

6. Lost Worlds of Labour: Paul Olberg, the Jewish Labour Bund, and Menshevik Socialism

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One of the darker sides of getting older, I feel, is that of having to outlive so many people one has known. Even here in Rome or in Milan, or wherever I happen to be, I recall those who no longer exist. Ever more seldom does one meet those people to whom one can say: Do you remember?

These words of the elderly Ukrainian Jewish socialist, Angelica Balabanoff in Italy, were read out by Ture Nerman at the interment in Skogskyrkogården's Jewish burial ground in Stockholm, one day in May 1960.² Paul Olberg was dead. He had been honoured from near and far with telegrams and flowers of condolence. "In the socialist world we feel deep sorrow and loss", explained the Party Secretary of Sweden's Social Democrats, Sven Aspling. But in particular, continued Aspling, it was Swedish Social Democracy that owed a debt of gratitude to Olberg, for his unfailing contributions to the socialist movement "in the country that was finally to become his homeland".³ It was here, in Sweden, through his loyal membership of the party, that he became a dynamic participant in its activities and information

¹ I would like to thank Dr Paul Glasser for the translations of YIVO-documents from Yiddish and Nadezda Petrusenko for help with translations from Russian.

² "Vid gravsättningen av Paul Olbergs aska den 29 maj 1960", manuscript of Ture Nerman, Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv och Bibliotek in Stockholm (Stockholm Labour Archive and Library, hereafter ARAB), Paul Olberg's personal archive 435 (hereafter POA), vol. 25.

³ Graveside address on burial of Olberg, by the party secretary S. Aspling, May 1960, manuscript of T. Lindbom, ARAB, POA, vol. 19.

work, by way of his numerous articles written for the labour movement press and the lectures given over the years.

Swedish Social Democracy was on its way to reaching its zenith, with record years of economic growth and the building of the welfare society (the so-called People's Home). But the praise from Balabanoff and others did not come in the first place from successful welfare-builders and pillars of state, but from the increasingly rare living memories of another cosmos, from radical socialist movements which had long been crushed in the vice of opposing forces – Soviet communism and capitalism, east and west – and then diffused in exile milieux the world over.

To this lost world belonged remnants of Russian Menshevism which had striven to survive as influential elements in the great social democratic mass parties in the West, in the inter-war and post-war periods. They comprised an aged and shrinking generation of orthodox Marxist social democrats from the period before 1917. In the funeral cortege at Skogskyrkogården, an observer noticed an almost exotic feature: Paul Olberg was followed to his final resting place by his fellow members of the Jewish Labour Bund (Paul Olberg död 1960). The same Bund – the once so powerful Jewish labour movement – that in 1905 shook Tsarism in Russia to its foundations and, through the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, showed the world that the Jews would not go like lambs to the slaughter. Paul Olberg, Menshevik and member of the Bund, through his long political life can help us now to illuminate the socialist world that disappeared in the east between 1917 and 1945 as well as the varied political destiny of the remnants.

The purpose of this chapter is, by way of certain main features in Paul Olberg's biography, to sketch out a political landscape in the labour movement that, once upon a time, was of great significance and that can contribute to our understanding of ideological influences within Social Democracy during the inter-war and early post-war years.

Olberg as Menshevik

Paul, or Pavel Karlovitj, Olberg was born in 1878 into a Jewish family in the Latvian town of Jakobstadt (nowadays Jekabpils) within the Russian empire. As a seventeen-year old, he joined the growing Jewish labour movement which in 1897 in Vilnius founded the Bund – or *Der algemeyner yidisher arbeter bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland* – as the name was in Yiddish (*Lite*

for Lithuania was added in 1901).⁴ The Bund was among the instigators of the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party the following year. Olberg himself already had several years behind him of illegal activities as participant in the underground *kruzhki* – worker circles – smuggling Marxist literature during nighttime in the moorland tracts around Pinsk.⁵ On account of this activity he was seized and imprisoned when twenty-one years old. Like so many other radicals, the year in prison became, in Olberg’s own words, his “literary faculty” (75-årige 1953). With Marx, Engels, Lassalle, and Plekhanov in his intellectual baggage, he resumed his activities after his release, participated in the first Russian Revolution in 1905, moved between different places in the Russian Empire, and wrote for the socialist press.

With the split in the Russian Social Democrats in 1903, Olberg adopted a position in support of Pavel Axelrod’s and Julius Martov’s Menshevik faction. It was on the same occasion that the Bund also broke with the social democratic Bolshevik majority when the Bund’s position as independent Jewish organisation was questioned. On the reunification of Russian Social Democracy, three years later in Stockholm, the Bund rejoined once more. In the division that occurred between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks the members of the Bund, in general and after some hesitation, came subsequently to belong to the Menshevik side (Wolin 1974: 251, 272, 286, 311; Sapir 1974: 375; Liebich 1997: 40; Minczeles 1999: 114).

Olberg belonged to the Russian Marxist exile milieu in Switzerland after the defeat of the first Russian revolution and his first son, Valentin Pavlovich, was born in Zürich 1907.⁶ Two years later his second son, Pavel Pavlovich, was born in Helsinki where Olberg, among other things, participated in the Finnish cooperative movement. Via this movement he came into contact with the Swedish Cooperative Union (KF) and contributed to

⁴ Biographical information in print on Olberg’s life occurs in newspaper articles concerning birthdays and in death notices. Here the information has been obtained from the articles: 75-årige 1953; Iz Partii 1958; En flyktingarnas vän 1958; Paul Olberg: Zum 1958; Paul Olberg 80 1958; Paul Olberg gestorben 1960; Paul Olberg död 1960; Pavel Karlovich Olberg 1960; Old Yiddish 1960. Paul Olberg’s personal archive (ARAB, POA) includes his passport, press cards, and correspondence that contributes to his life story. Biographical information is to be found in S. Aspling’s graveside address (see footnote 3) as well as in F.M. Olberg’s handwritten fragmentary and anecdotal biographical details “Kogda moi muzj inogda raskazyval ...”, ARAB, POA, vol. 30.

⁵ F.M. Olberg “Kogda moi muzj inogda raskazyval ...”, ARAB, POA, vol. 30.

⁶ His wife writes in her biographical notes that Olberg went to Geneva already before the Russian Revolution in 1905 to study historical materialism on behalf of the pioneer of Russian Marxism, G. Plekhanov, see F.M. Olberg “Kogda moi muzj inogda raskazyval ...”, ARAB, POA, vol. 30.

the publication *Kooperatören* with articles on cooperativism and economic conditions in Russia.⁷

In the wake of the Russian February Revolution in 1917, Olberg assisted, through the Russian support committee, those political emigrants in Stockholm returning home, the onward transportation of the Russian exile milieu who, from different corners of Europe, headed back to Russia via Sweden (Björkegren 1985: 251). He also took part, together with Axelrod, in the work of establishing an information bureau in Stockholm for the Russian Petrograd Soviet which at this time was dominated by the Mensheviks (Kan 2005: 128–9). Amongst the group of comrades in Stockholm was the Menshevik Bernard Mehr, a Swedish version of the name Bejnes Meyerovich. Like Olberg, his contemporary, Mehr originated from a Jewish family in Latvia where he was involved with the emerging social democratic labour movement but succeeded in reaching Sweden in 1905, having escaped from political imprisonment (Elmbrant 2010: 18–20).

In Sweden, Bernhard met and married the young Bund follower Sara Matles who, at about the same time, had fled from the city of Grodno (now in Belarus) when Tsardom crushed the rebellious strike wave in 1905 (ibid. 15–18). Bernhard and Sara Mehr constituted a hub in the support work for Russian political migrants during the stormy revolutionary periods around 1905 and 1917. Much later, in another era, Paul Olberg and Sara Mehr were to meet up again, this time in connection with a new help effort for refugees from the east.

Together with Axelrod, Olberg participated during the spring of 1917 in the preparations for the Stockholm Peace Conference, a failed attempt of the International Socialist Bureau (ISB), through a Dutch–Scandinavian working group to reconcile the different attitudes of European Social Democracy on the peace question (Sitzung 1917; Ascher 1972: 325–33). In a series of articles in *Social-Demokraten* Olberg defended the plans in response to the criticism of the Russian Bolsheviks and the Swedish Social Democratic Left Party (Olberg 1917; Kan 2005: 131). Olberg belonged to the Russian Menshevik milieu in Stockholm which, to begin with, did not adopt a position in respect of the split in the ranks of the Swedish Social Democrats the same spring.

