am a Jew, and the interests of our people are dear to me.’

Again we are both astonished He—for presumably approaching the wrong party, and I—wondering: What are his concerns regarding the Jewish revolutionists?

‘But you can bring me together with the Bund?’ he asks, his voice dropping by this point.

‘Most certainly,’ I say. ‘But I must first know what is involved.’

‘*Also hören Sie.*’ [Then listen.]

We sat down and, in a dry, business-like tone, Dr. Herzl proffered the following information:

‘I have just come from Plehve. I have his positive, binding promise that in fifteen years, at the maximum, he will effectuate for us a charter for Palestine. But this is tied to one condition: the Jewish revolutionists shall cease their struggle against the Russian government. If in fifteen years from the time of the agreement Plehve does not effectuate the charter, they become free again to do what they consider necessary. . . .’ The expression, *es iz mir gevorn finster in di oygn* [an idiomatic expression in Yiddish that might be translated as, “I was shocked and chagrined beyond measure”], would best describe the impression which this information made upon me. . . . It required the greatest effort of will on my part to overcome the wave of cold suspicion which engulfed me, and to hear him out calmly and with a clear head. . . . [Elsewhere in his memoir, Zhitlovsky categorically affirmed that the part of his conversation with Herzl involving the latter’s talk with Plehve had had such a traumatic effect upon him, that he was able to recall it verbatim when he penned his recollections twelve years later.]

tee of the Bund, and an article on Zionism for *Di Arbeter Shtime*. In addition, Liber and I were given a directive to write a report on the

. . . Then Herzl said something else about the importance of the moment . . . and our obligation not to allow such a rare, favorable opportunity to pass.

'Do you wish to help me in this?' he asked at the close, while peering directly at me. . . .

I replied that I must positively reject the mission.

'And,' I added, 'do you wish to take my advice, Doctor? Do not seek a meeting with the Bund. Put out of your mind any thought about this matter.'

'Why?'

I had to explain to him the total hopelessness of such a step. . . .

'Even if [the Jewish revolutionists] were to believe that Eretz-Yisroel [Palestine] is an answer to the Jewish question, and that Plehve can effectuate a charter, they would still be incapable, on their part, of betraying the interests of their struggle because of a side issue, an issue foreign to them. . . .

'But even the Bund, which is most certainly permeated with concern for Jewish needs and interests, . . . will under no circumstances accept Plehve's proposal. We, Jewish revolutionists, even the most national among us, are not Zionists and do not believe that Zionism is able to resolve our problem. To transfer the Jewish people from Russia to Eretz-Yisroel is, in our eyes, a utopia, and because of a utopia we will not renounce the path upon which we have embarked—the path of the revolutionary struggle against the Russian government, which should also lead to the freedom of the Jewish people. . . .

'Moreover, nothing can be built upon the words and pledges either of Plehve or the Russian government. . . . One thing is clear to me beyond any doubt: Plehve *can* promise something which he himself knows with certainty that he will never be able to bring to pass. He simply wishes to introduce demoralization into the Jewish revolutionary circles, to make a certain segment of the revolutionary army incapable of struggle.

'This is much too clear for the Bund not to perceive it. . . . The situation of Zionism is already dubious enough by the very fact of its standing aloof from the revolution. Its situation in Jewish life would become impossible if it could be shown that it undertakes positive steps to damage the Jewish revolutionary struggle. . . .'

In conclusion, I said to Herzl:

'It is not my business to interfere in your political calculations. But it seems to me it would be much more sensible for you if you were not to have the slightest dealings in general with the Russian government. I have sufficiently weighty reasons to believe that if the days of the minister's life are not numbered, the months certainly are. . . .' [Plehve was, as noted in f.n. 1, p. 293, assassinated on July 15, 1904, by a leading member of the terrorist group of Zhitlovsky's own SR organization.]

Dr. Herzl understood what I was alluding to. He sank into thought. I do not know which of my arguments had the greatest influence upon him, but after a short

Fifth Congress of the Bund. This too we carried out during the closing weeks of the summer.

while he responded:

'You are right. Let's let it drop.'

'But not even think about it!'

'You may rest assured that, on my part, the matter is absolutely buried. I would also like you to promise me that our conversation today will remain just between us.'

I gave him the assurance."

Zhitlovsky stayed behind, at Herzl's request, for additional conversations that day. While waiting for Herzl, Zhitlovsky reflected upon the preceding conversation and wondered about the Herzl-Plehve moves on the political-diplomatic chessboard, and the possible motives for them. He was by now fairly convinced that Herzl had gone to see Plehve in Saint Petersburg without the slightest idea about the Jewish revolution and the attitude of the revolutionists toward Zionism:

"[Herzl] was, in general, too 'loyal' to the ruling authorities—as is proper for a diplomat who has to deal with the powers that be—for him ever to be interested in revolutionists and involve them in his calculations. Only after coming to Saint Petersburg, in the course of the conversation with Plehve, the thought had to be born about the equal *shidekh* [match; in this context, *quid pro quo*—Plehve's charter for Herzl's stoppage of the revolutionary movement].

"He made the journey, of course, not in order to intercede for the people of Israel and to awaken compassion for us in Plehve's heart. He traveled as a politician who does not concern himself with sentiments, but *interests*. 'Russia' clearly showed, in the Kishinev pogrom, that it wanted to get rid of its Jews. Let 'Russia' then help the Jewish people obtain the charter.

"But—who is Russia?

"Herzl's "politics" is built on pure diplomacy, which seriously believes that the political history of humanity is made by a few people, a few leaders, and that what they arrange among themselves becomes the content of political history.

"Russia—that is now von Plehve. The Jewish people—that is now Dr. Herzl. Two reasonable people should be able to find a way out that should satisfy both interests. It was only after the conversation with von Plehve that the need must have arisen to involve in the matter yet a third factor—the Jewish revolution.

'Who' is the Jewish revolution?" [Here, Zhitlovsky concludes, Herzl—in his ignorance as to Russian realities and his naiveté—somehow assumed that Zhitlovsky was "the Jewish revolution."]

Other parts of the exchanges between the quixotic Herzl and the revolutionist-future Yiddishist leader Zhitlovsky are of considerable historic interest, but they deserve treatment in the body of a work on Herzl rather than in a footnote to the memoirs of Medem. Chaim Zhitlovsky, "*Eynike sho mit Dr. Theodor Herzl*" ("Several Hours with Dr. Theodor Herzl"), in Zhitlovsky, *Geklibene verk* (Yiddish) [*Selected Works*], Yudel Mark (ed.) (New York: CYCO Pubs., 1955), pp. 355–66; 373.

Geneva

THE FOREIGN COMMITTEE moved back to Geneva in the autumn of 1903, at which time I too was appointed a member of the committee, and consequently took up residence in Geneva.

I was naturally pleased with my new position. Not from any motive of ambition, but rather because first, I had entered a new sphere of activity; and second, for an altogether different reason. Until this time I had been a member of the groups abroad; the groups bore the name "Aid Circles" of the Bund. But they were not recognized as official party organizations. At the second conference of the groups, which took place around New Year, 1903, several comrades proposed that these groups should formally be recognized as party organizations; but this was turned down with the explanation that the circles abroad were composed largely of individuals who were merely at the point of preparing to embark upon real party activity, and such activity could take place only in Russia proper, among the mass of Jewish workers. Accordingly, we found ourselves outside the actual ranks of the party, something I strongly regretted. But the Foreign Committee was in fact a party institution; indeed, it was formally designated as such. It was the official representation of the Bund abroad; all of its members were appointed by the Central Committee. I thus derived a measure of moral satisfaction: I had become a full-fledged citizen of the Bund nation.

Life in Geneva was something less than joyous. The city itself was

admittedly a most attractive and vibrant place, and far more alive than Bern. Geneva is the largest city in French Switzerland and bears the stamp of the French character—animated, joyful, replete with music and flowers. Located on the shore of the beautiful blue lake, it represented a direct contrast to stolid, sleepy, typically German-Swiss Bern. Nevertheless I felt out of sorts there. I missed the “colony” life. Geneva, it is true, also had a large colony, larger in fact than the one in Bern, but it was quite different. Missing was the warm, homelike quality. The Bern crowd was rather somber, though serious and genial. Geneva did exude more spirit: it boasted a greater variety of color and diversity of people. Yet its general state was markedly inferior. It was a place where one could encounter female students at every turn, in ostentatious attire; youthful dandies; and debauchery aplenty, as well as card playing and drinking and hooliganism. Of course Geneva also had plenty of decent and serious elements; but these were interspersed among the others. What was lacking among them was that intimate association which endowed the Bern colony with its distinctive charm.

I therefore felt quite miserable. Even with a few dozen acquaintances, that certain “something” was absent. During the early months I was still able to spend considerable time with Abramovich, who had also taken up residence in Geneva. We became close friends, but then he left on a tour of other cities and later departed for Russia. I can still remember, to this very day, the long, depressing winter evenings I used to spend all by myself in my lonely room. It was sad.

The only place I truly felt at home was the official apartment of our Foreign Committee. The street on which the apartment was located was called Carouge; the apartment, consequently, acquired the nickname “Carougeke.” It was a small, modest flat of three rooms and a kitchen. The kitchen, as was customary in Switzerland, also doubled as a dining room. We spent many an evening there—a few comrades over a glass of tea engaging in friendly conversation.

The Foreign Committee was made up of a rather small membership. Based in Geneva proper were Gleb Mutnik—administrator and manager of the apartment; Vladimir Kosovsky—writer and spiritual tone-setter of the committee; and I. Alexander had been sent to America for the first time on a fund-raising trip for

the Bund. John Mill and Timofey Kopelson would arrive from time to time. And that was all. We lived together in harmonious and comradely fashion. The whole life of the Foreign Committee had something patriarchal about it. According to the standard practice, the members of the Central Committee who were sustained by the party treasury (I, for one, used to obtain money from home) received no specific wage, but would take from the treasury what they needed and record the expenditures in the ledgers, down to the smallest sum, which accounts for their having lived in an exceedingly frugal manner, husbanding every penny.

The "Carougeke" remained at the same location for about fourteen years.¹ It was the heart and nerve center of our whole organization abroad. The apartment also contained our printshop. With the subsequent marked expansion in activity, it became necessary to transfer the printshop to a separate apartment several houses away. New comrades, arriving from Russia in search of rest or to grab a little education, were forever showing up at the "Carougeke." It also functioned quite intensively as the editorial office of our foreign publications. We used to issue a weekly information bulletin in Russian, *Posledniia Izvestiia* (*The Latest News*) and in Yiddish *Di Letste Pasirungen* (*The Latest Events*); the Yiddish party journal, *Der Yidisher Arbeter* (*The Jewish Worker*); and the Russian journal, *Vestnik Bunda* (*The Bund Messenger*), which made its appearance in 1904. In addition, vast quantities of pamphlets were published and a journal also appeared for a time in the Polish language.

The "Carougeke" likewise served as the Bund "Foreign Ministry." From there we maintained our ties with the foreign parties and with the Socialist International. And it was the center, as well, for our own foreign groups, the network of which became more extensive from day to day as our apparatus gradually spread throughout the world. Numerous branches were established in America where they were united in a "Central League." A series of groups emerged in South Africa. And we even maintained steady contact with Australia.

At the same time we kept in close touch, naturally, with our

1. The address was 80 rue de Carouge.

organizations inside Russia, forwarding money and literature (smuggled in by a thousand different devices), and sending and receiving letters. The literature was smuggled in either directly—in massive amounts via the German or Austrian frontiers—or through the mails in sealed envelopes.² We made use of envelopes with addresses of different commercial firms. To avoid attracting the attention of the Russian postal censors, which might well have occurred had all the letters originated from the same place, we used to distribute them to our groups in various foreign cities, from which they would be mailed into Russia.

Party activity was spirited and fruitful. The Bund had been completely shaken by our withdrawal from the Russian party. Indeed a rather serious crisis ensued. There was a danger that the broad mass of both workers and intelligentsia might not sufficiently comprehend our action, with consequent disturbance and disorganization in our own party life. Hence the need to carry out the work of enlightenment on a broad scale. Liber returned to Russia immediately. He and the other prominent comrades traveled through our cities and towns delivering a report on what had taken place, and clearly setting forth to the audiences the correctness of our position. Abramovich and I did the same among the foreign colonies.

The results exceeded all our expectations. Under the pressure of these serious events, Bund consciousness and Bund loyalty became fortified in a most remarkable fashion. Only a handful of individuals, literally a handful, left us. The overwhelming mass became attached to us even more powerfully than before, and the Bund emerged from the crisis far stronger than it had been.

The Russian party, meanwhile, proceeded to splinter and split at a rapid rate. The conflict between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks blazed forth with incredible fury. And the most important incendiary material happened to be located precisely in Geneva, where the outstanding party leaders had assembled at the time.

As the Lenin position emerged victorious at the congress, he became the high muckamuck on the editorial staff of *Iskra* and in the

2. Pamphlets would carry the address and innocuous business title on the cover: Imprimerie Israélite (Jewish Publishing House).

Central Committee. Martov's group, the Mensheviks, reverted to the role of the opposition. As it turned out, they constituted a large majority in the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad, an organization which had actually been established outside Russia several years before the appearance of *Iskra*. The Mensheviks accordingly made the organization into a fortress of their own tendency or, more correctly, of their group, since there could hardly be any talk of a separate ideological tendency during the months immediately following the congress, when the dispute centered more on personalities than on principles.

Lenin, however, is not one of those people who can tolerate opposition, so he dispatched an agent of the Central Committee to break up the Union. The agent appeared at a session of the Union and told the group to disperse. (The Mensheviks later jokingly referred to his entrance "on a white horse.") The Mensheviks became terribly incensed, and only then were their eyes opened, only then did they understand the true meaning of Lenin's organizational appetite.

Just a few months before, when those same Mensheviks were working in tandem with Lenin and running the show in partnership with him, they blithely assented to his militaristic administrative actions. They themselves were playing the commanders' role, and it was other "alien" factions—*Rabochee Delo* and the Bund—that suffered from their high-handedness. Now, however, they felt the mailed fist on their own necks—and they rebelled. The rebellion began when the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad offered resistance to the "white horse" and declared that it would not allow itself to be dispersed. Then leaflets appeared critical of Lenin's methods. (These were secret, addressed only to party members.) The leaflets already gave currency to such stinging expressions as "bureaucratic centralism" and the like. Then the Mensheviks proceeded to ponder the essence of all this contention ever more deeply and reached the conclusion that the whole *Iskra* period was nothing more than an expression of a movement of the intelligentsia and of the intelligentsia's needs. Old Paul Axelrod, the deepest thinker of the whole group, offered a solid and accurate estimate of the situation. Trotsky (he was on the side of the Mensheviks at this time) subsequently issued a brochure in which he elaborated upon and popularized Axelrod's

ideas. Thus, out of a disagreement within a close circle there grew an ideological schism. By the end of 1903, the Bolsheviks (or the "hards," as they were called) and the Mensheviks had become two separate groups. True, the argument during that early period simply revolved around internal questions of party building; the differences of opinion on questions of political tactics arose only later.

We would observe and listen to these discussions with the greatest interest. It goes without saying that we were quite pleased with the emerging opposition to Lenin's efforts at militarizing the party, yet we used the requisite caution even in our relationship with the Mensheviks. Their oppositional mood had not yet reached the point where they were ready to change their attitude toward the Bund. Quite the contrary; on this question both factions wished to outdo the other and to demonstrate its orthodoxy on the score of Bund-baiting.



Medem and Gleb Mutnik, during emigration in Geneva (ca. 1903); both were leaders there of the Foreign Committee of the Bund

53.

Slavek

HE CAME TO US in Switzerland at this time. He came for a brief spell, departed, came once again, disappeared again. His whole life was one big coming and going; one big hurry—a brief hurry. He died nine years later, and in the memory of Jewish workers he remained a shining star of their movement. Bronisław Grosser—“Slavek.”¹

1. Medem's devotion of a chapter to Slavek is more than a reflection of personal admiration; it reveals the degree to which Slavek was all-but-idolized in the ranks of the Bund and beyond. Slavek won for himself imperishable laurels in the history of the Bund. Medem has alluded to his fighting spirit (an aspect of what Medem himself characterized as “Bund patriotism”). It revealed itself on frequent occasions. For instance, at the London Congress of the RSDWP in 1907, where Slavek was the youngest delegate (age 24), he did not hesitate to speak out forcefully and frequently. On one occasion, when Lenin made a reference to the Bund's helplessness, Slavek, never one to be overawed by the big names, instantly rose to offer a rejoinder: “Yes, we are helpless in the central bodies of the RSDWP, but on the other hand we are strong in our tie to the masses; as regards the Bolsheviks, one can say just the opposite.” Quoted in *Doyres bundistn*, I, 330.

He died in December 1912, but not before he had rendered yeoman service earlier that year to the Bund and the socialist cause generally by his outstanding role in the mobilization of Jewish and Polish support for the successful election campaign to the Fourth Duma Eugeniusz Jagiello of the left-PPS, candidate on that occasion of the Socialist Bloc.

One morning there appeared in Geneva a young man—very young, just out of school—a fellow of about nineteen. But he had already acquired a name. Word had reached us from Warsaw: “Take care of that young comrade. He is our great hope.”

He still bore the mark of immaturity, of an unfulfilled nature. Indeed he was still virtually a child. But he had already become a leader of great force—a young eagle.

Slavek was a lad of medium height, thin and narrow-shouldered. He had a small head on a long neck; and attractive, clear, blue-gray eyes. He gave the impression of a taut arrow ready to fly. When he would come to see me he would never remain seated in one place, but continually pace the floor from one end of the room to the other with long, swift strides. “Slavek is always in a rush,” said his Warsaw schoolmate to me at the time. “When he has to write a letter, he sends a telegram instead; when he has to send a telegram, he boards the train and goes himself. . . Eternally restless!”

Later on he matured, grew somewhat calmer. The surface unease was gone, but it turned inward. There remained the great restlessness, the great inner turbulence, and the great, acute incisiveness.

Incisiveness: this was the primary and characteristic quality of my young friend. First an incisiveness of mind. Here was someone who, though reared in a totally assimilationist Warsaw environment and nourished on Polish culture, had a truly Jewish mind. When I first became acquainted with him he knew scarcely a word of Yid-

The parallels between Medem and Grosser, both of whom opted to dedicate their all-too-brief lives in utter selflessness to the cause of the Jewish masses despite their strong Russian and Polish cultural backgrounds, were noted and appreciated in tangible form after their deaths—eleven years apart—which produced vast outpourings of grief. Scores of institutions were named for them—workers’ clubs, libraries, childrens’ schools—and in the case of Medem—one of the world’s great eleemosynary institutions—the Medem Sanatorium near Warsaw. (This writer has listened to a score of Bundists from Warsaw describe in glowing terms the vibrant social and cultural life centering in the Grosser Club.)

The funeral of Slavek, indeed, became the occasion of a massive demonstration which was finally broken up by the Tsarist police. The eulogies planned for the funeral were to have included those by the Duma deputies Skobelev and Jagiello; but the speeches were banned. See *ibid.*, 319–34; also *Geshikhte jun bund*, II, 592–97.

dish. He was an artist in the realm of thought—thought not of an idle, purposeless kind, but thought associated with a keen intelligence, enriched by a broad European, scientific, aesthetic, and political culture. But it was that Jewish mind which, in the words of the French savant, was like a sensitive instrument that measured and weighed with the precision of a druggist's scale; a mind of steel-like sharpness, capable of penetrating issues and concepts, dissecting and analyzing them, identifying the smallest, most delicate elements. In a word—Slavek's was the mind of a born Marxist.

He also possessed a keenness of temperament; he simply had to prick and assail. And he hated powerfully: his was that great creative hostility—and great courage too. I could not conceive of a situation in which Slavek felt any fear. There is an old German folk legend about a youthful hero who, from earliest childhood, had no concept of fear, and who undertook to travel the world over in search of fear. Slavek reminds me of this hero.

He experienced no sense of fear either in the broad arena of social activity, where he proved to be a dangerous adversary—indeed, a first-class polemicist—or in his private, his personal life. Great audacity sometimes reveals itself more strikingly in the petty things involved in private relationships among individuals than in grand events. I recall one such instance. We had convened a court of arbitration. (I will deal with the issue itself later.) I served as representative of one side, Slavek of the other. At issue was a certain individual's private life. Slavek held this person in low esteem—that I knew; but I was astonished when he suddenly began to tell him to his face what he thought of him. It was by no means done in a moment of indignation or polemical hostility. Instead, quite calmly and factually, with controlled voice, Slavek looked the man straight in the face and told him what he thought of him. It was terrible. I had the impression that to do something like that required no lower order of courage than fighting on a barricade, precisely because it was done in a state of calm and not under the influence of mass emotion.

But that which was especially worthy—and endearing—in Slavek's makeup was his nobility. An energetic, impetuous fighter, he remained, nonetheless, ever sensitive and decent—always the gentleman. Each fight had the character of a kind of duel for him. He

would register his blow—and a solid blow at that—but having forced his opponent to the ground, he would approach him, extend his hand, and help him back to his feet.

Slavek was proud, but not with the haughty pride encountered so often among Poles. It was the pride of an individual who knows his own worth and defends his rights.

At the time we met, toward the end of 1903, he was still very young; the whole of his life still lay in the future. And he loved life. He was no narrow, “just-a-party” person. His interests were of the broadest, most varied kind, and he remained that way to the end—full of interest in art, in literature, enjoying many friends who were exceedingly devoted to him. And love of woman also occupied no small place in his beautiful and luminous life.

As noted, he grew up in an assimilationist Jewish-Polish environment. He was impregnated with Polish culture which he loved. I remember a night we once spent together in a small Zurich hotel. A friend of his, a Pole, was with us. They talked about Warsaw—all through the night. With what tremendous passion he spoke of that city! Like a true native Pole, he had very little in common with Jewishness. He knew little of Jewish life; he began to teach himself to read Yiddish only a few years before his death, and even then he did not succeed in learning it adequately. While yet a youngster, he had decided to devote his activity to the Jewish workers’ movement. He became a loyal Bundist and remained one to his death. Why? He considered it his obligation. He said to himself, quite consciously: “I am a Jew. It is my duty to devote my energies to the Jewish worker.”

It involved great sacrifice on his part. The Polish world constantly beckoned to him; it could offer him more than we. He might have made a brilliant career for himself. He abjured it and remained with us. It was the great inner drama of his life that he felt the impossibility of developing his powers to the full within our environment. He felt constricted, unable to find a suitable niche. Here, in part, lies the explanation for his eternal restlessness. Still, he did not leave. His name, quite rightly, has remained enshrined in the memory of the Jewish working masses as the cherished name of a martyr.

Despite his youth he was already playing a prominent part in the movement. Not yet initiated in the ways of conspiracy, somewhat in-

cautious, disorganized, he occupied no specific position in the organization. Nevertheless, he fulfilled a variety of tasks for the party. Immediately following his arrival in Geneva he delivered a lecture on the Bund in the Polish colony. Abramovich and I went to hear him. We listened with amazement as this young man, who had come from far-off Warsaw and had never exchanged any ideas with us, defended our viewpoint with precisely the same perceptiveness and almost the same words as we would have used. Several months later, in the spring of 1904, our Foreign Committee began to publish a small journal in Polish. To Slavek and Liber (who had again arrived from Russia) was assigned the editorial task.

It was about that time that Slavek had occasion to participate in a conference of a radical Polish youth organization. There he conducted a brilliant struggle against the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). He was a first-class speaker and proved to be very effective. It is interesting to note that after the speech of this nineteen-year-old lad, when the session had come to an end and no more speeches were scheduled for that day, the representative of the PPS—the old party leader, Dr. Maximilian Hurwitz—requested of the conference that it permit him to respond promptly to Slavek on the ground that “it was impermissible for the session to adjourn under the impact of his speech.” The old party leader had detected the appearance of a dangerous adversary.

In the spring of 1904 I spent several weeks with Slavek in Zurich, where we conducted a struggle against the Iskristis. Seated in the Café Terrasse, near the shore of Lake Zurich, we would engage in lengthy discussions that ran far into the night. It was a warm and pleasant café, and the discussions there were equally warm and pleasant. We stayed at the same hotel and slept in the same room. I observed that Slavek always kept a revolver with him. Why? Surely not for political purposes. But the proud youth would never have tolerated a personal affront.

He later left on a brief trip to Galicia. I stayed on in Switzerland.

The Small Town's Seamy Side

WITH MY RESIDENCE now in Geneva, I traveled a great deal. I invariably passed through Bern, where I would stay for a few days and relax in familiar surroundings. But around the beginning of the summer of 1904 my affection for the colony at Bern cooled perceptibly.

I had spent the spring, as usual, in Clarens. From there I dropped into Munich once to deliver a lecture. On the way back to Geneva I stopped off at Bern. I found the colony in a state of tremendous agitation. The scene was marked by uproar, commotion, excitement. What had occurred? The story itself was ordinary enough, although it created a sensation. A Jewish girl—a youthful immigrant—had become . . . pregnant.

I should point out that this was not the first such “event” in the history of the Bern colony. What made it unique was the fact that it turned into a public scandal. The girl in question was prone to hysterics. She raised a tremendous howl, rushed off to one of the other girls, wept, screamed, nearly fainted on the street. The people in the colony showed all the symptoms of a disturbed ant colony. How? What? Who was the culprit? It turned out to be a comrade, a member of the Bund group; indeed, a good friend of mine.

I arrived at a meeting of the group, a special meeting that had not even been announced. Things were boiling, churning. As usual, the

men were more composed, but the girls were fit to be tied. I can still clearly see one of the women comrades (she was no longer a spring chicken, like the young girls with their close-cropped hair and masculine mannerisms) sitting there and screaming without letup: "We must compel him to marry!" I tried to reason with them. "Comrades! Since when is a political organization in the business of matchmaking!" But talking to people in a state of frenzy was futile.

After a prolonged argument I advanced the following proposal: I would speak to him—not about getting married, obviously—and suggest that he ought to leave Bern, at least for a while, due to the colony's tremendous indignation toward him. I would submit this idea to him not officially, yet actually in the name of the group.

My proposal was accepted. I sensed that I was embarking upon a very ticklish venture. I knew full well that I was placing a friendship in jeopardy, one which I cherished greatly. Still, ludicrous as it seems, there were party interests at stake: the fellow was a party leader. And where personal hostility toward an individual is involved, the crowd is generally inclined to transfer that hostility over to the party as well. We were therefore interested in having the person disappear from the Bern landscape for a time.

I went to see him, and my fears, indeed, were not without foundation. Much as I tried to soft-pedal the whole matter and to handle it with maximum "diplomacy," my highly indignant friend cut me off before I had scarcely begun to speak: "What is this all about? What right has the group to interfere in my personal matters? I shall pay no attention to them whatsoever!" I tried to plead with him: "You're right. It is a wholly personal and a wholly intimate matter. And the group really has no right to interfere. But the interests of the party require that you leave." "No," he responded, "I won't do it."

Well, my mission ended in defeat. And saddest of all for me was the fact that the attitude of the person involved subsequently became less cordial toward me than it had been previously. The group, on its part, decided that he should refrain from making public appearances in the immediate future. He responded by summoning the group before an organizational court of arbitration. The court upheld the group's decision. But by the time the matter reached the court, the case suddenly found itself resolved in a different fashion. How, in-

deed? Within a few weeks the fellow got married—and, in fact, to the girl in question. Moreover, something else soon appeared which added quite a humorous flavor to the whole incident: the girl had not been pregnant! It was all a misunderstanding. As a matter of fact, the first child she bore saw the light of day a full year after the big scandal.

But the colony was still unaware of all this at the time. The whole thing turned out to be a truly small-town tempest. I had a feeling of the most profound disgust. The din created by the girls; the digging into the most intimate subjects; and the hauling up of a deeply personal matter virtually into the street, all of it was dreadfully repellent. And I experienced for the first time a strong distaste for the Bern group. I would have liked to gather up the whole colony at a large meeting, confront them, and dress down the frenetic audience in the sharpest language I could muster.

Of course I did no such thing. But the old feeling of warmth, of closeness and affection which I had harbored for the colony until then, suffered a severe blow. The small town had betrayed its seamy side.

I decided, nevertheless, to spend the summer in Spiez. I use the term “nevertheless” advisedly, because Spiez was, so to speak, the summer division of the Bern colony. It is a small vacation spot along the shore of Lake Thun not far from Bern, a few hours by train. Spiez itself is a very small town, with a few hotels and shops. But dotting the countryside for miles around were farmhouses. It was in these houses that the “Russians” ensconced themselves during the summer months, that is to say, mainly Jews, and most of them, in fact, from Bern. The whole area echoed with the sounds of the Russian and Yiddish languages and song.

The district as such is not one of the prettiest in Switzerland, but it does serve as a kind of starting point for the routes that open out in various directions and penetrate to the very core of Switzerland’s grandeur. Here is the actual heart of Switzerland, the so-called Bernese Oberland, where the mountains soar into the skies. It is the region of eternal snow and ice; of breathtaking valleys, waterfalls and caverns, and of small mountain lakes. Whoever has failed to visit this

region at least once has simply not seen Switzerland.

I moved in with Liber, who was abroad once again. He had gotten married in the meantime, and was the father of a six-month-old daughter. Since I was all alone I drew close to them. We rented a few rooms from a farmer and organized a "commune." Kosovsky lived in a nearby house and took his meals with us. The three of us transferred a substantial portion of our work to Spiez.

We were then in the process of issuing our Russian-language journal, *Vestnik Bunda*. The task of the journal was not agitation but greater theoretical probing into the various items of our program. It was self-evident that the national question, the least to be elaborated upon until then, should occupy a primary place in our considerations. Two lengthy, in-depth articles by Kosovsky appeared in the first two issues, and in the next two issues I published two substantial articles myself. My articles were subsequently published in Russia in 1906 as a separate brochure—in Russian and Yiddish—under the title: *Social Democracy and the National Question*. The brochure came to be regarded at the time as a kind of Bund credo.

The articles represented the culmination of prolonged effort. I had pondered over the subject for years, yet, even after having arrived at definite and firm conclusions, I encountered no small degree of hardship in expressing them on paper. Writing proved quite exacting for me during those years. I found myself ripping up more than one sheet of paper before I finally surmounted the difficulties that confronted an unskilled pen. I had already tried my hand at it the year before, in the spring of 1903, and I really suffered through it. To this day, I can plainly see the sheets of paper I used at the time, a species of paper of especially tough quality. But nothing came of the effort. It was only a year later, in Spiez, that my attempts to write reached fruition.

The articles contained the formulation of that Bund "Neutrality" for which I was subsequently so often belabored, and concerning which I was so frequently misunderstood. This does not surprise me because there was something in the very posing of the problem that made it appear absurd and strange in the light of traditional thought. And unfamiliar things are always inadequately understood.

My primary task, and the major difficulty, centered precisely on

the posing of the problem. The concrete answer, the explanation of national-cultural autonomy, was by comparison among the simpler matters. But the posing constituted what was the most difficult and the most essential, because there existed no socialist viewpoint on the subject. The socialists used to waver between the two bourgeois viewpoints: they were either cosmopolites—assimilationists, who cared not at all about “such things”—or they would appropriate the complete baggage of the nationalists whose legacy, they sought to prove, was compatible with socialism. But there existed no official independent socialist position. What’s more, the possibility of the existence of a third alternative seemed literally beyond comprehension. “If you are not a nationalist,” argued those on the right, “you must be an assimilationist.” “If you are not an assimilationist,” said those on the left “then you must be a nationalist.” Neither of them could appreciate that there might be yet another position over and above the nationalist and over and above the assimilationist, one with its own and quite distinctive physiognomy.

This discovery and elucidation of the third, the socialist position, is what I desired. It happened to be my initial attempt; I had merely laid the first few bricks for the structure. Small wonder that I myself, in later years, felt prompted to improve and change many things.¹

1. In seeking to distinguish itself, during the exceedingly tense months of 1903, from the Iskrists on the one hand, and the Zionists on the other, an embattled Bund felt that it had to advance a theoretical position on the Jewish national question even though the question had not produced a substantial meeting of the minds within the Bund itself. Medem, aware of the difficulties and, indeed, the dubious reality of such a theoretical exposition, nevertheless took a stab at it. This was the stance of so-called “Neutralism,” *i.e.*, with respect to the future destiny of the Jewish people, the Bund would defer to the “objective course of development.” If, accordingly, what would be, would in fact be the disappearance of the Jewish people, the Bund was prepared to accept this verdict of “history.” This was the position adopted at the Fifth Congress of the Bund in 1903, although not without the sharpest possible division of opinion in the organization.

Medem, the reluctant exponent of “Neutralism,” gave the main report in which, addressing himself to the national question, he affirmed that “there are three solutions to the national question: a nationalistic one [read: a Zionist one], an assimilationist one, and a Social Democratic one. The first two have in common the fact that they treat the question from the standpoint of the developmental process of

I derived great satisfaction, a few years later, when the book by Otto Bauer appeared that was destined to become famous. Its title was virtually identical with my brochure's. I found the same principles enunciated in it. Of course his exposition was different: it was deeper, better, and clearer than mine.² Indeed, his is an uncommonly

each separate nation. . . . Social Democracy is neutral. For it, national adherence (*angeherikayt*) is in itself not important." It was the class standpoint which was paramount.

Life itself—and greater theoretical clarity—quickly spelled *finis* to the position of "Neutralism." Not only had the Bund, even before the congress of 1903, already adumbrated a program of Jewish national-cultural autonomy, but its daily, down-to-earth involvement with the ethnically distinctive Jewish masses, whose sense of national identity was waxing in every sphere of life, made it a certainty that "Neutralism" would swiftly disappear into the limbo of half-baked theoretical formulations. By 1904, the Bund was already forcefully agitating for various Jewish national demands, and at the Sixth Congress in 1905, where Medem was appointed reporter on the national question, ambiguity and vacillation all but vanished. The proclamation of the Bund calling for national-cultural autonomy for the Jews was adopted by the delegates almost unanimously. "The facts of life," wrote Grigory Aronson, "had a more powerful effect than theoretical arguments." See Grigory Aronson, "*Di diskusye vegn der natsionaler frage oyfn finftn tsuzamenfor fun Bund*" ("The Discussion About the National Question at the Fifth Congress of the Bund"), in *Geshikhte fun Bund* (1962) II, 529–35. See also Medem's memoirs, *infra*, pp. 348–51.

2. Bauer's brochure was titled: *Nationale Autonomie der Juden? Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* [*National Autonomy for the Jews? The Nationality Question and Social Democracy*], (Vienna, 1907).

One wonders about this seemingly unqualified endorsement, for, after the initial views of Bauer with which Medem could concur (the former's rejection of the principle, prompted by the complex ethnic realities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that nationality simply equals territory; and the affirmation in general terms that a given ethnic group need not constitute a majority in a particular territory to enjoy national rights), Bauer drew the line where the Jews were concerned, and argued that they should *not* be granted national rights. Offering a strained interpretation of the Jewish question; mixing fact with fancy, and advancing a sweeping, pessimistic prognosis based upon Marx's view of the Jew and a presumed Marxist reading of the negative influence of capitalist economic development on the prospects for Jewish survival, Bauer declared: "With the progressive development of capitalism and of the modern state, the Jews of the East will also likewise cease to be a nation, will likewise dissolve among the nations as have the Jews of the West long ago. . . . To be sure, the swiftness of this movement should not be overestimated. In the Russian Empire, the

brilliant mind (without question the finest mind in today's socialist movement), but on the essential matter we had found a common ground.

economic and legal preconditions for the process of assimilation are still missing. The Jewish population there will consequently be seized by the movement far more slowly; there the new Jewish cultural movement will likely have broad room for action for *decades* (my emphasis, S. P.). There the Bund will likely organize the Jewish workers for many years and give new content to their lives; there the Yiddish press, the new Yiddish literature, will yet enjoy much progress. But the more Russia draws closer economically and politically to the states of Western and Central Europe, the more quickly will the conditions within which the development of an independent culture is alone possible also fall away there. . . .

"It is a certainty that . . . the Jews of the East will finally merge into the nations of the East. The new Jewish national feeling will perhaps make more difficult the process of assimilation here and there. But the necessity of economic intercourse is stronger than all sentimental [*sic*] desires. Seen historically, even the awakening of the Eastern Jews to new cultural life is nothing but a forerunner of eventual assimilation."

While the Bund and other elements in Jewish life were opening wide the door to a secular Jewish culture and striving mightily to show that secular Jewishness and national-cultural autonomy, the Bund program of which Medem was largely instrumental in formulating, would constitute a powerful bulwark *against* assimilation, Bauer—ignoring his own earlier reference to the fact that the Bund would have a big role in "the new Jewish cultural movement [that] will likely have broad room for action for decades"—proceeded to advocate autonomy for all ethnic minorities *except* the Jews. His argument is interesting. The Jewish workers, he said, must draw closer in their way of life [*gesittung*] to the Christian. Posing the question of Jewish children studying in their own schools, with their own language of instruction, Bauer asked: "What spirit will dominate these schools? . . . [What] culture? It is the culture of an ahistorical [*geschichtslosen*] nation, the culture of people who stood outside the civilization of European peoples, who transmit a whole world of long dead ideas, desires, customs, and mores from generation to generation. Can there be any doubt that this old, torpid culture would impress its character for additional decades upon the Jewish schools, and not the young, emerging culture whose message comes to us from the revolutionary new Jewish literature, a culture struggling for power only slowly within Jewry itself? Thus the children of Jewish workers will be artfully constricted in the spirit of times long passed. . . . To them will be transmitted a medieval world view; they will be inculcated with the psychology of a dead economic outlook. . . . Can the Jewish workers wish that the school of their children should seek to educate with a spiritual viewpoint which life itself must subsequently reverse and

Aside from these articles, we wrote on a variety of current topics in *Vestnik Bunda*, and I attempted for the first time to write brief commentaries on public affairs.

overturn? The Jewish school means for the Jews, first of all, the artificial retention of their old cultural separateness, which limits their freedom of mobility and thereby increases their misery, and additionally the strengthening of their old ideology, their old social psychology, which would first have to be overcome in order for them to become capable of the class struggle. If we do not want separate Jewish schools, then national autonomy for the Jews makes no sense. Despite all the rhetoric, it is not the legal form of existence of the nation, but a means toward specific ends. . . . National autonomy cannot be the demand of the Jewish worker." Otto Bauer, *Werkausgabe* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1975), I, 414–35.

The Amsterdam Congress

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST Congress met in Amsterdam during the summer of 1904. I attended as one of the delegates of the Bund. Our delegation consisted of seven persons: Liber, Kosovsky, John, Maximov [Max Oguz] (one of our top people who was living in Paris), Alexander, Makavey [Alter Labserdak], and myself. Alexander and Makavey came to Amsterdam directly from America, to which we had sent them to raise funds for the Bund. In America, Makavey went by the name Michael Berg; in later years he bore the party name of Ezra [Rozen].

When we reached Amsterdam our group repaired to the private quarters to which we had been assigned by the organizers of the congress. We were welcomed by the owner of the flat, an elderly woman whose extreme friendliness was accompanied by gay, childlike laughter. But there was one difficulty: we didn't know a word of Dutch. We tried German with her, and French and English; she understood none of these. She laughed; we laughed too. But the conversation was getting nowhere. Finally we thought we understood her when she said, "The *doktor* will be coming very soon." We rejoined that we were in no need of a doctor, that we were all healthy, thank God. But the woman persisted: "Just wait; the *doktor* is coming shortly."

Oh well, let it be a doctor! Only later did it become clear that she meant not a doctor but her *tokhter* (daughter), which in Dutch sounded similar to *doktor*, and the daughter was knowledgeable in foreign languages. She finally arrived and we cleared things up.

Amsterdam is a wonderful city, a city possessing a distinct, highly personal charm. Of rare beauty are the ancient streets with the silent canals, the old-style houses, and the lovely musical tones from the church steeples ringing forth with melodious song on the hour. Equally attractive are the large, modern streets. I used to envisage the Dutch as a kind of somnolent and phlegmatic people, but it's not so at all. The spacious streets are alive, a picture of feverish activity. Music, laughter, and song can be heard well into the night even within the courtyards.

The Jewish quarters are tremendously interesting; they represent a world apart. Typically Jewish, they are unkempt, noisy, all trading and shouting. I had the illusion of being somewhere in Vilno . . . on Rudnitsky Street or Zavalne Street. Actually, the city of Amsterdam contains a mass of Russian and Polish Jews in addition to the old, established Jewish inhabitants of Spanish extraction, and the Yiddish language resounds quite lustily at every turn. Indeed, when I later barged into the midst of a crowd of young Jewish workingmen and women at a large meeting that had been arranged by the local socialist organization in honor of the congress, I felt as though I were present at a gathering somewhere in our own Lithuania.

The sessions of the congress were held in the most capacious concert hall in Amsterdam. It was a pretty hall and the audience was huge. The cream of the world socialist movement had come together here. One encountered prominent faces and names all over the place. Yet I was somewhat disappointed in the spirit of the congress. I had anticipated a great display of ceremony and enthusiasm which I failed to witness. The Zionist congress had been far more turbulent. What I found in Amsterdam was more routine than enthusiasm. Why the difference? Quite simply because the people who had assembled in Basel were by and large ordinary Jews. They had, for once, managed to escape from their narrow confines, from their prosaic affairs, and immersed themselves in the festive spirit reminis-

cent of the Sabbath. But here the audience was composed largely of professional leaders. To them a congress was no novelty; it was merely a continuation of their everyday activity.

Furthermore, one could not expect of a German or Englishman (and the Germans alone had a delegation of about a hundred persons) a display of that vibrant eastern temperament which one encounters at a Jewish meeting. Finally, there was the dulling effect of a traditional practice at international congresses: the system of trilingualism. Speeches were given in French, German, and English; and every speech in one of these tongues had to be translated promptly into the other two. It became exceedingly boring.

Nevertheless the opening session provided a truly inspiring moment. The congress had assembled only a few months after the start of the Russo-Japanese War, and our demonstration for peace was carried out in a highly colorful fashion. On opening the congress, Pieter Troelstra (leader of the Dutch Socialist Party) invited the representatives of the two warring nations—Plekhanov of Russia and Sen Katayama of Japan—to take seats next to him, one on the right, the other on the left. And when Troelstra, in his opening address, alluded to the war and the unity of the Russian and Japanese proletariat, both men rose; and Plekhanov extended his hand to Sen Katayama. Amid thunderous applause and shouts of “Bravo” throughout the hall, the two “foes” maintained a long, firm handshake. This turned out to be the most beautiful scene at the congress.

But a genuinely profound, and literally overwhelming, impression was made upon me a few days later, an impression that will not fade from my soul as long as I live. It was the kind of impression one derives from truly majestic events and phenomena: I heard Jean Jaurès speak.

The great debate on socialist tactics was in progress on the floor of the congress. The question: pure class struggle or cooperation with left-bourgeois parties? The German Social Democracy had just adopted its famous “Dresden” resolution which forbade cooperation; the French socialist movement was split. One party—more to the right—endorsed cooperation as permissible; it was headed by Jaurès. A second party, under the leadership of Jules Guesde,

adhered to the German view. (Aside from these, there existed a smaller third group, led by Jean Allemane.) The two leading contenders who engaged in the big battle at the congress were August Bebel and Jaurès.

It was also the first time that I heard Bebel speak. He was, of course, a superlative orator, and he emerged the victor. But how could he compare to Jaurès! A speaker entrancing as Jaurès has no equal and, I should think, can have none.

Before reaching the agenda of a plenary session of the congress, the issue in question was discussed in a large commission. Any delegate had a right to sit in on the session of the commission; it became transformed, accordingly, into a large meeting. I had been delayed, and by the time I arrived the discussion was already under way. I walked down the corridor in search of the commission's meeting room. Coming up before a closed door, and even before I had opened it, I suddenly felt a strange excitement. A voice was coming through from the other side of the door. I was unable to distinguish the words through the closed door, unable to grasp their essence; but I was stirred by the sound of the voice. I could sense that something extraordinary was taking place. I opened the door . . . Jaurès was speaking.

A small pudgy man, Jaurès had a round and ruddy face, a short, massive neck, and a square beard. His eyes were bright blue and small. But when gazing into them, one had the sensation of peering through two pellucid windows that opened onto a well of wisdom and goodness. And when this diminutive figure commenced to speak, he would take on the stature of a giant. One found oneself looking at a lion and listening to a lion's thunderous roar. The voice was not human: it was sheer thunder—powerful, raging thunder—a boiling wave that engulfed the listener, that transported him and shattered his equanimity. It was a mighty symphony of a one-hundred-piece orchestra. And the fervor, the enthusiasm! When he was speaking, Jaurès became oblivious to everything around him. His whole being was seized by the momentum of his speech, a momentum which conveyed him forward into the ranks of the audience.

There was no special speaker's platform in the small hall in which the session of the commission was held. Jaurès stood in front of the

first row of listeners, and the longer he spoke, the more impassioned he became. Something seemed to propel him toward the rows of people. One step forward; another step forward—and there he was: thrusting his way through the seats of the first row, cutting—unaware—into the packed crowd, thundering onward all the while. The Spanish socialist, Pablo Iglesias, was seated up front; he was almost crushed by the speaker. Jaurès stopped short, broke into a warm broad smile as he apologized to Iglesias, and moved aside. But within a few minutes he was once again intruding himself into the rows, still thundering, still oblivious. And the impact of what he was saying, and how he said it! The leonine power and the burning zeal were joined with a truly Gallic gentility, with a noble aristocracy of spirit and gentle humor.

I recall the start of his second speech. One of his adversaries was Rosa Luxemburg, who had consistently spoken out for a pure class struggle and against “cooperation.” (She also served as translator during each session.) Jaurès remarked: “When I finish my speech, Comrade Luxemburg—my opponent—will translate what I have said; here is evidence that struggle and cooperation are not mutually exclusive.” The audience laughed and applauded. Rosa Luxemburg also joined in the applause, and Jaurès then returned to the essence of his speech.

It was a speech in defense. Bebel had assailed the tactics of the French socialists; Jaurès was defending himself. The majority of those present were not in agreement with him, but no one in the audience could help but be touched by his words, as when he spoke of the danger confronting the French Republic, threatened by reactionary-monarchistic machinations; as when he related how he and his comrades had fought for the existence of democracy; as when—head raised high—his flaming voice thundered forth: “And we saved the Republic!” Even granting that he may have been a thousand times wrong, yet there stood before us a human personality of genuine historic greatness.¹

1. The essential issue was the attitude of socialists toward the defense of a bourgeois democratic republic. Jaurès, rejecting the “orthodox” Marxist position, became a leading exponent of a pragmatic socialism wedded to the concept of

It was a concluding speech, and the debate had to come to a close. But in the midst of his speech he voiced some passing reference to the other socialist party. Its leader, old Guesde, reacted with tremendous indignation. "I protest, and I request the floor," he cried out. Jaurès was finished. Guesde began to force his way toward the presidium table. Tall, old, with a long black-gray beard, Guesde was one of the most popular figures in the socialist movement. He was determined to speak. The chairman, Troelstra, would not permit it. "The debate is closed," he said. "What?" cried Guesde. "You refuse to let me speak? You will not allow someone to speak against whom the weightiest accusations have been hurled here; someone who stood at the cradle of the socialist movement in France? You will not allow me to say that the tactics of the party, which, . . ." and so forth and so on—all the while speaking on the substantive matter with such ir-repressible momentum that Troelstra merely shrugged his shoulders and let him go on.

A similar scene involving Victor Adler was enacted at the plenary session of the congress. He had mounted the rostrum and begun to speak. The chairman—another Dutchman, the towering, massive giant Henri van Kol—cut him off. I don't remember why; I think his time had run out. A chairman at such a congress is next to omnipotent; no one dares challenge him. But Adler blithely ignored him. Van Kol broke in again. An angry Adler responded with a sweep of his hand, shouting something at van Kol along the lines of "get off my back." The audience chortled, and van Kol allowed him to proceed.

Incidentally, I must say that after Jaurès it was Adler, in fact, who made the strongest impression upon me. To be sure, he did not possess the luster, the talent, the rhetorical power of Jaurès. His great impact derived from his wisdom. He is the wisest man I ever encountered: the true embodiment of wisdom. And witty to boot—as

parliamentary democracy and political gradualism, and appealing to a broader "Left." ". . . The rather eclectic doctrine of Jaurès," observed George Lichtheim, "presented itself from the 1890s onward not as a *revision* of Marxism but as an *adaptation* of Marx's doctrines to the traditions of French socialism, and indeed of French republicanism." George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 20.

only a witty Jew can be. Unprepossessing; his shoulders badly stooped; a thick head of hair nearly covering his eyes, Adler had an enormous impact upon everyone. He spoke gently, slowly, with no oratorical flourishes whatsoever; indeed he even had a slight tendency to stammer, but so slight as to be hardly noticeable. He managed to overcome this difficulty by virtue of his extraordinary will power. But his every word was a pure gem.

Aside from Jaurès, the most attractive speaker for me was the Italian Enrico Ferri, who has since left the socialist movement. A person of rare beauty, Ferri was endowed with an incomparably noble, classic face, a Roman nose, a gray beard, and a voice of incredible beauty. His speech had the quality of the loveliest music.

Emil Vandervelde, the Belgian labor leader and present minister, had the reputation of being the finest speaker, second only to Jaurès. I was not attracted to him, however. His oratorical stance always struck me as theatrical and contrived. I was once told that whenever he prepared a speech that happened to be drafted in advance, he would have recourse to variously colored markings for those words in the manuscript which were to be voiced loudly, medium loudly, and softly. I don't know whether this is true: it may be nothing more than a joke or merely apocryphal. But his speech, and also his gestures, did give the impression of being rehearsed and "artificial." And I disliked it.

To return to Jaurès. The big struggle ended in defeat for him. The congress adopted the "Dresden" resolution; and the congress expressed the firm desire that the various factions of French socialism unite in a single party, on the basis, actually, of that very resolution.

And Jaurès submitted. He carried out the unification, and, until his death, he protected the unity of the party with the total loyalty and consummate honesty of his noble character. Here was the most beautiful personality in the modern socialist movement.

Our week in Amsterdam was exceedingly interesting and pleasant. But one thing greatly disturbed the festive mood—our domestic "Russian" quarreling which endured virtually from the first day to the last.

The source of the problem was this: according to the old statutes of the International, each country was entitled to two votes at the

congress and to two representatives on the International Socialist Bureau. It was assumed that only one party existed in each country and that the two votes would accordingly be utilized to give representation both to the majority and to the minority; or, in a case where the movement was formally split into two segments, each party would have one vote.

This was actually the situation in most countries, but there were two important exceptions: France and Russia. I have already alluded to France with its three separate parties, known, from the names of their leaders, as the Jaurèsists, the Guesdists, and the Allemanists. As for Russia, it had a whole array of parties—no fewer than ten. Not all of them, it is true, had sent representatives; and not all of those which had sent representatives asked for a vote. It finally boiled down to a question of three candidates laying claim to the two votes: the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Bund. What to do? How should two votes be divided into three parts?

According to the International's own statutes, all the delegates from a single country were regarded as one "national" section upon which devolved the task of dividing up the two votes. Indeed, at the opening session of the congress a separate room was assigned to each section, in which it was to meet and decide this matter. We entered the Russians' room. Instead of a joint session we found only a meeting of the SR faction. "What is this?" we asked. "We don't need a joint session," they told us. "One of the votes is ours—and that's that." The RSDWP group, which had assembled someplace else, argued that the second vote was theirs. Which left us hanging in mid-air. Here we were, a part of the congress, yet without a vote. So we left. We were presently approached by Dr. Zhitlovsky, a member of the SR delegation, who set out to argue the question of our unwillingness to form a worldwide Jewish delegation, something that would make recourse to the Russian votes unnecessary. But we had neither the time nor the desire to engage in theoretical discussions with him. The International was organized on the basis of countries; we were from Russia; and we ought to have one of the votes assigned to Russia. We thereupon appealed to the International Socialist Bureau—the executive committee of the International. We ap-

preciated full well that both the Social Democrats and the SRs had a claim to a vote. Hence the only solution was—a third vote for Russia.

Even before we entered the session of the International Bureau, the Frenchman, Allemane, had already made an appearance there. He had also found himself voteless; and he too requested that the French delegation be granted three votes instead of two. We waited outside the door for the result of the deliberations. In a little while Allemane emerged in a state of high dudgeon. “How did you fare?” I asked him. “A refusal,” he replied. The bureau had been adamant: no third votes whatsoever. That’s what the constitution said. And aside from the constitutional provision, it was averred that the granting of a third vote would signify acquiescence in further splits. The bureau had posed the question simply: “Do you want a vote? Then don’t split!” Yet we wondered why a two-part split should be acceptable and a split into three parts unacceptable. We began to despair; apparently ours was not to reason why. Things looked anything but promising. It was no longer a matter of a third vote but of who would obtain the second: we or the SRs. We appeared at the session of the bureau and requested the vote. The Russian members of the bureau were Ilya Rubanovich for the SRs and Plekhanov for the RSDWP. In addition, the bureau included someone else who had a relationship to Russian matters, Rosa Luxemburg, who represented one of the two Polish delegations. (Poland was considered a separate country.)

On the basis of justice and of reason alike, one would have expected Plekhanov and Luxemburg to be on our side. It could readily be assumed that Rubanovich—an SR—would, as a matter of course, have to support his party. But the other two were, after all, stubborn opponents of the SRs, and, like ourselves, adherents of the Marxist doctrine. They should consequently stand with us. Plekhanov had in fact promised to be on our side, but he did not fulfill his promise. True, I cannot remember how he voted in the end, yet I do know that he spoke and acted in such fashion as to bring about our defeat. Luxemburg simply refrained from voting. And the upshot was that the majority of the bureau came out for the SRs.

We decided to appeal directly to the congress. It was an irksome task. Each of us knew German or French or both languages, but none of us had the audacity to use a foreign language in appearing before such a large gathering. Only one individual was willing to dare—Makavey. *Entre nous*, his German language had a bit of a Yiddish coloration. Still he was convinced that he knew the language very well, so we gave him leave to speak. The congress listened to his speech, but as we expected, it proved unavailing. A large assemblage of 700 to 800 persons is incapable of orienting itself in such matters. It tends to fall back on one thing: What is the decision of the bureau? And it confirmed the bureau's decision.

But we still refused to accept the decision placidly. We continued to approach individual delegates, pointing out all the while, and protesting against, the terrible injustice being committed. We might grant the reluctance to withhold the vote from the SRs—so be it; they could keep the one vote. But to the other vote, the Social Democratic one, we had as great a claim as did the Russian comrades. Let there be constituted, then, a common delegation embracing our two organizations, a delegation that would jointly control this single vote! The commotion persisted for several days. Finally we were handed a proposal: Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg offered to serve as intermediaries between us and the Russian Social Democrats. We accepted the proposal and appeared at a joint meeting. But we immediately noticed something: Luxemburg stood foursquare with the other side. Her partisanship showed, as did her nervousness; fretting all the while, she sought by every means to prevail upon us to soften our stand. But it had little effect; we continued stubbornly to defend our viewpoint. Kautsky understood that we were right, and, in the end, the decision was reached: the Social Democratic vote belonged to both sides. We were to share in its disposition. Each side would receive half a vote. Should we and the Russian Social Democrats find ourselves in agreement during voting at the congress, the two halves would become a single vote; and the vote would be jointly cast. But in the event that one side voted “for” and the other “against”—then no vote would be cast.

We were thus victorious. But all the contentiousness had spoiled

our mood and poisoned the satisfaction derived from the congress.

The dispute, incidentally, acted as a spur toward a reexamination of the statutes of the International. It was perceived that two votes for each country would not suffice, and the stipulation was changed. Representation in the International Socialist Bureau remained as before. We made it known, however, that we could not regard Plekhanov as our representative. Instead we sent a delegate with consultative power, and we followed this practice to the end.

The third conference of the Bund groups outside Russia took place during that winter. One rather interesting question, among others, was broached on this occasion. A segment of our comrades was not satisfied with the activities they were engaged in on behalf of the Bund. They declared that an additional obligation devolved upon them to aid the Russian party (the *ruslander partey*, as it was called). In addition to the Bund groups, the colonies also embraced *Iskra* groups and those identified with the other Russian tendency, *Rabochee Delo*. There could be no question about the *Iskra* groups: *Iskra* was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the Bund, and its groups contained no *bundovtises* (Bund adherents). But we were on friendly terms with *Rabochee Delo*, and it carried over in the personal relations of some of our people.

Gapon

THE WINTER OF 1904–1905 arrived. The first thunderclaps of the revolution were heard in Russia. The notorious slaughter of January 9 took place. The gigantic wave of political strikes had begun. A feeling was rife that things were on the upswing, that great events impended. Accordingly, our work abroad became more intensive and varied.

Among the circles of the Russian emigration, however, conflicts continued, and with increasing fervor. Differences of opinion between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks grew deeper; minor organizational issues gave way to questions of political tactics. Yet, the external forms of the disputes remained the same—and I must say they were not especially appetizing.

Similar conflicts had also been taking place within Russia proper. But at the same time another trend manifested itself there. The momentous developments were forcing the various *national* organizations of the Russian Social Democracy to draw closer together. A joint conference which brought together participants representing the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, the Bund, the Polish Social Democracy, and the Lettish Social Democracy, issued a common manifesto at a conference held simultaneously with the events of January 9.

In some circles of the Russian socialist movement, primarily

among the SRs, still another idea was afoot: the creation of a kind of union or, at the very least, an understanding, among all socialist currents. An attempt was made to realize this idea in the spring of 1905. The attempt was associated with certain moves by the famous leader of the Saint Petersburg workers, Father George Gapon. In the wake of the bloodbath of January 9, he fled Russia and came to Geneva. Shortly thereafter we received an invitation from him to participate in a conference of all Russian socialist organizations.

His plan was received rather coolly in the Social Democratic ranks. The disagreements, it was contended, were of such magnitude as to preclude joint activity. The Mensheviks refused altogether to participate in the conference. The Polish Social Democrats and the Bolsheviks did attend, as did—among the Social Democrats—the Letts, the Armenians, and the Bund.

I recall the meeting of the Foreign Committee held jointly with a representative of our Central Committee (Yudin) who happened to be in Geneva. Two delegates were selected: Yudin and myself.

I had no desire to attend the conference, and not for reasons of principle. I simply considered myself . . . too young. I was all of twenty-four at the time and looked even younger. I pleaded: "You're wild, mad. The conference, after all, will bring together the very cream of the revolutionary movement—old-time, tested leaders. It would make an exceedingly poor impression if someone as young as I should appear as a representative of the Bund. For pity's sake, send someone else!" But the group was adamant, and I had no choice. So I went.

