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Reactions of the American Yiddish Press to the Tshernovits Language Conference of 1908 as a Reflection of the American Jewish Experience

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I. THE TSHERNOVITS CONFERENCE ON THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE IN ITS IMMEDIATE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the last week of August, 1908, seventy-five to one hundred voting delegates from all over the world converged on Tshernovits, Bukhovina-Galicia, to discuss the future of the Yiddish language. Their ostensible purpose was mostly philological, as indicated by the anticipated agenda:

- (1) Yiddish Orthography
- (2) Yiddish Grammar
- (3) Foreign and New Words
- (4) A Yiddish Dictionary
- (5) Jewish Youth and the Yiddish Language
- (6) The Yiddish Press and the Yiddish Language
- (7) The Yiddish Theater and Yiddish Actors
- (8) The Economic Situation of Yiddish Writers
- (9) The Economic Situation of Yiddish Actors
- (10) Recognition of the Yiddish Language.¹

But, as the saying goes, *'Der mentsh trakht, un got lakht'*,² 'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men/ Gang aft a-gley'.³ A gray-bearded devotee of the Hebrew language arose in the middle of a speech by Peretz and accused the Conference of being a plot against Zionism and three thousand years of Jewish history. A tumultuous uproar surged; for the first of three times in the six-day conference, the meeting almost degenerated into open violence. But Khayim Zhitlovski calmed the assembly, and there ensued a heated ideological debate on the language question: In the struggle of the Jewish people for continuity in the modern world, which would it be – Hebrew or Yiddish? A wide range of Zionists, socialists, philologists, literati, and combinations and permutations thereof expressed their opinions; and at the end of the Conference, the following resolution was passed:

The First Conference for the Yiddish Language recognizes Yiddish as a national language of the Jewish people and demands its political, communal [i.e., social and cultural equality].

At the same time the Conference feels it necessary to declare that every participant in the Conference and also every member of the future organization retains the freedom to feel toward the Hebrew language as he personally sees fit.⁴

Innocuous as it may seem today, this resolution was revolutionary in its time, providing some international legitimization and respectability to a language whose most common cognomen was *zhargón*, whose most respected writers had expected it to die. But as much as the Conference was significant in its own right, it also represented the articulation of changes in attitude that had been occurring for a number of decades among the Jews of Russia and Austria-Hungary.

A. Contemporary Developments in Russia

A significant segment of the Jewish intelligentsia in the land of the czar gradually shifted from a purely Russian pose to a position favoring Jewish national-cultural autonomy. The young Jews who had joined some of the more progressive movements in Russian life in the sixties and in the seventies found in the eighties that they were not wanted. Thrown back into the Pale of Settlement, they attempted to continue their radical activities among the Jewish masses, using the Russian language. But the novices whom they attracted were more interested in Russian culture, in education and the professions, than in the class struggle and the proletariat. Arkady Kremer therefore proposed in 1893 that Yiddish be the language of 'agitation'. Many of the assimilated intellectuals set about learning Yiddish, not for any intrinsic merit but because of its utility as a tool of socialist propaganda. A *Zhargón* Committee set up in 1895 sponsored secret libraries, but the foundation of the Bund in 1897 did not change the fact that the political and cultural programs of the organization were two entirely separate matters.

Only after a declaration for the cultural rights of minorities, at the Austrian Social Democratic Party convention of 1899, the pogroms of 1903, steadily increasing competition with the Zionist parties, a rejection in 1903 of special status for the Bund within the Russian Social Democratic Party, and the Russian Revolution of 1905, did the Bund adopt a platform of complete national-cultural autonomy at its annual convention of 1905. With the Russian Reaction of 1907, however, energies that had been devoted to politics were channelled into cultural activities; among them, the Tshernovits Conference on the Yiddish Language, the Jewish Historical Ethnographic Society in St. Petersburg, inaugurated two weeks after the Conference, and the Society for Jewish Folk Music, licensed in November of 1908.⁵

The particular context of the Conference is also reflected in other national-cultural developments in Russia: (1) the parallel rise of national consciousness among other minority peoples of the Russian empire, and (2) the development of Hebrew within the context of Zionism – an approach to the problem of Jewish continuity, with extensive political, economic, and social ramifications.

B. Contemporary Developments in Austria-Hungary

The broader context of the struggle for cultural autonomy is even more apparent in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in which various nationalities competed for cultural dominance in the subdivisions of the empire. Although the Jews initially answered the language question on the census in conformity with the locally predominant nationality, they gradually recognized the potential advantages of recording their own language: recognition of Yiddish in the courts, the maintenance of a Yiddish school system, and neutrality *vis à vis* the other competing groups.⁶ The Tshernovits Conference took place amidst a struggle for the reform of this multinational system, a struggle that ended, in a sense, with the redrawing of the map of Europe eleven years later at Versailles, after the bloodiest war that mankind had ever seen.