⁷ Letter of recommendation by A. Gjöres, head of KF's organisation department and T. Odhe, editor of the periodical *Kooperatören*, Stockholm 28 May 1938, ARAB, POA, vol. 1. In the letter it is stated that Olberg in 1916 was recommended to the management of Sweden's KF publications by the Finnish cooperative movement's representative, Professor H. Gebhard.

Not only the Bolsheviks but also the Mensheviks sent fraternal greetings to the newly formed Social Democratic Left Party of Sweden on the occasion of its first congress in May 1917. During these spring months, with food riots occurring even in Sweden, the different wings of Swedish Social Democracy sought to bring clarity to the question of who represented what amongst the currents of Russian socialism, whereas the Russian socialists, conversely, sought to position themselves in response to the Swedish movement.

Through Stockholm, which for a time became the meeting place of international socialism, there flowed a stream of revolutionaries and reformists, internationalists and social patriots, pacifists and Leninists.

Here, Olberg not only belonged to the Menshevik circle but came into contact with the leading figures of Swedish Social Democracy such as Hjalmar Branting, Gustav Möller, and Arthur Engberg as well as figures of the Social Democratic Left Party such as Fredrik Ström, Zeth Höglund, and Ture Nerman. He got to know Angelica Balabanoff of the Zimmerwald movement who, a couple of years later, joined the Communist International, as well as many other prominent personalities of these revolutionary years. However, he also developed contacts with wider circles who were interested in developments in Russia.⁸

From the summer of 1917, Olberg was Stockholm correspondent for the Menshevik newspaper *Novaja Zhizn* in Petrograd, with Maxim Gorky as its most widely known writer (Kan 2005: 128).⁹ The newspaper was banned by the Russian Provisional Government in September 1917 – that is to say, during the stormy days when Kornilov’s troops marched on Petrograd to suffocate the ever stronger Soviet power base in the Russian capital. The publication of the paper was resumed from Moscow where, however, it was finally stopped by the new Bolshevik proletarian dictatorship in July 1918.

It was also during the year 1918 that Olberg returned to Russia and Petrograd for a time. In three articles for the Swedish *Social-Demokraten*, in the autumn of 1919, on the subject “Soviet Russia in reality”, he criticised the Bolshevik terror, corruption, misrule, and food shortages (Olberg 1919a). Bolshevism had, believed Olberg, established a regime “with which

⁸ From October 1917 to August 1918, he served for a period as editorial secretary for the publication *Shvedskii Ekspert* which was issued in Russian by the Swedish Export Association (Sveriges Allmänna Exportförening), see letter of recommendation by Bengt Ljungberger, Stockholm 19 Nov. 1919, ARAB, POA, vol. 26.

⁹ P. Olberg, press card for *Novaja Zhizn*, Petrograd 7 July 1917 in “Handlingar rörande Maxim Gorkis tidning”, ARAB, POA, vol. 1.

the darkest times of Tsarism seem to pale in comparison.” This was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but a dictatorship “over the proletariat” where all the freedoms of the working class are repressed and the regime could only rely on bayonets. “Time’s wheel has rolled backwards”, was Olberg’s (1919a I) conclusion. The strongly Bolshevik-critical article series was inspired by his diary-like *Briefe aus Sowjet-Russland* (Letters from Soviet Russia) which was issued in pamphlet form in Germany the same year (Olberg 1919b).

The articles were valuable for Swedish Social Democracy which, in 1919, was under pressure from the Soviet Russian example. They were published at the same time as Swedish Social Democracy was forced to meet the challenge from the Communist International – the Comintern – which had been formed the same spring and counted the newly formed Swedish Social Democratic Left Party among its first member organisations. The large Branting meeting in the Auditorium in autumn 1919, convened to declare the social democratic rejection of the Bolshevik dictatorship of the proletariat (Demokrati 1919), coincided with the publication of Olberg’s articles. It was during the time when Yudenich’s military offensive had started against Petrograd and bourgeois opinion nurtured hopes that Bolshevik power was near its end. For the Swedish Left Socialists, the circumstances demonstrated how the Menshevik Olberg, who during his time in Russia “enjoyed all privileges”, had now come to exalt Tsarism and as an “old, experienced newspaper man” knew how to write to “the full satisfaction of Soviet Russia’s enemies” (M. 1919).

For Olberg, on the contrary, Branting’s hard line against Bolshevism was proof that Swedish Social Democracy had risen to the challenge just as the Mensheviks themselves had. Paul Olberg’s knowledge and documentation from within the Russian revolution and the development of the crisis became highly valued ammunition against the left leaning critics in the Swedish labour movement that were drawn to the Comintern. Already during the revolutionary year of 1917 and in the immediate post-war years Paul Olberg thus became a contributor to the Swedish Social Democratic press with a significant personal contact network amongst leading Swedish Social Democrats as a consequence.

The Mensheviks in exile

It was some time towards the end of 1918 that Paul Olberg left Russia and travelled to Berlin, the city that was in the throes of the German Revolution

and the Spartacist Uprising in January 1919. An identity card, issued by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in Berlin in November 1918, indicates that Olberg is in their service.¹⁰ He was, already at that time, a man of experience and a political writer who, forty years old, had witnessed the Russian workers' movement birth and growth with all its ideological and political conflicts, the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and the start of the Civil War. He had a wide network of contacts in the Russian, Swedish, and European social democratic parties and a wealth of experience as a socialist writer in several countries.

In the Berlin which he came to, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had split apart and not only owing to the revolutionary surge of Spartacism. In the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), which was formed by the opponents of war within German Social Democracy in spring 1917, there were also party legends such as the 'father of revisionism' Eduard Bernstein and the interpreter of orthodox Marxism, Karl Kautsky. For Olberg, his wife Frida Markovna recalls, the articles he wrote for the German workers' press were literally "worth gold" and not just in political terms. "For the first article in the party newspaper *Vorwärts* he received two gold coins of 20 marks from Karl Kautsky."¹¹ As a writer for the German Social Democratic press and its leading organ *Vorwärts*, Olberg was able to get to know many of the key figures; he stayed for a period with Bernstein and served as Kautsky's secretary during his trip to Georgia in autumn 1920, before the Red Army invaded the country. The friendship with Kautsky and his family would last all his life.¹²

When the majority in the USPD decided to affiliate to the Communist International in 1920 the way back to the Social Democratic Party opened up for those who opposed the Bolshevik dictatorship. Even the Russian Mensheviks who identified with the USPD were to rejoin the SPD. It was during the period 1921–22, after the end of the Civil War, when the leading Mensheviks in Russia were forced to choose between banishment to Siberia or going into exile. The party had joined the Bolshevik side in the Civil War and operated legally in the new Soviet institutions but was subsequently faced by an ultimatum to join the ruling party or be declared illegal. The

¹⁰ The card states that Herr Olberg "steht im Dienst des Arbeiter- und Soldatenrats. Berlin, November 1918." It was issued by "Der Ausschuß für öffentliche Sicherheit", ARAB, POA, vol. 1.

¹¹ F.M. Olberg "Kogda moi muzj inogda raskazyval ...", ARAB, POA, vol. 30.

¹² For Olberg's extensive correspondence with Kautsky and his family, see ARAB, POA, vol. 23; correspondence with Bernstein in ARAB, POA, vol. 20.

party leader, Julius Martov, had left for Berlin in 1920 and, in the emerging Menshevik exile milieu, started the newspaper *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* – the Socialist Courier – commonly called *Vestnik*. Under the leadership of Martov and Rafael Abramovitch, in the Menshevik party's evolving foreign bureau, *Vestnik* was to form a mouthpiece for the Mensheviks, in practice the party leadership, for thirty years and continued to appear for a further decade. After Martov's death in 1923, Fyodor Dan was appointed the party leader while Abramovitch continued as Editor-in-Chief, right up to the last edition of *Vestnik* in 1963. By then, the newspaper and party had moved steadily westwards, both geographically and politically, from Berlin to Paris in connection with Hitler's accession to power, and from Paris to New York on the German occupation of France in 1940.¹³

It was in the Russian Menshevik exile milieu in Berlin, as well as in German and Latvian Social Democratic circles, that Paul Olberg was mainly active during the 1920s. The Russian Menshevik Party rejected from the start any plans to build up a new party in exile. Membership of the party's foreign organisation was only open to those who had joined before the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in November 1917, whether the person was active illegally in Soviet Russia or in exile (Wolin 1997: 320–1). The party's members in exile during the 1920s may have numbered only a few hundred, of whom a small number were from the former party leadership of the years in Russia. Olberg never belonged to this leadership but had been a member ever since the foundation congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1898 and his background within the Latvian Social Democratic movement was significant in this case.

