

## THE AMERICAN YIDDISH PRESS AND THE EUROPEAN CONFLICT IN 1914\*

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AT SARAJEVO, on June 28, 1914, a Serbian assassin struck down Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne. A Yiddish daily in New York at once declared that the Archduke was "a man of humane feelings," who "belonged to a dynasty with which we have always had certain sympathies."<sup>1</sup> This attitude was prompted by the fact that Austro-Hungarian Jewry had attained civil emancipation under the Dual Monarchy. Thus, there was a sharp contrast between the civil status of Jews in Austria-Hungary and Russia. Under the Tsarist regime, Jews were surrounded by a wall of legal disabilities, which barred the enjoyment of elemental political rights and restricted economic and educational pursuits. In addition, Russian Jewry lived under the constant threat of pogroms.

In the first days following the assassination, and before Russia's role in the imbroglio became apparent, the editors of the Yiddish press were able to maintain a certain objectivity toward the crisis. Despite a coolness toward Slavic peoples, they were inclined to analyze the assassination in the light of

\* The following abbreviations are used in the notes:

AH — *American Hebrew* (New York); AI — *American Israelite* (Cincinnati); AS — *American Socialist* (New York); BYS — *Bostoner Yidische Shtime* (Boston); CC — *Teglicher Yidisher Courier* (Chicago); CYS — *California Yidische Shtime* (San Francisco); FAS — *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (New York); *Forward* — *Der Forverts* (New York); FZ — *Di Fraye Zukunft* (New York); Gh — *Glaychhayt* (New York); ISR — *International Socialist Review* (Chicago); JC — *Jewish Comment* (Baltimore); LGW — *Ladies Garment Worker* (English Section) (New York); LL — *Literatur un Lebn* (New York); Macc — *The Maccabean* (New York); ME — *Mother Earth* (New York); MJ — *Menorah Journal* (New York); MZ — *Morgen Zhurnal* (New York); NT — *Di Naye Tsayt* (New York); Tog — *Der Tog* (New York); Vh — *Varhayt* (New York); YAV — *Yidische Arbeter Velt* (Chicago); YF — *Dos Yidische Folk* (New York); YS — *Der Yidisher Sotsialist* (New York); YT — *Yidishes Tageblatt* (New York); *Zukunft* — *Di Zukunft* (New York).

Outstanding among these periodicals at the outbreak of World War I were MZ, CC, Tog, Forward, YAV, and Macc.

MZ, launched in 1901, was an Orthodox newspaper, edited by Peter Wiernik. Its viewpoint in politics was conservative. In 1914, it had a circulation of approximately 100,000, ranking second to the Socialist *Forward*, which claimed almost twice this number in 1917. The Chicago *Courier*, also an Orthodox paper, was established in 1887, antedated only by YT, which began publication two years earlier. The *Courier* went out of existence in 1944; YT was absorbed by MZ in 1928. The *Tog*, a liberal, pro-Zionist daily, first appeared in November 1914. It recently absorbed MZ. YAV, the organ of the Chicago Jewish labor movement, was established as a weekly in 1908, attaining a circulation of over 10,000 by 1914. In 1917, it became a daily. In 1918, it became the Chicago edition of the *Forward*. YF, the publication of the Federation of American Zionists, appeared as a weekly in 1909, under the editorship of Abraham Goldberg. In 1917, its reported circulation was 24,000.

<sup>1</sup> MZ, June 30, 1914, p. 4.

Austrian encroachments upon Serbia in her *Drang nach Osten*.<sup>2</sup> The radical Yiddish press particularly underscored this view. The Socialist *Forward*, representative organ of the Jewish labor movement, regarded the killing as a by-product of the struggle for economic control of the Balkans. It maintained that Ferdinand, "the greatest propagandist of hate-patriotism," was killed "by the same forces which he, more than others, had helped to create."<sup>3</sup> The *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*, publication of the Anarchist Federation, even condoned the assassination. The victim, it declared, "would have begun a period of terrible reaction in Austria, which perhaps would have ended only in a fearful people's war."<sup>4</sup> If the hated Colossus that lay to the east of Sarajevo was stirring in the early days of July, the Yiddish press was hardly aware of it. For them, as for all Americans, world war was only a fantasy.

News of Austria's fateful ultimatum to Serbia and the prospect of armed conflict struck a totally complacent American public. "Old Europe is again bluffing with a world war," jibed the *Chicago Courier*.<sup>5</sup> When Austrian troops crossed the Serbian frontier on July 28, the Yiddish press stumbled into the camp of the Central Powers, shouting that it was all a Panslavic plot to spread "destruction and reaction."<sup>6</sup> When the Tsar ordered full mobilization, an ultimatum from the Kaiser demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from the frontier. Failure to comply brought a German declaration of war. French mobilization initiated a German attack on August 3, whereupon Britain came to the support of her Entente partners.

### *Sympathy for the Central Powers*

Ignorant of the causes, the American people were shocked by the outbreak of hostilities. Yet, despite President Wilson's plea for neutrality, they were quick to take sides.<sup>7</sup> Strong ethnic and cultural ties with England and France predisposed most Americans to sympathize with the Entente. They regarded the conflict as a struggle between the democratic west and the autocratic German state-order.<sup>8</sup> While East European Jewish immigrants

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Vh*, June 29, 1914, p. 4; *YT*, July 1, 1914; *Forward*, July 2, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *FAS*, July 4, 1914, p. 1. Cf. *ME*, Aug. 1914, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> *CC*, July 26, 1914, p. 4. "They will not dare to incur such a disaster," declared the Portland (Maine) *Express-Advertiser* (July 31, 1914). Quoted in Costrell, E., *How Maine Viewed the War, 1914-1917*, University of Maine Studies, Second Series, no. 49 (Orono, Maine 1940), p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> *YT*, July 27, 1914, p. 4. Cf. *CC*, July 28, 1914, p. 4; *MZ*, July 28, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> "America, the famed 'international boarding house,' was 'a menagerie of nationalities'; and millions of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, British-Americans and others could not be indifferent to the fate of the 'old Country.' Many if not most Americans sympathized with one side or the others, and hoped it would win." Bailey, T. A., *Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace* (New York), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Chambers, F. P., *The War Behind the War, 1914-1918* (London 1939), p. 188.

in the United States had similar impressions of Germany (gathered en route to the west), they also looked upon Germany as the great seat of culture in Europe. Immigrant Jews prayed that the "more civilized" Germans would free their oppressed brethren in Eastern Europe from Russian persecution.