First we had to drop in on Ansky who, at that time, found himself in Gapon's company a great deal. There we would be told the location of the conference. At Ansky's home we encountered a young man wearing a gray suit and red neckerchief. He had small brown eyes and a small pointed beard. There was nothing interesting about his face, or about him in general. We remained with him alone in the room for several minutes. He was apparently at a loss for something to talk about. Suddenly he asked me whether I was married. I answered in the negative. We fell silent. Then he inquired as to why I was so pale. Was I perhaps ill? Yes, I said. Again silence. Then Ansky appeared. We obtained the address and departed.

And when I arrived at the conference I learned, to my great amazement, that the uninteresting young man with the red neckerchief and the small eyes was, in fact, the famous Gapon himself!

The conference numbered about fifteen people. For the SRs there were Victor Chernov, Catherine Breshkovskaya, and Ansky; for the Russian Social Democrats, Lenin and another individual, of whom I shall subsequently have occasion to write. The Polish Socialist Party was represented by Ozko and Plakhotski (Wasilewski). Then there were representatives of two Lettish organizations; a representative of the Armenian Social Democratic organization; representatives of the Armenian Droshakists [*sic*]¹ and Georgian Federalists; and we, the two delegates of the Bund.

The other delegate from the Russian Social Democrats, Lenin's comrade, was a certain Maximov. In truth, I had been told earlier that Lenin would be joined by another prominent representative of the Bolsheviks, Alexander Bogdanov, a well-known theoretician, on whose book on political economy thousands of political activists had been educated. I was thus very curious to see this person. But in place of Bogdanov came Maximov, a blond young man of medium height, wearing a blue Russian blouse and presenting the ordinary appearance of a guileless worker with a simple, naive laugh. He responded to every joke he heard with rollicking laughter. I could not help wondering: Why should someone like that be sent to a gathering of such importance? But when the conference closed and I told my comrades about this delegate, it was their turn to laugh—and at my expense. For that “simple worker” was actually none other than—Bogdanov.

Gapon opened the conference with a speech. Some speech! The renowned orator who once had the capacity to inflame a workers' audience in Saint Petersburg numbering in the thousands was simply incapable, on this occasion, of arranging two words in sequence. He stammered, fumbled, was powerless to organize an intelligible thought. It was just as if a peasant had fallen in with a company of

1. Medem is likely referring to the Dashnakists, the Armenian Revolutionary Federalists.

the intelligentsia and found himself at a loss for what to say and how to act. He himself appeared visibly discomfited, and all of us sat with our eyes averted. It was pitiful. When he came to speak of the Amsterdam Congress, which had adopted a resolution calling upon the socialist parties of every country to unite, he even found himself unable to pronounce the name of the city properly. Instead of Amsterdam, it came out "Amstatadadam." We literally turned red for shame. So this is the "great leader!" we thought. How pathetic for him and for the workers whom he led!

Conflicts erupted immediately after his speech. We, the six Social Democratic representatives—the two Russian Bolsheviks, a Lett, an Armenian, and the two Bundists—joined forces in advance, and decided to support each other. None of us figured that anything substantial would emerge from the conference. The fellowship that had come together was simply too heterogeneous. We attended the conference with a feeling of distaste, and we waited for an opportunity to be rid of the whole business. The opportunity was offered to us at the very outset by our Lettish comrade.

In addition to the Lettish Social Democratic organization, a "Lettish Social Democratic League" was also present. In truth, the latter was no Social Democratic group at all but an SR group. Moreover, it had very little real substance; the more ungenerous were wont to say that it didn't even exist. But its representative abroad used to turn up everywhere and he proved to be a constant source of difficulty to the representatives of Social Democracy. It was the same story during the preceding year, at the Amsterdam Congress. The delegate of the league had also appeared there, and the representative of the Lettish Social Democrats had requested that the International Socialist Bureau bar him from the congress. I was present at that meeting of the bureau, and I remember a demagogical trick by Victor Adler. After the delegate of the Social Democrats had concluded his speech, Adler directed his attention to the representative of the league standing nearby, and asked: "But surely you know this person?" "Yes," he replied, "we even sat together in prison." "I declare!" rejoined Adler. "You can sit together in prison but not at the congress!" And the delegate of the league was admitted.

Now, at the conference in Geneva, the Lettish Social Democrat

again raised objections to his adversary of the league. He posed the question sharply and in the form of an ultimatum: "Either he or I." To tell the truth, we appreciated full well that such an ultimatum had no place here, yet we had obligated ourselves in advance to support each other. We tried to plead with him: "Drop it; don't be obstinate!" But he refused; he was simply immovable. Alas, for us there was no alternative but to act in unison. Naturally, had we held the conference in any sort of esteem, we would have hit upon something with respect to the stubborn Lett. But we had no real desire to remain there in any case, hence our decision to rally behind his ultimatum.

Lenin took upon himself the difficult task of making of the trivial matter a subject of overriding principle. The conference, he alleged, had been poorly organized in general; it offered nothing meaningful. What better example than the case of the Letts, with an invitation to a nonexistent organization. Secondly, where were the Finnish Social Democrats? Why hadn't they been invited? They had, came the reply; an invitation had been transmitted to them via the Finnish liberals; apparently they had not received the invitation. There you have it, said Lenin. Why do you send an invitation to a workers' party via bourgeois liberals? Why did you not do it by way of the Swedish socialists? Bungling work! A conference of fictitious parties; a conference in which real parties are absent. We cannot work with you!

And we departed. We went to the house of the Armenian delegate and set about drafting an official declaration to the conference—a kind of manifesto concerning the reasons for our leaving. Lenin was first with a statement swiftly drawn up. But it was unsuitable: rather arid, disjointed, even stylistically inadequate. It was evident that it had been composed on the fly. Then my comrade Yudin rolled up his sleeves and went to work. He brought it off in his usual manner—expansive, weighty, opening with the "historic moment" and closing with "revolution." It was just what we needed. We sent off the declaration and dispersed.

During the time Yudin was engaged in the writing, we all sat together chatting, joking, laughing. I recall one detail. Lenin had proceeded to interrogate us about the Lettish and Lithuanian parties. He knew nothing about them; even in the matter of the very names themselves, he was wholly incapable of figuring things out. We ex-

plained to him that there are two Lettish organizations and a Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, whose title also retains the name of Lithuania. And the Lithuanian Social Democracy—that's something else? Yes. And the Lettish? Also different. And the Polish, too? And the Polish, too. And he continued, in this manner, to repeat his questions over and over again. The impression seemed to grow that Lenin was a bit slow in finding his way. Yet all the while the look of those little eyes of his revealed his customary expression, as though he were saying: "It's all a heap of lies! I don't believe a word you're saying!" Just like a peasant selling his grain, yet fearful of being deceived. An amazing individual!

Later we returned to the conference in order to verify the minutes. In general it was devoid of any substantial results. The one thing the conference achieved was some kind of technical agreement. Weapons were jointly purchased and sent off to Russia by a special ship. But a mishap occurred, and the ship never got there.²

2. According to Bertram D. Wolfe, the ship *John Grafton*, "which was to land its arms on a frontier island, ran aground, then blew up near the Finnish coast." See Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, 1948), p. 304. Unlike Medem's reaction to Gapon, Lenin's was quite positive. He was "excited" about Gapon, and after an interview with him, convinced of his "sincerity." *Ibid.*, p. 302.

On the Eve of the Revolution

IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 1905. While events inside Russia quickened and grew ever more turbulent, leaders and theoreticians abroad found themselves confronted with issues of an increasingly novel and complex character. Under the shell of petty groupings and quarrels there appeared important disagreements on matters of principle. The question of the bourgeois movement emerged in all its acuteness, as did matters involving the peasantry and the unions of the intelligentsia. There also arose the question concerning the technical preparation of the revolution. The Bolsheviks argued that the slogan of the hour was an armed uprising, that the most important practical task was the acquisition of arms and the organization of fighting groups. The Mensheviks, on the other hand, set greater store by the education of the masses. There were other disputed subjects as well. One that came close to evoking the greatest interest among the circles abroad actually had the least relevance. It was the question of the attitude to be adopted by the Social Democrats after the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and the formation of a provisional revolutionary government. Should Social Democrats participate in such a government or should they not? The Bolsheviks stated that they should participate: it would, after all, be a revolutionary government of workers and peasants and Social

Democracy could not stand by passively on the sidelines. This idea already contained a kernel of the future Bolshevik plan for a "Left Bloc"—a political alliance of the workers and peasants against the bourgeoisie.

The Mensheviks, however, argued that the coming revolution would, by its very nature, be a bourgeois revolution, and that socialists must not participate in a bourgeois government. To do so would mean to be dragged into a swamp; they would achieve no results.

I must confess that the whole discussion seemed to me a kind of time-killing exercise in theoretics. I simply could not believe that the question of a revolutionary government and of participation by the Social Democrats could become items for the political "agenda" in the near future. And, in point of fact, it actually became urgent and practical only twelve years later; and by that time the situation and the attitudes had both changed radically. In 1917 the Bolsheviks were the very ones to oppose participation, while the Mensheviks favored it.

To the extent that I pondered the question at all in 1905, this much seemed clear: it was the Mensheviks who were correct. The revolution would be of a bourgeois character; participation in a bourgeois government was no concern of a revolutionary Social Democratic party. But this was theory. In practice it is very difficult to conceive that the representatives of the working class—the largest active force in the revolutionary upheaval—would be able to stand aside and settle for mere criticism of decisions affecting its destiny. The revolutionary momentum, the spontaneous, unavoidable thrust toward power, would absolutely impel it toward active involvement. And it would find itself willy-nilly on the inside, within the government. How well I remember witnessing the subsequent difficulties and incidents. I foresaw that even a victorious revolution would be compelled to wage a bitter struggle for its existence against the forces of reaction. The struggle would lead to a revolutionary dictatorship, possibly on the model of the French Convention. But a terroristic dictatorship is by nature such that one part of the revolutionary forces begins eventually to rule over the other part. One part destroys the other, and an iron bridle is once again set down upon the

awakened masses. This subverts the very foundation of the revolution—the independence of the masses—and lays the groundwork for the power of a Napoleon. Such was the case in eighteenth-century France; and I suspected that the same danger also threatened the Russian revolution.¹

Anatole Lunacharsky was the most zealous fighter at the time on behalf of the idea of participating in a revolutionary government. He loomed as a new star in the Bolshevik firmament; really the only star, because the Bolsheviks were impoverished with respect to people of prominence in those days. It was a period when Lenin—I don't know why—had the following earmark: he used to surround himself with exceedingly colorless and uninteresting figures. The only two persons with distinguished names who lined up with him at that time were Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. In actuality, neither of these men were real politicians. Bogdanov was truly an individual of many parts: a physician; by profession, a scholarly economist; a philosopher; a mathematician—in short, a person of great erudition who followed in Lenin's train on political matters. It was only in later years that he kicked over the traces and moved to the left of his "rabbi." As for Lunacharsky, he was actually a literary critic and salon-socialist. A typical Russian *intelligent* of "respectable pedigree," with the characteristic appearance of the *intelligent*, Lunacharsky had a high forehead and a small pointed beard. He was exceedingly interesting and witty in private conversation, an attractive writer and a most attractive speaker. His one major shortcoming was his voice. I do not know if others notice this, but there are such things as wise voices and silly voices. He happened to have a silly voice, with a kind of vocal quality that made me think of a goat. It used to spoil the impact of his

1. This early view of the twenty-six-year-old Medem, influenced by his deep reflections on the history of the French Revolution, and reinforced by his personal and political observations of Lenin in action during the *Iskra* period, hardened into an unwavering conviction with the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917. His antipathy to Jacobinism found frequent expression in his writings after 1917. While others in the movement were swayed by wishfulness and the sheer revolutionary fervor of the moment, Medem held his ground, standing for several years almost alone among the leaders of the Bund. After the first decade of Bolshevism in power, Medem's prophetic vision came to be acknowledged and praised.

speeches somewhat. Nevertheless he spoke magnificently. It was only unbecoming when he sought to dabble in internal party matters. At such moments he gave the impression of being out of his element, and one was tempted to ask: Why do you dabble in such matters, matters that are absolutely beyond your ken? Indeed his real forte was and remained not party politics but socialist cultural work. In this sphere he certainly has rather substantial merits.

The little Jewish world also began to stir. Several bourgeois political organizations appeared; there was a proliferation of various Zionist-Socialist groups. A bitter struggle commenced between us and the latter. But one corner of the "Jewish street" remained untouched by the revolutionary storms: the General Zionists. Petrified and preoccupied with their special interests, intoxicated with their publicly and legally secure newspaper *Khaym (Life)*, they continued bustling about in their parochial concerns, deaf and blind to the great events transpiring around them. The summer of 1905 happened to coincide with another Zionist congress, the Seventh, in Basel. Once again I went there to take a look at those gentlemen in action.

The congress was extremely hectic, a veritable chaos; it was just like a theater performance with a mass of actors but without a strong, competent director. The first congress minus Herzl, it evoked a feeling that the brain and soul of the movement was indeed no longer present. His place was filled by Max Nordau and David Wolffsohn. Wolffsohn was quite an intelligent person, a dedicated Zionist, but lacked Herzl's prestige; and Nordau was an attractively flamboyant advocate, the author of paradoxes and neatly turned phrases, but no leader. Accordingly the whole production was somehow wanting in arms and legs. As usual the crowd of delegates was very large and variegated, including a cluster of old Zionist leaders from Russia, quite a number of German lawyers, scores of rabbis, Russian and Galician, a substantial group of newly arrived Zionist-Socialists (SS),² and a solid mass of just plain Jews who had come to spend the

2. The full name of the organization, officially launched in 1905, was Zionist-Socialist Workers Party. (The word for Zionist in Russian is *Sionist*.)

The years 1901–1905 witnessed within Tsarist Russia the growth of Socialist-Territorialist and Labor (*Poale*) Zionist currents in Jewish life. Their orientation

summer months in Switzerland and, in the process, brought along to the congress votes of the Zionist “societies.”

diverged markedly from that of the Bund, with its concepts of internationalism and dedication to *do-igkayt* (the reality of Jewish dispersion; literally, “hereness”). Socialist Zionism propagated theories of a more conventional and integral nationalism associated with the concept of a Jewish territory. The quest was for a synthesis of Zionism and near-Marxian socialism; a conjoining of the national and social factors, of Jewish ethnic homogeneity and class struggle.

A step forward in the crystallization of viewpoints took place at the 1903 “*Vozrozhdeniye*” (“Regeneration”) Conference in Kiev. Nachman Syrkin, chief ideologue of the new SS tendency, advanced a Marxian-type economic-materialist thesis as the basis for Socialist Zionism. (As early as 1898, Syrkin—who would eventually undergo various intellectual permutations within the world of Zionism—adumbrated his views, views which would soon become the essential program of the SS, in a pamphlet, *Die Judenfrage und der sozialistische Judenstaat* [*The Jewish Problem and the Socialist-Jewish State*].) In a report on the Kiev conference issued in 1904, V. Latsky-Bertoldy, a leading disciple of Syrkin’s, formulated the viewpoint of his tendency as follows:

“For the Jewish mass in *goles* (the diaspora) neither national nor socialist ideals exist which it can succeed in realizing there. National autonomy [the Bund view, S.P.] without a territory signifies for Jews a concept without a content, a political demand without any real basis. This can only dim the aroused national consciousness, because those elements of national life which still remain among the Jewish people as, for instance, the language, remnants of national rights and national-social institutions, are simply legacies of the deprivation of rights in *goles*, and will disappear as soon as they will come into contact with the powerful neighboring nationalities. The national problem among the Jewish people differs from the national problem among other oppressed peoples in that its primary point of focus should be the concentrating of separated and dispersed masses in a definite territory. Thus, all national demands which ignore this major task represent only castles in the air, products of talmudic *pilpul* (hair-splitting). . . . When there does not exist any national economy and political system, national culture loses its most vital nerve, and represents merely deep survivals, more or less, of one-time national splendor.” See Ben-Adir (Avrom Rozin), “*Territorialistische shtremungen in sotsialistishn tsionizm*” (“Territorialist Currents in Socialist Zionism”), in *Der yidisher gedank in der nayer tsayt* (Yiddish) [*Jewish Thought in Modern Times*, Avrom Menes (ed.)] (New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1957), pp. 163–71.

The formal SS party program was replete with radical phraseology. It spoke of the “Jewish proletariat,” “revolutionary class struggle,” “class ideology,” “socialist development,” “liberation movement,” “Jewish bourgeoisie.” The language suggested an effort to steal a march on the Bund among the Jewish masses. But its general estimate of the Jewish condition, and the conclusions to be drawn from that

The place presented a scene of tremendous friction. Echoes of the Uganda question still resounded; the great dispute persisted around the issue of Palestinian Zionism and simple Territorialism.³ In the two-year interval since the preceding congress, the sentiment of the leaders had changed: Palestinian Zionism had won out, and its adherents came to the Congress determined to bury the Uganda project. But a strong opposition had also crystallized—the supporters of pure Territorialism. The latter were in a minority, but they were well organized and strongly determined not to submit. Hence the general uproar culminated in a split.

The congress as a whole left a dismal impression. There was not a single moment when one could sense a genuinely elevated spirit or great enthusiasm. Even the big scene involving the split was devoid of solemnity. Quite the contrary: instead of solemnity, a miserably scandalous incident occurred. The Territorialists engaged in furious obstruction, unwilling to permit a vote. Amid the massive tumult it was impossible to hear a single word. Consequently the leaders of the

condition, placed the SS program in diametrical opposition to that of the Bund. Its solution? Emigration! Emigration, at that juncture, to no country in particular, but emigration from a Russia in which working-conditions and future prospects were horrible and hopeless, and “normal socialist development” of the proletariat frustrated. For the Jewish workers, the basis for “a broad trade-union and socialist struggle” was wanting; “neither the economic nor the political strike [would] bring significant and satisfying results in the small, dark, dirty workshops.” But emigration of Jewish workers would enable them to reconstitute and massively concentrate their numbers in the lands of immigration under infinitely more advantageous conditions for the class struggle and achievement of socialist goals through colonization. “Migration becomes a force which strengthens the class struggle of the [Jewish proletariat]. The concentration of the emigration and its transition to colonization become component parts of its social ideal, and find expression in territorialism, in the striving to create a Jewish national-economic organism.” See “*Di tsiyonistish-sotsialistishe arbeter-partey*” [“The Zionist-Socialist Workers Party (SS)”], in *ibid.*, pp. 175–78. For the evolution of the *Poale* Zionist movement, see Ber Borochov, *Nationalism and the Class Struggle* (A Marxian Approach to the Jewish Problem) (New York: Poale Zion-Zeire Zion of America, 1937), pp. 179–82 and *passim*.

3. Territorialism was a formal ideological tendency which emerged at the time of the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903. It represented the conviction that any viable territory capable of sustaining compact masses of Jews was a realistic alternative to what was held to be an illusory Zionist ideal centering on Palestine.

majority, who were seated at the presidium table, gave a hand signal: "On with the vote, fellows!" The crowd understood; hands were raised and the matter resolved: loyalty to Palestine would prevail. When the Territorialists realized that obstruction was proving futile and that their opponents had turned the tables on them, they succumbed to an uncontrollable rage. Screaming hysterically, they surged toward the platform, determined to storm it. A few chairs sailed through the air and crashed at the presidium table. The enraged Territorialist host charged ahead behind this "artillery barrage." The celebrities on the podium offered no resistance. They cleared their places with remarkable agility. In a matter of seconds the podium was completely empty and the session was cut short. Such was the picture of the "great" moment. The Territorialists then departed and convened a congress of their own.

All this took place not without a humorous misunderstanding. During the dispute between the two Zionist factions, the name of the Bund was drawn in. How? The SS had constituted the most vibrant element among the Territorialists. They were represented, not only by a certain number of delegates, but also by a substantial number of visitors in the gallery—largely students from the nearby cities of Switzerland. The latter had occupied a whole section of the gallery, and when the debate opened on the main question, visitors joined in the obstruction, with immoderate outbursts and raucous shouts. This prompted a few of the "Palestine" Zionists to open up with shouts of "Quiet, Bundists!" The use of the term "Bundists" had the object, naturally, of needling the "troublemakers," since the term "Bundist" coming from Zionist lips represented the most egregious insult imaginable. But there were others present who did not appreciate the "joke" and who seriously believed that the disorder was actually being staged by real Bundists whose presence was prompted by a malevolent intention to disrupt the Zionist congress. The notion, of course, was insane. Our few comrades who were in the gallery obviously behaved most correctly; none of them would have thought for a moment of "dancing at someone else's wedding." The myth, however, was given credence. After the end of the congress I read a dispatch from Basel in a Russian-Jewish newspaper, in which something about a "Bundist" obstruction was reported quite serious-

ly. I was moved at the time to send a letter to the editor of *Voskhod* denying this silly calumny.

After the split I dropped in on the congress of the Territorialists. The confusion and ineptness which prevailed there were even greater than among the Zionists. One swiftly sensed that here was a stillborn child. And such was indeed the case. After a few years of stirring about, Territorialism died without even leaving behind any heirs.⁴ Their founding congress had been filled with dismal hostility, a condition wanting in rhyme or reason. It is sufficient to observe that one of the main speakers was Nachman Syrkin, and that his very first address to the Territorialists, who had left the Zionist Congress in protest against the Palestine stubbornness, was precisely a declaration of love for that very Palestine.

Having alluded to Syrkin, I should add that even before the moment of the split, while still a member of the general congress, he remained true to his constant role; that of entertaining the crowd. But he cut a pitiful figure. He was a picture of perpetual agitation, constantly seeking to get the floor, and always in vain. The short rotund fellow could be seen waddling across the hall dozens of times, leaping up the steps of the platform, dashing over to the chairman, engaging him in an exchange, finding himself rejected, waddling his way back down the steps and onto the floor, scurrying about frantically—flushed, drenched with perspiration, disappearing in the crowd. After a few minutes, the sequence was repeated: Syrkin again rushed up to the chairman, with a new objection, a new turndown, and yet another return to the floor. I had been sitting at one of the press tables up front, between the podium and the body of delegates.

4. As an idea and a movement, Territorialism did not totally fade out. It remains to this day a small current in Jewish life, drawing much of its inspiration from the ideas and personal magnetism of the late Dr. Isaac N. Steinberg, who worked assiduously after World War II to find a non-Palestinian solution to the problem of organized mass settlement of survivors of the Holocaust. The latter-day Territorialists are also conspicuous by their strong dedication to Jewish tradition and culture in its Yiddish form and ethos. See Michael C. Astour, *Geshikhte fun der frayland-lige un funem teritorialistishn gedank* (Yiddish) [*History of the Freeland League and of the Territorialist Idea*] (New York: Freeland League, 1967).

Syrkin would have to come dashing right by me on each woeful journey. And whenever he did so, a certain Dr. Levy—a prominent German Zionist—who was seated at the same table, extended his hand and seized Syrkin by his ample beard. Tugging at it, he would remark, smiling calmly and cynically: “Syrkin you fool! Syrkin you fool!” Syrkin merely shook his beard free and dashed on. I was extremely piqued at Dr. Levy: his action was gross, to begin with, and also cruel. Why, after all, pick on a poor fellow for not being too bright? It was not his fault.

October Days

IT HAD NOT BEEN my good fortune to participate directly, within Russia proper, in the truly sublime events of the October days. From far-off Switzerland we looked on and listened to the exciting reports; and we all sensed a new stage beginning.

It had already been felt at the start of 1905, immediately upon the arrival of word about the bloody day of January 9. Words cannot describe the state of agitation in our colonies. I was in Zurich during those days and recall how scores of "colonists" would appear at the editorial offices of the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* in the late night hours to learn of the most recent dispatches, to ascertain whether decisive events of some kind had occurred within Russia. In Geneva, the newspaper *Tribune de Genève*, which used to appear five times a day, carried fresh dispatches in each edition. Indeed some people in those days would buy all five editions of the paper on the off chance that a significant change had taken place during the few hours since the earlier edition.

I personally adopted a relatively unemotional attitude toward the January events. In a speech I delivered at a meeting in Zurich I observed: "The Ninth of January does not yet betoken a completed revolution. No revolution can be made with a cross in hand and under the aegis of a priest.¹ The Ninth of January is a sign that the

1. The reference is to Father George Gapon.

revolution is not yet ripe. But the day does represent a forward thrust, a tremendous thrust, a point of departure for the beginning of the revolution." And it had actually begun. As the year progressed, the revolutionary wave swept across Russia on a scale ever broader, deeper, vaster, and, finally—the great October strike.

I would seize upon the telegraphic information with feverish impatience. One overriding question gnawed at my brain: "Could this be, in actual fact, the crucial, the conclusive blow?" It was as though someone were standing at the shore peering into the waves. Here comes a wave rolling in, steadily closer, higher, and more powerful. Is this one, perhaps, the final deluge? Or would it, as in the case of all previous waves, spend itself without having attained its goal?

Then came October 17. And no matter how grave the doubt as to the capacity of this wave to transcend this particular point and move beyond it to where it could wholly demolish the ancient structure—one thing remained clear: this time it was no mere storm; it was not just another assault repelled. The massive ocean would no longer return to its prior state. Something new was aborning; whether complete or partial, it was still a revolution.

I had occasion to spend those tumultuous days in the company of the best of our movement. The Sixth Congress of the Bund took place just at that time.

It had again ~~been~~ decided to convene the congress abroad, and again, as with the preceding one, in Zurich. The preparations for it had been months in the making. A series of important questions were readied for the agenda. The smuggling of delegates across the border began during the first part of October and, just when most of them had already reached the outside, the newspapers carried the information about the beginning of the great strike.

The delegates found themselves in an exceedingly painful situation. All of them were seized by a burning desire to return home immediately. All of them appreciated the urgency of being at their stations in order to offer leadership to the movement. It seemed intolerable that, at the very moment of the greatest strike Russia had ever experienced, the finest leaders of our movement should remain on the sidelines. (Understandably, with the exception of a few who stayed behind in their home localities, all of our best leaders had come to the congress.) But it was too late. The railroad trains had

already stopped running. The farthest it would have been possible to ride, at best, was to the Russian border; beyond that the way was barred. Thus we had no alternative; we were on the ground in Zurich, and the congress got under way.

The congress was quite large and its composition rather impressive. Only a small number of our prominent comrades were missing: Noyakh was incarcerated in the Vilno prison. (He was freed right after October 2.) Alexander had left for Russia a few months earlier and remained there to carry on political activity. Several other outstanding comrades had returned to Russia from abroad in the course of 1905 and did not appear at Zurich. These included Timofey, who organized the Bund publishing house in Vilno, *Di Velt* (The World), and Slavek. With the exception of these few, nearly all the recognized leaders of the period showed up at Zurich.

Aside from the old and well-known leaders who had attended the previous congresses, several new personalities appeared. One young man was present by the name of Yevgeniy. (His subsequent pseudonym was "Gisser.") He had already been abroad for some time, and we had engaged in lengthy discussions—especially on the national question, which held particular interest for him. He advanced a number of extremely provocative ideas on the subject. I once sat with him in Zurich's Café Terrasse until three in the morning and listened with great interest as he held forth. But communicating with him proved to be a trying affair. One needed a considerable degree of skill to understand what he was saying because he had a distinctive failing: something like a barrier emerged between his brain and his tongue. His mind was filled with ideas, but his tongue did not follow suit. What escaped was a species of disjointed, unrelated words—like a coded letter, that could be understood by whoever knew the key to the code; but it was exceedingly difficult for anyone unaccustomed to his speech to penetrate to the essential content of his ideas. Still, people finally did get used to it.

Another personality at the congress, and also new, was Moissaye Olgin. He had not been called Olgin originally, but "Olga." I don't remember exactly why the feminine name became attached to him. I think Abramovich once addressed him by that name. They were very close friends, and he had come under the strong influence of

Abramovich. He later changed his name to "Olgin." He did possess, incidentally, a substantial degree of feminine softness which, to some extent, justified the feminine appellation.

I had already heard about him previously. Central Committee people who managed to slip abroad from time to time used to tell me: "There's a good writer—a first-class writer! He can write by day and by night, standing still and on the run." When, for instance, there was need of a proclamation or an article for *Di Arbeter Shtime*, the Central Committee, which found itself short on polished writers, would turn to him and say: "A decision has been reached on the following matter. It is essential to write it up along such and such lines." Olgin would sit down and, within half an hour, the thing was finished—polished; in proper literary form; every "T" crossed and "I" dotted. His was the golden pen of the Central Committee.² The other writer for the Central Committee was A. Litvak (Khayim Yankl Helfand). (I cannot recall whether he, too, was present at the congress.) Here was a person of an altogether different character, possessed of a strong spirit of independence and a markedly individualist bent.

I met Olgin for the first time at this congress. He was in his thirties, a quiet, modest person, with a blond beard. It seems to me that he never once took the floor.

Equally new, to me at least, was Beynish Mikhalevich. As an activist he was anything but new; indeed, he was one of the veterans. Still, until that congress, I had had no opportunity to meet him. Mikhalevich had a bad habit of continuously getting himself exiled. On this occasion he happened, by coincidence, to be free. He presented a very respectable appearance with his blond beard and gold-rimmed spectacles. At the Sixth Congress I also met David

2. At the time of Medem's writing in 1921, Olgin, who had denounced Lenin in the most stinging terms in the columns of the *Jewish Daily Forward* during the critical year 1917, was on the threshold of leaving the Jewish socialist movement in the United States and joining the Communist Party. Rising to prominence as editor of the party's Yiddish-language daily, the *Morning Freiheit*, Olgin lionized Lenin and later Stalin, while besmirching socialists in general and the Bund and Jewish socialists in particular.

Zaslavsky for the first time. I shall have an opportunity to deal with these individuals in subsequent chapters.

The congress opened on a hectic note. The audience was excited and tense. To the presidium were elected, if I'm not mistaken, Rakhmiel Vaynshteyn, Yudin, and myself. Rakhmiel chaired the opening session, his debut, I believe, in that role. He was not as yet familiar with the "trade" and his conduct of the proceedings left much to be desired. I had already acquired some experience along those lines (I used to serve regularly as chairman of the conferences of the Bund groups abroad), so I sat near him and tried to assist him. But such a "duet" served only to heighten the confusion, and the people grew still more edgy. Most of the later sessions were chaired by me alone.

We encountered considerable difficulty at the very outset in the matter of determining the agenda which, initially, included among other things items pertaining to political tactics. But conditions had taken such a turn that it was literally impossible to reach decisions on tactics; and truly, the whole time the congress was meeting in Zurich, tremendous events were happening inside Russia. The situation was changing day by day, hour by hour. What might have been suitable for the previous day had become inappropriate for today. No one could tell what the morrow would bring. Cut off from Russia, we could not rely on the reports arriving via the press. Under such conditions it would have been the height of impracticality to adopt any kind of tactical directives, and we, in fact, did not do so. We were obliged, whether we liked it or not, to exclude this subject from the agenda. The remaining issues were not so intimately linked to the situation of the moment. Foremost among them was the national question.

More than two years had elapsed since the Fifth Congress, at which a degree of uncertainty was manifested with respect to the national question. In the interim much had changed. A considerable job of enlightenment had been carried out; there was talk and discussion around the subject; people wrote about it and pondered over it. Numerous prejudices fell away and many doubts disappeared. The general attitude within our party grew considerably firmer and clearer. Simultaneously, the impact as well of political events prompted the adoption of a more solid and determined position.

The Central Committee of the Bund had found it possible as recently as the year before (it was in December 1904, if I recall correctly) to take an important forward step on its own responsibility. Not long after the death of Minister of the Interior von Plehve, Russia began to experience a sort of political "springtime." Under the combined impact of military defeats in the war with Japan and of the revolutionary movement, the new Minister of the Interior, Peter Sviatopolk-Mirsky, loosened the reins a bit; and a great surge of social movement began to consolidate newly won positions. The time had come for each tendency and every party to unfurl its banners and to show its face. The need to adopt a clear stand on the national question, among others, grew urgent. Our situation was as follows: we did have a program dealing with the subject—it was the resolution of the Fourth Congress on national autonomy; yet that same congress had decided we should refrain from advancing this demand for the time being. In truth it was hardly a burning issue in 1901. But by 1904 circumstances had changed. The Central Committee of the Bund, on its own responsibility, issued a kind of manifesto (a proclamation titled, "What we Must Not Forget") in which the demand for national autonomy was clearly and pointedly enunciated. This represented more than a significant political step. It also indicated that the doubts and vacillation in our own ranks were gone. Our Central Committee had always been exceedingly careful, always conscious of its heavy responsibility, and it never would have taken a decisive step without first ascertaining that the mass of party members was in accord with it. Here was clear testimony that the sentiment of the party had become solidified as early as the end of 1904.

A scant year had elapsed between the appearance of the proclamation and the October Congress about which I am writing. And understandably, consideration of the problem in the course of that year induced still more clarity in the minds of our comrades. The confirmation of our program at the congress was a foregone conclusion.

I was designated the reporter on this item. In my *referat* I elaborated upon the main contentions of our opponents and of our wavering supporters. The leading argument was an echo of the assimilationist gospel. Jewish "separateness" existed, it was said, solely because of the evil decrees of the Tsarist government. The Jews had

been confined to a restricted Pale of Settlement; they had been denied access to Russian life—hence their continued adherence to Jewishness. But once the Pale is abolished, once the confining barriers fall, the Jews will disperse throughout the whole of Russia like so much dust, and become submerged in the gigantic Russian mass. Hence the uselessness of talk about a Jewish culture and the futility of talk about Jewish autonomy. Still another argument was adduced by those who, disdaining even to prognosticate about the future of the Jews, disliked the very form of national autonomy.

I endeavored, therefore, to demolish both arguments: the latter with logical proofs; the former with facts and figures, to wit—the Jews are by nature disinclined to disperse themselves, to burst forth helter-skelter like so many dried peas poured from a sack. Even in those places where external compulsion is absent, the masses of Jewish people live together; and the elimination of the Russian Pale would not bring about an end to the existence of the Jewish people.

For the rest, I cannot precisely recall the full content of my *referat* and the fine points of the ensuing debates. I know there were exchanges, and that a few comrades persisted in their opposition to autonomy. But they remained a small minority. Others dilated upon the features of autonomy. One point of view (advanced by Abramovich) stressed that autonomy ought to be broader than we had contemplated. Then there was a contrary standpoint: autonomy ought to embrace schools and nothing else. Of course, in that case it hardly merited the resounding designation “autonomy,” for it would have represented little more than an association of schools. This was Yevgeniy’s position. But the large majority adhered to the idea of national-cultural autonomy along the lines of our proposal. And the resolution of the congress, reaffirming the decision of 1901, now gave expression to the latter in a new form that was both clearer and more precise.

A number of other items relating to the national question came under consideration. For instance, the dispute over a constituent assembly. All of the socialist parties at this time had advanced the slogan of a constituent assembly, to be elected by the whole population with the object of determining the political future of the country. Some of the socialist parties, e.g., the Polish Socialist Party,

and, I believe, also the Lithuanian, urged the convening, simultaneously with the Russian constituent assembly in Saint Petersburg, of a totally separate and independent constituent assembly for their respective countries. In short, a Polish constituent assembly in Warsaw, a Lithuanian assembly in Vilno. The local constituent assemblies would thus be completely divorced from the one in Saint Petersburg and would decide all issues on their own, or by prior agreement with Saint Petersburg.

The Social Democratic parties were opposed to all this; and our congress also voiced its opposition to the plan. Realization of the request would have been tantamount to a breaking of the revolutionary front and a splintering of forces. The initial requirement was the attainment, through unified forces, of maximum democracy by way of the all-Russian constituent assembly. Only after the determination of basic principles for the country as a whole would the need arise for convening local constituent assemblies. These in turn would elaborate the laws for the individual regions, within the limits prescribed by the general democratic representation of the country. The whole disagreement was actually an outgrowth of another disputed issue: whether the border regions should break away from Russia completely and become independent states, or whether they might be satisfied with autonomy. The request for a separate constituent assembly was really a disguised wish to break away. But owing to the fact that the slogan of "independence" had lost considerable force (even in Poland) during the stormy months of an all-Russian revolution, it was found necessary to settle for the veiled desire.

We did in fact deliberate upon the question of local autonomy for the border regions, and upon related matters. But we were on tenterhooks. We became progressively more agitated with the arrival of the news from Russia. And suddenly we read the first telegram about the pogroms. A second followed; then a third. It was as though a bloody tidal wave had gushed forth, surging onto the land and flooding the earth with a horrible deluge of destruction. The revolution had come face-to-face with the counterrevolution in its most dreadful, ghastly form.

For many Jews who had been socialistically inclined it constituted

a blow that tended to disorient them completely. They had awaited for years the advent of the great day of jubilee, and when it finally came it found itself drenched in rivers of Jewish blood, of innocent Jewish blood. Some people who lacked a firm belief succumbed to despair. This was the time when the party called Zionist-Socialists—a party which represented the organized expression of helplessness, of disappointment and desperation—began to flourish. In the course of a few years it grew to fairly impressive size, only to burst subsequently like a soap bubble and to disappear completely from the scene. Today it remains a thing of the past. A movement cannot be built on a foundation of despair; it can only be built by *faith*.

There was no despair in our ranks. But the pogroms, as well as the course of political events, clearly revealed to us that there could be no talk for the time being of a decisive victory of the revolution. The revolution had wrested concessions and pledges from the government.³ Yet actual power remained in the same old hands. All of us were well aware that bitter struggles still lay ahead. I gave expression to this general sentiment among us in a speech delivered at a banquet which followed the close of the congress. The efforts of our movement, I observed, may be likened to an ascent up a high rugged mountain. We crawl foot-by-foot over boulders and cliffs, clambering ever higher. Then the moment finally arrives when it seems as if the very summit of the mountain has been reached. And with the at-

3. The most famous concession, granted by Nicholas II against the immediate background of the revolutionary wave—a general strike and the emergence of workers' councils (soviets, in Russian)—was a parliament, the Duma. In the October Manifesto (October 17, 1905), the Tsar agreed "to establish as an unbreakable rule that no law shall go into force without the approval of the State Duma and that those whom the people elect shall have an opportunity actually to participate in supervising the legality of the actions of authorities appointed by Us." The Tsar also agreed in the Manifesto "to grant the people the immutable foundations of civil liberty based on true inviolability of person, the freedom of conscience, speech, assembly, and union." V. I. Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1939), p. 399. Although the October Manifesto was a significant step toward constitutional government, the power reserved to "Us" made it possible for Nicholas II to violate at will both the spirit and the letter of that document.

tainment of the summit there finally opens up before our eyes the vista of the promised land on the other side. A straight and simple road emerges into its lush green valleys.

That moment had arrived and we had reached the summit; yet, when we took the final steps and impatiently surveyed the scene unfolding before us on the other side of the rocky cliffs, we became aware that this was not yet the final peak. Indeed, it was only the first mountain, beyond which loomed a savage mass of new mountains—higher still and even harder to conquer. What we had achieved then was merely the first step. More roads lay ahead—difficult roads. And we were compelled to tread them as heretofore.

But all of us cherished a single hope: the old would never return again. A new stage was beginning with new opportunities and new prospects. Political life became more colorful, grew richer and more vibrant. The revolution was advancing.

In the immediate aftermath of the October days, a wave of Russian emigrants headed back toward Russia. I was asked: “Do you want to go?” My answer was: “If you need me I am ready at any moment.”

During the quiet October evenings, after the congress had adjourned, Abramovich and I used to wander aimlessly about the streets of Zurich and make plans. Fresh possibilities; new tasks, broad, open. Russian socialist papers had already begun to appear in Saint Petersburg. How could we stay behind? And I dreamed nostalgically of a regular position on a large daily newspaper.

Our strolls ended at the railroad station, where a high iron bridge over the tracks connected two streets. We would walk onto the bridge. Beneath us ran the trains, one after another, many of them rolling toward distant places abroad: toward the north, toward the Russian border. And I thought, who knows? maybe I will be sitting on such a train in a few weeks, homeward bound after the long four-year exile.

And that is what actually happened.

Meanwhile I headed back to Geneva to await a telegram from Russia; in the interim, Kosovsky and I were to work up the minutes of the congress. On the way to Geneva I stopped off at Bern for a

day. My visit happened to coincide with a large meeting in the colony at which I was invited to speak on the latest developments.

In my address I concentrated on the pogroms. I could readily discern in the audience the terribly depressing effect induced by those sanguinary events. Words of consolation are hard to come by in such circumstances; and that was not my task. I had merely wished to set the matter in its proper light. And I said: Blood is being shed, the situation is horrible, but one should keep in mind (I can literally recall the words that follow): "Blood constitutes that lubricant without which the carriage of history does not move ahead." Here was a thought, one would imagine, that was perfectly legitimate and plainly elementary, yet these words had the effect of stirring up a hornet's nest. The audience included some sort of Zionist (I don't know whether he was a fool or a vicious faker) who wrote a report in a Jewish newspaper about the meeting, and he put altogether different words into my mouth. According to his report, I allegedly stated that *Jewish* blood is the lubricant of the *Russian* revolution. A brouhaha ensued. The Zionists seized upon those fictitious words and tormented me with them for years. Several weeks after the speech—as soon as I arrived in Russia—I published a denial in *Der Fraynd*. I declared that what the correspondent had written about me was a lie; and I cited my actual words. Alas, to no avail. Those nice folks simply ignored my response; it suited them better to sustain the furor. And year after year the words would be thrown up to me—words which I had never uttered. It became simply habit. A real tradition was established in the Zionist press: whenever my name was mentioned, the following addendum would be tacked on: "This is the same individual who said that Jewish blood is a lubricant for the Russian revolution." To this very day, sixteen years later, the identical statement continues meandering through Zionist byways.⁴

4. The charge apparently dies hard. In 1972, a Zionist writer affirmed without qualification in the body of his book: "However, Medem [coined] a phrase which was to reverberate for years: 'The Jewish blood which was spilled during the pogroms would serve as lubricating oil for the wheels of the Russian Revolution.'" Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America,

When faced with liars, one truly remains powerless.

1972), p. 92. The author's book reveals his familiarity with Medem's memoirs, and presumably the passage in which Medem denounces this allegation. Leon Kusman, a life-long Zionist and polemicist against the Bund, was present at the meeting in question, and years later undertook to set the record straight. In a letter to the Israeli Yiddish periodical *Heymish (Homelike)* (Oct. 17, 1960), Kusman wrote: "In the course of all these years of bitter furor centering around the phrase, I felt that for me—as an eye-witness and Zionist—it was literally a historic obligation to come forth with a defense of Medem, to tell how I heard, felt, and understood it. This I finally did in 1948, in my sonnet sequence ("Ezra"), . . . where I describe those stormy days in the student colonies . . . and devote three sonnets to the Medem incident."

Before My Departure

I RETURNED TO GENEVA and began preparations for the long journey. Actually, "preparations" would scarcely be the proper word. There were no formal preparations to make; I had no personal business whatsoever to straighten out. A half hour for the packing of my few possessions would have been excessive. My sole worldly goods consisted of a sizable bundle of old letters which I sorted into a smaller pack, sealed, and deposited at the "Carougeke." The rest I burned. There is always something sad about burning letters, like consigning to the flames a part of one's life, that induces feelings of melancholy in the process.

I can still remember the room in which I lived at the time. (Indeed, I remember all my rooms.) It was really quite pretty—the most attractive of all the Swiss rooms in which I had lived until then. But when I muse upon that room, it becomes associated in my memory with a quiet, tender sadness. Was I not, after all, closing out a whole epoch of my life at that moment? I had spent four whole years abroad during which I experienced much, observed many things, amassed considerable knowledge, and I had derived no small quantum of happiness, tasted no small measure of suffering. They were years rich in substance, colorful years, if for no other reason than that I journeyed about a great deal. I saw London and Brussels,

Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich, Karlsruhe, Heidelberg; I traversed almost the whole of Switzerland. I obtained an abundance of impressions in the social sphere; and I had innumerable personal experiences.

In the preceding chapters of my memoirs I have made few references to my personal life. I have dealt largely with social matters. But the lovely mountains engaged my personal being profoundly, a substantial part of my soul remained among the beautiful Swiss lakes. Oh, those lakes! Virtually every significant experience of mine during those years was associated with one of the lakes and I grew attached to them. It was no mere relationship of a casual tourist, of someone reveling in the surface splendor of things. The various Swiss regions had for me the quality of living things, like old dear friends, each with a distinctive countenance, and loved precisely for their singular charms.

Lake Geneva, conspicuous for its noble, aristocratic modesty, always occupied first place in my affections. But I was also drawn to Lake Vierwaldstätter, with its bright, polychromatic loveliness and its variegated, ever-changing shoreline, like the alternating scenery in a theater. There was the quiet summer resort of Weggis, strung out along the shore. It faced a low, sprawling mountain on the opposite side, a veritable dragon with long outstretched neck, which seemed as if it might, at any moment, open its mouth and devour the little boats passing by.

I loved the verdant shores of Lake Thun, with the incomparably beautiful road extending the length of the shoreline. Several tall pines—so rarely seen in Switzerland—brought back memories of distant home. The deep green waters shimmered through the twisted branches. And off in the distance there soared the eternally white peaks of the mountain giants.

The golden autumn plateaus of Geneva, the gorgeous colors of a sunset, the light blue sky peering through the white snow-covered trees of a Bern forest, and more and more of the same—all of these were things alive, pieces of one's soul, segments of life, wedded to pain and joy.

And, then, the things fashioned by human hands: the Munich

museums, the theaters of Munich, and those of Paris and of Berlin and of Brussels, the wonderful music, and the books—new revelations of a new art.

How many were the new writers with whose works I became acquainted and whom I learned to love during those years? With eyes and ears wide open, I absorbed the new and the beautiful. In matters of art I had never been doctrinaire, a pedant insisting that art must be precisely this or that—absolutely realistic, or absolutely idealistic, or absolutely tendentious. A Frenchman once said: “Every kind of art is good except the boring.” I would draw from all sources and from the most varied types. I viewed works of art that resembled flowers in exquisite bloom, their bright, gorgeous colors suffused with hot currents of blood. I loved them—whether books, or musical compositions, or pictures: D’Annunzio and Duhamel in literature; Wagner and Beethoven in music; Boecklin in painting. There were things woven together with the finest threads, drawn with supremely delicate features, impregnated with the most intimate, profound beauty—in sum, the reverse of those other qualities noted above. Still, they were beautiful, and I loved them. Holding first place among them was Peter Altenberg. His were the works of a simple, benign human soul. Dear to me and close were various Russian writers and composers, Chekhov, Tchaikovsky, Orensky, and a number of German writers. And when the report arrived of Chekhov’s death, I felt as at the loss of a close personal friend. There were many, so many others. Art represented for me no mere bagatelle, no way of just passing time. I took it seriously, probed it deeply, like something alive. My whole attitude toward life was permeated with a certain artistic element, endowing even pain and suffering with a luminous blossoming of beauty.

And transcending books, paintings, and music, was the most consequential: people. Living human souls that unfolded before me, that lived with me and with me drew upon the timeless treasures. . . .

Those were rich years. I said farewell to them in a mood of subdued sadness. But the time was right for saying farewell, not only from an external standpoint—because of the events in Russia—but also from inner considerations. The trials of living had multiplied

during the recent past, also in the area of serious personal matters.¹ A great weariness had set in. And I craved a change. It was time to write *finis* to the four-year period. I knew that the life awaiting me in Russia would be hard and somber. But it was necessary: I simply had to plunge into a new current. And I waited impatiently for the call from “there.”

I did not have long to wait. A telegram from Russia arrived within a few weeks: Vladimir Kosovsky and I were to come back immediately. We departed.

1. An inquiry concerning these “serious personal matters” elicited from J. S. Hertz, historian of the Bund, some details on the matter passed on obliquely by Medem. Before his return to Russia, Medem had had a serious romance with a Bundist comrade in Switzerland, a student. A male child was born to this union. Medem and the young woman parted; she subsequently returned with the child to Russia. Years went by. “After the October Revolution,” said Hertz, “one of our leading women comrades in Warsaw paid a visit to her brother in Russia, and in the course of that visit she met Medem’s son, who carried his name. Upon her return she told a group of us about her encounter with him. I vividly recall her saying that the son looked exactly like Medem—the same face, the same build, the same appearance—exactly.” (Taped interview of Hertz with writer, April 19, 1973.)

Medem’s marriage to Gina Birntsvayg took place in Switzerland in 1908. A girl, Natasha, was born to them, but died of meningitis in 1917, when she was less than a year old.

Return to Russia

THE GREAT OCTOBER strike had ended, as had a second strike which had been declared because of the proclamation of martial law in Poland. Conditions were in a state of flux. Although the reactionary forces had not yet fully recovered, the assaults of the counterrevolution had already begun. In the wake of the massive wave of pogroms, hooliganism proceeded to increase once again on a tremendous scale. A twilight time had set in.

We decided to travel illegally early in November. It was still the more secure way. Who could tell to what extent the newly granted amnesty was being observed? We, in Geneva, still had in our possession a substantial supply of passports. Accordingly, I carried a passport under the name of Sobol. I cannot recall Kosovsky's alias, but he, too, used someone else's passport. In addition, each of us brought along a revolver, a Browning. There was no time for us to learn to shoot. I had in fact done some shooting during my early years while in the company of my brother at the military camp; Kosovsky, however, had never held a weapon in his hands. We took yet another precaution, due to the likelihood that the ubiquitous spies in Geneva might tail us all the way. We slipped out of Geneva into Clarens, where our comrade John Mill was living at the time. From there we made for Berlin. During our few days in Berlin we purchased

“respectable” clothes and derby hats in order to acquire a “bourgeois look.” Finally, one morning,—I believe it was November 14 (Old Style), we settled into an express train heading for the Russian border.

We reached Wierzbolow late at night and stepped out on the platform. It was dark and silent; few people were about. The number of travelers returning from abroad during that uneasy period was very small. As a matter of fact, it was actually the beginning of the great exodus. A Russian *nosil'shchik* (railroad porter), dressed in a white apron, picked up our things. A tall gendarme asked for our passports. The check was carried out swiftly and without problems. During the wait for the next train we went into the buffet. It was quiet. At a table near me sat a nondescript Jewish man trying to order a glass of tea in mutilated Russian. I had a craving for some kind of authentic Russian delight: I had longed for it for so many years! I called the waiter and asked for a bottle of *kvass* (a fermented drink made of black bread and malt). The waiter smiled: “We have that only during the summer; it is too cold now.” So I also ordered a glass of tea. The train soon arrived and we went aboard. It was a “courier”—an express train from Wierzbolow to Saint Petersburg with only cars of the first and second class. We had a whole compartment to ourselves. But, alas, how pitiful its appearance! What a contrast with the third-class in the German through train; the latter, clean, neat, lit by electricity; while here, in the second class of the Russian “courier,” it was dark, and lit by a bit of poor candlelight; and the train moved slowly, just creeping along. My heart grew sad. Voices reached us from an adjacent compartment belonging to an officer and someone else. I listened to their conversation and the first word I heard was *zhidi*—“kikes.” I grew sadder still. I lay down and tried to sleep, but even my sleep was penetrated by the angry, agitated voice from the adjacent compartment and the constant return of that angry hissing of the malicious word: *zhidi, zhidi, zhidi*.

The night was receding. By morning we arrived at Dvinsk, our destination and the seat of our Central Committee headquarters. For conspiratorial reasons, the location of the headquarters had been changed a number of times during the long years of our party's ex-

istence. It was once located in Minsk, and in Bialystok, and also, I believe, in Warsaw. At this time it was set up in Dvinsk. Our *yavka*¹ was situated there, but, for similar reasons of secrecy, one did not proceed directly to the correct address; the address could only be obtained after first having reported to a designated flat and given the prescribed password—a sign that the individual was “one of our own.” During that year the arriving visitor was required to say *gam zu* (“It’s all”) while the host responded with *leto’vah* (“for the best”), indicating that everything was in order.

When we stepped out of the railroad car it was already daylight—about six in the morning. A young man was walking along the platform. He looked at me. His eyes suddenly froze. Visibly excited and joyful, he dashed over. “Pardon me, aren’t you Medem?” “No,” I replied, “you must be mistaken.” The young man was nonplussed. He gazed intently at me, apologized once again, and departed; but I became acutely discomfited. I recognized the young man—an old comrade. We had worked together in Minsk five years earlier; we had spent time in prison together, indeed, in the same cell. Yet I was forced to respond with a “no.” I was, after all, illegal, and in possession of a false passport; and I had heard nothing about him during the past few years. I knew nothing about him at that moment. Conspiracy!

We started for the city. We had never been to Dvinsk. The city made a sorrowful impression: poor, dirty, gray, lamentable. A mere twenty-four hours before, we had been in big, sparkling, vibrant Berlin. What a tremendous contrast! An altogether different world! We walked through the streets. Our job—to find the flat, the *yavka*. We asked a Jew: “Where is such-and-such a street?” He stopped and pondered aloud: “Such-and-such a street? And whom are you looking for there?” The question of a genuine provincial. After finally riding ourselves of the curious fellow, we continued to stumble around a bit more until, a half hour later, we at last arrived at our destination. There we were, enjoying a glass of tea in the company of our old good friends of the Central Committee.

1. An indoor meeting place or rendezvous point for the transaction of conspiratorial business.

Then we repaired to a hotel, reputedly one of the best, indeed, the very best in the city, I believe. But how pathetic is the room in a hotel of a Russian provincial town. The ancient sheets ("dark white," in the words of a friend of mine), the filthy washbasin resting on an iron stand, a dusty mirror, a sleepy waiter bringing the samovar in the morning, the cries of a drunken officer in an adjacent room—provincial Russia—sad, impoverished. . .

I went into the street and strode about the city. Small, rundown houses; somnolent people. All so cheerless. A few dozen children, Jewish lads, had congregated near a fence and were playing. What kind of game do children play during a revolution? Staging a demonstration. They lined up in ranks and began to march. Then they broke into a run while shouting "hurrah!" That was all. As I continued walking, I encountered adults also occupied with games of a sort: I was shown a street, it was the *birzha* of the SS, the Zionist-Socialists. Young men and women were circulating about, conversing rapidly, heatedly, gesticulating: "Proletarianization . . . emigration . . . colonization. . ." The comrade who was accompanying me shook his head: "Silly boys." But they kept up a noisy bustle, and not without results. It was a kind of epidemic. We moved on. A lecture was scheduled for that very evening by a guest speaker from the SS. We dropped in for a look. The audience was mostly Bundist. We knew some of the people. Whispered comments were exchanged. An announcement was made that a discussion would be held. The speaker commenced. And he talked and talked. I listened for the first hour; by the second I grew bored. It was wearying. I had spent the night before in the train compartment and craved sleep; my eyelids drooped. The speaker kept droning on. Midnight came; he announced a brief intermission. He had finished the first part of his lecture, and would resume after the intermission. I got up and left. Enough is enough. I couldn't stand any more.

The streets were dark and empty. I felt for the revolver in my pocket. My thoughts turned constantly to pogroms, assaults; the very atmosphere was haunted by their specters. But no one touched me. I returned to the hotel. Kosovsky was not yet asleep. We undressed and got into our beds. Our revolvers lay on the little night tables. Kosovsky glanced at them with a critical expression and muttered

half seriously, half jokingly: "Can you imagine it! Going to bed armed with weapons! What the devil are we, heroes of ancient times?"

The days dragged on in Dvinsk. The gray and lonely mood persisted. I was without any occupation. We had to mark time until the Central Committee should decide who was to do what. Meanwhile, we had to wait for the arrival of the committee members. They were constantly on the move, and only a few people remained here, "on the ground." It was like being on an island. The big postal strike was just then in progress. No mail arrived. We felt cut off from the whole world. Only a newspaper could still be obtained. It was therefore necessary to go to the railroad station in the evening to meet the Saint Petersburg train and snatch up the latest news. And the reports were not good. We sensed the approach of a sweeping, massive, dark cloud.

We waited a few days. The decision was finally reached: Dvinsk was not the place—neither for us nor for the Central Committee. A larger, more vibrant center was needed. We moved on to Vilno.

And here I was—in Vilno. After quiet somber Dvinsk, it was like stumbling upon something of the nature of Paris. The place was alive, bustling, people filled the streets, awareness of the revolution was pervasive, and the Bund also made its presence felt.

The situation resembled an armistice. There already appeared signs of a counteroffensive, of a counterattack, albeit still weak for the moment. The foe had not yet bared his teeth. It was apparent that he was readying himself silently. But we were still living on the accumulated merit of the great October deeds; we of the Bund still savored the role of "privileged characters."

The whole city is filled with Jews. I walk down *die lange gas* (Long Street). I come upon an office of the party with scores of individuals filing in and out, bustling about the rooms. Yuli (Lensky) is seated at a table, signing up members, issuing cards, disposing of various matters—occupied up to his ears. He has hardly a chance to say *sholom-aleichem*.² Devenishsky (A. Vayter) enters; he is the most

2. The universal Jewish words of welcome.

popular individual in Vilno—known to everyone, and jokingly called our chief of police. He is head of the self-defense organization, and his authority will actually soon be as great as the authority of the real chief of police. Out on the street someone draws my attention to a young fellow: tall, head erect, face intent. As he passes by, the crowd whispers: “That’s our Lassalle.” It is the brilliant young mass orator, the future Baruch Charney Vladeck.³ I spot a few old familiar faces: my long-time friend, Ilyushka Vilenkin, just returned from Siberia, and his younger brother; and another old comrade. I am in my element. In this warm atmosphere, in the presence of close comrades-in-arms, I feel myself surrounded with love.

When evening came I was taken to the “Intelligentsia Club.” A beautiful, spacious center on the largest and most attractive street, it served as our headquarters. Here we were truly lords of the situation. It was the assembly point for all our people—a place for consultations, for appointments, for just passing a little time of day. Here one could slip quickly into an administrative room to dash off a proclamation. The place was filled with people—and with sparkling high spirits. Here was life.