During the Latvian independence process in 1918, a new Social Democratic party under Menshevik leadership was formed; this party was to occupy a strong position in inter-war Latvia, up to the coup d'état in 1934, when it was banned. Through the Latvian Mensheviks, among others, the leadership in exile was able to establish close contact with supporters in Soviet Russia for intelligence and sharing of information (Liebich 1997: 106, 128). *Vestnik* could thereby include detailed knowledge about the Soviet developments that Olberg and other writers then communicated to social democratic circles in Europe.

The strategy for the Mensheviks in exile was, after their attempt to participate in the building of international cooperation through the so-

¹³ For a complete overview of *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik's* publication, articles, and writers down the years, see Liebich (1992).

called Vienna International in the early 1920s, to become members of the mass membership social democratic parties in the West (Liebich 1997: 157–63). There they could contribute knowledge about the Russian experience and ideologically uphold what they saw as a Marxian perspective. As representatives of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, they were also represented in the re-established Socialist International leadership.

Menshevism regarded itself, through its central interpreters in the persons of Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov, and his successor Fyodor Dan, as orthodox Marxist revolutionaries in contrast to what they saw as the utopian, voluntarian, and terroristic Bolshevism (Ascher 1972). Socialism was, as they saw it, an unavoidable historical consequence of capitalism's development, but which could only come about, as Marx explained, when capitalism's productive forces broke the old shackles holding back the forces of production. It was in the western world, where capitalistic industrial development had come furthest, and where proletarian wage work was predominant, that the prospects were to be found for a socialist transformation, not in backward Russia. Russian peasant society must first undergo its industrial modernisation before the preconditions even existed for the socialist phase. The task for Marxists in Russia, therefore, was, through the revolution, to establish a parliamentary democracy where the productive forces could be developed, an emerging labour movement strengthened and the conditions prepared for social reforms and the future socialist transformation (Sapir 1974: 364–89).

The Mensheviks believed that Bolshevism turned Marx upside down; their proletarian dictatorship was a despotic camouflage for archaic hierarchies and backward economic conditions. An expression for this viewpoint was the Menshevik criticism during the 1920s of the Soviet so-called New Economic Policy (NEP) where they maintained that the Bolshevik-led power of the Soviets was not in any way a proletarian dictatorship but, in social terms, appeared to be developing towards a bureaucratic state capitalist dictatorship (Wolin 1974: 245–9).

For Paul Olberg, therefore, his activities as journalist in Menshevik exile circles and, above all, on behalf of German, Latvian, and Swedish Social Democracy were central during his years in Berlin. But the personal networks within Russian Menshevism and European Social Democracy which, on that day in May 1960, would be reflected in the bouquets and telegrams that accompanied him to his final resting place, also included another dimension: the Jewish Labour Bund.

The Bund

The Bund, after its formation in 1897, had developed into a Jewish labour movement without peer in areas of Jewish settlement in the Russian empire; from Vilnius in the north-west and down across Belarusian, Polish, and Ukrainian communities where a Jewish proletariat emerged in the early years of the twentieth century. The organisation built its movement into a proletarian Jewish cosmos, based around a secular and socialist Yiddish culture in the form of political clubs and trade union sections, children and youth organisations, schools and orphanages, theatrical and cultural activities, sporting organisations and self-defence groups (Blatman 2003; Jacobs 2001; Minzeles 1999; Slucki 2012; Traverso 1997; Weinstock 2002).

Ideologically, the Bund differentiated itself both from the Marxists – Bolsheviks as well as Mensheviks – who favoured Jewish assimilation under the banner of universalism, and from the Zionist movement which was born in Basel the same year that the Bund was formed. Through its ideologues, with Arkady Kremer and Vladimir Medem as leading figures, the Bund developed a view of the national dimension and national rights that lay near the theoretical currents of Austro-Marxism, mainly formulated through Karl Renner and Otto Bauer.¹⁴ In contrast to what was seen as Zionism's unrealistic utopianism and bourgeois nationalism, the Bund propagated the message of *doykait*; that the Jewish working people should struggle for their rights 'in situ' where they lived, 'here and now'. Through Jewish cultural autonomy within democratic civic states, the foundations would be laid for mankind's socialist liberation without the need for repression and subjection.

Like the Austro-Marxists, the Bund developed its perspective in a multi-ethnic empire and did not conceive that the liberation of the proletariat would be achieved through separation into new national states. Here the Bund was ideologically closer to the radical, more cosmopolitan Marxism which, in the figure of Rosa Luxemburg and others repudiated all merely national solutions (Hudis and Anderson 2004). However, unlike this current which in the name of internationalism also rejected the building of Jewish identity, the Bund was active in asserting, strengthening, and developing such an identity on the basis of socialist ideals. Yiddish as a linguistic

¹⁴ Renner (1870–1950) and Bauer (1881–1938) were leading Austrian Social Democrats and Marxists. Bauer (1907) outlined his strategy in *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*. For Austro-Marxism, see Olausson (1987).

and cultural, secular and socialist community came to emerge as the distinguishing feature of the Bund.

The Russian revolution of 1905 coincided with the Bund's first heyday. The second could have been the Russian February revolution in 1917 but the movement was already then weakened by repression, ethnic cleansing, and the downfall of the Russian empire. With the seizure of power by Bolshevism, the Bund was subsequently brought face-to-face, like the Mensheviks, with an ultimatum of being repressed or merging with the victorious Bolshevik party. During the Russian Civil War, parts of the movement like the Jewish population otherwise, had joined the Red Army and the Soviets in self-defence against the 'White' side's anti-semitic mass pogroms. Under the designation *Kombund* elements of the Russian Bund were absorbed in the Communist Party's Jewish sections, *jevseksii* (Gitelman 1972; Minczeles 1999: 260–2, 265–70, Weinstock 2002: 181–90, 233–8).

As part of Russian Social Democracy's organisational sphere, the Bund was to split apart during the Russian Revolution. While certain of the movement's leaders and elements followed Bolshevism, others came to regard themselves as part of the Menshevik-led bloc which was driven into exile. Among these was Paul Olberg and, as a Jewish socialist, he was far from alone. Almost the entire leadership group in the foreign bureau of the Mensheviks comprised intellectuals with a Jewish background (Liebich 1997: 12). But like so many other Russian and Polish Jewish Marxists – from Leo Trotsky to Rosa Luxemburg – the majority did not cultivate any Jewish identity *per se* but rather saw themselves as global revolutionaries in the service of humanity. They opposed both nationalist, as well as what we today would call ethnic oppression; they saw themselves as serving a greater cause than merely being champions of the Jewish proletariat, and they did not use the Jewish issue as a campaign banner. For supporters of the Jewish Bund, however, matters were rather different.

Rafael Abramovitch was one of the historic leaders of the Bund who, since the reunification of Russian Social Democracy in 1906, had represented the movement in the reunited party's central committee. With the split in the Russian Bund, Abramovitch and other Bund members followed the path of the Mensheviks and went into exile (Minczeles 1999: 266–7). Even though the Bund in Russia had been dissolved, Abramovitch remained in the Russian Menshevik exile leadership and, as an experienced publisher of Bund newspapers, became the editor of the newly started *Vestnik*. Abramovitch was always a Bundist, above all else, according to André Liebich in his history of Russian Menshevism in exile (1997: 26).

As writer for the Yiddish language *Forverts* in New York, the newspaper intended for the growing Jewish working class in the United States, Abramovitch represented, since the time prior to the Russian Revolution of 1905, a Socialist *Yiddishkeit*, a Jewish cultural identity on socialist foundations. One could say that Abramovitch, in an ideological sense, acted as a kind of shadow representative for the dissolved Russian Bund in the Mensheviks' exile leadership in Berlin, Paris, and New York during both the inter-war and the immediate post-war period after 1945.

In a similar way, Paul Olberg belonged to the network of the dissolved Russian Bund and was in close contact with Abramovitch and other exile Bund members throughout his life.¹⁵ With the emergence of Nazism, the new World War and the Holocaust, an exceptional role change took place in this socialist exile milieu. From individual Russian Bund members belonging to the small Menshevik party in exile, they – as Mensheviks – now belonged to the much larger Bundist world movement that was established in the wake of the massive refugee flows arising from the World War.

