

הערט אונדזער קול!
HEAR OUR VOICE!
SONGS OF REVOLUTIONARY JEWISH
SOCIALISM

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Introduction and Rationale

הקדמה און צוועק

“*Sh’ma koleinu*-- Hear our voice.” These words are recited daily during the sixteenth blessing of the *Amidah*, and take on a starring role in the penitentiary liturgy of *Selichot*. In both instances, this fervent petition is directed toward God. Its language is straightforward and direct. The congregation entreats God to show mercy and forgiveness, to receive our prayers with favor. We beseech God not turn us away empty-handed or abandon us. Despite its apparent simplicity, as I recite this prayer I am struck by the grammatical details of its opening phrase.

“*Sh’ma*”--in the preceding sequence of petitions, our requests are frequently posed in the jussive form, a softer, more indirect alternative to the imperative. The first sentence of “*Sh’ma Koleinu*,” however, dispatches a quick sequence of terse imperative verbs-- *sh’ma* (hear), *chus* (have mercy), *racheim* (pardon), *kabeil* (receive). This creates a sense of acceleration in the rhythm of the text, lending the prayer an air of urgency and importance.

“*Koleinu*”-- all of the petitionary blessings of the daily *Amidah* address God communally, speaking in the first-person plural voice. When we parse the second word of the prayer-- “*koleinu*”-- we identify the suffix, “--*einu*”, as the first person plural possessive: our. But the noun-- “*kol*”--is singular: voice. Instead of the more conventional, grammar police-approved construction, “hear our *voices*,” we implore God to “hear our *voice*.” While we each approach God in prayer as an individual, as we pray

side by side we imagine our disparate appeals melding into a single prayer-- reaching the ear of the divine as a single voice.

This concept of multivocality--that a unified whole can comprise a multitude of heterogeneous, often paradoxical ideas--is essential to any discussion of what it means to be Jewish. It lies at the heart of Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, and Torah. Rather than a codified, immutable object, each of these terms represents a lively, unfinished discourse, filled with complexity, controversy, and contradiction. The simple word "Jewish" contains vast multitudes, extending far beyond the most familiar parts, and every remote island and forgotten corner is worth exploring. These less-traveled regions contain invaluable treasures, full of untapped potential to engage Jews who struggle to connect with the subjects that typically receive the most attention in progressive Jewish communities. By reaching beyond this conventional canon for source material that will enrich and provoke our community members, we invite a more vibrant, representative and diverse array of Jewish voices into the conversation.

The story of the Jewish revolutionary socialist movement formed at the turn of the 20th century is one valuable repository of Jewish wisdom, debate, and inspiration that is frequently overlooked by Jewish leaders and educators. As they navigated a volatile, rapidly shifting social and political landscape, participants in the Jewish socialist movement endeavored to formulate a concept of Jewish identity that would speak to their particular circumstances and challenges. In 19th century Russia, the Jewish working class shouldered a dual burden of crushing poverty and national oppression. Inspired by the

Marxist vision of a society free from the exploitation and inequality that characterized their lives, large numbers of Jewish workers were drawn to socialist ideology.

Fervent anti-Jewish sentiment pervaded Russian society, including the emerging Russian revolutionary circles, despite their avowed commitment to universalism. For radical Jewish intellectuals, who were shielded by their middle-class status from the dire living conditions faced by most Jews, and steeped in Russian culture at Russian universities, this marginalization was a stinging reminder of their enduring otherness. Dismissed by their Russian intellectual peers, they instead found common cause with Jewish workers, forging an alliance between intelligentsia and proletariat that became the bedrock of the Jewish socialist movement known as the Bund. The strength of this bond distinguished the Bund from its counterparts in the Russian Social Democratic movement, where ties between the theorists and the proletariat were more tenuous.¹ Together they developed a complex, at times contradictory philosophy that celebrated Jewish particularism while elevating universalist values.

Music played a vital role in expressing Bundist ideology and transmitting it to adherents throughout the Russian empire and across the ocean in America. For the Bund, whose members stemmed from diverse backgrounds and internalized socialist ideology in different ways, song was essential to forging a sense of unity and solidarity. The lifespan of the General Jewish Labor Bund's formal political organization, as well as the heyday of the mass movement it represented was relatively brief. Nevertheless, Jewish

¹ Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism* (New York: Verso, 2017), 32.

revolutionaries produced a voluminous corpus of songs and poems which recount their daily struggles, proclaim their beliefs, celebrate their victories and lament their losses. Though many of these songs have undoubtedly become lost in the twists and turns of history, hundreds have been handed down to us through field recordings and transcriptions. From stereo speakers and the pages of songbooks, these not-so-sweet singers of Israel cry out to us: “*Hert undzer kol!*-- Hear our voice!”

Progressive Jews are now confronting challenges not unlike those faced by our revolutionary ancestors. Like them, we are witnessing dramatic disruptions of longstanding social and political norms, both for good and for ill. We too, watch with alarm and disbelief as government-perpetrated violations of basic human rights become normalized and routine. Our future, like theirs, seems increasingly hazy and uncertain, a situation that inspires ardent hope as well as paralyzing fear. Old definitions of what it means to be a Jew in a non-Jewish society feel antiquated and insufficient to contain our experience, but we are not yet sure what will replace them.

Many of us, destabilized and outraged, find ourselves turning to our clergy and institutional leaders for guidance. We yearn for a response to the turmoil around us informed by Jewish tradition and rooted in progressive values. We long to hear an affirmative vision for a just future and a mobilization strategy to make it a reality. To us, the radical bards of Vilna and Kyiv and New York, preserved in paper and wax and magnetic tape and memory call: “Hear our voice! We get what you’re going through. We’ve been there too, and while we have your attention, we’d like to share some thoughts...”

Like a congregation of petitioners who each entreat, “*sh’ma koleinu...*” the voice of revolutionary Jewish folksong is really a chorus. While the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia functioned as a formal political party, the mass workers’ movement that it fostered was organizationally decentralized and largely beyond the control of its nominal leadership body. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that there have been as many permutations of Bundism as there have been Bundists. What united the coalition of activists and local organizations that operated under the Bund’s auspices was not a central authority or a precisely articulated doctrine, but a shared vision, represented by the movement’s repertory of beloved songs.² These songs comprise a unique chronicle of the multitude of understandings and interpretations this vision inspired, with discord, misjudgments and inconsistencies presented unresolved as in a Talmudic debate. They provide a model of how it is possible to move forward together on an uncertain path.

And, like the insistent opening of the *Sh’ma Koleinu* prayer, the songs of revolutionary Jewish socialism do not so much ask, as demand to be heard. The musical legacy of the Bund and the Jewish labor movement is an invaluable spiritual and educational resource with particular resonance for progressive Jews today. Anyone engaged in the areas of education, social justice organizing or spiritual exploration in the Jewish community will find this music relevant and applicable to their work.

² Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 40.

The purpose of this repertoire guide is to make the songs of the revolutionary Jewish socialist movement more accessible to clergy, educators and community leaders for use in teaching, worship and community programming. To this end, I have compiled a catalog of songs that provide a representative sample of this repertoire, along with historical context, analysis, relevant sources and suggested applications for common Jewish communal activities. Since my research, which is primarily concerned with folk material, has an ethnographic dimension, I feel it is important to reflect briefly on my positionality in regard to this subject. As a politically and religiously progressive Jew of eastern Ashkenazi heritage, this music is a part of my own personal history and culture. In many ways, my position and purpose in assembling this guide is similar to the early twentieth century Jewish folklorists like S. An-sky, Joel Engel, Shmuel Lehman and Moshe Beregovski who collected and preserved most of the material I have worked with. Like them, I cherish this music and I strive to preserve it and promote engagement with it in the progressive Jewish community, where I believe there are many who would likewise appreciate it. My approach to this research is far from a dispassionate academic analysis, which would not suit this project's purpose. However, in my sourcing and analysis of the music in this guide as well as my discussions of its historical context, I have endeavored to cleave to a rigorous academic standard. While, on the one hand, I hope to serve as another link in the chain of this music's folkloric transmission and interpretation, as a researcher I am concerned with reconstructing the links that have come before me, to the extent that primary evidence enables, and presenting my findings with as much detail and transparency as possible for those interested in these aspects of this repertoire.

In my research for this project, I primarily surveyed Yiddish language folksongs published or recorded in the first half of the twentieth century in Russia and the United States. When considering which songs to include in this guide, I looked for examples that are musically distinctive and illustrate significant themes, ideas, and events in the story of revolutionary Jewish socialism. This guide references both in-print and archival materials, which are designated in the song entries by the symbol ©. Please consult the bibliography for full details of where these materials can be found. Many are easily accessible in digital form. I have endeavored to include English translations of songs in cases where a full translation is not available in an easily accessible source.

In the “Background and Context” discussion, I have tried to provide an overview of the historical circumstances and theoretical discussions relevant to an understanding of these songs’ relationship to the history and ideology of radical Jewish socialism. The first section, “The Intelligentsia and the Mass Movement,” differentiates the two major constituencies within the Bund--the radical intellectuals and the workers of the mass movement--and explores how their interaction shaped the movement’s strategic and ideological development. In the second section, “From Economics to Politics,” I outline the progression of the Bund’s agitation campaign, and discuss the connections between its two main areas of emphasis: workplace conditions and opposition to the autocratic Tsarist regime. Section three, titled “Culturally Jewish” examines the Jewish socialist movement’s relationship to traditional Jewish practices and its role in the flourishing of politically progressive secular Yiddish culture at the turn of the twentieth century. “Singing the Struggle,” section four, discusses the role song played in the Jewish radical

socialist movement and the formulation of the concept of Jewish nationalism in the Russian Empire. The final section, “How a Song Becomes a Revolutionary Folksong,” outlines the criteria employed in the compilation of this guide, and summarizes the history of this repertory’s collection and publication. I hope this guide will be a helpful resource that encourages greater engagement with this fun, inspiring, and meaningful repertory in Jewish communal settings.

A Note on Yiddish

אַן אַנמערקונג צור ייִדישער שפּראַך

As Yiddish is the language of almost all of the songs presented in this guide, it is important to reflect on the accessibility challenges this presents for those engaging with this repertory in progressive Jewish settings and how these might be addressed. Most progressive Jews' familiarity with the Yiddish language is limited to the sprinkling of colorful vocabulary that has become incorporated into the American vernacular. Therefore, a block of Yiddish text, even in transliteration, certainly has the potential to be intimidating and off-putting. However, this should not be taken as equivalent to a lack of interest or enthusiasm for Yiddish language and culture. A large portion of the progressive Jewish community descends from Ashkenazi ancestry. As the unanticipated popularity of Joel Grey's recent Yiddish language production of the musical "Fiddler on the Roof" exemplifies, many of them consider Yiddish a part of their heritage, to which they feel a strong emotional connection. Others are attracted to possibilities for the expression of a rich, confident diasporic Jewish identity not defined by religion that secular Yiddish culture represents. No matter what the motivation, in my experience, if interest and curiosity are present, then any obstacles posed by the language itself can be overcome with some thought and planning.

Transliteration is, of course, an invaluable tool, but only if it is clear and consistent. To ensure this, I recommend employing YIVO standard transliteration, the system used in this guide and most recent Yiddish music publications. Unfortunately, older Yiddish publications are not standardized in transliteration or even spelling, and

may reflect regional differences in dialect. Before using a transliteration from a resource that employs a different system for teaching or group singing--For example, Mark Slobin's critical edition of the song collections of Moshe Beregovski titled *Old Jewish Folk Music*, which uses a soviet standard transliteration--I recommend altering them to reflect the YIVO guidelines. Resources explaining YIVO standard transliteration, as well as how to sound out Yiddish words written in the Hebrew alphabet, can be found at <https://www.yivo.org/Yiddish-Alphabet> and <https://www.yiddishwit.com/transliteration.html>.

A number of other strategies can help lower the barriers that unfamiliarity with Yiddish poses. For each song in this guide, I have indicated a readily available resource with a reasonably complete translation, or provided my own translation. Translations should always be provided when teaching or listening to a song. Where a singable translation or English adaptation of a song has been created, I have made an effort to include it in the resources listed in that entry. Using these in conjunction with the Yiddish text can help make the experience of a song more immediate and integrated for non-Yiddish speakers, while still preserving the opportunity to engage with the original Yiddish. As previously mentioned, a number of Yiddish words have become a part of everyday American English, and these will undoubtedly be familiar to many singers and listeners. Pointing these words out when they appear in a song is a great way to foster comfort and connection.

Multimedia, including audio recordings, images, and video, can help create a multi-sensory experience of a song that supports understanding. Archival and field

recordings can be particularly captivating, providing a glimpse of the song in its native context that can feel like a trip back in time. Including images on song sheets or slides when teaching songs is a great way to help singers associate unfamiliar texts with a recognizable context. When teaching a song for group singing, the intimidation factor of Yiddish words is much higher. It is a good idea when introducing a song for the first time to choose one with a repeating refrain or a section of melody sung with nonsense syllables, and teach only that part. Alternatively, if a singable translation is available, you can teach the chorus in Yiddish and sing the verses in English. Finally, if you are feeling creative, you can create your own singable translation or updated English version. Many of the songs featured in this guide were repeatedly adapted to fit particular events and people. Continuing this tradition is an excellent way to help this repertory feel fresh and relevant, and an effective educational strategy to help learners internalize and apply the themes of a song. Be creative, and most importantly, don't be afraid! Yiddish has been spoken in an uncountable variety of dialects by Jewish communities all over the world. It can be your *mame-loshn* (mother tongue) too!

Background and Context

הינטערגרונט און קאָנטעקסט

1. The Intelligentsia and the Mass Movement

The strong connection established between Jewish intellectuals and workers was a defining feature of the Jewish labor movement and a pivotal influence on the course of its development. This was also true of Jewish labor organizing in the United States, whose immigrant pioneers drew on lessons from Russian revolutionary politics.³ However, it is important to draw a clear distinction between the masses of workers who participated in the Jewish socialist movement and the intellectuals who undertook the formation of its ideology and institutions. While the political party known as the General Jewish Labor Bund and the Jewish mass labor movement were highly interrelated, they were not one in the same.

The founders of the Bund came from the ranks of the secular Jewish intelligentsia, a social group born out of the 19th century *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment). The growing influence of the *Haskalah* on Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement coincided with the ascent of Tsar Alexander II, whose program of reform opened new opportunities to Jews with a secular Russian education. As a result, Jews from middle-class families began attending Russian secondary schools and universities in greater numbers, forming a class of Jewish intellectuals steeped in Russian cosmopolitan culture. A segment of this intelligentsia became deeply committed to a version of Marxism gaining popularity

³ Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 203.

among their Russian intellectual peers and resolved to devote themselves to the revolutionary cause.

Though these young Jewish intellectuals bore no particular allegiance to Jewish workers, a number of factors impeded their integration into the Russian Marxist movement. The omnipresent threat of pervasive anti-semitism, which was expressed in the violent and devastating pogroms of 1881, shaped the intellectuals' conception of Jewish identity. Additionally, the early efforts to radicalize the working class relied heavily on the strategy of the *kruzhok*, or circle. The circle was a sort of Marxist book club, in which a select group of students and workers were instructed by an intellectual leader. Despite the intellectuals' internationalist orientation, social norms and language barriers divided national groups, making it nearly impossible to instruct members of different nationalities in the same circle.⁴ Thus, Jewish circle organizers almost exclusively taught Jewish workers.

In the estimation of Ezra Mendelsohn, the circle organizers failed to realize their goal of creating, "an elite that would devote itself to the revolutionary movement." The circles attracted only a small number of workers, and of those, few went on to become committed socialists.⁵ Nevertheless, they served as the initial point of contact between the revolutionary intelligentsia and the Jewish proletariat. Even more importantly, the circles brought the nascent Jewish labor movement and its haphazardly organized strikes to the

⁴ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 17.

⁵ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 39.

attention of the intellectuals for the first time.⁶ The appeal and popularity of these efforts among the Jewish working class inspired the socialists to change tactics and become labor leaders in the growing movement.⁷ It was this decision that ultimately brought together the revolutionary intellectuals and the mass worker's movement.

The alliance between the intelligentsia and the workers' movement relied on both pre-existing and newly created organizational structures. At the foundation were *kassy*, organizations founded by workers of a particular trade to collect funds for strikes. As the labor movement gained momentum, many *kassy* developed into more substantial, trade-union-like institutions, with leadership elected by their members. Of these organizations, Tobias writes, "The *kase* proved to be the magnet that drew the intellectuals and the workers they educated to the masses, the instrument that linked up strike-conscious workers' organizations and Marxist intellectuals anxious to translate theory into action."⁸ However, *kassy* were illegal organizations, and even at their peak only a small minority of workers who took part in the labor movement were members.⁹

In larger cities, local Committees were organized to occupy the position above *kassy* in the loosely defined hierarchy. These committees were made up of committed party members, primarily intellectuals but also some workers. They attempted to supervise the activities of the *kassy*, and maintained connections between the party, the local labor organizations, and labor leaders in other cities.¹⁰ Local Committees answered

⁶ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 19-20.

⁷ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 47-48.

⁸ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 25.

⁹ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 82.

¹⁰ Mendelsohn, 71.

to the group of Vilna intellectuals who had pioneered the labor agitation strategy, who in 1894 referred to their organization as the Jewish Social Democratic Group. In 1897, satisfied that the agitation campaign had recruited a substantial number of Jews throughout the Pale, they founded the General Jewish Labor Bund.¹¹ The decision to constitute their organization as a political party was motivated by their desire to become part of a multinational Russian Social Democratic party.¹² After the founding of the Bund, the group overseeing the confederation of local organizations and constituencies that made up the infrastructure of the labor movement was referred to as the Central Committee.

Another important way that the socialist intellectuals interfaced with the workers who participated in the mass movement was through the creation and distribution of propaganda. Although most of the intellectuals were raised and educated in Russian, Yiddish was the language of 99.6% of Jews residing in the Pale of Settlement.¹³ For this reason, communication between the socialists and the workers they sought to radicalize was a challenge from the outset. As their goal shifted from the education of individual workers to mass agitation, it became clear that they would have to create more agitation resources in Yiddish, and use it as the primary language of their activities, rather than a mix of Yiddish and Russian. Writing in 1893, Vilna intellectual Shmuel Gozhansky

¹¹ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 203.

¹² Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 75.

¹³ Brossat and Klingsberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland*, 32.

advocated that the intellectuals deliver training to worker-leaders partly in Yiddish, since it was Yiddish that they would be speaking with the workers.¹⁴

A short time later, the Vilna Group began printing their own Yiddish brochures. With the founding of the Bund, they established an underground press and a newspaper titled “*Di Arbeter Shtime* (The Workers’ Voice)”. To aid in the production of these materials, they enlisted a group of self-educated workers and Yeshiva drop-outs, who were given the dubious honor of the title, “half-intellectuals.” Not only were these half-intellectuals adept in the Yiddish language, but as they themselves came from the Jewish working class, they also served as intermediaries linking the distant worlds of the intelligentsia and the proletariat.¹⁵ The Yiddish language would ultimately become a major part of the ideology and culture of the Bund.