The evening hours passed in amiable conversation. “Comrades,” I said, “I must find myself a place of some kind; it’s midnight already. I’ve got to sleep somewhere.” “Don’t worry,” came the reply. “Everything will be all right. It is our Vilno.” We continued talking. One o’clock, two o’clock. We got up to leave. I was being taken

3. The lives of Medem and Vladeck were destined to become closely intertwined. A leading figure in New York political life and in the Jewish labor and socialist movements, Vladeck served for years as Managing Editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. During Medem’s last two years of life which were spent on an organizational mission for the Bund in the United States, with death from nephritis ineluctably approaching, Vladeck evinced the most tender solicitude for his well-being. (Vladeck’s daughter—Mrs. Mazie Bromberg—has confirmed, in conversation with this writer, how her father was almost constantly present in Medem’s Brooklyn apartment during the final weeks.) And at Medem’s historic funeral, the eulogy delivered by a deeply shaken Vladeck included the lines: “He was a man. He was a personality. He was a world. Much—very much—will yet be written about him here and abroad. His own memoirs are a worthy memorial to his activity.” In short order, Vladeck organized a committee which raised the funds to publish the memoirs in a two-volume edition, titled: *Fun mayn lebn* [*About My Life*].

to a lovely, well-appointed apartment, the home of a prominent Vilno attorney. "Come now," I protested. "How can I barge in on a total stranger in the middle of the night, without as much as a by-your-leave?" "Don't you worry," came the reply again. "That's our concern." So we set out, reached the place, and rang the bell. The servant opened the door. The man of the house had not yet come home. Together with my comrade guide I walked into a pretty salon. "This gentleman will be spending the night here," said my comrade to the servant. He departed; there were still matters to take care of. I stayed there alone.

I sat waiting. About three o'clock the door opened and an unfamiliar figure walked in. It was the occupant of the apartment. He looked at me; I looked at him. "Forgive me," I said, "for having dropped in on you in the middle of the night. My comrades directed me to do so." "From the Bund?" he asked. "From the Bund." "You're welcome then." He showed me to a sleeping place, and we retired for the night. I was not the only visitor. Lensky arrived later. He had been staying there regularly.

In the morning we left together. It was Sunday. A large mass meeting was scheduled for noon at the circus grounds. "Come along; you'll be a speaker," he said.

When we reached the site we found the large wooden structure solidly packed with thousands of people. Not a sign of police. Several comrades spoke; then I. It was my first public speech in Russia. I began with the words: "Comrades, citizens, keep yourselves in readiness!" These words expressed the very essence of the speech. We were standing on the threshold of great events. It was the eve of a storm. And the outcome of the revolution— a victorious end or a defeat— would be decided by the manner in which we weathered the storm. The enemy was preparing for the great assault. "Comrades, citizens, on guard."⁴

4. On April 24, 1966, in his reminiscences serialized in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, David Shub recalled: "... I can still see before me [Vladimir Medem's] luminous visage, the way I saw him at the end of 1905 on Big Stefan Street in Vilno, strolling with Mark Liber and Raphael Abramovich; and later at a gigantic Social Democratic mass meeting in the Vilno circus, at which he was the main speaker."

In the evening we went to the theater. The bill featured Gorky's *Children of the Sun*. But before the curtain went up, a request arose for the orchestra to play "The Marseillaise" and "The Marseillaise" was played! And the whole audience stood, everyone, even the members of officialdom and the officers down in the orchestra section; everyone, standing and listening to the rendition of the revolutionary anthem. And when it ended, the cry went up for an encore—and still another encore. The revolution was alive.

December Days

AND SO THE DAYS passed, one by one, and the storm clouds grew steadily thicker. By the following Sunday it was no longer possible to hold a meeting at the circus. Police surrounded the building and allowed no one to enter. Reports arriving from Saint Petersburg became progressively worse. Everyone had the feeling that a new clash was imminent. I took part in the meeting of the Vilno organization at which plans were elaborated for the coming battle. Preparations were made for a new mass strike coupled with large street demonstrations. First-aid stations were organized for relief of the wounded; we felt certain that blood would flow.

I was staying at the home of a dentist on Long Street. He was a well-to-do Jew and somewhat frightened. "You know," he said to me, "I have here in my pocket a passport for foreign travel, and I wish to make this request of you; when the moment comes for the new 'events' to break, let me know, so that I can hie myself abroad." I promised. Indeed, the time soon arrived. It was the beginning of December. From Saint Petersburg came a report that the leaders of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies had been arrested. That was the signal: further waiting was out. The die was cast. The new battle was under way. I so informed my landlord, and he duly departed.

I too departed, but not from the battlefield, not to foreign soil.

The Central Committee sent me to Odessa. Our comrades there were short on speakers, and I was coming to help them during the stormy days. The journey from Vilno to Odessa lasted more than a day. While en route I feared that a new railroad strike might erupt and leave me stranded. We stopped at a medium-sized station late in the evening—Luninets. A huge noise on the outside reached me through the window. I stepped onto the platform: the place was a sea of people. A giant meeting of the railroad workers was in progress. I could not hear the speaker's words but only the furious shouting of the crowd. This, I thought, must be the strike, but I was mistaken. The bell clanged, the locomotive tooted, and we were on our way. We reached Odessa without incident.

I cannot recall today the street on which our headquarters was located. Odessa's streets are so much alike—long, straight, and broad. They are laid out geometrically, according to a definite pattern, in the style of a chessboard. In sharp contrast to other Russian cities, it gives the impression of something *artificial*, manmade. There is a cold, uncongenial quality about it. On one of those straight, broad streets stood our party restaurant, established during the free October days. It served as headquarters, the place where I was supposed to find our people. I arrived rather late, toward evening; it was closing time. I made the required contacts, talked things over with a few people, explained the reason for my trip. They were readying themselves for a strike, but I looked in vain among them for the great enthusiasm, for the spirit of combativeness one expects on the eve of a major struggle. But their wings had been clipped. A kind of pall hung over the city. Memories of the pogrom were still too fresh. Gloom had settled over Odessa.

A day went by, and then another. The strike was proclaimed. Yet the only visible, distinct sign of the strike was a detachment of Cossacks riding around in the vicinity of our headquarters. Then the police arrived and closed down our restaurant. I was getting ready to give a speech at a meeting. Before I managed to do so, word arrived that the meeting would not take place; it had been banned by the police. Martial law was proclaimed. A segment of the Jewish workers struck; another part had already been unemployed. But what was happening out there in the city's environs, where the big factories

were situated? There was no word. I arrived at a session of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. The soviet as a whole was nonexistent. Only an executive committee, *minyán*-sized, was functioning. Conversation focused on the strike. A young Jewish student, a Bolshevik, was holding forth with a fervent agitational speech to his corporal's guard. Another speaker—also a Jew—assured us that the Russian workers would rise to the occasion. We parted. The deathlike atmosphere persisted. The Cossacks dominated the city.

Reports arrived from Moscow about the big uprising—confused reports, vague reports. Nevertheless, a single feeling was shared by all: the decisive battle was in progress. But here in Odessa everything was quiet, calm, depressed; a scene of impotence.

The executive of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies convened once again. A plan was advanced to stage a massive demonstration in the very heart of the city: an armed demonstration. Resistance would be offered to the Cossacks. Some weapons were available and, it was said, a few grenades. The Jewish youths repeated their assurances that the Russian workers would rally *en masse*. A favorable decision was reached. The group departed. And precisely nothing came of the plan.

The days drifted by. I was simply floundering about, without a stitch of activity. Not a single gathering, not a single meeting. The strike just petered out, but the unemployment remained. And increasingly in the workers' quarters one encountered the care-worn faces of people stalked by hunger. It was wintertime. The famished people would drop into a coffee house; the proprietor would allow them to warm themselves while they huddled in the corners and stared at the food with hungry eyes.

Then came the report: the Moscow uprising was lost. The postal workers' strike had ended even earlier. The trains were running. Everything was "in order." Odessa was once more connected with the outside world. And we knew: the second act of the great drama was over. We had suffered a defeat.

I returned to Vilno. The place was unrecognizable. In the few weeks that elapsed since I left the city on the eve of "the big events," it had become something else. True, the streets and houses were still the same. But two weeks before it was "our" Vilno; now it had sud-

denly become an unfamiliar city. Two weeks before, we were still in the saddle—as the liberators, the defenders, and the decision makers, and we were surrounded on all sides by a benign atmosphere. Now our favored status was ended. The servitors of the regime sensed that the revolution had suffered a body blow: the respectable folk have a rather keen feel for such moments. And we had suddenly dropped down to the status of fallen heroes, no longer recognized on the streets by those who had jumped aboard the bandwagon only yesterday. The atmosphere around us grew frigid. I felt it acutely, as when I showed up once again at the very same club of the intelligentsia where we had appeared only a few weeks before in the capacity of most honored guests—nay, more than guests, as the real authorities. Now we no longer even went there. The place had become something alien to us.

The workers, most assuredly, remained with us and for us; there could be no question of that. Among the intelligentsia, as well, a substantial number of supporters and sympathizers certainly remained with us; the real flight would commence only a few years later. But the attitude of the city as a whole, of the broad nonpartisan mass, had changed, and I gathered it was not only in Vilno; the phenomenon was general—more pronounced in one place, less pronounced in another. This was the summation of the ill-fated struggle of December. The honeymoon period of the revolution was liquidated.

On December 28, 1905, the first legal (and the first daily) paper of the Bund began to appear in Vilno: *Der Veker* (*The Awakener*). Just why the paper appeared so late was somewhat hard to understand. In Saint Petersburg, for instance, the Russian socialist papers had begun to appear immediately after the October events. And we of the Bund—the experienced, the best organized—we waited two whole months! Why? The answer lies in the fact that it is precisely the large and powerful organization which sometimes takes more time to adapt to new conditions. Of all the revolutionary organizations in the Russian Empire, the Bund did, in fact, possess the finest organizational apparatus. (Only the Polish Socialist Party could compare with us.) But the greatest virtue of the organization lay in its remarkably effective adaptation to the surrounding conditions of life and its incomparably deep and broad roots. An organizational apparatus of such size and

scope has a logic and momentum of its own, and time is required for it to shift over to other tracks. Moreover, we were not in as fortunate a position as the Russian comrades. They were involved in the publication of Russian newspapers—and in Saint Petersburg. We were based in the provinces, and the newspaper had to be in Yiddish. While they encountered no formal obstacles whatsoever, we did.

But for all that, it was our press that had singular good fortune. It made its appearance late, but it lived unusually long. Changing names, it persisted for all of two years—almost to the end of 1907. The Russian papers, the Saint Petersburg socialist press, had long since been extinguished and smashed, while we still held on—untouched by the gendarmerie until the late autumn of 1907. How did this happen? What accounted for it? I do not know—but that's how it worked out.

However, in December 1905, when we turned to the publication of *Der Veker*, we could not know that the gendarmerie would leave us alone until 1907. On the contrary, it was reasonable to assume that they would favor us with their greatest attention. After the December defeat, the repressions resumed as in the good old days. The Bund had once again become illegal and *treyf* [non-kosher; thus, fair game for persecution]. Some of the most prominent Vilno leaders had fled and were being sought. Yet at this very time there appeared a paper which, if not explicitly calling itself the central organ of the Bund, had under its masthead the unambiguous inscription: "The program of our paper is the program of the Bund." Which made it virtually certain that we could count on frequent visits from the "men in blue."

Hence the decision to exercise caution by carrying on our work outside the official editorial office, which was first located on Milyone Street, and later on Zavalne Street. The place contained only tables and chairs. The whole editorial staff used to meet and work elsewhere. It would come together every day at one of the respectable quarters placed at our disposal by cooperating *intelligenti*. One day it would be a physician's office; the next, an attorney's parlor; the place would change every day. It was all quite weird: a legal daily newspaper issued surreptitiously. But this merely reflected the weirdness of the political situation. In later years, such

peculiar combinations occurred more than once. On this occasion, however, the thing could not be sustained for long. Anyone who is the least bit familiar with journalistic endeavors knows the tremendous inconvenience associated with the work of such a homeless editorial staff. When one day passed, then another, then a few more, and all was calm and no gendarmes appeared, we at last decided to throw caution to the winds. Indeed, we actually moved into the quarters on Milyone Street, where the work proceeded more effectively.

Ours was a rather sizable editorial staff, but virtually no one was familiar with the technical side of journalism. Yudin (Eisenshtat) alone had had some journalistic experience, so that he became, in fact, the central figure on the staff. He was later arrested and his place was taken by Kosovsky.

A second pillar on the paper was Paul Rozental. (His pseudonym was Anman.) Although he wrote without particular literary polish, he proved to be a useful staff person. He had a splendid capacity for working swiftly and working hard, among the primary virtues on an editorial staff.

The three writers just mentioned represented the "heavy artillery." Heavy because they used to write the editorials, meaning the more solid component of the paper. None of them, it should also be noted, could write in Yiddish. Consequently, they would write in Russian which would have to be translated. A few special translators were always on hand at the editorial office.

Literary polish was provided by the real writers in Yiddish, above all by Litvak, wielder of the caustic, glowing, bilious pen. Olgin, with his human-interest pieces, also went over unusually well with the readers. Then there was Tsivion (B. Hoffman)¹ and his facile, authentically journalistic style of writing; and a few more feuilletonists. At a

1. Tsivion recalled that "Medem had begun to learn Yiddish at that time, and later became a brilliant writer in Yiddish. I felt that Vilno had a big share in Medem's becoming a Yiddish writer." See, "Di ershte yidishe sotsialistishe tegleke tsaytung in Vilno" ("The First Yiddish Socialist Daily Paper in Vilno"), in Tsivion, *Far fuftsik yor* (Yiddish) [*In the Course of Fifty Years*] (New York: Elias Laub Pub. Co., 1948), pp. 144–45.

later date, the editorial staff also included Esther (M. Frumkin) and Zaslavsky. I was one of those whose articles had to be translated from the Russian. But I did not provide our translator with much work: I wrote virtually nothing during all of the five or six weeks in which *Der Veker* appeared.

I simply could not settle down—either outwardly or inwardly. Outwardly, I found it exceedingly hard to adjust once again to Russian conditions. Living abroad for four years is no small matter. One acquires new habits, and getting rid of them is not so simple. In particular, it is quite difficult to become accustomed to a life of illegality. Since I had been traveling with a false passport, I had intended all along to skip over to my birthplace, Minsk, at the first opportunity, and complete the necessary formalities associated with legalizing myself. In fact, I had hoped to do it as soon as I returned to Vilno from Odessa. But the news arriving from Minsk was anything but pleasant. Minsk was one of the first places in which reaction revived most rapidly. Under the aegis of the notorious Paul Kurlov of the Black Hundreds [Governor of Minsk, 1905–06], police conditions were instituted there which were almost identical with those before the revolution. Just when I was preparing to leave for Minsk, reports reached me about mass arrests; among those seized was my brother-in-law Zhaba, who had been one of the leaders of the railroad strike. I was warned that I would surely be arrested if I appeared in Minsk. Well, better to be illegal and free than legally in prison. So I remained illegal for the time being.

To tell the truth, there were other characters who lived illegally for years, and relished it. But I had a special headache: too many people knew me. During my four years abroad I had spoken at dozens and dozens of meetings in the various colonies in Switzerland, Germany, France, and Belgium. With few exceptions I spoke under my real name and was thus known to thousands of persons. From among these individuals, masses had returned to Russia and could be found hustling and bustling about in our cities and towns. I used to encounter them everywhere, as when I arrived in Odessa and was stopped on the street the very next day by a young man who opened with a hearty *sholom-aleichem*. I stared at him. “Don’t you recognize me, Comrade Medem?” “No!” “My, I heard you speak in Zurich

two years ago.” Really, there was no particular reason for me to know him; but there was for him to know me. And there were thousands like him. I was walking on a street in Vilno. Suddenly I heard my name called. A young fellow was running toward me and shouting in the distance: “Medem, Medem, how are you?” Such incidents occurred again and again. Just try to function illegally under such conditions! It was thus necessary to exercise caution, which meant fewer and fewer encounters with people and isolation from the wider environment. The effect of it all was exceedingly unpleasant.

And there was something else. According to the old aphorism, an individual in Russia was composed of three parts: a body, a soul, and a passport. A passport, whether legal or illegal, was essential. Illegal passports were of two distinct types; one, a passport belonging to another person; this was a proper, genuine passport of someone who had died or had departed—for instance, to America. With this kind of passport one could live for years; one could even be arrested with it and be released. But such a passport, which would have been suitable for me, was unavailable just then. I therefore had to settle for the other type of passport. It was a bit of paper which went by the name “belletristic.” An empty page would be taken from a passport and stamped. (We always had a large number of such blanks.) A fictitious name would then be inserted. Such a passport was clearly not authentic. Should someone fall into the hands of the police for any reason, the fake character of the passport would immediately be apparent; and the consequences would be serious. I fashioned such a passport for myself and kept it in my pocket. But I avoided using it, which was why I did not rent an apartment of my own. An aunt of mine (my father’s sister) was living in Vilno. She was an elderly woman who lived with her daughter in a small wooden house on Baksht Street. I moved in with them. The *dvornik* (house watchman) was a friendly gentile, and he did not request that I register with the authorities; so all went smoothly. Living with my aunt was really quite pleasant. We were very close friends, and I felt truly at home. But the apartment was extremely small; I had no room of my own and no place to work.

All of these were external things. In addition, I found myself unable to adjust to work on the editorial staff, where I had no definite,

specific assignment. Merely writing articles from time to time did not seem to work out. I don't know why. There are times when, try as one may, things somehow fail to make headway.

Thus a few weeks elapsed. Then, the first blow: *Der Veker* was closed down. Several weeks went by before a permit arrived to start another paper. Taking advantage of the interval, I made a quick visit to Moscow where my two oldest brothers and my sister were then living. I had not seen them for years. It was an opportunity to spend a little time with them.

Moscow—a totally different world. A real Russian city, with real Russian people, with a real Russian language. The language had a ring of rare beauty there. How could it be compared with the broken, pitiful Russian which was spoken among us in the Northwest *rayon* (region)? I was struck by something else, incidentally: the voices of the people there were markedly different, especially as compared with those of the Jews. Ninety percent of our Jews had bad voices: cracked, weary, devoid of spark and ring. The Russian voice, however, was resonant, unfettered, full-toned. I used to receive that precise impression whenever I came to Moscow or Saint Petersburg, but I must confess that after having spent a few weeks in the Russian environment I felt a silent yearning for the twisted, squalid little Vilno streets and for the poor, unkempt Vilno Jews. The pull was homeward.

Moscow was still replete with memories of the revolutionary days, full of signs of the December uprising. The shelled houses were still visible; policemen armed with rifles were still posted at street corners. My relatives had experienced considerable fear. They had not been active participants in the events. The only one who manifested an irrepressible desire to participate was my young nephew, my sister's son, Seryozha. A remarkable boy, truly a child of the revolutionary times. A mere lad of eleven years, he was already inordinately concerned with politics. He read the newspapers, indeed, twice a day; in the evening he simply had to have an evening paper. And he knew his way among the political tendencies. "On general matters," he told me, "I'm a Social Democrat, but on the agrarian question I'm in agreement with the SRs!" And when the uprising started, he insisted on nothing less than mounting the barricades. They could barely restrain him.

Those few weeks spent in the warm and intimate atmosphere of a fine home in the incomparably lovely city were truly gratifying. I had a chance to stride about the streets, visit the lovely old churches in the Kremlin, take in the art gallery, theaters, concerts. I also attended a few political meetings. It happened to be the time of the elections to the First Duma, and there were mass meetings. With my brother, a member of the Kadet² Party, I attended a Kadet meeting where I heard the liberal leader, Professor Alexander Kizevetter, go to the most extreme lengths in order to prove that a monarchist system represented no obstacle to democratic development. After that I also had occasion to attend a workers' meeting. As is known, the Social Democrats—Bolsheviks as well as Mensheviks—boycotted the elections to the First Duma.³ That meeting had been called to hear reports from the factories on the progress of the boycott. The meeting, under the chairmanship of Nicholas Rozhkov, the historian and prominent Bolshevik leader, took place in a large hall. It was the first time I had ever attended a huge meeting of Russian workers, and it made a truly sublime impression upon me. The audience consisted of mature, serious people. The speakers indulged in no phrase mongering, but recounted the developments in their factories in a simple, factual manner, in popular language which was occasionally spiced with a solid bit of earthy humor. A genuinely proletarian spirit prevailed, as did excellent order. Nowadays, when I have occasion to read a description by someone or other who has made a quick visit to Soviet Russia in recent years and has come away impressed by a beautifully conducted meeting of "simple workers," I recall that meeting, one of many, which I witnessed fifteen years ago during the reign of Nicholas Romanov. History did not begin in the year 1917. . .

As usual the meeting was not complete without its Jewish student who leaped into the picture and proceeded to recite, with theatrical pathos, Gorky's "The Song of the Stormy Petrel." It grated on the ears—so out of place in the light of the serious, practical character of

2. The Constitutional Democratic Party—the party of the left-liberals.

3. Actually, there was a limited participation in the elections—and a very successful one—by the Mensheviks in the Caucasus.

the workers' meeting—yet the audience heard him out in a composed and tolerant manner and continued with the agenda.

At the meeting I encountered one of the prominent figures in the Russian movement. I learned from him that a congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party would shortly be taking place. It was to be a "Unification Congress." The split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had grown substantially broader and deeper during the recent past; parallel organizations representing the two currents existed in virtually every locality. There had been no joint congress since 1903. On the contrary, each tendency consolidated around its own centers. At the start of 1905 there took place a separate congress of Bolshevik organizations and a conference of the Mensheviks. But the October events gave a powerful impetus to unification. "Federative Committees" embracing both tendencies began to take shape in the localities. And a large Unification Congress of the whole party was scheduled for the spring of 1906. There was also a question of uniting with the "nationality" organizations: the Poles and the Letts. The comrade with whom I spoke inquired about the Bund, and whether it still adhered to its demands of 1903. I replied that the Bund had not changed its position. "In that case," he responded, "it's useless to talk about unification." My feeling was: "Well, so be it."

But when I got back to Vilno I became aware that the question of unification was in fact being discussed—and discussed quite animatedly. The news about the "Unification Congress" had already arrived. It was decided that a conference of the Bund should be convened beforehand, one which would deal with both current political questions and with the question of our relationship to the Russian party.

Indeed, I was greatly surprised when I heard, even within the most intimate party circles, voices advocating far-reaching, major concessions. The biggest "apostate" was Dr. Rozental. While actually an old-timer within the Bund leadership, he happened to have been in Siberia, far from the Bund environment, during the very years of our sharpest struggle with *Iskra*, the period when "Bund patriotism" had crystallized; hence his relative unfamiliarity with the issues, coupled with his somewhat "gentilized" makeup. Special Jewish con-

cerns were alien to him, even incomprehensible. I recall a characteristic discussion we once had with him in the editorial office. I had written a short article about the SS; it was a polemic against their “nonproletarianization.” I must confess that the article itself had fallen flat and was actually never printed. But that was beside the point. Said Rozental to me: “Your proofs are no proofs at all.” I responded: “Perhaps. But I would be interested to know how *you* would prove the falsity of the SS arguments.” To which he replied: “There is no need at all to do so.” “And why, pray tell?” “I adhere to the internationalist viewpoint.” “But all of us adhere to the internationalist viewpoint. Yet we must still know whether a Jewish proletariat will exist or not.” “No, the question does not exist for me. I adhere to the internationalist viewpoint.”

Oh well, Rozental was an exception in this respect. His “gentile” mood was absolutely uncharacteristic of our organization; all the other comrades were pretty solid Bundists. Yet the fact that we stood alone had given rise to a feeling of weariness in many: the urge to reunite with our Russian comrades had strongly asserted itself. And the issue had become rather serious.

It was decided that our conference should convene at the beginning of April in Switzerland—in Bern. And during the closing days of March I left Russia for the second time.

Abroad Once Again

WHOEVER HAS LEFT the land of the Tsar to go abroad must surely recall the exhilarating sense of liberation experienced on crossing the Russian frontier. The final salutation was tendered by the Russian gendarme who returned the traveler's passport, and it was only a matter of minutes before the traveler reached the German frontier station at Eydtkuhnen. Suddenly there was a sense of security; a feeling of being a free man. Walking along the platform, one's attention was drawn to the German faces and to the uniforms of the German officials, and to German order and tidiness, and to the waiting train—attractive, neat, clean. The railroad officials went about their business nimbly, briskly, without the slightest sign of Russian torpor, of Russian neglect and drabness. The conductor entered the car, addressed the passenger with a courteous *guten Abend* ("good evening"). The compartment was bright and gleaming.

I had entered Europe and returned to civilization. Concern for the individual's convenience was manifest at every turn. Signs were posted all about indicating what could be found and where. A tall railroad official with a Prussian handlebar mustache, immaculately attired, moved about the platform wheeling a small wagon containing pillows and blankets; they were for rent during the run to Berlin. His voice resounded through the station: *r-r-r-reise Kissen; r-r-r-reise Decken* ("pillows for the trip; blankets for the trip"). I paid him a mark and settled back in comfort. True, most of the travelers coming

from Russia got by without them; in the Russian style, they were carrying their own large bundles of bedding. On the way from the border to Berlin during the first night out, the car was still full of Russian—or Jewish—families that had stuffed their bulky, awkward packs into every available corner. But, by morning, we arrived in Berlin; the *landslayt* (fellow countrymen) disappeared. Stepping out into the city, one had the sensation of finally being abroad.

I knew Berlin of old, having been there several times before, but was never particularly enamored of the city. It had about it a quality of Prussian aridity. One felt like an alien in Berlin. Other cities of Europe possessed far greater charm. When I had occasion to visit Vienna, at a later date, I felt at home by the very next week; it was the same in Paris and Munich. Berlin, however, was not homey and I found it cold and unfriendly. Nevertheless, after arriving from a poor Lithuanian city, I derived immense satisfaction from the vast seething and the gigantic crush, from the imposing, powerful culture, from the populace—many thousands strong—inundating the turbulent streets. There was also something tremendously gratifying in the brightness of the light, in the pronounced cleanliness, in the remarkable order. And what should one say of the unrivaled cultural treasures (the subject only of dreams in a Vilno) that were here spread out before one's eyes: the incomparably rich musical life, the theaters, opera, museums, exhibitions? During the years immediately preceding the war, Berlin was a city that was growing—not only externally out also inwardly—literally from day to day. One could feel the current of an immense power in it and a plenitude of life becoming ever more pronounced. Berlin was a city of work, of creativity; a center of a healthy, vigorous nation that found itself bound and constricted in a military uniform. Yet even this uniform was incapable of arresting the potent flowering of a fresh and forceful organism.

I spent only a few days in Berlin this time. In subsequent weeks I returned to it twice. Each time I would hurl myself, like a ravenous creature, at its cultural riches, and they provided me with deep, boundless gratification. I was well aware that the time spent in Berlin constituted only a brief interlude for me, and each time I hastened to absorb ever greater numbers of impressions, accumulating a rich reserve that could sustain me later in cheerless, drab Vilno.

But meanwhile I headed for Bern: a mere twenty-four-hour ride

and I was there. I felt a rather strange sensation walking the old familiar streets of Bern again. When I left Switzerland, barely three months before, I could not imagine that I would be visiting the country again so soon. At the time of my departure I was like someone preparing to leap into a dark abyss. I had set out for distant Russia to plunge into the revolutionary maelstrom, not knowing what awaited me in the future: great revolutionary events, pogroms, dangers. I had said my farewells to the small company of my close friends remaining in Switzerland, the kinds of farewells that suggested separation for many, many years, perhaps forever. And here I was, already back again, with nothing out of the ordinary having occurred at all. As in years gone by, I found myself striding through the quiet streets of Bern. The streets were the same; and I, too, had not changed.

But for the time being I could not enter into contact with my friends in the colony. We did not dare to show ourselves in the Russian quarters because the crowd was not supposed to know that our conference would be taking place in the city. What's more, there was no time for visiting.

The conference was quite interesting and spirited. Resolutions were discussed and adopted concerning the current political situation, the trade unions, the Russian party. I cannot recall the text of the resolution dealing with the latter, but I believe there were slight changes in the formulation of certain details as compared with the wording in 1903. The essential content, however, remained: we were ready to unite with the Russian party provided it would not mean the liquidation of the Bund. A delegation of three comrades was selected to go to Stockholm for the Unification Congress and to conduct negotiations with the Russian party. I was one of the three delegates.

I was exceedingly reluctant to go. There were certain personal reasons at the time which required that I remain in Switzerland a few more weeks.¹ It was no mere caprice or fancy, but something tremendously important. The Unification Congress was scheduled, however, for Stockholm, Sweden, and I had to leave right away. From there I would have to return directly to Russia. The situation

1. See footnote p. 359.

was thus very distressing. I tried to plead with our people, to point out more suitable candidates for the trip—to no avail. The Central Committee proved adamant. I had to go and that was that! An order from the Central Committee left no alternative; there could be no question about refusing to abide by its decision and such a thought would never have entered my mind. Still my heart was heavy, very heavy.

In the end, something happened—I can no longer recall what it was—which required a reexamination of the previous decisions concerning directives to various individuals. And it turned out that someone else was, in fact, appointed to replace me in the delegation. I remained in Geneva for a short time in order to organize the minutes of our conference.

The delegation—Abramovich, Liber, and Yoyne Koygen—set off for Stockholm. In a short while I received a telegram from them post-marked from Berlin: they had completed their travels and were now heading back to Russia; they requested that I come to meet them in Berlin for a few days in order to discuss their latest activities.

So I went to Berlin again. The congress had left anything but a salutary impression upon our delegates. In the essential question, the attitude of the Russian comrades to the Bund had not changed at all. They revealed the same prejudices, the same hostility, the same blindness. Nevertheless, concessions had been forthcoming—the result of the factional interplay between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

On the face of it, one would have thought that, of the two, it would surely be the Mensheviks who would be prepared to make concessions. It was they who were called, during those years—and not without reason—“the softs.” The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were known as the tough, hard-as-rock people. It could therefore be expected that they would hold steadfastly to their previous viewpoint. But, miraculously, the very opposite took place. The Mensheviks would have none of us; it was the Bolsheviks who made eyes at us.

The reason? As already noted—factional politics. Both factions, naturally, came to the Unification Congress with the object and the desire to be the dominant tendency in the party. The Mensheviks

were the stronger, so Lenin looked for allies. Whenever it was a matter of votes and credentials—i.e., questions of arithmetic—he was always a “practical politician”; hence his eye on the Bund. Its political line placed the Bund closer in fact to the Bolsheviks at the time. The main issue then in dispute was the attitude toward the Duma. The Bolsheviks favored a boycott; the Mensheviks, indeed, also arrived at the same decision, but not without a bit of wavering. The Bund, however, was determinedly set on the boycott. Lenin consequently hoped that in the struggles between the factions the Bund would go along with him, reasoning along these lines: “It’s a large organization and will command many votes. The result should be an anti-Menshevik majority. And that’s the most important consideration. As to the Bund’s being ‘nationalist’ and ‘separatist’ and ‘chauvinist’—oh, well—all this should not be taken too seriously. Arguments are advanced when needed, and concealed under the tablecloth when not needed.” Accordingly, the Bolsheviks favored making it easier for the Bund to enter the party.

And they actually did agree to certain concessions. While these did not constitute all the guarantees we had requested, the development itself represented an important step forward. Our organization was now faced with the significant and serious question: To accept or not to accept the terms submitted? Discussion of this question consumed the whole summer.

63.

Nashe Slovo

I WAS BACK IN VILNO by the beginning of the summer of 1906. This time I had already set forth with the purpose of occupying a specific position and engaging in a definite task. A decision had been reached to embark upon a new literary enterprise; it was to be a serious, scientific journal in the Russian language, entitled *Nashe Slovo* (*Our Word*). I was selected as one of the members of the editorial collegium and we promptly set about the work.

Everything went smoothly. Rarely have I labored with as much pleasure; rarely have I felt so good in an editorial staff. Indeed, the composition of that staff was most felicitous. Abramovich was the real head, although we were all nominally equal. His output, from the purely literary standpoint, was less than that of the others; in fact he used to write almost nothing at all. But there are times when one need not be a formal "dictator," nor even a man of letters, in order to be the soul of an editorial group; and this he was.

In addition to Abramovich, the staff included three young and talented writers: Zaslavsky, Tuvye Heylikman, and Alexander Zolotarev, all three with significant journalistic abilities. Zaslavsky was our humorist and satirist, a person of rare wit. In later years he became one of the most prominent Russian feuilletonists.¹ Zolotarev

1. Zaslavsky joined the Communist Party in the Soviet Union several years after the Bolshevik Revolution, and eventually became a notorious journalistic

used to write the political articles (under the pseudonym S. Alexandrov); Heylikman dealt with Jewish questions. Both of them wrote not only interestingly and with solid content, but with literary flair and a polished, “new-style” language. Also quite modern in character were the several literary pieces we received from Sophia Dubnov (the daughter of the renowned Jewish historian).² Thus the journal as a whole bore a stamp of aesthetic sensibility, literary brilliance, and socialist seriousness.

Collaborating with such a company was sheer delight. We were all young, fresh, alive, working as comrades, in tandem. Various articles would be read jointly, revised, and revised again—and nobody ever took offense. There could be no question of nursing anger, or of personal ambition. We got along with each other at all times in a natural, friendly manner. Indeed I cannot recall anything having ever been put to a vote. A problem would be worked out—and that was the end of it.

The editorial office was located in a small flat on Chopin Street. Actually it was not a genuine, “independent” flat. We acquired two small furnished rooms on a sublet basis. The furniture consisted of two or three tables and a half-dozen chairs and absolutely nothing else. For all that, the place was peaceful and quiet. We never saw the tenants. I believe they were away at a summer resort.

I resided, as before, at my aunt’s place on Baksht. I would go to the editorial office twice a day—in the morning and afternoon—because I took my meals at home. Walking through the Jewish streets of Vilno in the middle of a hot summer was no great pleasure. Rudnitsky Street alone, whose full length I regularly traversed, was

mouthpiece of Stalin’s in the columns of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. As late as 1958, he was penning a malicious attack on Boris Pasternak for *Doctor Zhivago*.

2. Sophia-Dubnov Erlich came to know Medem well over the years and contributed a lengthy biographical sketch for the commemorative volume published by the Bund [American Representation of the General Jewish Workers’ Union of Poland] in New York in 1943: *Vladimir Medem—tsum tsvantsikstn yortsayt* (Yiddish) [*Vladimir Medem—On the Twentieth Anniversary of His Death*]. By tragic coincidence, her memorial to Medem appeared at the very time the world learned of the murder by Stalin of the two renowned leaders of the Bund—her husband, Henryk Erlich, and Victor Alter.

enough to make one's life miserable. Vilno had not yet been blessed with a system of sewers. To this day it still lacks such a new-fangled invention. Thus, along the whole of Rudnitsky Street ran a sweet, friendly, old-fashioned gutter that conveyed a silent little milky-bluish streamlet. Not very conspicuous, one would imagine. But, oh, the smell! I used to have a comrade—it was in Vilno, in fact—who, because of illness or some other reason, lost his sense of smell. How greatly I envied this comrade whenever I had to walk down Rudnitsky Street with its gutter! Hence the desire to negotiate the perfumed area as quickly as possible. But there was a rub. The width of the sidewalk was such that two persons could scarcely get by; and there were individuals aplenty on a Vilno Jewish street. And our Jewish folk have another proclivity: stopping for conversation in the middle of the sidewalk. Then there is the Jewish woman carrying her little basket. She finds it impossible to walk in a straight line. Just when one wishes to pass her on the right, she turns left. When one seeks then to hop out into the street, there sits another Jewish woman at the curb, fishing from the gutter berries which had fallen from a basket into that very gutter. And having finally, with luck, succeeded in getting out into the street, one is still faced with the problem of running over the twisted, sharp cobblestones—painful to the feet and a menace to one's shoes.

However, after finally arriving at the editorial office and sitting down at the little table, one could forget Rudnitsky Street, with its gutter and its berries, with the Jewish women and the baskets and the pungent odors. One sat and worked, and the effort was delightful. Most of the editorial tasks involved working in twos, i.e., someone along with Abramovich. We used to spend days in the editorial office examining and editing articles, making corrections, and in the evenings we would go to the printshop to ensure that the edition came out just right.

Those were interesting and lively days. The First Duma had convened, only to be dispersed. The political situation was tense and grave. Important tactical questions emerged. There was always something to think and write about. Aside from all this, we, in the Bund, were caught up in a heated debate on the subject of unity with the Russian party. The comrades were divided into two camps: one

was in favor of accepting the conditions adopted at the Unification Congress; the other unswervingly opposed. The spokesmen for the “Nay-Sayers” were Litvak, Slavek, Ayzik-Meyer Devenishsky,³ and others. Heading the “Yea-Sayers” were Liber and Abramovich. After prolonged reflection I joined the “Yea-Sayers” and wrote a lengthy series of articles on the question for *Nashe Slovo*. In the articles I formulated the basic elements of our principle of organization. While pointing out that the Stockholm statute could not satisfy us, I finally came to the conclusion that we must nevertheless accept the statute, bad as it was, for the thrust toward unity was too strong, and to wait until the Russian comrades would adopt our entire viewpoint would mean postponing unification until the coming of the Messiah. Better that we enter the party and continue carrying on the fight from within. This could not have been done had the Russian party remained stubbornly wedded to its position of 1903, a position that was tantamount to the complete ruination of the Bund. Under no circumstances could we have gone along with that. But now the question was posed less sharply. The new statute, for all its shortcomings, granted us the most important, the primary concession: the Bund was to be acknowledged, factually, as the organization of the Jewish proletariat.⁴ As long as this was the case, the danger would be less acute, and entry into the party could follow.

Aside from the regular editorial work, I used to attend the sessions of the Central Committee from time to time. I was not yet a member of the Central Committee, but I was invited in a consultative capacity to all the more important sessions. The Central Committee’s main quarters were in Zverinetz. Zverinetz was a summer resort, a

3. Devenishsky was shot by the Poles when they occupied Vilno in 1919.

4. In supporting the statute, Lenin accepted what he had bitterly polemicized against before, during, and after the Second Congress of the RSDWP in 1903, the congress at which the Iskristis—before their own falling out—joined in forcing the Bund to leave the party. The Stockholm Congress resolved that “the Jewish Labor Bund entered into the composition of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party as a Social Democratic organization of the Jewish proletariat, which is not confined in its activity to regional frames.” See Hertz, “The Bund’s Nationality Program,” in YIVO Annual, vol. XIV (1969), p. 60.

kind of suburb of Vilno. A small woodland beyond Lake Vilya, just a few minutes walk from the city, where small wooden cottages were dispersed among the trees. Some residents of Vilno acquired *dachas* there. Our Central Committee rented one of those cottages. The official housekeeper was Liber's wife. Individual members of the Central Committee would also stop by in the course of their travels (as a rule, nearly all of them used to traverse the whole region). The house was arranged quite respectably, modest but comfortable. Various Jewish dishes were prepared by a servant girl (also a comrade), and all of us would, as a rule, eat lunch or supper together in the course of a "session." A pleasant, cordial atmosphere prevailed there. Although a goodly number of the members were no longer young, there was still opportunity for some delightful skylarking and diversion. The quiet, easygoing Noyakh, with his subtle Lithuanian humor, would sometimes give the signal. In the midst of a session, his voice would rise: "Yes, indeed, how's Berele doing?" And everyone, in unison, took up the chant: "Berele, Berele!" This was our name for the samovar. The servant girl would bring in "Berele" and, over a glass of tea, we used to proceed with our business.

But there were also abundant troubles. The mood in the city would occasionally become anything but pleasant. We were living in the aftermath of the Bialystok pogrom, and there was disquiet also in Vilno. Suspicious, hooligan elements floated around the city's outskirts; new and grievous incidents were constantly expected. The situation grew especially tense at the beginning of the summer, when a big religious procession, associated with a Roman Catholic holiday, was scheduled to take place. Catholic processions had been prohibited in Vilno for decades—ever since the Polish uprising of 1863, I believe. But now, after the proclamation of religious freedom, the procession was once again permitted. And we greatly feared that the Black Hundreds would exploit it to make trouble. All that was needed was the firing of a shot or the throwing of a provocateur's bomb during the procession—and the pogrom would be under way.

I remember that day. I was out on the street all morning. Thousands of peasants from the surrounding villages had arrived on foot or by some other means of transportation; thousands of people carrying religious banners were converging upon the various churches.

The individual groupings were then supposed to congregate on Long Street and parade to the large cathedral. I stood on that street among the crowd of onlookers and watched the parade. It was noontime; there was a broiling sun. The procession got under way in this heat. The mood was tense—at least this was my feeling and the feeling of those Jews who happened to be on the street. The banners and priests appeared. The crowd moved along. Things grew quiet. I stood there, waiting. And suddenly I heard a powerful, resounding explosion, and I shuddered. What had been expected had come to pass; a bomb had obviously been thrown by the hand of a provocateur. The storm would surely break at any moment. I felt in my pocket for my revolver—and waited. But strange; the crowd remained cool, there was no outburst, and the procession continued undisturbed. And there was no pogrom. Suddenly I began to laugh. I had completely forgotten that every day at twelve a shot was fired from a cannon mounted atop the castle hill in the heart of the city. That was the shot which had so frightened me. The rest of the day passed calmly and without incident.

The Lemberg Congress

THE DISCUSSION ON unity with the Russian party was drawing to a close. It was decided to hold a congress of the Bund—the Seventh—in the middle of August, for the purpose of resolving this particular question as well as other important items on our agenda. Among them, the most important political question: our relationship to the new Duma. The Central Committee was preoccupied with preparations for the congress. I recall that at one of the Central Committee's final sessions the future composition of the committee itself came under discussion. Actually, the Central Committee was to be selected by the congress proper, but preliminary agreement was necessary as to both the number of members and the names of the candidates. A decision was reached to increase the size of the Central Committee membership to nine due to the volume and ramified nature of the organization's work. Discussion turned to the candidates. I was asked to leave the room briefly. After a few minutes I was informed that, among others, I too had been designated. My eyes popped. "Comrades, what are you up to? Where do I come off serving as a member of the Central Committee? I'm too young and not mature enough, and I don't have sufficient experience!" This was no mere coquetry on my part. I meant it sincerely. My attitude toward the great responsibility associated with such a post was extremely serious. I felt I was not yet ready to occupy such a place

among the official party leaders, but the group simply dismissed my objections with a laugh, and I had to submit.

The congress was scheduled to convene in Galicia, in the city of Lemberg [now Lwów]. We left Vilno during the first half of August. I traveled together with Alexander. Since we had no passports for travel abroad, we had to stop off in Warsaw for a day. It was enough to register at a hotel there, and in the course of the same day one could obtain a passport.

We reached Warsaw in the morning and found the city in a state of fear and perturbation. It happened to be the day following the famous “Red Wednesday.” During that single day in the year 1906 the Polish Socialist Party carried out a slaughter among the Warsaw police. Dozens of assaults were mounted against the police in various sections of the city; scores of people were killed. The city was turned into an armed camp. We hired a *drozhki* (horse-drawn carriage) and rode from the station into the city. At every turn—military patrols; on every street corner—a policeman guarded by several soldiers with rifles at the ready. The populace was frozen with fear. The streets were dead, except for the little Warsaw newsboys, nimble, animated gentile lads, dashing about, insinuating themselves among the soldiers, leaping aboard the *drozhkis* and selling—the *Rabotnik* (*The Worker*)—the illegal newspaper of the very same Polish Socialist Party!

We rode up to a hotel and turned over our “passports” to the hotel *shvaytsar* (manager). (Alexander had a “genuine” passport, albeit someone else’s; I was still going about with my “belletristic.”) We wanted the *shvaytsar* to report our presence and to issue us a permit to obtain a foreign passport. He refused: new regulations had been issued. Some sort of confirmation emanating from the passport’s place of origin was required. A nice kettle of fish. How could I go obtain confirmation from the source? I was the source of my own passport! We left the hotel. We would have to seek out different ways and means. I dropped in on a Warsaw comrade. He lived on Gzhibovski Street—a Jewish neighborhood favored with special attention by the police. The street was deathly still. Our comrade’s place had a balcony overlooking the street. In the midst of our conversation I rose suddenly and moved toward the balcony for a breath

of fresh air. Someone seized my coattail and exclaimed, "Are you crazy?" "Why? What's wrong?" I asked. "You're not supposed to go out on the balcony," came the reply. "You can get a bullet in your head." I remained indoors for a while.

We decided to try another hotel. Again we hired a *drozhki*, and shortly found ourselves riding down some narrow street. We came upon a postal wagon guarded by a large detachment of soldiers riding on board, rifles in hand. Something happened to be blocking the road. The *drozhki* found itself in the middle of things, unable to move; the postal wagon was also stuck. The soldiers were angry. There was shouting. They suspected some kind of imminent assault. And they began to raise their rifles, ready, it seemed, to begin shooting. But the matter ended peacefully. We continued riding.

The day was drawing to a close. It had become apparent, after all, that we would be unable to obtain any passports. An alternative course of action was indicated. Sitting around and waiting in Warsaw made no sense. It would be best to ride up to the border at Sosnowiec. Our local comrades there would manage somehow to maneuver us across the border. I parted from Alexander who had some leftover business to dispose of, and continued on my way with the comrade from Gzhibovski Street. The train was scheduled to depart around midnight. We rode up to the Vienna station. The place was dark, empty. Soldiers, patrols, policemen! The ordinary townspeople were all safely closeted in their homes. Only occasionally would a female figure appear on the empty sidewalks: the prostitutes were the only ones engaged in their "occupation." A dreadful impression! We boarded the train and left for Sosnowiec.

The train was a "courier"; we rode second class. We dozed off, awoke at daybreak, and stepped out into the corridor. The two of us stood there alone, no other passengers were visible. The conductor came through, stopped, and struck up a conversation with us. "Yesterday," he said, "a bomb was thrown in Bendin (the station just before Sosnowiec). A *strazhnik* (guard) was severely wounded. He's being taken abroad, to Katowice, for an operation. Indeed, on this very train."

When we reached Bendin we could actually see the whole procession from the window. The wounded person was brought in. The

train moved on. We were only a few minutes from Sosnowiec. The conductor came by once more, stopped near us again, and whispered cautiously: "You should know that the station at Sosnowiec is full of Cossacks, and everyone leaving the train is being searched." How this man could have known that the information would be of interest to us, I could not understand. Naturally, we feigned total indifference. Let the Cossacks search us—who cares? But we were, of course, deeply concerned. Although we carried no illegal matter with us, we were ourselves illegal matter. But the thing passed uneventfully. Cossacks were, in fact, present at the station, but they did not approach us.

We went into the city to search out the comrades who were to see us across the border, located the flat and found the people. A rather lengthy consultation began over what to do next. Two young men injected themselves into the situation: one was rotund and ruddy-faced, and of happy disposition; I promptly dubbed him the "Optimist." The other fellow, however, was pale and thin and a terrible pessimist; he trembled over my fate. The "Optimist" said, "I have a nice 'border pass' (a temporary permit to cross the border; such permits used to be issued to residents of border towns). With this little document you will be able to cross over as smoothly and easily as passing a knife through a pie." The "Pessimist" declared: "God forbid! Don't give the slightest consideration to such an idea. To let Medem travel with a 'border pass'! Why, it's sheer madness. His face alone will give him away. Anyone can tell he's not a local, and he'll be caught. We cannot take the risk."

The two young men continued to cross swords in this fashion. I finally asked the "Pessimist": "To what avail are your objections? Can you suggest any alternative?" "Not at the moment," he replied. "You just have to wait a bit." "There's nothing more to say," I responded. "I must be in Lemberg tomorrow. Which means I leave today. Hand me the 'border pass'."

The train was scheduled to depart exactly at noon. The "Optimist," it was decided, would ride with us to Katowice and take care of all the border formalities. He was, after all, a local fellow who traveled about the area constantly. But the "Pessimist" was still unable to compose himself. We had already said farewell to him and

were on the way to the train when, lo and behold! my "Pessimist" appeared from a side street somewhere. He had scurried all over the place to cut me off and to plead with me once more: "Don't go!"

We reached the station. The passports had to be turned in: they would be given back on board the train once it was under way. We entered the compartment, took seats—and waited. And the longer we waited, the greater the change in my "Optimist"'s demeanor. He began to show signs of panic; his good humor vanished. He appeared progressively more agitated and frightened, so visibly distraught that I began to regret our having taken the chap along. Instead of helping us, he might only serve to do us in.

The train finally started moving. The gendarme returned our "border passes" and we crossed peacefully over the "Border of the Three Emperors" (the frontiers of Russia, Germany, and Austria). Our fears had been groundless, at least where I was concerned; the Sosnowiec fellows were less fortunate. Both were arrested in their homes a few days later.

We were abroad once again. We stopped at Katowice for a few hours, in the course of which we dropped into a large German café where we ordered a draught of good German beer. Then we took leave of our escort and resumed our journey into Austria. We spent the night at Cracow, and were already in Lemberg by the following noon.

The Cracow comrades of the Galician Jewish Social Democratic Party (the Galician Bund) had prepared attractive and comfortable quarters for our congress. The place was a hall belonging to a Polish singing society and located in the very heart of the city, opposite the large theater. It was the first time that we held a congress in such a lovely hall; and it was also a first time for such a large, imposing, truly "European" congress.

It was a period when both the strength and flowering of the Bund had reached a high point. We numbered about 30,000 organized members. Approximately seventy delegates were present at the congress. Visitors came from fraternal parties: two delegates from the Russian party; one delegate from the Lettish Social Democratic organization; one delegate from the Armenian comrades; and a delegation from the Galicians. For the first (and the last) time we also

had stenographers, brought along from Saint Petersburg itself, indeed, from the Russian parliament, the Duma.

As always at our congresses, the debates were—for all the attendant passion—serious and to the point. The major battle centered on the question of union with the Russian party. It was already clear by the very first day that the “Yea-Sayers” had a majority; and the congress did, in fact, decide on reentry into the party. The “Nay-Sayers” submitted; only the young, hot-blooded Slavek-Grosser remained defiant: “In the light of this decision—I can no longer participate in any activity.” We tried to convince him (I think Abramovich was with us) during a stroll in Kilinsky’s Park—a large and lovely formal garden on the city’s outskirts. We conversed the whole evening, but he remained adamant. “I don’t want to disturb the organization,” he said, “I am not thinking in terms of any kind of split. But it is simply impossible for me, personally, to engage in any activity.” That’s how things stood for the time being. It was, however, only a transitory mood. Slavek was too faithful a Bundist to stand aside for any length of time and he soon returned to work.

The next important issue was a political one. It was anticipated that the Second Duma would be convened in the near future, which gave rise to the question: Should the Bund boycott the new elections as it had the first, or should it participate in the elections? I believe there were no substantial disagreements among us on this issue. The boycott tactic had few supporters. The First Duma had been boycotted because of the supposition that the great wave of revolution would soon surge up anew and proceed, by its own direct momentum, beyond the Duma. But it turned out that the situation had been estimated incorrectly. The boycott proper proved unsuccessful; the interest of the populace in the election had been too strong. True, a segment of the working population had abstained from voting, but this did not coincide with our intention. We were concerned with an *active* boycott, with interference in the voting, etc. And here the result was precisely nil. Thus, when the Duma assembled, it became apparent to everyone that the Duma was in actual fact, and whether we liked it or not, the focus of general attention and the center of political life. The stream of events flowed not past but *through* the Duma. In that case, our attitude should become a different one. We

should go there and utilize the new arena in the interests of the revolution. Such was the sentiment of the large majority among us, and such, likewise, was the decision of the congress.

A number of other matters were discussed, among which was autonomy for Poland. A resolution was adopted on the subject. It was actually not a new decision. The Sixth Congress (in 1905) had already adopted a resolution on territorial self-government, but it dealt only in a general way with various border regions, and made no specific reference to Poland. Now, however, the comrades who were active in Poland came to the congress with the request that the resolution be interpreted explicitly in the sense of meaning autonomy for Poland as well. The issue was especially acute in Poland; an unambiguous response was essential. The congress acceded to the request.

Discussion of the Organization Statute occupied a substantial amount of time. The Bund had had no written constitution until then. It was merely, so to speak, a *torah shebealpeh'* (oral, or talmudic, law), hence the need to create also an organizational *torah shebiksav* (written, or biblical, law). Our specialist in such matters was Yoyne. He gave the report on that agenda item. His presentation actually turned out to be somewhat boring. But for that very reason the stenographers were highly satisfied. "Comrade Yoyne," they chuckled, "is the best speaker among all the delegates." Why? "Because he speaks slowly." Indeed, they would complain that their work was much more difficult at our congress than in the Russian Duma. Jews have a habit of speaking terribly fast.

A new Central Committee was elected at the conclusion of the congress. As expected, the slate prepared in advance was accepted without any opposition at all. The nine members of the Central Committee—if I recall correctly—were Noyakh, Yudin, Rakhmiel, Kosovsky, Liber, Abramovich, Ezra, and myself.¹ The first seven were Central Committee incumbents.² A closing banquet was the scene of much humor and hearty good fellowship. Then everyone

1. Medem omitted a ninth member—Kremer—and erroneously included Ezra. In place of Ezra (Alter Rozen) he should have included Yoyne (Fishl Koygen).

2. Kremer and Yoyne were incumbents; Ezra was not.

returned home. I managed to stop off at Berlin for a few days on personal matters, after which I returned to Vilno.

For the trip back across the border I finally obtained a "solid" passport. On this occasion as well I had no difficulty at all in Wierzbolow. The border official looked at me and said: "You're so pale; you must have gone abroad for a cure!" "Yes," I replied, "but it didn't do much good." The official nodded compassionately; and thus ended the ritual.

In the South and North

AT THE TIME WE departed for the congress in Lemberg, *Nashe Slovo* ceased publication. We intended to resume publishing the journal when we returned, but it never happened, for reasons I cannot recall. At any rate, we finally decided to wait a while. In the meantime I set out on a lecture tour of several cities. My subject: "The Political Situation and Our Immediate Tasks."

The first city in which I delivered this lecture was my dear old familiar Kiev. I had left Kiev seven years before. I felt both joy and pain upon visiting a city I had come to love and from which I had been separated for quite a number of years. Seven years earlier I had parted from the cozy surroundings of my uncle's beloved family. Now I found the family dispersed: my aunt had died; my uncle had aged and turned gray; his son, a student in the gymnasium when I had last seen him, had become a solid gentleman with a respectable bald spot; the older daughter had left for service as a nurse in a hospital. Everyone was living apart. It was sad. My encounter with their youngest daughter, a cousin with whom I had once been really close, was particularly depressing. In the days when I was still living in Kiev, she had been a mere child of fourteen; now she was a grown-up young woman. My uncle and I were walking along the Kreshchatik, the city's main street, when we met her. She knew nothing about my arrival. I greeted her with a *sholom-aleichem*. She

looked at me, at a loss for words. "Don't you recognize me?" "No." "Look at me closely. Doesn't it remind you of anything?" "No, I've never seen you before." Not until I addressed her by her name did she respond with a warm greeting. We started to renew our old friendship, but it was sad to learn how greatly I had changed. True, I wore a beard at the time (even if a small and pitiful one), and this would, of course, markedly alter one's appearance.

I spent a few days in Kiev. They were lovely, sun drenched autumn days. I traipsed about the city, seeking out all the endearingly familiar places. I gave my lecture at the Politechnicum, in the largest auditorium. The place was filled. After attending a few meetings of our committee, I moved on to Zhitomir.

I was told that auto-omnibuses were traveling between Kiev and Zhitomir and I decided to take one. The bus station was located far out, somewhere near the end of Bikovsky Boulevard. I went there, examined the machine, and purchased a ticket. The omnibus had a peculiar characteristic however: just when it was time to depart, it broke down and wouldn't budge. I waited one day, and another; it was still out of commission. Nothing remained but to simply travel by train.

Concerning the train itself, it, too, was something out of the ordinary. As far as Berdichev the trip was quite decent, but at Berdichev it was necessary to change for the Zhitomir branch train. Now that was a train! It conjured up a vision of how trains must have operated during the first half of the nineteenth century. It knocked and it shuddered and it shook, and it crawled so slowly that for anyone in a hurry it would have been better to travel on foot.

I was on the way to the home of one of our comrades, a bank employee. I had known him during the earlier years in Minsk. The *referat*—an illegal one—was scheduled to take place there. The audience assembled in the evening—about sixty or seventy people. The room was not large enough and the crowd spilled over into an adjacent room. I climbed on a chair in the doorway between the two rooms and began to speak. I had scarcely been speaking more than a few minutes when the occupant of the apartment entered and said: "We must disperse; we've received word that the police are on the way."

I grew silent. There was no panic. People were accustomed to such surprises in those days. First, I was told to depart from the premises; an illegal personage, a visitor, must leave before anyone else. I stepped out into the street and proceeded toward the heart of the city. One of the comrades accompanied me. There we were, walking the streets at an already advanced hour—around eleven P.M.; and there was no train on which to leave. Where to spend the night? My comrade pondered the matter; it was a sticky problem. The leading comrades were still at the lecture site, and who knew whether they had succeeded in dispersing before the police arrived. It was altogether a most precarious situation. Very well, let's try someone not too close to the movement; let's go to Dr. So-and-So. "You mean, without a by-your-leave, dropping in on a stranger in the middle of the night?" "Don't worry. He'll open his door." And he did, in fact, let us in. Indeed he received us most warmly and I spent a restful, satisfying night. The following day I boarded the shaking, knocking railroad car once again and left Zhitomir. The police had actually shown up on that occasion. Although the occupant of the apartment experienced a few bad moments, the affair ended without incident.

From Zhitomir I went to Odessa. It was the time when the foul gangs of the Union of the Russian People had begun to proliferate. The notorious teahouses of the Black Hundreds made their appearance—nests of hooligan-patriotic bandits. Those respectable gentlemen, armed with "genuinely Russian" rubber truncheons, would pour out of the teahouses and mount their assaults upon Jews and *intelligenti*. The city was terrorized. But one red island persisted amid the reveling of the Black Hundreds—the university. Student autonomy was still alive. The university was a city in itself, a place in which the students ran the show. The four walls of the university enclosed their kind of sacred precinct. Meetings would be staged without let or hindrance; the various socialist factions carried on their activities quite openly, each in its separate room, each posting its official announcements. And no one interfered with them. Although there remained just a few months more of this kind of freedom (actually, the end came right after my departure from Odessa), it was still being exercised at the moment. Thus my lecture could also take place in the largest university hall, under conditions of com-

plete freedom, without any obstacles. The only interference was offered by darkness. The *nachal'stvo* had turned off the electricity. A few candles were obtained and placed on a table beside me, creating a rather romantic aura. The candles could only illuminate the faces of those closest to me, in the front rows; and the whole large auditorium which accommodated a thousand people was enveloped in darkness. I delivered another lecture in the women's division. There in fact it was light, but, on the other hand, it was so cramped as to make movement all but impossible. The audiences in those days were visibly actuated by a great spiritual hunger, and throngs descended upon the lectures.