It was outside Soviet Russia, in the newly independent Poland that broke away from the former Russian Empire, that the Bund not only lived on in the 1920s but gained increased influence in a growing Jewish working class (Blatman 2003; Minczeles 1999: 271–330, Weinstock 2002: 205–25). With union organisations for Jewish workers, the youth movement *Tskunft*, its self-defence militia *Tsukunft shturem* (Future Storm) and the sports movement *Morgnshtern*, together with the children's organisation SKIF (*Sotsyalistishe Kinder Farband*), and the women's organisation YAF (*Yiddisher Arbeter Froy*), the Bund created a world of Jewish, Socialist mass organisations. Further to this, there was the building up of the secular Jewish school system *Tsysho*, *Kultur Liges*, Yiddish theatre, artists and authors, and a network of social arrangements such as camping activities, kindergarten, and the famous, Bund-run Medem Sanatorium for the treatment of Jewish children and youngsters suffering from tuberculosis. In the Polish municipal elections in 1938, the Bund was the largest Jewish party, gaining over 60 per cent of the Jewish votes in Warsaw (Minczeles 1999: 313–4).

¹⁵ An extensive correspondence between Olberg, Abramovitch, the Bund's central figure during and after the war E. Nowogrodsky, the movement's historian B. Nicolaevsky, S. Schwarz, and others is found in ARAB, POA, vols 20 and 22, and in YIVO (*Yiddisher Visnshaftlekher Institut*, i.e., Institute for Jewish Research), 1400 Bund Archives (in the following BA), ME 17, vol. 22 "Paul Olberg" and YIVO, BA, ME 18, vols 206–16 "Bund in Sweden. Jewish Socialist. Workers Party in Sweden".

In the struggle for the loyalties of the labour movement between Social Democracy and Communism, the Polish Bund long chose to remain outside both the Communist International and the Socialist International, re-established after the First World War. After its entry into the Socialist International in 1930, the movement constituted an extremely radical component, as well as an opponent to both what was considered a much too pragmatic, establishment socialism and to Labour Zionism's *Poale Zion* which, it was believed, represented a bourgeois nationalism (Minczeles 1999: 297–8).

Outside Poland, the Bund did not exist as a party but only in the form of a network and support groups in the different countries to which Jewish socialists, in the first place those with a Russian background, had gone (Slucki 2012). The individual Bundists normally joined up to the social democratic parties, in particular after the affiliation to the Socialist International. To be, for example, a German or French Social Democrat, a Bundist and, at the same time, to belong to the Menshevik exile milieu was, therefore, no contradiction. The Bund members in the USA were long the leading power in the textile workers' trade union organisations, as well as in the American umbrella organisation, the Jewish Labour Committee, which at the end of the Second World War encompassed over half a million members.

With the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and the new World War the main element of the Bund in Europe was destroyed. During the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland 1939–41 parts of the organisation's leadership were liquidated, of whom Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter, executed in 1943, were the most well-known representatives. During the Holocaust, the movement's mass base was pitilessly crushed. The uprising in the Warsaw Jewish Ghetto in 1943 under the leadership of the Bundist Marek Edelman, among others, constituted the movement's ultimate great struggle in Europe (Blatman 2003: 90–120).

Olberg in Sweden again

On Hitler's accession to power in 1933, Olberg together with his wife Frida Markovna came to Sweden with the support of Swedish Social Democrats. This was the year following the Social Democrats' great election victory, with the launch of the crisis programme which would change the direction of Swedish politics, and with the growing influence of the popular movements in the development of society. After initially staying at different addresses, and subject to provisional arrangements during the war, the

couple moved to a bedsit in the working class district of Stockholm's Lilla Essingen.¹⁶

As Menshevik socialist it was given for Olberg to join the social democratic party wherever he happened to live. From being a member of the German SPD during the 1920s, already on his arrival in Sweden in 1933 he joined the Social Democratic Party where he developed contacts with leading party members.¹⁷ Here he met up again with Anders Örne, a leading figure in the cooperative movement, who had managed to become both a member of the *Riksdag* and director-general of the Swedish postal service. Gustav Möller had been appointed Minister for Social Affairs after the election of 1932 while Arthur Engberg led the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. The Left Socialists Zeth Höglund and Fredrik Ström, who for a time had led the Swedish Communist Party, had now returned to the social democratic fold. Höglund, at the time of Olberg's arrival, was chairman of Stockholm's Social Democratic party organisation (labour commune) and Ström Editor-in-Chief for the daily *Social-Demokraten*. Olberg's contact network in Swedish Social Democracy extended to leadership levels in both the press and the government.¹⁸ Through decision of the Social Democratic Party, Olberg immediately became engaged in organising the Labour Movement's Refugee Relief. He was however soon forced to leave the mission after a scandal with a Gestapo agent who managed to infiltrate the organisation.¹⁹

With the move to Lilla Essingen, he joined the district association of the Social Democrats in Stockholm. He maintained his membership for almost twenty years but occurs only exceptionally in the discussion minutes and as opening speaker at only one recorded meeting.²⁰ Instead, it was as a writer for Swedish and international Social Democracy that he appeared on the political stage. He contributed on a regular basis to the party press: *Social-*

¹⁶ The first lease on Lilla Essingen dates from 1942, ARAB, POA, vol. 30.

¹⁷ Olberg's first membership card of Stockholm's labour commune is from 1933, ARAB, POA, vol. 1.

¹⁸ Among those sending congratulations on his sixtieth birthday in 1938, according to *Social-Demokraten* 24 Nov. 1938, were G. Möller, Z. Höglund, F. Ström, the party treasurer E. Wallin, and party secretary A. Nilsson, the lawyer G. Branting, the school principal G. Hammar, and the social democratic priest B. Mogård, ARAB, POA, vol. 1.

¹⁹ Letter from the board of the Swedish Social Democratic Party to the board of Landsorganisationen (the Swedish trade union confederation) 14 May 1933, introducing the project and Olberg as its director, ARAB, SAP, E.I.II, utg skrivelser 1933. For the scandal: Fult streck 1934, Nazistspionen 1934, Socialdemokratiska flyktingskommittén 1934.

²⁰ Olberg gave a speech on 12 Oct. 1943 about "Poland and the Second World War", Annual Report 1 Feb. 1943 – 21 Jan. 1944, ARAB, Essinge Islands (Stockholm) Social Democratic Association archive no. 1036, in the following ESFA.

Demokraten and later *Morgon-Tidningen*, *Tiden*, *Frihet*, *Kooperatören*, *Folket i Bild*, and the Swedish trade union confederation (LO) journal *Fackföreningsrörelsen*. His contribution to the LO series of articles examined the role of the trade unions in the Soviet Union and the trade union policy of the Communist International (Olberg 1928; German edition 1930).

To the German Social Democratic press was added the Swiss press also. This Switzerland where he belonged to the Menshevik exile milieu, where his first son was born and his mother buried, in some sense was his second homeland and he saw the neutrality, the militia system for national defence, and local democracy as models. As Menshevik, he contributed to *Vestnik* and as Bundist to the Yiddish *Unser Stimme* published in Paris. Together with his writing activities, his extensive correspondence on political and ideological issues, with influential international socialists, provides insights in both the development of the Menshevik exile milieu and the Bund. Here, Olberg belonged to social democrats with a strong socialist conviction that through radical reforms it would be possible to abolish capitalism. At the same time he strongly rejected Soviet communism.

“There was a melancholic, white-haired man in Stockholm called Paul Olberg who had a past with connections to the Jewish Bund and German Social Democracy”, wrote the Social Democrat Kaj Björk in his memories from the 1930s (1984: 134). “For a few kronor I translated his long articles for *Social-Demokraten*, where he eulogised old Kautsky’s ideas on war and attacked the Soviet Union” (ibid.). At that time Björk himself, despite his social democratic critique, regarded the Soviet Union as a positive factor in world developments. For Olberg, however, there remained nothing of value in the Soviet example, in fact quite the contrary. Ever since 1917, he had warned about what he saw as Bolshevism’s tyranny. He was now obliged to experience how everything he had fought for, since he was young, and associated with socialism – his party, comrades, and ideals – were swept away by the dictatorship.

During the terror of the Stalinist period his personal loss became immeasurable also. “He practically never wrote or spoke about the frightful misfortune that afflicted his family during the Yezhov era”, wrote *Vestnik* in its obituary notice for Olberg (Pavel Karlovich Olberg 1960). Olberg’s two sons had been drawn into the communist movement in Germany and Czechoslovakia and had been recruited by the Soviet security service, the NKVD. Having sought to infiltrate the Trotskyist opposition the elder brother, Valentin Olberg moved to Soviet Russia and appeared as a main witness against Trotsky in the first Moscow Trial in 1936. Together with the

other witnesses he was condemned to death and shot in August 1936. The younger brother, Pavel, was arrested and executed in October of the same year. Valentin's wife Betty was sent to the Gulag but was handed over as a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact in 1940 to the German security service and disappeared without trace. His first wife Sulamith, stenographer and translator on the Comintern's executive committee, was shot in November 1937 (Bundesstiftung 2008; Nekropole 2013a; Nekropole 2013b).