While Von Moltke's battalions were pouring through Liege upon the Flemish plain, New York's Yiddish newspaper editors were more concerned with the entry of the Tsar's army into Galicia: "There are few of us who have not some relative in the affected countries. It is therefore natural that our commiseration for them should be more intense than that of people who are not familiar with the sights and scenes of the devastated regions and cannot picture the heart-breaking agony of millions of suffering souls."<sup>9</sup>

"What I fear," a 'Galitzianer' was quoted, "is that the Russian thief wants to grab Galicia, and then we shall become Russians. They will make pogroms against us and our Emperor shall not be able to help us."<sup>10</sup> A *Varhayt* reporter, making the rounds along East Broadway in New York City, heard curses against Nicholas on every side.<sup>11</sup> Galician synagogues offered up prayers for Franz Josef. Young Jewish hotheads, seeking to enlist, gathered about the Austrian consulate on State Street. The German consul in New York requested the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to accommodate German reservists prior to their embarkation. The HIAS took in a number, pointing out that its facilities were not reserved exclusively for Jews.<sup>12</sup> From Cincinnati came rumors about the formation of a German Jewish volunteer unit to help defend the 'Heimatland.'<sup>13</sup>

The *Varhayt* received the following letter:

We, a group of Jewish youths, born in Austria, have decided to enlist in the Austrian army to defend our Fatherland. We are ready to carry out our plan, but . . . we want to know precisely whether it is logical and correct that Jews should willingly fight for a land which is no longer actually theirs?<sup>14</sup>

The *Forward's* advice to an anguished mother also applied to these brave young men who pondered the meaning of loyalty: "Let them give thanks that they are in America and are not forced to kill or die needlessly themselves."<sup>15</sup>

Jews, Irishmen and Germans, as well as a large proportion of Polish and Scandinavian immigrants, viewed the struggle primarily as a contest between Russian barbarism and German civilization.<sup>16</sup> Even the intensely partisan

<sup>9</sup> *LGW*, Nov. 1914, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Forward*, July 31, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Vh*, July 29, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *YT*, August 10, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Cincinnati Freie Presse*, Aug. 5, 1914; quoted in Child, C. J., *The German-American in Politics: 1914-1917* (Madison 1939), p. 23, n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Vh*, Aug. 1, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Forward*, Aug. 14, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wittke, C., *German-Americans and the World War*, Ohio Historical Collections, V (Columbus 1936), p. 7. Most of the Swedish-American press, because of the historic antagonism between

English-language press could say little in favor of Russia, though she was an Entente partner.<sup>17</sup> In the eyes of the pro-German elements, marauders from the steppes were once again storming through the Carpathians, threatening the bastions of civilization. "A victory for the Slavs," the *Tageblatt* warned, "will be a blow to science, to popular government, to liberal ideas and free thought. A Slavic victory means the destruction of the advances made in Europe in the last four hundred years, and it means the end of progress for a long, long time."<sup>18</sup>

The reactions of many Jews in Russia were in marked contrast to the views of their brethren in America. No longer subject to Russian rule, Jewish emigrés denounced Tsarist oppression; on the other hand, Russian Jewry was prone to support the regime under which it lived. Israel Zangwill describes a procession of five thousand Jews from the Great Synagogue to the Tsar's Palace in St. Petersburg; *kneeling* before it, the faithful intoned Hebrew hymns and the Russian national anthem.<sup>19</sup> Russo-Jewish immigrants were no less passionate in their love for homeland. Nonetheless, they desired that nation's defeat in the war — a reaction to pogroms, civil disabilities, and other types of persecution. The Yiddish press hammered away at this legacy: "The Jews support Germany because Russia bathes in Jewish blood . . . who will dare say that it is a crime for Jews to hate their torturers, their oppressors and murderers? . . . It is natural that Jewish sympathies should be on the side of learning and not on the side of ignorance."<sup>20</sup>

Since pro-Ally English-language newspapers provided few clues to the extent of sympathies for the Central Powers among Irishmen, Poles, Balts,

Sweden and Russia, was markedly pro-German in 1914–17. Cf. Stephenson, G. M., "The Attitude of Swedish-Americans Toward the World War," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, X, pt. 1 (1918–19), p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> C. C. Cummins' study of Indiana press reactions, *Indiana Public Opinion and the World War, 1914–17*, Indiana Historical Collections, XXVIII (Indianapolis 1945), p. 7, reveals that with very minor exceptions, there was "no sentiment . . . in favor of Russia and its autocratic government."

<sup>18</sup> *YT*, Aug. 3, 1914, p. 4. Cf. also *Forward*, July 31, 1914, p. 4; *JC*, Aug. 31 and Sept. 4, 1914, p. 270; *CYS*, Oct. 23, 1914, p. 2; *AI*, Nov. 19, 1914, p. 4. "German newspapers in Germany in their editorials and speakers at German meetings made continual reference to Russia as a medieval barbarism and as 'that Muscovite despotism.' Russians were not only Cossacks, they were Tartars. The perfidy of the Tsars was emphasized. There were also praises for Germany's mission — kultur, civilization, independence, and liberty — all the catchwords of a good cause." Dahlin, E., *French and German Public Opinion on Declared War Aims: 1914–1918* (Palo Alto 1933), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> *AH*, July 30, 1915, p. 304. A Russian-Jewish organ declared: "We were born and brought up in Russia. Our ancestors are buried here. We Russian Jews are bound to Russia by ties which cannot be broken, and our brothers who have been driven beyond the ocean by cruel fate cherish their memories of Russia all through life . . . At this historical moment, when our country is threatened by foreign invasion, when brute force has taken up arms against the great ideals of humanity, the Jews of Russia will bravely go forth to battle and fulfil their sacred duty . . ." *Novy Voskhod*, Sept. 24, Oct. 7, 1914, quoted in American Jewish Committee, *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone* (New York 1916), pp. 37–38.