I delivered a third lecture in wholly different surroundings—to the workers. The workers' environment was located outside the bounds of the island of freedom. Party activity that was conducted there was carried on under strictly illegal conditions, in the face of stringent repression. Anything like a large mass meeting was out of the question; consequently, only a few dozen of the closer comrades were brought together. The setting was the Jewish quarter, on "Moldavanka." The meeting took place in the evening, in an empty apartment, totally devoid of both residents and furniture. An arrangement of some kind had been worked out with the *dvornik* so that he would allow us to assemble there, but great caution was still required. To avoid arousing the suspicion of people nearby, lights could not be turned on. So the comrades stood in a dark, empty room; those who didn't care to stand sat on the floor, but most stood, unable to see anyone else, listening to a lecture that ran for an hour and a half.

After Odessa I made a sudden leap into an entirely different world, from the far south to the far north—to Finland. I had returned to Vilno, where I was informed that a conference of the Russian "People's Party" (Trudoviki)¹ would be opening in a few days. The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party would be

1. The Trudoviki, neo-Populists, were known as the Laborite or Toilers' faction, a loose grouping with a strong peasant orientation, politically close to, but to the right of, the SRs. Alexander Kerensky was one of the more prominent members of this grouping, which had a substantial representation in the Duma.

sending a delegation there as guests; and since we, the Bund, were already back inside the Russian party, it was felt that a member of the Bund Central Committee ought to be included in the delegation. Hence the decision that I should go.

The conference took place at Imatra, a location famous for its giant waterfall. As was customary, I traveled there via Saint Petersburg where Alexander had settled a few weeks before. After the Bund had reentered the Russian party, Alexander was appointed one of our two representatives on the RSDWP Central Committee, so that he had to live in Saint Petersburg. Our other representative at the time was Abramovich. I dropped in on Alexander, obtained from him the address and instructions about whom to see, and resumed the journey to Finland the same day.

The Finnish railroad train which I took from Saint Petersburg reminded me of that provincial train I had used not long before on the way from Kiev to Zhitomir. Once again the same pounding and shaking. It seemed as if the car would disintegrate completely at any moment. The car was small and narrow. An iron stove stood in the center. All was dark and empty on the outside. The train passed a succession of tiny stations with Finnish names strange to my ears: Terioki, Kolomaiki, Mustamaiki, Juokala. Small wooden structures, feebly lit with night lamps, a few silent people on the platform, and between one stop and the next, thick, black night, darkness and emptiness. The longer the ride and the later the hour, the deeper grew the silence, broken from time to time by some words in a totally unfamiliar language, unlike any other more familiar language I knew. Not a single word was intelligible to me. And the darkness grew ever more pervasive. It was as if I were riding into a forbidding, black desert—homeless, abandoned, all alone, at the end of the earth.

I arrived at Imatra and found not a city, but only a railroad station and a few hotels set in the surrounding emptiness. I checked into one of the hotels. When daylight came I looked over the new place. Another world indeed! What a contrast to the south's Odessa, whence I had just arrived. Not only were the people different, and the houses; but the food was wholly new and different. Rocky soil, little anemic white birches, a pale, delicate sky; not a sign of the striking antiquity of the south. Half-colors, pastel colors, calmness and

silence—a respite for the eyes and ears; a greater modesty and gentleness: the sweeping beauty of the north.

I ordered breakfast at the hotel: clean, neat, tasty. The “Swedish” bread especially appealed to me; it was something like matzoh, the unleavened bread eaten on Passover, but made from dark flour. I then went to the other hotel, where the conference was taking place.

Several dozen delegates had assembled, the Trudovik faction of the first, recently dissolved, Duma. I was witnessing for the first time a purely gentile Russian conference. Only a single Jew belonged to this group—the lawyer Leon Bramson—and he was actually the only one at the conference who displayed a modicum of practical sense. The remainder were largely village *intelligenti*, very nice, idealistic people, but divorced from reality. They talked and they talked, back and forth, for nought. I was waiting the entire time for the adoption of some kind of resolution. Alas, in vain. The chairman, an attractive elderly man with a large gray beard, offered a summary of the discussion—and that was all. A number of visitors, representatives of other parties, were also present; they were people politically more educated. Of the SRs, there was the venerable Mark Natanson; of the Populist-Socialists, there was the well-known writer Anensky. Fyodor Dan and Alexander Bogdanov were present from the Russian Social Democrats. Bogdanov, indeed, was most suitable for the conference because he too behaved like a real pedant. The other visitors would take the floor on matters involving current political questions, on the elections to the Second Duma. They spoke about tactics, about the decisions of their own parties, about the possibility or impossibility of joint action, and the like. But what does Bogdanov do? After the political issues were disposed of and the conference moved on to a purely internal subject, to the question of how to organize itself—whether to create a party or an association, and how and in what forms—Bogdanov takes the floor and proceeds to sermonize. He argues that they, the Trudoviki, are representatives of the petty bourgeoisie; that the petty bourgeoisie is by nature individualistic and incapable of organizing itself; hence nothing would accrue from their efforts. All of which may perhaps have been basically correct, and may have constituted a most suitable topic for

a workers' gathering or a propaganda circle, but the impression it made at the conference was one of impracticality.

After the disposition of the political items and the transition to minor organizational matters, the visitors prepared to depart. Before leaving I stopped off to see the waterfall. One of the largest in Europe, it is truly lovely, not yet spoiled by human beings through all manner of "beautifications." It has remained as it was, in its primitive, isolated simplicity. Naturally there are some signs of human presence: a tiny wooden balcony stands at the edge, totally covered with carved or written words and names. Nowhere in the world, apparently, can a place of interest get by without this. One inscription there among the many foolish or simply meaningless words did in fact appeal to me; a child—a little girl—seeking to convey her impression of the great roar and thunder: "My mommy sings at the top of her voice, but I don't hear a thing."

On the return trip I spent a few days in Saint Petersburg. I visited my brother, the Petersburg musician. I had not seen him in five years. As so often happens, he failed to recognize me at first. "I saw a familiar face," he later told me, "but I thought it was one of those young painters—Rerik or Rustshitz."

The train on which I traveled from Saint Petersburg to Vilno had a special military guard. It was a time when disorder was rife. A big bomb had exploded in Saint Petersburg several days before. The vast wave of expropriations and assaults was sweeping Russia. The revolution had begun to substitute its great mass treasure for sanguinary small change.² The gigantic peasant uprising which, according to Lenin's promise, would surely take place in the autumn—right after the harvest—failed to materialize. The sailors' revolts were

2. With due acknowledgment to Medem's poignant metaphor, substantially more than "small change" was involved in the expropriations ("exes") and other shady, if less violent, operations. Several hundred thousand rubles were obtained during that period for the political coffers of a Lenin faction soon to find itself in considerable disarray. Actively involved, or otherwise implicated, were Kamo (Semyon Ter-Petrosyan), Stalin, Leonid Krassin, Victor Taratuta, and Lenin himself. See Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 278–80. See also *infra*, pp. 433–34; 456–57 and *ibid.*, f.n.s. 1 and 2.

suppressed. The courts-martial had already commenced their operations. Dozens, if not hundreds, of scaffolds were erected across the whole country. Stolypin had undertaken to “pacify” Russia.

66.

Kovno

AT THE BEGINNING of the winter of 1906 we decided to resume publication of our Russian weekly, but it was not the former *Nashe Slovo*; it was something quite different, in name as well as form and content. Another name had to be designated because *Nashe Slovo* had been closed down by the government. Its format became less striking for reasons of economy; our financial resources had grown a bit slim at the time and we were forced to send Liber to America during those days to rustle up some dollars.¹ And the whole

1. Liber arrived in New York on November 8, 1906. A banner headline in the *Forward* on November 24 read: "Support the Bund in the Big Election Campaign [for the Second Duma]." A line of smaller type read: "The Central Committee issues an appeal through Comrade Mark Liber to the Jewish workers and all progressive citizens of America." A mass meeting in the Manhattan Lyceum featuring Liber was announced for the same day. The program also included Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Forward*, Meyer London (the future Socialist Party Congressman), and Dr. Moissaye Gurevich, leader of the Bund groups in New York and coordinator of Liber's tour, who had himself arrived as a delegate of the Bund Central Committee during the preceding months. Aside from his fund-raising efforts in the United States, Liber also appeared on the public platform with a series of lectures in both Yiddish and Russian. An excellent speaker, his subjects included the position of the Bund on Jewish culture and on the class struggle, and the role of the revolutionary movement in Russia. See Abraham Cahan, *Bleter fun mayn lebn* (Yiddish) [*Pages of My Life*] (New York: Forward Association, 1928), IV, 438–40.

character of the publication likewise changed. It was the eve of the elections to the Second Duma, and the party was in need of a militant organ in Russian which would contain more timely and lively material that was easy to grasp. And another change was required: it became necessary to shift the location of the editorial office. Officially, the new paper would appear, as before, in Vilno; the paper's administrative office and place of publication were located there. But the composition of the editorial staff was such that the majority of its members could not live in Vilno; the police were on their trail. Hence the decision to transfer the main editorial office to another city.

During the month of November I relocated in Kovno. The flat that had been rented for us was situated on a street whose formal name was Pazheskaya. In the city, however, it was known as "Katsh's *zaylok*" (side street or blind alley), a name derived from the ownership of the largest house on that small street by a certain woman named Katsh, where we actually took up residence. It was a capacious and fashionable house of six or seven large—indeed unusually large—rooms, and completely vacant. Bare, dark, and cold. The woman rented us the two front rooms in that empty house. Two beds, a large table, and a couple of chairs were placed in one room; in the other—a table, and nothing else. An old lamp hung above the large table. The lamp had certainly seen better days. By now it had grown old and weak and dripped kerosene constantly, splattering drop by drop upon our table. We finally located a clay pot and tied it with strings beneath the lamp; the kerosene thus fell into the pot, and all was well. The front rooms were heated. The owner's servant girl would come in the morning; she was an old Catholic spinster, one of the so-called *devotkes* (zealots) who spent every free moment in church. Extremely ugly, she was also half-deaf and understood no Russian. She used to heat the stove and bring us the samovar. The other rooms remained bare, dark, and cold.

There, in that extraordinary house, is where our editorial office was located; and there we lived, the two of us—Zaslavsky and I. The third member of the editorial staff, Yudin, found a place in some other part of the city.

It's easy to see that the house was not especially cozy, and the reception we got was anything but pleasant. The day we moved in, we

stayed up late into the night. Suddenly, around one o'clock, we heard a knocking at the door. Such knocking during the old days in Russia spelled something bad. We sat there looking at each other. "Someone's knocking," said Zaslavsky. "Someone's knocking," I responded. "It's pretty sad," he went on. "It's disgusting," I replied. "But someone's got to open the door." "Certainly someone's got to." I went into the anteroom. "Who's there?" "The night watchman." "What do you want?" "Open immediately." I opened. In the doorway there appeared a figure in a sheepskin coat together with a policeman. I looked at them; they looked at me; and both sides felt somewhat uncomfortable. "What do you want?" I asked the gentlemen. "And what are you doing here?" they asked me. "I live here," I said. "You live here? Really? Since when?" "Since today." "Really?" "Yes." "Well, in that event, everything is satisfactory." "Why the inquiry?" "Forgive me," said the watchman, "I made a mistake. I noticed light in the window and knew that the house had been empty; I was puzzled. I thought perhaps robbers had gotten in. So I called a policeman. Good night." "Good night." And we dropped off to sleep.

Our activity began. Living and working with Zaslavsky was sheer delight. He was a happy, vibrant fellow, the source of boundless jokes and pranks. The four walls of our sanctuary constantly resounded with laughter. The electoral campaign was under way and our paper adopted a fresh, pointedly militant tone. Whenever a new edition was being prepared, Zaslavsky would seat himself at the table, roll up his sleeves, and, all smiles, ask: "Well, who's in line for a beating today?" And, indeed, he would beat with relish. We had enemies on all sides—and the blows rained down so that sparks flew. One day it was the Jewish liberals who needed a cuffing; next, it was the Zionists; and the following day, the Zionist-Socialists, the SS (who just happened to be running one of their most important candidates in Kovno itself). Coincidentally, we received a Jewish newspaper from America at that very time containing a picture of a certain prominent SS leader traveling overseas. He was a young man with a pointed beard and a shock of long, unruly hair. Beneath the picture was a typically American advertising caption: "A face of Jesus, a temperament of a volcano." Zaslavsky took the paper, cut

out the picture with the caption, and pasted it on the wall in our room. And whenever he had to do a piece on the SS, he would walk up to the picture, gaze at it, and derive from it the inspiration for a few stinging witticisms.

We used to prepare the edition on the day before, or, more correctly, the night before it was scheduled to go to press. Consequently, a definite routine evolved. Yudin would come to us in the evening and join us for supper. Then we armed ourselves with the requisite instruments, to wit, first—a samovar; second—a few bottles of soda and a package of small, round, hard candies that served us in place of cigarettes. Equipped with these tools, we would seat ourselves at the two tables and go to work. Yudin would do a major political article—very long, a bit ponderous, but well liked among the readers. I would analyze various tactical questions. And Zaslavsky would mount his brilliant cavalry assaults. Then we read the several articles, corrected and polished them, and—at about two or three in the morning—wound up the work. Yudin would then lie down on the large table in the other room and take a nap. I would also snatch some sleep, but only for a few hours, since the train left for Vilno at five in the morning and I had the job of bringing the paper's copy to Vilno for printing. It was quite some distance to the railroad station and I used to hire an *izvozhik* in advance. He would arrive between four and five o'clock and knock on the window. Tired and still sleepy, I would rise from my warm bed and take a seat in the sleigh. It was a very severe winter: the days were bitterly cold, and my feet nearly froze more than once. I suffered greatly from the cold. Arriving in Vilno in the morning, I would remain there a few days, correcting proof and taking care of the printshop. The edition completed, I would return to Kovno and the work would resume.

During our free days we participated in the electoral campaign. In Kovno we put forward our most important candidate, Abramovich. Our activity was conducted vigorously and in high spirits. We used to deliver speeches in synagogues, and large meetings were held in the chamber of the city *duma* (council). Superficially, conditions in Kovno were quite favorable. The police did not bother us, and if a policeman should by chance appear at a meeting, we would slip him a few rubles or invite him into an adjacent room to be treated there to a

little bottle of whisky. That was enough for him to leave us alone.

I recall the first big meeting at which Abramovich delivered a lengthy and appropriate speech. It included a well-rounded treatment of current political questions and an explanation as to why the audience should vote for the candidates of the Bund. Thereupon a youthful adherent of the SS stepped forward—a lad of about seventeen or eighteen and a very attractive speaker himself (in form, that is)—and launched into some extraneous babbling. He came up with one story, for instance, to the effect that the Central Committee of the Bund had sent a memorandum about emigration to the congress of the International. He continued in like vein. The audience, composed largely of ordinary, unsophisticated people—workaday Jews—looked on without the faintest notion of what he was after and what relationship his various stories might have to the Russian Duma and the elections. It was a characteristic example of the patent impracticality of the SS. The young man, it goes without saying, received a suitable what for. In later years he grew much more serious² and, as commonly occurred, parted company with his pedantic party which, I might add, no longer even exists.

While on the subject of the SS, I ought to relate another story involving their candidate from Kovno, that same ludicrous figure of whom I previously had occasion to speak: Nachman Syrkin, the present-day *Poale* (Labor) Zionist. He happened then to be an SS. (He left the SS a few years later, dumping several buckets of filth upon them in the process of leavetaking.) In Kovno, as in other cities, there existed at the time a “Jewish Electoral Committee,” a committee of the “Jewish People” made up of local notables who conducted a campaign on behalf of the “respectable” candidates. The committee, accordingly, organized a meeting of the representatives of the “whole” Jewish population for the purpose of discussing the matter of candidates. The socialist candidates were invited to present their platforms at the meeting. How such representation from the “Jewish People” is produced is well known. Representatives are picked in the synagogues. Thus, all manner of trustees and sextons showed up, a

2. The reference is to Dr. Aaron Singalovsky, later a prominent figure in the ORT organization. At that time he used to be called “Aaron Czestochower.”

few dozen colorless, ordinary Jews, and a handful of busybodies from among the leading *intelligenti*. Several representatives from the parties were also admitted—which was how I came to show up there for a look at the interesting spectacle.

The socialist candidates also appeared. Abramovich took the floor and delivered a brief address in which he expressed his viewpoint. Naturally, he spoke in Yiddish. Who would have thought for a moment of addressing such an audience in any other language? Then Syrkin was recognized. He stood up in his long black doctor's suit-coat, straightened out his broad, flowing beard, and launched into a sermon—in German. I sat there, listening, and wondered whether I was dreaming. Could it perhaps be a mistake? No, he was speaking, pounding away in a pure, genuinely literary German, not at all as if he were addressing the Kovno elite, but rather an assemblage of Berlin *yehudim* (German Jews). From time to time he would inject a passage in Hebrew and then resume his sermonizing in *Hochdeutsch* (High German). Didn't he know any Yiddish? Of course he knew it. Why then the German? Apparently from a desire to impress the crowd. After all, here was a doctor who could command German and Hebrew. How could such a savant not be elected? Still, the audience was wiser than the speaker; and the German speech failed to produce the overwhelming impression on which the learned doctor had counted.

I had the opportunity at that time to participate in several electoral meetings beyond Kovno. I spoke in Vilno. I went to Ponevezh; the meeting there took place in the main synagogue. The place was so solidly packed and the air so stifling that the lamps flickered and almost went out. Our adversaries suspected my identity, despite my having to speak there, as elsewhere, under an assumed name, and endeavored to discomfit me. No sooner had I begun to speak (I spoke in Russian because I did not yet know Yiddish) when they commenced to shout: "Yiddish! Yiddish!" But they were made to quiet down. The funny thing was that their own candidate, the attorney Naftole Friedman,³ also spoke in Russian.

I had a rather odd experience in Grodno, where we put forward

3. Friedman was elected a deputy to the Third and Fourth Dumas.



Editorial staff of Bund weekly, *Nasha Tribuna* (*Our Tribune*), at a secret apartment in Kovno (1907). Right to left: Medem; Yudin (Isaiah) Eisenshtat; David Zaslavsky

our comrade Shmuel Gozhansky as a candidate. I came to speak at an electoral meeting. At the speaker's table, no less, there sat a police inspector hanging on every word. I adopted a humorous tone in the polemic with the other parties. The audience laughed uproariously. The inspector too was convulsed with laughter. After I finished my speech, our comrades approached me and said: "It will be healthier if you leave by a back door: the inspector may be laughing, but when you go he may arrest you nonetheless." So I sought to depart by the back door. But alas, the door was locked and there was no key. Without much ceremony, our lads applied a little push-knock-pull and broke in the door. There was a minor hubbub; but we were already out and on our way.

The following day I learned that the inspector had told the organizers of the meeting, "That Bundist was a pretty nice speaker! But what need was there to break in the door? Do you really believe I would have arrested him? Heaven forbid! I know who he is. His name is Medem. I even knew his father in Minsk. I wouldn't have touched him." So that's how a door was ruined needlessly. But there is an old German expression: *Sicher ist sicher* ("You can never be too sure"). For the gendarme who had arrested me in Minsk years before also claimed he knew my father. And still I went to prison.

The London Congress

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN ended. Immediately afterwards we were forced to cease publication of our weekly. The reason was most prosaic: inadequate funds. The Yiddish daily, *Di Folks-Tsaytung* (*The People's Press*), also had a substantial deficit; and the very limited financial means at the disposal of the Central Committee did not permit us the luxury of two newspapers. We were thus compelled to dissolve our editorial staff. A few days after we left Kovno, the police staged a raid on the house in which we had lived. But they made a minor error. They went to the floor above and arrested an innocent person, someone who had no connection at all with the editorial staff or with the Bund.

I left for a brief visit to Moscow. (I had even managed to avail myself of a few days there at the time the paper was being published.) Now I had enough free time for a leave of several weeks, during which politics was set aside and the time devoted to my private life. It was only by coincidence that I met a number of Russian comrades on several occasions. A large Russian publishing house run by the Granat brothers had decided at that time to issue an extensive *History of Russia During the Nineteenth Century*—a collective product. The leading collaborators were two well-known Bolshevik writers, the *privat dozenten*¹ from Moscow, Nicholas Rozhkov and

1. Individuals who have met the requirements for official recognition as university teachers.

Michael Pokrovsky. Through my former editorial staff colleague, Heylikman, who lived in Moscow, I was invited to take charge of the Jewish section. I agreed to do so, and was asked to meet with Pokrovsky for a discussion of the details. I went to see him. He was a congenial, serious, modest person, who if I'm not mistaken, is at present working with Lunacharsky in the Soviet Commissariat of Education, and we quickly agreed on terms. While I was with Pokrovsky, two other comrades came in whom I had not previously known. One was a young man of moderate height, with blond hair and a round little beard, the image of a Russian *intelligent*. I later met him abroad. He was one of the few Bolsheviks whom I found personally quite affable. Despite his typically Russian face, he was a Jew. He is the present chairman of the Moscow Soviet and one of the most important Russian leaders—Leo Kamenev.²

The other was a less intellectual Jewish fellow, also a Bolshevik and a rather important leader in the Bolshevik faction. He was decidedly not one of the most pleasant specimens. I also had occasion to meet him abroad subsequently, and I used to hear stories about him that were not especially pretty. He was the object, for a time, of some really ugly suspicion; but it remained only suspicion. He was a truly small-minded, faction Bolshevik with the characteristic narrow view of the sectarian. While we were seated at Pokrovsky's and chatting, the conversation also turned to that *History of Russia* in the publication of which I was to participate.

The collaborators whose names were made public included not only a number of accepted Social Democratic writers (among them Lenin and Plekhanov), but also several SRs and nonpartisan people as well. This prompted the Jewish fellow to grimace at the prospect of

2. In August 1936, a mere fifteen years after Medem identified Kamenev as "one of the most important" Soviet leaders (indeed, one of those closest to Lenin and his wife), he, Gregory Zinoviev, and fourteen other Old Bolsheviks fell victim to Stalin's blood lust in the first of the Moscow "Show Trials." Before the Great Purge of the 1930s and the smaller subsequent purges ran their sanguinary course, millions would experience imprisonment, deportation into the forced-labor world of Gulag, and "liquidation." It might be noted that Stalin, in prescribing death for the Old Bolsheviks, was, among other things, violating Lenin's dictum that recourse to the death sentence should never be had in resolving political differences, deviations, or defections among Communists.

the Social Democrats—and Lenin in particular—participating in the venture. “It’s nothing but a compromise operation” was the way he expressed it. To tell the truth, I thought he was making light of the whole thing, and I looked at him with a smile, but he meant it seriously. Kamenev, who was more intelligent, understood that his comrade had gone a bit too far, and tried to smoothe over and explain away his words. “There can be no objection,” he said, “to Social Democratic writers participating in such a serious, scientific effort. But in the case of Lenin it’s somewhat different. His name has the significance of a party standard-bearer, and for that reason it would be better for him to abstain.” In the end, as a matter of fact, Lenin did not participate. But my work was not crowned with good fortune. Some time later, after having prepared a portion of the material, I received word at the editorial office that the various articles had expanded greatly and that space had grown scarce. There was not enough room. Who gets thrown out? Naturally, the Jews. I was even assured that the Jewish section would be included in a second compendium, *The History of the Twentieth Century*. But this second compilation has not yet seen the light of day.

Although I had no direct connection with the local movement, my life in Moscow was anything but calm. Living illegally leads to trouble in any case. As usual, I had not reported to the authorities. I was living in my brother’s house, although he himself had already left Moscow and moved to Kovno. But my sister and her husband (my brother-in-law Zhaba) were still there. I lived quietly for a few days, bothered by no one. Then, one evening, a relative of my brother-in-law—a boy of sixteen and a conspicuous ne’er-do-well—came rushing up and informed me that he had an acquaintance who was serving . . . in the secret police, and that the acquaintance had allegedly spoken to him about me. He knew I was here in Moscow and was looking for me. Well, I had no confidence in this lad and even suspected that it was no more than bluffing on his part; but what if it were true after all? I therefore went to an acquaintance (in fact, it was to Heylikman) and stayed with him for a few days. Meanwhile everything was calm at my brother’s house. The house was located on a small, quiet street, and any suspicious individual loitering there would have been noticed. No one appeared, so I went back. Some

days elapsed. Everything was in the best of order. I used to visit the large Moscow library every day to gather material for my Jewish history. One day, when I was seated quietly in the library reading a book, I happened to raise my head and saw my brother-in-law—seated directly across from me at the same table. I gazed at him. What could have brought him here? Something must have happened. He wrote a note and slipped it to me. It read: “The police have interrogated our *dvornik*. They want to know who’s living at our place.” Trouble again. With this kind of information I could not, of course, go home, so I spent a few days with other acquaintances, after which I left directly for the station and departed from Moscow.

It was the end of April. The congress of the RSDWP was scheduled to open in Copenhagen at the beginning of May. Without returning to Vilno, I went straight from Moscow to the congress.

I had already prepared myself in advance with a foreign passport that had been assembled in Vilno. How such passports were made at that time was quite interesting. As previously noted, my passport for travel within Russia was “belletristic,” fashioned by myself with a fictitious name. But in Vilno, as, presumably, in every city in the Pale lived a Jew who was known as the “governor-general.” This person was an operator, with frequent entree to high places and access to various administrative offices, where he would carry on all manner of shady transactions. Thus he would take such a *fal’shivka* (spurious passport) and bring it to the administrative office of the governor, where he would exchange it for a foreign passport. The *fal’shivka* would remain at the governor’s as security, and in its place one would obtain a genuine, legitimate foreign passport—with a fictitious name, such as the kind of passport I acquired. With it, I crossed the border in both directions.

The trip abroad from Moscow goes through Minsk. Five and a half years had elapsed since that autumn night when I left my hometown and fled to Switzerland. They were such long, long years; the four years I had spent abroad seemed to me an eternity. It’s strange; if I now take the same span of four years, but at a later period, when I recall, for instance the year 1917—a comparable period of time, after all—I have the feeling, nevertheless, that it was just a short time ago. But those first four years appear to me as hav-

ing been almost like time out of mind. When I returned to Russia in 1905 I had the impression that something like a whole century had elapsed. Since that time another year and a half had gone by, and my earlier life in Minsk had faded into a truly distant, deep, and hazy past. Much had actually changed. Of my relatives, none were left in Minsk; my old friends, also none—or virtually none. But when the train on which I was traveling from Moscow approached my hometown, I peered out of the window, my heart pounding. The old longing had revived, with all of its acute poignance. I dared not stop off in the city. I was, after all, an illegal person with an assumed name and a false passport, and there were still enough people left in Minsk who would have recognized me immediately had I merely shown myself on the streets. So I sat at the window of the car and looked out with yearning and anguish. The Moscow train did not cut straight through the city proper, but passed by, quite some distance away. One could see only the periphery and, off in the distance, only the very tallest buildings. Yet how near to me were the places on the outskirts, how familiar. Here was the passage of the railroad crossing with the guardrail and the watchman's little house. How often had I passed his house on the way to the "Antonov" woods, to the bishop's *dacha*, amid the broad fields and the tall pines, on the soft white sandy road! How often had I stopped at that little house for a glass of cold milk, reinforced by a piece of black bread—bread encased in oak leaves and baked at home by the watchman's wife. Here was the railroad bridge across the Svisloch. Crossing that particular bridge used to be forbidden, but we would cross it; there was no other bridge in the vicinity. Here was a little wooded area reaching to the very tracks where we had held a meeting of the Bund committee a mere seven years ago. There was the road leading to our summer residence beyond the city. All of them beloved, cherished places evoking so many associations, places with which were bound up the finest and loveliest gift that anyone can possess—youth.

The train pulled into the station. I could not restrain myself and stepped out onto the platform. The same old Brest-Litovsk station. The same small wooden structure, and a second wooden building containing the eating counter. The platform was nearly empty. Two people walked out of the station toward the train. Two familiar faces.

One, a bank director, a Polish Jew. I recall how the story of his truly aristocratic way of living had made the rounds in Minsk. The proof? He used to have fresh bread delivered every morning all the way from Warsaw! The other was a Polish attorney. I had even known him personally. But he didn't recognize me. Both entered the train. The platform remained empty. And I said farewell once more to my old beloved Minsk. Indeed, I was never to see it again. To be sure, I was to follow that same route again in later years, but on that occasion I did not step out on the platform. I was seated then behind the iron bars of a prisoner's car, guarded by armed soldiers and being taken from Orel to stand trial in Warsaw. The year was 1915. . .

After crossing the border without incident I arrived in Berlin, where I met Liber. The two of us left for Copenhagen together. We registered at a large, attractive hotel and met some other delegates. Trotsky, for one, was staying at the same hotel. He soon came into our room. I had not seen him for several years and he had changed considerably during the interval. Trotsky lived through a great deal in the course of a few years. In 1905 he left Switzerland for Russia, played a significant role in the Saint Petersburg Soviet, was arrested and exiled to Siberia. He had only recently escaped and returned abroad and, still weary from the journey, he was emaciated and pale. He had also changed inwardly, having grown more mature, solid. In the old days, when I used to see Trotsky abroad, there was still much about him that was boyish. After the discussion in which we had engaged in Karlsruhe, I met him again in the same year, 1903, at the congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party in Brussels and London. Later on we participated together in a large Russian meeting that took place in Geneva right after the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War. I served on the presidium at that meeting; Trotsky was the principal speaker. I still recall his speech very well, and the strange impression it made upon me. He argued that, objectively, the great West European countries were—in 1904, no less!—already ripe for the social revolution.

Trotsky generally gave the impression in those days of someone with little sense of responsibility, someone exceedingly pompous and in pursuit of the pretty, pungent phrase. The humorous and acerbic Riazanov at the time tagged him "Balalaikin." Another nickname he

gave Trotsky because of his attitude at the congress was *Leninskaya dubinka* (Lenin's little cudgel). But as already noted, Trotsky had changed markedly. He had matured; and it seemed to me that he had grown calmer and more serious. He moved far from Lenin and broke with Bolshevism. He did not actually become a Menshevik, but occupied a middle position that was close to the political position of the Bund. He wished to form a faction of his own in the party and evidently counted on the support of the Bund; thus he began a rather strong flirtation with the Bund and the "Bundovtses" (Bundists) which continued for years. In earlier years he had been a bitter opponent of the Bund; at the congress in 1903 Trotsky had engaged in the sharpest clashes with Liber. But the situation had changed and he endeavored to establish a relationship with us of some considerable intimacy.³

Personally, I had never believed in the sincerity of this new friendship. From the first moment that I set eyes on Trotsky, he became distasteful to me, and as far as I know, his attitude toward me was precisely the same as mine toward him. This was confirmed, incidentally, on the very morning after our arrival in Copenhagen. During the time we were publishing *Nashe Slovo*, I had written an article on the political situation, touching on the reasons that the revolution was not yet victorious. I stressed, in particular, the significance of the Russian peasantry. Trotsky was in prison at the time, occupying himself with literary work, in the course of which he had happened to express himself along the same line. When he came into our room in the Copenhagen hotel, he immediately asked Liber: "Say, which of your people is Vinitsky?" (That article had been signed by this pseudonym of mine.) From the tone of the question it was apparent that the article had strongly appealed to him and that he was prepared to look upon the author as a kind of partner. Liber replied: "That's Medem." "Really!" rejoined Trotsky. And he grew silent. It was clear from his demeanor that he was not especially delighted with this revelation.

3. Medem here uses the charming (and untranslatable!) Yiddish expression to describe Trotsky's overtures to the Bund: "*Er hot zikh bamit tsu vern mit undz a gantser mekhutn*" (literally, "He tried to become a real relative by marriage").

We spent a few days in Copenhagen awaiting the arrival of the other delegates. Suddenly one morning we received a piece of bad news. The Danish government notified us that it could not tolerate a Russian socialist congress on its soil, and we were directed to leave "hospitable" Copenhagen promptly. It was a severe blow. Everything had already been arranged; the delegates were present—and they represented no small host. About 300 persons had arrived. But we had no choice. It was decided to shift to the one and only European city in which it could be certain we would be left alone—London. And it was there, in fact, that this large and interesting congress took place, a congress that ran on for weeks.

The surface aspect of the congress was interesting and noteworthy in itself. Our sessions were held in a church. London has very few large public halls for the holding of mass meetings, hence the recourse to churches. Some sort of liberal "Brotherhood" (I have forgotten its name), with a church of its own, had placed its church facility at our disposal. The arrival of Russian revolutionists was well known in the city. The newspapers had learned of our "Expellee's Congress" and of our shift over to England. Reporters with cameras stood at the entrance to the church and succeeded in photographing a few female delegates, whose photographs appeared in the newspapers accompanied by fantastic inscriptions. A policeman was also posted at the gate—to see to it that we were safe from any assault. It was the first time in history that a congress of Russian revolutionists took place under the protection of the police.

The church was not particularly spacious, but there was ample room for the 300 delegates. It also contained a gallery to which selected guests were admitted. The delegates seated themselves according to factions. The Bolsheviks sat on one side; the Mensheviks on the other; in the middle—the three nationality factions: the Bund, the Letts, and the Poles. It was a real parliament. Each faction was tightly organized and led by a forceful faction committee, and fairly strict discipline prevailed. A formal decision of the Polish faction, for instance, had affirmed that everyone was obligated to vote as a solid unit. No such formal compulsion was operational in our faction, but in point of fact, it turned out that way on virtually every vote. The Bolshevik and Polish factions had special "conductors" who in-

dicated to the people how to vote, since not all the delegates had sufficiently oriented themselves about what was happening at the congress. A large number of Polish delegates had not even understood—or had poorly understood—the Russian language. So that, with each vote, the conductor would mount the dais and announce: our faction votes such-and -such a way. And the people would know how to raise their hands. As a consequence, there could be no question of one side convincing the other. There was actually discussion aplenty, but the result was a simple arithmetical calculation: How many votes from this faction, how many from that, how many from another, etc.? The conductor of the Bolshevik faction was the Moscow historian Rozhkov; the conductor of the Poles was Marchlewski (Karski). The Letts themselves were split into two sections. The Bund and Menshevik factions carried on without a director's baton.

The pick of the whole movement was represented among the delegates. Almost all the important leaders were there with the sole exception of those who were in prison and could not attend. On the benches of the Bolshevik faction sat two distinguished guests whose arrival created quite a sensation: Maxim Gorky and his wife Andreyeva, and visible in the gallery was the attractive gray head of the renowned old revolutionist, Aaron Zundelevich.

The congress was opened by Plekhanov. Election of a presidium followed. In line with prevailing practice at Russian congresses, no single chairman was elected but rather a whole collegium. Agreement on the composition of the presidium was reached in advance by all sides. Because there were five factions, it was decided that five chairmen would be chosen, one from each faction. These were, for the Bolsheviks, Lenin; for the Mensheviks, Dan; for the Poles, Jan Tyszko (Leo Jogiches); for the Letts, Azis (F. A. Rozen); and for the Bund, myself. We took our seats on the dais. The first session was to be chaired by the one among the five who had received the largest number of votes. That was Azis. But even before the proceedings got under way, the first flare-up had already erupted.

The incident involved Lenin. He had written an article some time before which had highly offended the Saint Petersburg Menshevik organization. Consequently, the Mensheviks pressed charges against him before a party court. The incident dragged on; the court had not

yet convened (it was destined, in fact, never to convene), but the Mensheviks contended that Lenin was under a cloud of suspicion for unbecoming conduct. Now, at the very opening of the congress, they promptly submitted a written protest against the election to the presidium of a person facing a party court. The protest was submitted directly to Azis. Azis glanced at the piece of paper and turned toward us with the question: "What do I do with this?" We all looked at each other: "What should be done with the protest? It should be read." So Lenin was asked; he was after all most directly interested in the matter. He said: "Certainly it ought to be read." Azis thereupon stood up and proceeded to read the whole story aloud. As soon as the audience heard the opening words and realized what was involved, there arose a tremendous hue-and-cry. The Bolsheviks started screaming—but really screaming! At first, only a few people in the front rows began to stir, then more and more, and finally the whole place was in a wild uproar. Seated in the first row among the Bolshevik benches was an old party activist named Lindov (Dr. G. A. Leiteisen). He leaped up from his place, pale, shaken, half mad with anger, and yelled toward me, while pointing a finger at Azis: "Tear the piece of paper away from him!" "Don't get excited," I urged. "If Lenin himself concurred in the reading, then you ought to calm down." But, alas, it was all in vain. The screams literally bespoke danger. Poor Azis—a quiet, modest man—became confused and lapsed into silence. The presidium walked off the platform, and the "inspiring" opening session was suspended. The crowd dispersed.

The next session was scheduled for the following morning. It was quite clear that the congress would be unable to function without the adoption of drastic methods. The presidium met, and we discussed the question of how to avoid scandalous episodes in the future. We drafted a special set of procedures for the congress. Among others, we adopted one item which affirmed that the various statements and reports—both personal and collective—were to be read only at the conclusion of each session, and then only after having been passed through the censoring authority of the presidium. Should the latter determine that any particular statement would be likely to evoke indignation and produce an eruption, the reading of such a statement would be disallowed.

The people came together the following morning and waited for further developments. Somewhat wrought up and chagrined over the hapless beginning, they looked forward to the course of the session with anxiety. Tyszko was next in line to chair the session. But that wise and clever man had no desire to be the first to plunge into the maelstrom. "I'm not at all familiar with your (Russian) customs," he said. "Let someone else chair today's session." So I had to do it. I had already acquired substantial experience as a chairman. I know that the main thing is not to be afraid of the crowd and of the noise; and, in actuality, I am not afraid of them. Thus I opened the session, spoke in a calm but deliberate tone, and asserted that we considered yesterday's incident closed, that there would be no return to it. I reported on the items for the agenda which the presidium had drawn up, and requested the congress to approve them so that we might be given the opportunity to conduct the session in an orderly fashion. The congress approved our proposal unanimously and without debate, and the proceedings got under way. The session was completed in peace and quiet; the audience breathed easier. The crisis had been successfully surmounted. When the session ended many people came up to me and expressed their satisfaction at my conduct of the meeting. The diminutive Angelica Balabanoff (at present a prominent Bolshevik leader) voiced the supreme compliment. "You are the Russian Singer," she said. (Paul Singer was one of the German Social Democratic leaders, the perennial chairman of the German and international socialist congresses.)

The endless series of sessions had begun. Russian congresses had a habit of forever starting with ABCs. Thus, the first item on the agenda was the point about the current political situation; then came other general questions. Only at the very end, after several weeks of hair-splitting and theorizing, did the congress get around to more practical questions. And all the while an embittered, stubborn battle was being fought between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Only the Bundists and the "neutral" Trotsky would, from time to time, introduce a third note into that duet. They constituted the center.

A very small portion of the 300 persons at the congress actually participated in its deliberations. Each faction had several speakers

who would invariably take the floor; the rest of the audience sat silently, participating only in the voting. The members of the Duma were a source of great interest, a new phenomenon at a Russian congress. The Duma group was also split into Menshevik and Bolshevik segments. Before the outside world, in the Duma, they presented a solid front; but internally there were constant clashes. Those clashes were also carried over to London. The leader of the Menshevik wing of the Duma group was Irakli Tseretelli; the Bolshevik leader was Gregory Alexinsky.

I saw them in London for the first time. Tseretelli made a very fine impression. A young man of about twenty-six; handsome, composed, with a wise and appealing face, and judicious in speech—he was well received by everyone. Alexinsky was an altogether different type. Also young, but not at all attractive, short and minus beard and mustache (giving the impression that they were absent not because he shaved them off, but because they had not yet begun to grow); his back slightly twisted; a high-pitched, feminine voice—he created an image of a semi-cripple. He was no fool. Alexinsky's speeches in the Duma occasionally created a tremendous stir. But there was something repulsive about him. I also used to encounter him later on, after the close of the congress, when the whole Duma faction had returned to Russia and when all of its members had been arrested and sentenced to hard labor, while he—by some remarkable coincidence—remained abroad. He acted the part of a fervent revolutionist. Even Lenin had subsequently gone too far to the right to suit Alexinsky. But I never had any confidence in him—either personally, or in his extreme redness; and it came as no surprise at all when I learned during the war years that this “dangerous” revolutionist had become a partner of Denikin.⁴ It should perhaps be noted that he was not the only one who made such a revolutionary transition from dark-red to dark-black.⁵ I fear he won't be the last. . .

4. Lieutenant-General Anton Denikin was one of the leading “White” officers during the post-1917 civil war in Russia. He commanded the so-called Volunteer Army in southern Russia.

5. Another Bolshevik figure in the Duma (the Fourth Duma, elected in 1912) was Roman Malinovsky. Unlike Alexinsky's, his transition was not from dark-red to

But a capable individual he was, and a good speaker; more accurately, a good polemicist. I once heard him deliver a festive, sentimental speech—it was pathetic. But when it came to telling

dark-black. He was from the outset an agent of the Tsarist secret police ordered to assume the color dark-red and infiltrate the Bolshevik organization. Malinovsky surfaced as something of an answer to Lenin's prayer. (The Bund, the Mensheviks, and other socialist groups had to contend all along with Lenin's claim to ideological infallibility, and his strategy of never being "outflanked" on the Marxist Left.) Lenin was having problems at the time with other Bolshevik comrades, in particular, with the six Bolshevik members of the Duma who were guilty of the sin of "conciliationism" [read: the spirit of intra-party harmonization with the Mensheviks, Bundists, etc.]. Displaying the precise shade of "Lenin-red," Malinovsky became Lenin's darling. He was not going to be another Alexinsky, wrote an enthusiastic Lenin who (together with the secret police!) put Malinovsky forward as a Bolshevik candidate for the Fourth Duma. "*For the first time among ours in the Duma,*" declared Lenin, "there is an *outstanding worker-leader*. . . . The results . . . will be *great*. . . ." Lenin also sponsored him for membership in the Central Committee elected at the Lenin-rigged-and-run Prague Conference (self-designated as the "Sixth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party") in 1912.

In short order, Lenin directed Malinovsky to press for a split in the unified Social Democratic Duma fraction of thirteen members, seven of whom were Mensheviks. Flailing away at Menshevism and "conciliationism," Lenin's mouthpiece succeeded in effecting the split. Here too Lenin was unaware of one thing: Malinovsky had also received a directive to split the Duma fraction from his superiors in the secret police! "The situation of the Fraction," wrote Assistant Police Director Vissarionov to the Minister of the Interior (Dec. 18, 1912), "is now such that it may be possible for the six Bolsheviks to be induced to act in such a way as to split the Fraction into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Lenin supports this. See his letter." The letter had been passed along to Vissarionov by Malinovsky. And Malinovsky played his part admirably; he disrupted the unity of the Social Democratic deputies in the Duma.

Then the rather conventional story of police infiltration entered the category of high drama. On May 8, 1914, presumably sensing that his role would be exposed, Malinovsky suddenly resigned from the Duma and simply left Russia. Where did he go? Directly to Lenin, in Cracow (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The consummate actor told a confusing story to his mentor, the bottom line of which was a "confession" that he had, as a youth, been sentenced for attempted rape, and that the police were now threatening to blacken the Bolsheviks with the story unless he resigned. Aware of the profound implications of such a development for the status of his group in the movement and for his role as embattled, putative leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin engaged in an early version of "stonewalling." He ignored the increasingly open allegations of the non-Bolsheviks and even some Bolsheviks, who

someone off, he was in his element. Brash and impudent, he possessed a caustic wit and a nasty, cutting tongue; even his effeminate voice could be as piercing as a sharp knife. At the congress he wrangled constantly with Tseretelli. But all in all, the calm and quiet Tseretelli more than held his own. Alexinsky also sought to take on Plekhanov, despite the latter's standing as one of the keenest wits in the international socialist movement; and Plekhanov did, in fact, find himself on the receiving end of some sharp thrusts from Alexinsky's pointed tongue. I remember one such episode. Plekhanov had developed an unfortunate habit in his later years: he used to talk about himself too much. In one of his speeches at the congress, he said: "When I was preparing to come here, the doctor said: 'You are ill; you should not go.' But I replied: 'Even if I were lying on my deathbed, I would still get up and go there to defend my political line.'" Several days later, Alexinsky was giving a speech in which, as was his wont, he assailed the Mensheviks. Plekhanov could not contain himself, and he shouted an interjection of some kind. Alexinsky

were also alluding to the "Malinovsky Affair," and gave Malinovsky a complete political clean bill of health. Never one to be put on the defensive, Lenin poured vitriol on Martov and Dan as spreaders of rumors and "malicious slanderers" of Malinovsky. No, he would not agree to an investigation by an impartial party court, although the Bolshevik press had, in fact, condemned Malinovsky for "indiscipline" and "desertion of his post." But by 1916, after having joined the Russian volunteer army in France the year before, Malinovsky found himself a prisoner-of-war in Germany, where he spread Bolshevik propaganda while keeping in close touch with Lenin. With the Bolshevik press now declaring him to be "fully rehabilitated," Lenin continued to adhere stubbornly to his view that Malinovsky was not an *agent provocateur*—this, despite the fact that the damning story had become public by 1917 and the Provisional Government in Russia was conducting an investigation. Lenin himself testified and reaffirmed his prior views despite the evidence to the contrary.

The denouement proceeded from high drama to a fantastic climax. In early November, 1918, with Lenin in the saddle and the Cheka dispensing justice, Malinovsky returned to Russia and was swiftly arrested, tried, and sentenced to death (but not before his futile attempts to summon Lenin, and not before "the workers' organizations of Moscow sent deputations to attend, for they feared that Lenin might exonerate their ex-Deputy once more"). Before his execution by a firing squad, Malinovsky repented and presumably died in the faith. See Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, ch. XXXI ("The Case of Roman Malinovsky").

stopped speaking and turned his eyes—those small, piercing eyes—toward Plekhanov. Twisting his mouth into a sardonic smile, he responded in his thin, high-pitched voice: “Comrade Plekhanov, you’re a sick person and getting excited might do you harm!” “Comrade Alexinsky,” replied Plekhanov, “you can never excite me!” Alexinsky’s thrust was actually quite witty; but he ought to have displayed somewhat more respect for the old, venerated founder of Russian Social Democracy.

Plekhanov himself knew how to pour on the jokes. Many of them were old, but many were new and brilliant. Rosa Luxemburg was the recipient of one such pungent sally. During a speech on political tactics, Abramovich had expressed the view that Luxemburg was sitting between two stools. Plekhanov got up to speak next. “Comrade Abramovich is not correct,” he said. “Comrade Luxemburg isn’t sitting between two stools, but floating among the clouds like a Raphael Madonna.” Anyone who had seen Luxemburg, neither young, nor attractive, and with a limp to boot, could appreciate his piercing thrust. But the wise woman joined with the others in laughter and in the applause punctured by bravos.

Luxemburg became involved in a major flare-up with the Bund faction. While polemicizing against a speaker for the Bund, she allowed herself to say that the behavior of the Bund in politics was like that of a shopkeeper who sits and calculates whether the sugar is becoming costlier or cheaper. This witticism had about it a specific, exceedingly unappetizing flavor. I happened to be chairman on that particular day and, wishing to be impartial, I did not call the speaker to order. Moreover, when our faction started to protest, I quieted the crowd, refusing to permit any outbursts. Our faction held a meeting after the session and drew up a protest against Luxemburg’s language. The protest was extremely forceful. According to the procedures set up for the congress, the statement had to pass the censoring mechanism of the presidium. The members of the presidium were prepared to render us the proper satisfaction and admitted our protest. They appreciated that Luxemburg had overstepped the bounds. The only one who might in fact have exercised a veto on our protest was Tyszko, the representative of the Polish faction, but it just happened that he was not present at the consultation of the

presidium. The protest, therefore, was read from the platform toward the close of the second session. The Polish comrades rose to the defense of Luxemburg, and, on their part, also submitted a protest. I cannot recall the contents of their statement, but I do know it was far more cutting than the Bund's and embodied a massive insult to the Bund faction. By a majority vote the presidium decided that the protest should be read. At that point I announced I was resigning from the presidium; the Menshevik Dan likewise resigned. This had its effect. Negotiations followed, and it was finally agreed that all the insulting words from both sides would be expunged from the minutes.

This was not the only clash between the Bund and the Polish delegation. On another occasion involving the case of the "Lodz mandates," things almost reached the point of actual blows. The incident originated in the selection of delegates to the congress. Each faction, quite understandably, had wished to maximize its number of delegates, yet the indiscriminate selection of delegates was naturally forbidden; certain rules had to be observed. If I'm not mistaken, the practice was one delegate for each 300 members. Fair enough, one would imagine. But not entirely. What assurance was there that all sides would submit accurate figures on membership? After all, the organizations were illegal, precluding membership lists and addresses, which left a big opportunity for minor and major deceptions. And it must be said that the relations among the factions were such that mutual suspicion did exist about some rather ugly tricks. And what was most important—the suspicion was often justified.

Hence the decision to establish a joint Control Commission in those cities—and this was the case almost everywhere—which had two factions. The commission's task was to supervise both sides, to the end that each would conduct itself decently in the elections.

The Polish Social Democrats, unable to boast a particularly large organization, nevertheless desired a large delegation. Consequently they had recourse to a variety of means designed to thwart the formation of such a commission in the large working-class city of Lodz. They blithely violated the prescription and conducted their elections without any outside supervision. The result? From that blessed city, where they were entitled to only a few delegates, they sent along all of

thirteen people. The Bundists of Lodz knew full well that the operation was highly disreputable, but they were unable to do anything about it. Thus the matter became a subject of discussion in London, and people grew exceedingly agitated over the ugly deed. As a result, the expression "Lodz mandates" assumed something of the character of an epithet.

One of the delegates from Lodz was the well-known Maxim (Shimen Klevansky)—our very own Maxim who had played such a tremendous role in the October days when he functioned as a veritable dictator in Riga.⁶ He later escaped from Riga and worked in

6. In 1905, Maxim had been assigned to work in Riga by the Bund Central Committee. Even before the climax of the revolution in October, the Bund had already gained a considerable reputation in the anti-Tsarist movement of the city. As October approached, tension filled the air in this industrial center and vital railroad hub. The key to success of the revolution in and around the city were the railroad workers, 3,000 strong, many of whom were nationalistic and anti-Semitic Russians working amidst the Letts and Germans. (Their presence in Lettish Riga reflected the "Russification" policy of the regime.)

The railroad workers gathered for a critical mass meeting in the railroad yards. To cries of *zhid* ("kike"), speaker after speaker—although not necessarily Jewish—was hooted off the platform. Maxim—pale, thin, with a dark beard and half-dreamy eyes, hardly the stereotype of the horny-handed gentile proletarian—mounted the rostrum next, and launched into what would become a speech of several hours and a contest of wills. Despite the heckling and shouts of *zhid*, Maxim grew steadily more forceful, inspired, expansive, and determined.

The crowd finally grew silent; the catcalls ceased. The mass of railroad workers was now listening to the passionate, flaming words with rapt attention. Maxim had penetrated their hearts and captured their spirits.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bund in 1947, the prominent Yiddish journalist Tsivion (B. Hoffman), who was active in the Bund in Riga at the time, vividly recalled the scene:

"Had Maxim continued to speak all night, he would have been listened to. But that was no longer necessary; the job had been done; the railroad workers lined up on the side of the revolution.

"Inspired, they now wish to do anything the speaker urges.

"'But what is your name?' comes the cry from all sides.

"'Maxim,' replies the speaker.

"'Well, then you're our Maxim. We will follow wherever you lead.'"

On the following day the general strike began in Riga. It was a complete success. The government of the city and district ceased to function altogether. Governmental

Lodz in 1907. For reasons of conspiracy he had changed his name; he went by a different one in Lodz. An easily excitable fellow, he arose after a particular vote at the congress which was won by the Bolsheviks, thanks specifically to the thirteen from Lodz, and shouted: "Lodz mandates!"

The Poles grew terribly indignant. First they started to shout: "Maxim! Maxim!"—itself detestable, for it meant revealing the identity of someone much sought after by the police. But that did not exhaust the scandalous matter. The "Lodz mandates" themselves joined in the affray. Of the essential subjects discussed at the congress, they understood very little; but raising one's hand to vote demanded minimal talent. Mostly simple workers of limited social consciousness, corralled and taken across the sea to serve as voting tools, they now joined in the assault upon Maxim and the Jewish faction in general. They hurled imprecations of the kind one might hear in a Russian army barracks, but surely not at a socialist congress. People who found themselves in the very thick of things stated that the word *zhid* (the derogatory Russian term for Jew) was also not missing. The Bund faction and the Poles had been seated cheek by jowl. Both sides leaped up. People could already be seen waving fists in the air; another minute, and there would have been a regular brawl. With considerable strain and effort, the crowd was finally quieted.

Another terrible outburst erupted at one of the final sessions of the congress. I can no longer recall what the scrapping was about, but it involved plenty of passion. The session had been unusually long, and Lenin had tried all afternoon, with iron stubbornness, to force through a certain resolution. The discussion had taken an exceeding-

authority was taken over by the Revolutionary Federative Committee made up of the Lettish and Russian Social Democratic organizations, and the Bund. This Federative Committee even had its own police force, the old one having simply disappeared.

"Was this a republic? [asked Tsivion]. "No, officially not. But is the name important here?"

"Was Maxim the president of the republic? No, officially not, but in point of fact he was much more." See "*Der 'rigger prezident' Maxim*" ("Maxim, the 'President of Riga'") in Tsivion, *Far fuftsik yor*, pp. 302–08.

ly complicated turn. The audience grew very weary, extremely tense and wrought up. When, finally, the resolution was on the verge of being adopted, Lenin declared (from some kind of strategic motive) that he was withdrawing the motion. Thus, as it turned out, a whole day had been wasted on nothing. Here was the drop which caused the cup to run over. Delegates became infuriated. The Mensheviks raised a tremendous clamor. One of them—a quiet, composed, elderly man—now beside himself, sprang up, and with fists at the ready lunged toward the platform. It looked as if he would, at any moment, begin beating Lenin. He was held back. The tumult mounted. Another Menshevik collapsed in a faint and was carried from the hall. The frenetic crowd was a picture of motion and commotion. I happened to have had the “good fortune” to be chairman. There I stood, upon the platform, in the center of hysterical screams on all sides. The more composed comrades of the center came rushing up and told me: “Adjourn the session; this cannot go on.” But I did not do it. I knew that, had I adjourned the session, both sides would really have sprung upon one another then, and a battle royal would have been under way. It was thus necessary that things first be quieted down; this was my first task and I was successful. I have already noted more than once that the most tumultuous audience can be quieted down as long as one remains calm and steady oneself. The place grew quiet. I continued chairing the session. I recognized the next speaker, determined not to let up on the reins.

But my comrade Slavek got up and speaking calmly and to the point (he had gauged my tactic correctly and in fact adopted the proper tone), he directed my attention to the terribly stifling atmosphere in the hall which made it literally impossible to remain seated. It turned out that something had gone wrong in the gas line and that gas was escaping from a break somewhere and spreading through the hall. This explained, in part, the great hubbub.

At this point, the session had to be adjourned. I indicated to the audience my decision to do it, requested of both sides that they disperse promptly, without starting any new arguments, made a few routine announcements, and the thing was finished. The crowd departed. It was the last big storm.

The congress dragged on—week after week after week—for

almost a whole month. A West European socialist once said to Plekhanov: "No wonder there's such great conflict at your congresses; after debating among each other for weeks, people must become fed up with each other."

And, indeed, the spirited debates continued rolling along. In the final analysis, it turned out to be superfluous exercises, for the results were already known from the very first day, as soon as the factions had been seated and a head-and-hand count taken: the Bolsheviks, together with the Poles (who voted, as one man, along with them) and a number of the Letts, had the majority. And as long as the majority was theirs, they would be able to carry through whatever they wished. And that's how it was. Regardless of all the talk and disputes, the result was always the same: the Bolsheviks would get their "compact" majority.

I recall one decision that bore no special Bolshevik imprimatur and which did not even satisfy most, if not all, of the Bolshevik faction. This was the decision about the so-called "partisan actions" (what is called in America "guerrilla warfare").

I have already alluded to the subject of "partisan actions" in one of the earlier chapters. Those were armed undertakings, conducted by small but well-organized bands, and involving assaults on post-offices, banks, railroads, the *monopolkes* (whisky shops) for the purpose of "expropriating" government funds. These expropriations or "exes," as they were called, had never been acknowledged by the Social Democratic Party as official modes of struggle, but their occurrences were very often overlooked. And the armed fighting detachments which did exist in the Social Democratic Party more than once pulled off "a little job," taking advantage of that to which the party benignly shut its eyes.

The "exes" assumed the nature of a real plague during 1906 and 1907. Other, non-Social Democratic organizations (e.g., the Polish Socialist Party, or the Russian "Maximalists"⁷) used to occupy themselves with it quite officially. But as already indicated, even

7. The Maximalists were a faction of the SRs that emerged at the end of 1905 and for the next two years sought, through varieties of terror and assorted depredations, to implement the "maximum" program of the party.

many Social Democrats, unable to resist the temptation, succumbed to it. This plague became something terrible and contributed to a tremendous demoralization. Initially the “exes” used to be carried out in order to provide money for the party treasury. Later, an ever-increasing portion of the stolen money would be held back for the needs of the “fighting detachment” itself (for purchase of new weapons, sustaining people, etc.). Finally these particular expeditions became ends in themselves, and the boundary between “ideological” undertakings and just plain professional banditry began to disappear. The danger had not yet become very acute in central Russia; but in the Urals, in the Baltic region, and in Poland the harmful results of this bloody game could be clearly observed.

At the London Congress the majority of delegates understood that the time had come to adopt energetic measures against this disease. I can't recall the official position of the Bolshevik faction. Within the faction itself, the “exes” enterprise certainly had a substantial number of defenders; but such elements found themselves isolated on this question. The Poles, who had a first-hand picture of the sad example in the Polish Socialist Party, emphatically pressed for the termination of the “exes”; the Letts had already lived through their own melancholy experience and learned their lesson sufficiently; as to the Bund and the Mensheviks, there could be no question. Hence the congress decided by a large majority that the partisan actions would have to stop, and that the “fighting detachments”—to the extent that they still existed as party instruments—would have to be dissolved. The degree to which the decision was actually carried out is something else again. I shall have occasion to deal with this subsequently. But the decision had been made.