Though the alliance forged between the intellectual socialists and the workers of the Jewish labor movement proved mutually beneficial, the divergent interests of the two constituencies were a frequent source of tension. The founding of the Bund met with mixed reactions by local Jewish labor organizations. Because of the Bund’s illegal status and the need to keep the identities of its leaders secret, others at first remained completely unaware of its existence.¹⁶ Questions of ideology and long-term strategy were addressed almost exclusively by topmost level of the Bund’s party leadership.¹⁷ One result of this was that the finer points of these ideological debates had little relevance for workers at

¹⁴ David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zw828.7>.

¹⁵ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 33.

¹⁶ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 95.

¹⁷ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 182.

the movement's base, whose primary connection to the labor movement was through its local organizations. Workers adapted the main concepts of Bundist ideology in a myriad of ways, and took their own initiative. The local Committees struggled to direct and coordinate the activities of the *kassy*, and were often blindsided by the spontaneous actions of local workers.¹⁸ Preventing outbreaks of violence against strike breakers proved particularly challenging, despite the disapproval of all levels of the Bund's leadership.¹⁹ Groups of workers allied with the Bund also engaged in acts of terrorism, including assassination attempts. One famous example was Hirsh Lekert's attack on the governor of Vilna, which though unsuccessful elevated Lekert to the status of folk hero throughout the Pale.²⁰ Though the Bund supported workers' right to self-defense, its leaders condemned the use of aggressively violent tactics.²¹

In addition to those who largely ignored the proclamations of the intellectual party leaders, there were workers, particularly *kassy* members, who accused them of elitism and protested the exclusion of workers from the higher levels of party leadership.²² Though this was at least in part due to the need for secrecy, these accusations rang true.²³ According to Jonathan Frankel, "...between 1892 and 1904, the leadership of the movement steadily emancipated itself (above all in the ideological sphere) from control from below," and, "[a]s the movement was increasingly financed from without, that is, by funds sent by sympathizers in the United States, so the immediate recipients of this

¹⁸ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 101.

¹⁹ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 104.

²⁰ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 151.

²¹ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 130.

²² Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 126.

²³ Mendelsohn, 127.

money (the committee abroad and the central committee) inevitably gained in power.”²⁴

Despite efforts to respond to the voices of the worker base, the challenge of balancing democracy with centralization plagued the Bund throughout its existence. S.V. Zubatov, a member of the Russian secret police, exploited these divisions, and in the early years of the twentieth century, successfully diverted a portion of the Jewish working class into a government-sponsored sham breakaway party.

The development of the Jewish labor movement in the United States, though it paralleled that of its counterpart in Russia in many ways, differed in a number of key areas that had important implications for the direction of the movement’s development. While in Russia most Jews worked in artisan trades, immigrants to America found employment primarily in large sweatshops and factories. This included those immigrants who came from the ranks of the intelligentsia, who, unlike the intellectuals in Russia, worked alongside the people they organized and were already accustomed to conversing with them in Yiddish.²⁵ Another significant difference for American Jewish labor was the real potential for immigrants to be absorbed into American society. The intellectuals who led the American Jewish labor movement were not forced to grapple with the meaning of Jewish identity in the same way as those who remained in Russia, and thus the motivation to form specifically Jewish labor organizations remained pragmatic. While workers periodically coalesced around their Jewish identity at times of crisis, Jonathan Frankel

²⁴ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 181.

²⁵ Nora Levin, *Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917: While Messiah Tarried* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 116.

points out that the surge of national sentiment was usually short-lived.²⁶ Unlike in Russia, Nora Levin argues, in the United States, “there was no strong philosophical reason for a national movement of Jewish workers.”²⁷

In spite of these fundamental differences, the American Jewish labor movement remained closely linked to the revolutionary socialists in Russia. Disciples of Jewish socialism frequently moved back and forth between the U.S. and Russia, facilitating a continuous exchange of political strategy and culture--including, of course, poetry and music. As in Russia, the Yiddish press featured prominently in the establishment of the American Jewish labor movement, and contributed to the flowering of secular Yiddish culture on the Lower East Side as in the Pale of Settlement. Though the history of Jewish labor in America diverged radically from its European counterpart, Jonathan Frankel’s description highlights the considerable amount they shared:

One political subculture came into being in Vilna, Minsk, Belostok, the East End of London, and the Lower East Side of New York. Its lingua franca was Yiddish; its economic base, the clothing industry and the sweat shop; its politics, the running dispute and constant interaction between socialist internationalism and Jewish nationalism; its organizational expression, the Yiddish press, the public meeting, the trade union, the ideologically committed party, and (where relevant) the armed self-defense unit.²⁸

²⁶ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 546.

²⁷ Levin, *While Messiah Tarried*, 98.

²⁸ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 3.

2. “From Economics to Politics”

One of the most significant consequences of the Vilna intellectuals’ decision to ally themselves with the mass Jewish workers’ movement was their adoption of the strategy of economic agitation. The ultimate goal of the Marxist intellectuals who would found the Bund remained an empire-wide revolution against the tsarist regime. However, as they learned more about the workers’ day-to-day concerns, they concluded that the most pragmatic way to recruit Jewish workers to the revolutionary cause was to become involved in the burgeoning fight for improved working conditions. According to Henry Tobias, the intellectuals hoped that through economic struggle the Jewish working class would come to identify with the international proletariat over their Jewish employers, and see the Russian state as its enemy.²⁹ Under the slogan, “from economics to politics,” they concentrated their efforts on spreading the revolutionary message to the masses.³⁰

The primary object of the campaign of economic agitation was to limit the workday to twelve hours.³¹ At the time, the Jewish artisan commonly spent sixteen hours a day at work.³² As the Vilna socialists strategized how best to present their case to Jewish workers, Shmuel Gozhansky stumbled upon a valuable tool. He recounts, “Quite by accident, I discovered an old law Catherine II had issued in 1789,³³ the first statute of which states that artisans are to work only twelve hours with a half-hour break for

²⁹ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 49.

³⁰ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 53.

³¹ Mendelsohn, 86.

³² Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 27.

³³ Mendelsohn notes that the law Gozhansky refers to actually dates to 1785. *Class Struggle*, 49.

breakfast and a one and one-half hour break for dinner.”³⁴ Accounts differ as to where precisely Gozhansky heard about this law, but it provided a reassuring legal pretext and an issue that appealed to a large swath of the Jewish working class.³⁵ “From seven to seven!” became a typical rallying cry of the movement.³⁶ Additional concessions sought by the workers included higher wages, prompt and regular compensation, and an end to abusive treatment by employers.³⁷

The mass labor movement’s weapon of choice was the strike. Though strikes were organized by Jewish workers before the Vilna intellectuals embarked on their campaign of economic agitation, they were sporadic and often disorganized.³⁸ With the assistance of the intellectuals, strikes became better coordinated and more effective. At the outset of the mass movement, the majority of strikes cleaved to a legal framework, which required that workers announce their intention to strike two weeks in advance.³⁹ The workers wariness of illegal action did not concern the socialist intellectuals, who correctly predicted that even legal protest would elicit a harsh response from state authorities.⁴⁰ Realizing the state as well as their employer was against them, they believed, workers would inevitably resort to illegal tactics. In the evaluation of Ezra Mendelsohn, this gamble proved generally successful.⁴¹ The local committees of the Bund advised the

³⁴ S. Gozhansky, “Evreiskoe rabochee dvizhenie nachala 90-kh godov,” in *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie sredi evreev*, ed. S. Dimanshtein (Moscow, 1930), 81-93, quoted and translated in Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 49.

³⁵ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 49-50.

³⁶ Mendelsohn, 86.

³⁷ Mendelsohn, 87-88.

³⁸ Mendelsohn, 29.

³⁹ Mendelsohn, 94.

⁴⁰ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 49.

⁴¹ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 51.

striking workers on strategy and tactics, supported them financially, and printed and distributed flyers.⁴² On occasion, the Jewish labor movement employed other methods to advance the workers' cause. In 1901, the Bialystock local committee organized a successful boycott of Janovsky's cigarette factory, forcing him to rehire workers that had been fired without notice.⁴³ While the assistance of the Bund's network of labor organizations proved invaluable, the strike movement was largely led by the workers themselves, particularly in smaller towns, and it remained outside of the Bund's control.⁴⁴

By the turn of the twentieth century, the economic situation of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement was worsening, and owners of small artisan operations were increasingly unable to compete with large factories.⁴⁵ Strikes proved ineffective against employers who were simply incapable of meeting workers' demands, and many of the gains made by workers were soon reversed.⁴⁶ "Faced with increasing difficulties in the strike movement," writes Mendelsohn, "the Bund's leaders had, by the early 1900s, come to stress the primacy of political over economic goals."⁴⁷ At the Fifth Bund Conference in 1902, the Bund's leadership resolved to shift their efforts from the labor movement to focus on cultivating revolutionary organizations dedicated purely to political objectives.⁴⁸ While the labor movement continued, the Bund entered a new phase in its organizing strategy.

⁴² Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 100.

⁴³ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 90-91.

⁴⁴ Mendelsohn, 84.

⁴⁵ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 139.

⁴⁶ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 110.

⁴⁷ Mendelsohn, 136.

⁴⁸ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 156.

Political agitation and organizing brought participants into direct confrontation with the state, and thus secrecy was imperative. Anti-government activities carried a high risk of extended prison sentences or exile to Siberia. As a result, the masses of workers unaffiliated with the Bund or its related organizations who took part in the strike movement largely abstained from participation in political actions, which were planned and attended by a much smaller circle of dedicated party and *kassi* members.⁴⁹ The Bund's political activities were predominantly confined to the educational sphere, and included the production and distribution of illicit propaganda, secret meetings, and demonstrations. Henry Tobias notes that, "the open demonstration, a sign of considerable spirit, size and discipline," became an increasingly frequent occurrence as the movement progressed, and "was a common phenomenon by 1899."⁵⁰ He writes, "For the Bund leaders in Russia, the public demonstration was an intermediary step between the old techniques of propaganda and education and the expected open conflict of the future."⁵¹ Essential to all of these efforts was the *birzhe*, a name given to streets where laborers gathered to find employment. In the *birzhe*, Bundist agitators had easy access to large groups of workers, and the crowds and noise provided excellent cover to those relaying messages and distributing propaganda. Furthermore, in the words of Tobias, "The *birzhe* also served as a form of permanent resistance, 'a permanent demonstration' against the authorities."⁵²

⁴⁹ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 138.

⁵⁰ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 97.

⁵¹ Tobias, 153.

⁵² Tobias, 101.

The peak of the Bund's political operations came with the 1905 Revolution. In the wake of the unsuccessful Russo-Japanese War, popular frustration with the government was mounting. The tension came to a head when a group of peaceful protestors from a nearby factory approached the Winter Palace and were fired upon by the guards, killing more than 100. The massacre, which came to be known as Bloody Sunday, sparked an explosion of strikes and protests throughout the Russian Empire, with unprecedented levels of popular participation. The Bund, seeing the distant goal of empire-wide revolution suddenly become a reality, enthusiastically rode the wave of unrest, seizing every public gathering of Jewish workers as an opportunity for political mobilization.⁵³ They also began to direct the organization of paramilitary groups to defend demonstrators when confrontations became violent. These groups also attempted to defend communities from the vicious onslaught of pogroms that accompanied the general unrest.

The Bund was a powerful force not only in the Jewish community, but in many cases served as the leader and coordinator of all local revolutionary groups.⁵⁴ Jews made up nearly a third of those arrested during the months of the 1905 revolution, a testament to the disproportionate influence of the Jewish socialist movement.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tobias, 307.

⁵⁴ Tobias, 311.

⁵⁵ Barry Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish: 1903-1917* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 24.

3. Culturally Jewish

Bundism and the movement it fostered was not only a movement made up of Jews, but an intrinsically Jewish movement. Unlike their peers in the United States, Jewish socialists in the Pale of Settlement could not sidestep the question of Jewish identity. The persistence of government sponsored antisemitism clearly indicated that the adoption of Russian culture would not achieve equal civil rights for Jews. Thus, the “Jewish question” demanded a particularist solution. Additionally, the masses of Jewish workers drawn to Bundism were not transformed into staunch Marxists; rather, they incorporated socialist ideas into their existing cultural framework, forging a new Jewish working class identity that was a fusion of the traditional and the radical. As the intellectuals refined their ideology, the Yiddish language transformed from a logistical necessity to a signifier of national distinctiveness and vehicle for uniquely Jewish cultural expression.

The late 19th century was a politically and economically unstable period for the Russian empire, and the situation of its Jewish community was uniquely precarious. Jews had long been subject to discriminatory state policies preventing them from owning land and entering certain professions, subjecting them to special taxes and forced military conscription, and restricting their communal institutions and press. These measures contributed to the isolation of Jews from other ethnic groups and left them especially economically vulnerable.⁵⁶ Even middle-class, assimilated Jewish intellectuals found it

⁵⁶ Adam Teller, “Economic Life,” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, August 5, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Economic_Life.

impossible to become integrated into Russian society.⁵⁷ The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 triggered a wave of devastating pogroms and the enactment of the May Laws, which imposed further restrictions on Jewish residence and business. These events obliterated whatever hope remained for Jewish political emancipation at the hand of the tsarist autocracy, convincing many that the Jewish Question demanded a more radical solution.

This was also a time of profound transition in the organization of Jewish society, which stressed traditional institutions and intensified divisions within the community. The restrictions on Jewish residence combined with the effects of industrialization forced Jews to leave rural areas, causing the Jewish population to become increasingly concentrated in the cities of the Pale of Settlement. The labor movement, under the leadership of the secular intellectuals, was perceived as a threat by the rabbinate, who feared that workers would be persuaded to abandon traditional religious beliefs and practices in favor of the doctrine of socialism.⁵⁸ Industrialization widened the gap between classes, breaking down social ties between Jewish employers and workers. Henry Tobias notes that the deterioration of these relationships undermined the strength of traditional institutions, such as the *khevra*, that provided for the needs of Jewish workers.⁵⁹ The Bund's campaign of economic agitation and the strike movement escalated these tensions to a state of class warfare.

⁵⁷ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 29.

⁵⁸ Mendelsohn, 105.

⁵⁹ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 19.

It became clear to socialists organizing within the Jewish community, though they remained committed to their universalist vision, that they would need to address the idiosyncratic struggles of Russian Jewry. The fact that Jews constituted a clearly defined ethnic group within the Russian empire yet lacked any clearly defined territory complicated the matter significantly. Nationalism--the belief that the emancipation and flourishing of the Jewish community was a necessary precondition for a socialist world order--was the most popular response among the various currents of Jewish socialism. However, opinions were deeply divided as to what form a Jewish nationalist agenda should take. Zionists, believing Jewish liberation within the Russian empire was a lost cause, argued that the only solution was acquiring a territory that would serve as a homeland for the Jewish nation. Though the Bund embraced the cause of Jewish nationalism, they repudiated the necessity of an autonomous territory. They felt that the establishment of a Jewish territory would be a tacit endorsement of the anti-Semitic accusation that Jews were foreigners to that land where they had long dwelt.⁶⁰ The philosophy espoused by the Bund, that Jews should fight for equal status in the states where they already resided, came to be known as "*doykayt*"--roughly, "here-ness".

From the outset, the Vilna group declared itself dedicated to the struggle for Jewish civil rights, led by the Jewish working class.⁶¹ Though this principle was generally accepted by the political leadership of the Bund, there was still significant controversy around how it should be expressed in the party's formal strategy and

⁶⁰ Tobias, 253.

⁶¹ Tobias, 54.

ideology. The precise articulation of the Bund's stance on the "national question" was the subject of agonizing debate at party conferences.⁶² Positions advocated by the various contingencies ranged from demanding Jewish national autonomy within the Russian state to staunch adherence to the Marxist notion that the emancipation of Jews was only a temporary necessity on the way to assimilation into the international proletariat.⁶³ The tension between proponents of Jewish nationalism and those of Marxist internationalism was never resolved, and as a result, explains Jonathan Frankel, "In practice...the Bund steered a middle and often erratic course between these two poles."⁶⁴ The compromise position of national-cultural autonomy, which demanded state recognition of Yiddish as an official language and the right to administer an independent system of Yiddish-speaking schools, was officially adopted at the sixth party conference in 1905, and from that point on the Bund threw its unequivocal support behind the development of Yiddish cultural institutions.⁶⁵

As I have already emphasized, the intellectual leadership of the Bund mainly regarded Yiddish as an expedient in their campaign of agitation prior to 1905. David Fishman convincingly dispels the claim, common in Bundist mythology, that the Bund "created a modern Yiddish culture," arguing that the Bund only took part in the surge of interest in Yiddish culture already taking place.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, he asserts that Bundist propaganda played an undeniable role in promoting Yiddish literacy among Jewish

⁶² Tobias, 161.

⁶³ Tobias, 167.

⁶⁴ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 184.

⁶⁵ Fishman, *Modern Yiddish Culture*, 57.

⁶⁶ Fishman, 48.

workers, expanding the demand for Yiddish literature, and “creating a modern Yiddish lexicon.”⁶⁷ Barry Trachtenberg enthusiastically credits the socialist intellectuals as, “the first generation to take seriously the possibility that Yiddish could serve as a means through which to communicate the entire range of human thought,” asserting that, “in so doing, they helped to lay the intellectual and institutional foundations for a secular Jewish culture based on their spoken language.”⁶⁸ A number of Yiddish writers and poets who allied or sympathized with the Bund, such as S. An-sky, Avrom Reyzen and Y. L. Peretz, composed works with socialist themes that targeted a working class audience. The Bund organized workers’ lending libraries and literary evenings, where such works were distributed and discussed among workers.⁶⁹

With the Bund’s formal adoption of the agenda of national-cultural autonomy, the Yiddish language took on a central role in Bundist ideology, becoming virtually synonymous with Jewish national culture. Hebrew was dismissed as the language of the Zionist and bourgeois elite. In 1905, as a concession to the revolutionaries, the government ban on the Yiddish theater and press was lifted, leading to an explosion of Yiddish creativity that propelled the development Yiddish national culture into a ubiquitous part of Russian Jewish life.⁷⁰ The Bund, its political ambitions stalled for the moment, devoted considerable energy to the creation and support of Yiddish cultural institutions, including journals and newspapers, a secular Yiddish school system, the Jewish Literary Society, the Society for Jewish Folk Music in Saint Petersburg. In

⁶⁷ Fishman, 50.

⁶⁸ Trachtenberg, *Revolutionary Roots*, 3-4.

⁶⁹ Fishman, *Modern Yiddish Culture* 51.