II. REACTION IN THE AMERICAN YIDDISH PRESS

The positive attitude towards Yiddish enunciated at the Tshernovits Conference is thus related intimately to the larger issue of national-cultural autonomy in a multiethnic context. In the United States, however, the Yiddish press seemed only vaguely aware of the situation in Europe and was even less conscious of the role of language and nationality in American life. At least in the case of the *Forverts* and the *Yidishes Tageblatt*, the ideological commitments and practical goals of the editors fit in well with the possibilities and demands of American life; so that the newspapers gave their tacit approval to the structuring of Jewish institutions along religious lines and to the elimination, in theory, of secular, national-cultural alternatives.

The following table traces the growth of the Yiddish press for the period under consideration. Note the phenomenal growth of the *Forverts* (*Jewish Daily Forward*), the socialist paper founded in 1897 and edited by Ab. Cakan; and the persistent strength of the *Yidishes Tageblatt* (*Jewish Daily News*), the organ of Orthodoxy founded in 1885, and the first successful Yiddish daily in the world.

Year	1895	1900	1905	1910
No. of dailies	1	2	5	4
Circ. of <i>Tageblatt</i>	13,400	40,000	48,031	69,000
Circ. of <i>Forverts</i>	–	19,502	52,190	122,532
Grand total, circ.	16,000	62,000	190,000	336,125 ⁷

A. Forverts (Jewish Daily Forward)

Coverage of the Tshernovits Conference by the *Forverts* in August and September of 1908 consisted of (1) editorial and feature comment before the conference, and (2) regular news reports:⁸

(1) Editorial and Feature Comment.

(a) 'Di konferents vegn der yidisher shprakh' [The Conference on the Yiddish Language], by Tsivyen (Ben-Tsien Hoffman), Friday, September 4 (page 4, columns 5–6);

(b) 'Undzer muter-shprakh afn tshérovitser konferénts' [Our Mother-Tongue at the Tshernovits Conference], by Sh. Ayzenshtadt, written in Bern, August 17, and published in 3 parts: Thursday, September 10 (page 5, columns 2–3); Friday, September 11 (page 5, columns 2–3); Monday, September 14 (page 5, columns 2–3);

(c) 'Yidish' [Yiddish], editorial, Saturday, September 12 (page 4, columns 1–2);

(d) 'Kroke, yidish un tshérovitsh; di badaytung fun "zhargón" in galitsien' [Cracow, Yiddish and Tshernovits; the Significance of 'Zhargón' in Galicia], by Morris Rosenfeld, Sunday, September 13 (page 4, columns 3–4, and page 5, column 7).

(2) Regular News Reports.

(a) 'Ónheynger fun loshn-koydesh makhn a tuml afn tshérovitser konferénts' [Partisans of the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) Create a Stir at the Tshernovits Conference], by 'Our special correspondent, an EXILE', written August 31 and published Thursday, September 17 (page 5, columns 3–6);

(b) 'Yidish – a natsionale shprakh' [Yiddish – A National Language], by the same anonymous author, written September 2 and published Friday, September 18 (page 5, columns 2–5).

While the news reports are factual and straightforward, the editorial comment is distinguished, first of all, by a tendency to view Yiddish language and literature as entities in themselves, unrelated to social institutions. Ayzenshtadt's three-part feature is devoted entirely to the original, philologically-minded agenda of the Conference, but for Tsivyen, covering even these ten items seemed to be too formidable a task:

It's enough that solid foundations for Yiddish orthography (spelling) and rules of a Yiddish grammar be worked out at the Conference, and we will have to be superbly satisfied with these results. *Loy alekha ha-melokhe ligmer* [You are not required to complete the task . . . *Pirke Oves (Pirkei Avot) 2:21*°]; at the first Conference on the Yiddish Language, not all issues can be resolved.

Finally, the *Forverts* editorial on 'Yiddish' praised the recognition of Yiddish as a language and celebrated the fine aesthetic qualities of the latest Yiddish literature.

The second distinguishing characteristic of the *Forverts* commentary is its tendency to ignore the European context of the Tshernovits Conference, the relation of the Conference to the struggle for national-cultural autonomy in Austria-Hungary and Russia and to the raging debate among the socialists and the Zionists. Tsivyen was entirely oblivious of these issues. In Ayzenshtadt's case, the oversight was intentional: 'The question about the recognition of the Yiddish language is a purely political one. An a-political language conference can do absolutely nothing towards its realization'.¹⁰ Ayzenshtadt was also firmly committed to ignoring

... the old questions about Hebrew and its competition with Yiddish – questions that have been discussed enough recently by both sides and which have no practical application to the Conference, which has for itself only one purpose: creating favorable conditions for the development of the Yiddish language.¹¹

Apparently, as far as Ayzenshtadt was concerned, such favorable conditions were unrelated to broader issues of public policy. Finally, the *Forverts* editorial reflects the same viewpoint but in a subtler way. 'Yiddish' portrays the rising use of the language only as a response to anti-Semitism, a 'demonstration' by the intelligentsia 'that the Jewish blood shed has opened their eyes, awakened them from their foolish mistake, that they could remove themselves from their people'. The fact that the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Jews saw Yiddish as a constitutional element of national-cultural life was lost upon the editors of the *Forverts*.