Paul Olberg's position in respect of the internal struggles that, during the period leading up to the Second World War, split Menshevism was hardly unexpected. The Pact between Hitler and Stalin in the summer of 1939 convinced many socialists, the world over, that the Soviet state no longer represented, in any positive respect, the revolutionary development dating from 1917. Large parts of the political middle ground between the Comintern and the Socialist International, which despite the Stalinist repression defended the Soviet Union against both Fascism and Western Capitalism, then drew the conclusion that Stalin's Soviet system had now turned into a new type of imperialism and fascism. This was an approach that was wholly rejected by Fyodor Dan's *Novy Put* (The New Way) which within the Menshevik exile milieu did not only defend the Soviet Union's existence but also, despite its opposition, showed a certain understanding for Soviet foreign policy (Liebich 1997: 260–70). The Abramovitch line from 1940 sought, instead, to combine a socialist 'orthodox' Marxism with a furious resistance to communism and absolute opposition to the Soviet regime. Even Abramovitch followers came to defend the Soviet Union during the World War but, in the resistance to Soviet 'totalitarianism', to discount any hope in respect of the Soviet regime's views. For Olberg this was a self-evident attitude.

Anti-semitism, the Holocaust, and refugee relief

In Olberg's writing and engagement before the Second World War, Jewish issues and anti-semitism occupied no central position. A report trip to the Middle Eastern countries in the mid-1930s gave rise to several articles on social developments and political conditions in the Middle East, including the development of the *Yishuv*, the Jewish settlements. Here articles on the Arab political parties alternated with articles on Jerusalem's modernisation and issues surrounding the division of Palestine (Olberg 1936; 1937; 1938a; 1938b). Olberg was naturally interested in the labour movements and, for a period of time, was the Swedish correspondent for *Davar*, the newspaper of

the Jewish trade union movement *Histadrut*.²¹ However, he did not regard the development primarily from the perspective of a Jewish state formation but rather as a general modernisation of the Middle East in a democratic direction. His idealised anthem to 'The modern Egypt' which was written after the trip expressed a very hopeful view of the region's future. Egypt found itself, in Olberg's judgement, on the threshold to the modern breakthrough with growing national awareness, economic development, democratic reforms, increasing freedom for women, and with the first signs of a modern labour movement. The many ethnic groups and being at the crossroads of world religions was, he believed, a source of strength not disruption and Egypt was free from totalitarian ideas and the European curse of anti-semitism (Olberg 1943: 26, 28, 46–8, 54).

Anti-semitism naturally belonged for Olberg to the crimes of German Nazism. But his journalism and writing during the war years were not dominated by his engagement for the persecuted Jews. It was, instead, in the examination of Soviet Communism that his great knowledge of Russian conditions found expression. In the book *Rysslands nya imperialism* (Russia's New Imperialism) from 1940 Olberg pointed out how Soviet expansionism had characterised Bolshevik policy ever since the early 1920s. The book, which was published after the Soviet attack on Finland, was for Swedish readers an uncommonly knowledgeable and detailed depiction of the Sovietisation of the Caucasus with Georgia and the Muslim areas in the former Tsarist Empire (Olberg 1940).

The presentation of the Soviet Union as imperialistic – and the Communist regime's continuity with Tsardom – was in line with the sharpened questioning of what the Soviet state really represented. Amongst the Mensheviks, the Soviet Union had for a long time, in economic terms, been characterised as a state capitalist system and the Stalin regime, during the 1930s, as 'totalitarian'. However, like other socialist currents, the Mensheviks constantly wrestled with the question what the social order under the 'new Tsar' really represented. Even on the outbreak of the new world war, the majority view in the Mensheviks' foreign bureau was that the Soviet state in key respects was a positive result of the great Revolution of 1917. The task was to democratise, not to dissolve, the new order. Olberg was not longer concerned by such distinctions.

Already, the following year, there was published in both Swedish and German, *Tragedin Balticum*, where Olberg examined in detail the com-

²¹ Olberg's press card for *Davar* issued in June 1940, ARAB, POA, vol. 1.

munist policies in relation to the Baltic states, from the time of the revolution after the First World War up to the annexation in 1940 (Olberg 1941). This work represented, according to Anders Örne in the foreword, an overview of “the practical implementation of Russian imperialism” (ibid. 7). Olberg’s authorship, at least for the Swedish public, came thereby during the first war years to focus on Soviet excesses and become a powerful argument in the period’s agitated anti-communism.

The years 1939 to 1942, in Sweden, were characterised by the internment of communists, police raids, transport bans on the communist press, and strong public condemnations. Zeth Höglund, who wrote the foreword to Olberg’s *Rysslands nya imperialism*, had launched the epithet ‘nazi communists’ after the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and Social Democrats, Syndicalists, and Left Socialists encouraged the purging of communists from trade unions and popular movements. The terror attack against the Communist newspaper *Norrskensflamman* in March 1940, which killed five people, represented a violent peak of the anti-communist mobilisation in the final phase of the Finnish Winter War.

Moreover, Olberg did not place the Jewish issue in the spotlight in the review of Poland’s fate that he had long been working with (Olberg 1944). Instead, the unavoidable impression is that the book is aimed at a patriotic Polish and Polish-friendly opinion in line with the classic liberal nationalism that regarded Poland’s liberation as a bulwark against the East.

“Every Pole is born a revolutionary”, cited Olberg approvingly the words of Karl Marx and conceived that Polish nationalism and democracy went hand-in-hand, not least where Tsarist Russia’s Soviet heirs were concerned (ibid. 126). In his history nothing is found with regard to the extensive pogroms against the Jews, about the time of the Republic’s formation in 1918, or the Jewish Labour Bund’s struggles, during the 1930s, against an aggressive Polish anti-semitism.

It was, instead, the Soviet occupation methods that, according to Olberg, had been “of an anti-semitic nature” through deportations that hit the Jewish population hard. Nevertheless, he believed, it would be incorrect to equate the Russian and German occupation of Poland, above all owing to the “attitude to the Jewish question”. Whereas the Russian regime, in principle, rejected anti-semitism as a policy, the Nazi occupation launched a war of extermination against the Jews with the object of “extinguishing the Polish nation as such” (ibid. 103–4). Olberg was thus careful not to separate the fate of the Jews from Polish suffering in general and, by way of introduction he designated the million victims of the German occupation as

“Polish citizens” and those wiped out communities as “Polish villages”. Subsequently one becomes aware from reading the book that the figures, that already in 1944 were known, largely referred to the liquidation of the Jews. No Polish anti-semitism is highlighted in Olberg’s history; only that the young Polish nation in 1918 had had minority problems “which were not easy to settle” (ibid. 56, 110). When Olberg, in the autumn of 1943, spoke before the Social Democratic association in Essingen on the subject “Poland and the Second World War” the focus was on the courageous military resistance to superior force. The awful terror of the occupiers, according to the meeting minutes, had cost the lives of 3.5 million Poles, adding “of which 2.5 million Jews”. But in Poland there were no Quislings and the Polish population stood united against the occupiers, was Olberg’s conclusion.²²

Nevertheless it was just here, in the final stages of the war and with the immense Jewish catastrophe in Europe that Olberg’s engagement grew. Even before the war he had attempted to assist individual, persecuted comrades. The Kautsky family had fled from Austria after the ‘Anschluss’ in 1938 and the 84-year old Karl Kautsky had died on arrival in the Netherlands. When Karl Kautsky’s elderly widow Luise, in 1942, begged Olberg for help in coming to Sweden he contacted Zeth Höglund. Any operation there to assist appears to have ended in failure; Luise Kautsky, who was Jewish, was deported two years later to Auschwitz where she died after arrival.²³

The Bund in Sweden

Through the US Jewish Labor Committee, Paul Olberg contributed during the last years of the war to provide contacts and help to Jewish camp prisoners and refugees.²⁴ From the autumn of 1945, and for the next couple of years, he was the Committee’s paid representative in Sweden. He was responsible for establishing in Stockholm a committee to assist repatriation and transmigration of war refugees.²⁵ With LO Ombudsman Nils Goude a

²² Essinge Social Democratic Association, meeting minutes 12 Oct. 1943, ARAB, ESFA.