⁷⁰ Trachtenberg, 43.

interwar Poland, the Bund was instrumental to Jewish cultural life, founding the Central Yiddish School Organization, the youth movement *Tsukunft*, the Jewish sports organization *Morgenshtern* and the Medem Sanatorium. Through the promotion of Yiddish cultural life, Bundism evolved into a complete Jewish subculture for its adherents. “At its best,” sums up Jonathan Frankel, “the Bund was considered something of an extended family.”⁷¹

Despite the importance of secular Yiddish culture to the Bund and the Jewish labor movement, it is not accurate to characterize Bundism as a total break with Jewish religion and tradition. When examining the culture of the Jewish socialist movement, it is vital to be mindful of the distinction between the intelligentsia and the rank and file Jewish workers outlined in the first section of this discussion. While the Russified intellectuals had long ago abandoned traditional religious practice and rejected the authority of the rabbinate, they generally did not see assimilation as a precondition for Jewish workers’ participation in the socialist movement.⁷² Despite the apparent contradictions, significant number of workers identified with the cause of Jewish labor while retaining their religious beliefs and commitments. In many other cases, Bundist workers adopted an idiosyncratic patchwork of religious custom and socialist doctrine. “[J]ust as the *khevrah* had played a role in the evolution of the *kase*,” writes Henry Tobias, “so the old religious and social traditions found new forms of expression in the

⁷¹ Jonathan Frankel, “The Bundists in America and the ‘Zionist Problem’.” In *Crisis, Revolution and Russian Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 217.

⁷² Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 18.

revolutionary movement, forms that came as much from the masses as from the intellectuals.”⁷³

Contemporary accounts contain many colorful illustrations of this hybrid religious-socialist outlook. In one case, described by Ezra Mendelsohn, “after hearing an activist hold forth on the glories of the socialist order to come, a bristle worker asked: ‘Tell me “reb” Preacher, what will happen if the Messiah comes before we achieve freedom and introduce socialism?’”⁷⁴ Another group of workers, “swore on a Torah scroll during a strike that they would not serve as strikebreakers.”⁷⁵ Jonathan Frankel ascribes some of socialism’s appeal among Jewish workers to the strong current of messianism in Jewish religion.⁷⁶ Traditional stories, symbols, rituals, and holidays served as important touchstones, frequently referenced in Bundist literature and propaganda as well as revolutionary folksongs. “Song,” writes Tobias, “an ancient part of Jewish religious ritual, became an important ceremonial rite in the mass movement as well.”⁷⁷ While I will elaborate further on this point shortly, one anecdote from an 1897 tanners’ strike in Krynki paints a particularly vivid picture of a creative hybrid religious-socialist ritual involving a revolutionary folksong: “‘The weather was bad, it began to rain; everyone stood in the rain for more than two hours. All swore by a pair of phylacteries that they would stand firm and support those workers who had been fired, and everyone sang the

⁷³ Tobias, 43.

⁷⁴ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 29.

⁷⁵ Mendelsohn, 109.

⁷⁶ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 2.

⁷⁷ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 44.

“Oath”, the official hymn of the Bund.’ Thus a solemn religious ceremony was followed by the singing of a revolutionary song.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 109-110.

4. Singing the Struggle

As in the case of the Bund's relationship to traditional Jewish culture, the bifurcation between intellectuals and workers is key when examining the role of music in the Jewish socialist movement. Like Yiddish literature, the development of modern Jewish national music was a central preoccupation of the radical Jewish intelligentsia, of whom many were members and associates of the Bund. To combat the belief--held widely by Jewish and Russian academics alike--that Jews had no national folk music, the Jewish nationalist intelligentsia mustered an effort to record, collect, document and publish Jewish folk songs, as well as compose new works inspired by folk tradition. At the same time, the worker base of the Jewish labor movement created and repurposed a multitude of Yiddish songs to accompany the workday, political gatherings, strikes, and demonstrations. Thus, like its ideology and Jewish identity, the Bund's musical culture developed simultaneously from the top down and the bottom up.

The paradoxical position of Jews in Russian musical culture at the turn of the twentieth century has been often noted. While Jewish musicians were notably overrepresented among the ranks of famous virtuoso performers, works of Jewish music were conspicuously absent from the Russian musical scene.⁷⁹ Propelled by the rising influence of Jewish nationalism, the legion of Jewish conservatory students set to the task of filling this hole.⁸⁰ Through the creation of modern Jewish art music, they sought to prove the

⁷⁹ James B. Loeffler, *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 6.

⁸⁰ Loeffler, *Most Musical Nation*, 6.

existence of a distinct Jewish national culture as rich and vibrant as that of any other national minority in Russian Empire.

The endeavor to find a musical expression of Russian-Jewish identity united intellectuals from across the political spectrum. This new spirit of cooperation was evidenced by the post-1905 flowering of Jewish cultural societies.⁸¹ Prominent figures in this enterprise with ties to Jewish socialism included writers S. An-sky and Y. L. Peretz, musician Zisman Kiselgof, and Bundist leader Israel S. Okun, who served as secretary of both the Society for Jewish Folk Music and the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society. Though they hailed from diverse camps, these intellectuals shared the conviction that music, previously neglected by advocates of Jewish nationalism, was essential to the project of Jewish cultural renewal. “In order to raise our children in the Jewish national spirit, we must give them folktales, songs, in short, that which forms the root of children's education in other peoples,” An-sky argued before a conference of the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society.⁸² James Loeffler’s characterization of the intelligentsia’s quest for Jewish national music evokes striking parallels with the Bund’s conception of national-cultural autonomy:

In contrast to the multitudes of German Jews who turned to music as a path toward universalism and away from parochial identities, these Russian Jewish musicians paradoxically sought to reach the universal through the particular, to become European through asserting and emphasizing their Jewishness within the specific context of the Russian Empire. ⁸³

⁸¹ Loeffler, 109.

⁸² Loeffler, 84.

⁸³ Loeffler, 12.

Fieldwork and ethnography were essential components of the effort to elevate and modernize national Jewish music. The European nationalist passion for folklore collection reached Russia in the early 19th century.⁸⁴ Inspired by this trend, Jewish musical nationalists pressed for ethnographic expeditions into the rural Jewish communities of the Pale of Settlement. Jewish music, both sacred and secular, was transmitted orally and notated examples were almost non-existent.⁸⁵ For them, the *shtetl* represented the only source of truly “authentic” Jewish folk songs--though what exactly made these songs authentic was the subject of heated debate.⁸⁶ For Joel Engel, who believed that “authentically” Jewish art music could only be created through the adaptation of folk melodies, the “authenticity” of the folk songs collected by ethnographers was of particular concern. He feared that sources of “true” Jewish folk song were in danger of corruption by an infusion of new popular Yiddish songs, like those by self-taught popular composer Mark Warshavsky.⁸⁷

In 1912, sponsored by the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society, Engel, An-sky and Kiselgof led a landmark expedition to collect examples of Jewish folk music in the Pale of Settlement, obtaining hundreds of recordings and transcriptions.⁸⁸ To the Russified intellectuals, the *shtetl* was an exotic locale, and in turn, their huge phonograph and broken Yiddish inspired much attention and confusion among the locals.⁸⁹ Echoing the founders of the Bund, Engel remarked dolefully upon leaving the expedition on his

⁸⁴ Abigail Wood, *And We're All Brothers* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 50.

⁸⁵ Loeffler, *Most Musical Nation*, 9.

⁸⁶ Loeffler, 83.

⁸⁷ Loeffler, 76.

⁸⁸ Loeffler, 91.

⁸⁹ Loeffler, 87.

sense of alienation both from the shtetl he was leaving and the Russian academy to which he was returning.⁹⁰ Engel and An-sky's expedition was far from the only effort to document and preserve Jewish folk music in the Pale of Settlement, and their obsession with "authenticity" did not escape the criticism of other Jewish folklorists. Moshe Beregovski, writing with a distinct Marxist orientation, charged their camp with ignoring the historical context of the songs they collected and romanticizing the oppression of the communities they surveyed.⁹¹ With particular relevance to the present discussion, Beregovski roundly condemned An-sky's exclusion of workers' and revolutionary songs from his ethnographic collections and denounced his claim that such songs represented a break from the "authentic" Jewish folk tradition.⁹²

Though academic debates over the authenticity of their songs made no difference whatsoever to the workers who sang them, the Jewish intelligentsia's increased engagement with national music had an important impact on the culture of Jewish political movements. Published collections of folk songs and choruses, music classes and "ethnographic" concerts--which presented new Jewish art music alongside folk tunes--were popular among the urban Jewish middle class and workers.⁹³ Music became a core element of the early 20th century Jewish cultural revival in Russia, and a central part of urban Jewish life.

⁹⁰ Loeffler, 92.

⁹¹ Moshe Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music: the Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*. Ed. Mark Slobin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 20.

⁹² Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 27-28.

⁹³ Loeffler, 57.

Like the brochures and leaflets printed by the illegal press, song was an important tool for transmitting the Bund's message and ideology. Though the Bund's cultural campaign was slower to develop than its program of economic agitation, Ezra Mendelsohn points out the comparatively enduring nature of its impact on the masses of workers: "A tailor might lose his twelve-hour day; he could not be so easily robbed, however, of what he learned at the 'kassa' library or at the 'Saturday reading'."⁹⁴ In his memoir, Bundist agitator A. Litvak (the pseudonym of Khayim Yankl Helfand) writes, "in the early years of the movement, a song had a stronger impact than a speech or a brochure (my translation)."⁹⁵

As Jewish nationalist groups became increasingly aware of the power of folk songs as propaganda, they became increasingly ubiquitous at political gatherings.⁹⁶ Books of folk songs collected by ethnographers were enthusiastically incorporated into the curricula of the Yiddish schools overseen by the socialists. A. Litvak recounts an anecdote that took place while organizing a group of factory workers in Pinsk. A colleague gave him a stack of copies of two song texts--"Mayn Tsavoe," by David Edelshtadt and "Tsum Arbeter Fraynt" by Morris Winchevsky--to take with him to the factory workers. He recalls that the song sheets were "simply torn from my hand (my translation)," by the workers, who hand copied them over and over and had soon all learned them by heart.⁹⁷ In the introduction to his collection of Jewish workers' and revolutionary songs, Moshe Beregovski emphasizes the significance these songs held for

⁹⁴ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 125.

⁹⁵ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 233.

⁹⁶ Loeffler, *Most Musical Nation*, 57.

⁹⁷ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 233.

Jewish workers. “For us,” he writes (though the nature and extent of his involvement in Jewish socialism is unclear), “these songs sound like important, cherished documents of the heroic struggle, of strikes, demonstrations, exile, prison, difficult defeats, and new victories, and for us they serve as a resounding call to the battle and to new victories.”⁹⁸

Musical settings of the poetry of Morris Winchevsky, Dovid Edelshtadt, Morris Rosenfeld and Avrom Reyzen were among the most popular songs of the labor movement.⁹⁹ Set to music by unknown composers, they represent a unique category of folk-literary hybrid. Often labeled the “sweatshop poets,” each of these writers, at different times, found their way to the United States. Though much of their poetry was written and popularized in America, these songs arrived in the Pale of Settlement through the culture and propaganda efforts of the Bund, forming an important part of the Jewish socialist subculture that united the Pale and the Lower East Side.¹⁰⁰ Many songs also originated among the workers of the mass movement. According to A. Litvak, most of these songs spread only locally, within a particular town or *shtetl*, though some achieved wide dispersion.¹⁰¹

Song was employed by the workers and revolutionaries of the Jewish socialist movement in a variety of contexts. Beregovski asserts that folk songs were often sung to accompany the interminable, onerous work of Jewish artisans, “as a means of enlivening, brightening up, and reviving attention.”¹⁰² Noting that traditional Jewish folk songs are

⁹⁸ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 36.

⁹⁹ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 231.

¹⁰⁰ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 125.

¹⁰¹ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 233-234.

¹⁰² Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 33.

monophonic and usually sung by a single singer, he argues that this is in part due to the individual nature of artisan work.¹⁰³ Ruth Rubin also describes singing at work as a widespread practice.¹⁰⁴ Workers sang lustily during strikes and demonstrations. A. Litvak recounts a memory of a group of workers, victorious after the first strike in their small town near Dvinsk, running through the streets and singing of their triumph with an improvised two-line song to the tune of a Hassidic *nigun*.¹⁰⁵

Revolutionary folk songs were also used to lend a sense of ceremony to political gatherings. For example, a description of the fifth anniversary celebration of the Bialystock woodworkers' *kase* reports:

A member opened the celebration with a speech in which he explained the importance of the holiday, and briefly noted the progress that had been made by the carpenters' craft during the last five years. Another person spoke about the woodworkers' craft, and praised our brothers who have fallen in the struggle. Everyone had a good time until late at night and, singing revolutionary songs, everyone was inspired with the thought of taking a firm stand for our ideas.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, a guest at an evening fundraiser for the workers' library in Shirvinty, a town near Vilna, recalls, "Revolutionary songs were sung and many toasts offered...The celebration began at 12:00 noon and lasted until late in the evening. It ended with the singing of the 'Oath'."¹⁰⁷

Illegal gatherings and secret meetings were occasions for a more solemn mode of singing.

The heightened emotions engendered by these dangerous situations lent these songs a

¹⁰³ Beregovski, 32-33.

¹⁰⁴ Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 280-281.

¹⁰⁵ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 229.

¹⁰⁶ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 66-67.

¹⁰⁷ Mendelsohn, 122.

particular power.¹⁰⁸ Bundist Aaron Cohn describes the profound impact of song that he experienced at one of these forest meetings:

But before I had time to consider the whole situation, a girl with short-cropped hair and a black band around her beautiful pure white neck suddenly appeared, shouting, “Brother weavers of Lodz, now is the time for you to stop allowing such terrible exploitation. We must fight against all oppressors and exploiters, and also against the Russian Tsar, who lies like a leech on our bodies and sucks our blood.” The words, “overthrow the Tsar,” made me shudder... Before I had time to recover, a blood-red flag unfurled with the inscription, “Long live the Jewish Labor Bund of Lithuania, Poland and Russia.” People sang, and their song drove away the fear in me. Everyone left for home with shining faces.

At times, song even took on the weight of sacred ritual. This was particularly true of *Di Shvue* (The Oath), as is demonstrated by the anecdote, recounted earlier in this discussion, of the striking workers who sealed their promise to hold by singing *Di Shvue* over a pair of *t’fillin*. The title *Di Shvue* actually refers to two important revolutionary songs. The first, often called *Di Alte Shvue* (the old oath) was composed in 1896 by a group of the so-called “half intellectuals.”¹⁰⁹ This is the song referred to in the story of the tanners’ strike, and is considered by some to be the “first modern Jewish revolutionary hymn.”¹¹⁰ The better-known *Shvue* that became the official anthem of the Bund was written by S. An-sky, the intrepid ethnographer who later disavowed his revolutionary commitments. Of this *Shvue*, Henry Tobais writes:

The old revolutionary circles had their songs of course; but now the singing of “The Oath” was a ceremonial act, more akin to the Jewish religious ritual. The act itself was an important symbol of internal discipline in a society largely lacking external enforcement. To the workers, singing the hymn was a solemn affair, to be performed with joined hands and even at times with the sacred scroll of the law or

¹⁰⁸ Fishman, *Modern Yiddish Culture* 51.

¹⁰⁹ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 44.

¹¹⁰ Tobias, 44.

the prayer shawl. For them, a simple description of class struggle did not suffice as a declaration of faith.¹¹¹

The ritual power of *Di Shvue* was such that Bundist Pati Kremer, upon being brought to be executed in the fields of Ponar reportedly said, “Let us all embrace and sing *Di Shvue* and death will not be so terrible.”¹¹²

¹¹¹ Tobias, 44-45.

¹¹² Irena Klepfisz and Daniel Soyer, eds., *The Stars Bear Witness: The Jewish Labor Bund 1897-2017* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research), 26, https://yivo.org/cimages/bund_120_post-pub_final.pdf.

5. How a Song Becomes a Revolutionary Jewish Folk Song

This guide would not be complete without an explanation of the criteria used to select its content. There are three qualifiers employed by this guide to address: Jewish, revolutionary and folk. Endless ink and hours of ethnomusicology seminars have been spent in an attempt to formulate a definition of Jewish music. Is any music written or embraced by Jews Jewish, or is there some inherent musical quality that makes it Jewish? What makes this question particularly thorny is that Ashkenazi music is the product of a centuries long process of cultural exchange with a multitude of communities. Thus, efforts to tease out precisely which musical elements are “authentically Jewish” are an exercise in futility. Folklorists contemporary with the Bund frequently referred to a mystical, distinctive Jewish scale, which their more perceptive colleagues like Engel and Beregovski easily refuted by pointing out that the so-called Jewish scale is a ubiquitous feature of Eastern European folk music.¹¹³ And even within the bounds of what is broadly recognized as Ashkenazi Jewish music, there are dozens of genres, ranging from the chant of the synagogue to the fight songs of the Bund. Like the question of what makes a person a Jew, it is impossible to isolate a single defining feature that encompasses this diverse repertory.

One characteristic used in this guide to identify Jewish music is language. As Yiddish was the vernacular of Ashkenazy Jews, a Yiddish language text is a reliable indicator that a song was sung by Jews. Therefore, for the purposes of this guide, I follow

¹¹³ Loeffler, 68.

the lead of Sholem Aleichem and consider Yiddish sufficient evidence of a song's "Jewishness."

While not all of the songs in this guide can be classified as folksongs, the overwhelming majority fit--to some extent--in this category. Here it is important to note that not all songs sung in Yiddish are folksongs, though the manner in which Yiddish songs have been transmitted and published often gives this impression. Abigail Wood notes that the concept of a musical genre defined by the Yiddish language is itself a product of 19th-20th century Europe--the precise time period and location where the music of this guide originates--as part of the effort to demonstrate the existence of a national Jewish folksong tradition described in the previous section.¹¹⁴ This idea has been reinforced by the post-Holocaust tendency to frame all Yiddish song as an artifact of a distant, lost culture, and is still profoundly influential today.¹¹⁵

Though the nationalist ethnographers of the early 19th century tended to regard the folk songs they collected as a single, amorphous genre, the question of what constituted authentic Jewish folk music was a point of heated controversy. In his essay, "On the Study of the History of the Russian Jews and the Creation of a Russian-Jewish Historical Society," renowned Jewish historian Simon Dubnow wrote,

I have not named Jewish folk songs in the list of sources, for the simple reason that we practically have none, at least, none with historical significance. The Jews never had folk lyrics in the usual sense of these words, for example, as in Ukrainian songs. The Jew never sang outside the synagogue. His songs, anguished or joyous, were always prayers.

¹¹⁴ Wood, *All Brothers*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Wood, 57.

As we have seen, the musical nationalists, led by Engel and An-sky rushed to dispel this claim, collecting and promoting examples of “authentic” Jewish folksongs. However, Engel--who had previously defined Jewish folk music as what was recognized as authentic by the Jewish people-- soon found himself in the role of musical gatekeeper in an altercation with Sholem Aleichem over the songbook of Mark Warshavsky. Engel objected to the Warshavsky’s use of the term “folksong” in the title of his book, calling it a “deliberate forgery.”¹¹⁶ Sholem Aleichem retorted that these popular Yiddish songs, embraced by the Jewish people as their own, were Jewish folksongs according to Engel’s own definition.¹¹⁷

As I mentioned above, many of the most popular songs among the workers of the Jewish labor movement have texts by known authors--most notably, perhaps, S. An-sky’s *Di Shvue*. These songs were often set to melodies by unknown composers and underwent the folk process as they were transmitted orally among the workers, producing many variations of both the melody and the original text.¹¹⁸ The folklorization of these literary works is illustrated colorfully in an anecdote recounted by Izaly Zemtovsky in an essay on S. An-sky: “An-sky’s ‘room-mate’ in a prison cell, a young Jewish worker, a Bundist, sang ‘*Di shvue*’ with great feeling but scandalously garbled its text. When An-sky tried to correct his mistakes, the lad was exasperated by his approach: “Whatever next! The

¹¹⁶ Loeffler, *Most Musical Nation*, 76.