<sup>20</sup> *YT*, Aug. 12, 1914, p. 4. Cf. also *Forward*, Sept. 23, 1914, p. 4; *CC*, Oct. 22, 1915, p. 4; *Zukunft*, Sept. 1914, p. 876.

Germans and Scandinavians, there was a feeling of uneasiness among Jews that support of Germany was not quite "American." Thus, one detects a note of apology in the defense of the bombing of Antwerp and the rape of Belgium. "We personally believe," the *Morgen Zhurnal* stated, "that Kaiser Wilhelm's army had a right to go through Belgium when Berlin became convinced that the Belgians were in open sympathy with the French."<sup>21</sup>

An even more ironic position was adopted by "Americanized" German Jews, who, despite their flight from immigrant marginality, had not overcome German nationalistic sensibilities. The banker and philanthropist, Jacob H. Schiff, attempted to straddle the issue by attributing all aggressive designs in the war to Russia.<sup>22</sup> The *American Israelite* of Cincinnati, with some discomfiture, preached the maxim, Silence is Golden: "The country at large is in no humor to listen with any degree of patience to accusations or defense of any of the peoples or governments involved in the European war. History will place the stigma of infamy where it belongs and those who are wise will leave it to the arbiter to decide."<sup>23</sup>

Because of its sympathy with the Teutonic camp, the Yiddish press discovered that it had to condemn Russia's allies, though it had no basic antagonism toward them. This was the consequence of a fundamentally negative position — anti-Tsarism went hand in hand with a mild case of Anglophobia. Thus the theme of English "hypocrisy" was emphasized. Editors wondered how a crusade for "freedom" could be waged with Tsarist support.<sup>24</sup>

While the struggle in the East was viewed as a "Kulturkampf," the war in the West was interpreted as an imperialist struggle between English business interests and German competitors.<sup>25</sup> The Yiddish press could not

<sup>21</sup> *MZ*, Oct. 2, 1914, p. 4; *YT*, Aug. 28, 1914; *Forward*, Sept. 3, 1914; *CC*, Aug. 19, 1914, p. 4; *LL*, Dec. 1914, p. 100.

<sup>22</sup> Adler, Cyrus, *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters*, II (New York 1929), p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> *AI*, Sept. 10, 1914. On May 12, 1915, following the *Lusitania* sinking, Schiff advised Bernhard Dernberg, head of the German Information Bureau in New York, to "keep quiet. Do not express any opinions." Adler, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-90.

<sup>24</sup> "It is regrettable that England has placed herself on Russia's side, and we believe that this was unnecessary. We do not want to see England go down, and we are certain that she shall not go down. But she had no business allying herself with an Asiatic barbarian, and if she shall pay dearly for this, it will only be a sign of the existence of historic justice. But we hope that she will in time wriggle out of her criminal error and that it will not cost her too dearly . . ." *MZ*, Sept. 9, 1914. Cf. also: *AH*, Sept. 11, 1914, p. 508; *YT*, Sept. 7, 1914, p. 4; *Bulletin of the YMHA* (New York), Sept. 1914, p. 10; *CYS*, Oct. 2, 1914, p. 2. That the Russian alliance was a source of embarrassment to the British themselves was made clear in the comment of the Liberal organ, *Daily News* (July 29, 1914), ". . . the most effective work for peace that we can do is to make it clear that not a British life shall be sacrificed for the sake of Russian hegemony of the Slav world." Quoted in Lasswell, H. D., *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York 1927), p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Forward*, Aug. 13, 1914, p. 4; *CC*, Aug. 6, 1914, p. 4; Boudin, Louis B., *Socialism and War* (New York 1915), p. 151. The Swedish publication, *Minnesota Stats Tidning*, Aug. 26, 1914, agreed that "England's motives, now as in the past, are wholly selfish." Cf. Stephenson, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

reconcile Britain's concern for a "scrap of paper," guaranteeing Belgian neutrality, with her failure to enforce the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, which pledged that the Jews in Rumania would be given equal treatment.<sup>26</sup> Hence, Zangwill's pleas from London, urging American Jews to support the Allies in a war which might "yet civilize Russia and Germany," fell on deaf ears.<sup>27</sup> In 1915-17, immigrant Jews opposed loans and shipments to Britain, criticized her naval policy, and supported the German position in the submarine controversy.

The English-language press in the United States absolved France of any war-guilt and hailed her defense of Western civilization against the onslaught of German barbarism.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the German-American press saw France as "decadent and immoral," and accused her of plotting the seizure of Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>29</sup> The Jewish view was that France had erred in her associations: "The French Republic deserves to be punished for her unclean love for Russia, and if she takes this attachment so seriously as to go to war for her barbaric lover, she will in the end get what she deserves."<sup>30</sup> France was "greedy" and obsessed by the spirit of *revanche*. Indeed, the Yiddish press wondered why France had forgotten the Paris Commune of 1871 and remembered only the ignominy of the fall of Louis Napoleon.<sup>31</sup>

Aware of the sentiments of American Jews, the Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst of the German Foreign Office undertook to keep them at fever pitch. Dr. Isaac Straus, affiliated with the German-Jewish Komité für den Osten, was sent to the United States in September 1914 to direct propaganda work among Jews for the German Information Bureau in New York. Dr. Straus was assisted by S. M. Melamed, post-war editor of the *Chicago Courier*, who was in charge of Yiddish translation work.<sup>32</sup> Louis N. Hammerling, director of the American Association of Foreign Language Newspapers, an advertising agency, was an active intermediary between the Jewish press and the German Information Bureau. Beginning with the issue of August 27, 1915, *The American Leader*, published by the Association, was sent to 624 rabbis throughout the country.