²³ Postcard to Olberg from L. Kautsky, Amsterdam 16 July 1942. Copy of letter from Höglund to Foreign Minister Ch. Günther 1942, concerning L. Kautsky. For L. Kautsky’s death in Auschwitz Birkenau, see letter to Olberg from fellow prisoner L. Adelsberger 13 Oct. 1945. All documents in ARAB, POA, vol. 23.

²⁴ Expense records 1943–45, YIVO, BA, ME18, vol. 205.

²⁵ Letter from Olberg to the Swedish European Relief in Stockholm, 15 May (no year given) ARAB, POA vol. 25. Olberg’s tax declarations show income from the American Jewish Labor Committee amounting to SEK 1000 for Oct–Dec 1945, SEK 6000 for 1947

key figure, acting as a link to the trade union movement and thereby to central and local authorities, this committee arranged work and housing for Jewish refugees from camps in Poland, Germany, and Austria. It also helped in contacts with the public authorities, medical care, and educational issues, visas and all kinds of practical questions concerning finance, clothing, tickets, and not least contact with relatives and friends around the world. In practice, the committee comprised mainly Paul Olberg himself and Sara Mehr who once again, as after 1905, was engaged in helping Jewish socialists as refugees. In effect, the Jewish Labor Committee and Olberg's committee came to represent a support function for Jewish Bund followers among concentration camp victims and refugees.

Already in 1945 a group of Jewish refugees from Poland formed a Bundist group in Uppsala.²⁶ The following year saw the formation of the "Judiska Socialdemokratiska Förbundet 'Bund' i Sverige" (Jewish Social Democratic Association 'Bund' in Sweden) which over the following years organised local groups in almost a dozen Swedish towns and cities. Paul Olberg held membership card no. 1; the chairperson initially was Sara Mehr. The war's end thus meant for Olberg that membership of the Bund which, for him, had so long only involved correspondence with Abramovitch and other Russian Jewish Bundists scattered abroad, was reactivated again.

Now heading towards his seventieth birthday, Olberg initiated a febrile period of activity to receive, place, and assist hundreds of Bundist refugees in Swedish society – and help many on to the homes of friends, relatives, or party comrades in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Australia, and, in certain cases, Palestine.²⁷ In addition to the great practical assistance there was the political project to unite the separated Bundists again around their agenda on Swedish soil. This involved basic work on behalf of the association: forming local branches and working groups, choosing committees and designating responsibilities, holding meetings and conferences, and, not

and the same amount for 1948 as well as SEK 7200 for 1949, information for 1946 is lacking in the archive, ARAB, POA, vols 26 and 30.

²⁶ A report from Uppsala states that a Bund group was formed in Jan. 1945. Minutes from first national Bund conference in Sweden 14–15 Aug. 1948, handwritten notebook, YIVO, BA, ME18, 206.

²⁷ In the letter of 15 May to Swedish European Relief, ARAB, POA, vol. 25, which must have been written around 1948, it is asserted that the Committee provides help for purposes of repatriation and transmigration of refugees; it had helped five hundred families to Sweden, half of whom travelled onwards to other countries. *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* maintained that this enabled around 2000 Bundists to travel onward to different countries in the world (Iz partii 1959).

least, running political work in the first place on behalf of the Jews in Sweden.

Most of the Bundists in Sweden arrived with the refugee transports from Poland, some from exile in the Soviet Union.²⁸ Besides supporting one another after difficult experiences and in the new country's unfamiliar surroundings the activities involved arranging discussion meetings and cultural events, marking May Day and celebrating Bund anniversaries as well as days of remembrance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Each Bundist would subscribe to *Unser Stimme*, the Bund's daily newspaper published in Yiddish from Paris. In addition, there was the more theoretical publication *Unser Tsait*, which after the war was issued by the Bund's international co-ordination committee in New York. A recurrent urge was that the local Bundist groups should seek collaboration with, and integration into, the ranks of Swedish Social Democracy. The Bund in Sweden presented itself as part of the Social Democratic Party, the design of the membership cards was copied, local contacts were established, Olberg was invited to the Social Democratic party congress and a small Bund column marching behind its own banner took part in the Social Democrats' May Day demonstration in Stockholm during the first post-war years. The language, however, represented a major obstacle. Only Paul Olberg and Sara Mehr mastered Swedish and toiled in their travel across Sweden to local events. Where no Swedish speaker was available the sphere of contact with local party organisations was reduced to a polite exchange of greetings.

In addition to the language obstacle, there was the deeper and more distant question: What should the Bundists in Sweden really do there? Their core tenet of *doykait* (hereness) referred to the struggle for a socialist Yiddishness 'in the here and now'. This would have been a natural approach in Poland with large, dynamic Jewish communities. Matters appeared differently in Swedish localities such as Alingsås, Vetlanda, or Eskilstuna with just a handful of Jewish families. The Swedish refugee policy did not permit those newly arrived to move to Stockholm or Malmö with their larger Jewish communities. During the first year in Sweden a self-evident starting point for several of the Bundists was their return to Poland where the Bund was seeking to reorganise itself amidst the ruins of the Holocaust.

²⁸ See question form for representatives at the Bund Conference in Stockholm 1948, where several of representatives indicate 'Soviet Union' or 'Russia' as answer to where they spent the war years. Minutes from the first national Bund conference in Sweden, 14–15 Aug. 1948, handwritten notebook, YIVO, BA, ME18, 206.

With the repatriation of hundreds of thousand Jews from exile in the Soviet Union, it appeared for a time as if Polish Jewish communities could be rebuilt once more. Pogroms in Kielce in 1946, and other anti-semitic outbursts, served to persuade most Jews that any return was inconceivable.

When the Bund in Poland in 1948 was faced with the ultimatum to join the ruling communist party, the history of the Bund in Poland came to an end. The once upon a time so mighty Jewish labour movement was now gone like the Jewish working class that constituted its mass base. At the same time, its Zionist rival had launched the struggle for Palestine with the goal of proclaiming a Jewish nation state. For the Bundists around Sweden and elsewhere in the world questions of an existential nature were being asked. What was the future for the Jewish socialist project for which their comrades in thousands had lost their lives? The question loomed up during those days when the world was gliding apart into the East and West of the Cold War.

When the Bund's international network of support groups, with around ten thousand members in some twenty or so countries, met for the World Congress in 1947, the previous opposition to Zionism was unchanged as well as the opposition to the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine (Slucki 2012: 24). The movement distanced itself from both Soviet Communism and American capitalism. Instead, what was essential, believed the international Bund, was to build a third Socialist force in world politics. This was represented, according to the Bundists, by international Social Democracy with the Labour Party's victory in Great Britain in 1945 as foremost example and Scandinavian Social Democracy as effective models. The international Bund also joined, as associated member organisation, the reorganised Socialist International in 1951.

The Bundists in Sweden participated in the movement's international debates and united themselves with the majority positions. At the national Bundist conference in Stockholm, in the summer of 1948, when the world situation had once again deteriorated and the state of Israel had been proclaimed a few months earlier, the assembled representatives of about three hundred members or so adopted the international line.²⁹ That Olberg was the self-evident key figure and the veteran, almost twice as old as most representatives, did not prevent him from being criticised for standing too close to the "Western side". On the other hand, he did not hear those re-

²⁹ Minutes from the first national Bund conference in Sweden, 14–15 Aug. 1948, handwritten notebook, YIVO, BA, ME18, 206.

representatives who desired a more positive attitude towards the proclaimed Israel.³⁰ For those Bundists, who saw the British Labour government as the most important example of the socialist ‘third way’, the armed Zionist struggle in Palestine against the British mandate authorities represented an example of reactionary nationalism.

The rapid Soviet and American recognition of the Jewish state – the two big power blocs that the Bundists were opposed to – was also interpreted negatively as was the support of communist volunteers and arms from Czechoslovakia to the Israeli struggle. The murder of the UN mediator, Folke Bernadotte in 1948, was condemned by the Bund in Sweden as a crime of the “Fascist Stern gang” which had thereby lost any claim to be a civilised force and provided the worst example of the Zionist movement’s nationalism.³¹

Menshevism, the Bund, and the Cold War

With the escalation of the Cold War and the loss of power by the British Labour Party in 1951, the socialist ‘third way’ between East and West melted away. In New York the last remnants of the foreign bureau of the Mensheviks were in process of disintegration. The split with Fyodor Dan’s *Novy Put* had only been deepened during the World War and was unbridgeable by the early days of the Cold War. Or rather, when Dan died in January 1947 there was nothing really to hold the two wings together. Whereas *Novy Put* adopted a position in support of the Soviet Union in the growing conflicts between East and West, Abramovitch and *Vestnik* placed themselves, as increasingly anti-communist in outlook, on the side of the West.