¹¹⁷ Loeffler, 77-78.

¹¹⁸ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 37.

bourgeois will teach me how to sing OUR songs!”¹¹⁹ This episode illustrates that songs are inured to the process of folklorization even within in the lifetime and locale of a known creator. Therefore, songs that appear in the collections of ethnographers like Beregovski and Shmuel Lehman are considered in this guide to be encompassed by the term folk songs, even in cases where an author or composer has been identified.

Finally, there is the matter of what songs fall under the heading of “revolutionary Jewish socialism.” Here, the posthumously published first volume of Moshe Beregovski’s planned anthology of folk song transcriptions, whose subject is workers’ songs provides a key model. In his introduction, Beregovski writes, “Jewish workers’ and revolutionary folk songs can be divided into two categories: (1) songs created before the arising of an organized workers’ movement and (2) songs created under the immediate impact of an organized revolutionary workers' movement and reflecting its various stages.”¹²⁰ The second group he dates roughly to the 1890’s, while he speculates that the first group originates from the first half of the century and earlier. He specifies that, “songs of the first group reflect the preproletarian psychology of Jewish workers, the psychology of the hired artisan or small craftsman, not united with his comrades for a common struggle,” while, “songs of the second group--revolutionary songs--reflect class psychology, recognizing its possibilities, optimism, and belief that the future belongs to it.”¹²¹ Thus, in

¹¹⁹ Izaly Zemtovsky, “The Musical Strands of An-sky’s Texts and Contexts.” In *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, eds. Gabriella Safran and Steven J. Zipperstein (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 218.

¹²⁰ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 31.

¹²¹ Beregovski, 31.

the selection of his songs Beregovski relies mainly on the thematic content of the text and approximate historical dating. Within these criteria, he specifies four subcategories: “lyric, balladlike, satiric, and hymnlike;” among these are songs generally performed solo and chorally.¹²² In these designations, he takes into account qualities of the music as well as the text.

Following Beregovski’s lead, I relied primarily on the thematic content of the text to determine which songs fell within the scope of this guide. I also considered indications of a song’s approximate date--such as specific terminology, musical characteristics, publication history or references to historical events--and whether these point to the period when the Jewish socialist movement was most active--approximately 1880 to 1930. I have also used song texts as the primary basis for my guide’s organization. My reasoning was that a content-based system would be more practical for the purpose of identifying songs that are relevant to lessons, events, actions and worship.

The categories employed in this guide are organized around major themes in the history of the Jewish socialist movement that have current relevance to Jewish communities. They are not intended to be precise or definitive, and many songs in the guide could fit well in more than one category. The first category, “Poverty and Labor,” consists of songs that illustrate the bleak working and living conditions faced by Jewish workers at the turn of the century. The second, “Socialist Ideology,” comprises songs that express the goals of the Jewish socialist movement and the tenets of its political beliefs. In the third category, “Jewish Identity,” are songs that employ references to traditional

¹²² Beregovski, 32.

Jewish texts, customs and practices, as well as those that deal with rivalries and divisions in the Jewish community. Songs in the fourth category, “Women and Youth,” relate specifically to the experience of women and children who participated in the Jewish socialist movement, whose voices are less often heard in traditional histories. Sections five and six, “Economic Agitation” and “Confrontation and Detention” represent the two major branches of the General Jewish Bund’s activities: the strike movement and the anti-government campaign, respectively. The final category, “Memory and Legacy,” contains songs that illustrate the enduring impact of the Bund and its representation in the arts.

6. Back to the Source

In assembling this catalogue of songs, I consulted recent critical print music anthologies as well as archival materials, including out of print songbooks and sound recordings. I am particularly indebted to the archivists at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research for assisting me in accessing primary sources. Here, I will outline the most significant sources of songs that I consulted for this project.

The first group of sources originate from the Jewish folklore and ethnography movement of the early twentieth century, described earlier in this introduction. One of the earliest collections of Jewish folk songs from oral sources was compiled by Yehuda Leib Cahan in Poland during the 1890's. Cahan includes a number of worker's songs in his four collections, which were posthumously edited by Max Weinreich and published by YIVO.¹²³ Cahan, however, learned the songs he collected by ear, and then later sang them to Cantor Henry Rusotto, who notated them.¹²⁴ The next major source is the first volume of Beregovski's *Jewish Folk Music*, edited by Mark Slobin and posthumously published. It contains songs collected by Beregovski in Ukraine between 1928 and 1931, as well as a number of examples recorded in the expedition led by Engel and An-sky (1912-14).¹²⁵ In the words of Mark Slobin, Beregovski's anthologies "represent our chief corpus of accurately notated songs in Yiddish from oral tradition; there is not even a close runner-

¹²³ Chana Mlotek, "Cahan, Yehudah Leib," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Cahan_Yehudah_Leib.

¹²⁴ Mark Slobin, introduction to *Old Jewish Folk Music*, by Moshe Beregovski, trans. and ed. Mark Slobin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 2.

¹²⁵ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 40-41.

up.”¹²⁶ Beregovski was uniquely ahead of his time, in that he carefully annotated the sources of his transcriptions and included details of performance practice.¹²⁷

Another major contemporary source of revolutionary folk songs is the collection *Arbeyt un Frayhayt*, who in 1921 published what Beregovski refers to as “the first anthology of Jewish workers’ and revolutionary songs of the 1905 period.”¹²⁸ Lehman was a lifelong member of the Bund, and collected songs throughout rural Poland.¹²⁹ A. Litvak credits Lehman with preserving many locally known songs created by members of the mass movement.¹³⁰ Challenging Beregovski’s claim about Lehman’s anthology, however, is the songbook *Di Fraye Muze*, compiled by Yakov Glatshiteyn (cousin of the well-known writer of the same name) and published in Warsaw in 1918. Glatshiteyn was the son of prominent Lublin cantor Rabbi Moyshel Glatshiteyn, and worked in the Tsisho schools run by the Bund in Poland.¹³¹ The title page describes these songs as “collected in workers’ circles.”

A more recent source of Jewish labor songs is Yiddish folklorist Ruth Rubin. Rubin was the author of the only general book-length work on Yiddish folk song, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folk Song*, which is more of a compelling work of story-telling than an ethnomusicological study. Beginning in 1947, She conducted

¹²⁶ Slobin, intro to *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 2.

¹²⁷ Slobin, intro to *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 2.

¹²⁸ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 27.

¹²⁹ Itzik Gottesman, “Lehman, Shmuel,” YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lehman_Shmuel.

¹³⁰ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 233.

¹³¹ Joshua Fogel, “Yankev Glatshiteyn (Jacob Glatstein),” *Yiddish Leksikon* (blog), August 28, 2015, <http://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2015/08/yankev-glatshiteyn-jakob-glatstein.html>.

fieldwork among Jewish immigrants and refugees in New York, recording around two thousand songs on tape.¹³² Though Rubin's fieldwork is an invaluable resource, she did not annotate her recordings with the biographical details of the singer or the context of the song.¹³³ Workers' and revolutionary songs belong to a category she referred to in her work as "Songs of Social Significance." A collection of transcriptions of her tapes, titled *Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive*, edited by Chana Mlotek and Mark Slobin, was published in 2007.

Modern critical anthologies that are good sources of Jewish socialist songs include the series edited by Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, and published by the Workmen's' Circle: *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, *Mir Trogn a Gezang*, and *Songs of Generations: New Pearls of Yiddish Song*. Each song is printed in lead sheet format, and includes English transliteration and translation as well as historical notes and sources. The other major anthology that includes examples of this repertory currently in print and readily available is the *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs* published by Hebrew University, particularly volumes III and IV. These volumes include notated melodies, English transliteration, and English and Hebrew translations for each song, though many of the English translations are incomplete or paraphrases.

Both of these anthology series exemplify a "essentializing" phenomenon identified by Abigail Wood in her study of Yiddish songbooks. They frame the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel as the endpoint of Yiddish song as a living

¹³² Chana Mlotek and Mark Slobin, introduction to *Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), xi.

¹³³ Mlotek and Slobin, intro to *Ruth Rubin Archive*, xiii.

tradition, merging songs of diverse genres into a representation of a timeless past. “In framing their collections of Yiddish songs within personal or family narratives,” she writes, “the compilers of all these song collections privilege memory over history as a paradigm for the communication of Yiddish song to a contemporary audience. Further, in assimilating a large number of songs into a single historical frame they write against the diversity of histories represented by the songs in their respective collections.”¹³⁴ This tendency is important to keep in mind for those of us who wish to promote Yiddish cultural creativity, as the closing of the canon of Yiddish songs with the Holocaust gives the impression that these songs are precious artifacts, not to be engaged with, played with, and made our own. In addition, the homogenizing tendency of these anthologies paves over difference, silencing voices that present a view that challenges the historical narrative they are trying to establish. By dissociating songs from the particular groups who sang them, this approach weakens their ability to represent the colorful diversity of the Jewish community.

¹³⁴ Wood, *All Brothers*, 77.

1. Poverty and Labor

דלות און אַרבעט

The difficult economic situation of Jews in the Russian empire was exacerbated in the late 19th and early 20th century by the effects of industrialization and the emancipation of the serfs. Deprived of many traditional sources of employment, masses of Jews found work in the urban sweatshops of the Pale of Settlement. Low wages, irregular payment and unemployment left many in dire poverty, struggling daily just to afford food and shelter. Sweatshop work was long, repetitive, and often exposed workers to dangerous conditions. Employers exercised virtually unlimited power over their employees, resulting in frequent episodes of abuse.

For the great numbers of Jews who fled the Pale of Settlement for the shores of the United States, employment prospects were little better. Most were forced to labor in the Jewish-owned sweatshops springing up in American cities, particularly the Lower East Side of New York City. Impoverished by the journey and strangers to American culture, many Jewish immigrants who had been members of the middle class in Russia found themselves working alongside their poor and working-class compatriots.

In the United States today, the gap in income and wealth between the richest and poorest segments of the population is as wide as in the era directly preceding the Great Depression, and continues to grow at record rates.¹³⁵ Sentiments that the economy is “rigged” and that climbing the financial ladder has become impossible fuel grievance on both sides of the political divide. Young adults entering the workforce today face stagnant wages and are burdened with unprecedented levels of debt. In many ways, the current situation resembles that of Jewish workers at the turn of the 20th century. Therefore, this collection of songs expressing anger, frustration, and despair at the conditions Jewish workers faced are highly relatable to those who currently find their hopes and expectations for the future have been disappointed.

Suggested Practical Applications:

- Curricula on Jewish-American immigrant experience
- Curricula on Jewish activism
- Curricula on the role of Jews in the history of organized labor
- Curricula on the history of Eastern European Jewry
- Framing for service projects involving hunger and homelessness
- Framing for community organizing and actions related to the issue of income inequality
- Discussions and sermons on income inequality

¹³⁵ “Income Inequality in the United States,” Facts, Inequality.org, Last modified March 12, 2019, <https://inequality.org/facts/income-inequality/>.

- Memorials for victims of labor-related tragedies, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory fire, possibly during a Shabbat service

1. A Mashine

א מאשינע

A Machine

Text: Morris Rosenfeld

Alternately titled “*Di Svet-Shop*” (The Sweatshop). A worker describes losing his sense of self in the endless repetition of factory work. He feels as if he is becoming one of the machines. The poem is likely inspired by Morris Rosenfeld’s experience working as a tailor in sweatshops in New York and London. This poem has been set to at least two different melodies. The first, which appears in the song collection *Di Fraye Muze* is set in a triple meter. The melody consists mainly of stepwise motion and repeated notes, illustrating the grinding repetition of the factory machines. Though it fits the language of Rosenfeld’s poem particularly well, this melody seems to have been a favorite setting for folk songs. It also appears as a setting for Morris Winchevsky’s poem “*Tsum Arbeter-Fraynt*” (song #46) and the song “*A Geroysh, a Getum!*” (song #114).

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 78

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 78 (variant, *Di Svet Shop*)
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 17

Recordings:

- Tsibele, *It’s Dark Outside-Indroyasn iz Finster*, Track 2 (variant, *Di Svet Shop*/The Sweatshop)
- Amelia Lavranchuk, *Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism*, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 4:58

2. Bin Ikh Mir A Shnayderl

בין איך מיר א שניידרל

I’m a Little Taylor

A tailor and a cobbler ironically explain what makes a worker’s life so good. Though they work constantly, they can’t afford basic needs. The depicts a conversation; the second

singer's questions are offset by a change in key. The clipped rhythm of the melody underlines the song's satirical tone.

Translation

<p>--I'm a little tailor, I live from day to day, happy, joyful, well. --Tell me, dear good little tailor Does your needle get you enough for bread with butter? --I make two gilden and three groshen a week, I only eat bread because butter is too expensive.</p>	<p>--I'm a little cobbler, I live from day to day, happy, joyful, well. --Tell me little cobbler, do you have what to chew on? Are you in need, can you borrow from anywhere? --No one lends, no one gives loans, I'm a cobbler, and yet, I go barefoot.</p>
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Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 163
- *Ikh Her a Kol: 22 Selected Songs* (1952), 132 (Duet with piano accompaniment, arr. Jacob Schafer)
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 29
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 16
- ©*Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 14

Recordings:

- Mark Levy, *Bin Ikh Mir a Shnayderl*--I'm a Little Taylor, Track 1
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 00:11 (Duet with piano accompaniment, arr. Jacob Schafer)

4. Bin Ikh Mir A Shnayderl (2)

בין איך מיר אַ שניידרל

I'm a Little Taylor

A tailor who has worked so much he can no longer hold a needle tries to find another way to make a living. The poem has an ironic and bitter tone.

Translation

I'm a little tailor,

I can't hold in needle in my hand
 So, I put out a sign
 That I print cloth.
 Ask, what can I do?
 Tiddle-diddle-dum!
 So I print, to hell with it!
 I take it in good part
 I take it in good part
 Tiddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-dum!

Sources

Print:

- *Yidische Folkslider mit Melodyes* (1956), 425
- ©*Yidische Folks-lider* (1938), 16
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 91

5. Der Kranker Shnayder

דער קראַקער שניידער

The Sick Taylor
 Text: S. An-sky

The poem describes the terrible living conditions of a tailor, though he works constantly. He asks, "If this is life, how can death be worse?"

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 76

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 76
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 167

Recordings:

- ©Saul Lyibimov, "Saul Lyibimov Der kranker shnayder S. Ansky [Shloyme Zavn'l Rappoport]," Youtube Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKTRmak7S7I>
- ©Avrohom Slucki, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1967, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*Di shib iz klayn, di shtib iz alt*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/categories/browse/Dublin+Core/Title/Der+kranker+shnayder?site=site-r> (variant)

6. Dire-Gelt

דירה-געלט

Rent

An impoverished tenant must find a way to make the rent or face harassment by the landlord, despite the fact that the accommodations are barely habitable. The catchy refrain is easy to teach.

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 76

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 76
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 35
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 25

Recordings:

- Theodore Bikel, Theodore Bikel Sings Yiddish Theatre & Folk Songs, Track 6
- Zupfgeigenhansel, Jiddische Lieder, Track 2
- Golem, Fresh Off the Boat, Track 8 (“The Rent”)
- © Teddi Schwartz, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1962, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Dire-Gelt*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5406>

7. Efsher Hot Ir, Menshn, Gehert

אפשר האָט איר מענטשן געהערט

Perhaps You People Have Heard

The singer tells of the tragic death of a young factory worker in Odessa. Unsafe working conditions were a frequent problem in the sweatshops where many Jews were employed in both Russia and the United States. The free meter of the song recalls synagogue chant. The repetition of the text gives the impression that the singer is herself still trying to process the news she reports.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 222

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 142

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 05:50

8. Ikh Steh Oyf Gants Fri

איך שטיי אויף גאַנץ פרי

I Wake Up Early in the Morning

Though the singer labors from early morning to late at night, he is still chastised by his boss for not accomplishing enough work.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 140

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 140

Recordings:

- ©Harry Ary, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Ikh shey oyf gants fri*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/categories/browse/Dublin+Core/Title/Ikh+shtey+oyf+gants+fri?site=site-r>
- ©Dora Wasserman, Jewish Russian Folk Songs, recorded at Montreal’s Jewish Public Library, Frances Brandt Online Yiddish Audio Library: https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/archival-recordings/fbr-995_4994/jewish-russian-folksongs-dora-wasserman

9. Ikh Steh Oyf Gants Fri (2)

(2) איך שטיי אויף גאַנץ פרי

I Wake Up Early in the Morning

A seamstress bemoans sacrificing her youth and family life to endless hours of work.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 192

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 4

10. Lid fun Trayengl-Fayer

ליד פון טריינגל-פּייר

Song of the Triangle Fire

Text: Anshel Schorr

Music: Joseph Rumshinsky

On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory in New York City. 146 workers, most of them young Jewish and Italian women, died in the accident. Many were trapped inside by the locked stairway access doors, and some jumped to their deaths. The tragedy inspired widespread strikes led by Jewish garment workers on the Lower East Side, and propelled the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union to the forefront of the American Labor Movement.¹³⁶ This song could be sung at Shabbat services to commemorate the anniversary of the tragedy, or in any curriculum about Jewish immigration to the United States or the role of Jews in the American labor movement.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 251

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 251

Recordings:

- Susan Leviton, *Zingendik!* Track 13

11. Mashines Klappn

מאַשינעס קלאַפּן

Machines Clatter

Both in the Russian Empire and the United States, Jews frequently worked in the garment industry. Though these jobs were often characterized by poor safety conditions and meager wages, experience as tailors and seamstresses allowed Jews to work for Jewish employers who accommodated the observance of Shabbat, and provided opportunities for those who immigrated to the United States to find employment in the rapidly expanding

¹³⁶ Levin, *While Messiah Tarried*, 190-191.

garment industry. This song stands out in the repertoire for its positive take on needle work.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 180

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 180

Recordings:

- ©Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Mashines Klappn*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5859>

12. Mayn Rue Plats

מײן רועפלאץ

My Resting Place

Text: Morris Rosenfeld

Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle*, referred to Morris Rosenfeld as, “the genuine voice of the sweat shop workers.”¹³⁷ Rosenfeld worked as a tailor in sweatshops in London and New York, and his poetry draws directly from his experience. *Mayn Rue Platz* is among the best-known songs based on Rosenfeld’s poetry. The lyrical melody, which climbs longingly before slowly descending once more, has been performed in many different styles, demonstrated by the recordings listed below. It lends itself as well to intricate choral arrangements as to simple folk-style performance. The song expresses the singer’s hope that love can brighten the bleak reality of life in the sweat shop.