<sup>26</sup> *CC*, Sept. 7, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> *AI*, Sept. 24, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. White, E. B., *American Opinion of France from Lafayette to Poincare* (New York 1927), pp. 270-71; Grattan, C. H., *Why We Fought* (New York 1929), p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> Wittke, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *MZ*, Aug. 3, 1914, p. 4; *YT*, July 17, 1914, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *FAS*, Sept. 26, 1914, p. 8; *CC*, Aug. 19, 1914, p. 4; *YT*, Aug. 25, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Senate Sub-committee of the Committee on Judiciary, *Hearing on Brewing and Liquor Interests, and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess. (1919), I, p. xvii; II, pp. 1389, 1448-49; *AH*, Feb. 2, 1917, p. 410. In 1916, Straus and Melamed established the weekly *American Jewish Chronicle*. Straus was interned in March 1918 on the basis of evidence by the Department of Justice that he had received \$85,000 from Dr. Heinrich Albert, Germany Privy Councilor in the United States in 1915, in addition to \$30,000 from an unnamed source. Cf. *ibid.*, Apr. 12, 1918, pp. 684, 694. Cf. also, Falcke, H. P., *Vor den Eintritt Amerikas in den Weltkrieg; Deutsche Propaganda in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, 1914-1915* (Dresden 1928), pp. 95-98.

The German Information Bureau was eminently satisfied with its relations with the Jewish press, as the minutes of the meeting of November 5, 1914 attest: "So far as our relations to the very influential Jewish press are concerned, they are in good shape, and will be carefully nourished. It is important in this connection that all news pertaining to them shall elevate the Jewish self-respect — for instance, the appointment of Jewish officers, the installation and honors conferred upon Jewish professors, should all be sent here."<sup>33</sup>

### *Attitudes of the "Intelligentsia"*

The heightened nationalism which characterized the first days of the conflict shattered socialist ideological commitments to the resolute maintenance of peace. Though split over the issue of a general strike in the event of conflict, the congresses of the Second International at Stuttgart (1907) and Copenhagen (1910) pledged socialists to a continuing "war against militarism."<sup>34</sup> Austro-Serbian hostilities led to an emergency meeting of the International Socialist Bureau at Brussels on July 29, 1914, which in turn issued a call for a general congress to be held in Paris eleven days later.<sup>35</sup>

On August 2, however, the French Socialist Party, in a tumult over the assassination of its leader, Jean Jaures, in fear of the threat of German invasion, called upon workers to defend the Motherland. The following day, the German Social Democratic Party, historically committed to opposition to Tsarism, and fearing — as did all Germans — inroads by the Cossacks, decided to vote for war credits. At once, there emerged a small group of irreconcilables, led by Karl Liebknecht, who stood resolute in the face of popular passions and the Emperor's wrath.<sup>36</sup>

In the United States, radicals at once embarked upon a peace crusade. On August 12, the Socialist Party issued a proclamation in support of "the declarations of the international socialist movement," and called for opposition "to this and all other wars, waged upon any pretext whatsoever." In keeping with a petition drawn up by women pacifist groups in Europe, the Party called on President Wilson to start peace negotiations immediately.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Senate Sub-Committee . . . , *Hearing . . .* (as in note 32), II, p. 1391.

The Jewish press reprinted pro-German statements made in Europe by Max Nordau, Werner Sombart, Ludwig Geiger, Nathan Birnbaum, and Hermann Cohen.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Walling, W. E., *The Socialists and the War* (New York 1915), pp. 38, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Fainsod, M., *International Socialism and the World War* (Cambridge, Mass. 1935), pp. 22-23; Lorwin, L. L., *Labor and the International* (New York 1929), p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> The British Labour Party and Trade Union Congress announced their support of the government over the opposition of Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party. Leading Austrian and Hungarian Socialists quickly announced their support of the war, while Friedrich Adler led another group of irreconcilables. In Russia, the fourteen socialist deputies in the Duma stalked out as Alexander Kerensky, speaking for the ten-man Labor group, urged support of the regime.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Walling, W. E., *op. cit.*, pp. 212-13. Cf. also, Degen, M. L., *The History of the Women's*

A month later, the Socialists issued an invitation to radical parties in ten European countries to a proposed conference for peace to be held in Washington.<sup>38</sup>

Jewish unions in New York and Chicago met on August 8 to protest against "capitalist blood-letting."<sup>39</sup> Five days later, the United Hebrew Trades of New York, a central union council, addressed a peace memorial to President Wilson.<sup>40</sup> On August 29, women socialists marched down Fifth Avenue to Union Square, where they heard Yiddish anti-war speeches. The Jewish Socialist Federation, a Yiddish-speaking affiliate of the Socialist Party, helped arrange a "Red Week" for peace agitation following Labor Day.<sup>41</sup> A labor conference, organized by the central committee of the New York County section of the Socialist Party, was held on September 10 to seek measures "to keep our country from being dragged into war."<sup>42</sup>

The radical Yiddish press scored the capitalist system in its war indictment, viewing the conflict as a phase in the struggle for control over world markets. This struggle, Socialists believed, led to a preparedness race, which instilled a "murder patriotism" and the "voice of blood" into the masses. The consequent delusion of the proletariat was responsible for the collapse of Socialist internationalism.<sup>43</sup>

### *Retreat from Non-Partisanship*

Although Socialists claimed that they were internationalists and that war responsibility was collective, Jewish radicals nevertheless took sides with the belligerents. Like the majority of European socialists, they were not immune to partisan sentiments reflecting ethnic and nationalistic attachments. The hatred of Tsarism — a passion as Jewish as it was nihilist — created sympathy for the pro-war position of the German Social Democratic majority. This partisan tendency, manifest after the first days of disillusion

*Peace Party*, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series LVII, no. 3 (Baltimore 1939), p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> *AS*, Sept. 19, 1914, p. 1. The meeting was not held.