Another matter which was decided not precisely as the Bolsheviks would have wished involved the elections to the Central Committee. What the dominant faction would have most preferred was a Central Committee composed exclusively of its own people. But here the “nationalities” stepped in once again, and a sort of “coalition cabinet” was chosen in which all factions were represented.

During the final week of the congress the delegates found themselves acutely distressed. No one had reckoned, at the time the congress was being planned, that it would run so long. And no one

had known that it would be necessary to shunt 300 persons from Copenhagen to London. As a consequence, the funds were exhausted. Not only were expenses missing for the return trip; the funds had even run out for living in London. It was a most lamentable situation. What to do, where to float a bit of a loan, became a gnawing problem. Our London friends suggested that we send a few of our people to a group of progressive Englishmen and make them aware of our plight. Perhaps they might be induced to respond. There was no other alternative. It was therefore decided that the top celebrities should go: Lenin and Plekhanov. They went. I remember well the report on the trip delivered by Lenin the following day: "We thought," said Lenin with a half-embarrassed smile, "we were headed for a private home where we would encounter a few people and talk things over with them in an informal manner. But what we found upon our arrival was this: a large salon, full of people, rows of seats arranged as in a theater, and a dais in the center of the room. We were invited to step up to the dais and speak. Alas, we were already in the very midst of the group. So Plekhanov mounted the dais and delivered a speech on the Russian revolution. He was thanked—and that was the end of the performance." "I must confess," observed Lenin, concluding his report, "that we felt very silly."

The first attempt thus ended in nothing, yet the need for money persisted. It became a matter of seeking out some wealthy radical individual willing to risk about 20,000 rubles for the honor of assisting a revolutionary congress. One such radical was in fact located. He merely requested of us that all the delegates give him their autographs as a keepsake. In addition to this, a subcommittee made up of one member from each faction gave him an official note and promised to reimburse him at the earliest opportunity, an opportunity that never arrived.

Another Trip to Finland

I FELT VERY MUCH out of sorts while in London. The congress itself was a most trying affair and, in addition, I had received very distressing personal news from Russia. Participating in the work of the congress thus involved a tremendous demand upon all my energy. After weeks of great strain I sensed that I must find some rest, else the consequences would be bitter.

I could scarcely wait for the congress to end, and left London the very next day. But I did not return directly to Russia; the climate was unhealthy for conspiratorial reasons. Instead I detoured to Geneva. There, in my beloved Switzerland, I spent a number of weeks for rest and rejuvenation, rambling a bit through the hills, engaging in conversation with old, dear friends. Then I returned to Vilno.

What followed was a sequence of long, boring Vilno months. Only once before the year ended did I manage to leave on a *koman-dirovka*.¹ I was off to Finland once again—to a conference. It was a kind of supplement to the London Congress. As soon as the latter had ended and the crowd had returned to Russia, the Second Duma was dissolved and the Social Democratic faction was arrested. The elections to the Third Duma were scheduled to take place in a few months, on the basis of a revised electoral law. Thus a new political

1. A mission at the behest of the organization.

situation had been created which was not foreseen in the decisions of the congress, and hence the need to convene a special conference. It was held in a small Finnish city named Kotka. I attended as one of the Bund delegates.

Back again in Finland. Again the rattling railroad cars, the small wooden stations, and the *dachas* in the environs of Saint Petersburg. But this time I traveled deeper into the interior. Past the car windows swept the broad, dark forests, studded with rocks and cliffs—a beautiful and fascinating sight. No less interesting were the practices at the Finnish railroad stations. There stood a large table loaded down with various delicacies: innumerable types of fish—boiled, fried, marinated, salted—cold meats, and goodness knows what else. You paid one Finnish mark and were free to choose and consume as much as you wished of all those delightful things, in addition to being served either a glass of tea or a bowl of soup. The local people, however, did not abuse the opportunity, but ate in moderation; each one knew his capacity and was well aware that what was offered was no more than an appetizer. But traveling together with me were our Russian comrades. When the train stopped for quite a while at one fairly large station, they stepped out and descended upon the table like a swarm of locusts. In a matter of minutes, everything was stripped bare. Well, to the Finns it was a basic custom that the table must always be full; after all, new travelers would be arriving. Additional shipments were accordingly dragged from the kitchen: boiled fish and fried fish, sardines, and pilchards and herring. Alas, to what avail? In a minute everything was cleared away once again. Happily the train had begun to pull out and the human locusts were forced to pile back into the cars.

Kotka was a small port city on the ocean. I spent two or three days there without managing to see the city. I had, indeed, a strong desire to stroll through the streets and obtain a closer view of the Finnish city, but we were notified that it would be undesirable for reasons of secrecy; we were not to make ourselves conspicuous. So I resigned myself to staying put and all I saw was the small house in which we slept. There were two on a bed and two on a mattress laid out on the floor; there may even have been another two on a small sofa in the same room. I can no longer remember. But I do recall the

presence of a large mass of special diminutive occupants, on the bed as well as on the mattress and the sofa, so that the whole night was spent in ceaseless, vigorous scratching. However, the sessions of the conference took place in an attractive facility—in the People's House. The whole of Finland was even then covered by a network of People's Houses (in America they would be called "Labor Lyceums"²), built and administered by the labor organizations with the financial assistance of the city governments. And a city as small as Kotka also had a People's House. It was brand new and still in the process of being completed. All of us admired this lovely symbol of Finnish popular culture and workers' power.

The conference ran its course quickly and smoothly. Lenin's address on the political situation and the election proved interesting. On this occasion he turned not against the "external enemies" [read: the Mensheviks], but against the "internal" ones, against a segment of his own people. There had appeared at the time in the very bosom of the Bolshevik group, an extreme left faction, the so-called "boycottists." Actually this was nothing new; quite the contrary. During the elections to the First Duma they had all been boycottists; but for the Second Duma they did choose candidates, and the boycott was abandoned. Now, however, in the wake of the dissolution of the Second Duma, a portion of the Bolsheviks desired nothing but a reversion to the boycott. In his presentation Lenin adduced various citations from Engels, and with the aid of those citations he sought to make clear to his comrades the simple and self-evident idea: a tactic appropriate in 1906 might be bad in 1907; when conditions change, tactics ought to change as well. The "boycottists" apparently did not hold with this argument.

In the end—as might easily have been predicted—it was decided to participate in the elections.

Of the individual episodes, one very small scene has remained

2. These were buildings equipped with meeting halls and other facilities. Sustained by the members of trade unions, socialist organizations, and labor-fraternal orders such as the Workmen's Circle ("The Red Cross of the Labor Movement" was the description in those years), labor lyceums served as centers for union meetings and for an array of cultural, social, and political activities.

etched in my memory. It took place at the final session of the conference.

Since the time for the group's departure was approaching and there still remained some unfinished matters, it was decided to convene an evening session. Night sessions, however, tend to induce a feeling of acute exhaustion, and under conditions of exhaustion something strange happens: one may start to laugh—and to laugh uncontrollably—at something quite trivial. Three of us were seated at the presidium table: Lenin, Adolf Warski (of the Polish Social Democracy), and I. Lenin was conducting the meeting, when he suddenly began to laugh. He had made some quiet remark to me concerning a delegate—there was really nothing about the matter that particularly justified laughter; under different circumstances it might have elicited a smile at most, and nothing more. But Lenin apparently felt a need to laugh. He burst out laughing and continued laughing, meanwhile passing along to me the piece of paper with the list of speakers on it and signaling with his hand for me to take over the chair from him. Laughter, however, has a contagious power, and I too began to laugh and was also unable to conduct the meeting; and I shoved the piece of paper over to Warski, who in turn became infected by both of us. The speaker grew silent. Everyone at the conference sat there gazing at us, waiting for the presidium to finish laughing. Then the whole crowd in turn succumbed to laughter. It continued that way for a few minutes; and only after we had had our fill of laughter were we in condition to resume the session.

69.

Downhill

A SAD AND CHEERLESS period now opened. I was based in Vilno serving as a member of the editorial staff of *Di Folks-Tsaytung*, participating in the meetings of the Central Committee, engaging in routine daily work. But the work was going badly. It had nothing to do with my own personal mood. The period of the great reaction had commenced. Reaction crept in gradually; it would have been hard to say precisely when it began, yet one sensed, with each passing day, that the direction of things was downhill. The massive shocks of 1905 and 1906 were followed by the beginning of the pervasive weariness. All of us at the center of the movement could see and feel it in the most varied signs. Maintaining the circulation of the newspaper proved steadily more difficult. The press run in the autumn, if I am not mistaken, was about 8,000 copies. Finances became exceedingly slim. Organizational life grew weak. The number of people under the sway of our movement had begun to decline. The prevailing mood was one of depression.

I can recall the last days of September, when we were supposed to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Bund. An anniversary edition had been planned and I was asked to do a festive article. But I was unable to. I remember going to the Bernadine Gardens to clear my mind. A lovely, quiet park located off the beaten path, and only rarely frequented by people.

It was a beautiful autumn day. The trees were decked out in their yellow and red autumn finery. The air was crisp, clean and transparent, with a bright, silvery autumn sheen. I sat on a bench and tried to gather my thoughts, but I felt I simply could not write an anniversary article. Let it be said that I am not one of those who falls into a state of despair because of a passing mood; I was far from losing my faith at that time, but an anniversary article should perforce be cheerful—and I was without any feelings of cheer. To write just for the sake of writing, to coin phrases one doesn't feel, is falsehood, and I am incapable of it. So I went up to the editorial office and told our colleagues that I would not write.

I found myself new quarters with so-called "furnished rooms." The place was a large house on the cathedral square, situated in a gentile neighborhood. The apartments on the lower floors were fully furnished. On the top floor, a long corridor extended the length of the house, with smaller and larger rooms on both sides. My room wasn't too bad, but in a house made up of furnished rooms there is always something tragic to record. It's a place for homeless people, and mostly unhappy people. How often would I hear late in the night, through the thin walls, the silent, heartrending weeping of a woman—some forlorn girl living in the adjacent room! And everything, everything bore the mark of homelessness and loneliness: the sleepy waiter, with the long mustache and disheveled hair who brought the samovar in the morning and heated the stove; the voice of a drunken officer somewhere on the opposite side of the corridor; dark, empty walls; the pathetic little lamp; the infinite number of petty and inconsequential things—all of this became woven into a massive gray cloud of sadness and desolation. And it corresponded closely to the depressed social mood.

The *Folks-Tsaytung* had been seized by the government. We immediately began to issue another newspaper called *Hofnung* (*Hope*), but the cheerful name somehow failed to harmonize with the actual situation. The paper barely managed to stay alive. The deficit grew steadily and there was no way to cover it. The staff could not be paid. I remember how Onkhy (Zalmen-Yitskhok Aronson), the talented young writer, used to come into the editorial room and literally plead for at least one ruble so that he might go to a dentist for his

toothache; but he could not be paid. At the meetings of the Central Committee we would wrack our brains trying to figure out how to extricate ourselves from the horrible situation. It was suggested that we stop publishing the paper. Liber was a strong supporter of this proposal. I was against it. At one of the meetings I offered some calculations on the basis of which it appeared that even from a purely commercial standpoint it would pay to try again, to endeavor to issue the paper at least for another few months; after that, we'd see. Liber declared that I had convinced him and a favorable decision was reached. But we simultaneously arrived at another decision: to change the character of the paper. It would be converted into a small penny sheet, written in a highly popular, down-to-earth fashion. Perhaps that was the way to attract a broad circle of readers. I embraced the proposal wholeheartedly. I had long dreamed about a paper of that kind, one that would transcend the narrow circle of the "initiates" and reach out to the very broadest mass of readers. Having decided to make the attempt, the Central Committee appointed a small editorial staff of three persons: Esther Frumkin, Litvak, and myself. But the plan was not destined to be realized. On the very first day that we were supposed to begin working, I headed down Zavalne Street, where our editorial quarters were located. But on the way I was stopped by a comrade especially posted for my protection. "Don't go up to the newspaper office," he said. "The place has had 'visitors'." The "visitors" were gendarmes. They had shown up in the morning and had apprehended everyone they could find there—and they found quite a number of people. These included my two staff colleagues, Esther and Litvak, two members of the Central Committee, Alexander and Yoyne, and several other active comrades. All of them were seized and taken off to prison. By a lucky chance I had come late; had I arrived a half-hour earlier, I too would have been arrested.

The Central Committee gathered and deliberated upon the situation. Further publication of a daily paper was out of the question. The decision was reached to shift to a weekly—*Der Morgenshtern* (*The Morning Star*). The new staff included Yudin, Zaslavsky, A. Vayter, and myself. During the discussion about the composition of the editorial staff, a wholly new question surfaced for the first time.

Liber was the one who raised it. There were among us, he argued, individuals with various approaches to current matters of political tactics. But our organization had its official position, and it was necessary that the paper be operated in agreement with that official position. To that end it was necessary to appoint someone as editor in chief whose political line would be in accord with the line of the majority. The stumbling block lay in the fact that, during the preceding months (Kosovsky having gone abroad during the summer of 1907), Yudin had been the tone-setter on *Di Folks-Tsaytung*; and Yudin had, at that time, certain Bolshevik inclinations that did not correspond with the position of our organization. Liber's proposal was prompted by a desire to avoid creating a similar situation on *Der Morgenshtern*. The proposal was favorably received, and I was appointed editor in chief. The new collegium functioned harmoniously, although I recall one instance when I was compelled to make use of my special authority. It involved an article by Yudin; if I am not mistaken, my editorial notation proved sufficient.

The staff moved to new quarters—also on Zavalne Street. During the first few days we acted, for reasons of caution, precisely as we had two years or so before, at the time of the establishment of our legal press; the editorial office served merely as a location with an address. We used to meet somewhere in a private residence (except that we no longer had at our disposal the comfortable homes of the various physicians and attorneys; we would meet in the modest room of A. Vayter). And just as at that earlier date, we tired of this very quickly, and moved into the official quarters of the editorial staff.

But this too did not last long. A total of three issues appeared and then the "visitors" arrived once again. They showed up late at night, about one o'clock, and it was once again a fortunate coincidence that saved me. We had left fifteen minutes before, so that no one was found on the premises. But the paper was closed down and it had become clear that for the time being we would have to give up the idea of a paper. The fact that our press had been tolerated for so long was in itself amazing: in Saint Petersburg and Moscow the workers' press had long since been stamped out. Now the "New Course" had finally reached Vilno too. We understood this and refrained from further attempts. After scarcely two years of existence our legal press

was to become silent . . . for four and a half years.

In place of a newspaper, we decided to issue small *zambikhlekh*.¹ I continued as editor. The title of the first series of collected writings was *Di Naye Tsayt* (*The New Times*). Later on, over the next four years, the names changed continuously.

The content of these anthologies was supposed to reflect the new social situation. It was not a time of great political issues; the earlier spirit of elation had been superseded by a general feeling of resignation. Under the circumstances, I held that we ought to become more deeply involved in the more sober and prosaic questions of daily life, particularly in those questions bearing upon Jewish life. Special attention was directed to the problems of the Jewish *kehilla*.²

We had already come to appreciate the great power in Jewish life of the communal notables—the *pney*—during the elections to the Second Duma. I used to write about it in *Nasha Tribuna* (*Our Tribune*), emphasizing that in order to oppose their power, we had to plunge into the very thick of *kehilla* affairs, seeking to fight the patriotic leadership in the area of the practical, daily concerns of Jewish life. To do this, we ourselves had to become distinctly knowledgeable about such concerns, and also enlighten the working masses about them. In *Der Morgenshtern*, Beynish Mikhalevich wrote a series of articles on the *kehilla*, the first articles on this subject to appear in our literature. However, the articles merely approached the question in general terms, on the level of principles. And this was insufficient. It was necessary also to develop concrete, practical material. This was done in the first two issues of *Di Naye Tsayt*.

I had no permanent group of collaborators. I functioned substantially alone. My only regular assistant was my old friend Teumin, who worked as a translator and who helped me edit the articles. I thus found myself requesting various articles from one or another

1. *Zambikhlekh* (sing., *zambukh*) were actually the equivalent of journals containing a collection of articles on various subjects. They appeared irregularly and under changing titles. Although the term *zambikhlekh* is not a precise equivalent of “anthologies,” the words are sufficiently close as to English meaning for the word “anthologies” to be used in these memoirs.

2. The organized Jewish community, with quasilegal authority.

comrade who just happened to be on hand. One local leader in Vilno at the time was strongly concerned with precisely those everyday problems of Jewish life. I asked him to do a few articles on the *kehilla*. He gathered the material and wrote the articles. He is the present-day Communist, Moyshe Rafes. His older brother, Dr. Mikhol Rafes, wrote a few articles about the special Jewish taxes. Several additional articles were submitted by our writers. Accordingly, the sociopolitical part of the anthology was completed. Yet this was not enough. A literary section was also needed. Vilno was a center alive and astir in those days with youthful, talented Jewish writers, but I was quite removed from the literary circles, and needed an intermediary who would be concerned with the literary material. Baruch Charney Vladeck, who was living with Hersh-Dovid Nomberg at the time, became such an intermediary. He was intimately associated with the literary element and through his encounters with the various literati, he would obtain stories and poems and turn them in to me. So that prior to the appearance of the first issue, I received a lovely story by Moyshe Zilburg, several wonderful poems by Dovid Einhorn, a poem by Vladeck's younger brother Daniel Charney, etc. This was literary material of a very high order. I also addressed a letter at that time to I. L. Peretz in Warsaw, with a request for a contribution. Still unable to write in Yiddish, I wrote the letter in Russian, asking his forgiveness for my use of that language. A reply from Peretz came quickly. "I forgive you your Russian," he wrote. "But your illegible handwriting is far more grievous." Peretz himself used a typewriter. My handwriting is frankly not of the best.

I began to establish some contacts with the literary people on the occasion of the founding of the Vilno Music and Drama Society (I believe that was its name), toward the end of 1907. This was the modest start of a Jewish cultural movement. It was a workers' society, boasting a rather attractive workers' chorus and sponsoring literary evenings which featured the reading of their works by the finest Jewish writers. Thus, a reading was held there of Yitskhok-Meyer Vaysenberg's *Der tate mit di bonim* (*The Father and the Sons*). Vaysenberg, no declaimer himself, sat by and listened to someone else read, laughing heartily at the humorous passages. Sholom Asch arrived and read his *Shabse Tsvi* [*Sabbatai Zevi*]. Then the group of

literati repaired to the Hotel Continental for a banquet. I delivered an address there on the Jewish cultural revival—the “Renaissance.”

Still the political movement continued to slide downhill. I could feel it clearly when, in my capacity as member of the Central Committee, I had occasion to spend frequent evenings at the *yavka*, i.e., an apartment to which representatives would come from the Bund’s provincial centers to meet with a representative of the Central Committee for discussions on various party matters. I cannot recall the name of the street where this particular *yavka* was located, but I remember its location and would be able to find it even today. It was situated in the midst of the Jewish quarters, not far from Rudnitsky Street. One entered the courtyard, turned right at the far corner, walked up a long, dark stairway, and passed through the occupant’s apartment. There, in a tiny room, I used to sit and wait for the visitors. During the cold winter evenings two of us would be there together: the secretary of the Central Committee, my old school comrade Yashka Kaplan, who now bore the conspiratorial alias “Horotsy,” and I. We would sit and wait; it was silent and depressing. Earlier—as recently as the year before—people from various cities and towns had come by the dozen. We possessed a large and very extensive apparatus. There were scores of “professionals” under the jurisdiction of the Central Committee, that is, persons who devoted themselves explicitly and exclusively to revolutionary activity. It served as a kind of ministry, surrounded by literally masses of agents. At every meeting of the Central Committee it had been necessary to deal with the distribution of our substantial human resources among the different cities. Reports and requests arrived almost daily; someone had to leave a certain city because he was under too close surveillance, someone else had to change his name, and another individual might complain about having been on duty too long in the small lonely town, and request a transfer to a different position in a larger city. Then there were the people who would come with problems that had emerged in their local organizations; the Central Committee was asked to render the judgment. And so it went. It was an endless clatter, a constant seething. But now things had grown quiet, subdued. Very often only a single person would arrive; at most

two. And we frequently found ourselves waiting there a whole evening while no one arrived. Bitter, sad times. . .

Such was the tenor of life during those lonely months. I had very few personal acquaintances. I also felt a reluctance about staying at home in the alien, uncongenial furnished room. Hence I would spend whole days in a coffeehouse, at Marikhes's place.

Marikhes's coffeehouse was one of the typical "institutions" of Vilno. I had a great fondness for it—and I must tell about it.

The way I discovered this sanctuary is interesting and characteristic of Vilno. It was still 1906. I was on the street with Zaslavsky, I believe, and with a third party. The street was *di lange gas* (Long Street), or perhaps I'm mistaken and it was actually *di breyte gas* (Broad Street). I don't quite remember. In Russian it's called *Bol'shaya*, and it represents the central artery of Vilno life. The time was a summer evening. While we were walking on the street it suddenly began to rain, not just an ordinary rain, but a downpour. It fell in buckets and seemingly without letup. Vilno is like that: whenever it begins to rain heavily a real flood develops. The street is narrow and somewhat sloping. After about ten minutes of heavy rain the street becomes a lake. There is nothing either funny about it or exaggerated; the street turns into a genuine lake. The sidewalks and cobblestone roads are covered with rushing, swirling water. And it's quite deep. Any further walking is out of the question.

So we entered the first suitable gate into a courtyard. But the water continued to rise; on the street it had already come up to one's knees; and it was beginning to seep into the yard. It was thus impossible to stay there either. Then we noticed—indeed, in that very courtyard—a small plaque on a door reading "Coffeehouse." We walked up to the second story and, sure enough, there was the coffeehouse. That's how I discovered Marikhes's, where, in later times, I was to become a daily visitor.

Two small rooms; in one, a billiard table, in the other, the dining area. On one seat sat the proprietress. The room held half a dozen small tables around which the patrons sat drinking tea and coffee. The coffee served there was the finest in all Vilno. It was the most savory coffee I had ever tasted and the cost was only a few kopecks. I

had never obtained such pleasure from coffee in the coffeehouses of Vienna. And Vienna was, after all, renowned for its coffee—not to speak of the truly delicious *babka* (a kind of cake) served there.

Newspapers lay on the tables, among others a German paper, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, which was a great source of attraction for me. Most of the patrons, however, had a different pastime: playing chess.

Adult Jews—gray and well on in years, some of them—would sit there in broad daylight and play chess. Their wives were apparently doing the toiling for them, hence their chance to play. I rarely played myself, preferring the genuine pleasure of sitting, watching, and listening. A Jew, after all, has a distinctive manner of playing chess. A Jew is impelled to talk and to melodize continuously. It starts with someone dropping a comment of some kind. The player picks it up and proceeds to repeat it in an endless variety of ways—only with a lilt, in fact with a multiplicity of melodic lilt. The other player—in the manner of the first—steeped in concentration and not even aware of his verbalizing or melodizing, now begins to repeat the comment and its lilting accompaniment. It was enough to make one explode with laughter. But the actual players were not the only animated individuals. Seated and standing around each table, hovering over each pair of players, was a big crowd of onlookers. Their role? Kibitzing. The meaning of the word kibitzing differs in America and Europe. In America it means joking around; in Europe—observing others in a game, while participating in it by word and advice.³ And the advice was what used to give rise to constant quarrels. Two men would be playing while a third leaned over them and put his two cents in. “*Reb Yid*,⁴ you’re not playing it right,” suggests a kibitzer. “Don’t bother me,” responds the player. “But why didn’t you move the knight over here?” “Please leave me alone,” replies the increasingly angry player. Things quiet down for several minutes. After a few moves the kibitzer is back at it again: “You bungler. Don’t move there. Here’s how to play it.” “Go to the devil; let me play!” Another minute of silence; then the same routine.

Once, I recall, a certain kibitzer had made such a pest of himself

3. Of course, it means the same thing in England as in America.

4. “My good fellow”; literally, “Mister Jew.”

that the player lost his patience and exploded with a vigorous and resounding “Russian expression.” The room grew deathly still. After a few seconds of silence, one of the patrons spoke up. “My, *Panye* (Sir) Rabinovich, you do speak a beautiful Russian!” The crowd laughed and the player, already sunk in thought about chess combinations, abstractedly hummed a Jewish melody while repeating “My, *Panye* Rabinovich, you do speak a beautiful Russian.” Hour after hour, from one table and then another, there emanated the Jewish melody from the preoccupied players: “My, *Panye* Rabinovich, you do speak a beautiful Russian.” To this day I retain a vivid picture of that small room, with the quiet old proprietress and the old Jews at the tables; and I can still hear the melody about *Panye* Rabinovich who speaks Russian so beautifully.

When I visited Vilno not long ago, after a lapse of twelve years, one of my first questions was whether Marikhes’s coffeehouse was still around. It no longer exists. Too bad!

Saint Petersburg

AT THE BEGINNING OF 1908 I took a leave and went to Saint Petersburg. My actual plan was to go abroad for some rest and relaxation, but just at that time I happened to receive an offer to participate in the publication of a large Russian anthology which appeared in fact a year later under the title, *The Forms of the National Movement*. The publisher of the anthology approached me in Vilno with a request that I contribute an article to it about the socialist parties among Russia's nationalities. In addition, he strongly urged me to come to Saint Petersburg and collaborate with him on the editing of the translations and other technical editorial tasks. (Many of the articles had been arranged for with foreign writers, hence the need to translate them into Russian.) It was a matter of a few weeks. I accepted the proposal. Those few weeks, incidentally, eventually stretched into several months.

A city is something alive, it resembles a living being; it has its own distinctive physiognomy. The faces of most people, generally speaking, are similar, almost identical. And most cities are also alike. It is that way in Europe and even more so in America. But occasionally one finds in the seemingly monotonous and undifferentiated character of the crowd a face that reveals a striking personal distinctiveness. The face becomes etched in one's memory, unforgettable. And the same applies to cities. There exist a few select cities with a

powerful, striking personality; wholly unlike others. A city of this type is a world in itself. Paris is one such city, as is Moscow; and Saint Petersburg [today's Leningrad] was such a city.

Was; it is no longer. When I speak of Saint Petersburg I am mindful of the splendid words written about Western Europe by the great—virtually the greatest—Russian writer, Dostoevsky. The West, he observed (through the mouth of one of his heroes, Ivan Karamazov), is a vast cemetery; but the cemetery is the repository of the dear, cherished dead. . .

Saint Petersburg, too, has come to resemble a cemetery. A dead city. Yet whoever knew it alive will never forget it.

The inhabitants of Saint Petersburg were wont to grumble and lament: a gray city, a depressing city, a cold city of fog and wind and rain and mud. Who knows? Had I become a resident of Saint Petersburg, I too might have offered lamentations. But for the few brief months I spent there—as a guest, so to speak—the cold did not faze me, nor did the grayness, the fog, and the rain. These were present, to be sure, yet I neither saw nor felt them. That which I did see and feel was only the marvelous charm of this amazing city.

Gray, admittedly, it is: gray the buildings, gray the sky, gray the sweeping mighty Neva, and gray the granite of its surrounding embankments. A coldness and harshness lies sprawled across its face. It is not one of those cities which captivates with its vivid, effulgent colors, with a life that is easy, bright, many-hued. Saint Petersburg is a city of the North, a city reminiscent of the introverted personality. One needs to penetrate its deepest recesses and to learn to become a part of it. One needs to discover its innermost beauty. But before that determination is forthcoming, before the discovery of the seven locks sealing it in, one may yet discern something of the striking hidden beauty. It is only necessary to lay bare its soul. And the soul is that of the Russian intelligentsia.

A city with a grand and magnificent soul is Paris. A city with a rich life in a vibrant present, and a city replete with historic recollections, with traces of great revolutions. Walking the streets, you feel it at every turn: at this spot, 130 years ago, the massive surging crowd pressed to shatter the walls of the Bastille; at that spot, the armed people in the revolutionary suburb moved to storm the royal palace.

In your imagination you can still hear the thunder of the drums which accompanied the revolutionary procession. Here was spilled the workers' blood during the giant battles of 1848; and there lie the fallen heroes of the deathless Commune. It is still the same Paris; different, yet the same. And you feel as if the very air you are breathing is still permeated with the illustrious memories of an exalted revolutionary history.

Saint Petersburg is different. It lacks a great and hoary revolutionary past. In this respect it is poorer than every large city of the European West. But into the fabric of its gray walls is woven the generations-old history of the Russian intelligentsia, the generations-old thinking, striving, yearning, and suffering.

Even before one gets there, Paris is already known to anyone who is familiar with the story of the great revolutions of old. And before one gets to Saint Petersburg, it is already known to anyone who is familiar with the history of Russian thought and Russian culture and Russian literature. Lying immured within the gray stones of the Saint Petersburg houses is a treasure produced by a great spiritual fervor. The face of the city has been reflected in hundreds of novels and tales, beginning with the very earliest celebrities, Pushkin and Gogol, on through Dostoevsky, and ending with Alexander Blok and other representatives of the young generation; a city filled with intense thinking and seeking, with the eternally serious and profound quest for a *Weltanschauung*, with ceaseless inquiry into life's meaning and purpose; a city brimming with great and glorious artistic creativity, a city of spirituality and of fervent human spirit; a city of numberless student youth, a city of writers, thinkers, and artists; a city of a developed, extensive working class. One feels the intense, pulsating life on all sides; sees a mass of intelligent faces; overhears conversation about the vital and transcendent problems of life.

An amazing city. Deep and withdrawn, like the Russian soul, blanketed by some sort of mystic secret. "A fantastic city," Alexander Ostrovsky once observed. "One has the feeling that, on a certain morning, it will completely rise into the air and fade away like a dream."

Built upon swamps, shrouded in fog, shackled with Tsarist administrative offices—yet filled with such tremendous spiritual

richness! Although I spent only a few months there, I saw and heard virtually the most beautiful things in the world. There was the performance of Wagner's magnificent opera, *Siegfried*. I had heard it more than once in the big cities of Western Europe, but in no city was this gem of German art executed so nobly as in Russian Saint Petersburg. There was the arrival of the greatest of living conductors, Artur Nikisch. In no city was he appreciated as profoundly, in no city was he received with such enthusiasm, as in cold gray Saint Petersburg. There was a concert by a renowned Russian singer, Sobinov, rendering Rachmaninov's songs, and one cannot imagine anything more lovely.

Then there was the opening of an art exhibition. Brand-new modern art displayed, ironically, in an old, old house—in the very house in which Pushkin himself had lived seventy or eighty years before. One senses the great spiritual force of the Russian cultural tradition, reaching like an unbroken thread across time, linking the most modern exploration with the earliest beginnings of time-honored Russian creativity. On another occasion I entered the Russian "Theater Club." It was an anniversary evening dedicated to the memory of Turgenev. The luminaries of modern Russian art appeared on stage: the famous writer Leonid Andreyev, the famous painter Ilya Repin, the famous actor Vassily Dalmatov. And seated in the audience were dozens—nay hundreds—of representatives from the elect of culture bearers and culture creators. Somewhere in a corner I noticed the dignified figure of the old woman revolutionist, Vera Zasulich; and in another corner, a group of socialist workers who had come from one of the industrial suburbs to participate in this festival of Russian literature. And to the celebration also came the members of the Moscow Art Theater, the finest art theater in the world. Indeed, there was more, much more. . .

The great sacred glow continued day and night. Saint Petersburg, so it seemed, never slept. At eleven at night, when the sedate, substantial citizens of the "civilized" West were off to sleep in their warm featherbeds, the visiting would first begin in Saint Petersburg. At one o'clock in the morning the Nevsky Prospekt was filled with a large, noisy crowd.

I had been staying with the publisher of the aforementioned

anthology. We frequently spent half the night in lengthy discussion. All night long the ceaseless clattering of hooves resounded on the street one after another, one after another, passing over the asphalt pavement. What one heard was not the noise of the wheels, but the continuous clatter of horses hooves, hour after hour, a persistent turbulence like the pounding of a heart during a sleepless night. And when we finally ended our conversation and turned off the lamps—it was by then the very middle of the night—the house still remained illuminated. The sky was transparent; the city bathed in the wonderful white night, that famous white night of the northern Saint Petersburg.

It is all gone now. The one-time Saint Petersburg is no more. It is just about four years since it began to die. . . I remember at the time the agony of death was beginning, having read an article in the newspaper which Gorky was publishing then. The author had drawn upon an illustration from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in which Tolstoy depicted Moscow on the eve of the entry of Napoleon's army. He compared it to a beehive abandoned by the bees: deathlike emptiness and ruin. The same thing had happened to Saint Petersburg. A dead city. Will it ever rise up from the dead? It is highly doubtful; I fear it will not. In any event, not in its earlier form. Ostrovsky's sad words, it seems, have been realized; the city has faded out like the clouds which used to enfold it.

When Peter the Great built the city in the region of cold forests and humid swamps, his opponents—the opposition of that day, the supporters of the “Old Believers”—voiced a dire prophecy: “The city shall become a wasteland.”¹ That mystical prophecy, one feels, has come to pass. The city has become a wasteland. Here is one of the greatest sacrifices the Russian people have laid upon the altar of war and revolution. It remains a cemetery. Yet how dear is that vast cemetery to anyone who has left a piece of his heart there!

1. The Old Believers, also known as the Old Ritualists, received their appellation because of a stubborn refusal to accept various reforms in Orthodox Church ritual carried out by the powerful and high-handed Patriarch Nikon in the seventeenth century. These schismatics—the *raskolniki*—resented the Patriarch's effort to abandon the concept of Moscow as “The Third and Last Rome.” Accordingly, when Peter the Great, some years later, went even further and abandoned Moscow altogether, the Old Believers condemned him as the very “antichrist.”

Once More Abroad

AFTER VISITING MY sister in Moscow for a few days, I went abroad in the month of May. My destination: Geneva, by way of Vilno and Berlin. I counted on staying there for only a short time, perhaps a summer. It never occurred to me that I would be remaining abroad for years. Yet that is what happened, in the wake of sad and depressing reports I received from Russia in mid-summer. The Central Committee had been reduced to such straits that it was unable even to sustain its members. Except for a few people who remained professionals, all the others had to settle down in various localities—in Vilno, for instance, or in Warsaw—and take legitimate positions as a means of earning their daily bread. Most turned to teaching. I would not have been able to do it, since I was still living as an “illegal.” During the preceding year I had made a cautious attempt in Vilno to acquire legal status; it proved futile. There was no sense in going to Russia and becoming a burden on the party. A broad field of activity for a speaker and writer did not exist. Moreover, I was not an individual cut out for practical organizational activity. I therefore considered it proper to remain abroad, where I would find greater opportunities to engage in something. And my stay was prolonged for all of four years.

I established myself in Geneva. It was a time when numerous leaders of the Russian movement had gone abroad. The Russian newspapers carried an announcement that the government was look-

ing for “*Dvoryanin* (Nobleman) Vladimir Ulyanov” and “*Meshchanin* (Citizen) Yuli Tsederbaum.” The reference was to Lenin and Martov. At the time I encountered them they were already abroad. Once again Russian Social Democratic newspapers began to appear outside the country. We too swiftly decided to issue a Bund newspaper in Geneva named *Otkliki Bunda* (*The Answer of the Bund*). It was reminiscent of the period following the year 1905.

A special meeting of the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party took place right after my arrival in Geneva. The Central Committee had already been elected at the London Congress the year before. Its headquarters were nominally in Saint Petersburg, but it had actually ceased to exist during the recent past. Arrests, persecutions, the departure abroad of a series of the most prominent leaders had brought activity at the center to a standstill. After a lengthy hiatus, a meeting of the Central Committee was finally arranged; it had to be shifted all the way to distant Switzerland. It took place in Geneva, at the quarters of the Bund’s Foreign Committee—the “Carougeke.”

About ten or eleven participants were present at the meeting. The Bund was represented by two delegates, Ezra Rozen and myself. The whole session (it lasted for several days) was occupied with a running conflict between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. I remember two major items which provoked the sharpest clashes. The first question centered on the matter of “expropriations.”

Reference has already been made to that subject in connection with my account of the London Congress. The congress had forbidden the “exes” and had decided to dissolve the “fighting organizations.” But now the Mensheviks came forward with complaints against the Central Committee (in which the opposing faction had the primary say) for not implementing the decision. It turned out that several persons had been arrested in Paris and Munich only a short time before—Bolsheviks (one of whom is at present numbered among the “big guns” of the Russian Soviet government!) in the process of seeking to exchange in local banks a number of Russian banknotes which had been stolen somewhere during an “ex-

1. This is a reference to Maxim Litvinov.

propriation.” The Mensheviks contended that the Bolshevik-run Central Committee was mixed up in this and similar matters.²

Quite typically, the Bolshevik members of the Central Committee refused to admit their guilt. Indeed they responded with an “offensive defense,” with a counter-accusation. They advanced their own disclosures, charging that the Central Committee, when it was still under Menshevik control, had also made use of such tainted money; that “exes” had been carried out on its behalf somewhere in the Caucasus. The Mensheviks, of course, also denied this. So that it boiled down to two parallel accusations and, in the end, nothing came of the matter.

Another issue was brand-new: the question of the so-called “Liquidators.” It represented quite a new phenomenon in Russian party life.

What it involved was this: the Russian Social Democratic organizations, which had flourished rather nicely during the spirited years 1905–1906, and begun to conduct large-scale activities, had now slipped back into a very unhappy condition. The mass movement was somnolent. The frictions among the Bolsheviks had come to occupy the central spot in the whole of party life. There was no activity whatsoever of a broad nature; there were no masses. What survived were little groups of remaining party leaders involved in constant bickering and in the conduct of small and petty circles and circle politics. As a consequence, there developed among a certain sec-

2. “. . . There is no doubt that Lenin was directly implicated in the most notorious expropriation, which took place in Tiflis on June 13, 1907. The London Congress had just banned partisan activities and expropriations and ordered ejection from the Party of those who would continue them. But on this date Semyon Ter-Petrosyan, the famous Kamo of the Caucasian terrorist exploits [‘His direct boss at one time was none else than Stalin’], directed the bombing and hold-up of an armed convoy transferring 250,000 rubles to the state bank. Proceeds of the robbery, the Bolshevik source states unequivocally, were conveyed to Lenin in Kuokkala [Finland]. The smaller denominations were left there; some five-hundred-ruble notes of which the police had the serial numbers were sewn by Krupskaya, among others, in the vest of a Bolshevik courier who conveyed them abroad. Other high denominations were carried to Berlin by Kamo himself. The attempt to exchange them . . . led to the arrests of the Bolsheviks all over Europe.” Ulam, *Bolsheviks*, pp. 279–80; see also *supra*, pp. 405 and *ibid.*, f.n. 2; 433–34.

tion of the Menshevik leaders a kind of distaste for the small, illegal, underground party organization. Nothing good, it was claimed, could come from this type of organization; there was no point in expending labor and energy to maintain this party. The only effort that was worthwhile involved activity among the broad public organizations of workers in the form of trade unions, cultural societies, cooperatives. Here was the real labor movement. The illegal party circles should, accordingly, be completely "liquidated." It was this "liquidation" expression that gave rise to the term "Liquidators."

It is worth noting that only a mere handful of persons adhered to this view. The overwhelming majority of the Menshevik faction, at every level, was not in agreement with it. True, the whole Menshevik faction did devote considerable attention to the "open" labor organizations. It did believe in fact that they should be utilized in the broadest fashion, but it simultaneously held that an illegal political party organization was completely necessary and could under no condition be dispensed with. The Bolsheviks, however, tremendously inflated the liquidationist danger. They utilized it as a means of compromising Menshevism altogether. Hence their ceaseless accusations that all Mensheviks were culpable. Their object was to degrade Menshevism in the eyes of the workers.³ And in the course of the suc-

3. In dealing with the situation in 1908, it would, perhaps, have been more appropriate for Medem to have referred to Leninists (or at least "Bolshevik-Leninists") than simply to Bolsheviks. The erosion of the Bolshevik group (these "Majorityites" in the RSDWP actually ceased being such within months after the end of the Second Congress in 1903), in which Lenin had enjoyed unquestioned authority and the fidelity of his followers when the group began to function virtually as an incipient political party in 1904, reached an advanced stage by 1908. Wrote Shub (*Lenin*, p. 131): "A wave of desertions from the Bolshevik Center included some of its leading writers and theoreticians, among them Maxim Gorky, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, Professor Rozhkov, Alexinsky, Professor Pokrovsky and Stanislav [Nicholas?] Volsky. These men indicted Lenin for disregarding the majority will of his own faction, for illegal seizure of party funds and the party press and for seeking to suppress all independent opinion. Krassin . . . also deserted Lenin for reasons of his own. In later years some of these men were to return to the Bolshevik camp, but in 1908 Lenin stood almost alone. The two leading Bolsheviks who remained firmly at Lenin's side throughout this crisis were Gregory Zinoviev and Leo Kamenev. . . ."

Thus, it was an enraged Lenin, seeking also perhaps to compensate for his intra-

ceeding years—until the outbreak of the World War—the struggle of the Bolsheviks against Menshevism was waged under the banner of “Saving the Party” from the “Liquidators.”

The tip-off was given at that meeting of the Central Committee in Geneva during the summer of 1908. The Bolsheviks gave currency to some kind of story about a few Menshevik leaders refusing to participate in the work of the Central Committee. (I can no longer remember whether they were really “Liquidators” or whether it was

factional slippage, who charged into battle and broke a lance with the Mensheviks, a hatred for whom had reached pathological proportions in the period since 1903. “Pathological” is used here advisedly. No other characterization seems possible after a reading, for instance, of the penetrating memoirs of Nikolay Valentinov (N. V. Volsky), Lenin’s erstwhile Bolshevik confidante and sounding-board in 1904, at a time when Lenin was crystallizing his thoughts on the eve of writing his anti-Menshevik diatribe, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. They had developed a fixed routine: half-hour walks along the quai du Mont-Blanc in Geneva, during which Lenin would hold forth. Valentinov was less concerned with enumerating Lenin’s specific criticisms of the Mensheviks than with describing “the changes in Lenin’s state of mind as he delved further and further into the political sins of the Mensheviks, real and imaginary.”

“From the contemptuous and ironical tones with which he had begun his analysis of the ‘riff-raff’ [these were followers of the Mensheviks, among whom Lenin included the Bund], Lenin passed abruptly to caustic anger, and eventually to what I have called *rage*. I recall especially one day when Lenin, in the grip of this rage, startled me with his appearance. . . . One might have thought that he was drunk: actually, he was not and could not have been—I never saw him drink more than one glass of beer. He was excited and flushed, and his eyes were bloodshot. Never before had he spoken about the Martovists, the supporters of the new *Iskra*, in a word, about the Mensheviks, with such intense fury and with such abuse. His accusations against the Mensheviks had never before gone so far. During the seven or eight days in which I had not seen him, Lenin’s attitude to the Mensheviks had turned into a burning, unbridled, and savage hatred.” (Earlier, Valentinov noted that when he arrived in Geneva in January 1904 and first met Lenin after escaping from Russia, “Lenin was in a very depressed mood. Two months earlier, on 1 November 1903, he had been compelled to give up the editorship of his beloved *Iskra*. This was a real tragedy for him, an intolerable wound to his pride. He felt as if he had been overthrown, and deprived of both power and position. All the outstanding party leaders in Geneva were Mensheviks. Only a small circle of his supporters stuck by him. His confederates in the Central Committee in Russia, who had been elected at the Party Congress, had started to lean towards ‘conciliationism,’ instead of waging a relentless struggle against the Mensheviks, as Lenin demanded.”)

merely a frame-up against them.) What followed was a big hue and cry and the unleashing of a lusty assault upon the Bund. Because the Bund stood closer to the Mensheviks on political questions at that time, the charge of being “liquidationist” was leveled against it, too. Despite the fact that the accusation was totally false, all protests proved unavailing. As long as a convenient weapon could be found with which to assail an opposing faction, there was no desire to relinquish the weapon; it continued to be used year after year.

During the next walk, Lenin unburdened himself on the matter of Jacobinism and Blanquism, for which un-Marxian attributes he had been assailed by the Mensheviks. “They (the minority) charge us with Jacobinism, Blanquism, and other horrible things,” said Lenin. “These idiots, these Girondins, don’t even understand that they are paying us a compliment by making such charges.” Lenin’s anger was visible. “[His] cheeks flushed with rage, his eyes narrowed to sharp points.”

Valentinov met Lenin a few days later. “He was still in a rage and kept on saying that in his book [*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*] he would develop at length all the arguments for the inevitable split. . . . After [two other meetings], during which Lenin spoke with the same bitterness about the necessity for a split in the Party, I did not see him for more than a week. . . . I gasped when I saw him again: he was unrecognizable. The gradual nervous exhaustion from which he had evidently been suffering for weeks was all too obvious now. He looked a very sick man. His face had turned yellow, his eyes were heavy and dead-looking, and his eyelids were swollen, as if he had not slept for a long time; his whole appearance showed the marks of extreme fatigue. ‘Are you ill?’ I asked him. Lenin shrugged his shoulders and did not answer. . . . I broke [the] rather oppressive silence by asking how his work was getting on, and if it was nearly finished?” Lenin gave a cryptic reply: “Never before have I written anything in a mood like my present one. What I write and revise makes me feel sick. I have to force myself.”

Observed Valentinov: “Whatever his reasons and motives, it was apparent that Lenin had completely reversed himself in the course of writing his book. As he neared the end of it, he went back on his call for breaking off all party contacts with the Mensheviks and declared that this was out of the question. He undoubtedly arrived at this decision with great difficulty. Not without reason did he lose weight, grow haggard, and turn sallow. He had to suppress the rage that was storming inside him, he had to control himself, he had to revise the text of his book and alter a number of pages in it. This is why writing it made him ‘feel sick’ and why he had to ‘force’ himself.”

Citing other instances of Lenin’s rage associated with personal, non-political episodes in his life, Valentinov wrote: “He put this kind of *rage*—but with even greater fury—into his public, revolutionary, and intellectual activity. He wrote to Inessa Armand [his Bolshevik comrade and sometime paramour] in 1916:

It was Lenin himself who stepped forward at that meeting with the charge against the Bund. As a consequence I had a rather sharp clash with him. The man's conduct, in this connection, was interesting; he behaved like a *kalter gazlen* (cold-blooded thug). I had had frequent opportunities to observe his conduct and had never seen him lose his frigid, stubborn composure. At the time he advanced his accusation against the Bund I took the floor, denied the charge, and offered him an appropriate response. The tone I used was exceeding-

'That is my life! One fighting campaign after another. . . . It has been going on since 1893. And so has the hatred of the philistines on account of it! But still, I would not exchange this life for "peace" with the philistines.'

On July 9, 1921, Lenin wrote to Gorky: "I am so tired, I can do *nothing at all*." Valentinov was prompted to observe: "It would be worth following into the period after October 1917 the ebbs and flows of Lenin's *rage*, which eventually turned this impetuous man into a paralytic incapable of speaking or of moving his arms and legs. . . . That was what Lenin was like. . . . It would seem that people like this, subject to such jumps in their cerebral system, are bound to die of haemorrhage of the brain, as Lenin did. . . ."

Valentinov's vivid descriptions of Lenin's wildly fluctuating emotions suggested the manic-depressive state. In the course of a conversation with Valentinov in 1927, Bogdanov, the leading Bolshevik and one-time close collaborator of Lenin's (he was a doctor as well as a natural scientist, philosopher, and economist), commented, with reference to the years around 1906: "Watching certain reactions of Lenin's over several years, . . . as a doctor, I concluded that Lenin occasionally suffered from a mental condition and displayed symptoms of abnormality." Nikolay Valentinov (N. V. Volsky), *Encounters With Lenin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 121–51; 236; and *passim*.

It was, accordingly, against this ideological-emotional background tinged with pathology that Lenin mounted his offensive against the "Liquidators" and kept at it for years. By attaching the label "Liquidators" to political adversaries, and extrapolating from the term all manner of betrayal and treason to the Marxist cause, Lenin was using a method of political struggle which he developed into an art form (and from which he would reap vast dividends in his thrust for power in 1917). It was his distinctive style of *ad hominem* argumentation; he was the political chemist identifying various elements of sin and fashioning them into foul-smelling amalgams of treacherous ideas propagated by equally treacherous individuals. Ransacking the vocabulary of insults, Lenin hurled about his political pejoratives with reckless abandon: "Liquidators"; "Economists"; "Conciliators"; "Political Cretins"; "Waverers"; "Vulgarizers of Marxism"; "Philistines"; "Separatists" (this one reserved for the Bund!); "Riff-Raff" (also used against the Bund). Coining—or appropriating—such terms, Lenin proceeded to generalize from them in the process

ly pungent: and the form as well. I said that his words were frivolous and undignified. One would have thought that such a thrust against an individual who was, even at that early date, accustomed to being treated with the greatest respect, at least by his own people, would have aroused him. Nothing of the sort. He merely cast a swift, piercing glance toward me with his small dark eyes and kept silent—as if it had nothing to do with him. And that was the manner he used to adopt all the time.

of denigrating his targets, whether individuals or whole groups. By sheer repetition, he endowed the terms and the individuals to which he attached them (there was a scattershot quality in all this reminiscent of the method of Senator Joseph McCarthy) with utterly devilish attributes, the attributes of political sub-humans, hence tangible objects of hate for the pure-of-heart, innocent proletarians susceptible to corruption by several varieties of devil. (“We draw the attention of the workers to. . .”).

Lenin’s technique was also applied in similar fashion and with like purpose *directly* to human adversaries across the political and geographic spectrum by the simple device of adding an “ism” or “ist” to names such as Akimov and Jaurès (to cite only two of the more prominent examples), or by erecting whole categories from individual names by transmuting them into the plural form as, for instance, “the Akimovs,” “the Martynovs,” “the Millerands,” “the Vollmars.” (This was the amalgam—scattershot technique on a continental scale!)

Lenin reserved much of his hostility for the Bund, and something of the flavor of his style and disputation with the Bund (its sin, as already noted, was “Separatism,” but he blithely—and dishonestly—coupled the Bundists with the “Liquidators” too) may be derived from his response to an article by Vladimir Kosovsky in which the latter had the *khutspah* to offer a vigorous rejoinder to Lenin’s charges: “Don’t lie, Mr. Separatist and Jewish liberal. Lies will not help you, for you will be exposed. . . . Any worker . . . will understand well enough that a petty liar who has been caught red-handed is seeking salvation in evasion and imprecation. You will not scare the workers that way, gentlemen. . . . Messrs. Kossovsky, Medem & Co., are a group of liberal intellectuals that is corrupting the Jewish workers with bourgeois nationalism and separatism. For this reason *Pravda* has fought against and will continue to fight against the Bund.” “Has *Pravda* Given Proof of Bundist Separatism?”, *Pravda*, No. 127 June 5, 1913; in Lenin, *Collected Works* (1963), XIX, 176.

At the very time Lenin, the true-blue revolutionist, was hurling these ideological thunderbolts from the safety of the Austro-Polish city of Cracow, the “liberal intellectual” Medem—hands and feet shackled—was in custody of the Russian police, moving through the unspeakable Russian prison system in a twenty-five month ordeal that would test his every physical and moral fiber, and leave his life hanging on the thread of a thread until a *deus ex machina* in the form of the German army

The meeting of the Central Committee produced no tangible results, and the petty conflicts in the party persisted and grew stronger with each passing day. Another plenary session of the Central Committee took place a half year later—with the same outcome. The single achievement was the creation of a Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee. Its Russian initials were *ZBTsK* [*Zagranichnoye Buro Tsentralnovo Komiteta*]. This *ZBTsK* entered into the history of the Russian party as an arena of endless friction and argument. No useful, constructive work was accomplished. The Bund had all the while endeavored to play the role of peacemaker and worked tirelessly to bring the two factions together. Considerable energy and effort were expended toward this end; but all the exertions were in vain. In place of unity, additional fragmentation occurred. The Bolsheviks themselves split into two factions: the official Bolsheviks, with Lenin at the head; and the “Boycottists” or “Recallists” (Russian: *otzovists*), as they were known—led by Alexinsky and Bogdanov.⁴ The “Recallists” were so named because of their view that it was necessary to “recall” the Social Democratic deputies of the Duma. There was no role for them in the Duma, it was argued, and they should be withdrawn. A separate faction also took shape among the Mensheviks, under the leadership of Plekhanov. Plekhanov took seriously the Bolshevik accusations against the “Liquidators” and established a distinct faction among the Mensheviks to fight the “Liquidators.” A feeling for unification subsequently arose among a segment of the Bolsheviks. But in the sequel, unification did not come to pass; instead, these people set themselves off as still another faction. And even a sixth faction took shape: Trotsky established—also in

seized Warsaw during the second year of the First World War and enabled him to gain freedom. See *infra*, chaps. 75–85.

4. “In 1907, at the July Conference of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks to consider the Third Duma, fourteen out of fifteen Bolshevik delegates (all but Lenin!) had been for boycott and they had named Bogdanov instead of him as spokesman for the faction. All through 1908 this nagging conflict smoldered and flared up again: now as ‘boycottism,’ now as *otzovism* or ‘recallism,’ now as ‘ultimatism.’ Not till the middle of 1908 did Lenin win a slender majority on tactical questions in Moscow, and not until 1909 in Petersburg.” Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, p. 505.

the name of unity—a separate group, and he began to issue a paper of his own in Vienna. It was all a characteristic phenomenon of disintegration and decay. Factions and groups sprang up like mushrooms after a rain. The Menshevik leader, Dan, was correct when he once observed at a meeting that what was happening in the party was not just a split, but simply a crumbling into tiny pieces. There was a direct correlation between the absence of a mass movement and the proliferation of small circles and grouplets. Where there is no control by the broad mass of workers, every self-willed character presumes to run the show.

I did not participate in the efforts of the Bund to bring about peace among the warring factions. Our comrades who later came abroad, such as Yoyne and Liber, did devote themselves energetically to it; but I was averse to such activity. All of the friction had induced in me, in a personal way, a feeling of real disgust. Politically I held to the view that nothing would come of it. It was my conviction that the conflicts among the factions were an expression of a profound *malaise* which had befallen the Russian movement. It was an internal sickness specific to the Russian organizations, for which a cure could not come from without. Only the development of a mass movement would put an end to all the ugly and distressing manifestations, and no such movement could be fashioned by diplomatic efforts on the part of the Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee. Hence my preference for remaining wholly on the sidelines, while devoting myself almost exclusively to our Bund activity. I promptly joined the Foreign Committee of the Bund, participated in its publications, traveled about delivering lectures, worked on the anthologies which were published within Russia, although composed outside. (The task of editing the anthologies had been entrusted to the Foreign Committee.)

I spent the latter half of the summer of 1908 in the mountains. After a lengthy interruption of three years I finally received the opportunity to realize that for which I had yearned so powerfully while in Vilno: spending a few months in the bosom of Swiss nature. I visited several new and unfamiliar places, discovered new and unfamiliar beauties. Autumn provided the greatest loveliness. It was then that I made a brief visit to the part of Switzerland which had

previously been virtually unknown to me—that small corner near Lake Maggiore known as Italian Switzerland. I had already visited this area a few years before, but the visit had been very brief, just a few days. Now I stayed there for three whole weeks.

How wonderful that interlude, and the environs of the small village of Ascona on the shore of Lake Maggiore, not far from the city of Locarno. The same Switzerland, yet so different: a slice of Italy! The same land, yet another world. Glorious fall days. Three weeks of solid sunshine—a mild, calm, autumnal sun, the air gentle, clear and autumnal. Vineyards were everywhere, and in the vineyards the grapes—heavy, dark, ripe, suffusing the air with their aroma. Through the fragrant air wafted the music of the fetching, sonorous Italian language and the beautiful Italian song. Fruit at every turn: in addition to the luscious grapes, fresh, tender figs—dark blue on the outside, light, rose-colored on the inside, the flesh sweet, soft, and succulent. A small Italian inn where I would take my lunch each day. A little courtyard surrounded by a high stone wall, with heavy stone tables and stone benches. The dark red Italian wine. A few striking human figures: German artists—“nature-people”—vegetarians, who used to walk about garbed in linens, with hair unshorn, in stockingless feet. A small boat on the lake, with its two long oars. The rowing was done standing up, not seated, as among us. In a little boat a young lad, silently and slowly working the oars, singing an Italian folk song in a soft, tender voice. Overlooking the lake, a quiet road high on the mountain. A large, red moon shining above; and below—the gray, calm water. On a quiet night I would walk past the small old Italian cemetery enclosed by a new wall, its dreamy small white tombstones standing among the tall, green, southern trees. Or I would take a boat far out into the lake, to the breathtakingly beautiful islands. The very names of the little islands had the resonance of the lovely Italian music: *Isola Bella* (“The Pretty Island”), *Isola Madre* (“The Mother Island”). I disembarked. It was like a dream: magnificent gardens, with exotic trees and flowers from the hottest, most distant southern climes. And strutting about slowly and proudly on the steps of an old Italian palace, under the glowing Italian sun, were the fantastic figures of shining white peacocks, their snow-white feathers outstretched. And returning home in the even-

ing, I would find a seat at the stone table of the little inn (the courtyard was illuminated by an old iron lamp) and partake of Italian delicacies and drink the dark red wine. It was like a dream. . .

We spent three weeks in that pleasant district. (With me was the woman who is now my wife.) For three weeks in a row the sun shone; not a single cloudy day, not one day of rain and fog. Ever the beautiful, untamed radiance of the warm south—so much like Italy. And when we had to return to Geneva, we felt as though we were leaving a bright dreamland for the gray, “cold reality.” It was very cold, and the cobblestone pavement of the Geneva streets was covered with a heavy dampness. It had rained. It was the real autumn, the depressing autumn. But there still rang in my ears the hushed and lovely song of the Italian lad on Lake Maggiore’s bright blue waters.

I spent nearly four years in Geneva. That is not to say that I stayed put during the whole period. I traveled about a great deal, just as I had during my first four years of living in Switzerland. Each winter I would undertake an extended lecture tour. The topics of my lectures were: “Social Tendencies in Jewish Life”; “Modern Art and Marxist Criticism”; “Proletarian Zionism”; “The National Question in Russia.” At the same time I participated in the most varied literary tasks. The party literature of the Bund was then quite sparse: occasionally a Yiddish anthology, a Russian journal published abroad, and a few issues of an illegal newspaper inside Russia. It was not enough. So I had to find a berth also in nonpartisan publications. I would write for the Russian-Jewish periodical, *Yevreyskiy Mir* (*The Jewish World*); for *Vestnik Yevropi* (*The Herald of Europe*); occasionally for *Der Fraynd* (a polemic against A. Vayter and Hersh-Dovid Nomberg). A few of my articles also appeared in the German *Die Neue Zeit* (*The New Era*) under the editorship of Karl Kautsky.