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 150

Singable English Translation: Daniel Kahn, <https://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/MaynRue.pdf>

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 150

¹³⁷ Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, Theodore Bikel, and Tsirl Waletzky, *Mir Trogn a Gezang!: Favorite Yiddish Songs of Our Generation* (New York: The Workmen’s Circle, 2000), 148.

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 33
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 9
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 17 (The attribution to Winchevsky in the English transliterated heading is an error, in the Yiddish below the notation the text is correctly attributed to Rosenfeld)
- *Gezang Un Kamf* No. 8 (1940), 34 (SATB choral arrangement by Max Helfman)
- ©*Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 70
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 49

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 12
- Mark Levy, *Bin Ikh Mir a Shnayderl*--I'm a Little Taylor, Track 3
- Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, Partisans and Parasites, Track 12 (Sung in Yiddish and English)
- Cinder Well, The Unconscious Echo, Track 3
- Milken Archive of Jewish Music, Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration - Songs of Solidarity, Social Awareness, and Yiddish Americana, Track 4
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 07:45 (SATB Choral Arrangement by Max Helfman, adapted by Amelia Lavranchuk)
- ©Sidor Belarsky, Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 86, side A

13. Mayn Yingele

מײן יינגעלע

My Little Boy

Text: Morris Rosenfeld

A father who works long hours expresses his sorrow at only being able to see his beloved son at night, when he is asleep. “One day,” he laments at the song’s conclusion, “when you awake, my child, you will not find me anymore.” Rosenfeld’s own son, Joseph, died at the age of fifteen after being pushed down the stairs by some other boys.

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 148

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 148

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 221
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 66

Recordings:

- Joe Glazer, Welcome To America, Track 9 (Sung in Yiddish and English)
- Milken Archive of Jewish Music, Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration - Songs of Solidarity, Social Awareness, and Yiddish Americana, Track 3
- ©Wolf Younin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Mayn Yingele*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/6341>

14. Melokhe-Melukhe

מלאַכּה-מלוכה

Work is Wealth

Text and Music: Zelik Berdichever

This satirical song contrasts the lot of workers with his wealthy customers. The refrain, exhorting the listener to be joyful for the work and sing a little Yiddish song, is set to a lively dance rhythm that belies its bitter irony.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 92

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 92
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 186

Recordings:

- Hilda Bronstein, Yiddish Songs Old & New, Track 5

15. Mir Zemir Doch

מיר זעמיר דאָך

We Are Just Poor Workers

A workers' lament transcribed by Shmuel Lehman from Mordechai Coopershmid in Warsaw. A. Litvak remarks that many songs originated among workers were spread only

locally, and that Lehman's book includes a number of examples.¹³⁸ As this song does not appear in other publications, it may be an example of this phenomenon.

Translation

We are just poor workers,
We work ourselves to death,
We work our young little legs off,
We have not even a little bit of bread.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 121

16. Oy, Ikh Nebach, Zindiger Beker

אוי איר נבח, זינדיגער בעקער

Oy, I, Pitiful, No-Good Baker

A baker has been sold by his father into a life of work at a bakery. He feels this kind of life is not worth living.

Translation

Oy, I, pitiful, no-good baker
My life is not even precious to me
Because from morning until evening
They burn me by the fire

I work all night, pitiful me,
Burning, roasting, burning, roasting.
In the early morning the baker comes up,
She yells, "the buns are not finished!"

My father gave me to a boss.
He slaughtered me, pitiful me,
For my whole life.

By each a music plays
With musicians, with musicians,
By me, pricking
Are many crickets with bugwort.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 129

¹³⁸ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 233.

17. Shver un Biter Vi der Toyt

שווער און ביטער ווי דער טויט

Hard and Bitter As Death

A worker bewails sacrificing all her life to work, and yet is in constant fear of losing her job. Beregovski notes that the style of the melody suggests that it originates from an instrumental piece played at Jewish weddings, and speculates that this musical genre is a common source of borrowed melodies.¹³⁹

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 203

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 45
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 201

18. Ver Stradayet Noch

ווער שטראַדייעט נאָך

Who Suffers

Employers often abused their workers, showing little regard for their needs as human beings outside of the factory walls. These divisions intensified as the economic gap between workers and employers expanded in the late 19th and early 20th century. In this song, a worker tells how his employer treats him like a piece of equipment. There appears to be a mistake in the key signature of Lehman's transcription, which should read G minor rather than D minor.

Translation

Who suffers so much in the world
As I, pitiful, poor working man;
I was sold to the man with the money,
And I stand like the horse in the harness.

My head bent to the machine,
My only care a bit of bread;
Even if I roam from here to there,
Need follows me everywhere.

The master in the quiet,
He does what he wants with me,
He extinguishes all my feelings;
Because there in the factory,
There is my happiness,
I must quiet my hunger.

¹³⁹ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 270.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 116

19. Zaritski Hot

זאַריצקי האָט

Zaritski Has Ten Children

The children of poor families often had no choice but to go to work in sweatshops, no matter how talented they were. This verse, recorded in the fieldwork of both Beregovski and Lehman, appears to be a fragment of a longer song which describes all ten children.

Translation

Zaritski has ten children, ten children
And we can work on each specially.

Oy vey, misfortune,
The best child,
That he goes to work in the factory
Is cause for rage like a dog.

Sources

Print:

- © *Yidische Folks-lider* (1938), 60
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 132

Recordings:

- © Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Zaritski hot tsen kinder*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5417>

20. Zumer in di Groyse Hitsn

זומער אין די גרויסע היצן

In the Heat of Summer

A worker describes her arduous days toiling under the draconian supervision of her boss. Even laying down to sleep brings no relief, as all she can think about is rising at dawn the next day; a very relatable experience. The setting consists of two repeated phrases, the first in D minor and the second in E minor. The abrupt modulation between the first phrase of the couplet and the second lends a feeling of rising tension, reflecting the

structure of the text. The version in the Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs differs from Lehman's transcription in *Arbayt un Frayhayt*, notating the first note of the sixth measure as B natural rather than B flat. However, Lehman's notation does not appear to be an error, and adds interest to the melody.

Translation

In the heat of summer,
My head aches;
Not from the great heat,
But from getting up early.

When my dear mother brings me food,
The boss gives me a whooping,
And if I take even a spoonful,
She refuses to let me leave.

If I come at seven,
The boss says, "This is good."
If I come at a quarter to eight,
She sucks my blood.

If I sit at my work
And drink a little cup of tea,
The boss comes over
And says, "*Vind un vey!* (That's too bad...)"

When I go to sleep, oy,
I can only think about how I must get up,
And on my ailing legs
Walk to work.

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 206
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 133

21. Zuntik Bulbe

זונטיק בולבע

Sunday Potatoes

This song was first published in 1911 by Zisman Kiselgof,¹⁴⁰ who in 1912 along with Yoel Engel and S. An-sky led an ethnographic expedition to the shtetls of the Pale of Settlement. It humorously describes the lack of variety in the diet of Eastern European Jews. The prevalence of potatoes in Ashkenazi Jewish cuisine will be familiar to anyone who inherited traditional recipes from their Eastern European ancestors. This song is perfect for any program related to Jewish food. Additionally, this song is simple and easy to teach, making it ideal for communal singing with adults or children.

¹⁴⁰ Eleanor G. Mlotek et. al, *Songs of Generations: New Pearls of Yiddish Song* (New York, NY: The Workmen's Circle, 1997), 74.

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 74

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 74
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 184
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 11

Recordings:

- © Mary Michaels, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1956, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Zuntik bulbes*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5412>
- © Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1962, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Zuntik bulbes*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5421>

2. Socialist Ideology

סאַציאַליסטישע אידעאָלאָגיע

The relatively liberal regime of Tsar Alexander II ushered in a period of political reform and economic growth in the Russian Empire. For educated Jews, industrialization and modernization opened up new opportunities. Some were even permitted to settle in the major cities of Saint Petersburg and Moscow, beyond the borders of the Pale of Settlement. During this time, a second generation of *maskilim*--Jewish intellectuals educated in secular Russian schools and steeped in Russian culture--began to find their voice. In university libraries and urban cafes, they learned about the principles of Marxism and soaked up the revolutionary fervor gaining momentum among their Russian peers. Many of the Jewish intellectuals gravitated toward radical circles dedicated to the eradication of the tsarist autocracy. Originally, they had no intention of forming a separate Jewish movement, but rather embraced the Marxist ideals of internationalism and secularism.

The Marxist founders of the Bund believed that the collapse of capitalism, reliant on the exploitation of the increasingly desperate working population, was imminent and inevitable. They envisioned the autocratic regime of the Tsar replaced by a democratic government, ruled by the workers who had so long been oppressed. Rather than wealth and profit, the highest value of this society would be the collective wellbeing. Though the Bund failed to realize these lofty goals, it did its best to counter the damaging effects of autocracy and capitalism by supporting and organizing the Jewish workers and fostering a sense of national solidarity and pride. They responded to the particularly severe oppression of the Jewish community not by seeking an alternative Jewish homeland, but by demanding that their human rights be recognized in the land that they had long made their home.

The global financial crisis of 2008 led to renewed public scrutiny of the practices of the corporate institutions that play a major role in the global economy. In the following years, a number of protest movements have sprung up all over the world decrying the risky practices of financial institutions, the outsize influence of corporate donors on government policy, and the historically wide gap between the rich and poor in income and wealth. The relatively weak social safety net in the United States makes the situation of middle- and lower-income Americans tenuous. Policy proposals that aim to protect the majority of earners from the fluctuations of the economy, the impact of technology, the effects of longstanding racial discrimination and the skyrocketing cost of medical care have become increasingly popular. These are the same sorts of injustices that the Bund set out to redress. This category of songs and anthems transmit the Bund's universalist ideology of equality, democracy, and economic justice, as well as its demand for recognition of Jewish national distinctiveness.

Suggested Practical Applications:

- Social justice and community organizing trainings
- Representing the Jewish community at demonstrations, protests, and actions
- Framing discussions before community political activities such as voter registration drives, appointments with government representatives, or participation in protests and demonstrations
- Lessons and teachings on the Jewish value of *tzedakah*
- Curricula on social justice in Jewish tradition and thought
- Discussions on Jewish views of the messiah and messianic age
- Services and gatherings with a social justice emphasis
- Passover Seders
- Curricula on historically oppressed groups in the United States
- Curricula on Eastern European Jewish history
- Curricula on Jewish philosophy and thought
- Curricula on Jewish nationalism and Zionism

22. A Shvartser Volk

א שווארצער וואַלקן

A Black Cloud

The ultimate goal of the Bundists was to overthrow the Tsarist autocracy. While the Bund was a nationalist Jewish movement, they sought to liberate all people. “*A Shvartser Volk*” exemplifies how the political doctrine of the Bund was transmitted through song.

Translation

A black cloud in the sky
Has spread out over Russia,
It’s a cry, a tumult,
That Russia that must be freed.

Get off your high throne
You executioners,
No one will believe in you,
Only in our flag.

All the streets churn and boil,
A cry is heard in the air,
From thousands-strong worker masses:
“Down with Tsar Nikolai!”

Our red flags,
They flutter in our hands,
We swear to free all,
Free Russia!

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 14

23. Arbeter Ring Himen

אַרבעטער-רינג הימן

Workmen's Circle Anthem

Text: Avraham Liessin

Music: Meir Posner

The Workmen's Circle was a mutual aid society founded by socialist-leaning Jewish immigrants in New York City in 1900. The founders responded to the massive immigration of Eastern European Jews by providing its members with insurance, healthcare, burial arrangements and social activities. The Workmen's Circle played an important role in the Jewish labor movement. Today, its members continue to see themselves as "guarding our cherished flames" by promoting Yiddish culture and sponsoring politically progressive Jewish education.

Translation

Eliyahu Mishulovin, liner notes to Milken Archive of Jewish Music, Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration - Songs of Solidarity, Social Awareness, and Yiddish Americana, <https://www.milkenarchive.org/music/volumes/view/legend-of-toil-and-celebration/work/third-seder-of-the-arbeter-ring/>

Singable English Translation: Samuel H Friedman, *Socialist and Labor Songs* (2014), 19 ("Workmen's Circle Hymn")

Sources

Print:

- *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs* Vol. VI (2002), 217
- *Socialist and Labor Songs* (2014), 19 ("Workmen's Circle Hymn," with keyboard accompaniment)
- ©*Rebel Song Book* (1935), 34 ("Workmen's Circle Hymn," with keyboard accompaniment)

Recordings:

- Milken Archive of Jewish Music, Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration - Songs of Solidarity, Social Awareness, and Yiddish Americana, Track 18

24. Blondzhe Mer Nit

בלאָנדזשע מער ניט

Go Astray No Longer

Text: L. Maloch

Music: E. Sheinin

The Marxist theory that motivated the Bund's founders was interpreted in many different ways by its members and sympathizers. Even among the leadership, there was fervent disagreement on how to balance the Bund's Jewish national identity with the internationalist tenets of Marxism. What held the Bund together despite its members' disparate political philosophies was a shared vision of a just future, where no one would be forced to struggle to meet basic needs. Their cooperation was based on mutual trust rather than ideological uniformity. This song urges the listener forward, in spite of the many obstacles, toward that shared vision.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 12

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 11
- ©Gezang un Kamf No. 6 (1938), 42 (SATB choral arrangement by Max Helfman)

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 130
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 130 (variant)
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 131 (variant)
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 64

25. Der Bund, Der Groyser

דער בונד, דער גרויסער

The Bund, the Greater

According to Lehman's notes, it was common among the Jewish workers to mock the cowardice of the Russian revolutionary party members by joking that though they made a show of bravery when the police showed up, they would shout revolutionary slogans into

their sleeves.¹⁴¹ In many ways, the Jewish labor movement did advance further than its Russian and Polish counterparts. National solidarity helped the intellectual leaders of the Bund make a stronger bond with members of the working class than other revolutionary parties.¹⁴² At the time of the 1905 Revolution, the Bund had nearly 30,000 members, while the Socialist Revolutionary Party had only about 8,500.¹⁴³

Translation

The Bund, the greater,
S. R. [the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party] the lesser,
They shout into their sleeves,
“Down with the Tsar!”

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 79

26. Der Frayhayts-gayst

דער פרייהייטס-גייסט

The Spirit of Liberty

Text: Morris Winchevsky

Morris Winchevsky was a Jewish socialist leader and poet who emigrated from the Pale of Settlement to the United States. His poems were frequently set to music and sung among Jewish workers. This optimistic song expresses the conviction that with justice on their side, the working masses will prevail.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 257

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 126
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 76
- © *Gezang Un Kamf* No. 5 (1937), 64 (SATB choral arrangement by Max Helfman)

¹⁴¹ Szmil Lehman, *Arbeyt un Frayhayt* (Warsaw: Folklor-Bibliotek, 1921), Steven Spielberg Yiddish Digital Library, National Yiddish Book Center, Amherst, Massachusetts. <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yiddish-books/spb-nybc212450/lehman-szmil-arbeyt-un-frayhayt>.

¹⁴² Brossat and Klingberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland*, 32.

¹⁴³ Brossat and Klingberg, 33.

- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 100

27. Der Ovend-Glok

דער אָוונד-גלאָק

The Evening Bell

Text: David Edelshtadt

Though Jewish socialists were driven by the vision of a world free from injustice and oppression, the loftiness of their ambitions was not lost on them. The challenge of scraping together a livelihood and the waves of pogroms that devastated the Pale of Settlement demonstrated just how distant the future they dreamed of was. David Edelshtadt left Russia with his family after the pogroms of 1881, and settled in New York where he became involved with the Jewish anarchist movement. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 26, but his poems, many set to music, spread widely among Jewish workers in the United States and Russia. According to the memories of A. Litvak, this song, along with a number of others based on texts penned by Edelshtadt, was among the first to become popular with workers in the Jewish labor movement in Lithuania and Poland.¹⁴⁴

Translation

Don't call me a muse! With your magic
fingers
Don't wake the strings of my sick heart!
Your pale singer is sentenced to death,
The song of struggle and pain is over!

The evening bell is ringing, yes, I hear it
ring,
I hear my death sentence in its peal.
And life wants, it wants to dream, sing,
Fight against all slavery!

His way was very hard, on it he
encountered Thorns, stones, slander,
huger, cold.
There was lighting and thunder and rain--
And, homeless, he wandered through the
world.

I would have wanted, oh, my people,
To make your red flag still redder with the
blood of my heart,
And, like a lion with his sharp claws,
To fight your foe proudly, with a hero's
courage!

Now death knocks on the door of his life,
He says: my days of toil are over!
Extinguish your fire, lay down your
hammer!
Come! Do you hear? The evening bell is
ringing.

But what use are even the holiest longings,
The stormy days of my life have come to
an end!
An end to dreams, tears and songs--
Death calls, the evening bell tolls.

¹⁴⁴ A. Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 231.

Sources

Print:

- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 64

28. Di Tsukunft

די צוקונפט

The Future

Text: Morris Winchevsky

In “*Di Tsukunft*,” Winchevsky paints a vibrant picture of the utopian future the Jewish socialists envisioned. It is a world in which truth prevails over the crown, the purse, and the sword. This song demonstrates the secularized messianism that inspired the Jewish socialists. The song seems to be very popular at Bundist gatherings, appearing on a number of recordings of Bund world conferences. In his memoir, Bundist A. Litvak lists *Di Tsukunft* among the first songs to become popular with Jewish workers in Lithuania in Poland. The two phrase melody is simple and easy to pick up, making this song a good choice for teaching and group singing.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 86

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 86
- Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies Vol. 9 (1932), 127

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 15
- Susan Leviton, *Zingendik!* Track 14
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 15:12
- ©Audio recording of the Third World Conference of the Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 1, tape 1, side A
- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, Box 1, tape 25, side B
- ©Workmen’s Circle Chorus, Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 45
- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 86, side B

29. Di Yidishe Marselieze

די יידישע מאַרסעליעזע

The Yiddish *Marseillaise*

Yiddish version of the “Worker’s *Marseillaise*,” a Russian revolutionary song set to the tune of the *Marsellaise*, a song popularized during the French Revolution which became the National Anthem of France. It was particularly popular during the 1905 Revolution, in which the Bund played a major role.

Translation

The Jewish Marseillaise, Library of Congress Music Division: <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200182314/>

Sources

Print:

- *The Jewish Marseillaise*, Library of Congress Music Division: <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200182314/>
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 38 (variant)

Recordings:

- Yiddish Book Center’s Wexler Oral History Project, “Chana Szlang Gonshor Sings ‘The Worker’s Marseillaise’ in Yiddish”: <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/excerpts/woh-ex-0002001/chana-szlang-gonshor-sings-worker-s-marseillaise-yiddish>

30. Dort in Vinkl in Nasn Keler

דאָרט אין ווינקל אין נאַסן קעלער

There, in a Corner of the Damp Cellar

A man dying of tuberculosis in the corner of his dirty room after a hard life of toil exhorts his child to avenge his death by fighting against the wealthy who benefited as his expense. The editors of *Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive* note that the melody seems to be based on Tchaikovsky’s “Song of the Gypsy.”¹⁴⁵ This attribution is supported by the memoir of A. Litvak, though he cites the source by the text’s opening words and poet, Yakov Polonsky. Yankl Goldman, one of the singers who recorded this song with Ruth Rubin, reported hearing the song at political demonstrations in Warsaw during the years 1907-1909.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Eleanor G. Mlotek and Mark Slobin, eds., *Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive*, 245.