Only Morris Rosenfeld understood that the Tshernovits Language Conference convened amidst cultural struggle in multi-ethnic Europe:

The Czechs, Poles, Ruthenians, Croations, and other nationalities in the Hapsburg Empire (Austria) are working now for the official recognition of their mother tongues, and the Jews are working for this too.

Though his main conclusion is that 'the Conference will have strong repercussions for Jewish politics in Galicia', Rosenfeld was also aware of its symbolic significance for Jewish nationalists and socialists in Russia:

[T]he eyes of the true friends of the people and of the workers in Galicia and even in Russia are turned to Tshernovits; therefore that Conference has an important historical significance.

Rosenfeld, however, did not view the Conference as a significant event for American Jewry, and this brings us to the third distinguishing characteristic of the *Forverts* coverage: its tendency to overlook those aspects of American life that militated against Yiddish language and culture, and Jewish nationality in general. For all of the writers except Rosenfeld, the tendencies to see Yiddish language and literature as entities in themselves and to ignore the European context of the Tshernovits Conference coincided with an indifference to or unawareness of the situation in the United

States. Thus, Tsivyen discussed the anglicization of the Yiddish press and mentioned the concomitant 'indifference and coldness' to the Conference but outside of any broader context. Ayzenshtadt was aware that 'the situation in every country is different and depends on the political tendencies of the government and on the political power of the Jews',¹² but he wasn't really interested in these matters, and, in addition, he lived in Switzerland. The *Forverts* editorial answered Tsivyen's criticism about the anglicization of the American Yiddish press:

Local life is much more expansive than in the old ghettos. The Jews here therefore often require words that they didn't need in the old country, and these words are bound up with local requirements.

There is nothing more in this editorial about Jewish life in America.

Only Morris Rosenfeld had the perspicacity to recognize the apparent approaching demise of the Yiddish language and culture in the United States, though he was too enmeshed in the web of time to understand its deeper causes. Rosenfeld pointed out that, while in Galicia, the issue of language was 'a matter of life and death', part of a 'language battle that sooner or later will shake up the world'; in America, the recognition of Yiddish was a 'coffee house question', a 'sterile topic for a kibbitzing den'. The perceptions in America that a language conference would not produce practical results and that orthographic niceties are irrelevant only partially accounted for local indifference to the Conference. Rosenfeld pointed to other factors too: the absence of a Yiddish school system and the use of Yiddish as a 'ferry' to English by even the best Yiddish writers. But the broader political and social context of Jewish life in America lay beyond his ken.

B. Yidishes Tágeblat (Jewish Daily News)

Coverage of the Tshernovits Conference in the *Tágeblat* consisted of two editorials, one before the Conference and the other after; a feature; and four regular news reports:

(1) Editorials and Feature.

(a) 'Di tsukúnft fun undzer máme-loshn' [The Future of our Mother-Tongue], editorial, Friday, August 21 (page 4, columns 1-3);

(b) 'Hebre-ish un zhargón' [Hebrew and *Zhargón*], editorial, Sunday, September 20 (page 6, column 2);

(c) 'Anfalsher gelekhter gor on grammatik; tsemekh bal-mesholim kumt vider mit a mayse' [An Incorrect Laugh – Entirely Ungrammatical; Tsemekh, Master of Parables, Comes Once More with a Story], by Sambatyen, Tuesday, September 1 (page 4, columns 1-4).

(2) *Regular News Reports* (by Gershom Bader).

(a) 'Der konferénts vegn yidish in tshérovits' [The Conference on Yiddish in Tshérovits], Monday, September 14 (page 8, columns 2–3);

(b) 'In tshérovits; hebre-istn makhn a liárm af dem yídishn shprakh konferénts' [In Tshernovits; Hebraists Create an Uproar at the Yiddish Language Conference]; Thursday, September 17 (page 4, columns 4–5; page 8, columns 4–5);

(c) 'Eyn folk[,] tsvey shprakhn' [One People, Two Languages], Monday, September 21 (page 4, columns 4–6);

(d) 'Der sakhakl fun tshérovits; di letste tsvey tag fun der yídisher shprakh konferénts' [The Grand Total for Tshernovits; the Last Two Days of the Yiddish Language Conference], Wednesday, September 23 (page 4, columns 6–7).

If the writers of the *Forverts* expressed blissful ignorance or sad recognition of some of the conditions in this country, their counterparts on the *Tágeblat* seem to have been more aware of the possibilities and limitations of American life – mostly of the limitations. Behind the *Tágeblat's* thinly veiled hostility to Yiddish lay not only its resentment of Jewish secular movements, and the commitment to Americanize that it shared with the *Forverts*, but also fear and insecurity about American anti-Semitism and a general sense of powerlessness in the new American environment.