The paradox, writes Liebich (1997: 288), was that the exile Mensheviks’ great, new political opportunity also became their ruin. The opportunity offered by the moment involved the enormous Russian emigrant milieu which brought together Red Army soldiers from the prison camps, slave labourers, those driven into exile, and others who refused to return to the Soviet Union. The now elderly Mensheviks threw themselves into this environment, in rivalry with old supporters of tsarism and former Nazi collaborators, in an attempt to organise a democratic, Russian mass opposition. Their Marxist socialism, on the threshold of the 1950s and the escala-

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Declaration from the Social Democratic Bund in Sweden, YIVO, BA, ME18, 206.

tion in the Cold War, was clearly not an asset amongst the Russian exiles who shunned everything that could be associated with the term 'socialism'.

Facing the immense problem of building alliances in the new exile milieu – who could be regarded as friend and foe? – and the pressure to renounce socialism, at least the terminology, the Foreign Committee was dissolved in 1953. Abramovitch continued to issue *Vestnik* for a further ten years, together with his closest comrades up to his death, in an imagined continuity with the Russian Revolution's Menshevik Social Democracy. The combination of a furious anti-communism which placed *Vestnik* amongst the Cold War hawks, with its profession of a socialist vision of the future, had during the intensive years of McCarthyism an extremely limited political space both in the USA as elsewhere. For the last Mensheviks who had been fighting Bolshevism ever since 1917, indeed since the split that divided Russian Social Democracy in 1903, the socialist vision subsequently faded out to be replaced by the warnings against any compromise at all with the Soviet regime. Like Olberg, many of these had suffered great personal losses. Abramovitch's son, for example, had headed for Spain as a volunteer in the Civil War but was apparently kidnapped by Soviet agents and never seen again.³²

The international Bund too, like the Mensheviks, subsequently joined the Western side against Soviet communism in the Cold War. For Paul Olberg, this position did not represent any dilemma. Since 1917, he had belonged to the hardest critics within the Menshevik ranks of the Soviet system and communism in general. For almost forty years, as a writer, he had fought to establish the anti-communist credentials of social democracy, not least in the Swedish party. In particular, he had been involved in the resistance of the Baltic States against annexation by the Soviet Union and participated in the ceremonial occasions held by the Latvian Social Democrats in Swedish exile.³³ At the same time as the last Mensheviks in New York attempted to bring together what – they hoped – constituted

³² Abramovitch never gave up trying to find the truth about the disappearance of his son, Mark Rein (Liebich 1997: 261–2). S.D. Erlich, the widow of the Bundist leader H. Erlich, executed in the Soviet Union, also belonged to the Mensheviks in New York but followed the line of *Novy Put* (ibid. 275).

³³ On, for example, Latvian Social Democracy's fiftieth anniversary in Stockholm 1954, the Bund was represented by Olberg (Lettiska 1954) as in the case of the first May Day celebration in 1953 of the *Östeuropeiska Socialistiska Samarbetskommittén*. For the Baltic Committee in Stockholm, together with T. Nerman's brother, B. Nerman, he issued the booklet *Balticum: Fantasi och verklighet* (The Baltics: Fantasy and Reality) (Olberg and Nerman 1946) and, on his death, condolences were sent by the Estonian National Council and other Baltic organisations, ARAB, POA, vol. 28.

democratic elements of the Russian exile community into a US supported anti-communist movement for Russia's freedom, he himself became a member of the Swedish department of the CIA funded *Congress for Cultural Freedom*.³⁴ The movement whose purpose was to bring together intellectuals behind the West in the Cold War had been formed in Berlin under the leadership of leading Mensheviks, among others.³⁵ In presentations of the Jewish Labor Committee it was underlined where the Committee stood in world politics and Olberg was welcomed at the US embassy.³⁶

Within the Bund, the Swedish Social Democratic project could be seen as a model, or perhaps rather as a last socialist example. Olberg himself was keen to present Sweden as a genuine socialist social development for the exiled Bundists he attempted to integrate into the Swedish labour movement. Swedish socialism was slow but sure, he explained for countless refugees in cold barracks while awaiting transit onwards. And the Bund's international coordination committee in New York sent greetings to the Swedish Social Democrats' party congress in 1952, in the form of a telegram:

Our best wishes to the delegates of your party congress in their relentless effort to create a genuine socialist welfare state – STOP – During the cruel years of the Second World War your country shined as a haven for all persecuted by the Nazi-hangmen – STOP – May the spirit of international brotherhood which distinguished your great leader Hjalmar Branting lead you to further achievements for the cause of socialism, democracy and a lasting peace – STOP³⁷

“I cannot sufficiently underline how happy I am to be a citizen in a free, democratic, and highly cultured country”, explained Olberg in autumn 1953 for the Social Democratic *Morgon-Tidningen*, in response to the journalist's ingratiating question about his impressions of Sweden, after twenty

³⁴ Olberg had membership card no. 52 of the Swedish Committee for Cultural Freedom, issued 1955, ARAB, POA, vol. 1.

³⁵ It was B. Nicolaevsky and S. Schwarz who represented the Russian exile organisation Association for the Struggle for the Freedom of Peoples and the Mensheviks' foreign delegation (Liebich 1997: 298).

³⁶ See, for example, the letter of introduction for Olberg from A. Held, chairman of the Jewish Labor Committee in the USA to Honorable W.W. Butterworth, United States Ambassador to Sweden, 16 Oct. 1950, ARAB, POA, vol. 30.

³⁷ Telegram to the Party Executive Committee, Stockholm, Sweden, 4 June 1952 from E. Nowogrodsky, World Coordinating Committee of the Bund, YIVO, BA, ME18, vol. 207.

years in the country of which almost fifteen as Swedish citizen. “Here are the conditions of life which I dreamed of in my youth” (75-årige 1953).

The same year Olberg, at the age of 75, represented the Bund during the re-instituted Socialist International congress in Stockholm. In actual fact, most Bundists in Sweden had by then travelled onwards to family members and comrades in other countries and only a handful then remained. Even if those remaining continued to maintain contact and follow the Bundist press, coherent activities had now dwindled. Olberg himself continued to maintain contact with the international Bund – and to long use its letter head – but his resurrection as a leading Bundist comprised a relatively short-lived experience in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Soviet anti-semitism

Even if Olberg did not publicly turn against Sweden’s neutrality policy, he criticised the accommodation towards the Soviet Union and belonged to the Swedish party’s most anti-Soviet circles. With the publication of his book *Antisemitismen i Sovjet* (Anti-semitism in the Soviet Union) which branded Stalin’s anti-semitism, his opposition to those he considered communist fellow-travellers came to the surface (Olberg 1953a). In the Social Democratic newspaper *Morgon-Tidningen*, Nils Lindh (1953) criticised the book for being too propagandistic and based on partly dubious source material. In a furious rejoinder, Olberg (1953b) accused Lindh of using communist polemical methods to confuse public opinion and, with the review of his book, to have performed “a service for Moscow-inspired anti-semitism”. Lindh, who was a contemporary of Olberg’s, had worked during the inter-war years as press attaché at the Swedish embassy in Moscow and was a member of *Sällskapet Sverige-Ryssland* (Swedish–Russian Society). During the 1920s he wrote about the revolution and Soviet developments in *Social-Demokraten* under the pseudonym Strannikov and was regarded as the Social Democratic expert on the Soviet Union (Björilin 2003: 55). Olberg was to complain to Hugo Valentin, the leading Swedish scholar on Jewish history, about the fact that “the Social Democratic Party’s main organ had been used to defend Stalin’s anti-semitic policy”.³⁸

During his final years, Olberg had acquired a clear profile as the friend of Jewish refugees and a bitter critic of anti-semitism in the Soviet Union – even if his personal friend and principal of Brunnsvik Folk High School

³⁸ Letter to Valentin from Olberg of 5 May [in error, should be June] 1953, ARAB, POA, vol. 22.