¹⁴⁶ Mlotek and Slobin, eds., *Ruth Rubin Archive*, 245.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 246

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 245
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 108
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 115

Recordings:

- © Feygl Sultan, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Dort in Vinkl in Nasn Keller*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5968>
- © Yankl Goldman, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Dort in Vinkl in Nasn Keller*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5393>

31. Dos Ershte Veln Mir Nemen Nokh Regirn

דאָס ערשטע וועלן מיר נעמען נאָך רעגירן

The First Thing We'll Seize After Taking Power

This revolutionary song promises that once the poor workers take power, the first thing they will do is bring those who have benefitted on the backs of their labor to account.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 257

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 120
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 78

32. Es Rirt Zikh

עס רירט זיך

It's Moving

Text: Morris Winchevsky

The turn of the twentieth century saw the rise of labor and socialist movements around the world. The founders of the Bund were swept up in the growing enthusiasm for Marxist theory among the students of Russian universities. The Russian empire was

undergoing dramatic economic and political change under the impact of modernization. The tectonic shifts in the world of Eastern European Jews made change feel inevitable, inspiring excitement and hope that it might be for the better. In this song, the singer asks, “Can you hear how things are moving?” The major key and frequent skips in the melody give this song a heralding, declamatory character.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 36

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 126
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 35
- © *Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 7
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 88
- © *Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 8

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 14:06

33. Ir Shvester un Brider

איר שװסטער און ברידער

You Brothers and Sisters

This song envisions the day when the Russian autocracy will be no more. Its melody bears similarities to the popular Bundist anthem “*In Zatsikn Yam.*” The repetitive text of this song lends itself well to teaching for group singing.

Translation

Sisters and brothers,	Sisters and brothers,
You will celebrate the holiday,	Raise up the flag with pride!
Hoorah, hoorah, hoorah, hoorah!	Hoorah, hoorah, hoorah, hoorah!
To the abolition of the rule of the throne!	To the abolition of the rule of the throne!

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 21

34. Ikh Vil Nit Keyn Ayzerne Keytn

איך וויל ניט קיין אייזערנע קייטן

I Want No Iron Chains

Text: Baruch Charney Vladeck

Music: Mikhl Gelbart

Barukh Charney Vladeck was active in the Bund in Russia and later became the manager of *The Jewish Daily Forward* and a New York City councilman. In his poem “*Ikh Vil Nit Keyn Ayzerne Keytn*,” the singer asserts his agency, an act of resistance toward a social system that demands submission to many masters. The dotted rhythms of Gelbart’s march-like setting capture the poem’s defiant attitude.

Translation

I want no iron chains,
I want no golden crown.
Servitude is loathsome and bitter--
It is for God alone.

If the little enemy should curse,
And sharpen his dull sword--
To sink into the deep abyss
Is his destiny in my future.

I know no fear of people,
I know not of bowing before God,
My heart is my servant and master,
My desire is my command.

I spin my thread from rays of light,
For myself I weave my faith and my flag--
In all the games of life,
Is the one who turns the wheel.

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 86

35. In der Kuznye

אין דער קוזניע

In the Smithy

Text and Music: Sh. Eichel

A blacksmith sings of a future when all will be free as he works. He is so enthralled by the image, he does not notice that the iron has cooled long ago. The major melody is warm and lyrical.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 5

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 4
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 23
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 22
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 69

Recordings:

- Mark Levy, *Bin Ikh Mir a Shnayderl*--I'm a Little Taylor, Track 10
- ©Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*In der kuznye*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5391>
- ©Betty Granatstein, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1964, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*In der shtubnye*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5384> (variant)

36. In Zaltsikn Yam

אין זאלציקן ים

In the Salty Sea

Text: S. An-sky

The text of this song was written by S. An-sky in 1901 in tribute to the Bund, and sometimes appears with the alternate title "*Tsum Bund* (To the Bund)." It was first published in the socialist journal *Der Arbayer* in 1902.¹⁴⁷ The poem is a polemic against the various institutions of the Jewish establishment--the clergy, the Zionists and the wealthy--and an effusive ode to the Bund. However, despite this reverent tribute and the fact that he also authored the text that would become the Bund's official anthem, An-sky was always peripheral to the Bund, never becoming a member. In his memoir *Vos Geven*, A. Litvak reports hearing this song widely and frequently in the years between 1902 and 1908. He writes that the song was particularly beloved by its singers for final line: "In Russia, in Lithuania and Poland, long live the Jewish Workers' Bund!"¹⁴⁸ Litvak also recalls that in later years, when An-sky turned to Zionism, he demanded that parts of the poem be stricken from Bundist publications. According to Litvak, he was simply ignored.¹⁴⁹ The poem has ten stanzas, although all ten are rarely sung. See the recording by Daniel Kahn, Psoy Kolorenko and Oy division for a performance that includes all ten

¹⁴⁷ Eliyahu Adelman, "In Zaltsikn Yam--A Jewish Workers' Song," Song of the Month, Jewish Music Research Center, June 2014, <https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/zaltsikn-yam-yiddish-workers-song>.

¹⁴⁸ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 237.

¹⁴⁹ Litvak, 238

stanzas, some in Yiddish and some in English. The melody is in modal minor, a scale commonly used in liturgical chant. The opening repeated triplets recall the movement of the waves of the “ocean of tears” described in the beginning of the poem.

Translation

Daniel Kahn: <https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/attachments/InZaltsiknYamTranslation.pdf> (Singable Translation)

Sources

Print:

- Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies Vol. 9 (1932), 32

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 8
- Daniel Kahn, Psoy Korolenko and Oy Division, The *Unternational*: The First *Unternational*, Track 6
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 16:40
- ©Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*In gazaltsenem yam fun di mentshlekhe trern*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/categories/browse/Dublin+Core/Title/In+gazaltsenem+yam+fun+di+mentshlekhe+trern?site=site-r>
- ©Anne Kline, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1964, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Der gezaltsener yam mit di*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/categories/browse/Dublin+Core/Title/Der+gezaltsener+yam+mit+di?site=site-r>
- ©Audio recording of the Third World Conference of the Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 1, tape 1, side A

37. Internatsional

אינטערנאַציאָנאַל

International

Text: Eugene Pottier

Music: Pierre Degeyter

Eugene Pottier, who attended the “First International” congress of workers in 1864, composed the original French text of “*L’Internationale*” to be sung to the tune of the “*Marseillaise*.” A decade later, his text was given its own original setting by composer

Pierre Degeyter.¹⁵⁰ Though the song, in Russian translation, came to be strongly associated with the Soviet Union, it was first a standard of socialist groups around the world, and has been translated into many languages. For the intellectual leaders of the Bund, the emancipation and advancement of Russian Jews was seen as an intermediate step toward the ultimate goal of international socialism. The Yiddish translation of this anthem can be understood as a symbol of the Bund leader's universalist ambitions, which were in dynamic tension with the popularity and practical necessity of the Jewish nationalist parts of their agenda.

Translation

Singable English Translation: Charles H. Kerr, *Socialist and Labor Songs* (2014), 44

Sources

Print:

- *Socialist and Labor Songs* (2014), 44
- © *Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 5
- © *Yidische Folks-lider* (1938), 3
- © *Rebel Song Book* (1935), 5 (with keyboard accompaniment)
- © *Mit Gezang Tsum Kamf* (1932), 5 (with keyboard accompaniment)

Recordings:

- Forward, "Old Jewish Lefties Sing 'The Internationale' in Yiddish": <https://forward.com/fast-forward/370514/watch-old-jewish-lefties-sing-the-internationale-in-yiddish/>
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 19:12

38. Kirkhn-Glokn

קירכן-גלאָקן

Church Bells

Text: Avrom Reyzen

Writer Avrom Reyzen frequently contributed prose and poetry to the Bund's publications. "Kirkhn-Glokn" is a critique of the moral supremacy claimed by religion, though it

¹⁵⁰ David Walls, "Billy Bragg's Revival of Aging Anthems: Radical Nostalgia or Activist Inspiration?" (Paper, Working Class Studies Association conference, St. Paul, MN, June 15, 2007) http://web.sonoma.edu/users/w/wallsd/smm-aging-anthems.shtml#_ednref15.

invokes the Catholic church rather than the rabbinate. The singer imagines creating a bell that is used not to intimidate, but to inspire. A. Litvak recalls in his memoir that this song was particularly popular in the years between 1904-1907, and was often mistakenly thought to originate from a folk source rather than a published poet.¹⁵¹

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 42

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 41

39. Maylid

מײליד

Translation of Title

Text: Khayim Miller (M. Sorerives)

Music: Meyer Posner

The first of May marks International Workers' Day, also known as May Day. The date was chosen to commemorate the Haymarket Affair, when a bomb during a labor demonstration in Chicago resulted in the deaths of several demonstrators and police officers, and injured many others. May Day is often an opportunity for strikes and other organized labor actions. "Maylid" invokes springtime imagery to depict May Day as a metaphor for the future envisioned by the Jewish socialists. The song can be understood as a secular version of traditional ideas of the messianic age. In *Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider*, editor Albert Bitter attributes the melody to G. F. Handel, while *Pearls of Yiddish Song* credits the music to M. Posner. This suggests that Posner was an arranger, rather than the originator of the melody, particularly since his notation is for SATB choir. The major melody, alternating between light staccato and lyrical phrases, certainly evokes the baroque style, though I have not been able to identify a work of Handel that it may be drawn from.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 82

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 82
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 86

¹⁵¹ A. Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 239.

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 2
- ©Audio recording of the Third World Conference of the Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 1, tape 1, side A

40. Mayn Tsavoe

מײן צאָווע

My Testament

Text: David Edelshtadt

The singer details her will and testament. She asks only that her friends bury her with the red flag that stands for her ideals, and continue the fight for freedom in her memory. She imagines that she will hear the sounds of battle from her grave, and in turn grant courage to workers. Twice, the song specifically mentions “Jewish and Christian” workers, hinting at the tension between particular and universal that characterized the ideology of the Bund. A. Litvak reports that this song, along with other settings of Edelshtadt’s poetry, was among the first sung by members of the Jewish labor movement in Lithuania and Poland.¹⁵²

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 30

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 29
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 129
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 84
- © *Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 32
- © *Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 10
- © *Gezang un Kamf* No. 8 (1940), 42 (SATB choral arrangement by Max Helfman)

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 6
- Mark Levy, *Bin Ikh Mir a Shnayderl--I’m a Little Taylor*, Track 16 (“*O Gute Fraynt*”)
- Milken Archive of Jewish Music, Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration - Songs of Solidarity, Social Awareness, and Yiddish Americana, Track 5

¹⁵² Litvak, 237.

41. Mir Brekhn

מיר ברעכן

We Are Breaking

Text: Avrom Reyzin

A high, fortified stone wall represents the daunting challenge of liberating the workers from poverty, oppression, and tyranny. A. Litvak recalls this song as especially popular in the revolutionary years of 1904-1906, and often misattributed to a folk source rather than a published poet. The image of a wall is frequently invoked in political discussion, and these occasions may lend this song particular relevance when incorporated in organizing and advocacy. The melody flows back and forth between the major, in which it begins and the parallel minor in which it ends. The modal ambiguity mirrors the text's description of both triumphant victory and painful loss. One way this song could be used for group singing is to teach the group the one-line refrain that concludes each stanza.

Translation

Eyes filled with troubles, dripping
with blood,
Hearts beating with courage and strength!
We stand before a wall build high
With hammers and irons in our damaged
hands--
We are breaking, breaking the iron wall.

And from the stony wall a stone breaks
loose,
The falling brick strikes someone on the
head,
But the others fearlessly stay standing
And continue working, not one flees.
We are breaking, breaking the iron wall.

The wall is built thick and fortified,
Blocking the way to life and happiness,
Obstructing the shining light,
Turning the most joyous day to a
sorrowful night--
We are breaking, breaking the iron wall.

The work may take long, the work is hard,
Join together brothers, all come here!
If only each one lends a hand,
We will break the high built wall.
We are breaking, breaking the iron wall.

Sources

Print:

- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 45

42. Mir Zaynen Soldatn

מיר זיינען סאָלדאַטן

We Are Soldiers

Text: Morris Rosenfeld

The melody of this march for fighters coming to destroy the unjust world order climbs steadily, like an army marching toward the listener. It reaches its highest pitch in the final phrase.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 32

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 31

43. Natur Un Mentsh

נאַטור און מענטש

Nature and Humanity

Text: David Edelshadt

This mournful waltz depicts nature mourning humanity's corruption of the world's beauty, defying the natural order by introducing slavery and bloodshed. A. Litvak cites this, among other songs based on Edelshtadt's poetry, as one of the first to be sung by workers involved with the Jewish labor movement in Poland and Lithuania. This song could be reinterpreted and used in activities related to environmentalism.

Translation

Brothers, how can I sing joyfully
 When hate and war are everywhere?
 It seems to me that deep pain resounds
 Even in the song of the nightingale!
 It seems to me that the moon and stars,
 The silver-white lily flower,
 Are drenched with the hot tears of humanity,
 And pale and silent with terror.
 When people suffer, moan, fret,
 Can nature be joyful?
 No, bloody tears are hidden
 In the red sunshine.
 She sees how her human children
 Have destroyed the beauty of the world,
 And her most beloved, like cattle

Have been slaughtered and sold for cash
 And nature sheds pearl tears
 And with her cries the blooming valley;
 The sun, the moon and stars weep,
 And the nightingale wails with sorrow.
 The songs of pain resound
 In the suffering poet's breast,
 And he kneels down before humanity
 With hot tears and prayer.
 Oh, humanity! For love, happiness and life
 Did nature create the world!
 You were given a free world--
 But humanity and earth are now enslaved!
 The one who can enslave his brothers
 And spill their blood--he is a hero.

Sources

Print:

- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 22

44. Nemit Zikh Tsenoyf

נעמט זיך צענויף

Come Together

This exuberant march emphasizes the universalist dimension of Jewish socialist ideology, proclaiming all children of a single mother, united by the red flag.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 259

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 133
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 22
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 34

45. Trogt Aroys

טראַגט אַרױס

Raise Up

In his annotations, Lehman remarks on the similarity of this song to *In Kamf*, a popular song with a text by David Edelshadt.¹⁵³ This may have been a local creation it inspired.

Translation

Raise up the sacred red flag	To free the poor slaves,
From its dark tent.	Who suffer in hunger and cold;
We're coming to take revenge,	The radiance of freedom should serve
To free the whole world.	them,
	In return for the sacrifice they have
	offered.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 43

46. Tsum Arbeter-Fraynt

צום אַרבעטער פֿרײַנט

To the Workers' Friends

Text: Morris Winchevsky

The singer beseeches friends of the working class to explain that all of their toil and hardship is merely a sacrifice on the altar of money. According to the memoir of A. Litvak, this was one of the first songs commonly sung by Jewish workers in Lithuania and Poland. This melody seems to have been popular among folk singers. It is also used for a setting of Rosenfeld's poem *A Mashine* (song #1), and "*A Geroysh, a Getuml*" (song #114).

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 258

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 127

¹⁵³ Lehman, *Arbayt Un Frayhayt*, 166.

47. Tsu di Genosn

צו די גנאָסן

To My Comrades

Text: David Edelshtadt

In Edelshtadt's poem, truth is personified as the captive champion of the workers. The singer exhorts his comrades to come to truth's aid, setting her free to fight on their behalf.

Translation

<p>The night is dark, no stars can be seen, The sky is black as the earth. Wind stirs the sea of human tears, Only the sword and the executioner reign.</p> <p>The truth lies despairing, locked in chains, Wounded by the terrible foe, Oh, truth, where are your true comrades? Where are your honorable friends?</p> <p>Why don't they come to heal your bloody wounds, And perform their duty to humanity? Has the sun then disappeared forever, Her holy light extinguished?</p> <p>Is the spirit of humanity dead? Do only executioners and servants live? And all that is hateful, dirty, corrupt-- Is what has the right to live?</p> <p>No, brothers, I cannot, I will not believe it! We live martyred, enslaved, Weary in cages, like captive lions, But our power is not dead!</p> <p>This humanly power can still work wonders, When the storm awakes our spirit, As if by magic, it shatters stone and iron, Silently tears apart chains!</p>	<p>One cannot lose hope for freedom If they know the history of the world. Only in darkness Can violence, theft and money reign.</p> <p>And so, as the bright morning comes Executioner and throne are in danger, All the terrible things that darkness conceals Will become visible and clear to the people.</p> <p>The chains break, the thrones fall, Only free thought rules. There is no need for blood, no need for cannons, Love and honor inhabit the land.</p> <p>And when you have found hope, don't lose the weapons That can lead you to victory. Don't lose truth, she fights for slaves, For human freedom and happiness.</p> <p>See how the truth despairs, drenched In a river of blood. Come to her, save her, brothers, comrades! She battles and bleeds for us!</p>
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Sources

Print:

- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 71

48. Vakht Oyf

וואַכט אויף

Wake Up

Text: David Edelshtadt

This rousing march exhorts the listeners to cease accepting the existing social order and claim their power.

Translation*Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 88**Sources**

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 88
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 131
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 233
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 4
- ©*Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 72
- ©*Mit Gezang Tsum Kamf* (1932), 62 (SATB choral arrangement by Jacob Schaefer)

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 5
- The Klezmatics, *Apikorsim*, Track 8 (variant)
- ©Audio recording of the Third World Conference of the Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 1, tape 1, side A
- ©Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 1, tape 43, side A

49. Vi Heylik iz di Natur (“Alte Shvue”)

ווי הייליק איז די נאַטור

How Holy is Nature (The “Old” Oath)

Before “*Di Shvue* (The Oath)” became the official anthem of the Bund, another song was known as the Bundist oath. Once it was replaced in this role by An-ski’s text, it came to be commonly referred to as “*Di Alte Shvue* (The Old Oath).” Like *Di Shvue*, it was employed as a declaration of loyalty to the Jewish labor movement, though Litvak,

Beregovski and Tobias all date the song's composition to 1895 or 96, predating the founding of the Bund.¹⁵⁴ It was sung solemnly and ceremoniously, at times over a Torah scroll, *talis*, or set of *t'filin*.¹⁵⁵ The text appears in A. Litvak's 1925 memoir "*Vos Geven*," beginning with the words "*lomir legn oyfn hartsn di rekhte hant* (Let us lay our right hands on our hearts)." He describes the song as "primitive," and attributes the melody to a Latvian worker song.¹⁵⁶ Two versions appear in Beregovski's collection. The second is titled "*Lomir Legn oyfn Hartsn di Rekhte Hant*," and matches Litvak's text. The first is titled "*Vi Heylik iz di Natur*" and opens with some additional text and music before continuing in a similar manner to the second. According to Beregovski, the free, solo character of previous Yiddish folk music did not easily lend itself to a revolutionary march, motivating the creators of "*Di Alte Shvue*" to borrow from other styles. He identifies three different melodies that he argues were incorporated into the song: a Russian church hymn titled "*kol' slaven*," a German popular song, and a tune played by bandstand orchestras.¹⁵⁷

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 256

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 117
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 119 (variant)

Recordings:

- ©Avrohom Slucki, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1967, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*Heylik iz di natur*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5956>
- ©Feygl Sultan, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*Heylik iz di natur*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5328> (variant)

¹⁵⁴ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 236; Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 34; Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Tobias, *Jewish Bund in Russia*, 44; Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 109-110.