The *Tágeblat* editorial of August 21 showed apparent respect for Yiddish as a national cultural treasure, but assured its readers simultaneously that 'the Tshernovits Conference will have no influence on the future of our mother tongue', and the 'zhargón, as dear as it is to us, can only exist as long as it will be spoken by the people and no longer'. As far as the *Tágeblat* is concerned, the people are interested in learning the language of the Land:

The Jewish children who study in American, German, or other schools stop studying Yiddish not because this language doesn't have a grammar but because they want to know a language . . . which the other citizens of the country speak.

Apparently, there is nothing to be done one way or the other to guarantee the survival of Yiddish language and culture, because 'Jews will speak Yiddish as long as conditions will be favorable, and after that they will stop just as they once stopped speaking Hebrew and exchanged it for other languages . . .'. The *Tágeblat* had opted for Americanization, and this editorial was its premature⁶ אַחוריקא דאַען הו-עמס¹³ to the demise of the old Mother Tongue.

The parodic stance of ridicule in the *Tágeblat's* feature article on the Conference expresses its editorial policy more candidly. This is the sign that Tsemach, Master of Parables, discovered on the streets of New York:

Ha Ha Ha Hi!!!
 Laughing in 10 Lessons
 for only 5 Dollars

'You have to understand that people laugh very incorrectly these days', the Laughing Instructor informs Tsemach. The message of the parable is clear: Teaching Jews how to speak Yiddish is a ridiculous as teaching them how to laugh.

The *Tágeblat*'s hostility to the secularity of Yiddish culture emerges in its distortion of events and in its final editorial. Gershom Bader's news reports on the Conference are consistently accurate, sophisticated, and sympathetic. In his opening piece for the *Tágeblat*, Bader had written:

We consider ourselves every bit as important as the writers of the other nations of the world, and we won't relinquish our honor as workers for the people – even one iota.

But the subheadlines to the news report of September 17 sharply conflict with the tenor of Baders' reporting. 'Only One Delegate from America; the Best Yiddish Writers from Russia Stay at Home' – as if to say, 'It's true that we have to print this article about the Conference, but it's really not important enough for you to read'. And just as the subheads seem to be the work of the editorial staff, the factual inaccuracies in the final news report may be the fruits of their bitterness rather than a sign of Bader's carelessness. In any case, that report indicates, incorrectly, that the Conference had asserted 'that Yiddish is the only national language'. On the basis of this inaccuracy, the *Tágeblat*, in its second editorial condemned the Tshernovits Conference out of hand:

The conference on *zhargón* in Tshernovits has decided that the Jewish national language is *zhargón*. If the resolutions of the conference are followed, the *AHsider* [prayer book] won't be recognized as a national book; "*AH Lekho doydi*" [a well-known Sabbath hymn] will have to be driven out of Jewish national literature. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Torah of Moses will have to be recognized as foreign books, and the entire modicum of *Yiddishkayt* will lie in Asch's drama, "*Got fun nekome*" [God of Vengeance] and in Perets' "*Shtrayml*" [fur-edged hasidic hat].

The real issue emerges rather clearly in the contrast between the holy writings of the tradition, and Jewish secular literature. Even recognition of Yiddish as *one* of the national languages of the Jewish people represented a provocation to the traditionalists, whose monopoly on Jewish life had passed away. Perhaps it was easier to portray the Yiddishists as extremists and to respond to grievous insult: '*Áderabe ve-áderabe* (to the contrary) – you presume to put us in *kheyrem* [under a ban]? We will put you in *kheyrem*'.

Instead of presenting the language issue as 'Yiddish vs. *landshprakh*', as in its first editorial; in 'Hebrew and *Zhargón*', the *Tágeblat* became the vociferous partisan of the Holy Language:

The people decided long ago that we too are a nation. That our national language is only the one in which the spirit of the Jewish people developed, in that language which our religion is written [*sic*], in the language in which the Bible is written – the book which has made us immortal.

Unlike the Hebraists at the Tshernovists Convergence, who hoped one day to live in a Hebrew-speaking society, the editors of the *Tágeblat* were interested in asserting the supremacy of the religious tradition, rather than in advocating Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jewish people. The *Tágeblat* had already expressed its preference for the *landsprakh* in its editorial on 'The Future of our Mother Tongue'.

III. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The attitudes of the *Forverts* and the *Tágeblat* to the Tshernovits Conference in particular and to Yiddish language and literature in general can only be understood within the context of the newspapers' general editorial policy and coverage of the news, and in relation to focal events and processes in society at large. For the *Forverts*, the elections of 1908 were the most important story; for the *Tágeblat*, the Bingham Affair, the events surrounding the 'scandalous allegation' of Jewish criminality by the Police Commissioner of the City of New York. For the Jewish labor movement, the years 1909–1915 were the 'Great Revolt', the period of unionization of the New York needle trades; but for other segments of Jewish New York, like the *Tageblat*, these years marked the launching and the heyday of the New York Kehillah, which served to protect Jewish interests in American society as much as to bring unity and cohesion to a fragmented community.¹⁴ While the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was building its membership from 7830 to 72,707,¹⁵ the Kehillah was there, more a Community Council than a Community, helping to fight crime among the downtown Jews, mediating 'Jewish' labor disputes, and through the Board of Jewish Education and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, initiating programs in Jewish education with explicitly assimilationist overtones. But neither the organ of the unions nor that Orthodox voice in the Kehillah had any real interest in the creation of Jewish institutions in America (outside of the frameworks of labor or religion), within a scheme of cultural pluralism, such as the one outlined by Khayim Zhitlovski several years earlier.¹⁶ For different reasons and in different ways, the primary concern of the *Tágeblat* and the *Forverts* remained successful integration into American life. That interest, more than

anything else, accounts for their attitudes to the Tshernovits Conference on the Yiddish Language.