<sup>39</sup> *Forward*, Aug. 9, 1914, p. 1; *YAV*, Aug. 7, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *American Jewish Year Book*, XVII (1915), p. 206.

<sup>41</sup> New York County Socialist Party, "Correspondence," in Rand School (New York) File: Series O-Z (1914) (manuscript).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *FAS*, Aug. 15, 1914, p. 4; Nov. 28, 1914, p. 4; *Gh*, Sept. 25, 1914, p. 3; *NT*, Sept. Oct., 1914, p. 3; *Forward*, Nov. 15, 1914, p. 4; *IGW*, Nov. 1914, p. 5. This theme was echoed by Boudin, member of the national committees of both the Socialist Party and the Jewish Socialist Federation. He theorized that "the disposal of the surplus-product of the modern industrial nations has ceased to be a matter of trade carried on by the individual, and has become a matter of armed forces, actual or potential, used by large groups, called nations." Boudin, *op. cit.*, p. 80. A similar interpretation appears in pamphlets by Charles E. Russell (*Facts About the War*, 1914) and Allan Benson (*Socialism, the Lone Foe of War*, 1914).



and disgust, was a product also of an ideological attachment to the German socialist heritage, which was the wellspring of East European radicalism. Furthermore, if a mass circulation newspaper like the *Forward* had opposed the maincurrents of Jewish opinion, it would have courted financial disaster.

The retreat from non-partisanship was not without breast-beating and soul-searching, however. Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, then a pioneer figure in the American Poale Zion (Labor Zionist) movement, expressed the radical's dilemma:

We believe too strongly in the immediacy of the social revolution, which supposedly could have destroyed the Old World with but one blow . . . we did not for a moment imagine that socialists, so deeply imbued with the ideal of world peace, would after all this time contemplate, as does the older world, the best means of destroying human lives en masse.<sup>44</sup>

The gospel of the "defensive war," inherent in Lassalleian nationalism and proclaimed in 1880 by August Bebel, a founder of the German Social Democratic Party, became the platform for pro-German Jewish radicals.<sup>45</sup> But doctrine alone was insufficient to rationalize the break with the highest principles of internationalism. Whatever his cosmopolitan illusions, the café radical, like the synagogue Jew, saw the *shtetl* aflame; indeed, the defeat of Tsarism in the war held every prospect for Jewish emancipation. Why not, therefore, support the pro-war German Socialists? "It is foolish to accuse German Social Democracy of hypocrisy and falsehood," wrote Dr. Louis Levine, the labor historian.<sup>46</sup> Echoing radical sentiment, the *Chicago Courier* declared: "The Jew who came from Russia, and who knows how black it is there, who has seen the cruelties and terrible deeds of her soldiers and Cossacks, can sympathize with German socialists."<sup>47</sup>

### *The Case of Abraham Cahan*

The pro-Germanism of the majority of Jewish radicals in 1914–15 is mirrored in the writings of Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Forward*. Echoing the German Social Democratic defense of its pro-war stand, he stressed Russian war responsibility, attacked the "corrupt" Entente alliance, and pointed to the possibility of revolution in a defeated Russia.<sup>48</sup> "All civilized people sympathize with Germany," he declared; "every victorious battle

<sup>44</sup> Zhitlowsky, C., *Gesammelte Shriftn*, VIII (New York 1919), pp. 68–69. Also: *FAS*, Aug. 8, 1914, p. 4; *Forward*, Aug. 15, 1914, p. 4; *ME*, Aug. 1914, p. 182; *NT*, Sept. Oct. 1914, p. 4; *CYS*, Sept. 4, 1914. *LGW*, Sept. 1914, asked: "Why are the masses of workers in all lands such fools? Why do they become hysterically patriotic when a crowned ruler utters a word? Why do they not organize for the purpose of tearing governments out of capitalist hands?"

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Forward*, Sept. 6, 1914, p. 4; Oct. 22, 1914, p. 4; *YAV*, Sept. 11, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *FAS*, Sept. 26, 1914, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> *CC*, Sept. 16, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Forward*, Aug. 20, 1914, p. 4; Oct. 25, 1914, p. 4; Oct. 27, 1914, p. 4, Dec. 9, 1914, p. 5.

against Russia is a source of joy.”<sup>49</sup> Germany’s defeat, Cahan theorized, would lead to the final collapse of the Socialist International through the destruction of its German trade union base.<sup>50</sup> The same position was taken by Friedrich Ebert, who declared in the Reichstag in April, 1916: “In defending our country we protect the vital interests of the German workers.”<sup>51</sup>

Despite Cahan’s condemnation of Jewish “sentimentality” as a bourgeois impulse — he actually disparaged Yiddish, regarding it merely as a propaganda and information vehicle — his pro-Germanism had an ethnocentric flavor, characterized by a distinct *Jewish* hatred of Tsarism. His arguments, expressed in radical phraseology, were fundamentally the same as those advanced by the editors of non-socialist Yiddish newspapers. Like Gedaliah Bublick and Peter Wiernik (of the *Tageblat* and *Morgen Zhurnal*, respectively), Cahan was uneasy over the role of the western nations in the Entente: “If this were only a war between Germany and Russia, certainly no socialist in the world would desire German defeat. Unfortunately, England, Belgium, and France are fighting against Germany.”<sup>52</sup> Cahan hoped for a military stalemate in the West following Russia’s anticipated collapse. He supposed that a negotiated peace would restore unity in national Socialist parties, and thereby lead to the revival of the Second International.