(Dalarna), Alf Ahlberg, feared that in this respect his was a “voice crying in the desert”.³⁹ In actual fact, as we have seen, the issue of anti-semitism had not previously dominated Olberg’s political involvement; at least where his public profile was concerned. He had in his writings about, for example, Poland and the Baltic States almost downplayed the domestic anti-semitism there or referred to Russian “foreign rule” (Olberg 1944: 57). His irritated reply to the Bund’s European office, which after the war sought information on how the Swedish Bundists were responding to anti-semitism in Sweden, was as follows: “I do not think we should look for anti-semitism where it does not exist.”⁴⁰

Without questioning Olberg’s sincere engagement on behalf of the Soviet Union’s Jews, it is a short step to connect it with the more strategic struggle against Communism. Ever since the Russian Revolution, Soviet power in a broad anti-Bolshevik opinion had been associated with the Jews. And for many Jews, the Red Army and Soviet power had represented a lesser evil, both during the Civil War 1918 to 1920 and in relation to Nazism and the Holocaust. However, with the Slansky show trial in Czechoslovakia, the trial of the Jewish doctors (Doctors’ Plot) in Moscow, and the repression of Jewish culture, Soviet Communism also played the anti-semitic card, as Olberg saw it, as a way of attracting popular support in the East.

He was not alone. The Jewish Labor Committee in the USA, the international Bund, and other Jewish organisations openly attacked the same development. Hereby the issue of anti-semitism in the Soviet bloc came to be one of the Cold War’s interfaces. At the same time as it constituted a way for Jewish organisations to win support from niggardly authorities in Europe and the USA, it could also serve as a tool for the West in the Cold War for winning support amongst the Jewish population.

That Israel’s position in world politics during this period shifted from having a degree of support, at least for a time, from the Eastern bloc to getting closer to the West was also significant for both the Bund and for Olberg. In 1955 the International Bund finally adopted the position that Israel “constituted a positive factor in the Jewish world community” (Slucki 2012: 173). Behind this change lay not least the American Jewish Labor Committee which spoke out for Israel at an early stage. Rather than the leading Bundists prompting the American mass organisation to follow the Bund’s course, the pressure from the American workers finally came to

³⁹ Letter from Ahlberg to Olberg, Brunnsvik 26 Sept. 1958, ARAB, POA, vol. 20.

⁴⁰ Letter from Olberg to R. Ryba, 7 Apr. 1949, YIVO, BA, ME 18, vol. 206.

change the Bund's attitude. Even though the Bund in this way came to accept Israel, its negative view of Zionism was not changed.

After three quarters of a century of endeavour, under tumultuous political circumstances, the once so revolutionary socialism of Olberg, the Jewish Labour Bund, and the last Mensheviks had now morphed into a strong loyalty to the capitalist West side in the Cold War against communism. For Paul Olberg, in particular, the social democratic welfare project he experienced in Sweden constituted the real and possible socialism. For his old Menshevik comrades in the USA, Abramovitch, Nikolaevsky, Held, Schwartz, and others, the struggle for socialism had been transformed into the struggle against totalitarian communism where they were welcomed as uncompromising ideologists. Several of the last, elderly Menshevik leaders finally achieved successful, individual careers as writers and lecturers amongst other hawks of the Cold War. Abramovitch even went so far as to regret the American reticence to using the atomic bomb (Liebich 1997: 300).

Epilogue

“Do you remember?” Indeed yes. In the flow of letters to Olberg's widow from the worlds of Menshevism and Bundism there were still those who could answer Angelica Balabanoff's question affirmatively, those who could associate Olberg with Balabanoff's words about “a good and faithful socialist” who remained attached to the “cause of socialism”.⁴¹ When Essinge Social Democratic association held its members' meeting in May 1960, the new times however had begun to wipe away the traces of what had been. The cheers for socialism at the close of the local association meetings had fallen silent already at the beginning of the 1950s; roughly at the time when meeting participants started to complain of lack of interest amongst young people and show films from the US embassy.

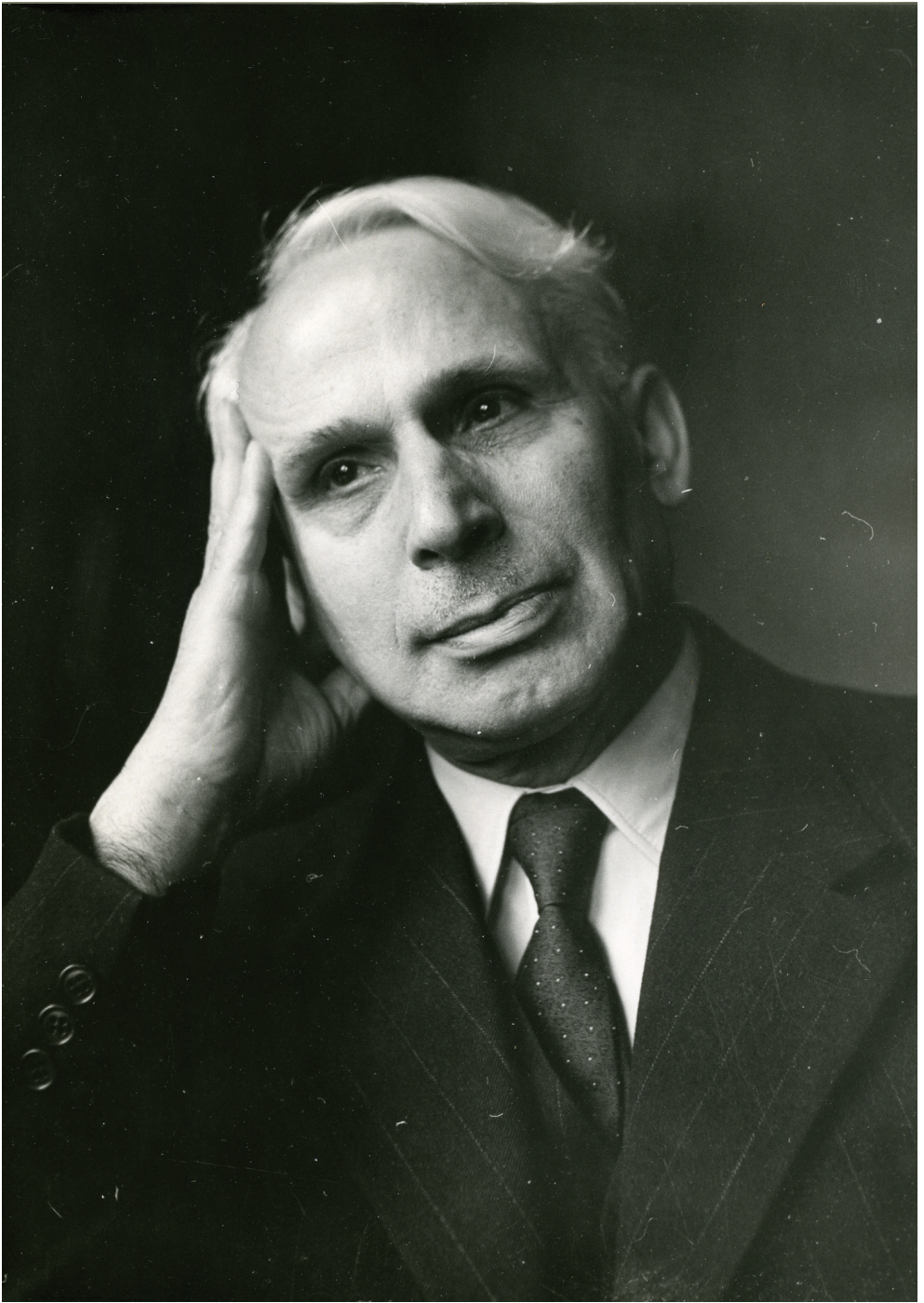
So when the meeting – which the local party association chairman opened by reporting on Olberg's decease – drew to a close, it was not with any memorial sketch of the political cosmos which, with the figure of the aged Jewish Socialist, had now faded away. It was with the American cartoon film “Woody Woodpecker Heralds Spring”.⁴²

⁴¹ “Vid gravsättningen av Paul Olbergs aska den 29 maj 1960”, manuscript by T. Nerman, ARAB, POA, vol. 25.

⁴² Essinge Social Democratic Association, meeting minutes 18 May 1960, ARAB, ESFA.



The young Olberg (Labour Movement Archives and Library, Stockholm /
photo: 22111878-05051960)



Olberg in his mature years (Labour Movement Archives and Library, Stockholm)



(Above) "Welcome – Long live socialism". Paul Olberg with bundists in Sweden, 1946 (Labour Movement Archives and Library, Stockholm / Photographer: Bäckstrand)

(Left) 'Bund' at the First of May demonstration in Stockholm, 1946 (Labour Movement Archives and Library, Stockholm)

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