A. *Forverts*

The *Forverts* was founded in 1897, when a large contingent of Jewish socialists seceded from the Socialist Labor Party, because its arrogant and dogmatic leader, Daniel De Leon, stubbornly refused all compromises with the capitalist system and willfully eschewed all real benefits before the revolution. It is not surprising then to find that the revisionist socialism of the *Forverts* coincided with its Americanism; its analysis of issues along class lines, with a decision to participate wholeheartedly in the economic and political life of the country, through the trade union movement and the Socialist Party.

Under the masthead of the *Forverts* on the editorial page, for the period under study, there stood a box with the symbol of the Socialist Party and the following, programmatic information;

The Socialist Party

For President:	Eugene V. Debs
For Vice President:	Benjamin Henford
For Governor:	Joshua Vonhop
For Congress in the 9th Congressional District:	Morris Hillquit

The Growth of the Socialist Vote

1888 . . . 2068	1896 . . . 36564	1904 408,230
1892 . . . 21157	1900 . . . 96961	1908 ? ¹⁷

In its editorial of Rosh Hashana, 1908,¹⁸ the *Forverts* wished its readers three things: (1) that Czar Nicholas be assassinated, (2) that there be a revolution in Russia, and (3) 'that in America the power of the workers be increased, with a million Socialist votes and with three million *members fun treyd yunyors*'. Finally, in an editorial on July 2 of the same year, the *Forverts* referred to the American public schools as 'without a doubt a bright sun on the soical horizon', and 'a realization of socialism'¹⁹. Given this array of attitudes, it is easier to understand why the few stories about Tshernovits were relegated to Page 4 and Page 5, why Yiddish language and literature appeared as abstract entities outside of any broader context: because the *Forverts* used Yiddish as an instrument towards the realization of its program of socialism and Americanism but had no interest in American Jewish national-cultural institutions in and of themselves.

B. Tágeblat

The *Tágeblat*'s antipathy towards Jewish nationality in America and its corresponding preference for religion reflect an attempt to salvage as much of the traditional life as possible, without arousing the wrath of the Gentiles. On September 1, 1908, as Hebraists and Yiddishists argued in Tshernovits, Bukhovina, a different story hit the American Yiddish press: Police Commissioner Theodore Bingham had published an account of 'Foreign Criminals in New York',²⁰ with statistical documentation of his charges that fifty per cent of the criminals in New York were Jews. The East Side resounded with ineffective protest. Sensing their powerlessness in the face of 'anti-Semitism', the downtown Jews of many affiliations turned to the uptown *shtadlomin* [intercessors] to clear the name of the Jews. They decided to set up the New York Kehillah, after the affair was over, in order to be prepared for similar episodes in the future. Simultaneously, the German-Jewish elite participated in the Community, for the most part in order to Americanize the foreigners on the lower East Side who posed a threat to their own secure position in American society.

The Kehillah was always careful to speak of Jewish identity in strictly religious terms. Even before the organization was officially constituted, there was a change in the formulation of its purpose: '[F]urther[ing] the cause of Judaism in New York City' replaced 'represent[ing] the Jews in New York City'²¹. In their private correspondence, both Louis Marshall, of the American Jewish Committee, and David de Sola Pool, rabbi of the prestigious Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue, warned that Jewish nationality in America would constitute an '*imperium in imperio*' – the probable anti-Semitic consequences of which are left unspoken.²²

Even though the Orthodox elements of the Kehillah did not participate fully in its activities, for a paper such as the *Tágeblat*, the Kehillah represented a means of protecting Jewish interests in the United States and of retrieving some of what had been left behind in Eastern Europe: status, power, and a way of life. The formula of acceptance that America handed the Jews, 'American nationality, Jewish religion', coincided with the traditional emphasis on religion. In this context, Yiddish was seen as an obstacle to full integration into American life, if not a probable cause of anti-Semitism, as well as a *fraye*, secular, Jewish alternative to the traditional way of life. No wonder the Tshernovits Conference on the Yiddish Language became an object of ridicule and contempt in the pages of the *Yidishes Tágeblat*.