I do not intend to present a chronological, year-by-year account of my life in Geneva. Each year was sufficiently like the next. I wish merely to pinpoint a few specific episodes.

The Kaplinsky Story

IN 1908 THERE BEGAN a series of disclosures about provocateurs, disclosures associated with the name of Vladimir Burtsev. He was living in Paris, where he had established ties with an official of the *Okhrana*—Michael Bakai—who helped him “work up” the secret materials. Each party received its “gifts.” The biggest sensation was the Azev story, which almost destroyed the Socialist Revolutionary Party. A number of lesser provocateurs were discovered inside the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. Burtsev became especially productive after the arrival in Paris of another, and higher, official of the Russian political police, Leonid Menshchikov, who brought along with him a whole mass of secret documents which he had purloined from his Russian police department. The year was 1909, the year in which the “general of provocateurs” of the Bund was also exposed: Yisroel Mikhl Kaplinsky (“Langzam”).

One morning I arrived at the “Carougeke,” the headquarters of our Foreign Committee, and found the handful of committee members there in a state of tremendous agitation. A letter had arrived from Burtsev. Burtsev alluded to information in his possession about the presence of a certain very important provocateur in the Bund, a central figure in the organization, but he did not know his name. He only knew that the name had a connection of some kind

with a . . . pharmacy. Moreover, he knew that the provocateur in question had taken part in a Bund conference whose participants had been arrested in Warsaw in 1906. That was all.

We became terribly upset. We were familiar with the total composition of that Warsaw conference. None but old, tested comrades had participated in it. We knew all of them from way back and trusted them as we would each other. Every one of them was above suspicion. We talked about the people involved, mentioned one name after another—went down the list. Could this one be a provocateur? Impossible! Or perhaps that one? Ridiculous! Maybe so-and-so? Madness! And then that mysterious connection with a pharmacy—what could it mean? What is the significance of a pharmacy? We were at a complete loss as to what it meant. Yet, upon further reflection, we knew that Burtsev's reports were reliable. His previous revelations had been accurate. There must be something in it. What to do?

We decided for the time being not to write to Russia about the matter. We requested of Burtsev that he seek to obtain more precise information. We sent him a letter and waited for a reply.

I can't recall how long we had to wait. Perhaps a few days; possibly a couple of weeks. We were in a state of dreadful impatience during that wait. Could it be that we, too, had our very own Azev in the Bund? Finally another letter arrived: this time Burtsev also knew the name. It was Yisroel Kaplinsky.

We were terribly shaken by this intelligence; but at the same time we breathed a bit easier. Indeed, Kaplinsky had been one of the key people in the organization, involved in some of the most conspiratorial activities. His "profession" was establishing our illegal printshops. He knew a great deal and was in a position to do tremendous damage, yet we found one source of consolation: he was not a member of the Central Committee. Our highest party authority had thus remained inviolable; and this fact put us at ease.

Now, for the first time, the business about the pharmacy became clear. It involved the word "drops." Drops, of course, are sold in a pharmacy; and the Russian word for drop is *kaplya*. Hence the name Kaplinsky did have a "relationship" with a pharmacy. Yet who would have conceivably hit upon such a connection before the arrival of the new information from Burtsev?

But the matter was still not sufficiently clear because Kaplinsky, as already noted, had been privy to virtually every development concerning things conspiratorial. Hovering constantly about the Central Committee, he was intimately familiar with all of its members and with all important correspondence. I recall a meeting of the Central Committee in Vilno which was held in his residence on Stepanov Street. How then did it happen that everyone was not arrested?

As to what Kaplinsky had definitely done, Burtsev offered us only a few clear items of information: he had "squealed" on a printshop of the Russian party in Kishinev in 1902. We well remembered its seizure: Leon Goldman (Liber's brother) and his wife were arrested on that occasion. But six whole years had passed since then. What had he been doing during that interval? Burtsev's letters provided no answer; the matter remained inexplicable.

It was decided, accordingly, that one of us should leave for Paris immediately and talk to Burtsev; we might perchance be able to elicit further particulars from him.

I went to Paris and saw Burtsev. But he was unable to provide me with additional details. "I wrote you everything I knew," he said to me. He also refused to identify the source of his information. He used to behave in an extremely secretive fashion in those days. If I'm not mistaken, nothing was known at the time about Menshchikov, although he was already in Paris. But Burtsev kept him "under wraps" and allowed no one to approach him. The sole assurance I obtained from Burtsev was that his information was absolutely correct. And with that I departed.

We notified our Central Committee about the whole matter. The subsequent course of the affair is known from the story described not long ago by A. Vaynshteyn in the Minsk *Veker* (part of it has been reprinted in the *Jewish Daily Forward*). The confrontation with Kaplinsky took place. He was informed that his identity was known. Naturally he denied everything from top to bottom and volunteered to go abroad and present himself before a party tribunal. But he did not travel to such a tribunal; instead, he suddenly disappeared. He was subsequently seen in the interior of Russia. After the revolution, Kaplinsky was arrested. I learned a year ago that he was shot on orders of the Soviet government.

Kaplinsky has remained a mysterious figure. There is no doubt that he did work for the *Okhrana*. Yet it is also clear that he failed to betray even a tenth of what he could have betrayed. For had he only wished to do so, he could have betrayed virtually the whole Bund. In any event, he could have “buried” the whole Central Committee and all of the Bund printshops. Indeed, it is a fact that after the seizure in 1898 not a single Jewish printshop was discovered. He evidently played a double game.

He had been arrested at the time of the first major “setback” to the Bund in the year 1898. Zubatov had presumably pressed him to the wall on that occasion and extorted from him a pledge to work for the *Okhrana*. He released him on that condition, and in the course of about ten years Kaplinsky played a part in the movement while under the permanent obligation to feed “intelligence” to the political police. He would do it very cautiously. He was a clever, dispassionate, easygoing individual. He could otherwise not have maintained his pose for so long. It is interesting to note that Kaplinsky was more liberal in his disclosure of information about non-Bundist leaders and happenings. Where the Bund itself was concerned, he was exceedingly frugal. Why so? Some people claim it was simply astute calculation on his part: had he revealed all the Bund secrets he knew, the finger of suspicion would quickly have pointed toward him, and he would have long since been exposed. But others have suggested that there remained hidden away in the black soul of the provocateur a modicum of devotion to our party, after all. Lacking the courage to break with the gendarmes, he desired nevertheless to minimize the injury to the movement with which he had been associated for years. He carried that secret with him to the grave.

For the rest, the matter is of purely psychological interest. The name Kaplinsky remains inscribed on the black slate of the Bund’s history. It is the name of a traitor and miscreant.

73.

Two Congresses

AFTER A LENGTHY interval of four years, a conference of the Bund was convened in the autumn of 1910. The worst of the period of social reaction and helplessness was over. The nadir had been reached during the years 1908 and 1909. Scores of people had left the movement. A mass of workers had departed for America. The intelligentsia fled the movement virtually in toto. Numerous organizations had to make do without any forces of the intelligentsia at all. But the Bund as a whole never ceased for a moment to exist and to function. The local organizations of the more important cities never suspended their activities; and the Central Committee—even if smaller in composition—remained on the job and fulfilled its tasks throughout the period. In this respect, the Bund was the only workers' organization on the Jewish workers' "street" which was capable of successfully overcoming its prolonged and severe crisis. Of the other parties, there remained only dispersed, disorganized clusters and a few emigré leaders.

In 1910 one could sense that the direction of things was once again upward. It was a moment of recovery and revival. And the Bund conference was designed to open a new phase of activity. But a considerable legacy still remained from the harsh years of reaction. The worst were the internal disputes. Disagreements of a fairly serious nature manifested themselves within the Bund, and the con-

flicts assumed a rather acute form—more acute than ever before. We were faced with the same question around which the fight was being waged among the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and the “Liquidators”: the question of the so-called “legal possibilities.”

The revolutionary years 1905 and 1906 had left, by way of a legacy, a certain change in the juridical position of the labor movement; particular forms of the movement had been legalized. To be sure, the political organizations of the workers were forced to remain just as illegal and subterranean as prior to 1905. They were hounded, and the punishment meted out proved even more severe than heretofore. But other forms of the movement were allowed. It had already become permissible to create open, legal trade unions, cooperatives, and cultural societies. True, the “permissible” often remained simply a dead letter. The government would interpose a thousand kinds of obstacles which frequently tended to negate the whole business. Nevertheless certain “legal possibilities” had been created. And there arose the problem of the attitude to be adopted toward them.

No “liquidationist” tendency, in the Russian sense of the word, existed in the Bund. Still, there was present also among us a viewpoint that the main focus of activity should be shifted to the open, legal organizations where a broad, mass activity could, and indeed had to be, conducted. The illegal organization was capable of embracing only a limited number of the more tested comrades, those who were obliged to concentrate in their hands the leadership and the coordination of legal activity. Liber and Abramovich were the most energetic proponents of this particular tendency. Noyakh Portnoy and Rakhmiel Vaynshteyn also belonged to the same camp. Another segment of the comrades had no faith in the legal possibilities and approached them with skepticism. They would emphasize the importance of illegal work in the strongest fashion. They held that the mass movement, even during those days and under those conditions, could be poured into the traditional mold of a strictly illegal, “underground” organization. The representative of this tendency in the Central Committee was Yudin, while Litvak served as the literary exponent of this wing. The arguments assumed an exceedingly sharp and passionate character. When the conference assembled in

Lemberg, the relations between the two sides were very strained. In fact, some rather stormy clashes occurred. Nevertheless, Bundist tradition prevailed, and after a lively discussion it was discovered that the issue was not all that crucial. With a display of goodwill on both sides, a compromise solution was sought; and when one seeks with honesty and sincerity, one finds. I can no longer recall the precise text of the adopted resolution. But I do know that it left an appropriate place for both modes of activity. It was both consistent in principle and expedient in practice, and, what was most interesting, after the sharp, highly emotional arguments, the resolution was adopted unanimously. The delegates sensed that the frictions simply had to be eliminated at a time when the reconstituting of party work was beginning, and under conditions of the greatest difficulty. In a word, it was necessary to get along. And that was what happened; the issue disappeared from the agenda once and for all.

The same procedure was followed with respect to all other questions. The agenda of the conference included a series of items which had special reference to Jewish life. These were the questions about the *kehilla*, about Sabbath and Sunday rest, about the rights of the Yiddish language.¹ All these questions gave rise to larger and smaller

1. At its Eighth Conference, the involvement of the Bund with an array of specifically Jewish questions and cultural issues centering upon Yiddish reflected a conscious broadening of concern and commitment in the post-1905 period. The point of departure for the resolution on the Yiddish language was the blatant deprivation of its rights, a deprivation greater than that suffered by any of the other non-Russian languages which enjoyed at least some degree of recognition by the government authorities.

"The resolution on the Yiddish language," wrote Sophia-Dubnov Erlich, "affirms, among other things, that the government authorities and the organs of local self-government must arrive at an understanding with the population in the question of the latter's language; and this must be assured through special laws. Before the effectuation of national-autonomy [the fundamental ethnic demand of the Bund], a successful fight must be waged for the establishment of state schools in the mother tongue; all restrictions must be eliminated with regard to the use of the mother tongue in public life—at meetings, in the press, unions, private schools, etc." Sophia-Dubnov Erlich, "*In di yorn fun reaksye*" ("During the Years of Reaction"); ch. 8: "*Di akhte konferents fun bund*" ("The Eighth Conference of the Bund"), in *Geshikhte fun bund*, II, 579.

differences of opinion; yet the outcome was invariably the same. That line was hit upon with which everyone was in agreement; the disagreements were eliminated; and all resolutions were adopted unanimously.

In a detailed analysis of the conference, Vladimir Kosovsky emphasized the significant part played by specifically Jewish problems during the deliberations. "The work of the conference with respect to these points on the agenda," wrote Kosovsky, "is directly connected to the evolution which we observe in the development of the Bund in the course of the last ten years: the tendency to concretize decisions regarding the questions of Jewish life is growing steadily. . . . We are penetrating more deeply into national problems. . . . The responses provided by the conference testify to the deep organic interest in the national needs and requirements of the Jewish proletariat and of the broad popular masses in general, and testify to the readiness to defend with the greatest energy the demands which flow from these needs both externally as well as internally, within the Jewish environment proper." *Ibid.*, p. 580.

The ascendancy of Yiddish involved something in the nature of a cultural revolution in Jewish life. Yiddish had earlier been designated, somewhat patronizingly, by elitist elements and Russified or Polonized Jewish intellectuals, as simply *zhargon* ("jargon")—the folk tongue—the patois of the masses—with no initial pejorative aspect to the designation. (The masses called it by its own name. Active disparagement and even denigration of Yiddish as a "mere jargon" represented a later response of various Jewish elements, after the devotees of Yiddish had begun to assert themselves and to advance broader claims for the language and the culture associated with it. The consequence was greater defensiveness—coupled with combativeness—on the part of the Bund.)

In the years immediately before the launching of the Bund in 1897, Jargon Committees in a number of cities embarked upon the dissemination of literary materials of a more sophisticated social and intellectual content. A simultaneous increase in literary output of an agitational and propagandistic nature was attributable to the intensified efforts of the Bund pioneers themselves. With each passing year, Jewish national consciousness found more powerful expression within the Bund—a response to, and a reflection of, the growing ethnic self-consciousness in the ranks of its natural constituency, the Jewish working class.

In this fundamental development, Vladimir Medem played a central role, on the level of both theoretical formulation and practical application. See, for instance, his pamphlets or essays, most of which were included in various larger compilations on the national question. A non-exhaustive selection of his writings for the period 1904–1912 alone, and translated into Yiddish prior to Medem's own mastery of the language, included: *Di sotsial-demokratye un di natsionale frage* (*Social Democracy and the National Question*); "*Di natsionale frage un di natsionale sotsialistishe parteyen*" ("The National Question and the National Socialist Parties"); "*Vegn*

Returning to the first resolution, it is interesting to observe that it also resolved, in passing, a vital and a vexatious matter concerning the trade unions. When, in the year 1905, the trade unions, for the first time, had been set apart in the form of an independent organization, the principle continued to be adhered to that these unions must

rusishn natsionaln gezikht" ("On the National Face of Russia"); "*Teoretishe un praktishe fragn fun yidishn lebn*" ("Theoretical and Practical Problems of Jewish Life"); "*Di yidische kehile*" ("The Jewish Kehilla"); "*Natsionalizm oder neytralizm*" ("Nationalism or Neutralism"); "*Notitsn vegn der yidisher natsionaler frage*" ("Notes on the Jewish National Question"); "*Di alveltlikhe yidische natsye*" ("The World-Wide Jewish Nation"); "*Di natsionale frage in rusland*" ("The National Question in Russia"); "*Di yidn-frage in rusland*" ("The Jewish Question in Russia"). See Victor Shulman's annotated bibliographic listing of most of the foregoing, and other major works by Medem, in *Vladimir Medem—tsum tsvantsikstn yortsayt*, pp. 363–67.

Thus, from 1905 onward, the national question and its application in life came to transcend exclusive concern with class. Having already acknowledged the existence of a Jewish nationality, the Bund made clear that Yiddish would no longer serve merely as an organizational handmaiden to its socialist agitation and propaganda, but that it would henceforth be acknowledged as *the* national language, whose literary flowering gave to the period the name "Renaissance." To the three stellar figures of this "Renaissance"—Mendele Moykher Sforim (Sholom Yankev Abramovich—"The Grandfather"); Sholom Aleichem (Sholom Nakhman Rabinovich—"The Grandchild"); and Yitskhok Leybush [Isaac Leib] Peretz—Yiddish was regarded as integral to the very life of the Jewish people, their *mame-loshn* ("mother-tongue"), *the* medium for introducing a vital new dimension into the life of the Jewish masses: the world of modernism, enlightenment, and secular culture.

The contribution of the Bund over the preceding ten years was well summed up in its short-lived daily organ, *Di Hofnung* (*Hope*), in October 1907:

"[The Bund] created a Yiddish culture. . . . The first step of the Jewish workers' movement, the turn from propaganda circles to mass agitation, already begins by cultivating the Yiddish language. To Jews one must speak Yiddish! And all must admit that the Bund greatly developed the Yiddish language, made it richer, more flexible. It turned the market jargon into a language in which serious scientific affairs can be discussed. Speak with an average Jewish worker, and you will see how the Bundist literature has influenced his speech.

"Furthermore, the Bund has taught the Jewish masses how to read. Before, the Jewish workers read only the most entertaining novels. Only the enlightened understood Mendele Moykher Sforim; only a few read Peretz's *Bletlekh* [the periodical *Yomtev Bletlekh* ("Holiday Publications"), which began to appear in 1894, and which became a literary platform for Peretz's then pronounced radical and socialist

be partisan. "Bundist" unions were established—"Bundist" not merely in spirit and composition but also formally, in name and according to their constitutions. The political party would assign to them its representatives who, in certain instances, would even have the right to impose their veto on the decision of the trade union organizations. In subsequent years it turned out that such an arrangement was unsuitable. The conclusion was reached that formal domination by the political party over the unions interfered with their activity, and the conviction was arrived at that the unions ought to enjoy a status of equality within the family of the working class. It was necessary to see that they should become permeated with the socialist spirit without, however, using methods tantamount to automatic dictation. The resolution of the Lemberg conference enunciated and reinforced this new tactic.

Another convention in which I participated that year was the Copenhagen Congress of the International. Our delegation was made up of four persons: Miron Nakhimson (at present a Communist);

feelings]. The Bund created a great circle of readers which needs good books and newspapers, and it created a new literature for this circle. Naturally, both processes went hand in hand. The new circle of readers developed together with the new literature.

"The Jewish masses have received no cultural inheritance from their upper classes, no literature, no art. They must create it all for themselves. The work is great, but a beginning has already been made, and more than by anyone else it has been done by the Bund. It has published over one hundred books and brochures, besides newspapers and journals. The whole general socialist literature, in so far as it is available in Yiddish, is the work of the Bund. The other parties can only total up a few brochures [to their credit]. They use the Bund's literature. They must also admit that many works for the masses not directly from the Bund, were created under its direct influence. Those areas of popular scientific literature not stirred by the Bund still remain unworked fields." (Cited by Herbert J. Lerner, *The Tshernovits Language Conference: A Milestone in Jewish Nationalist Thought*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, Columbia University, 1957.)

A watershed was reached in 1908, the same year as the Bund's Eighth Conference, with the formal recognition of the elevated status of Yiddish at an international conference in Czernovitz, Rumania. The conference, in which Peretz, Zhitlovsky, and Sholom Asch played important parts, adopted the following resolution with respect to Yiddish: "The First Conference for the Yiddish Language recognizes Yiddish as a national language of the Jewish people and demands its political, communal and cultural equality."

Olgin²; Anna Lifshitz (in 1905, during the *Potemkin* affair in Odessa, she became famous as a speaker; she was called at that time “The Female Gapon”); and myself.

In contrast to the Amsterdam Congress, we did not have to wrestle this time over our right to a vote. The constitution of the International had been changed in the interim. Instead of the previous rule that each country should have only two votes, different countries were granted variable votes, on the basis of the size of the country and the significance of its labor movement. Russia had twenty votes. The RSDWP obtained half—the ten votes having already been allotted in advance among the various segments of the party. The Bund had two votes. Representation in the International Socialist Bureau remained as before: two for each country; but right after the Amsterdam Congress, the bureau admitted a special representative of the Bund with a consultative role (voice but no vote). The arrangement was to become permanent. At Copenhagen, I served as that representative.

The work of the congress was neither as rich in content nor as interesting as that in Amsterdam, but one issue proved to be of considerable interest to me; it was the case of the Czech trade unions. A major conflict in the Austrian labor movement had arisen at that juncture between the Czechs and the Germans. The Austrian Social Democratic Party was built upon a federative basis. It consisted of six separate national organizations: German, Czech, Polish, Ukrainian, Italian, and South Slavic. All were united in a common Austrian party. The trade-union movement, however, was a unitary one—centralized, without a separation between the various nationalities. It was in this united trade-union organization that exceedingly bitter disputes flared up at the time. The Czechs insisted that they were being wronged by the German—i.e., the ruling—nation; that the Germans had drawn off special funds from the general trade-union movement for the benefit of their German party, while neglecting the needs of the Czech movement. At the outset they merely requested certain concessions for themselves and had no

2. As already noted (see *supra*, p. 347, f.n. 2), Moissaye Olgin had also become a Communist, indeed a mentor of the Jewish Communist movement in the United States.

desire to rupture the general organizations. But the Germans proved adamant, which in turn strengthened the resistance and poisoned the atmosphere. In the end, the appetite of the Czechs had become so sweeping that they were no longer satisfied with individual concessions. They desired, in short, the establishment of a wholly independent trade-union organization for themselves. A plan of that kind, aimed at dividing the trade-union movement along lines of nationality, was inherently wrong, and the Germans could not agree to it. Hence their complaint to the International and the request that it do something about quieting the rebellious Czechs.

According to custom, the matter was referred for consideration to a special commission. The Russian Social Democratic delegation was authorized to send two representatives to the commission. I had become extremely interested in the matter and would have been ready to join the commission. But there were many volunteers—first among them Plekhanov. Naturally, he was selected. Which left the second position open. When my candidacy was advanced, the Bolshevik majority of the delegation reacted quite negatively. Those gentlemen suspected that I sympathized with the Czech requests. Actually this was not so, despite my view that the Germans were, to some degree, at fault over the question's having become so exacerbated. Yet my standpoint was the same as theirs: the Bund had always favored a unified trade-union movement.³ Although the delegation should have known that, they wished to subject me to some sort of special test on this matter. I balked at it, and my candidacy, as a consequence, fell through. In place of me they sent some Lett or Estonian who did not even bother to attend all the sessions of the commission, and on the occasions when he would attend, he never uttered a word. A Russian comrade—a delegate of the Russian

3. Lenin attended the Copenhagen Congress of the Socialist International and presumably knew the position of the Bund. Yet see his disingenuous effort to fashion an amalgam between the "Separatists" (Czech Social Democrats, Bundists—Medem and Kosovsky) and the "Liquidators" (Mensheviks), in "Separatists in Russia and Separatists in Austria." ". . . The prominent Bundist, Medem, in the well-known book, *Forms of the National Movement* (St. Petersburg, 1910), admits that the Bundists . . . have always been separatists." This method of putting words into peoples' mouths was also characteristic of Lenin's polemical style. *Pravda*, No. 104, May 8, 1913; in *Collected Works*, XIX, 88.

trade unions—and I were chosen as alternate candidates.

I attended every session of the commission. All the speakers who opposed me were Czechs. Yet, notwithstanding the faultiness of their requests, I believed there was a small core of validity in their argument. True, no separate Czech unions were justified, and the unified unions were, after all, under no obligation to satisfy their needs; yet this remained the only way to eliminate the conflict—to do nothing meant to bring on a split. Since I was not a member of the commission, I could not obtain the floor. I expressed my viewpoint, however, in the form of a supplement to the resolution. And I approached Plekhanov with a request that he submit it. He was not eager to do so, offering various excuses, and finally wriggled out of it. However Walecki, one of the Polish delegates, had evinced an interest in my resolution. He asked me for a copy, discussed it with a few other people, changed its form slightly, and brought it before the commission. The resolution was adopted. But the dispute between the Czechs and the Germans had already gone much too far, and the congress was unable to bring its influence to bear upon them. The definitive split in the trade unions occurred in short order, a split which also ripped to shreds the political party.

It must be admitted that the International had oriented itself quite inadequately in this matter. The following minor incident was typical. When the commission concluded its work, it was proposed that Plekhanov be the one to deliver the report to the plenum. Well, Plekhanov may have been a brilliant report-deliverer, but that was not the point. Of greater interest was the explanation offered for his selection. Plekhanov—it was urged—was a Russian, a representative of a Slavic people. The Czechs were also Slavs. Thus the effect upon the Czechs would be the more salutary were he to deliver the report. They were, after all, of one ethnic family! Here was truly a testimonial to unreality. For Slavism really played no part whatsoever in the whole conflict. It was a conflict between a *ruling* nation and a national minority; this was the essence of the matter. And even granting the desirability of selecting someone capable of commanding greater confidence among the Czechs, the choice should have actually fallen upon a representative of a national minority, whether Slavic or non-Slavic—this was of no consequence at all—who was familiar, from his own experience, with the special plight of

a minority. Instead of this they selected a representative precisely of a ruling nation which had never experienced national injustice of any sort and to which the national question was completely alien. Plekhanov delivered the report in fact, and the congress did adopt a resolution. But as already noted, it provided absolutely no remedy. The Czechs refused to abide by it.

While I'm on the subject of the congress, I should mention a small consultation which took place in Paris. (It was during the same year, I believe, or possibly in the year 1911.) The consultation was arranged by the Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee (*ZBTsK*) for the purpose of exploring the question of unifying the groups abroad of the Russian party, the Bund, the Letts, and the Poles. The participants in this small consultation were Zinoviev; Warski—for the Poles; Yoyne and I—for the Bund. I cannot recall the representative of the Letts.

The consultation took place in the official quarters of the *ZBTsK*. It produced no results whatsoever, and left an exceedingly unpleasant aftertaste. Zinoviev conducted himself in a literally disgusting manner. When it was all over and we were in the process of departing, there took place a minor, albeit meaningful, incident. I was walking toward the door with Yoyne. As soon as we passed through, Yoyne stopped, and, deep in thought, proceeded to wipe his shoes against the floor. It was no conscious attempt at humor; he had been thinking of something else. It was simply an automatic gesture, an unconscious expression of a feeling of having left some kind of squalid place whose dirt one felt impelled to shake from one's feet. I looked at him in surprise: "What are you doing?" He caught himself, and we burst into unrestrained laughter. Yoyne Koygen is now a Communist, working for the Bolsheviks.⁴

4. One of his superiors was the same Zinoviev who, at the time of Medem's writing (1921), was a leading member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, head of the Communist International, and party "boss" over that very Saint Petersburg (Petrograd) which Medem elegized as a "wasteland" and a "cemetery." Zinoviev contributed mightily toward making the "cemetery" more than a metaphoric expression. During the crisis-ridden year 1921—"the point at which," in the words of one writer, "the Soviet regime began to devour its conscience"—Zinoviev, the quintessential Leninist, proved to be the authentic "liquidator": he played a leading role in the physical liquidation of over 15,000 Kronstadt sailors whose rebellion was a desperate early expression of the desire for "socialism with a human face." As to Zinoviev's own fate, see *supra*, p. 415, f.n. 2.

74.

Vienna

IN THE SUMMER OF 1911 we arranged a consultation which included the Foreign Committee of the Bund and several representatives of the Central Committee who had come out of Russia. Among other things, a project was discussed about again starting up a legal weekly paper of the Bund. The paper would appear in Warsaw. But owing to the fact that most of our writers were completely "illegal," indeed, one of them had only recently been compelled to flee from Warsaw, they would not have been able to get by for long while living under the eyes of the Warsaw *Okhrana*. Hence a plan was hit upon to locate the editorial staff somewhere abroad, and to have the articles forwarded to Warsaw. With Switzerland too distant from Russia for the effectuation of such a plan, it was decided to establish the editorial staff closer to the Russian border, either in Cracow or in Vienna.

The Central Committee later confirmed the plan. But its realization took quite some time. Everything was in readiness however by

the spring of 1912, and the members of the editorial staff came together in Vienna: Slavek, Abramovich, Litvak, and myself. Slavek subsequently departed for Russia and Olgin replaced him on the staff.

Thus I left Switzerland once again after nearly four years.

In previous years I had been to Vienna a number of times and had already developed a liking for the city. Now that I came to reside in it for a longer period, my affection for it grew even stronger.

It was truly a remarkable city. Today's word from Vienna is rather depressing: it has died, one is told. But at that time it was the center of a large state. Vienna was attractive, pulsating, hospitable. Above all, hospitable. After spending no more than a few weeks there, one felt like a native. A warmhearted city. In other large cities one must first develop a feeling of being at home; and the loss of that sense of strangeness frequently takes years. But I arrived a total stranger—neither Austrian nor German—and after only a short time began to feel like a denizen, to feel just as if I were at home. The reasons for it were many. First, the character of the Viennese people: frank, easygoing, affable; second, the heterogeneity of the Viennese population. Most Viennese, of course, are Germanic; still Vienna was, not without reason, the leading city of a multicolored Austria with its ethnic mixture, its incredible variety of nationalities. Visible at every turn were scores of Czechs and Poles and Italians and Bosnians and, naturally, Jews—Jews without number.

The local folk had become accustomed to this nationality mish-mash, and used to regard everyone with a far-reaching tolerance, as though they were kith and kin, natives. It's true that some incitement against aliens was preached within the circles of the German nationalists; it was a struggle to preserve the "German character" of the city. An occasional outburst or a demonstration of sorts by German young people would take place to protest a Czech concert or convention; but that was politics. The population as a whole kept aloof from the nationalistic noisemaking; the same was true for anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitic Christian Social Party was in fact the dominant party; and anti-Semitism was its useful stock-in-trade. But this too constituted little more than politics. Racial hatred was

scarcely felt in daily life; and in comparison with the condition of the Jews in Russia, life in Austria was idyllic. The depression and fear that weighed like a heavy burden upon the Jews in Russia were experienced neither in Vienna nor in Galicia. Feeling much freer, and more stalwart in their demeanor, the Jews of Austria bore themselves with a certain pride and independence.

I loved Vienna deeply. True, with respect to such things as comfort and the amenities of daily life, Vienna could hardly compare, for instance, with Berlin. Moreover it was rundown and there was no orderliness. I used to observe in jest that what the city needed was the strong hand of a Prussian sergeant-major: he would have been able to straighten it out. But for all its shabbiness, Vienna was still very lovely, a joyous place that was distinguished by a rich and glowing life.

I arrived in Vienna toward the end of March 1912. At a consultation there of the Foreign and Central Committees in April, we discussed all the details of future work. By May, publication of the new paper was under way. Slavek-Grosser had already been living in Vienna and we set up our editorial office in his residence. It was a small, very modest room, and very sparsely furnished. A large table and several chairs stood in the middle of the room. In place of a bookcase, we obtained wooden boxes from somewhere and piled them on top of one another alongside the wall to hold the various newspapers we used in our work. In that small room, located in a quiet district on the very outskirts of the city, we used to gather each day, discuss the topics, and write and edit the articles. These were dispatched in the evening and reached Warsaw, the seat of the paper's administration, the following day. Also based at the Warsaw center was another special representative of the editorial staff who used to receive the articles from us and work up the regular features—the chronicle and the correspondence which he received directly from the various localities. This individual was Moyshe Rafes, a prominent leader of the Bund at that time, today a Communist and a virulent foe of the Bund.

The name of the newspaper was *Lebnsfragn* (*Problems of Life*). The first edition evoked a storm of enthusiasm. Greetings poured in from everywhere, from a great variety of cities and towns. I don't

know whether the paper was good or bad; and it didn't really matter. What *was* important was the fact that it was a Bund paper. After a silence of four and a half years our press had revived. And this was truly an occasion for celebration by the Jewish workers.

The celebration proved short-lived, however. The first edition was immediately confiscated. We prepared the second edition. Incidentally, in putting together this second edition I attempted for the first time to write an article in Yiddish. It was still too difficult for me to write Yiddish letters (although I had, while in Geneva, resumed my study of Yiddish reading and writing), so I wrote the article using the Latin alphabet. Litvak looked it over and commented that the language was quite good and there was little for him to correct. But the second issue was also confiscated. Moreover, the authorities showed up and arrested the whole administration of the paper. The official editor, Mrs. Raychik, was arrested; as was her husband Elyohu, who worked in the administration; and also S. Galay, the official publisher (later, his wife too); and a correspondent for the paper, Lipman Bergman, our comrade in Lodz. The remark of a prominent Warsaw gendarme was passed along to us: "We know that this is a Bund paper, and we will not tolerate it under any circumstances." Clearly, the paper would be unable to appear in Warsaw. The accumulated material was accordingly published in the form of an anthology and it was decided to transfer the paper to Saint Petersburg. Conditions there were actually somewhat freer than in Warsaw. It was a time when a Russian socialist press had made its appearance once again. Though harassed, it was still able to exist; and we figured that our paper too would be able to maintain itself in Saint Petersburg. But several months were to elapse before all the necessary preparations had been made.

Meanwhile a new conference of the Bund, the Ninth, was convened at Vienna. It was the eve of elections to the Fourth Duma, and we had to decide on the matter of the electoral campaign: on the slogan to be advanced and with whom to join forces. The question of joining forces was especially acute in Poland. There were two Polish parties with whom it was possible jointly to conduct the election: the Polish Social Democracy and the left-PPS. We desired and indeed requested the formation of a common bloc with the two organizations.

Both were in essence Social Democratic parties. The Polish Social Democratic Party (PPSD),¹ was closer to the Bolsheviks; the PPS bore somewhat more of a Menshevik character. The Bund stood politically closer to the latter, although formally our link was closer to the PPSD, since we were both, after all, part of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. As stated, we endeavored to create a general coalition of all three parties. But the Polish Social Democrats regrettably proved obstinate and refused to join in a bloc. We had no alternative but to link up with the left-PPS. After lengthy negotiations the agreement was concluded, and we jointly proceeded to offer the candidacy of the deputy Eugeniusz Jagiello in Warsaw.

Another issue, one which agitated all of us greatly, was quite different in character. A substantial and serious dispute had erupted between Polish and Jewish workers. The case involved the displacement of Jewish workers from the factories.

During the year 1911 a pestilence spread among the shoeworkers of Warsaw: the Polish workers undertook to expel Jews from the mechanized factories. It somehow became a kind of unwritten law among them: Jews must not be permitted to work in mechanized shops! They were transgressing upon the rightful claims of the Christians! And the latter actually implemented this principle in defense of their claim—by force.

Similar disputes had also occurred previously. The same thing happened only a few years before, in Bialystok, among the weavers. But the Jewish workers there did not allow themselves to be wronged and things were finally ironed out. It was decided to work half-and-half. (The agreement remained in force for about ten years, until the city came under the rule of the new Polish state, at which time the conflict started all over again.)² In Warsaw, however, the situation

1. The initials SDKPL are often used to designate the party. They derive from its Polish name: *Socialna Demokracja Krolestwa Polskiego i Litwy* (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania).

2. Economic anti-Semitism, as an especially vicious form of a spreading general anti-Semitism in inter-war Poland, remained a serious problem. The audacious manner in which the Bund responded to the challenge would have warmed Medem's heart. See Isaiah Trunk, *Shtudiyes vegn yidn in poyln 1919–1939* (Yiddish) [*Studies*

was far more acute. The matter remained unresolved and continued to drag on.

What was there to do in the face of this affliction? The Bund organization came forward with one response: it was necessary to discuss the question with the Polish labor organizations and arrive at an understanding. This response was quite proper. But it had a single shortcoming: for an understanding the agreement of both sides is necessary and there was no such agreement. A more than shameful role was played in this instance by the Polish Social Democracy. Instead of exerting influence upon the Polish workers and curbing their chauvinistic appetites, they directed their moralizing at the Jewish workers. Articles appeared in the Polish Social Democratic press by their party leader, Warski,³ who told his readers that the

About Jews in Poland 1919–1939]; Shikl Fishman (ed.) (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1974), pp. 3–98.

3. Warski (Adolf Warszawski) later became a founding figure and leader of the Polish Communist Party. He was “liquidated” by Stalin in 1937, along with virtually all of his fellow leaders of the party. Polonized and assimilated Jews such as Warski and his close comrade, Rosa Luxemburg, shared with Russified and equally assimilated Jews such as Trotsky and Zinoviev, an abiding hostility to Jewish ethnicity, the Bund, and Yiddish as the flourishing cultural-linguistic medium central to the life of the Jewish masses. Peter Nettle, biographer of Luxemburg, notes the absence of Jewish content in her immediate family, despite its residence in the city of Zamość, with a large, enlightened Jewish population. Of Luxemburg’s outlook on the Jewish question later in life, Nettle observes: “Though fond of using pithy Yiddish shorthand, she had no time for self-conscious Jewishness, either as a pattern of behavior or as a basis for personal identity. In 1917 when many of her friends were looking for a rationalization of their despair she rapped Mathilde Wurm [her left-socialist and close personal friend] over the emotional knuckles: ‘Why do you come with your special Jewish sorrows? I feel just as sorry for the wretched Indian victims in Putamayo, the negroes in Africa. . . . The “lofty silence of the eternal” in which so many cries have echoed away unheard resounds so strongly within me that I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.’” J. P. Nettle, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 31–33; 516–17. (Abridged edition.)

In a taped interview with this writer (April 23, 1973), J. S. Hertz observed, anent Rosa Luxemburg: “She hated Jews. And even more than Jews, she hated Yiddish. This is a characteristic of many assimilated types.” Alluding to her response to Mathilde Wurm, Hertz noted, with unconcealed resentment: “Those wartime years

Jews were forever keeping themselves apart; that they still continued speaking in “jargon” (*i.e.*, in the Yiddish language)—“a remnant of the dark Middle Ages”; and that the first condition for peaceful collaboration was the abandonment of said jargon. The articles, it should be further noted, offered a few trite remarks to the effect that the Jews shouldn’t be persecuted. But the general impression of the articles was: let the Jews first become respectable, after which steps would be taken to resolve matters.

About the right-PPS there could be no question. The left-PPS, on the other hand, behaved somewhat more decently. Yet it was apparent that they too had neither the strength nor the courage to offer any resistance to the sentiments of the mass. Still our people pleaded that an understanding must be effected. They endeavored to organize a joint consultation. But the matter failed to make any headway.

I wrote an article at the time for one of our *zamlbikher* in which I advanced the following thesis: There exist two sides. One does the assaulting; the other is the victim. The victim desires an understanding. The assaulter evinces no eagerness for it. Hence the need to act in such fashion as to compel him to desire it. An understanding can be reached only as a result of a struggle. The eagerness for an understanding will become evident only when the other side encounters resistance. And conversely: Although talk about an understanding might go on for years, without the offering of resistance nothing will come from all the palaver. The thing must be fought through.

That, in brief, was the moral of the story. I mailed the article to Russia for printing; but a first-class uproar ensued there. The Central Committee learned of its content and found the article harmful. The readers might construe it as an incitement of the Jewish workers against the Polish, and it could induce widespread confusion in people’s minds. I received a letter requesting that I withdraw my article.

I refused to do so. I contended that what I had said was correct and had to be affirmed. If it were found that the article could not be

were, in general, very bitter for the Jews: pogroms on the Russian front, hangings of Jews, etc. Here you have the character of the woman.”

One cannot resist the thought that Warski and the others sought a “final solution” to the Jewish question and to the Jews as an ethnic entity, albeit more benign than Hitler’s.

printed, the editorial staff had the opportunity to reject it. Against such action I was powerless. But I myself would not voluntarily renounce it.

Indeed my piece of writing was finally blue-pencilled, and the article did not appear. In the course of these transactions I stood more or less alone. The Central Committee was against me; my friends abroad were against me. But when the conference convened it turned out that I had supporters there. After a lengthy discussion a resolution was offered to which I could subscribe. Even though my own thought was not conveyed in its sharp and striking form, the resolution affirmed nevertheless that the attitude to be adopted toward such Polish workers as would force out Jews and take over their positions should be the same as the attitude toward common strikebreakers. This, in essence, was the same as what I had requested, for it did embody the idea of struggle; and I was satisfied.

Our newspaper started up again a few months after the conference. It was published in Saint Petersburg and was named *Di Tsayt* (*The Times*). The first issue appeared around New Year 1913. The staff remained in Vienna for the time being. Its composition changed slightly. Slavek had left for Russia some time before. In December the sad news arrived of his untimely death. Olgin took his place.

The editorial staff work proved to be exceedingly difficult. The public was not satisfied with the paper. Such, at least, were the sentiments voiced by the "higher ups." Every letter we received from Saint Petersburg carried the same lament: "It's not on target." We had been trying with all our might, so we thought, to make the thing progressively better. After all, our best party writers, men like Litvak and Olgin, were working on the paper. But still the dissatisfaction persisted. I don't know why this was so; perhaps their objections were unjustified. We in the Bund had always maintained a critical attitude toward our own writers and our own press, far more severe than toward others. And maybe the objections were valid. It was also patent that a newspaper could not be edited from a base in a distant, foreign city. Possibly so. Indeed, the editorial staff was later transferred to Saint Petersburg itself, and the folks ceased complaining.

But in the meantime we operated the paper, and in the face of

such salutations from Russia, our mood was understandably less than cheerful. The staff work did not occupy the whole of our time. In addition, one had to be concerned with something of a livelihood. Hence each of us obtained a private position. Abramovich worked in a patent office; Olgin served as a correspondent for the *Forward*; I became a correspondent for a Russian newspaper.

In the autumn of 1912 I received word that a new and large newspaper—*Den'* (*The Day*)—had begun to appear in Saint Petersburg. The paper's editor was to be Alexander Kugel, the very same Kugel who had, until then, edited the large Kiev daily, *Kievskaja Mysl* (*Kiev Opinion*). The Kiev paper was one of the finest and most decent of Russian newspapers. It bore a distinctly Marxist coloration. A series of prominent Social Democrats, like Trotsky and Lunacharsky for instance, were numbered among its collaborators. *Den'* was slated to become a paper of the same sort (and in large part with the same collaborators). Thus when it was proposed that I become a Vienna correspondent, I accepted the proposal with great satisfaction. My task was to write several pieces of correspondence each week and to send daily telegraphic dispatches about the latest events.

It was a wholly new type of work for me—very interesting and quite arduous. Writing the few items of correspondence was no big thing; I was, in any event, extremely interested in Viennese life, and had sufficient material. But the telegrams—this turned out to be a more difficult proposition.

During the initial period I was required to send fairly long telegrams, roughly five to six hundred words a day. Hence the need to accumulate daily the very freshest, most pulsating material. It meant that one had to become a habitu  of the coffeehouses.

In Vienna the workplace of a journalist was the coffeehouse, which constituted not only a workplace and not only a place for a journalist; in a word, in Vienna the coffeehouse was everything. An individual would enter a cafe, sit himself down, and order his coffee. Incidentally, one did not simply order "coffee." Anyone who would have said, "May I have a cup of coffee?" would have been looked upon as crazy. That someone desired coffee was, of course, self-evident. But the question was what kind of coffee. There was *m lange*

(a blend of coffee varieties), and there was black coffee (this also of two kinds: just plain black coffee and coffee with a nut base—*Nuss* coffee); there was light coffee (heavy on the milk) and brown. Then one could order coffee with *Haut* (“skin,” i.e., the layer of coagulated albumen on top) and coffee without skin; coffee in a demitasse and in a *Tee-Tasse* (teacup; or *Tee-Schale*, in Viennese German).

There was an art to the whole business, an art with its distinctive jargon which only a Viennese could understand. One said, for example, “May I have a *Tee-Schale-Haut*?” which meant a large cup of coffee with skin, and so on. But this is not the main point. A Viennese would come to the coffeehouse, obtain his coffee and a glass of water as well, and sit. He would sit for an hour, for two hours, for three hours. His coffee had long been downed. He would not order any more—and no one asked him to. His water, however, was changed with great frequency, so that it remained fresh and cold. (Actually, Vienna has the finest water in Europe.) Why did he ensconce himself in the coffeehouse? The query can be answered with another query: Why does someone stay at home? For the coffeehouse was really a home, and perhaps even more than a home. It was a place for recreation and it was a place for relaxation. It was a place where one met acquaintances and where one transacted business. And it was a place where one worked. Letters were written there and letters were received there. Articles were composed there and articles were edited there. And it was more comfortable than home. Who cared if it tended to be a bit noisy? One became accustomed to that very quickly. Moreover it offered all manner of conveniences. Every sizable coffeehouse contained dozens of newspapers and journals and weeklies and monthlies (frequently, even special trade periodicals). Off in some corner stood an encyclopedia and dictionaries. And by one’s third visit the waiter already knew one’s preference in a newspaper and the type of coffee one drank; and he would bring these without asking. Such then was how an individual would spend half a day and half a night at his coffeehouse.

Like everyone else I had “my” coffeehouse; and it was where I used to work. The main task consisted of having to read all of the Viennese press each day and to excerpt from it everything of significance and interest to my paper. This turned out to be fairly dif-

ficult at first, but after a while I became adept at the job, so that it did not require more than a few hours of my time. Newspapers in Vienna appeared throughout the day: the morning editions in the early morning; the afternoon editions at noon; and from 3 P.M. until evening, various evening editions rolled out in rapid succession.

One had to be finished with the reading at approximately 6 P.M., when the most arduous two hours of a most intense effort commenced. The correspondents would arrive at that time and proceed to the large building housing the main telegraphic facilities. It contained several rooms set aside especially for the journalists. That was where the nightwork took place. People coming and going, meeting each other, conversing in whispered tones, making telephone calls, receiving dispatches, sharing items of information. It was a news factory.

At the same time, however, it was necessary to condense all the assembled material into clear, concise language. Telegrams were expensive; one dared not use a single superfluous word. Hence the need to select for each news item the most succinct and precise expression. And this had to be done very quickly: everything had to be completed by eight or eight-thirty, else the dispatch would not arrive on time in Saint Petersburg. During the late night hours only "urgent" telegrams could be sent, those dealing with exceptionally important events.

The work was very enjoyable despite its considerable difficulty. As for the telegraphing, it proved most beneficial to a writer. One learned to deal sparingly with the language, to avoid all nonessential words; style grew clearer, more pungent and disciplined. It would be highly salutary for every writer to take up this trade if even for a short time.

Within our "journalists' quarters" and at the main wireless receiver we felt the pulsebeat, strikingly and acutely during that hectic and most interesting period, of great political events. It was the year 1912 and the Balkan War had just begun.

Austria did not participate in that war, although the war was waged by her closest neighbors at her very doorstep. And while she may have been a nonbelligerent, she was nevertheless very much involved in a political sense.

The Austrian government had old scores to settle with the Balkan states. Her strife with Serbia had already lasted for years. And now, with the onset of the war, she had a tremendous urge to intervene in the vast hubbub and to utilize the opportunity to emerge as a dominant influence in the Balkans. One seemed to feel, throughout that year of warfare, that a plunge would come at any moment and the Austrian army would find itself being thrust across the border. But there was a simultaneous feeling that should this occur, Russia would not remain quiescent; and a world war would be the consequence. Austria was making noises all the while—shouting, venting her irritation, hurling threats. And there were some days and nights when a war declaration was imminent. It was touch-and-go. But Austria would invariably get cold feet at the last moment and pull back. It constantly reminded one of the Russian aphorism: “The desire is there, the itch is there—and mother won’t allow.” Yet the wish remained tremendously strong; and the wish actually did prevail later on, in the year 1914. In point of fact, the signal for the gigantic World War was given in Vienna.⁴

I found observing the diplomatic-political game exceedingly interesting. I also warmed quite nicely to journalistic work, although the environment of bourgeois journalists whom I had occasion to meet up with every day was not pleasant and I encountered serious difficulties with my paper. It had inaugurated its operation on a very expensive basis, inviting the finest writers and offering fairly good salaries. But business was poor during the early period and they stopped paying. Some writers (Trotsky among them) left because of it. I stayed. (I simply had nowhere else to go.) Yet this did not stop

4. The question of the “signal” for the First World War dies hard. At the time Medem penned his memoirs, he could not have known that, among the professional historians, “revisionist” studies of the origins of the war appearing in the 1920s and 1930s would include those which shifted the indictment altogether, or at the very least broadened the indictment in the matter of the war’s causation, to include the major belligerents on the Allied side. Nor could Medem have foreseen that in 1961 the question of war-guilt would revive in Germany, opening with a major splash by the historian Fritz Fischer who, in a massive revision of the earlier revisionist writings, asserted that the “signal” came from Imperial Germany rather than its Austrian ally.

me from becoming a striker. "If you do not send me enough to meet expenses," I informed them, "I shall cease telegraphing. I cannot, after all, lay out hundreds of kroners of my own for dispatches; I don't have them!" The threat was unavailing, and I actually staged a strike, in which I persisted for a respectable period. After receiving some money I started working again. But before very long the money again stopped coming and again I struck. It was that way the whole time—one strike after another.

Life in Vienna proved generally pleasant and interesting. Suddenly, however, I found myself toying with a plan: to return to Russia and to do so not simply the way I used to travel in earlier years—illegally—but to travel in fact under my own name, and to become legalized.

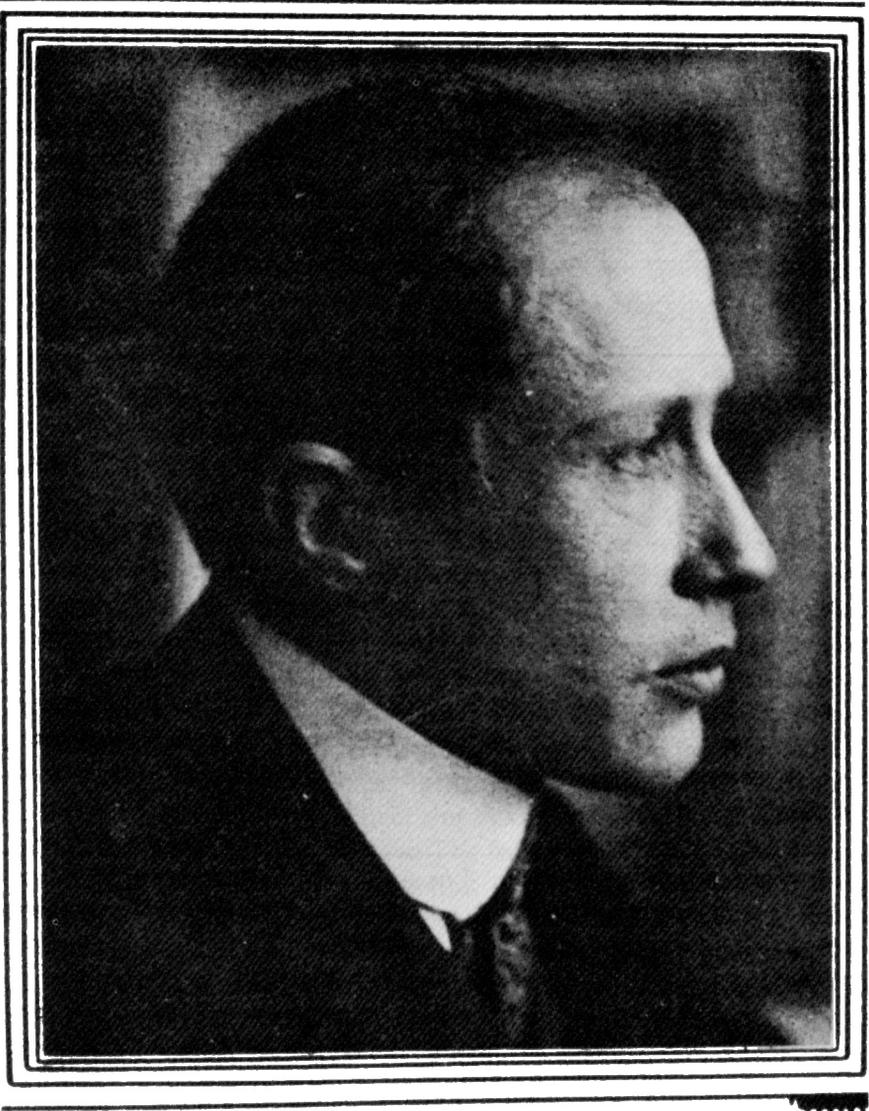
Russia was then engaged in celebrating the tercentenary of the Tsarist dynasty. To commemorate the occasion, a partial amnesty had been granted to political "criminals." A directive was simultaneously issued to Russian consulates abroad calling upon them to provide passports for those emigrants wishing to return to Russia. Hence my idea of taking advantage of this opportunity.

A certain Stephen Beletsky was serving as the director of the police department in the Russian Ministry of the Interior at that time. (Along with many other high officials, he was shot after the Bolshevik Revolution.) This Beletsky had previously held a post as an official (not with the police) in Kovno. While there, he came to know my older brother well. Now, when I wished to return to Russia, my brother recalled that old acquaintanceship and wrote a letter to Beletsky inquiring about my status: Was there any threat hanging over me should I appear in Russia? Beletsky's reply was very diplomatic and very ambiguous, susceptible to both an affirmative and a negative interpretation. But since I desired very strongly to make the move, I interpreted it to suit myself. Still, Abramovich would shake his head and say: "Uncle, you might as well start sewing a big sack; it will serve you well traveling by the *étape*."⁵ But I

5. For a characterization of the *étape*, see *supra*, p. 181, f.n. 1. For how Medem experienced it, see *infra*, chaps. 77–84.

laughed it off. After all is said and done, I reasoned, what's the danger? They'll arrest me? So what? I'll serve my time; or they will exile me and I'll escape abroad once again. One can at least give it a try.

And I gave it a try. Sure enough, a few months later I found myself with the sack on my back. Abramovich had been right.



Medem (ca. 1920)

75.

Back to Russia

AT THE END OF JUNE, 1913, my wife and I left Vienna to return to Russia. We traveled together as far as the station at Oderberg. From there I cut back through Germany on the way to Kovno, where I had counted on promptly obtaining a temporary passport with my brother's help. Then I intended to proceed to Minsk and straighten out the matter of my legitimization once and for all. My wife had meanwhile proceeded to Warsaw, to wait there until I had disposed of all these matters.

My brother rode out to meet me at Eydtkuhnen. Together we crossed the border at Wierzbolow. The frontier officials were his acquaintances. They made no difficulties for me whatsoever. And we arrived in Kovno without incident.

Once again in Russia! And again, as in 1905, I arrived there after a hiatus of four long years. But it was not like the previous time. On that earlier return from abroad, it seemed to me as if I had been absent from Russia for an eternity, and that everything during the interim had changed tremendously, had become strange and alien. But this time I no longer had that impression. I encountered the same Kovno which I had left, lo! those many years before; and I had the sensation of having been there only yesterday. The years had somehow flown by very quickly.

I stopped off at my brother's home where I spent a few joyful,

lovely days. I visited the chief of police and requested that he issue me a temporary passport. My brother had already spoken to him in advance and the chief of police promised to send me the passport within a few days. But instead of a passport something quite different arrived.

It was the fifth day, I believe, after my arrival in Kovno. We were spending the evening at the home of my brother's father-in-law. It was a celebration of some kind—a birthday or something similar. The father-in-law was one of the wealthiest people in Kovno, if not actually the wealthiest. The revelry at his place extended well into the night: one big round of eating and drinking and merrymaking galore. I returned home and went to bed. Toward daybreak, just as I began to stir, I found my brother at my bedside awakening me: the police had come with the order to arrest me, an order signed by the investigating magistrate of Warsaw.

I must confess I began to feel a bit queazy. I was not afraid of an arrest as such; for me it was neither the first nor the last time I would experience imprisonment. But what did contribute to my acute disfigurement was the involvement of the investigating magistrate.

During the earlier years my arrests invariably took place along administrative lines; I had been prepared for that type of arrest then. It didn't frighten me. In more recent years the outcome of such arrests was not even exile to Siberia, but rather banishment to southern *guberniyas* of European Russia. It was often possible to commute such banishment to deportation abroad. And even where this could not be arranged, escape was no great problem. So that the matter, consequently, was not all that terrible. But the business with the investigating magistrate smacked of something quite different. It meant that the arrest was not of the administrative type, in a word it meant a court trial. And I knew that a trial in the Warsaw court smelled of *katorga*; and *katorga*—well, that was no laughing matter.

Still, how did I get mixed up with the Warsaw court? I had never lived in Warsaw. I immediately sensed what was afoot; the details became known to me only later.

In one of the preceding chapters I referred to *Lebnsfragn*, which we had edited in Vienna and printed in Warsaw during the preceding year. I recalled that after the paper had been confiscated

and closed down, everyone who had had any official relationship to the paper had been arrested in Warsaw. It included Galay, Raychik and his wife, and Bergman. I of course knew of their arrest, but I evinced no greater concern with it than with any other arrest—which was a daily occurrence. Thus, I forgot about it altogether in the course of the year. But things were happening in the meantime.

Those people were still behind bars. A “literary” trial had been conducted against them for publishing a newspaper that “incited one class against another,” etc. This was the notorious Russian Paragraph 129. The paragraph itself constituted one of the lesser terrors; individuals received a year in a jail or in a fortress. Moreover, the tercentenary of the Romanovs had taken place, and the attendant amnesty set aside all the trials that had been conducted on the basis of said paragraph. The group was consequently supposed to be set free.

But they were not released. The obdurate personnel of the Warsaw court pulled off an ugly trick: they simply changed the paragraph and altered the indictment. In place of a literary stipulation, they slipped in a different paragraph—the one dealing with adherence to the Bund. This was Paragraph 102, which contained the threat of *katorga* up to eight years. And the amnesty did not apply to this paragraph, which explained why our people remained in prison.

Several of my articles, signed with my full name, had been printed in the issues of *Lebensfragn*. During the investigation the judge was interested in finding out about the individual named Medem. There was not much to go on. Then the following happened: The arrested Galay had a wife. Years before, while he was a student in the German town of Friedberg and she was still his fiancée, she happened to be studying in Bern—during the very years in which I had been there. She used to correspond with him. In her letters she would tell about colony life and about the socialist leaders. I was one of them, and my name appeared frequently in her letters. She preserved those letters for years. After the arrest of her husband in Warsaw, a search was also conducted of her quarters and the letters were found. She too was arrested. Thus, from the letters the investigating magistrate obtained a clear picture of me. And just at the time I returned to Russia, he circulated an order calling for my arrest on

sight. The order happened to reach the Kovno gendarmerie only a few days after my arrival in Kovno. The comrades in Warsaw, having learned just then of my arrival in Russia, were on the verge of sending a telegram to Kovno with a warning that I hide. But before they could do it, they received word that I had already been arrested. It was too late.¹

When the police led me from my brother's home it was already about five o'clock. A bright, lovely morning. We passed through the silent streets of Kovno. The large iron gate of the prison swung open and then closed behind me. I entered a cell, lay down on a dirty little iron bed and fell asleep. The long sequence of two oppressive prison years had begun.

An individual who has never been in prison has a highly distorted image of the state of imprisonment. He thinks of prison in terms of unrelieved "languishing," of endless sitting and gazing at the iron bars, of constant thinking about the prison, of perpetual craving for freedom. Truthfully, however, it is not like that. In any case, it is not like that when one is imprisoned for any length of time. After becoming somewhat accustomed to prison, one is no longer "languishing" continuously. One lives.