Along with other Jewish editors, Cahan regarded the struggle in the East as a “Kulturkampf.” While Russia was spilling Jewish blood, he declared, Germany had “since 1871 made the greatest progress of all nations in science, in culture and in the socialist labor movement.”<sup>53</sup> Polish, Lithuanian and Galician Jews, accordingly, had little reason to fear the Germans. His visit to the Eastern Front in the spring of 1915, under the auspices of the Kriegspresseamt, confirmed this impression. Even before a segment of German Social Democracy openly approved of “rectifications” of the Reich’s borders, Cahan declared:

I . . . am convinced that in the interests of general progress and for Jews specifically that a Russian defeat would be fortunate; I am convinced that it would be fortunate for all of Europe and for the whole Jewish population if Germany would take all of Poland and also Lithuania from Russia.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 7, 1914, p. 4. In the same spirit, the Social Democratic *Rheinische Zeitung* declared at the beginning of hostilities: “We fight against Tsarism. With its bear’s claws it will stamp out the culture of the whole of Eastern Europe and inveigle its barbarian population against our women and children.” Cf. Berlau, A. J., *The German Social Democratic Party 1914-1921* (New York 1949), p. 83 n.

<sup>50</sup> *Forward*, Dec. 10, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Berlau, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> *Forward*, Aug. 28, 1914, p. 4; Dec. 11, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1914, p. 4. Cahan’s statement mirrors the German Social Democrats’ declaration in the Reichstag on August 4, 1914: “We need to secure the culture and independence of our country . . . We shall not abandon our Fatherland in its hour of peril.” Cf. Berlau, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> *Forward*, Dec. 10, 1914, p. 5; Oct. 23, 1914, p. 4; Dec. 13, 1914, p. 4.

In contrast to Cahan's position, a group of radical "neutralists" directed their criticism at Germany, but were at the same time reluctant to express forthright pro-Ally views because of Russia's role in the war. Others, more doctrinaire in outlook, regarded partisanship in the war as entirely incompatible with socialist integrity. This faction was attracted to the revolutionary socialist Zimmerwald movement in Europe.

### Other Socialist Opinions

Louis B. Boudin, while dividing the responsibility for the war, branded Germany as the immediate aggressor and accused her of "leading the rest of the so-called civilized world in the development of this modern imperialistic — that is, warlike — philosophy or creed, and leading far in advance of its competitors."<sup>55</sup> Condemning all belligerents, he refused to reconcile the "defensive war" gospel with the ideals of revolutionary radicalism. Emma Goldman, the anarchist, was vitriolic against the "German exponents of Political Socialism," who have "helped to strengthen the power of despotism and exploitation."<sup>56</sup> Dr. Nachman Syrkin, a member of the central committee of the Poale Zion organization, feared that Nietzschean philosophy would destroy German Social Democracy if the Prussians emerged triumphant in the war.<sup>57</sup> A. S. Sachs, editor of the radical *Yidische Arbeter Velt* of Chicago, believed that the fall of the Hohenzollern throne would be a death-blow for all monarchies.<sup>58</sup> In the same vein, S. Yanovsky, editor of the anarchist *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*, reasoned that the post-war resurgence of social revolutionism would overpower all the weakened belligerent governments.<sup>59</sup>

Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky refused to become a partisan in the conflict. Socialists, he felt, must work for the revolutionary overthrow of all capitalist regimes.<sup>60</sup> To the anarchist Alexander Berkman, it was not credible that Peter Kropotkin, the ideological leader of the anarchist movement, had come out in support of the Allies: ". . . he take sides in the European slaughter and give aid and encouragement to this or that government? Impossible! We could not believe it . . ."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Boudin, L. B., *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> *ME*, Aug. 1914, p. 178.

<sup>57</sup> *FAS*, Aug. 29, 1914, p. 4. Karl Fornberg, editor of the radical monthly *LL* made the following significant observation, Oct. 1914, pp. 47-48: ". . . German victory shall not mean the triumph of German culture, of German philosophical thought, of the German labor movement and socialism . . . it shall be a triumph of German reaction and the monarchy, of the Hohenzollerns and junkers; it shall retard democratic development in Germany for decades and wipe out Belgium and Luxembourg . . . it means the coming of a new, great, inevitable World War, wherein Russia shall play an even more prominent role as 'defender of civilization.'"

<sup>58</sup> *YAV*, Aug. 21, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> *FAS*, Dec. 26, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Tog*, Nov. 15, 1914, p. 4; Nov. 26, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *ME*, Nov. 1914, p. 281. See also Goldman, Emma, *Living My Life*, II (New York 1931), p. 564; *FZ*, Nov. 1915, p. 7.

Decrying partisanship, Henry L. Slobodin, a founder of the American Socialist Party, lamented "the collapse of the two greatest aims of the Socialist movement — the brotherhood of man, the greatest of social ideals, and the international solidarity of the working class, the most tremendous of economic motives." The socialist movement in Europe, he noted, had embraced "the same low, reactionary motives which inspired the dominant social groups." Now socialist leaders urge that these motives be adopted by the movement as permanent standards and ideals. Yet, he contended, the war must lead to a social catastrophe — a situation ripe for revolution. Proletarians, "now entrenched on the battlefield of Europe," would not shy away from resort to force. But would socialist parties, caught in the quagmire of partisanship, be prepared to lead them?<sup>62</sup>