IV. TOWARDS A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY

Even though we have analysed the reactions of the *Forverts* and *Tágebblat* to the Tshernovits Language Conference of 1908 in the context of general editorial policy and in relation to contemporary developments in Europe and America, a deeper appreciation of this period of American Jewish history requires a longer view — a broad examination of the processes and events in American life and in Jewish life, independent of one another, over the decades before and after the Conference; and an analysis of the nature of the interaction between America and the Jews.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Jews of Eastern Europe faced a serious crisis: For over a hundred years before, most had been excluded from Russian society and confined to a Pale of Settlement; but in the early 1880's, a new series of harsh decrees and cruel pogroms devastated the Jewish "economy", created social dislocation on a massive scale, deprived the Jews of physical security, and exacerbated the crisis of ideology in the traditional society.

In earlier years, conservative theological formulations had contributed to the perpetuation of a way of life that despite its good points, was parochial, ascetic, quietistic, and other-worldly, in many respects. The intellectual treasures of Western civilization were branded *treyf-posl*, "non-kosher-invalid", and condemned as the first step to conversion. The typical responses to misery were watchful waiting for the Messiah and "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land. . ."²³ All in all, the Children of Israel were not supposed to live in the world as much as in God and the Torah, the *AH Gemore* (Gemara) and the *AH Shulkhn orekh* (standard codification of the Jewish law).

There were several responses to this crisis: rigid maintenance of the old way of life, conversion or assimilation, participation in the Zionist movement or in Jewish Socialism, and emigration to the West. If the first two responses were old, unimaginative extremes, and the next two, radical ideological innovations in Jewish continuity, massive emigration to the West was an extraordinary but unstructured leap of faith or fear, characteristically motivated by perceptions of a steadily worsening situation in Eastern Europe and contrasting expectations about life in the Golden Land. You could earn a living in America, and there were no pogroms. *AH Meshane mokem, meshane mazi*.²⁴

But as much as the life of each immigrant was radically changed by his arrival in the new American environment, his responses to America were conditioned by his experience in Eastern Europe. The commitment of the *Forverts* and the *Tágebblat* to Americanization, for example, derives from the contrast between America and Eastern Europe and the attitudes of each towards the Jews, and not just from an appreciation of America in the ab-

stract. The uproar over Bingham's accusations of Jewish criminality is also, to some degree, a carry-over of the experience of anti-semitism in Eastern Europe, and not just a direct response to events in America.

Similarly, American reactions to its Jewish immigrants were conditioned by earlier developments in the United States. The separation of church and state, with its extraordinary consequences for Jewish life in America, grew out of the particular conditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nativist hostility to the immigrant was part of a larger reaction by small town America to the loss of its traditional way of life.

As a result of the separation of church and state, there was no official discrimination on the basis of religion. 'Members of the Jewish faith' were entitled to equal rights with everyone else, in business, in the professions, and in the arts and sciences. The government assumed a neutral stance towards religion so that Jews were free to practice or abstain from practicing their religion, in physical security. Finally, the Bill of Rights set a pattern for the integration of immigrants as members of religious groups rather than of national-cultural units.

According to Bernard Bailyn, the principle of church-state separation developed during the third quarter of the eighteenth century — a product of social developments in the English colonies throughout the preceding years; the ideas of the European Enlightenment and English liberal politics, and, 'the magic of Revolutionary thought'²⁵. In traditional English society, the government guaranteed the predominance of the Church of England, and there was a coordinate unity of church and society. But several factors coincided to produce a different situation in America: (1) The colonies were a haven for religious dissenters. As a result, the Church of England was non-conformist and worked with other dissenting groups against the locally 'established' churches. The established churches, on the other hand, had insecure links to public authority, because the English governors had no special interest in protecting them. (2) Conditions of settlement in the American wilderness did not always lend themselves to orthodox practice and a traditional social structure. (3) The desire to attract settlers mitigated against strict enforcement of doctrinal orthodoxy. (4) The Great Awakening affected a social revolution of the first order; the founding of 'New Light' churches over and over again in the different communities of the land further destroyed the traditional unity of church and society.²⁶

Significantly then the principle of separation of church and state developed in the world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, before the advent of industrialism and modern nationalism. New immigrants retained their Old World identity mostly under the rubric of religion, and the English-American language and culture persisted as a common bond. A century after the Constitution, however, the assumptions of the earlier era were

brought to bear on a different group of immigrants, in a world that had changed immeasurably from what it had been.

'Nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, urbanization'²⁷ — these are some of the revolutionary processes in modern life that drew new immigrants from the villages of Europe and America to their cities, from the villages of the Old World to the cities of the New. The scramble and the boom in the United States offered the immigrants extraordinary economic opportunities but also posed formidable challenges for them in their struggle for survival.

These same factors — nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, urbanization — created a world that was as much of a shock for the small-town American as for the East-European Jew. And when that American saw the coming demise of his value system and way of life, he reacted with hostility to government, big business, the city, and the alien. A rising middle class of professionals, and specialists in business, labor, and agriculture developed a new set of values for a 'scientific-industrial society' that found their classical expression in the Progressive Movement: 'perpetual management, contingencies, endless group interplay', rational control of the 'complex, fluid social process'.²⁸ But an answer to the problem of social cohesion eluded the modern bureaucrats, and in times of crisis, they relied on traditional approaches: exclusion of undesirables or their forceful assimilation.