In truth, it might be rejoined: "Woe to such living." Still and all, it is a life like any other, with its particular interests, with its special cares. As petty, pathetic, perhaps even ludicrous as those interests and cares may be, they still provide a fullness to life.

The prison is a wholly different world, a world in microcosm, unique and self-contained.

I get up in the morning. What are my tasks for today? It's Tuesday; that means I have an "inspection." I must first of all get the bottles ready, and also the dirty wash to be turned in. The things are ly-

1. After Medem's death, his wife, already pro-Soviet, entered actively and prominently into the service of the Communist movement, which included systematic denigration of the Bund. Thus, in the matter of his arrest, she offered a different version of the failure by his comrades to warn him in time, and suggested a motive for their conduct. "... Medem's arrest in 1913," she wrote, "could have been avoided had there been a more attentive and comradely attitude toward Medem on the part of the Central Committee of the Bund. . . . Except for Slavek . . . and Olgin [the latter in the pantheon of Communist leaders at the time of her

ing in the closet in the corridor. I must remember—not to forget!—that the closet is opened at noon. What else? Yes, I must ask my wife to bring me a few buttons and some thread. I still have a needle—I think. I look for it. Yes, the needle is here. And that's all—buttons and thread.

Another day. What do we have today? Saturday. Today we go to the bath. I must check and see whether I have enough soap. And the decision still has to be made as to who shall stand guard at the bath today while we wash; otherwise the underwear and clothing will be purloined by the thieves. What are the chores for today? Yes, today we have to wash the floor; and I happen to be one of those whose turn it is to work at this occupation.

writing], . . . Medem personally did not enjoy friendly relations with any of the central figures of the Bund. . . ." Gina Medem, *A lebnsvæg* pp. 175; 185–86.

In the matter of the return to Russia and the arrest, she added: "The receipt by us in Vienna of a single telegram telling us *not* to leave for Russia would have prevented the arrest, the two years in prison, and the sentence of four years at hard labor which Medem received." (*Ibid.*, p. 175.)

The foregoing is what Bund spokesmen have cited as examples of Gina Medem's inclination to fantasy or outright falsehood, for it was she herself who, according to information provided by Hertz in a taped interview with this writer (April 20, 1973), insisted on their returning to Russia. Hertz had heard this from a number of comrades in the Bund, but the most detailed information came during the 1920s from one individual who was very close to the Medems—Abram Kostelansky. "Kostelansky, a highly trustworthy comrade in the movement," said Hertz, "told me that Medem had not wished to go back to Russia. First, he was actually afraid that he would be arrested again—he was under a standing prison sentence; second, he realized that, for a socialist party, there was not yet a field for broad activity in Russia. But Gina Medem vehemently demanded that they return; it was as a result of her pressure that they did; she simply placed him under an ultimatum. I am transmitting Kostelansky's words as closely as I can. I should point out that he was no idle prattler, not a person who would simply concoct things out of whole cloth. He said this: 'There were moments when Gina Medem even threatened to commit suicide if she did not go back. She insisted that she couldn't live in Vienna, that she had no one there, while in Poland she had friends, acquaintances; there was Jewish life.'"

Medem, presumably for highly personal reasons, did not provide such details; he was very sparing in his memoirs of "private life" details in general. He simply recorded that he was ready to take a calculated risk on returning because of the rumored Tsarist amnesty.

Sunday. Our neighbor has been put in solitary. Caught playing chess. Actually, it's a mistake. He wasn't playing chess at all. He was merely looking on. But that dog, the *pomoshchnik* (aide), put him away. It's a shame. We must intercede for the fellow.

Monday. A new "guest" has been brought to an adjacent cell. We must communicate with him before the walk in the yard. He may have some interesting news to relate.

Wednesday. Alas, the new "guest" in the adjacent cell has turned out to be just a plain old thief who tells nothing but lies. The chess fellow has been released from solitary, hungry but satisfied. He was lucky; he was placed not in the "dark" but in a "light" solitary cell, and it turned out all right.

Thursday. Today we had a general inspection. Comrade N. had a small knife which he tried to hide in his mouth. But it was discovered and confiscated. Too bad. The guards dumped all the straw out of the pillows while searching for hidden objects. Now we have to ask the *pomoshchnik* for new straw during the evening *poverka* (shakedown). But who's going to approach him? Let so-and-so do the talking. Agreed.

And such is the nature of life in prison. Days, weeks, months go by. One lives. A trivial existence, boring, monotonous, drab—but one lives and becomes adjusted.

The foregoing picture of a week in prison, presented in a few broad strokes, was drawn from a later period—from the final months of my incarceration in Warsaw's Mokotów prison. The early part was spent in Kovno. Owing to my brother's efforts to have me freed on "bail," a requisite of which was illness, I pretended to be sick. I was placed in the prison hospital where I lived the good life. I was treated very well in prison because of the "connections" which my brother had with high muckamucks in Kovno. The efforts to effect my freedom proved unavailing, however. The Warsaw prosecutor's office had evidently detected that a "big fish" had fallen into its hands, and it refused to release me for any money. After five months of incarceration in Kovno, I was transferred to Warsaw and placed in the notorious "Tenth Pavilion" of the Warsaw fortress.

The Tenth Pavilion

TO THE BROAD PUBLIC which has heard of the Warsaw prisons but never experienced them from the inside, the very sound of the words "The Tenth Pavilion" has a dark and savage connotation. For the smooth, whitewashed walls of its silent cells are really impregnated with oppressive and bloody memories. Hundreds of persons have sat between those white walls, sat and waited for that dreadful, dark night when the door would open. That night would come and the heavy door would open, and the path would be brief—and final: to the gallows.

And even if no death sentences had been issued during the few years immediately preceding the war, the memories still remained, and the specter of death still haunted the old prison.

And I would occasionally come across inscriptions, notations arranged with dots between the lines of an old book in the prison library; or scratched with a nail on an old bench: "I was sentenced on such and such day. Verdict: Death." And someone else's hand would scratch an addendum: "The verdict was carried out. All honor to the memory of the fallen comrade."

Yet the prison itself was quite satisfactory. It had all the amenities. To be sure, it was a bit on the cold side; the *nachal'stvo* had probably filched the coal, and many cells were damp. But aside from this, everything was fairly decent: the cells were light and clean, the food rather good; and anyone with a little money could obtain

lunches from an officers' club. The behavior of the gendarmes on guard duty was quite civil. The place had none of the prison discipline so typical of the ordinary prisons—the drills, the shakedowns, the assorted aggravations. There was an attractive and rich library. The prison was located well beyond the outskirts of the city. The courtyard in which we used to take our walks had the appearance of a real garden. The trees that grew there—horse chestnuts, acacias, lilac—were beautiful. When spring came, and then summer, I literally felt as though I were at a *dacha*.

During the first month I was all alone in my cell although nearly all the others held two inmates. Yet, I was satisfied that no one else had been assigned to the cell; for my initial impression of the adjoining inmates was most unfavorable. I did not even see them, the separation of prisoners being most stringent, but I could hear the knocking on the wall: the system of communication from cell to cell through the walls, in the voiceless language of prisoners. I still remembered this language of knocks from my earlier days in the Moscow prison. True, the alphabet employed there, in Moscow, had been Russian, while here the conversation was in Polish. But I learned quickly—if not how to speak Polish (I was not yet able to)—at least to comprehend the knockings. I personally never responded, but would sit and listen to the conversations of the others. It was the content of those conversations which turned me away from my neighbors.

The very day after my admission to the Tenth Pavilion, I heard the knocking. I listened and tried to make sense of the letters and the words, and the first thing I caught was an uncouth, boorish swear word. A reply followed immediately from another cell—another expletive. I listened further and soon understood: they were engaged in a kind of exchange of greetings. The gentlemen were amusing themselves, passing the time in knocking out to each other foul and uncouth prisoners' expressions. I was greatly surprised, since I knew that only "politicals" and no ordinary criminal prisoners were incarcerated in the Tenth Pavilion. Which prompted the thought: how pitiful indeed for such politicals who could find no better diversion than to revel in disgusting obscenities! Anti-Semitic expressions also slipped in. One prisoner would ask the other: "Who's in cell such and such?" To which the other would respond: "Some sort of Jew." Real-

ly, I thought, what have I fallen into here? What strange kind of “politicals” are these prisoners in Warsaw? I obtained an answer to this puzzle only later. Two scoundrels were, indeed, located just above my cell, two notorious and dangerous Polish provocateurs, who, having already been exposed, made no further effort to conceal themselves. Hence their free and uninhibited talk, quite in keeping with their boorish souls. One of them was the notorious Sukenik, an old member of the PPS and a former *boyovets* (member of a fighting detachment) who had personally participated in twenty-odd assaults. He subsequently turned provocateur and began to betray his former comrades. He engaged in that particular business for years. It is said that he betrayed up to 300 people. I later had the “pleasure” of seeing this particular beast. A thin, gangling fellow with long, misshapen legs and extraordinarily long arms which hung almost to his knees—he looked like an oversized monkey. A frightening face, with two tiny, murderous eyes. The sight of his repulsive physiognomy literally made one shudder. And this was the very individual who had long worked within the party and enjoyed its confidence!

As noted, I learned about all of this only subsequently. During the early weeks I merely listened to those charming conversations, and that was enough for me. I had no yearning for a cellmate. I was consequently very unhappy when, upon returning from a walk one morning, I found a “guest” in my cell—a strange young man. “What are you doing here?” I asked. “I was put here with you,” he replied. Well, that’s that, I thought; so I’ve got a cellmate. And I proceeded to engage him in conversation.

I put the customary questions to him: “Why are you in prison? What have you been charged with?”

He replied: “I am a Social Democrat.”

“What did you say?” I asked. “You’re being accused of belonging to the Polish Social Democratic Party?”

“N-n-no,” he responded. “The charge against me is membership in the National Workers’ League.” (This workers’ league, whose Polish name was *Narodowi Zwionzek Robotniczy*, was a chauvinistic, reactionary workers’ organization.)

“Why then do you call yourself a Social Democrat?”

“That’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it presently. I am by nature really a Social Democrat, and I did belong to the Social

Democratic Party. But then I hit upon an idea: I knew that the National Workers' League is a large, powerful, and extremely destructive organization. It has many worker members and they are blind and deaf to Social Democratic agitation. I thought it would be easier for me to exert some influence upon them if I entered their ranks, became one of the initiates, worked inside their party and gradually inculcated them with socialist ideas. Thus I joined up with them and became a member of their league. And I was arrested as such. But I am a Social Democrat."

Well, the tale verged on the fantastic. Yet I must confess that I believed the fellow. It's a foolish habit of mine: I have faith in people. True, I have been gradually shaking it off, but I was younger at the time, and credulous. Naturally I took the necessary precautions. As regards myself and others, I would tell the fellow nothing whatsoever about conspiratorial matters. But him I believed.

He told me about his personal affairs in rather precise detail. He was an official in the Warsaw telegraphic system, had recently completed his military service and had gotten married; he had a brother who had been arrested with him and who was also imprisoned in the Tenth Pavilion; and so forth and so on. The fellow was young, no simpleton, and of a happy disposition. He related stories and sang not badly; and so we used to pass the time rather pleasantly. He grew strongly attached to me, followed my advice in all matters. Everything, in short, was proceeding swimmingly.

Still, the more I spoke to him, the more puzzled I became: here was a really peculiar Social Democrat. I observed, to begin with, that he was tremendously ignorant; he did not even know the basic elements of socialism. Oh well—he was probably just an ordinary chap; the movement did have such people. On one occasion I mentioned the name of Rosa Luxemburg. I noticed that the name did not ring a bell with the young man. This seemed especially strange to me. Rosa Luxemburg was after all the leader of his party—and he knew nothing about her. On another occasion I made a certain reference to the Central Committee of the Polish Social Democratic Party. The committee was known at the time as "the Chief Administration" (in Polish: *Zazhond Gluavni*). To which he responded that there was actually no such expression in Polish. This deepened the riddle even more and set me to thinking: What sort of party member is someone

who has never even heard the name of its Central Committee? Then he proceeded to recount various tales about his life as a soldier in the barracks: how he and his comrades would somehow purloin government items and bring them to the market to sell. I took it all in and silently pondered: This is a Social Democrat?

My suspicions gradually increased, and I found myself beginning to take note of one detail after another. The fellow, I could now see, was a liar; his statements failed to jibe. Hence I stopped believing him, although I said nothing and we continued to live at peace. He finally became ill and went to the hospital. It was only some months later, at the time the war started and all of us were removed from Warsaw and transferred to a prison deep inside Russia, that I learned the whole truth. The young man had no connection at all with either Social Democracy or the National Workers' League; and had not even belonged to a political party. He was quite simply a German spy who, indeed, had been arrested as such. And I had spent almost six months in the same cell with him.

After he left I received another cellmate. This person was of an altogether different stripe, an intelligent, congenial young man, a Polish student and a member of the PPS, who found himself under a severe indictment. He had been charged with returning from abroad for the purpose of killing Skalon, the governor-general of Warsaw. At the time I came to know him, he had already been imprisoned for three years. Yet he remained cheerful and hearty, laughing and carrying on like a youngster. Our cell was accordingly filled with laughter, song, and jesting.

It was a comparatively idyllic existence. We used to stroll beneath the blooming, fragrant acacias, and feed breadcrumbs to the birds (they already knew us, and we had our special favorites among them). We played chess; we read, wrote, sketched. We engaged in a rather spirited correspondence with neighbors in other cells (this was of course forbidden, but where there is a desire, the suitable ways and means can always be found). We even contemplated the publication of a written, illustrated newspaper. In such fashion the days and weeks flew by.

We gave little thought to the future; it was better that way. For our prospects appeared anything but rosy. My cellmate was virtually assured of a ten-year sentence at *katorga*; and a similar threat of

katorga hung over me. True, mine came to only eight years at most; but that, too, was quite sufficient. I had not yet, at that time, had any opportunity to observe the actual conditions in hard-labor prisons; and I must confess that in my imagination they assumed the very darkest hues. I strongly doubted that I would be able to survive them. But as already stated, I tried to give the subject as little thought as possible. The primary technique for preserving one's spiritual balance in prison consists indeed of not thinking about such depressing things. It is essential to maintain firm control of oneself and not to permit one's nerves to run wild. I actually conducted myself in this manner the whole time, thanks to which I was really able to endure the twenty-five months of imprisonment fairly well.

At the start of June 1914 (it was already about a year after my arrest), I was taken before the court for sentencing. I was very pleased: the waiting would finally be over and a decision rendered one way or the other. At the very least I would know where I stood. But luck was not with me this time. A few witnesses for the prosecution failed to appear, and the prosecutor requested a postponement of the trial. And it was in fact postponed. Once again I had to wait many months. Meanwhile the summer vacations had begun for the court people, and the case dragged on. Our life resumed its previous course.

Then suddenly everything changed. The war had begun.

We received no newspapers in prison. Very rarely did a smuggled paper fall into our hands. Still we knew what was happening more or less in the outside world. My wife used to visit me twice a week. I would meet with my attorney from time to time. Thus I received reports from them. And when the event occurred which constituted the first signal for the World War—the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand—we learned about it immediately; and we also knew that a war was in the making.

For an individual in prison there is, willingly or unwillingly, a special "prison view," even about world events. No sooner had conversations begun to focus on the subject of war, when a single question leapt to the mind of each prisoner: "Will it bring me freedom?" And a host of fantastic speculations were spawned. There was talk about an amnesty; or thoughts turned upon a variety of strategic combinations.

The Russian General Staff (so the talk went) had the following plan: in the event of war with Germany, it would not defend the land area of Poland; the Russian army would immediately retreat to the other side of the Vistula and even beyond, up to the Bug. The Germans accordingly would promptly march into Warsaw. Hence the question: Would there be time to remove the prisoners from here? Perhaps not! In which case we would remain, the Germans would free us, etc., etc. We therefore waited impatiently for the turn of events. We knew that the chances of war were becoming greater with each passing day. Indeed, we used to ask each other daily: "Where do things stand? Maybe the war has already begun? Maybe the fighting has already started and we don't know it?"

I remember one particular day. It was a Sunday, perhaps five or six days before the actual declaration of war. The day had passed like all others. The evening rolled around and we were already preparing for sleep. It was a rainy evening. The weather had turned stormy. There was thunder and lightning. Suddenly, penetrating the splashing of rain and peals of thunder, we heard a shooting as of distant cannon. One volley after another, weak yet distinct. It became more and more prolonged, and continued without letup. What could this be?

We assured each other: "Those are probably night maneuvers underway somewhere beyond the fortress. The soldiers are training." Still it was a bit puzzling. It was Sunday, after all, a holy day! Oh, well. We continued to sit quietly and listen. Suddenly—a horrible report, a tremendous peal of thunder, the whole courtyard became illuminated by a huge flame, as from a massive explosion. The walls shook; the tinkle of broken panes reached us from somewhere; and a hysterical scream could be heard from what sounded like a youthful voice. It seemed to us as if a cannon shell had exploded under the very windows of our prison. We leaped from our benches agitated, shaken. What's happening? Could it be that the war has already commenced? Could the bombardment of the Warsaw fortress have already begun? This was hard to believe. We dashed to the door and started banging on it. Our neighbors were doing the same thing. The gendarmes rushed about helter-skelter. The door opened. What does it mean? The guard stood there, pale: "I don't know either." The

prison was turning into a scene of commotion. We heard a knocking on the wall: it came from a neighbor with whom we used to engage in regular communication. It was Felix Dzerzhinsky—the same Dzerzhinsky who would later become so notorious in Soviet Russia as the head of the *Cheka*.¹ He too was imprisoned in the Tenth Pavilion at that time. The manner of his knocking now betrayed his degree of perturbation: “Modlin has already grown silent,” he told us. (Modlin was the fortress not far from Warsaw which was supposed to block the advance of the Germans. It meant that Modlin had fallen and the Germans had already arrived.) Did he mean it? Was it a joke? Or was he really serious? For a moment I was under the impression that the fellow had gone mad. After all, it was a few hundred miles to the German border. It would have required a week for the Germans to be able to reach Warsaw, and we surely would

1. For Medem’s prison relationship with Dzerzhinsky, see the recollections of cellmate, Stanislav Dvorak; *infra*, pp. 556–57, f.n.

Dzerzhinsky was one of the leading figures of the Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania who joined the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917 and, before the year was out, rose to head the Cheka (the shortened form in English for “The All-Russian Commission for the Suppression of Counterrevolution, Sabotage, and Speculation”). Rosa Luxemburg, only weeks before she became a victim of German right-wing terror, was deeply distressed over her old Polish comrade-in-arms’ presiding over the inauguration of the Bolshevik “Red Terror.” Karl Radek, who traveled the same course as Dzerzhinsky from Polish Social Democracy to Russian Bolshevism, described a conversation with Luxemburg in December 1918. “Rosa was hurt that Dzierzynski had accepted the post of heading the Cheka. ‘After all terror had never beaten us; why should we have to depend on it? . . . How can Josef [Dzierzynski] be so cruel?’” At that very time, she was reported by founding members of the German Communist Party as saying: “The working-class revolution needs no terrors for its ends, it hates and despises cold-blooded murder.” Nettl, *Luxemburg*, pp. 455–56.

Until his dying day six years after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Medem’s unremitting hostility to the Soviet system—a hostility which found him at odds even with people within socialist and Bundist ranks who had become intoxicated with “the first proletarian revolution”—was based upon his abiding and absolute revulsion toward the institutionalization of the “Red Terror.” His departure for the United States at the end of 1920 on what was ostensibly a service mission for the Bund of limited duration, was not unrelated to Medem’s strong disagreement with the prevailing pro-Soviet sentiment in the Bund.

have known about it. No, it couldn't be; it was just an explosion of some kind. We gradually calmed down. The shelling stopped and things grew quiet. We went to sleep.

Later we were told that a bolt of lightning had struck some ammunition stores located in the fortress not far from our prison, with the resultant explosion. Others insisted that it was no lightning but German agents who had fired the stores. What it was in actuality I never did find out. Luckily, another and larger collection of stores situated nearby remained untouched. Had it exploded then, our whole pavilion, and all of us in it, would have been blown sky high. But everything closed out peacefully enough.

Still it was like an augury of sorts. For, as a matter of fact, the war did begin within a few days.

We were suddenly awakened on a Tuesday or Wednesday very early in the morning. The door opened and the old master of the guards came in, excited, bewildered. He brought us the books in which we used to record the products that were purchased for us. "Be so kind," he said, "as to total up your figures." . . . "What's going on?" . . . "We've received a report that a general mobilization is to be declared today or tomorrow. The Tenth Pavilion will then be vacated and a hospital for the wounded will be set up here. You will be transferred to some other place."

So the war was, in fact, approaching. In a few days we received the final report: war had been declared. A week later we said farewell to the Tenth Pavilion.

Inside Deepest Russia

EARLY ONE MORNING the long black prison wagons arrived. Gendarmes, mounted and on foot, and armed with swords, revolvers, and rifles, surrounded us on all sides. Our procession slowly began to move out of the fortress and into Warsaw.

We rode for a long time through the whole city, from one end to the other. Everything was still asleep; the shops were closed, the streets empty. At the far end of the city we passed through the city gates and eventually drew up before a large, black, iron portal: the central prison for hard-labor convicts in the Warsaw suburb of Mokotów.

It was a large “modern” prison which had been erected not long before—a veritable small city in itself—a mass of buildings and courtyards, buildings for “living,” for working, factories, workshops. The whole thing was enclosed by a high red wall adorned with little watchtowers. Bayonets glistened from the towers.

The gate swung open and we rode into the courtyard. All was silent. The prison workshops stood dormant; no work was in progress. It was wartime, and here, too, preparations were under way to move the people to some other place. Then our ears picked up a singular sound: a peculiar ringing, unabated, muted, delicate. One is almost tempted to say a silvery ringing, as from a thousand tiny sleigh bells.

What, precisely, could it be? I didn't know. I was only conscious

of the ringing on all sides. It reverberated through the air, filling the courtyard. Indeed, the tones pervaded the whole gigantic prison. Could I, perhaps, have merely been imagining it all? Was I perhaps ill? Or was it possibly my own blood singing in my ears? Yet, I observed, my comrades had also caught it and were hearing the same thing.

And suddenly we knew: those were the shackles. The iron resounded at the slightest movement, and the tones wafted through the solid red brick walls, singing and blending together in a horrible prison symphony. And I stood there silently pondering: how remarkably gentle sounds the ringing of the heavy iron!

We were distributed among what were supposed to be one-man cells, each of them full, indeed overfull. Three men were squeezed into a cell five feet long and three feet wide. The tiny cell resembled an actual coffin, a coffin solidly packed with living human bodies. But that did not faze us, for we knew that the cell was for us little more than a sort of waiting room. Here, too, we would not be staying long. Within a few days they would be taking us farther—into deepest Russia. They had no desire to abandon us to the Germans.

We proceeded to scrutinize our temporary home. In point of fact there was not much to see, but, on the other hand, there was something to hear. For new and harsher tones now joined the clanging of the chains. We paid no attention to them at first. Then they began to assail our ears—the heavy, resounding blows of hammers, as in a forge. But we knew that the factories were closed down. The sound of the blows was reaching up to us from the courtyard. So—a swift dash to the window for a look. True, this was forbidden, and most strictly. A face would no sooner appear at the bars than the guard in the courtyard below would raise his rifle; and for someone not sufficiently agile it meant a shell in the forehead. And the guards were not to be taken lightly: they aimed well and fired swiftly. Yet one was not, after all, a veteran prisoner for nothing. One did manage to snatch a cautious glimpse from the window. And in short order we knew whence came the heavy pounding.

Those were the shackles once again. But now they were being firmly fettered—fettered to human legs. Because prior to our departure, so we were told, all the prisoners, even those who had previous-

ly moved about on “free legs,” had to receive their share of iron accouterments. The people were led into the courtyard in groups. The business was handled *ogulom* (wholesale), twenty to thirty men at a time. Dragging a heavy clump of chains out of some cellar, a guard would fling the weighty burden—a mass of old rusty iron—to the ground. While a thick reddish cloud of dust and rust swirled into the air, the prisoners would hurl themselves madly upon the clump of iron. The scene was of a weird agglomeration of jumbled human forms sprawling over the shackles amid dirt and dust. An amazing struggle began. A struggle over shackles? But why? Were the people afraid that the iron jewelry—heaven forbid—might not suffice? Indeed, no! There was more than enough iron. It was simply this: everyone sought to grab a lighter piece.

All were taken care of in short order. The shacklers raised their hammers. The job on the one party of prisoners was finished; and another party moved up. A new clump of chains was dragged over; the same clustering of humans and once again the pounding hammers. And so it continued day in and day out, unceasingly.

We became somewhat less than lighthearted. Would we, perchance, also be granted a similar gift? Actually the law forbade it: we had not yet been convicted. But who bothered about mere law? It was wartime, after all, and Russian laws in general were made so as *not* to be enforced. Thus, according to law we had the right to wear our own clothing. Nevertheless, no sooner had we arrived in Mokotów than we were made to strip naked and were thrust into filthy prisoners’ garb. Protest? Of course we protested. But we were told: “Kiddies, do you want to run the risk of resisting? By all means, go ahead and try! A dozen cartridges more or less—they’re of no consequence to us. It’s wartime.” No, we did not defend ourselves. So that we too were now prepared to receive the gift of iron.

However, we were not put in shackles. Yes, the “small jewels”—the handcuffs—these we did receive en route. These iron bracelets were always used during movement of a prisoner party through the city, on the way to or from the railroad train. They were not hammered on but were locked on with a key, and were removed at the point of destination.

Thus we lay in our coffins and waited. The third day arrived.

We had barely awakened in the morning when we heard a com-

motion, running, shouting in the corridor. All the doors were unlocked. "Out! Quickly! Instantly!" The journey was resuming.

The ugly and painful procedure of examining, counting, closing chains, arranging the rows, seemed to last an eternity. Finally, a long, thousand-headed procession was drawn up. We marched across the whole city on the way to the train.

A long line of prison cars, their small windows decorated with bars, already awaited us. "Get in! . . . Not much room . . . All filled . . ." Again the order was repeated: "Get in!" And again and again, "Get in! Get in!" At last we were all inside. The engine whistle sounded; and slowly, drowsily, our train started to move.

Thousands of versts from Warsaw, deep—very deep—within the Russian countryside, lay our destination: the medium-sized Russian city of Orel.

We pressed against the little windows. With powerful curiosity we peered out into the bright world: What was happening there? And throughout the country? What were people saying?

This much we knew; a gigantic war was in progress. And we were certain it would bring great news: Tsarist Russia would collapse. We had already heard in prison that on the very eve of the declaration of war large-scale workers' disorders had begun. Barricades were on the verge of being erected in Saint Petersburg. What effect then was the war having? Had it induced a still more potent blazing of the revolutionary fire, or a patriotic upsurge? We didn't know. Train after train passed by: soldiers on the way to the front. Agitated faces. Shouts of "hurrah" repeated again and again. An irrepressible comrade shouted from our window: "Long live the revolution!" No response. Our train stopped at a certain station. Alongside us stood another train loaded with soldiers. An attempt was made to open a discussion through the windows. A rumor had been circulating just then about a strike proclaimed by the workers of Berlin. One of us started to pass it along to the soldiers. "You see, comrades," he said, "the workers don't want to fight. They've already begun a strike in Berlin." One of them responded. "That's great!" he said with a crafty smile. "Let those Germans strike. In the meantime we'll march into Berlin and finish them off!" The soldiers laughed. No, revolution was not in the air. The chatting did not resume.

We traveled for three days and three nights. It was summer, the

beginning of August. The heat was dreadful, simply intolerable. Even with the little windows open, it was useless. The cars were packed so solidly that it was literally impossible to breathe.

There was no room to sleep. Two individuals would lie on each of the few benches, dividing the space between them. Actually it was no lying. They sat hunched over, with legs drawn up to their bodies. Yet even that was a luxury; and the honor was reserved for only a few. The rest had to sprawl out on the floor. Between the benches, under the benches, we lay packed against each other like herring in a vat. And still there was not enough room for everyone, even on the floor. Hence the sleeping had to be organized in sections: one section slept, the other stood or squatted, leaning against the wall in the passageway.

Our food consisted of a little black bread. On the second day we received, in addition, a bit of fat. But the fat was such that we could not take it into our mouths. And whoever could muster the courage, nevertheless, to swallow a few pieces was obliged to suffer the most terrible agonies; for it was dreadfully salty and it induced a horrible, burning thirst. And we were of course forever short of water. Thus we found ourselves at the point of collapse from hunger and thirst.

Our nerves grew taut. At the stations we shouted our tale of misery and anguish from the windows. No one heard us. One person after another succumbed to severe fainting spells and attacks of cramps. Everyone suffered from swollen legs.

Finally, finally, we arrived. But it still took quite a while before we reached the end of our woes. Racked beyond measure, scarcely able to stand on our feet, we dragged ourselves from train to prison over a seemingly endless distance. The soldiers—gross in their savagery and insults—drove us like a herd of cows. We still had to wait long hours in the prison courtyard under the broiling sun. And when we were finally driven into our cells, we collapsed once again on the hard plank cots, without even the strength to lift a finger.

Orel

OUR REAL ANGUISH was just beginning. The *guberniya* prison in which we were placed was too small for the large influx of hundreds of new “guests.” In addition to us—the inmates of the Tenth Pavilion—prisoners were also brought from Warsaw’s other prison, the notorious Paviak, and from other Polish cities: Lodz, Piotrkow, Kalisz. The prison was full to overflowing. The total prisoner complement of the Tenth Pavilion, which in Warsaw had filled that rather large structure with its dozens of cells, was confined here to a single large cell. Although it had room for only thirty or so prisoners, about seventy were placed in it. One can readily imagine the crush. The barest necessities were lacking; the place was even without drinking cups. There were no mattresses for sleeping. And when we finally did receive straw pallets, they contained so little straw that it was just like sleeping on bare wood. We were given no blankets at all. The prison food was utterly wretched. We were without money. The little we had in Warsaw had been taken from us before our departure. (The authorities promised to have it forwarded to us in Orel; but the promise was not kept.) I had even foreseen something like this, and had consequently sewn a few rubles into my clothing and glued some into my shoes before leaving the Tenth Pavilion. But our clothes and shoes had likewise been taken away, although we were also assured that these items too would be returned

to us as soon as we reached our destination. We waited for them a day, and another day, then weeks, and finally months—while our things were wallowing somewhere on a train and could not be found.

I finally received mine eight or nine months later, after I had already returned to Warsaw. So there we were, without underwear, dirty and unkempt. Moreover, we were not permitted to go to the baths. It was pretty sad.

Worst of all was the fact that the prison administration in Orel had not been accustomed to dealing with political prisoners. We were therefore treated—at least in the beginning—like common criminals, like thieves and cutthroats. Most distressing was the uncouth and brutish manner in which we were addressed (the officials used the familiar *du*); and on top of this there was the swearing and the drilling.

It was equally painful to be incarcerated in a solidly packed cell holding seventy people, all total strangers. The crowd was highly diverse: one part—decent and fine individuals; the other—disgusting miscreants. The latter included a few provocateurs (among them the aforementioned “celebrities” who, despite the strict supervision en route, had already been administered some healthy blows; they were placed in a separate cell, far from the other people), and a number of lesser “heroes.” A few others were suspected of engaging in provocations. There was a fellow who feigned insanity, and one who, I believe, actually became insane—or half insane. Three common bandits drifted into our midst; they were hung a few months later. To round out the whole set, we also included in our number about ten German and Austrian spies.

Of the “true” politicals, not even all of these were strictly exemplary and attractive personalities. And it was extremely irksome in general to find oneself constantly, day and night, in the company of seventy people. There was never a moment of quiet. The place was in a state of perpetual excitement, of constant commotion and uproar. It would have been a thousand times better to be sitting in a one-man cell.

After the passage of several months, the crowd came to realize that things could not continue as before if the lot of us were not to go mad. A *starosta* (headman or overseer) was accordingly chosen and

a definite “constitution” adopted containing rules of behavior (e.g., the designation of certain hours for absolute silence in the cell, etc.). We had a good *starosta* at the time, Alexander Pristor¹, an activist of long standing in the PPS. A gentle, elderly man with a bushy, flaxen beard, Pristor was a former Russian officer who had been sentenced to *katorga* for organizing “fighting detachments” of the PPS. After the revolution, he returned to Poland where he became an assistant minister. This man knew how to run things with a strong hand, and the people obeyed him. We thus enjoyed a little order in the cell. But that was to come somewhat later. During the early period behavior was far from decorous.

Meanwhile we had completed the first few weeks in prison. Then, one morning, we received some news: we were to be shipped off to a few small cities in the same *guberniya*—to their prisons, of course. The former “residents” of the Tenth Pavilion were split into two parties: one was sent to Malo-Arkhangelsk, the other to a different city whose name I have forgotten. I was in the first group. We arrived at a tiny *uezd* (district) prison in Malo-Arkhangelsk run by a very decent director. We were content; and felt that life there would be satisfactory. I was placed in a small one-man cell which I shared with a Polish Social Democrat, a certain Yuzef Unschlicht, a leading figure in his party. Subsequently—after the revolution—he held a distinguished position in Soviet Russia among the Bolsheviks. If I’m not mistaken, Unschlicht now occupies the place of Dzerzhinsky as head of the notorious *Cheka*. He was a cold, dry individual, far from stupid, and exceedingly nimble and proficient. In prison he had the remarkable faculty of arranging his affairs well under any circumstances. No sooner had we arrived in Malo-Arkhangelsk, than he promptly maneuvered his way into the prison kitchen and struck up a conversation with the chef—and in no time at all we began to receive hospital rations (with milk and white bread), even though he, at least, was quite a healthy individual. We were beginning to settle in, and I was counting on a good rest. Suddenly, something wholly unexpected

1. See *infra*, pp. 550–57 f.n. 1, for Dvorak’s prison reminiscences about Pristor, Unschlicht, and Dzerzhinsky.

happened. We had been in Malo-Arkhangelsk scarcely a day when I was called out to the director who greeted me in very friendly fashion and offered me good news. He had received word from Orel that I was about to be set free. He was instructed in writing to send me back promptly to Orel where I would be freed. I was to leave the next morning.

One can readily understand that I was pleased beyond measure. I knew that my brother had been exerting every possible effort during the time of my imprisonment to obtain my freedom. Yet more than fifteen months had already elapsed and there was still no success. He had now apparently managed to bring it off after all. I was in seventh heaven.

I was led from the prison shortly before daybreak. The town of Malo-Arkhangelsk was located about fifteen or twenty versts from the railroad line. I climbed aboard the waiting peasant wagon together with the two soldier-guards, and we started out. We rode across the broad silent meadows. The sun came up. It was quiet, and there was an absence of all feeling of restraint. What joy, what bliss as I savored the prospect: freedom.

We chatted with the peasant. A peasant's subject of conversation? The land, of course. Naturally he was unhappy. Almost revolutionary in spirit. He had too little land while the landowner had an excess. Where was justice? Why shouldn't he be given the landowner's surplus land?

"A pretty business!" roared the peasant. "They tell us that the soil is the landowner's very own and dare not be taken away. Well and good! But I ask you: Here I've got two sons. My very own, one would think. Yet they were taken away from me and sent off to the front. They can be taken but not the land? Where, I ask you, is justice?"

We arrived at the station. I was put on the train, in the prisoner's car. An old *bosyak* (tramp), filthy beyond description, was seated next to me. Every few minutes he would dig down into his clothes, drag out a clump of lice, and flip them away. I received my portion. It was disgusting. Still I thought: no tragedy; a few more hours and I'm free.

We entered the prison courtyard and walked past the female sec-

tion. A few women comrades were peering out the window. Their eyes opened wide in amazement: What is this? Just left and already back again? "Where are you headed?" came the shout. "Toward freedom!" I replied.

An armed guard took charge of me for the *étape*. I asked him: "When will I be freed? Right away?" He looked at me: "I don't know." I was led into a room. I waited. Hours went by, but no one appeared. One day passed, and a second, and a third, and I finally learned that the whole thing was a misunderstanding. There was no question of release. My imprisonment continued. It was very distressing.

My previous neighbors from the Tenth Pavilion were no longer there. I was with new people (the ones who had arrived from Paviak), among them a goodly number of Bundists. In addition to those standing trial with me, there were others from the movement. I found myself submerged in a warm, comradely atmosphere. But the tribulations of imprisonment continued. I remained confined for weeks. Then my fortunes took a turn for the very worst: there began a new stage in my wanderings.

Smolensk

THIS MUCH I KNOW—AND it may have something to do with my ability to adapt to any situation, even the harshest—when it was a matter of spending a substantial length of time in one place (I mean, in one prison), I could become accustomed to things and feel reasonably well even under the most adverse conditions. One learned somehow to adjust. In the final analysis, one managed even to cope with the worst prison overseers. They, too, were human beings, after all. To be sure, there were types among them who by nature had the souls of hangmen, or whose prison “work” had literally developed in them a morbid, a sadistic inclination to derive pleasure from tormenting prisoners. But these were obviously the exceptions. The majority were simple Russian peasants, soldiers who had served their time, family people who suffered from an abundance of poverty and who were themselves greatly dissatisfied with their conditions. With such people it was possible to get by. After an extended period of closeness, one established rather friendly ties with them. One became something of a “native,” an intimate. Hard as it is to believe, it was so; one began to feel almost at home in prison.

But when the journeying started, the moving to places of interior exile by the *étape*, things became quite different. As soon as the *starshiy* (the chief overseer) entered the cell and proceeded to read from the roster the names of those being banished to some distant location; as soon as one heard the shouted command: “Line up for

the *étape!* Quickly! Now! This very instant!," one lost one's human character, was reduced to a speck of dust, a grain of sand, a tiny portion of a huge agglomeration—devoid of significance, voiceless, without personality. One became a minuscule element in the vast pile of gray human dust, human waste, human refuse. As if by a gigantic steam shovel, this dust pile was scooped into an amorphous heap, cast off somewhere else, dispersed, congealed again, shoved into filthy prison cars, expelled once again, swept apart, and once more lumped together in a new pile. And so it continued, relentlessly, without limit and without end. Gone all pity and all humanity and all humans. The wheels of a cold, dead, savage machine rolled on. Its terrible iron lips grasped the puny, utterly inconsequential individual, hurled him into its deep cauldron, choked and pressed and chewed him, and ground him to bits with its heavy millstones. And when the machine had done its little job and spat him out somewhere, thousands of miles away, the human being found himself shattered and devastated physically as well as morally. Such was movement "by the *étape.*"

And when, on top of everything, the machine tended to grow rusty and grind to a halt, when the driving could only function by fits and starts, with delays, with stoppages and breakdowns, well, nothing worse could be imagined. That is exactly how it was. The war was responsible for blocking roads, holding up the movement of trains, throwing the machinery out of kilter, bringing confusion into the whole apparatus. And it simultaneously hurled into the iron cauldron thousands upon thousands of new people, a wholly new and fresh mass of human material. And the rusted, clogged, overflowing machine proved incapable of digesting all the material. It was choking and suffocating; and each turn of the giant, ponderous wheels cost human lives.

No single individual was to blame. Everything was confusion. It was the war's doing. But woe to those who fell beneath the terrible massive wheels. And I was one of them.

I found myself in Orel—in the miserable, filthy, solidly-packed cell. How truly fortunate, I pondered, was the individual who had the opportunity to draw enough clean, fresh air into his lungs each day. I was not among those fortunates. True, conditions were fairly tolerable for the moment: it was autumn, and the windows could still be kept open during the day. Happily this was not forbidden, but

they had to be shut at night because it would have been too cold for the many of us sleeping on the floor. It was then that it became terribly stifling. And what would it really be like, one wondered, with the onset of winter?

The thought struck me: Would it be possible to take a whole winter of this and still come out alive? It seemed to me at the time as if that would be quite impossible. And yet, the winter passed, and another, and even a third. People simply stayed and stayed in prison. Indeed no one was actually compelled to say farewell to life.

Then all at once there arrived a piece of news: I was being returned to Warsaw—to stand trial. The trial would take place shortly. It was necessary to get ready for the trip.

Very well. I set to work. A sack was sewn together, and into it I stuffed my bit of underwear (the comrades from Paviak did have their things, and shared them with me), along with a piece of bread, some tea and sugar, a teakettle, a pot, and a wooden spoon. Finished. Then we began our journey, my five comrades and I, all involved in the same trial.

We were led out into the corridor. It was a scene of bustling activity. The soldiers were already on hand. Our names were called. We were searched. Rough soldier hands crept into our pockets, felt around our clothing, our underwear, our bodies. First one individual, then another, was forced to strip completely naked. Anything suspicious was thrown aside. “Suspicious” items included such things however as tobacco, matches, toothpowder or toothpaste. It was a time when one was not permitted to take along even soap.

We lined up. The hand manacles were locked on and we began the march to the train. Then once again the squalid prisoner cars pulled up. Again a new prison, a new filthy hole; and again soldiers, again the foul shakedown, again hand manacles. A new train, a new prison, on and on. Journeying by the *étape* often lasted weeks, sometimes whole months.

This was customary routine. But, as already noted, it was now wartime, and entirely new and special obstacles had accumulated. We no sooner arrived at the first *étape* station—it was the city of Smolensk—when we received a sad bit of intelligence; we could not proceed any farther.

The reason? All trains headed for Warsaw were occupied by the military. Movement by the *étape* had come to a halt.

How long would it last? The old overseer smiled: "Yes, my friends, you will in all likelihood have to be patient until the end of the war. The Germans are on the outskirts of Warsaw."

So we were going to remain in Smolensk. And when we stepped into our new "home" and gazed upon the scene which opened before us, we were appalled. We had stumbled into a veritable hell.

We were conducted into a long corridor, grimy and dark as a coal pit. Then a door opened on one side and our nostrils were assailed by a gush of stifling, nauseating, damp-warm air. We were placed inside. The door was shut. And we stood there staring at each other.

We were in a cell—eight paces long and the same in width. The space was almost completely filled by two large wooden pallets, long boards nailed on to thick wooden legs. The pallets extended the length of the wall on both sides, allowing for a narrow passageway between them. And on top of, between and beneath the pallets, human bodies filled every space: standing, sitting, lying in a weird jumble. Squeezed together, filthy, sweating, bedraggled—disgusting! And as if to add its own mockery, a sign next to the door read: "Room for 9 People." But there were easily twenty-five; and that moreover was a lucky day. Later on the number reached as high as thirty-five.

As for sleeping, that took place on bare boards, without a bit of straw. But attaining even such a bed, on a couple of boards the width of two or three hands, involved a stroke of particular good fortune. The ones who had no such good fortune were obliged to sleep beneath the pallets, on the cold asphalt floor. For a pillow, one individual would have recourse to a broom; another, to a pair of old boots—or his own fist. A blanket of any kind was out of the question.

Filth, stench, vermin. . . Some of the prisoners had been lying about for months without a single change of underwear; without having once undressed, without having once held a piece of soap. Bedbugs by the million clung to the walls, lay on the floor, pressed into corners in thick black clumps. They used to descend upon the pallets at night and attack the people with savage ferocity.

I set up this kind of "agenda" for myself: twice a day I would go "hunting." The procedure involved stripping from head to toe and

conducting a precise and systematic examination of each item of underwear. A slaughter was carried out. But to what avail? The disgusting creatures would lay thousands of fresh eggs each night and the routine would have to begin anew the following day. Alas, it was all in vain. During the pleasurable “hunt,” I used to dispatch about forty-five specimens each time—i.e., twice a day. My concern with “statistics” may seem laughable, but for me the matter was deadly serious at the time. Then, after a few hours, they would be back again.

Of the individuals languishing there, more than one had succumbed so thoroughly to self-neglect as to lapse into a kind of dull indifference. Such persons submitted without resistance to the supremacy of the parasites. They would lie there and allow themselves to be consumed. But others did embark upon the “hunt” from time to time, which invariably drew from one of the onlookers the quip beloved of the prisoners: “You’re not being selective, brother! You’re not going after the stubborn ones! Keep hammering away! Don’t just dabble!” And the hammering would in fact go on continuously, in systematic fashion and with philosophic sedateness. After all, time we had aplenty.

We were constantly hungry. The food was poor and scanty. Whenever the bowls were brought in, the people lunged at them like starving animals; and in a minute all was gone. Whoever lacked the ability to gulp down the hot soup with extra swiftness was compelled to go practically without lunch. Six, eight, sometimes as many as fifteen men would eat from a single pot—and among the eaters there were more than enough sick people.

The air . . . it would not even be accurate to say the air was bad; there simply was no air. The “common” Russian fears the cold more than anything else. One need not dwell on the matter of how the people were dressed: it was pathetic. And no one would agree to having the windows open at night. And on top of that—there was the historic *parasha* standing in the corner. The clearing of our lungs—the daily walk—lasted all of fifteen minutes!

The guards treated us literally like cattle. A deluge of curse words rained down upon us constantly. What can I say? One gets used to it. Is there any alternative? We were nothing more than *étape*-prisoners, the most miserable among the miserable, the most deprived of the

deprived. No longer the privileged, no longer the “politicals.” Nobody knew we were politicals. And when we said we were, nobody believed us. So we were treated like common *brodyagi* (tramps). What could one do? One could only grit one’s teeth and keep quiet. The price for failing to do so was not infrequently a kick in the side, a slap in the face. Hence one kept quiet. But even silence was no assurance against rudeness and villification. Someone falling ill and seeking, for instance, the services of the *fel’dsher* (medical assistant—a physician was out of the question), would elicit from the guard a perfunctory response coupled with an endearing Russian expression. Or the overseer would offer this rejoinder to someone wishing to make a request: “There’s no need for you to write any requests.” “But. . .” “Hold your tongue.” And once more a couple of familiar Russian expressions.

Such was the countenance of the lovely institution into which we had stumbled. We used to lie on the hard pallets and ask each other what there was to do. Money we didn’t have; it was forbidden, of course, to take money along on the *étape*. As far as our relatives were concerned, we had disappeared. No one knew where we were. Notify them? Precluded. Writing letters was not permitted. Moreover, where would one obtain the seven kopecks for a stamp? We were thus confined, without help and without strength, and with a single prospect: to die like animals in the filthy, miserable hole.

We would lie about and think. (One who has never been so situated cannot begin to imagine how trivial, how insignificant thoughts and ideas can become under such conditions.) A beautiful, a glorious “ideal” restricted solely to the realm of dreams was, for me, my “cozy” cell in the Tenth Pavilion, in the Warsaw fortress. What would I not have given, I used to say at the time, and in all seriousness, just to be sitting in my fortress cell. But even that was too audacious a dream. My desires were generally far more modest. When I ate my supper, consisting of a piece of black bread, I would dream about how delightful it would be if, along with it, I could have just a small piece of salami. Not to eat my fill; no, heaven forbid. I envisaged actually a small slice of salami, the size, let us say, of a two-kopeck coin. Just to inhale its odor and . . . perhaps . . . take it to my mouth and hold it there while I chewed my hard piece of black bread.

These were all trifles. Over and above such petty and inconse-

quential cravings, there always lived and ceaselessly echoed the single, deep, overriding wish-refrain: to survive, to hold out at all costs!

That I really did succeed in surviving and not falling apart was a real miracle.

The Forgotten Ones

IT IS WORTH DEALING a bit with the society in which I spent that sad time.

Of the total population in a Russian prison, the *étape* prisoners were the most forlorn. Year in and year out, hundreds of thousands would be shunted from pillar to post by way of the *étape*, among whom relatively few were convicted prisoners. They were largely just an assortment of misfits: *Lumpen* (down-and-outers: individuals with no stable social-class position), *brodyagi*, people without a particular vocation, people concealing their names. But very often one encountered people who were also quite respectable: people who had failed to renew their passports in time and who were being chased home by way of the *étape*; people who had simply experienced a misfortune, stemming, for instance, from a dispute of some sort with a policeman and a failure to pass on a bribe. And there were other hapless individuals, so very many, including persons who had not the slightest notion as to why they were being held.

Smolensk was a large rail junction, the meeting point of several railroad lines. Consequently, new parties used to arrive and depart almost daily. The segment which had been scheduled to depart in the direction of the war zone would remain in Smolensk; the rest would merely lay over for a few days and then resume traveling to some other place. Before our eyes there passed a seemingly endless array of

human types, in a scene like a motion picture: variegated, weird, occasionally most unpleasant; yet withal, forever interesting.

There come to mind the three Ukrainian peasants imprisoned with us, young fellows from somewhere in Kiev *guberniya*, healthy, strong lads, a bit on the wild side. When the war began they were engaged in farmwork on the grounds of the Kovno fortress. They got drunk one evening and ended up in the usual brawl. What did the fortress commander do? He had them arrested, subjected them to a liberal whipping, and sent them home—on “suspicion of espionage.”

But instead of reaching Kiev, they found themselves hopelessly sidetracked and ended up in Smolensk, where they had already been imprisoned for three whole months. They could not proceed any further. Forgotten!

I recall a fellow prisoner from the Lublin district, a Polish peasant, floundering about in the prison for over two months, who had never once removed his boots. It was whispered among the others that some rubles had been sewn into the boots, which presumably explained why he never removed them—even when taking a bath.

Indeed his precautions were not wholly unjustified, for the place contained a respectable number of individuals interested in other peoples' possessions. In another case, where the person had failed to take such strong protective measures, a pair of suspenders, the victim's sole possession, was stolen with lightning swiftness. The old man wept like a child, but in vain. Not until several days later did the thieves sell him back his own suspenders for two packages of *makhorka* (cheap tobacco).

Another prisoner was an old shepherd from the neighborhood of Grodno. He was afflicted with an ugly, loathsome sickness. A stinking exudate drained constantly from the sores and abscesses which covered his whole body. People consequently treated him like a leper. Even the most degraded among the prisoners balked at eating from a common bowl with him. Because he was not even allowed to sit on the pallet, he would lie underneath it day and night, on the cold asphalt floor, abandoned and filthy like an animal.

One prisoner, a deaf-mute, was apparently also somewhat insane. For three days and three nights he stood at the door without moving from the spot—as rigid as a pole. And whenever I got up at night, I

encountered the glassy stare of this unlovely cellmate standing guard at the door of our hell.

As to the mentally deranged, the place in general held any number of them. It was rare for an *étape* not to carry along with it a few such unfortunates. Where were they being dragged? With what transgression were they being charged? Nobody knew. With those among them who had not yet fully lost their reason, it was still possible more or less to engage in conversation. Most of these people were held on some sort of suspicion of crime. They were being hustled along to a larger city where a commission of doctors would investigate their mental condition. Individuals in this category frequently experienced a very special difficulty. The law required that they travel in the company of a *fel'dsher*. Meanwhile, the person in question found himself still imprisoned in Smolensk when he had to proceed, for instance, to Moscow. But the *fel'dsher* would surely not go out of his way for the sake of one prisoner; he needed ten at the very least, else the matter was hardly worthwhile. So the sick unfortunate was compelled to mark time until a party of ten psychotics had been organized. He would simply wait and continue to rot in prison.

My cell contained one such patient—a young fellow suffering from a terrible nervous disorder. Every two or three hours he experienced a severe attack, and would collapse—half-fainting, half doubled over with cramps—in something resembling an epileptic seizure. And each time he would begin to scream wildly, singing and unloosing a torrent of foul language. Then in a matter of minutes he was calm again and returned to normal until, with the lapse of a few hours, the attack recurred. It was that way continuously, with regularity, day and night. One can readily imagine the effect of such proximity upon our nerves: we too almost went out of our minds.

Incidentally, after having spent five weeks in Smolensk and returning to Orel, I found myself back in Smolensk three months later. And the first prisoner I encountered there was that same sick fellow, still sitting and waiting for the nine others needed to round out the *minyán*.

Our prison bunch included also a substantial number of robbers and cutthroats. These were not necessarily the worst of neighbors,

and they corresponded not at all with the conventional image of such people as sinister creatures whose very faces bear the mark of spilled human blood. It was sometimes possible to sleep with such people for weeks on end without the thought entering one's mind that they were conscience-stricken over such crimes. And among them I literally found congenial fellows.

There comes to mind, for instance, the young man who was led into our cell in prison garb. He turned out to be a Persian. With his parents he had migrated to the Caucasus, settled there, later committed a "bit of villainy," and ended up in prison. He had just completed four years of *katorga* and was on the way to Siberia.

A robust, childlike face; naive, dark eyes; attractive white teeth; a genial, open smile. We quickly became fast friends. We played at dominoes, laughed, carried on. I once asked him why, in fact, he had been given his four years of *katorga*. The lad was prepared to tell me about it, but it was not easy. For the Persian knew only a handful of Russian words and I did not understand a single word of Persian. Yet where there's a will there's a way. You talk with your hands—with your own and even with the hands of others. Thus my friend proceeded to grab three men from the "audience" and line them up in a row. They had no idea what it was all about. And a story commenced, obviously according to the demonstration method; with living illustrations, so to speak.

With the three fellows standing in line, the Persian launched upon his tale. "This one (his finger pointing toward the first) my uncle. Understand?" "Yes, yes!" "Fine. This one (pointing toward the second) a stranger. And that one (pointing toward the third), the stranger's brother. All right. Good." He next seized the "stranger's" hand and, with the latter's fist, struck a solid blow against his "uncle." Stabbed him, he indicated, to death. "Dead. Understand?" "Yes, indeed. What happened next?" "Well, then I—him (the Persian struck a blow with his own fist against the "brother of the stranger")—also killed. Dead! Understand?"

"Yes, but wait a minute. Why did you do in the brother of the stranger and not the stranger himself, the one who had stabbed your uncle?"

"Oh, one of my brothers had already (the fist shook in the air

once again) killed him. That one dead. My brother—*katorga*.”

Then the lad recalled something very funny. Laughing and leaping up like a child, he dragged two other men over, lined them up, and pointed with his finger: “This one here—another one of my brothers; and that one—another one of the stranger’s brothers.” And as he had before, he now seized the hand of his “other brother” and struck the stranger’s “brother” with it. “Also dead; also *katorga*!” he said, ending his story . . . while beaming all over.

“What do you propose to do when you finally return to the Caucasus?” I asked the Persian on another occasion. “Oh, there are still two others there,” he replied quite serenely, “two others whom I must also . . .” (and the fist rose up once again and betokened that which words could not express—murder). And suddenly he turned serious: “It must be done!” he said, with an innocent expression in his cheerful, dark, childlike eyes. “It must be done! Blood revenge!”

Among my fellow prisoners was an old man who had murdered his wife; another who had murdered his mother-in-law; and a third, a young chap, who had murdered his sister’s husband. All three individuals—absolutely quiet, unruffled, amicable.

I saw a professional killer who, according to his own words, had twenty-six victims on his conscience. I never would have believed this if I hadn’t known that he had actually been sentenced for it to a long term at *katorga*. True, when I saw him he was already seriously ill, in the terminal stage of tuberculosis; and he died, in fact, a few weeks later.

I must confess that in Smolensk I found the professional criminals—the “specialists”—decidedly likable. That is, from one particular standpoint: of all the inhabitants of a prison cell, they happened to be the best cellmates. A *bosyak*, a vagabond, a nobody, entering the prison as an incidental visitor was usually bedraggled; a filthy creature wanting in self-pride, totally devoid of any order and discipline, lacking completely any feeling of camaraderie. The types depicted by Gorky were indeed quite fetching in a book or on stage; but living with them in the same quarters, sleeping on the same pallets, eating from the same bowl were hardly among the greatest delights. Now the professional criminals, the regular prisoners, the permanent denizens of the prison—these people were quite different.

They manifested a certain type of discipline, a certain kind of honesty, even certain traditions.

Generally, they were rather interesting individuals and in no sense worse than many walking around free. It was the great Russian writer Dostoevsky, himself sentenced to *katorga* for many years, who had observed, decades before, that the Russian *katorzhniki* numbered among the finest and most able elements in the population. And I believe this to be largely true also in the present day.

I became acquainted with a large number of thieves; rarely had I, in actual fact, encountered such talented, efficient, and wise people on the outside. And this was especially interesting; regardless of the fact that their whole profession was, in essence, purely individualistic, each individual acting for himself—service in behalf of society it certainly was not—they nevertheless quite markedly revealed positive social virtues. A feeling of unity, for instance. Indeed it was not just a feeling, it was akin almost to “class consciousness”—in any event, to group consciousness. Comradely relations were developed among them to an extraordinary degree: in their own circle they were virtually communistic. How often had I witnessed it: no sooner had a prisoner—a real one, in prisoner’s garb—been led into the cell, when he instantaneously chucked his bag of *makhorka* (the most important of a prisoner’s earthly possessions) on the table: “Smoke, comrades!” And then he would proceed to divide up his bit of tea and sugar and bread as well. Of course, “comrades” were considered by him to be only the real prisoners, those like himself. In his eyes the human flotsam of the *étape* were not people; they were not “colleagues,” but only casual visitors, associated with a different world.

A small item, yet highly characteristic of prisoners’ traditions: in the case of individuals confined to the *étape* section along with the “incidental dregs,” the lunchtime scene went something like this: The bowls of soup and *kasha* would be brought in and everyone would lunge toward them; whoever was swifter got more. But it was sharply different when one was in the company of the real prisoners. Seating himself calmly around the bowl, each individual would scoop out his spoonful, in rotation, without grabbing. If bits of meat happened, on occasion, to be floating about in the soup, no one would move to

touch them. Only after the soup had been completely exhausted would the meat be divided among everyone. A trivial thing perhaps, yet within this trivial thing was reflected a distinctive feature—the feature of an “honest” prisoner.

Naturally, the singular conditions of the thieving “trade” placed a rather special stamp upon that feature. Yet the attitude of these people toward even their lamentable vocation was permeated with a certain—if I may venture the expression—moral seriousness. Robbery, for them, was no theatrical game of tricks, nor a romantic enterprise made the more interesting and enticing because of the very element of risk. No, they considered it a thoroughly prosaic, routine, and tedious job. Which is why they actually called it a “job,” a skill like any other. A line, a trade that had to be mastered, and within which one out of the various special trades had to be selected. There were indeed many: there were pocket-picking, house-robbing, horse-stealing, and scores of others. And the work had to be pursued with energy; and it was wearying. A pleasure it assuredly was not.

“It’s hard work,” a thief once told me. “But there’s no alternative. I never learned another occupation. I have no other profession. So what can I do? And in the final analysis,” he added with renewed conviction, “someone’s got to steal. Here am I, that someone. . . .”