¹⁵⁶ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 236.

¹⁵⁷ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 34-35.

50. Vos Viln di Hersher

וואס ווילן די הערשער

What Do the Rulers Want?

The singer suggests that joining the workers's struggle is the best way to understand the true intentions of the "rulers"--to suck from them every last drop of blood like vampires. The song "*Der Arbeter Kamf* (song #118)," which can be found on page 44 of Lehman's *Arbeyt un Frayhayt*, has a very similar melody. However, this version of the melody differs in that it descends by a fourth followed by a major second in its opening and concluding phrases, a motive featured prominently in the Ashkenazy *nusach* for the festival morning service. It is possible that somewhere in the process of being transmitted to Beregovski's informant, the melody was consciously or unconsciously altered by a singer to follow this familiar pattern.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 257

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 124

3. Jewish Identity

יידישע אידענטיטעט

Once the intellectuals decided that Yiddish would be the primary language of their organization and propaganda, it became inevitable that the labor movement they were fostering would be a Jewish movement. For these Jewish intellectuals, alienated from tradition and yet marginalized by their peers among the Russian intelligentsia, the movement became their people. As socialism spread rapidly among Jews throughout the Pale of Settlement, labor organizations also became a vehicle for the pursuit of Jewish civil rights and national autonomy.

Even as many Jewish workers and intellectuals unified around this new sentiment of national pride, the Bund's agitation tactics intensified divisions within the Jewish community. Ethnic segregation in the labor force meant that most Jews were employed by Jews, who were often little better off than their employees. Disputes between Jewish workers and Jewish employers could become particularly bitter. The socialists also attracted the ire of the rabbinate, who feared that the movement was leading workers to reject their authority and to abandon orthodox religious practices. Within the socialist movement, there was fierce disagreement around how to address the "Jewish Question" in Russia. The Bund espoused the philosophy of *doykayt*, "here-ness," arguing that the best path to Jewish liberation was to fight for their rights and develop a flourishing Yiddish culture in the land that they had long called home. A minority of Jewish socialists, however, had become convinced that emancipation in Russia was a lost cause. They believed that Zionism represented the best hope for the Jewish future. To the Bundists, the Zionists seemed utterly oblivious to the real needs of the Jewish workers. They were appalled by what they saw as a dangerous disavowal of their right to political equality in Russia.

While the intellectual founders of the Bund came from secular backgrounds and were educated in Russian schools, many of the workers who participated in the labor movement were raised in traditional religious households. Those who joined the Bund adopted endless permutations of a worldview fusing their traditional heritage with socialist ideology, creating a vibrant radical Yiddish culture that drew from both the old and the new. For many, the fight to bring about a just world became the primary expression of their Jewishness.

The members of the Jewish labor movement--intellectuals as well as workers--sought to articulate a coherent Jewish identity that could encompass all of who they were and what they believed. The question of how to make Jewishness feel relevant to modern life is a central preoccupation of progressive Jews today, particularly the community's leadership. As external forces that drive Jews to affiliate with the Jewish community weaken, the necessity of an internal force that will draw people in becomes increasingly apparent. In this area, the model of Bundism offers valuable lessons. From the Bund, we learn that

both fostering individual creativity and creating a shared vision that speaks to people's most pressing concerns are essential to a relevant and thriving Jewish culture. Hopefully, the songs in this category will provide a spark of inspiration; they exemplify some of the many ways that workers drew from Jewish tradition to make sense of their rapidly changing, tumultuous world.

Suggested Practical Applications:

- Curricula on Jewish holidays, particularly those exploring diverse ways they are and have been observed by Jews around the world and throughout history.
- Teaching about traditional Ashkezani *nusach* and synagogue modes
- Worship on a holiday mentioned in a song
- Discussions of Jewish identity in the modern world
- Curricula for teens and young adults exploring Jewish identity formation
- Discussions on the nature of God and theodicy
- Discussions around personal relationships with God and theology
- Inspiration for individual personal prayer, incorporated into worship or as part of a learning experience
- Curricula and discussions of modern antisemitism
- Curricula on Jewish nationalist movements and Zionism
- Exploration of Jewish views on social justice

51. Af Beri

אף ברי

Af Beri

Af Beri is the title of a liturgical poem by Eliezar Kallir traditionally recited before the *Geshem* (rain) prayer, during the *musaf amidah* on *Shemini Atzeret*. The name *Af Beri* refers in mystical tradition to an angel with power over rainclouds, derived from a play on words based on Job 37:11. This section of the liturgy petitions God for rain in the coming year. In this song, the singer addresses *Af Beri* with a different purpose. The song is set to the *misinai* melody of the *Geshem* prayer and the special *Chatzi Kaddish* that precedes it. Ironically employing the distinctive festival tune, the singer laments that tomorrow when the market opens, he will still have no money for food. He describes the broken shutters and roof of his house and holes in his boots, implying that these will provide him no protection from the rain his community prays for. This song plays one of the major themes of *Sukkot*; though custom dictates that we abandon secure homes to dwell in temporary shelters, inadequate shelter is a feature of the singer's day-to-day existence.

Translation

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 154

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 152
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 12

52. Alef--Indikes Est Der Nagid

אַלעף--אידיקעס עסט דער נגיד

The Rich Man Eats Turkey

This satirical folksong is structured as an alphabetical acrostic. Each line presents a contrast between the rich and poor. The melody of the song comes from the *Akdamut*, an Aramaic poem chanted responsively as an introduction to the Torah reading on Shavuot.

Translation

Songs of Generations, 68

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 67
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 23
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 382 (variant)

53. Ay, Mayn Man

אײַ מײַן מאַן

Ay, My Husband

The singer worries about all that her family lacks to celebrate Passover as it draws near. Her husband reassures her that with three weeks still to go, though they have no money they can borrow and pawn to get what they need. The singer's concerns are punctuated with woeful cries to a melody that evokes modal synagogue chant. Her repeated wails in the high register outline raised sixth and lowered seventh scale degrees characteristic of the *HaShem Malach* mode.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 157

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 155

- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 22

54. Brider, Oyb Got Vet Undz Nit Helfn

ברידער, אויב גאָט וועט אונדז ניט העלפן

Brothers, If Got Won't Help Us

Many Jews from traditional backgrounds were drawn to the message of the socialists and went on to participate in the labor movement and join the Bund. They found an endless variety of ways to blend harmonize their religious beliefs and traditions with socialist ideology, with some rejecting the religion they were raised with entirely. Rather than wait for the Messiah, they came to believe that by joining together, they could bring about a better world through their own efforts. “Brothers, if God won’t help us,” this marchlike song proclaims, “let’s free ourselves!”

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 257

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 125

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 29:15

55. Der Shnayder Zitst Ba Zayn Geney

דער שניידער זיצט ביי זײַן גענײ

The Tailor Sits by His Work

This playful song depicts an evocative vignette of the life of a Jewish worker. In the first verse, the tailor sits at his work, stretching his resources by turning one pair of pants into two in order to make a decent living. In the second verse, when the *Simchat Torah* holiday finally allows a break from his labor, he has one drink too many and bellows as he enters the synagogue, “Give me a *hakofe* [*hakafa*] or to hell with you!” The melody notated by Beregovski frequently changes meters and is interspersed with nonsense syllables, giving it a frenetic character that seems fitting for the pace of both the tailor’s work and his play.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 259

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 135

56. Dos Gebet

דאָס געבעט

The Prayer

Text: Y. L. Peretz

Peretz's encounters with Jewish socialists in the 1890's inspired him to focus on the experiences of the Jewish working class in his writing. His work was popular among the workers of the labor movement, and he had close connections to the Bund.¹⁵⁸ *Dos Gebet* is an impertinent prayer that interrogates, "has there not been enough suffering?" as its repeated refrain, set to a melody that is developed as the song progresses. The singer asks why humanity God would divide humanity into strong and weak, a question that echos the central preoccupation of socialist ideology. The song concludes in a low register, depicting the rotten dust that lies at the bottom of the abyss portrayed in the poem.

Translation

Master of the World,
Has there not been enough suffering?

Master of the world,
When will you reveal the deep abyss?
Why do you divide your children into
strong and weak,
Lambs and flayers?

Master of the World,
Has there not been enough suffering?

And the abyss is wide and deep like an
ocean,
And it soaks up our blood like a sponge!
The cry of pain echoes from there,
There lies revenge and gnashes its teeth.
There lies despair, terrified, addled,
With lips like execution by a goblet of
poison.

Master of the World,
Has there not been enough suffering?
When will you reveal the terrible abyss?

In the abyss--where only the knife shines,
Even the purest ideas are sprayed with
blood.
There the wings of the greatest eagles
break.
There the best hearts turn to stone.

Master of the World,
Can your praise sprout
In rotten, dark, bloody dust?

¹⁵⁸ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 118.

Sources

Print:

- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 24
- Arrangement for voice, piano and violin by Janot Roskin: [https://imslp.org/wiki/Dos_Gebet_\(Roskin%2C_Janot\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Dos_Gebet_(Roskin%2C_Janot))

Recordings:

- Sidor Belarsky, Sidor Belarsky in Jewish Melodies Volume 2 (arrangement by Janot Roskin, voice and piano): <https://rsa.fau.edu/album/226>
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 25:04 (arrangement by Janot Roskin, voice, piano and violin)
- ©Sidor Belarsky, Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 86, side A

57. Dos Naye Lid

דאָס ניִי ליד

The New Song

Text: Avrom Reyzen

This song is sung as part of the Workmen's Circle's annual "Third Seyder" during Passover.¹⁵⁹ It expresses a conviction that a time of peace and love will come soon, echoing traditional beliefs associated with the messiah. "It is no dream!" the song proclaims.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 93

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 93
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 15
- ©SATB choral arrangement by Zavel Zilberts (1930, melody by J.S. Roskin)
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 30

Recordings:

- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, Box 1, tape 25, side B

¹⁵⁹ Mlotek et al., *Songs of Generations*, 93.

- ©Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 1, tape 43, side A (SATB arrangement by Zavel Zilberts of melody by J.S. Roskin)

58. Eyder Ikh Leg Zikh Shlofn

איידער לעג זיך שלאָפן

Before Going to Bed

A weary seamstress describes the awful conditions under which she works. In the refrain, she cries out God, asking why she was born to be a seamstress. The melody is a mournful minor waltz. This song works well for group singing, as it has a repeating refrain that can be taught easily. The version in Lehman's *Arbeyt un Frayhayt* opens with the words, "Chol haMoed Pesach is coming," so this variant could be especially fitting for programming around the Passover holiday. Discussing the parallels in the life of this seamstress to the narrative of Israelite slavery would be an interesting topic for discussion.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 62

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 62
- Yiddish Folk Songs with Melodies, 389
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 20
- ©*Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 58
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 138 (variant, *S'kumt khol moed Pesakh*)

59. Freyen Zikh iz Gut

פרייען זיך איז גוט

It's Good to Be Happy

Text and Music: Zelig Barditchever

This lively dance tune by itinerant singer Zelig Bardichever enjoins the listener to drink a "l'chayim" and be cheerful, even if just for a moment. The text highlights the division between the old and the young. "Let old women weep and complain, we the young ones must not sit idle. Let our eyes shine with lightening!" It is easy to imagine these words appealing to a young Bundist, tired of waiting for a messiah or the emancipation of Jews to come down from the Russian Tsar.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 183

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 181

60. Gey Ikh Mir in Fabrike

גיי איך מיר אין פאַבריקע

I Go to the Factory

The singer must go to the factory early each morning despite snow and illness. She turns to God, asking if there is any hope that a day will come when she won't have to go to the factory anymore. The repeating refrain lends itself well to teaching for group singing.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 210

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 209
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 62
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 139

Recordings:

- © Feygl Sultan, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1963, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Gey ikh mir in fabrik*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5419>

61. Hamavdil Beyn Koydeshlekhoyl

המבדיל בין קודש לחול

The One Who Separates Holy from Profane

An acerbic parody of the well-known *havdalah* song, “*Hamavdil bein Kodesh.*” While the original asks God’s blessings for the coming week, here these requests only serve to remind the disillusioned singer of all that he lacks and the miseries he expects in the coming week.

Translation

<p>One Who Separates Holy from Profane, What can a person do, when it's not going well for him at all? Our seed--merely existing, and our money-- a piece of dung, The little bit of bread that only comes with toil. A good week, a good week, a good week...</p>	<p>Day dawns, Shabbat is gone, Like the shadow of a tree, Of all of the food there remains not a seed, And soon, oy, ach un vey, Tomorrow comes the miserable week. A good week, a good week, a good week...</p>
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Sources

Print:

- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 50

62. Heyb Ich Mich Oyf

הייב איך מיך אויף

As I Get Up in the Morning

A seamstress laments her difficult and weary life, asking God if it is her fate to always be a seamstress. Though she works all winter, her boss does not pay her until Passover. This song has a repeating refrain which can be taught for group singing.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 205

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 204
- *Yidishe Folkslider mit Melodyes* (1956), 387
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 56
- © *Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 89

63. Hemerl, Hemerl

העמרל, העמרל

Little Hammer, Little Hammer

Text: Avrom Reisin

Music: A. M. Bernstein

A cobbler wills himself to keep hammering, despite hunger and weariness, because he must finish the pair of shoes for his rich client by morning. Though he appeals to God for

strength, he knows that his hammer is his “only provider.” The song’s steady triple meter has a clear downbeat, suggesting the repeated strikes of the hammer.

Translation

Mir Trogn A Gezang, 78

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn A Gezang*, 78
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 190

Recordings:

- Mark Levy, I’m a Little Taylor, Track 5
- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 86, side B

64. Her Nor, Itsche-Ber

הער נאָר, איצשע-בער

Listen, Itsche-Ber

This song imagines a Hassid gleefully tells his friend that now that all the strikers have been killed or dispersed, they can go and study Torah in peace and without fear. Leman notes that the melody to this song came from a ubiquitously known Hassidic *nigun* for *Simchat Torah*.¹⁶⁰ Lehman also recounts a version of the story of the song’s origin. Allegedly, a Hassid, animated by the joyful *Simchat Torah* celebrations, sang out these words to mock the strikers. Fearful of revenge, he fled to the protection of a Rabbi in a neighboring village. One day, hearing someone coming, he hid under the bed. It was the Rabbi, who startled him out from his hiding place by singing the words of his mocking song.¹⁶¹ A. Litvak mentions this song in his memoir, identifying it as a local favorite sung only in Poland.¹⁶² Putting cruel words into the mouths of their opponents, this song illustrates the growing divisions between the workers of the labor movement and the traditional religious community.

¹⁶⁰ Lehman, *Arbeyt un Frayhayt*, 179.

¹⁶¹ Lehman, 179.

¹⁶² Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

Translation

Listen, Itsche-Ber,
Just come over here,
I want to tell you something
That I think you'll like.

[*Sisu v'simchu b'simchat torah*]
Be glad and rejoice on *Simchat Torah*--
No one fears
The strikers any more.

They have already massacred all the
strikers,
No one fears the strikers anymore.
Now we can go
And study Torah in peace.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 74

65. M'lozt Undz Nit

מ'לאָזט אונדז נישט

They Won't Let Us

The labor movement intensified divisions within the Jewish community. Jews were mostly employed by Jews, and so strikes turned conationalists against one another. The Bund saw Zionism as a fantasy of the well-off Jewish middle class, who were out of touch with the needs of the workers. This song asks workers to consider what good a Jewish homeland will do if they are to go there only to toil under the rule of wealthy Jews.

Translation

They don't let us talk together,
They don't let us stand together,
They don't let us strike together,
They don't let us walk together.

How can you workers be content,
With getting our own land?
There the rich Jews will rule,
And we'll just work for them.

So, you workers shouldn't look to
them,
Don't just stand there;
Come together, all sisters and
brothers,
We must go to the struggle!

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 69

66. Mit a Nodl, On a Nodl

מיט א נאָדל, אָן אַ נאָדל

With a Needle, Without a Needle

Despite the difficult conditions, a seamstress takes pride in her work. Observing the *halakhic* injunction to honor Shabbat with special garments, she dons her best clothing that she has sewn herself. The octave leaps in the melody lend it a feeling of decorous ceremony.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 259

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 137
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 18

Recordings:

- Mark Levy, I'm a Little Taylor, Track 5
- © Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1962, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*Mit a nodl, on a nodl*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5422>

67. Oy Der Rebe mit dem Pop

אוי דער רעבע מיט דעם פּאָפּ

Oy, the Rebbe and the Pope

A warning that teachings and injunctions of religious leaders only confuses the workers, so that they don't see that they are being robbed. In the version notated by Beregovski, the song goes on to declare that under socialism, there is no Jew and Christian, only rich and poor. This song illustrates a classic Marxist indictment of religion.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 254

Variant: Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 257

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 253
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 121 (variant, “*Geyt, brider, geyt aykh fodern broyt*”)
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 48 (variant)

68. Oy, Ir Narishe Tsionistn

אוי איר נאַרישע ציאַניסטן

Oy, You Foolish Zionists

The Bundists saw Zionism as the preoccupation of a small number of bourgeoisie, who had no real understanding of the urgent concerns of the Jewish working class. In addition, they believed the Zionists’ assertion that Jews must establish a their own homeland elsewhere undermined the struggle for Jewish civil rights in Russia, echoing the antisemitic accusation that Jews were foreigners who did not belong. The philosophy they espoused came to be known as *doykayt*--roughly, here-ness. This song urges the Zionists to go talk to the workers, and learn some sense from them. It is set in the *freygish* mode, common in Jewish liturgical and folk music as well as Eastern European folk music.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 257

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 125
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 70

Recordings:

- Daniel Kahn, Psoy Korolenko and Oy Division, *The Unternationale: The First Unternational*, Track 2
- Amelia Lavranchuk, *Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism*, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 29:41

69. Oy, Undzere Yorelekh Geyen Undz Avek

אוי, אונדזערע יארעלעך גייען אונדז אָוועק

Oy, Our Years are Going By

Workers in a bakery lament how the years pass them by as they work without respite. The oven is always glowing: “Friday night,” the singer explains, “when you still can’t see stars, we already hold a fire in our hand.” The music draws on conventions from Jewish liturgical and folk music that evoke lament and complaint. The minor 3-2-1 cadence that concludes a phrase in the cantillation system for the book of Lamentations appears several times in the melody. In addition, the third phrase of the melody makes use of the Ukrainian Dorian scale, an important mode in the Ashkenazi tradition of liturgical chant. In his essay, “The Altered Dorian Scale in Jewish Folk Music,” Moshe Beregovski presents musical examples to argue that the Ukrainian Dorian scale “is mainly used to express the grief of lamentation and complaint.”¹⁶³ This song provides another example that supports Beregovski’s claim.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 246

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 63
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 42

70. Roysh Khoydesh Elul

ראש חודש אלול

The First of Elul

A Jewish political prisoner sentenced to die the next morning is occupied by racing thoughts as the hours tick by. The song begins counting off the hours from midnight on the first day of Elul, the month traditionally dedicated to moral accounting in preparation for the High Holy Days. As she is visited by various family members, she reviews the events that have led to this point, repeating the phrase, “Oh, I lie and think.” When the Jewish chaplain comes to help her recite the *vidui* (confession of sins) it is not in preparation for the holiday, but in preparation for death.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 253

¹⁶³ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 562.