In *The Search for Order*, Robert Wiebe's brilliant analysis of this period of American history, we discover that 'around 1908' at the same time that 'the hosts of local reform began to arrive in Washington',²⁹ 'a qualitative shift in outlook occurred among large numbers of these men of authority [the ensconced leadership] . . . Critics who had only grumbled about national reform earlier now cried "socialism" and "communism"'. With respect to the immigrant, 'faith in national management with a belief in the mystical Americanizing powers of the soil' gave way to open hostility. A number of 'private Americanization programs began to appear in 1909 [that] gravitated almost by nature toward coercion, replacing the earlier paternalism with harsh demands to cast off all foreign ways at once'³⁰.

V. THE REACTIONS TO THE TSHERNOVITS CONFERENCE AS A REFLECTION OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

In the context of the above discussion, the reactions of the *Forverts* and the *Yidishes Tageblatt* to the Tshernovits Conference on the Yiddish Language emerge more clearly as the product of a complex interaction between the East European Jews and their newly adopted American environment. For the editors of the *Forverts*, the socialism of the trade union movement was a program for action that coincided with the finest principles and goals of American democracy. As an essential element of unionization and Ameri-

canization, Yiddish deserved token respect, but nothing more. A program of national-cultural autonomy like that of the Russian or Austro-Hungarian Jews was simply beyond contemplation. The editors of the *Tágeblat* also valued the opportunities in American life. But their rejection of Yiddish was rooted in a sense of powerlessness resulting from emigration and its social dislocation, the threat of American anti-semitism, and the rejection of traditional values by the Jewish secular movements. Thus, in 1909, the *Forverts* helped initiate the Great Revolt, and the *Tágeblat* turned to the New York Kehillah.

In Europe, meanwhile, after World War I, Yiddish culture flourished for a brief period of time. There were institutions of higher learning such as the Jewish Scientific Institute (YIVO) and the Jewish divisions of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev and the Institute of Belorussian Culture in Minsk; and secular Jewish school systems in Poland and Russia, which in 1931 had an enrollment of over 160,000 students.³¹ In the United States, Jewish institutions formed along religious lines, with secular-nationalist values expressing themselves within the religious movements, or through assimilation. The Yiddish schools of the Workmen's Circle, the Farband, and the Sholem Aleikhem Folk Institute met with limited success; but for the most part, since Yiddish language and culture conflicted with the theoretical bases and perceived possibilities of America Jewish life, Yiddish was allowed to pass away.

The holocaust, the birth of the State of Israel, the sterility of American popular culture, the civil rights movement and the subsequent rise of the blacks, the war in Vietnam, corruption and ineptitude in Washington, and economic stagnation have had and are having some effect on the future of Yiddish — and of Jewry — in the United States, but at this point in time, what that future will be is only a matter of speculation. One thing, however, is clear: To the extent that the present embodies the experience of the past, the longrange historical processes that shaped the reaction to the Shernovits Conference are shaping the future as well.

NOTES

1. Max Weinreich, ed. *Di ershte yiddishe shprakh konferénts; barikhtn, dokumentn, ópklanga fun der tshernovitser konferénts* [The First Yiddish Language Conference; Reports, Documents, Repercussions of the Tshernovits Conference] (Vilna, YIVO, 1931), p. 3.
2. Literally, 'Man thinks, and God laughs', i.e. 'Man proposes, and God disposes'.
3. Robert Burns, 'To a Mouse; On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough'.
4. Weinreich, p. 108, cited in Herbert J. Lerner, *The Tshernovits Language Conference; a Milestone in Jewish Nationalist Thought* (New York, Columbia University, 1957), unpublished master's dissertation, p. 158.