### *Radicals Espouse Cause of Allies*

In contrast to the dominant alignment, a handful of Jewish radicals openly espoused the cause of the Allies. Significantly, their partisanship was prompted by Jewish interests and welfare. Jacob Milch, former secretary of the United Hebrew Trades of New York, argued that the extension of German scientific antisemitism "would be far more dangerous than the Russian pogroms."<sup>63</sup> Max Barkin of the Jewish Socialist Federation proposed that since their brethren in Russia had cast their lot with the Allies, American Jews should do the same, rather than risk losing the "benevolent" influence exercised by France and England upon the Tsar.<sup>64</sup> That the democracies — the hope of the Jews — might lose the war, deeply disturbed Ber Borochof, the Poale Zionist ideologue and leader. Writing from Europe (he came to the United States in December 1915), he declared: "No one, except a German, can possibly wish that the French Republic and the great English democracy, the helpless people of Belgium and the courageous Serbian nation should be penalized for Nicholas' crimes. If you wish to punish the guilty, why should the innocent suffer . . ."<sup>65</sup> M. Baranov, a dynamic veteran of the Russian Narodnaya Volya movement, reasoned that the defeat of the Entente "would be a catastrophe for Europe." Hitting at the ghetto-complex, he predicted that Allied collapse would be "a catastrophe for the Jews, who are in fact a part of Europe's population."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *ISR*, Apr. 1915, pp. 587-88.

<sup>63</sup> *LL*, Dec. 1914, p. 91.

<sup>64</sup> *FAS*, Dec. 12, 1914, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Vh*, Oct. 1, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Forward*, Nov. 29, 1914, p. 4. Partisan views did not hamper socialist agreement with the program drafted by the party's National Executive Committee in December 1914, and approved by a referendum in September 1915. It called for the abolition of international conflict, attacked war indemnities, favored the plebiscite as a means of determining the distribution of territories, and demanded security for small nations. The program stressed universal disarmament, the abolition

*The Zionist Factor*

American Zionist leaders, while recognizing the wartime leadership of the English Zionist faction, were aware of the overwhelming pro-German sentiments of the membership, and adopted a policy of neutrality. They were sustained by Theodor Herzl's advocacy of non-partisanship on the part of Zionists in neutral states in the event of a general conflict. The Poale Zion organization, at its Rochester convention in December 1914,<sup>67</sup> and the American Zionist Federation, at the Boston convention in June 1915,<sup>68</sup> adopted this position.

Zionist leaders were cognizant of fears that Allied victory would enhance Russia's influence in the Near East.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, a conditional Entente agreement early in 1915 assigned Constantinople to Russia. Zionist spokesmen in Yiddish-speaking circles actually were pro-German until the success of the work of the Weizmann group became apparent — a development which coincided with the March 1917 revolution in Russia.

Pro-Zionist German war propaganda renewed interest in Herzl's plan introduced at the Third Zionist Congress (1899) to acquire a territorial charter from the Turkish government. The German Kaiser was alleged to have expressed sympathetic interest in the proposal. Even the mass eviction of Jews from Palestine in December 1914 failed to destroy confidence in this scheme in Zionist ranks. Shemaryahu Levin, a member of the Provisional Executive Committee, considered the expulsions an unfortunate consequence of the war.<sup>70</sup> The intervention of the German government, which ended active Turkish persecution in March 1915, was hailed in all quarters. German Ambassador von Bernstorff fully exploited this incident for the consumption

of secret diplomacy, democratic control of foreign policies, neutralization of the seas, and the socialization of the means of production. It favored a world federation, with an international court, congress, and police force. *AS*, Dec. 26, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *YS*, Jan. 15, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> "On the particular issues of the war, the Zionist organization, of course, passes no judgments and takes no sides. Its members are citizens of every embattled state; the people about whose special fate it concerns itself are fighting with the utmost courage and loyalty in every army, true to their civil and military obligations to the state which they serve, also unto death, even where those states are false to their own solemn obligation toward the parents, wives and children of soldiers, and even toward the soldiers themselves, who die for their sake on the field of battle. The Zionist organization is neutral and cannot be otherwise." *Macc*, July 1915, p. 29. On the other hand, the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, formed in New York on August 30, 1914, with Louis D. Brandeis as chairman, was pro-Ally in orientation. Taking over much of the work of the Berlin Inner Actions Committee, it cooperated closely with the Zionist Political Committee for the United Kingdom. Even before the end of 1914, Brandeis described Zionist aims to President Wilson and sought to engage the interest of the French and English ambassadors. *Cf.* Mason, A. T., *Brandeis, A Free Man's Life* (New York 1946), p. 451.

<sup>69</sup> *Cf.*, *YT*, Nov. 10, 1914, p. 4; *MZ*, Dec. 24, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Levin, S., *In Milchome Tseitn*, I (New York 1915), pp. 57, 59, 61, 174-75. See also, *Vh* Jan. 26, 1915, p. 4; *CC*, Jan. 28, 1915; *MZ*, Mar. 10, 1915, p. 4.

of the Yiddish press in a letter to Ezekiel Leavitt, editor of the *Bostoner Yidische Shtime*. Dated November 16, 1915, it declared:

As long as the war lasts, it would naturally be premature to say anything about the final shaping of conditions in the Turkish provinces. The benevolent and understanding attitude of the German Government toward the Jewish problem, which as you know is everywhere appreciated by the Jews living in the occupied parts of Russian Poland, Lithuania and Courland, guarantees that, also after the war everything will be done by Germany to improve the condition of the Palestinian Jews.<sup>71</sup>

In the early part of the war, all Zionist leaders frequently expressed friendship toward the Turks. Despite the official neutrality of the Zionist Federation, its Yiddish organ, *Dos Yidische Folk*, declared:

We have felt, and have often expressed the feeling, that in a well-ordered Ottoman Empire, the Jews had the best opportunity to develop their cultural and economic life in Palestine. We have based our policy upon the traditional friendship of Turks and Jews. We have assumed . . . that the kinship of the Jews and the Turks would allay any suspicions on the part of the latter with regard to our pacific endeavors in Palestine, and from the Jewish point of view, this kinship gives assurance of a splendid future for the Jewish people in the Orient.<sup>72</sup>

Louis D. Brandeis, despite his pro-Ally views, gave reassurances to Turkey on behalf of the *Yishuv* (Jewish community in Palestine). In January 1915, he wrote:

Zionism is not a movement to wrest from the Turk the sovereignty of Palestine. Zionism seeks merely to establish in Palestine for such Jews as choose to go and remain there, and for their descendants, a legally secured home, where they may live together and lead a Jewish life; where they may expect ultimately to constitute a majority of the population, and may look forward to what we should call home rule.<sup>73</sup>

Such statements served to bolster the pro-German attitudes of most Jews. Indeed, many Zionist spokesmen repeated these views with greater conviction than Brandeis. Thus, like many Jewish socialists, they played into the hands of German propagandists.