“Listen,” said one such specialist to me. “I staged my first robbery when I was thirteen years old. What does such a lad know? It was just an accidental thing, a joke, a prank. Luck eluded me, however. I was caught. There began a life in prison. Then I really started to learn the ropes. And it stood me in good stead for, when I came out of prison, all the doors of the decent folk were closed to me. ‘You’re a thief; get out of here!’ So I thought: well, if that’s the case then I ought to at least become adept at my trade. If a thief I must be, then at least an efficient one. So I really did become a professional thief, and will remain one to the end.

“Do you think, perhaps, it’s a bundle of joy? You’re greatly mistaken, my dear friend. Just look at it this way: I work a few months, then I get caught and am sent away for several years. Then I work briefly once again, and once again I get caught. That’s how it goes, endlessly. Ever since that first robbery I’ve spent about twenty years in prison—not consecutively, but in installments. And during the

whole period I've enjoyed about a dozen years of freedom. So where's the big pleasure? And as for the work itself, do you think it's easy? A dog's life, I tell you, a real dog's life. But that's the way it is and it can't be changed. You've got to make some sort of living, after all; and everyone does what he can."

I developed a real affection for some of the thieves. How could it be? How does one become a friend of such immoral people? But I submit that those fellows did have a morality, usually a distorted, a crazy one, yet withal a morality. This morality gave sanction to robbery, it's true. It was created by thieves, and not without good reason. And the thieves despised the "decent folk" and looked upon them as their natural prey. Yet they, too, had their principles. Rarely would a thief commit a transgression against a poor man. And if it happened that some immature fellow, or just some nobody, allowed himself to rob a pauper of his shreds of poverty, he would be regarded by the honest thief as a lowlife, a scoundrel, whose behavior violated the honor of a "serious" thief, contravened thief morality.

And it seems to me upon close examination of some of those "better" people, living in perfect freedom and who have never worn prisoners' gray, that there would be found more than one among them who could not hold a finger to the rejected, accursed, despised thief.

It is interesting to take note of a matter which has a bearing not only on the thieves but on the *étape* section as a whole. During our five weeks of imprisonment in Smolensk there was a continuous ebb and flow of individuals. Our cellmates changed constantly, so that we encountered hundreds of different people during that time. And throughout the whole period there was not a single instance in which we could detect even a sign of anti-Semitism. We were virtually the only Jews in our cell—we four men (the two women who had been sent together with us to Warsaw were of course set apart from us, in the women's section). We spoke Yiddish to each other constantly. Everyone could see and know that we were Jews. Yet we heard not a single anti-Semitic remark and felt not a trace of hostility during all those weeks. It was a source of great comfort.

It remains for me to say only a few words about a separate category of prisoners which flooded the Russian prisons at that time: the Germans. The arrest of German citizens all across the country

had begun at the very outset of the war. There were any number of Germans in Russia. They were seized and shipped off to some distant *guberniya* in the south or east. I saw hundreds of them. But that wasn't enough. Even peaceful German inhabitants of Germany proper were hauled away. The Russian military had penetrated quite deeply into Prussia during the first few months of the war, and civilians there would also be seized and hauled away into the depths of Russia. The process was carried out with horrible brutality. One morning, I recall, our cell door opened and an adult entered, along with two boys. The older one must have been about nine years of age, the younger about five or six. Gaunt, emaciated, hungry, miserable. The man? A German from the interior of Prussia. He told us his sad story. He was a peasant who lived in the vicinity of Tilsit. A detachment of the Russian army had passed by just at the time he was in the field, his two children with him. The officer called him over and ordered him to come along. Where to? To Russia! And the children? They too.

He implored them to allow him at least to dash into his house long enough to get some clothing for the children. No! They had to accompany the army just as they were. So they went along and arrived at the Russian border, where they were imprisoned. Thereafter they were sent from one city to another, from one prison to another, progressively deeper into Russia. They were now being driven toward a town in Astrakhan *guberniya*. The younger child was sick and debilitated, dressed in some tattered feminine clothing which a compassionate wife of a prison guard had given him en route. Without it he certainly would have frozen to death. And they still had to cover a distance of a few thousand miles. It was pitiful beyond words. We ourselves were in a terrible condition, but we forgot all our troubles and considered ourselves fortunate and privileged in contrast to the dreadful misery of those innocent victims.

Mokatów

WE WERE IMPRISONED in Smolensk for five weeks, during which time we had actually come to believe we would simply rot away there. But we were found after all. One morning my wife arrived from Warsaw. She brought along clothing, underwear, food. When she spied me through the bars, she failed to recognize me, so wild and rundown did I appear.

She had no notion as to the kind of condition in which we found ourselves. Thus she arrived carrying an assortment of goodies: chocolate and fruit and various sweets. I gazed at the items and said to her: "These are all very nice, but please do me a big favor. Go down to the city and get a few pounds of good bread and salami and some fat and butter; because ever since we left Warsaw, and that was about five months ago, we've hardly once had any food truly fit for human beings. We're hungry."

She dashed off and returned with the delicacies, and we were finally able to eat our fill, and with gusto.

Some time later we were sent back to Orel.

I have already described the "lovely" life in Orel. Still it was a veritable paradise in comparison with Smolensk. There I managed to get a nice rest and to feel quite well. But the "good" life lasted only a few months. Again a new order arrived. What was it this time? We had to move. Move? Where to? To Warsaw.

I was mortified. The whole story was beginning all over again: we

would arrive at Smolensk once again, and again it would turn out that the rest of the way was blocked; and again we'd be forgotten there. It was horrible. I pleaded to let us remain where we were. In vain. The *étape* was arriving. We departed.

This time, however, I was more fortunate. The road to Warsaw was already open, and the whole journey lasted "only" about twenty days. Arduous, in fact, as the journey turned out to be, with its full measure of distress and humiliation, the worst no longer held any terror for me after the anguish of Smolensk. In any event, nothing could have been worse than Smolensk.

The most painful incident took place at the end of the trip, as soon as we reached the Warsaw station. A young Jewish man was brought into our car not far from Warsaw. A pale fellow dressed in a long coat, the kind traditionally worn among observant Jews; it was a rarity among prisoners. We tried to engage him in conversation. He remained tight-lipped. We plied him with questions: Where did he come from? Why was he imprisoned? Where was he being taken? Still no answer. So be it; we left him alone. Upon our arrival at Warsaw we were led from the car, manacled, as was the custom, in pairs, one person's right hand linked to another's left.

We were lined up on the platform. And we waited. It was already dusk. The Jewish fellow was standing not far from me. Suddenly I noticed that he slipped his hand out of the manacle (this can sometimes be done if an individual has a very small hand); he took a leap, and started to run. The soldiers were momentarily caught unawares, but within a few seconds they caught sight of him and gave chase. The fellow sprang across the tracks. He could easily have escaped had he managed to display a modicum of agility. Alas, he was unable to. Instead of running he all but crawled. In a matter of seconds a soldier already had him by the neck. He was brought back, and the beating commenced. The soldiers were angry. Had he escaped, they would have been punished, so they vented their anger upon him. They pounded him with their fists. They beat him with the hilts of their sabers—across the mouth, on the nose. Blood began to flow. The beating persisted. Finally they stopped. The "senior" gave the order: "Revolvers at the ready! Anyone moving half a step out of line—a bullet in the head!" And so began our procession into the city. And while one walked one's thought turned constantly on the

hapless fellow who, every minute, was receiving another blow, another shove, another slap. Thus we traversed the whole city, from the Brest station to the Mokatów prison. It was late at night when we finally reached our new refuge. A fresh chance to rest.

I was back again in the large forced-labor prison of Mokatów, the very prison from which I had embarked upon my painful, agonizing odyssey a half year before. Now the beginning of a new journey was imminent, one that would be perhaps even longer and more painful.

The Mokatów prison had ceased functioning as a forced-labor prison during the war period. The *katorzhniki* were sent deep into Russia. It became an investigation prison, a place for those who had not yet been convicted. Twice already it had been completely evacuated, with everyone shipped off to Russia; and twice again it was filled to overflowing. People were being seized left and right.

A strange collection of human types had been assembled in this gigantic structure. Relatively weak was the representation of the two groups ordinarily encountered in a Russian prison—the criminal prisoners and the authentic “politicals.” Most of the inmates were now victims of the war period, people accused of espionage and treason.

The “aristocracy” of the Mokatów prison was represented by a special group of about twenty individuals, men and women, whose presence created a big stir; they were the well-known Sergei Miasoyedov (a distinguished Russian officer who had been charged with treason), and his alleged accomplices. Miasoyedov himself was disposed of very swiftly. The whole investigation lasted only a few weeks, perhaps even days, then he was brought before a court-martial and sentenced to death by hanging. But the others associated with him remained in prison while the investigation continued.

These people occupied an exceptional place in our prison. A separate building was reserved for them. Each person had an individual cell. (We—the ordinary prisoners—used to occupy larger cells, with about twenty persons in each.) They were kept strictly apart from all the other inmates, and were guarded with particular severity. Their building was placed under the jurisdiction of gendarmes who watched over it as only gendarmes know how. We were unable to establish any ties whatsoever with the people in this group. We could see them only through the windows, when they used to be

brought into the prison yard individually and under tight guard. Most of them were gentlemen of the "better society," though they numbered some elegant ladies too.

From my window I used to see Miasoyedov's wife every single day. She too had been arrested and accused along with him— a tall, blond-haired lady, always attired in black, and with a face as proud as it was deathly pale. Miasoyedov's wife knew that her husband had already been hanged; and while pondering over this thought, she was obliged to spend day and night alone in the single cell, awaiting her own trial. Nevertheless, she bore her destiny quite courageously. But there was another woman whose strength to live, whose very will to live, had been wholly drained in the course of a few days by the cold prison walls. Another figure which appeared in the courtyard was that of a young girl, a child of fifteen at most, also one of the accused. She, too, was placed in a solitary cell. For a week, maybe slightly longer, we observed her in the courtyard during the strolling period. She used to saunter about the area with truly childlike movements. The place had a sprinkling of green grass and a few wildflowers, and the little girl would pick the little flowers and fashion them into a small bouquet. . . . A child.

Then one day the girl did not appear in the courtyard and a terrible report spread like wildfire through the prison: the girl had committed suicide during the night. She hung herself in her cell. The commander of the guards promptly appeared in the courtyard. He dashed about, shouted, pointed at our windows: "Shut them! Away from the windows! No looking!" And in a few minutes, under the watch of a dozen armed gendarmes, they carried into the courtyard a pathetic, small child's coffin; the little girl was being taken to the morgue.

Our prison also included any number of "spies" and "traitors" (most, if not all, of them merited the quotation marks). Who, indeed, was not a "suspect" in those days? Whom did they not imprison?

For instance, I came across a whole group of Polish peasants from a small town in Kielce *guberniya*. When the war began and the Russian *nachal'stvo* took flight, the peasants had organized a militia to keep order. They had done so on instruction of those very authorities prior to their flight. Moreover, they were told by the latter: "If the enemy comes, keep calm and do what he says."

The enemy did, in fact, come, but he later withdrew. The Russians returned and the customary flood of denunciations followed. The upshot—imprisonment. The arrests included militiamen as well as nonmilitiamen: they were all alleged to have joined the Polish legions, to have committed treason, aided the enemy armies, and so forth. One of those “legionnaires” was a patriarch of seventy-four who could barely stand up.

Among our prison mates was a Catholic priest—a Capuchin—attired in a long brown vestment. He was a lively, humorous, wise individual. “First the Germans arrested me,” he would boast, “but I managed to extricate myself from them. Now the Russians wish to honor me with a rope. And I believe they’ll surely succeed in doing it, for there’s plenty of rope in Russia.”

In the end he managed, in a way unknown to me, to shake loose also from the Russians. I saw him a few years later in a patriotic procession of some kind on the streets of Warsaw.

Another clergyman among the prisoners was a Lutheran pastor. He had been serving as a field chaplain in the army. Two Latvian soldiers approached him on one occasion and asked him for some books to read. A conversation followed, in the course of which the pastor voiced a few pessimistic thoughts; the military situation, he suggested, was less than glowing. The soldiers denounced him, and the pastor was arrested and charged with treason.

The prisoners also included two Russian officials. Each had been the chief of a whole *uezd* (district). One of them had previously served also as a captain in the Uhlan guards regiment at Warsaw. The charge against both: spying.

There was a railroad official who had once performed a really big service for the Russian army. Then he was accused of spying and put in prison.

Other examples: A messenger, on whose person was discovered a copy of a certain leaflet which someone had directed him to deliver somewhere; a landowner who had allegedly told his peasants not to turn over their horses to the Russian army; a shoemaker, owner of the enterprise, who had been reading some kind of illegal periodical; a young man, a technician, who had worked in the trenches and made sketches necessary for his work; a mass of Jews of all varieties.

But who can remember everyone? Hundreds upon hundreds of different people were imprisoned there awaiting the military court.

And every last one of them was charged under that same horrible Paragraph 108, the paragraph invoked only in wartime. It embraced in its elastic framework anything one wished to include within it, and it dispensed one, and only one, form of punishment: death by hanging!

Sentenced!

IT HAPPENED ON May 3, 1915. A genuine spring day; warm and radiant, bursting with sunshine. I scarcely noticed it at the time, but now I can recall that day quite well. On the streets there was hardly any awareness of the war's presence. Except for the conspicuous presence of the many compassionate nurses, attractively dressed, not infrequently riding about in fancy automobiles in the company of young officers. People filled the streets. And the people looked so joyful. The women so fair and refreshing; and large numbers of girls dressed in white. I find most attractive a young girl dressed in white.

And the new greenery on the avenues; and the heart-warming sun shining through the beloved greenery. . .

I rode through the streets of Warsaw. And I gazed calmly, leisurely, almost indifferently at the whole gaudy, multicolored spectacle of life astir. At various intervals the thought entered my head: Take a good look! You will have to part with all of this for a long time, perhaps forever! Then, suddenly, I seemed to come awake, and to find myself absorbed with a segment of life that flashed across my field of vision.

On the street stood a young girl waiting for a streetcar. A wisp of a child, in a short dress, with an endearing little face and lovely brown hair, she stood there and took no notice at all of the pale and

downcast person who had fixed a long and intense gaze upon her. He, himself, was suddenly overcome by a strange feeling, a superstitious feeling: you must etch this dear child's face upon your memory. You must fix your gaze upon the little girl and hold it uninterruptedly until she disappears from sight. . . . Just then a wagon drew up alongside our carriage and obstructed my view of the street for a few seconds. I peered through the small window, waiting, growing uneasy: Will that wagon continue to ride alongside us forever? I must see the girl, I must see her once again. If I do not . . . who can tell what will follow? And I had a feeling: it would be an evil omen for me. . . . But the wagon moved off; and from the distance I again glimpsed the little white face with the brown eyes. I breathed easier. Then I lapsed once more into a state of torpor and indifference.

My carriage rode on. It was a long black crate, the kind used for poor Jewish funerals, except that mine had a small window with iron bars. From that small bit of window I looked out upon the beautiful world which I would not be seeing for a long, long time.

For I was now in the process of traveling from the courtroom back to the prison. And it was only a half hour before that I had heard my verdict rendered by the old chief judge: "Deprivation of all rights and four years at *katorga*." That was how he had pronounced the verdict, in his stammering, toneless, ancient voice, that savage Warsaw inquisitor, the old hangman of the long white beard and young dark eyes. Four years at *katorga*.

So, it was all over. I had earlier hoped that I would wind it up with "nothing more" than loss of all rights and banishment to Siberia. But no, on top of it came the four years at *katorga*. Actually, I had reconciled myself in advance even to this possibility; I was prepared for any eventuality. Thus I was now quite calm, really quite calm. Somewhat listless perhaps. That yes. A gentle sadness settled over me. As if a mantle of fog had enshrouded the whole world and life had lost its sparkle, its hues. Not *my* life particularly, but life in general. How remarkable that this beautiful, zestful, multicolored life; this life to which access had just been foreclosed to me for an almost indefinite period; this life which really should have seemed even more enticing and, in fact, more glowing still, was—despite

everything—not at all like that. On the contrary, it turned pale and drab. Longing vanished. The desire to live grew weaker. One's wishes ceased to be. And I calmly rode "home"—back to prison, to await what was to come.

In point of fact, nothing was likely to happen for the time being. I had decided to petition for a review so that, pending the review of my trial, I would not be sent off to the genuine *katorga*. For the next few months everything would remain as before. Accordingly I still had a little time: and in addition a little hope—hope for a miracle.

I hoped I would not have to serve the full four years. When my wife came to me on a visiting day, I consoled her: "It won't last long. In a year and a half there will be a revolution in Russia." (The prophecy was almost exact: I erred by only three months, but even a year and a half at *katorga* would hardly qualify as one of the more joyful prospects.)

For the moment I was not yet a *katorzhnik*. For the moment the attitude towards me was decent. I was not addressed with the contemptuous *du*. I was not beaten. I was permitted to have my own underwear and bedding. But every evening when I lay down to sleep—every evening without exception—I had the identical thought: How many more times will you still be covering yourself with your blanket and with a clean sheet? How many days until that evening when you will be lying in a *katorga* cell covered with the filthy, stinking *katorga* rag; with clanging chains on your legs?

One day passed. And another. The end drew steadily closer. I waited.

The Machine at Work

JULY ARRIVED. THE city and the prison were submerged under a massive heat wave. It was stifling and damp. And at night, when the windows had to remain closed (such was the regulation of the prison regime), we used to lie bathed in our own sweat, unable to breathe, laden with worry and anxiety. Yet by day we were once more compelled to sew bags and package sugar and tea, and to ready ourselves once again for a new journey. The big offensive of the year 1915 was under way.

For the third time the evacuation of the Warsaw prisons had commenced: the people were being shipped deep into Russia. The German army had again launched a major forward thrust.

At first the evacuation proceeded in niggardly fashion and piecemeal, just as though a firm decision had not yet been reached, as if there was still uncertainty. Later, however, it came to resemble a flood bursting the dikes.

The soldiers for the convoy would appear each day in the courtyard. Each day large parties of prisoners would be sent out—five hundred, six hundred people at a time.

We used to stand at the window and observe anew the savage procedure. Observe not simply as sideline viewers, but with the thought constantly running through our minds: Soon you yourself will have to experience this. Who knows, perhaps even tomorrow?

The soldiers were angry and irritable. It was hard work. Day and night, for weeks on end, they had no rest. They were weary and embittered. Their work was interspersed with curses, with insults, with blows. They used to confiscate the most innocuous things from the prisoners, and break, rip, scatter them apart. And when, in the wake of such an "operation" which lasted for long hours, the party would finally be whipped into shape and pass through the gate, the large prison courtyard resembled a field in ruins. Throughout the day the guards would ramble about the vacated courtyard and dig amid the refuse, stuffing their pockets with tobacco and cigarettes and food like so many black bugs on a giant garbage heap.

And the following day another party would appear and the cruel game would start all over again. We continued to post ourselves at the window and . . . truly, it is difficult to imagine how a person feels at such a sight, especially someone who has already experienced the whole thing and who will be forced to go through with it again in a matter of days.

But that was not all. There was something else as well. The nearer the giant wave of enemy armies approached, the more hastily operated the courts-martial. To save time and space, one such court-martial moved bodily into our prison administration office. This was how we came to have a horrible death laboratory "at home." With feverish alacrity it processed one death sentence after another. Verdicts would be issued daily against this or that individual. The person would be led out. And, if already apprised of the death sentence, he would no longer be permitted to return to the cell. Thus we continued to sit and wait: Will he return? He does not. Instead, a guard appears and removes his things. And then we know; the court has finished its little task, while he is being held in a single cell somewhere awaiting death.

Occasionally we heard the pounding of a heavy hammer in the prison courtyard; and we noted that someone's shackles were being removed. Freedom? No, the reverse; it was the preliminary to hanging. An individual was required to hang with "free feet."

In this fashion they used to disappear, one after the other. The Lutheran pastor was called out and did not come back. Death sentence. Whether he was subsequently granted clemency, I do not

know. The messenger who had been found carrying a copy of a proclamation, after waiting each night, for weeks on end, to be led off to the gallows, received “clemency” to the tune of twenty years at *katorga*.

Two brothers named Zaltsman were among those sentenced and hanged. In the course of their transfer from the courtroom in the prison administration office to a cell, a friend of mine chanced to be in the corridor where he saw the two. They were surrounded by a dozen guards and gendarmes, despite the fact that the distance over which they had to be led within the very prison itself involved only a few steps. Half dead, barely able to stand, the unfortunates moved along; and behind them ran a supervisor shouting at the guards: “Hold their arms! Hold their arms!”

A steady flow of new victims set forth upon the dreadful path. And others sat waiting. We were enveloped in a horrible atmosphere. It was unendurable.

I was sick and weak. My wife approached the prison doctor and asked that I be admitted to the hospital, the prison hospital, of course. The doctor was an intelligent, warmhearted individual. He acceded to the request. Thus I entered the hospital.

Touch-and-Go

THE PRISON HOSPITAL was situated on the prison grounds, although separate from the other buildings. It was not especially large, but it was fairly attractive. Still it had its own troubles aplenty. A typhus epidemic raged; tuberculosis was exceedingly widespread. Someone would be carried out almost daily to the prison morgue. Moreover, one was not rid of the *étape* even in the hospital. Individuals would be savagely hauled from their beds, thrust into the courtyard, and driven forth along the unspeakable *étape* toward a Russian prison somewhere. Wan and weary, drained of strength, the sick would barely pull themselves through the door (we were still observing the scene from the window) and, in a matter of minutes, already disappear amid the mass of hundreds constituting the large *étape* contingent.

It was sad. Still, there appeared a ray of hope. Happy tidings had arrived, received with a mixture of hope and skepticism. News was abroad that a decision had been reached not to evacuate the seriously ill, but to leave them in Warsaw. Such was the talk. It was just too incredible—and one hesitated to believe it. Could it really be possible? After all, it meant . . . freedom! To think that the Russian *nachal'stvo* would occupy itself with such niceties: seriously ill or not seriously ill. Pshaw, they'll surely take everyone away.

And yet . . . who knows . . . perhaps . . . it's possible after all. Indeed, one fine morning the doctor appeared with a sheet of paper

in his hand. He drew up a list of the seriously ill, of those unable to travel. And my name was also included in the list.

I could have shouted for joy! Yet I still hesitated to believe it. Was it really true? And was it actually definite?

No, it was not yet definite at all; the matter was not yet settled. Maybe yes and maybe no. The scales still hung in the balance. My fate was still desperately uncertain. And there followed long, endless days of intense waiting—waiting with baited breath. Yes or no? The torment was dreadful.

I marked time. “Any news?” “They say there’s a good chance.” “Really?” “Yes! The list is in the administration office and will likely be approved.” “Let’s hope, let’s hope.”

One day went by. And another. Then came a new and depressing bit of intelligence: the list was without value. The governor-general had no confidence in the prison doctor. A special commission of doctors would be sent to us; it would examine us and decide whether we were able to travel.

The news had scarcely reached us when, lo and behold, the commission had already arrived. There were footsteps in the corridor. The door swung open all the way and the new tribunal appeared: two unknown doctors along with the prison inspector.

The procedure—after the interminable waiting—was singularly brief: a swift glance at the individual; an exchange of a few whispered words—and that was it. Off they went. And our fate was sealed. Which way—yes or no? We were still in the dark.

More waiting. A guard entered our cell, an old, genial fellow. Maybe he knew something. “Any word? What have they decided?” “Well, what can I tell you? . . . some go, some stay.” “But who? Who? Tell us what you know; don’t remain silent!”

I rose from my pallet and waited breathlessly for a response. A few more seconds; another moment of hoping; then would come certainty. “Where do I stand?” “You leave.”

I lowered myself to the pallet—quite softly, quite slowly, and turned my face toward the wall. I wanted no one to see how I felt. But it hurt. If only I hadn’t previously built up a measure of hope. One can become accustomed to anything. And if one has become resigned at the proper time, well in advance, even to the most dreadful thought, one can then accept with equanimity even the worst. The

whole trick consisted of reconciling oneself in advance to the grim future that was approaching and from which there was no escape. Everything could then be taken in stride, all would be quite manageable. But where hope was cherished, how bitter the aftermath. This luxury one dared not allow oneself in prison. To live with hope—no matter how weak, how tenuous, a mere spark—and then to have the spark snuffed out, and to be flung again behind that dreadful black gateway through which one might perhaps never again pass, this was the most dreadful thing in the world.

And so I lay there in a state of numbness, like some insensible beast in a slaughterhouse, weary beyond measure, devoid of thought, of desire; beaten down, half-dead.

Again the door opened: it was our prison doctor. Words were being exchanged; a conversation of some kind was in progress. In my condition of utter apathy I could barely hear the voices. Suddenly a sound reached my ears, as through a mist. Someone had called out my name. And another voice responded: "He stays."

Hope blossomed anew. And one's shaken nerves grew taut once more. I was alive again. Until another grim message?

Meanwhile the evacuation continued. Our prison turned into a real *étape* citadel. New people were constantly being brought in from other prisons, even from other cities. They were organized into parties and sent off to Russia. I watched how my friends as well, one after the other, disappeared beyond the gate.¹ And the hospital itself

1. It must have been especially painful for Vladimir Medem to part with one particular fellow-prisoner at this juncture—the young cellmate from the Tenth Pavilion in Warsaw, who had entered Medem's cell after the departure of the German spy. (See *supra*, pp. 505–06). His name, which Medem did not recall in the memoirs, was Stanislav Dvorak. Years later, Dvorak left a memoir about his prison experiences in the company of Medem. Written in Polish, it was published in the Warsaw "Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute," Nos. 47–48, July–December, 1963. It is noteworthy, in the light of Medem's political history, that the Bulletin was edited by the well-known Communist, Berel Mark. Dvorak's memoir was translated into Yiddish by H. Bachrach, and published in the journal *Undzer Gedank* (Yiddish) (*Our Thought*), Melbourne, Australia, April, 1976.

Dvorak's recollections follow:

"During my wanderings through Tsarist prisons, in the course of which I came to know and establish friendly relations with such political prisoners as Dzerzhinsky,

grew steadily more vacant. Only the acutely ill and the dying remained behind. The black hearse would arrive every single day. Again and again I used to hear, in this connection, the prisoners' old consolation joke: "Yes, yes, nobody remains in prison forever; everyone must get out sometime. Whether dead or alive, there's really not much of a difference."

Leshchinsky, Pristor, Unschlicht, Sachs, and Radvansky, the figure of Vladimir Medem has been sharply etched in my memory.

"Thinking back to the time of over a half-century ago, I recall him constantly with a feeling of heartfelt sentiment. Could it be perhaps because he was the first political prisoner with whom I became acquainted in the Tenth Pavilion of the Warsaw Citadel? . . .

"Medem was an educated individual who had studied at the University of Kiev. He had a very extensive knowledge of Russian and English literature. In external appearance, Medem distinguished himself by his elegant dress—an extraordinary circumstance for a revolutionist, who would customarily show no concern about his external appearance. His pronunciation was reminiscent of a well-bred Viennese. . . .

"I was arrested by the Warsaw gendarmerie in November 1913. After a few days, I was turned over to the *Okhrana*, whose chief, Lieutenant-Colonel Zavazhin, interrogated me during the course of seven days. He finally parted with me with the words: ' . . . We are sending you to the Tenth Pavilion, where you can dream about an independent Poland.' . . . At the Tenth Pavilion a solidly built gendarme led me down a dimly lit corridor. I heard the banging of a heavy lock and found myself in a darkened cell. The gendarme said to the prisoner seated at a small table: 'Here's a comrade for you; you'll find things more congenial.' And he disappeared behind the closed door.

"At my appearance, the other man stood up and approached me with outstretched hand: 'Comrade, I speak Russian; I don't know Polish, since I don't come from there. . . . My name is Vladimir Medem. Take off your coat and come closer to the stove; you're probably frozen through and through. Are you hungry? I haven't touched my evening meal, *bigos* (hashed meat and cabbage). I love *bigos*, but the condition of my kidneys doesn't allow me to partake of this delight. During these first days, before you will become acclimated to normal prison life, I will fulfill the function of honorary supervisor.'

"I shook the outstretched hand and gave my name. 'I thank you most heartily for the pleasant greetings. After the talks with Zavazhin I would like rest and sleep, sleep without letup.'

"'Although everyone here knows Zavazhin,' replied Medem, 'let's speak more softly, because the gendarme has already removed his boots and is eavesdropping in his stockinged feet.'

Before going to sleep I gave Medem the news of the outside. He listened atten-

The giant prison became steadily more quiet and empty. A hush had settled over life itself. The prison was dying. The last party was passing through the gate. Large wagons arrived and carted off all the contents of the prison. There remained only the high, bare, stone walls. Finished; everything gone. The large massive structure which we gazed upon had become a soundless void, sheathed in darkness. We in the small hospital building were the sole remnant—a handful of sick people, waiting. But the prison was dead.

tively; he had already been cut off from the world for eight months. [Medem] believed that a world war was approaching. I told him about the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy), and about the Balkan tinder-box. The following morning after cell cleanup, Medem mentioned to me that, while I was slumbering for several hours during the night, prisoners from the neighboring cells inquired about the new comrade. To the right of the cell was Leshchinsky; to the left, Unschlicht. 'In keeping with accepted practice, I gave your name and Paragraph 102 [the law which Dvorak was charged with violating]. I repeated everything you told me, even that Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich was in Paris, together with the Chief of the General Staff, General Zhilinsky.'

"And thus the days, weeks, and months flew by—while we played chess and read Russian literature aloud. He enjoyed reading the Russian journal *Awakening*, in which Ivan Bunin, Anatole Kamiensky, and Vladimir Gippius published their stories and essays. We helped the time pass by singing Russian songs in duet. . . . The library of the Tenth Pavilion held 10,000 books, mostly of Polish literature. Included were all the forbidden books confiscated by the censor. Medem regretted that he didn't know Polish. . . .

"Medem was a good chess player. During the first months I lost consistently. Later I became familiar with his regular moves and he found it more difficult to win. I sensed that he felt some regret the first time I checkmated him, but he didn't show it. We avoided playing for a whole week.

"In the winter months of 1914 we were called out to the investigating judge for special cases. Medem's case was conducted by the judge, Yevdokimov; mine, by Barkov. We shared impressions, and we both agreed that the attitude of the judges toward us accused was somehow too mild.

"The summer of 1914 was very hot. From our window we could see a section of the Vistula and the prisoners' walking area, where we observed all the comrades sharing our common fate. In mid-July the gendarme quietly opened the door. 'Go on out for a walk,' he said. 'It's very hot—and in the world also. The Austrian Crown Prince has been murdered in Sarajevo. A storm is brewing in the world.'

"The gendarme was always courteous. He told us he was a Tolstoyan. Within an hour the Pavilion was electric with excitement. There was a pounding on the walls, oblivious to the customary measures of caution. The gendarme in the corridor called

And then they came to us, too. We were told to get up and dress, and were led out into the courtyard. The ones close to death were carried out. Then the black prison wagons drove up. We were put inside and were on the way. Where to? Could they really be setting us loose? No. It was for the moment simply an “innocent” journey. We were being transferred to another prison, within Warsaw proper.

out: ‘I ask that you stop the banging or else you will be deprived of your constitutional.’ Nobody paid attention to him; none of us slept that night.

“On the night of July 31 a terrible explosion shook the walls of the Citadel. The plaster fell from the ceilings; window-panes broke into pieces. I leapt toward the bars and seized them with all my force; they didn’t budge. After the explosion the cell turned bright—a reflection of the burning military stores. ‘The official rats are burning the empty stores; it’s their opportunity,’ remarked Medem.

“The first reports about the outbreak of the war came from Dzerzhinsky. Unschlicht banged the news through the walls: ‘The Germans have bombarded Kalisz.’ The questions arose: What will happen to us? I looked with amazement upon the attitude adopted by Medem. Watching me tearing at the bars, he sprung from his bed and, with a swift leap, interposed himself between me and the bars. I moved back from the bars; I had mauled my fingers. My action had been prompted by the smell of freedom.

“Medem was unusually lighthearted. I recall how, during the first night, while lying in bed, I observed him from the side. He was a puzzle to me at the time. A blond man, with thin hair and a drawn face, whose paleness was symptomatic of people with kidney disease. His eyes blue, deep, kindly. He spoke exquisite Russian; his German speech was like that of an authentic German. Elegantly dressed, his tie perfectly knotted (like Oscar Wilde’s, I used to say). Attractive black shoes from abroad (Medem had been arrested . . . right after returning from Vienna). He speaks no Polish; is probably a Russian; doesn’t look like an SR, and certainly not like an SD. And then the manners and bearing of a salon-habitué. He must have looked attractive in a dress coat. At the moment, he is a courageous prisoner wishing to break out to freedom.

“After the explosion and the fire, the Pavilion was mined. The administration, the gendarmes, were disoriented. The swift evacuation of Warsaw had been ordered; Congress Poland would not be defended. These were the rumors circulating about. On the first day of the war, when panic erupted, rumors had spread that the political prisoners would be freed. (After the abdication of Nicholas II and the fall of Tsarism, the correspondence concerning the political prisoners in Congress Poland was found in Moscow, among the documents of the Warsaw *Okhrana*. On the first day of the war it was calculated that Warsaw would swiftly be captured by the Germans and everyone would presumably be freed.) On the second day, calming orders arrived from the political department of the Ministry of Interior. The panic in

Our new home bore the proud name, Main Criminal Prison of Warsaw. But it was nothing more than an antiquated filthy crate of bricks, commonly known as "The Arsenal." It had actually once been an arsenal, but the guns and swords were long since removed, their places occupied by mice, rats, bedbugs, and, alas, people—prisoners.

Warsaw was quashed. This was the order: All political prisoners in the whole of Congress Poland were to be concentrated in the Paviak and Mokotów; dressed in prisoners' garb; and transported to Orel by a special train consisting of prison cars. (All such cars were heading toward Warsaw.)

"Only something such as this could be expected of Tsarist Russia in its attitude toward the Poles. The historic Tenth Pavilion was vacated. For the first time in a hundred years, the Tsarist satrap did not confine his victims within the specially constructed casemates. There remained the gallows and the prison hearse.

"Mokotów was the central jail for hard-labor [*katorga*] prisoners. Those sentenced to hard-labor were employed there; they turned out securities and government printing matter. The whole Tenth Pavilion was brought there. Our civilian clothing was taken from us; the prison garments were of black cloth, with small brown collars and cuffs on the sleeves. The shoes were very rough and minus shoelaces. We didn't look too impressive. Everyone believed the war would bring us freedom. Felix Dzerzhinsky, tall, thin, with an ascetic face, a small beard and mustache (he looked the type of a petty gentry), had already been sentenced to four years at hard labor. He proved that the war would last only a few months, that Austria had food supplies for three months, that defeats would befall the warring nations, and that the starving masses would launch social revolutions. He was supported by Leshchinsky and Radvansky. Pistor, as a reserve ensign in the Russian army, held that the war would last long. It would take a long time before such large armies mutually destroyed each other. The war was already a total war; it would bring about Poland's freedom. Pistor was under sentence of seven years hard labor.

"We maintained close ties with Medem. He didn't do much talking; perhaps he didn't wish to speak Russian. With some irony he made sport of the prophesiers; *khakhomi tsion* ("wise men of Zion") he called them . . . In the afternoon we were led out into the prison courtyard. We were given a small black bread and thirteen kopecks for a day's food. With this money the guards bought food for us at the stations. We were lined up in columns of four.

"I found myself in the column with Medem, and also with Leshchinsky and Barkevich, a student from the independent socialist youth organization. In the second courtyard, 100 forced-labor prisoners were lined up, among them thirty politicals in leg shackles. Armed guards surrounded us. This sad party was led by the chief of the Mokotów prison. The march through the main streets of Warsaw looked horrible. Shopkeepers came out into the streets of the Nowy Świat district. Apart-

We rode into the courtyard and crawled out of the black wagon. The evacuation of "The Arsenal" had not yet been completed; the place was still very much alive. Already at the inspection, the guards sought to confiscate all "superfluous" items, the bedding in particular. "What do you need it for?" they said. "The convoy will throw it away anyhow." "What convoy? We're not going at all; we're staying in Warsaw!"

ment dwellers gazed from the windows. Cries were heard: 'The politicals are being led away.' Dzerzhinsky began to sing the 'Red Flag.' Several dozen voices picked up the song; but not everyone was in a singing mood. When we arrived at the station, weary beyond description, the prison cars were waiting. Additional prisoners were brought from Kalisz, Piotrkow, and Lodz.

"The train rode by night. Escapes began. The guards fired. Just when the train passed through the forest, the engineer would slow it down, with the intention, apparently, of facilitating the escapes. . . . Although the watch was reinforced, there were escapes and shooting each night.

"In Siedlce the train stopped at the station alongside a military echelon on the way to the front. A general looked out of the car; Medem also looked out. 'Who are they?' asked the general. 'Political prisoners being taken by the authorities deep into Russia,' replied Medem. 'A pretty union of government and people,' responded the general, adding: 'The idiots are starting out nicely. May God be with you; you will soon be free in any case.'

"After five days traveling we reached Orel. . . . Medem and I again found ourselves in the same cell. We were content. The cell was large. Wooden pallets, large windows, plenty of air. All told, seven prisoners—almost the whole Tenth Pavilion: Dzerzhinsky, Leshchinsky, Unschlicht, Pristor, Sachs. The number of prisoners increased with the arrival of a group from the Paviak. The majority of them were Bundists. The living together of such a large group of people, with various viewpoints and temperaments, somehow became regularized. A self-governing body was elected. The Right[?] was occupied by a larger group of Bundists together with a smaller number of Zionist-Socialists and Poale-Zionists. Food was available in very limited quantity, and we shared along communistic lines. Many were engaged in physical labor, building storage facilities for sauerkraut and potatoes. Two hours were set aside for study, one hour for delousing. The library was a rich one; I became convinced that the Russian prisons possessed very attractive libraries. We established contact with the SR group in Orel. We were able to obtain newspapers secretly; each day we received the *Russkoye Slovo* (*Russian Word*) and *Russkoye Vedomosti* (*Russian Gazette*).

"Medem held lectures for the Bundists; the Zionist-Socialists also listened in. He spoke about the theses and cultural proposals adopted at the last congress of the Bund in Vilno. Medem enjoyed great authority. He was idolized. The people were

“You’re talking nonsense! Everything here is being cleared out. Nobody stays.”

A nice kettle of fish!

We were conducted into a narrow cell. The small window was located high up, at the very level of the rafters, so that it was impossible to look out into the yard. It was dark. The walls were covered with black pitch to the height of a man. Hardly the most delightful quarters. But who could bother with such trifles? To us the only meaningful question was: Do we go or do we stay?

largely poor workers and artisans from Warsaw. They would not allow him to stand night watch. He never carried out the *parasha* (toilet bucket).

“A chess tournament was organized on one occasion. In the final elimination contest, Medem and Pristor were the adversaries. It was a stubborn battle. They played with great concentration, all the while surrounded by a crowd of kibitzers. One of the Jewish prisoners began to hum Morris Rosenfeld’s *Ikh hob a kleynem yingele* (‘My Little Boy’). This unnerved Pristor; it was obviously interfering with the play. One of the PPS men began to hum a song from Glinka, “Do Not Excite Me,” while taking substantial liberties with the melody. Medem, very musical, with perfect pitch, gave a silent groan. It was an attempt on the part of the PPS man to lend assistance to Pristor. Both players respectfully requested that the singers not waste their voices, but save them rather for the opera. Happily for all, the chess game ended in a draw.

“The year 1915 arrived. In February Pristor and Dzerzhinsky were called into the prison office. After several hours they returned in chains. They were removed that day to the central hard-labor prison in Orel. Their sentences had been confirmed. The atmosphere in the cell became sad, oppressive. After the appeal everyone promptly lay down on their pallets. The farewell was touching.

“Medem and Dzerzhinsky did not relate well to each other. Here were two diametrically opposed characters. Dzerzhinsky—tireless, active, self-confident; uncompromising in Social Democratic questions of principle. Medem—self-controlled, an elegant diplomat, often not proletarian at all. In the large cell we maintained cleanliness as far as possible. At the outset we scrubbed the stone floors. Dzerzhinsky—barefoot, with trousers rolled up, worked away, scrubbed, lugged water. Medem, on the other end of his cell, sat and smoked a cigarette. The comrades of the Bund did not allow him to work hard. Dzerzhinsky couldn’t tolerate this. A controversy ensued marked by considerable tension. Dzerzhinsky was a more acerbic type. Medem did not give way. Antagonism mounted. They avoided each other. I defended Medem. His diseased kidneys did not allow him to bend. He was debilitated; he did not eat everything; there was no dietetic kitchen, and in the hospital the doctor admitted only the dying. Since it was unpleasant to remind everyone and himself about a sickness, he preferred to scrap.

For the time being we remained confined to our cell. We lay there and we listened to what was happening on the outside. Every once in a while shouting could be heard in the corridor. New parties were being continuously assembled for departure. A guard would appear with a roster and read off the names of those who had to leave with the next party. And more and more names were called in steady succession. Each of us listened with baited breath: Would our names also be called? For the moment no one bothered us. But this prison too was becoming progressively more empty and quiet.

“Yet the farewell between Medem and Dzerzhinsky was moving. Dzerzhinsky, holding the strap of the chains with his left hand, approached Medem with outstretched hand. Medem rushed up to him and gave him a prolonged handshake, wishing him all the best. . . .

“Through the newspapers, we learned that the Russian authorities had returned to Warsaw, that the courts were issuing sentences, that the front in Poland had been stabilized. In April, the prison inspector of the guards announced that the following prisoners should be ready for the next move within two hours: myself, Medem, Galay and his wife (from Medem’s case), Vieniava-Dlugoshevski, and others. The convoy was already waiting in the courtyards; a small group had already left the prison, a terrible prison in which sixty SRs from the ship “Potemkin” had met death. All young sailors, they died from tuberculosis. . . , as did also the student Barkevich. He was a noble figure, whose death shook Dzerzhinsky in particular most deeply. They had been very close. From far off we gazed at the dreadful prison in the Orlik river. Terrible Tsarist Russia! Who would destroy it, overthrow it?

“After four days we reached Warsaw again. As was customary, our car was shunted to a side track; we were waiting for a convoy. A light rain began to fall, to which snow was later added. The cold was penetrating. At last we began to move toward Mokotów, ten kilometers away. After an hour’s marching we were drenched through and through with the wet snow; it made movement and the carrying of the weight on our backs still more difficult. We proceeded down the middle of the streets, trodding on the sharp stones.

“Medem’s cheeks had turned a flaming red. I could see that he was on his last legs. Over his protests, I took his sack from him, else he would surely have collapsed. My sack was much lighter. . . . We crossed the Kerbedz bridge deep in snow. Worn and weary, we finally reached the Mokotów prison during the night. . . . We were conducted into the cellars where we were supposed to undergo two weeks of quarantine.

“After drying out a bit, we were simply too weary to fall asleep. In the morning—to the doctor. Medem was running a high fever. The doctor, very friendly to the political prisoners, directed him to the hospital. We were promised admission to the hospital in three days. Meanwhile the doctor ordered that we were to be allowed to

A number of days went by. Then a message arrived: by the next day it would all be over with here as well. Three or four hundred prisoners who had been sentenced to minor terms were to be freed altogether; it didn't pay to drag them off to Russia. All the rest would be departing in the morning, the prison administration along with them. The "Arsenal" was being closed down.

The final day, then! And hundreds of voices, in fact, could be heard in the yard. People were shouting, running about; the door was being slammed. Yes, the message was accurate: the petty thieves were being released.

rest on our beds for the three days. This turned out to be something beyond our expectations. He prescribed a liter of milk and a large white bread. Galay's wife was assigned to a warmer, single cell. . . .

"Three months in the hospital meant a real rest for us. The medical supervision and the concern for our health—moving; the food—good; the freedom—unlimited; lying in bed—all day. We received constant reports from the outside. . . .

"Medem had frequent visitations, from which he would return exhilarated. He obtained a special diet and began to look better. There was no reading, no playing chess. Talk centered exclusively on the war. . . . Each one of us was nothing less than a chief of the general staff.

"It was the second half of July. Medem had returned from a visitation. I noticed in him a controlled agitation. He avoided encounters with people, as though he were regulating his movements. At night I sidled up to his bed. Feigning interest in some sort of bird, he said, 'They have ordered an evacuation in Warsaw. The Germans are preparing a big offensive toward the East. Our days here are numbered. In the prison administrative office the documents are being packed and lists of prisoners for shipment to the East are being drawn up.'

". . . At night we heard the distant echoes of heavy artillery. I knew that Medem, who was not scheduled for transportation, would remain in the hospital. We said a passionate farewell. We were at a loss for words. Our eyes grew moist. We had lived through so much together—and would never meet again.

"Tsarism fell. The shackles were removed from my legs in Siberia. I returned to the country and enrolled in the university. I crisscrossed the length and breadth of Warsaw, especially the northern district (the Jewish section). Perhaps I might come upon the tracks of Medem. I sat in cafés, restaurants, cautiously inquired of waiters. But in vain. The sad information finally came from another quarter. In the center of the city I had stopped before the show-window of a newly repaired shop. The floor, misshapen, was being planed by a carpenter. For a moment he turned his face in the direction of the window. He was a member of the Bund, from Orel. I rushed toward him: Vladimir Medem, the leader of the Bund, died in New York in the year 1923, of acute kidney disease. My lips began to quiver uncontrollably. . . ."

The prison cook (a friend of ours and one of those scheduled for release) came dashing up to offer his farewells. He was excited and happy; small wonder—in a few minutes he would be a free man! “Stay well, gentlemen! I’m on the way, toward freedom! Too bad they’re not letting you go. It’s a sorry business. I’ll let you in on a secret. (The cook had constantly circulated about the administration office and knew precisely what was going on. His information was always accurate.) Tomorrow morning you leave. I’m not supposed to be telling you this. But really, why play at secrets? I myself heard it in the administration office. By tomorrow morning at nine you’ll be on the train already! So, farewell. I wish you all the best on your journey.”

Quiet settled over the place once again. The thieves departed. Only a few dozen people were left in the whole prison. Evening approached. The last night in Warsaw! Tomorrow—the resumption of the long, hard, terrible journey. *Étape . . . Russian prisons . . . katorga.*

Evening. A small, lonely kerosene lamp burned in a corner. The black walls around us were illumined by a scanty, niggardly bit of light. We prepared for sleep. But who could sleep at such a time? The last night. . .

Silence. A guard walked along the corridor by our door. It was actually not a real door; just a hole in the wall and bars. It could be opened when necessary.

“Mr. Guard!” The shadowy figure emerged from the darkness and approached the bars. “Mr. Guard! Have you heard? Tomorrow we leave.” “I know nothing about it.” “Come now, enough of your secrets. The thing is already common knowledge. No need to play games with us.” “I don’t know about it.”

The man appeared somewhat confused, sheepish. He averted his eyes. “He knows,” we whispered to each other. “He’s just lying.” “Yet, what if. . .” “Oh, cut out the nonsense. Finished and over with!” “Yet, what if. . .” “Now listen to what I’m saying: If. . .” “What’s all the ‘if, if’ about? . . .” “Enough. Now listen, the other guard arrives at ten o’clock. We’ll question him; maybe we’ll pick up something from him. . .”

Ten o’clock. Footsteps sounded in the corridor. The other guard had arrived.

“Good evening to you, Mr. Guard!” “Say, what’s going on here. Aren’t you sleeping yet, gentlemen?” “What sleep? Who can sleep? We’re leaving tomorrow. Would you know, perhaps, where they’re sending us?” A pair of good-natured eyes looked at us in amazement: “What’s all this about leaving? The Citizen’s Committee is here.”

The Citizen’s Committee? We leaped from our beds with lightning speed and surged toward the door: “What is it? What’s the Citizen’s Committee after?”

“Come, come now fellows. What’s wrong with you? Don’t you understand the simplest things? All right, the Citizen’s Committee—you know, of course, of the existence of a Polish Citizen’s Committee which will remain behind and take over the city after our *nachal’s tvo* finally departs? Well, the prison *nachal’s tvo* is leaving tomorrow, so the Citizen’s Committee takes over at the prison. After all, someone’s got to deal with you people!” “Brother, you’re making sport of us.” “Now how do you like that? I’m telling you, I think, clearly enough: The Citizen’s Committee is here—here in this very prison. They’re already walking through the cells. Really, have you fellows gone deaf? Now listen closely.” Indeed, one could hear a faint noise. Voices. Footsteps. Very near.

Two well-known Polish attorneys and civic leaders entered our cell.

“Good evening! From here on, we shall be your supervisors. The Citizen’s Committee is now boss over your domicile. We hope you’ll now feel better.” “Yes, but what about this business of leaving. We were told that tomorrow. . . .” “You may relax.” The two gentlemen broke into a genial smile: “Any talk of leaving is now out of the question. You can sleep in peace. Good night!”²

They walked out. The barred door was shut again. The footsteps died away in the corridor. It grew silent. But we who had remained

2. A factor of considerable importance in Medem’s remaining behind was the role of one of his two lawyers, the prominent liberal Jewish figure, Leon Berenson, who by a happy coincidence was also the Jewish representative of the Citizen’s Committee to which the Russian authorities turned things over at that critical juncture. Berenson was one of the Committee representatives who came to the prison hospital and brought the good tidings to Medem and the few other fortunate individuals left behind. (Taped interview of Hertz with writer, April 19, 1973.)

there alone in our black cell—we became simply mad with joy. We kissed each other; we shook hands; we jumped about. We were in the mood to break into a *freylakhs* (a Jewish dance for festive occasions).

But I continued to lie on my bed. I had become somewhat disoriented. The continuous shift from hope to despair, and back again from despair to hope, had been rather too much for my nerves. It was no joking matter even for the healthiest nerves; and there I was, already incarcerated for about twenty-five months.

And suddenly a weird thought entered my mind: “Are you sure it isn’t a dream?”

And I began to think about it quite seriously, to wonder with deep seriousness: Could it possibly be a dream? Maybe I’m asleep, and the whole thing is just one of those silly notions? I had reason to think that way, for in the course of the two years of prison life I had had such dreams more than once. More than once did I dream, while asleep, that I was free. I had myself walking the streets; and everything I saw about me—people and houses and horses and wagons—I used to see as clearly and distinctly as I now saw the black walls of pitch in the dark cell. And whenever I experienced such a dream, I used to ask—just as now—whether it was not a dream. And just as now, I would be unable to answer the baffling question. Then I used to recall the old technique, of pinching myself. If it were a dream, there would be no awareness of pain. And I used to pinch myself . . . and feel pain. After several minutes I would get up—indeed, still in prison, on the hard sack of straw; a miserable prisoner behind the iron bars. I had had such dreams many times.

And now, just as then, I lay hovering between dream and reality, without knowing—truly without knowing—which state I was in.

It was, I must say, a hard test. An individual in such condition finds himself very close to madness. Happily the condition did not last long because I immediately spoke of my doubts to my cellmates. And when they learned about the unsuccessful pinch test, I received from a friendly but powerful hand the kind of shove which could, under no circumstances, occur in a dream. It had the most convincing effect, and my voice, too, resounded joyfully amid the uproarious laughter which began to echo throughout our cell. It was no dream!

Thus, one might think that our worries had now ended and that

we could await with calm and firm hope the impending day of salvation.

Heaven forbid, it was nothing of the sort! Two days had scarcely elapsed after that happy evening when some new tidings arrived—and we were utterly crushed again. What we were told was this: the prosecutor of the military court (the military authority had not yet departed, after all!) learned that we had remained behind and dispatched a telegram about it to Saint Petersburg. If that was so, if they remembered us, then things looked pretty sad. It was almost certain that any reply would be a bad one. We'd be sent away. The reply might arrive at any hour. So we must get ready for yet another journey.

We put our things together once more, and again we waited. Hour upon hour, day after day. And the waiting lasted ten whole days.

Freedom

TEN DAYS PASS SLOWLY. We had grown dreadfully weary and succumbed to a feeling of lethargy and utter indifference. We resigned ourselves to any eventuality.

Against this background, the day of August 4 arrived.

On that day the whole of Warsaw already knew: today everything comes to a head. The last vestiges of the Russian army were leaving the city; the Germans would be there on the morrow. And we knew it too.

But it proved to be a long day. For one thing, the police and the gendarmes had not yet departed. And the bridges across the big river, the Vistula, had not yet been blown. The road to Russia was still open: open, also, for us. . .

The long summer day seemed to stretch on endlessly. Evening approached. Night arrived. We lay on our beds (who could sleep!), and at the slightest rustle that reached us from the corridor someone would leap up excitedly. What could it be?

A strange silence had settled over the streets. No sound of street-cars. Ten o'clock. The guards were changing; a new guard appeared. "What's new in the city?" "Quiet and empty." "And the police? Are they still about?" "The police are still posted on the streets."

Hours went by. Twelve o'clock; one o'clock. From time to time we could hear a kind of heavy pounding off in the distance, like that

of hammers each weighing a thousand *pood*.¹ The volleys of cannon? Three o'clock. Four. Day was beginning to dawn. And finally, finally a peculiar, long-drawn-out clap of thunder, quite distinctive in tone, broke through the predawn stillness of our cell. Once, twice, and a third time; and at that instant we knew: the three bridges across the Vistula had been blown. We were saved.

I fell into a deep sleep, but it did not last long. Once again I awoke with a start. The time was six o'clock, already fairly light. A guard dressed in civilian clothes was standing in our cell: "The Germans have reached the Vienna station." Another guard came up: "Just saw some German soldiers on the street." And a few minutes later: "A German officer has arrived in the prison administration office."

Gone were the last lingering doubts. I arose swiftly, discarded the hospital dressing-gown, and got into my clothes. My cellmates were bustling about: the ostensibly sick and the truly sick had all seemingly risen from the dead. People were readying themselves, tidying up, shaving, packing their things. The end. Soon we would be released.

But meanwhile something altogether different had made its appearance. Artillery pieces were opening up their music very close by; within the city proper, it seemed. I could hear not only the report of the firing but also the distinctive whine of the flying shrapnel. And details were already being circulated: the Russians had stopped on the other side of the river, at Praga, and were firing into Warsaw. Our group focused its gaze upon the windows (we had already been shifted to other, larger cells) which looked out on the broad prison yard, and we knew that it happened to be the side facing the Vistula. We grew uneasy. A guard came running up with a report that a shell had fallen near the very walls of the prison. It happened to be a fairy tale, but people believed it. The thought arose: who knows—one of those birds might come sailing into our cell; and that would be just too much of a shame. To be struck by a Russian shell just then, at the threshold of a new life! The prisoners became agitated. There was talk of going to the administrator with a request that he put us up in a more secure place for the time being.

But at that moment the administrator himself approached. He

1. A Russian unit of weight equivalent to about 36 pounds.

held a roster in his hands. And the gentlemen of the Citizen's Committee were also present: Prince Zdisław Lyubomirski and his secretary. Our names were read. All the politicals were on the list. "The gentlemen are free."

I lifted my sack to my shoulders and walked out. The gate opened. I was on the outside.

The street was empty. Firing was still in progress. My wife was waiting for me inside a gateway across from the prison. A detachment of German artillery rolled past, headed for a nearby position. A light rain was falling. I looked at the German soldiers in their gray uniforms and I finally realized, with complete certainty, that the end had come. The definitive end.

We got into a wagon and rode off. In a quarter of an hour I found myself seated in the home of my wife's relatives—on a really soft chair, around a truly beautiful, immaculate table. And how strange: the window was open and there were no bars. I was not accustomed to sitting at a window without bars. . . . And I had the right to get up at will and walk out into the street. In fact, I did just that. And we traipsed about the city to our heart's content. I was free.

It was not until the following day that I learned from the newspapers that at the final moment before the bridges were blown, the gendarmes had entered the hospital where three women political prisoners were lying, seized them, and taken them off to Russia. At the very last moment.

The angel of death²—the dark *malakh hamoves*—had hovered at

2. The angel of death did, in fact, claim Medem's comrade Lipman Bergman. Medem described his tribulations and tragic end: "He was accused, together with us, in the *Lebnsfragn* trial. I spent almost a whole year together with him—we shared a cell; ate from the same bowl; bore our heavy anguish in common; joined in laughter over our pettier hardships. He was the youngest on trial with us, and we loved him like a younger brother . . ."

"He remained incarcerated, until the trial, for about two-and-a-half years. Imprisoned in Lodz, then Warsaw; evacuated to Orel at the start of the war; then taken to Smolensk; back to Orel; and once again to Warsaw . . . At last came the sentencing, and at last the chance to breathe. One more month, and another—and he would be free. In Siberia, yet free; in a house minus bars, on a street without guards. We said farewell to each other in July 1915. He left by the *étape*; I stayed.

my bedside. I had heard the rustling of his wings above me. And anyone who has felt his icy breath can never forget him.

The life I began to lead after my liberation in 1915 was, in the political and social spheres, richer in content and of greater interest than in all the preceding years. But the events in which I played an active part are still too fresh; and the time to write about them has not yet arrived. With this I conclude my reminiscences for now.

[The end]

“He was compelled to experience the horrible *étape* journey a final time. And it was, in fact, his last journey. . . . When he had left, he was still in good health. The dreadful *étape* journey brought about his death.”

An editorial note offers further details about Bergman’s trial and death: “. . . He was arrested at the start of 1913 at an illegal meeting of the textile workers’ union, together with 92 other comrades. After several weeks in prison, he was charged with the authorship [under a pseudonym Ben-Alexander] of a brief item of correspondence in the second issue of *Lebnsfragen* [May 31, 1912] about the joy among the Jewish workers upon the appearance of the newspaper. [Bergman had written: ‘Among the workers there is a feeling of great elation. For the worker, in his bitter lot, this is a genuine celebration. It is the first time in years that he is hearing once again a word of comfort amidst the hardships of his life; and he sees that there still glows a spark of faith and hope. The mood is such that people are simply at a loss for how to express their satisfaction. . . .’]

“For 36 lines sentenced to exile in Siberia for life. On December 25, 1915, at the age of 23, expired in the arms of his comrades in a sleigh on the frozen Angara River in Siberia. Buried in the village of Zinovsky (Yenisei guberniya).” *Doyres bundistn* II, 247–48; see also *supra*, pp. 484; 496–97.



Medem with group of Bund activists in Siedlce, Poland



Foreground: Bundist members of Textile Workers' Union in Lodz (after World War I)



Pictures of Medem and Marx; Foreground: executive committee of Warsaw Clothing Workers' Union (1920's)



Medem in Woodstock, New York (Summer, 1922), during last months of his life

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