5. See *Ibid.*, pp. 32–43, and Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition; Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 242–248, 327–330.
6. Max Weinrich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh; bagrifn, faktn, metodn* [History of the Yiddish Language; Concepts, Facts, Methods] (New York, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1973), V. 1, pp. 297 ff.
7. Based on Mordecai Soltes, *The Yiddish Press; An Americanizing Agency* (New York, Columbia University, 1925), p. 24.
8. Since the *MLA Style Sheet*, 2nd ed., (New York, Modern Language Association, 1970), indicates on page 16 that '[i]nformation given in your text need not be repeated in a footnote', notes will be given for citations from the *Forverts* and the *Tágeblat*, only in cases of possible ambiguity. Many of these articles appear in Weinrich (1931).
9. *Daily Prayer Book; ha-Siddur ha-shalem*, Trans. Philipp Birnbaum (New York, Hebrew Publishing Co., 1949), p. 491.
10. Installment of September 14.
11. *Loc. cit.*
12. *Loc. cit.*
13. 'Blessed be the Righteous Judge', a traditional formula recited upon hearing of someone's death.
14. Cf. Arthur A. Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community; The Kehillah Experiment, 1908–1922* (New York, Columbia University, 1970).
15. January 1, 1909 – January 1, 1916: David Dubinsky, *International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union: Financial and Statistical Report, April 1, 1950 to March 31, 1953*, in ILGWU, *Report of the General Executive Board to the 28th Convention* (Chicago, ILGWU, 1953), p. 47.
16. See 'Der melting pat' [The Melting Pot], and 'Di feréynikte felker in di feréynikte shtatn' [The United Peoples in the United States], *Gezámlte shriftn* [Collected Writings] (New York, privately printed, 1912), v. II, pp. 189–286.
17. See, for example, August 28, 1908, p. 4.
18. September 27, p. 4, cols. 1–2.
19. 'Vu kumen ahín di kinder, vos fangen on [*sic*] geyn in di skuls [*sic*] un éndiken nit?' [Where Do the Children Go, Who Begin to Go to the Schools and Don't Finish?]
20. *North American Review* 188 (Sept. 1908): 383–94, cited in Goren, p. 25.
21. Goren, p. 45.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 52, 46.
23. *Daily Prayer Book*, p. 613.
24. Literally: 'A change in place, a change in luck', i.e., '[One who] changes [his] place, changes [his] luck'.
25. See *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 246–272: citation, p. 271.
26. Bernard Bailyn, *History 160a: American Colonial History* (Cambridge, Harvard University, 1969–70), the author's (unpublished) notes to Bailyn's course.
27. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order; 1877–1920* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 12.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 208–210.
31. Ch[aim S.] K[azdan], 'Yiddish Education', in 'Education', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, v. 6 (Jerusalem, MacMillan, 1971), p. 434–35.

POSTSCRIPT: BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN NEW YORK

The changing status of Spanish (and other language) in New York City in the 1970s provides an interesting contrast with the developments in Yiddish culture described in this paper. In September of 1972, an Hispano-American civic group, *Aspira*, initiated litigation against the Board of Education of the City of New York. Two years later, the Board agreed to institute a bilingual-bicultural program for many of the Spanish-speaking students in the public schools:

2. The Board of Education acknowledges its responsibility to provide all children attending the public schools, both English-speaking and non-English-speaking children, with programs in which they can effectively participate and learn. All children whose English language deficiency prevents them from effectively participating in the learning process and who can more effectively participate in Spanish shall receive: (a) a planned and systematic program designed to develop the child's ability to speak, understand, read and write the English language . . . , (b) instruction in substantive courses in Spanish (e.g. courses in mathematics, science, and social sciences) . . . ; (c) a planned and systematic program designed to reinforce and develop the child's use of Spanish; and, a planned and systematic program designed to introduce reading comprehension in Spanish to those children entering the school system whose reading readiness assessment indicates the need therefor. In addition the foregoing elements', and not at the expense of those elements, an important element of the above Program will be that the students receiving instruction will spend maximum time with other children so as to avoid isolation and segregation from their peers.¹

In addition to the program in Spanish, special programs in the following languages have been instituted under the Office of Bilingual Education, on the basis of the Consent Decree in *Aspira*: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Italian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, and Yiddish. Though, exact statistics are not available, there are at least 33,428 students in the program in Spanish and at least 3175 students in ~~of~~ of the other programs.² The total budget for all 1975-76 Bilingual or [English as a Second Language] Reimbursable Programs amounted to \$30,117,683, with much of the funding provided by the Federal Government under the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and Title of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 'Assistance to Local Educational Agencies for the Education of Children of Low Income Families.'³ In addition, there is a special program for the teachers of about 400 Vietnamese children, under the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975.⁴

The Yiddish program of the New York City school system has been centered in Districts 14, 15, ~~and~~; Williamsburg-Greenpoint, South Brooklyn, and Canarsie, respectively. In the 1975-76 school year, there were 129 students - many of them from Jewish religious schools - in kindergarten, first grade, and several grade ~~in~~ high school.⁵

All of the above projects are ~~in~~ infancy and require detailed description and evaluation. For a broader discussion of current develop

the field of bilingual education, see Joshua A. Fishman, *Bilingual Education: An International Sociological Perspective* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1976).

NOTES

1. Judge Marvin E. Frankel, Consent Decree in *Aspira of New York, Inc., v. Board of Education of the City of New York* (New York: U.S. District Court, Southern District, August 29, 1974), pp. 3-4, in Chancellor's circular (Brooklyn: Board of Education of the City of New York, August 30, 1974), pp. 25-26; based in part on the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974).
2. Division of Community School District Affairs, Office of Funded Programs, 'Summary Table 1975-76 Programs; March, 1976; Number of Pupils Served by Funding Sources and Category of Bilingual Programs' [N.B.: a duplicated count] (Brooklyn: Board of Education of the City of New York, 1976); telephone call to the Board of Education, May 17, 1976.
3. Division of Community School District Affairs, Office of Funded Programs, 'Grand Total of All 1975-76 Bilingual/ESL Reimbursable Programs; March, 1976' (Brooklyn: Board of Education of the City of New York, 1976); *United States Code Annotated* (St. Paul, Minn., West Publishing Co., 1971, 1976).
4. Interview at the Office of Bilingual Education, May 12, 1976.
5. *Loc. cit.*