### *The Fate of an Editor*

The sentiments of Jewish immigrants in America remained pro-German down to the March Revolution in Russia. They scorned Tsarist promises of post-war Jewish rights,<sup>74</sup> and hailed instead an Austrian proclamation to Polish Jews, which declared:

<sup>71</sup> *BYS*, Dec. 3, 1915, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> *YF*, Nov. 12, 1915, p. 8. See also, *Macc*, Sept. 1914, pp. 83-84.

<sup>73</sup> *MJ*, Jan. 1915, p. 18. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise wrote to Brandeis on March 23, 1916 that it would be advisable to obtain a statement from Henry Morgenthau, former Ambassador to Turkey "in which he would speak of the loyalty of the Jews in Turkey, and of the goodwill of the Turkish government toward the Jewish people." Louisville University, Brandeis Papers, "Correspondence with S. S. Wise, June 1914-July, 1916."

<sup>74</sup> *Forward*, Aug. 17, 1914, p. 4. Maurice Paleologue, the French Ambassador in Petrograd,

Our flags bring justice, freedom and equal rights as citizens, religious freedom, and freedom to live undisturbed in economic and cultural life. Too long you have suffered under the iron yoke of Moscow. We come as friends. The foreign barbarian yoke is gone.<sup>75</sup>

Ambassador von Bernstorff, in a letter to the *Tog*, promised the Jews full equality in liberated Poland.<sup>76</sup> In 1915-16, the movement for an American Jewish Congress was highly favorable to the German reorganization of conquered Poland and hailed the treatment of Jewish communities by the occupation forces. German propaganda was so effective that no American Yiddish periodical dared adopt a continuing pro-Ally stand.

Proof is provided by the experience of Louis E. Miller, editor of the *Varhayt* and a pioneer figure in the American Jewish labor movement. At the outset of the conflict, he appeared to be pro-German; however, by the end of the first week in August, he crossed over to the Allied line. The end of Kaiserism, he reasoned, would weaken the props supporting Tsarism. After Germany's defeat, France could break her military and financial alliance with Russia, and would thereby become a more potent force for democracy in Europe. Miller appealed for objectivity and neutrality, urging the recognition of moral issues arising out of the war responsibility of the Central Powers. He placed his faith in the Tsar's promise of post-war rights for the Jews and in the western Allies' influence upon Russia to stand by this commitment. Miller believed that German antisemitism was an insidious social force, whereas the anti-Jewish movement in Russia required Tsarist direction. The *Varhayt* editor warned that by supporting Germany, Jews were adhering to "momentary . . . interests and sacrificing the universal culture and civilization of humanity." At another time, he wrote: ". . . we would be deceiving our readers, the Jewish people, and circumventing the most important and holiest interests of the future of the Jews if we allowed ourselves to be moved by the petty, cheap, and selfish motives of other newspapers, that suppress the truth, which the Jews must know."<sup>77</sup>

Miller's editorials caused a severe drop in the newspaper's circulation. On November 24, 1914, he gave up his editorial post; however, as the chief

warned Sazanoff, the Foreign Minister, that unless Russia behaved better toward the Jews it could not gain the sympathy of their American co-religionists. Cf. Grattan, *op. cit.*, p. 75. Russian overtures to the Jews were regarded as a hopeful sign by the pro-Ally press in the United States. In an editorial entitled "The Day of the Jew in Russia," the Portland (Maine) *Express-Advertiser*, October 22, 1914, described the singling out of two Russo-Jewish soldiers for special mention as an example "of the way Russia leans and strides ahead when she is once stirred to do so . . . Russia is waking to the fact that she needs her Jews." Cf. Costrell, *op. cit.*, p. 13, n.

<sup>75</sup> *AH*, Sept. 11, 1914, p. 502.

<sup>76</sup> "Germany, openly and without any reservations, offers the Jews in Russian Poland all that they were and that they still are denied under the Russian regime; even the glimmer of such a promise cannot be perceived in Russia today." *Tog*, Nov. 10, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Vh*, editorials, Aug. 6, 10, 25, 26, 30, Sept. 8, 10, 16, 28, Oct. 12, 1914. The *Tog* was launched in November 1914 as a liberal, pro-Zionist daily. Among the World War I Yiddish dailies, only the *Tog* (which recently absorbed the *Morgen Zhurnal*) and the *Forward* continue to appear.

stockholder, he remained president of the Varhayt Publishing Company. Six days later, the daily published an article submitted by the German Information Bureau. In January 1915, Miller's connection with the organ, which he founded in 1905, was completely severed.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Senate Subcommittee . . . , *Hearing . . .* (as in note 32), II, p. 1448. Miller established the *Führer* (New York) in March 1915 after having procured a loan of \$35,000 from Jacob H. Schiff. This daily lasted until August 1915. With an eye on circulation, Miller altered his pro-Ally stand to one of "neutrality." Cf. *ibid.*, II, p. 1822. Late in 1916, he issued *Miller's Vochenschrift*, in which he leaned toward pro-Germanism. After America's entry into the war, the *Vochenschrift* received funds from George Creel's Committee on Public Information, a government agency. At this point it heaped abuse on Germany. The weekly went out of circulation in February 1918.