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 98
- *Gezang un Kamf* No. 5 (1937), 68 (“*Lig ikh mir un trakht*” SATB choral arrangement with tenor solo by Max Helfman)
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 101

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 30:35

71. Shir HaKhaitim

שיר החייטים

Song of the Tailors’ Guild

From his childhood in Kielce, Poland Sinai Leichter recalls that the tailor’s guild, a workers’ organization that was a precursor to the *kassi* that functioned under the auspices of the Bund, had its own folksongs. The song was call and response between a leader and the group of singers, and was accompanied by a circle dance.¹⁶⁴ The spirit of religious messianism expressed by this song as well as the early organizational framework of the tailor’s guild to which it belonged illustrates the conditions that made the Jewish artisan class particularly receptive to the agitation of the Bund.

Translation

A: Who will come first?	All: A day of rejoicing, a day of singing,
B: Our righteous Messiah!	A day of joy, a day of gladness,
A: And who will come next?	A day, a day, a day will come to us.
B: David’s descendant, our redeemer!	Rejoicing, singing, joy, gladness,
A: And then what will be?	Will come to us, will come to us.

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 220

¹⁶⁴ Aharon Vinkovetzky, Abba Kovner, and Sinai Leichter, *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*. Vol. IV, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987), 219.

72. Shtil Kunt Um der Umbashister

שטיל קומט אום דער אומבאָשיסער

The Defenceless Die Silently

Text: Nahum Yud

Music: E. Teitelboim

This song evokes the images of Haman and Pharoah to illustrate the grave threats plaguing the Jewish community. It would lend an interesting dimension to observances and learning Purim and Passover.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 44

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 43

73. Tsu Mayne Brider

צו מיינע ברידער

To My Brothers

Text: David Edelshtadt

Music: Ben Yomin

In this revolutionary ballad, David Edelshtadt highlights the particular challenges faced by the Jewish working class. Subject not only to crushing poverty, but also widespread and often violent antisemitism, the Jewish worker carried a heavier burden than others. Edelshtadt describes this situation as “a threefold chain,” representing the oppression the Jewish working class experienced as Jews, as poor workers, and as socialists. His imagery provides an interesting jumping off point for a discussion of Jewish identity in a non-Jewish society.

Translation

Brothers, we carry a threefold chain,
As Jews, as slaves, as freethinkers;
We are hunted and driven to death,
By antisemites and executioners.

They take us for beggars, they take us for
servants,
They strangle us, they bend us in circles.
They say to us: all should be alright for
you
And they rob you, and don't allow you to
scream.

Brother, we must free the suffering Earth
From chains and from tears.
Shoulder to shoulder with armor and
sword,
Forward in combat rows!

The harder the war, the sweeter the
victory,
The more splendid the celebrations;
And those who fall in fight for freedom,
Live on in future generations.

Sources

Print:

- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 7
- *Zing-a-Lid: 50 Arbeter un Folkslider* (1941), 3

74. Ver Tut Stroyen Movern

ווער טוט סטיוען מאָווערן

Who Builds Walls?

In this song, the speaker reflects approvingly on his decision to leave the Yeshiva and take on a new role in the revolutionary movement. This was the story of many referred to by the Bund's leaders as "half-intellectuals." Yeshiva drop-outs' fluency in Yiddish and familiarity with the communities the Bund wanted to organize made them an invaluable asset. This song appears to be based on similar source material to "*Men Firt Mikh Arayn in a Fintstern Kheyder*" (song #131), and "*Hert Nor Um*" (song #126).

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 254

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 106

75. Vi Mir Hobn Zikh Ale Sobirayet

ווי מיר האָבן זיך אַלע סאַביריייעט

When We All Gathered

This song recounts the story of an illegal meeting near Kyiv that is raided by police, resulting in a violent confrontation and the arrest of those in attendance, including children. The meeting takes place at a synagogue, suggesting that the divide between the labor movement and the traditional Jewish community was not as clear-cut as is sometimes suggested.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 251

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 88

76. Vos Shloft Ir, Ir Shlefer?

וואָס שלאָפֿט איר, איר שלעפער

Why Do You Slumber, You Sleepers?

The text of this song recalls Maimonides's well-known explanation of the reason for the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. In the *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah* 4:3, he writes that the voice of the shofar proclaims, "Awake, you sleepers, from your sleep! Rouse yourselves, you slumberers, out of your slumber! Examine your deeds and turn to God in repentance! Remember your creator, you who are caught up in the daily round, losing sight of eternal truth...Look closely at yourselves; improve your ways and your deeds." "*Vos Shloft Ir, Ir Shlefer?*" exhorts the listeners to awaken to the darkness of the world and the possibility of a brighter future. Rather than repent, it asks that they "see to it that all are equal." Examining the parallels between this song and Maimonides's text would be a fitting choice for teaching on the themes of the High Holy Days, and the song could be included in services during the month of Elul and Days of Awe. The melody is in the *freygish* mode, common in Jewish religious and folk music, which features an augmented second between the second and third intervals of the scale.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 259

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 259

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Rosh Hashanah: *Zichronot and Shofarot* According to the Birnbaum High Holy Day *Machzor*. Practicum at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8643255/videos/190110203>, 32:04
- ©Feygl Sultan, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Vos shloft ir, ir shlefer?*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5398>

77. Yidn Shmidn

יידן שמידן

Jewish Blacksmiths

Text: Moishe Broderson

Music: David Beigelman

The Jewish blacksmith of this song symbolizes the the Jewish labor leader. He kindles courage, forges iron shoes for the blind who stumble in the dark. The hot glow, caused by grief and rage, allows swords to be forged into plowshares, a quote of Isaiah 2:4.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 77

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 76
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 197
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 8

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 4

78. Zogt Mir Rabotay

זאָגט מיר רבֿותיי

Tell Me, Gentlemen

Many who participated in the Jewish workers' movement found ways to incorporate socialist doctrine into their religious beliefs. This song provides an interesting example. The singer muses on the idea that Jews are already ruled by God, and so what should they need with a Tsar?

Translation

Tell me, gentlemen,
How is this one fair?--
If we have a God,
So what do we need with a Tsar?

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 21

4. Women and Youth

פרוייען און יוגנט

The rapid cultural and economic changes at the turn of the century presented unique opportunities and challenges for Jewish women. The advocacy of early *haskalah* thinkers helped Jewish girls from both secular and religious families gain access to secular education. Jewish women from middle- and working-class were typically required to work outside the home. Working women were often subject to even poorer conditions than their male peers, which made them particularly receptive to the socialists' organizing efforts. Women were also well represented among the ranks of the socialist intelligentsia. Two women--Marya Zhaludsky and Rosa Greenblat--were among the founders of the Bund. At the movement's peak, women comprised as much as one third of its membership and twenty percent of its official leadership.

The Bund espoused an ideal of gender equality, and developed a new moral code for men and women working side by side. In many socialist circles, references to physical appearance were frowned upon, and romance and marriage were seen as a distraction from the revolutionary cause. Despite this attitude, many Bundists did indeed fall in love with their comrades, marry, and form families.

Children were also swept up by the revolutionary fervor and clamored to join the movement, often to the dismay of the adult members. In the early twentieth century, children between the ages of ten and fifteen formed *Kleyner Bund*, or little Bund, groups in a number of cities and towns. Where they were barred from participating local chapter of the Bund's activities, the *Kleyner Bund* organized their own strikes, demonstrations and direct actions. *Kleyner Bund* members took part in the demonstrations of the 1905 Revolution, and some were injured or killed.¹⁶⁵ The first official Bundist youth organizations, *Tsukunft* and SKIF, were founded in Poland in 1913. In 1926, the Bund opened the Medem Sanatorium, where children vulnerable to tuberculosis lived together in a collective.

This section highlights songs that relate specifically to the experiences of women and children. Both of these groups played an integral role in the history of the Jewish socialist movement. These songs, whether preserving authentic voices or depicting stereotypes, help to understand a part of this history that is less commonly recorded in official accounts. As progressive Jews work to correct imbalances of gender representation in our sacred texts, historical narratives and leadership, it is vital to intentionally seek out voices that are often not heard.

¹⁶⁵ Jack Jacobs, "SKIF: The Bundist Children's Movement." In *Bundist Counterculture Interwar Poland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 30.

Suggested Practical Applications

- Curricula on the history of Jewish education
- Highlighting the experience of Jewish women in Jewish history curricula
- Curricula on Jewish women and leadership
- Initiatives to increase the number of women in leadership roles
- Highlighting the role of children in Jewish history curricula for children
- Discussions of gender relationships in both traditional and liberal Jewish communities
- Organizing and advocacy on issues related to gender discrimination
- Organizing and advocacy on issues related to children's rights

79. A Gantse Vokh Horevet Zi

א גאנצע וואך האַרוועט זי

She Works the Whole Week

****Advisory- references sexual assault****

In the Russian Empire, during the latter half of the 19th century, Jewish women, who were typically expected to work outside of the home in order to support their families, increasingly began to assert their economic independence. Assisted by the effects of industrialization and urbanization, they refused arranged marriages at young ages, opting instead to spend time working and saving money before seeking a marriage partner.¹⁶⁶ The rising trend of women choosing to live independently is illustrated by the story this song recounts. The song describes a woman who works all week at a tailor's shop, eagerly rushing out on Friday evening to spend time with her romantic interest. However, the song soon becomes a cautionary tale. After being scolded by her mother for her recklessness, the woman stays out late with her boyfriend at a wedding celebration. When she leaves early in the morning, he follows and rapes her. This song is an interesting and complex representation of the experience of Jewish working women. On the one hand, the purpose of the song was likely to warn young women of the dangers of becoming "too independent." On the other hand, there is truth to the message that women workers were even more vulnerable than their male counterparts. The character it portrays feels strikingly realistic and relatable, as she finds herself in the all-too-common situation of being assaulted by a man that she knows and trusts.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 245

¹⁶⁶ Shmuel Feiner, "Haskalah Attitudes Toward Women," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive, 27 February 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/haskalah-attitudes-toward-women>.

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 57
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 38 (variant)

Recordings:

- © Dora Wasserman, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*A gantse vokh*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5403> (variant, as in *Yidishe Folks-lider*, 38)

80. Arbeter-Froyen

ארבעטער-פרויען

Worker Women

Text: David Edelshtadt

A rallying cry to join the socialist cause directed specifically at women. The song emphasizes the important contributions of women to the revolutionary movement. Three names are specifically mentioned in the poem's sixth stanza: Perovskaya, Helfman and Ginzburg. The first, Sophia Perovskaya, was a personal hero of David Edelshtadt, about whom he composed another popular poem.¹⁶⁷ A member of the *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) organization, she was arrested and executed in 1881 for her role in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Hesya Helfman (also referred to as Gesia Gelfman) was Perovskaya's co-conspirator, and died after giving birth in prison. As a Jew, her involvement was used as a pretext for the anti-Jewish pogroms that followed the assassination. Sofia Ginsburg, also Jewish led an attempt to revive *Narodnaya Volya* after the executions of its leaders. The poem *Arbeter Froyen* was first published in the New York socialist paper *Di Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (The Free Workers' Voice) in 1891.¹⁶⁸ It quickly spread and became popular among workers. A. Litvak mentions the song as being one of the first to be widely sung by Jewish workers in Poland and Lithuania.¹⁶⁹ Another memoirist, Abba Levin, reported hearing it sung frequently during the 1897 tanners' strike in Krynki.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ John Samuel Lorber, “*Tsum Folk Vel Ikh Fun Keyver Zingen/I Will Sing to the People From the Grave: The Emotions of Protest in the Songs of Dovid Edelshtat*” (master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 2015), <https://etd.library.vanderbilt.edu/available/etd-03242015-174157/unrestricted/LORBER.pdf>.

¹⁶⁸ Eleanor G. Mlotek, Joseph Mlotek, Zalmen Mlotek, and Tzirl Waletzky, *Pearls of Yiddish Song: Favorite Folk, Art and Theater Songs*, (New York: The Workmen's Circle, 1989), 68.

¹⁶⁹ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 231.

¹⁷⁰ Eleanor G. Mlotek et al., *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, 68.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 68 (partial)

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 68
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 132
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 56

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 10
- Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, The Butcher's Share, Track 4 (Sung in Yiddish and English)
- Susan Leviton, *Zingendik!* Track 15
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 36:55 (Sung in Yiddish and English, singable English translation by Daniel Kahn)

81. Ba Di Mashine

בא די מאַשינע

Bent Over the Machine

The song of a Jewish worker who resents the role she must play as a woman in traditional Jewish society. She knows that her parents would love for her to have a dowry so she can be married. However, she explains that she does not wish for marriage and children--she would be content simply to have her life be her own. The melody resembles that of the well-known *havdalah* song “*Hamavdi Bein Kodesh.*”

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 244

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 51

82. Bin Ikh Mir a Neyterke

בין איך מיר אַ נייטערקע

I'm a Little Seamstress

Beginning in the 19th century, many Jewish working women chose to eschew marriage at a young age, choosing instead to save money and become independent from the influence of their family, so that they could choose a partner for themselves.¹⁷¹ In this joyful tune, a seamstress sings happily about the independence her work provides from her family. She can earn her own money, and she is able to relax around her parents now that she is a guest in their home.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 243

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 51

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 36:03

83. Bread and Roses

Text: James Oppenheim

Music: Caroline Kohlsaatt

The phrase “bread and roses” was originally coined by women’s suffrage activist Helen Todd in a speech for the Chicago Women’s Club. As the slogan gained popularity, it inspired James Oppenheim to write his poem “Bread and Roses,” published in *The American Magazine* in 1911. The slogan was frequently invoked by Jewish activist Rose Schneiderman, and it became popularly associated with her. Schneiderman served as president of the New York Women’s Trade Movement League, fought for women’s suffrage, and played a key role in the Uprising of 20,000, at that time the largest strike of women workers in American history.¹⁷² The sentiment behind the slogan “bread and

¹⁷¹ Feiner, “Haskalah Attitudes Toward Women,” <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/haskalah-attitudes-toward-women>.

¹⁷² Annelise Orleck, “Rose Schneiderman,” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive, 20 March 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/schneiderman-rose>.

roses” was that working women were entitled not only to the rights to fair compensation and safe working conditions owed to them as human beings, but also the things that make life fulfilling like education, cultural activities and, most importantly, the vote.

Sources

Print:

- Socialist and Labor Songs (2014), 21
- ©Rebel Song Book (1935), 43

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Tack 14
- Ani DeFranco and Utah Phillips, Fellow Workers, Track 9
- NYC Labor Chorus, Workers Rise: Labor in the Spotlight, Track 2

84. Di Baleboste Geyt Arayn

די באַלעבאָסטע גייט אַרײַן

The Boss Lady Comes In

When the boss comes in, the workers pretend to stitch away diligently. But as soon as she leaves, they gleefully curse her. After each line comes the nonsense refrain, “*hop, dunay, dunay*,” which allows a group to quickly join in singing.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music 246

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 64
- ©*Yidische Folks-lider* (1938), 32
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 33 (*Hop, dunay, dunay*)
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 21 (*Hop, dunay, dunay*)

85. Dray Neyterins

דריי נײַטערײַנס

Three Seamstresses

Text: Y. L. Peretz

Music: M. Shneyer

The poem reveals the thoughts of three seamstresses as they are hard at work. Each represents a different stage of life. The first thinks glumly about her marriage prospects as

a poor worker. The second has given up on marriage. With her hair turning gray, she contemplates an affair with a man who has taken an interest in her. The third thinks about her beloved who will marry another in the coming week. Sick, blind and devastated, she believes she will soon die. It is worth noting that Y.L. Peretz imagines that these women are all primarily occupied with thoughts of love and marriage, and thus it is a description of women that strongly emphasizes their relationships with men.

Translation

Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, <http://rememberthetrianglefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/DRAY-NEYTORINS-3-SEAMSTRESSES-SONGLYRICS.pdf>

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 169
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 26
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 14

86. Forverts, Brider!

פאַרווערטס ברידער

Forward Brothers!

Gender equality was an important part of the Bund's ideology. One scholarly estimate has suggested that women comprised as much as one third of the Bund's membership.¹⁷³

Women took part in every area of the Bund's activities, including mass street demonstrations and paramilitary self-defense groups. This call to arms makes a specific appeal to women to join in the fight alongside the men.

¹⁷³ Jack Jacobs, "Bund," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive, 27 February 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/bund>.

Translation

Forward, brothers, to the lines,
Quickly, the flag is ready,
Come bravely as liberators,
To the fight for life and death.

Women, heroes, don't stand aside,
Come all here with courage,
Fight together with the men
To the last drop of blood.

Refrain:
All (quickly, quickly!) to the barricades,
Brothers, (quickly!) with weapons drawn!
Don't just stand there (unite!) comrades,
The victory is very great.

Tear stones from the streets,
Raise up barricades,
Brothers, comrades,
With weapons drawn.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 46

87. Ikh Dayn Muter

איך דיין מוטער

I, Your Mother

In this lullaby, a mother transmits her family's beliefs to her young child. She hopes that she will grow up to carry on the legacy of her father, who died in the fight against tyranny. The lullaby serves not only to instruct the child, but also as a comfort to the grieving mother. Max Wohlberg notes the similarity of this melody's structure to a common motivic pattern from the Shabbat morning *nusach*. Like the synagogue chant he references, the phrases of this melody conclude on the fifth, third, fourth and then first scale degree, respectively.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Max Wohlberg, "The Music of the Synagogue as a Source of the Yiddish Folksong," *Musica Judaica*, Vol. 14 (1999): 33-61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23687702>.

Translation

I, your mother, rock you child.
Close your eyes;
I wish now for you to be brave and strong,
Aylu-lyu-lyu-shi.

Brave, strong should you rise
My child, from now on,
Hate and loathing should you show
To the savage tyrant.

And when you, my child are older
And you understand somewhat,
You should swear loyalty to the oppressed
And go with them in the struggle.

You should, my child, stand for your
brothers
That join the struggle for right;
You should, my child, help overthrow
Rulers, executioners, and injustice.

And when you, my child, are bigger,
You will pick up the first one from the
ground.
You should listen to your father's will,
And take up the sword in your right hand.

You should break the ruler's walls,
And bring the light of freedom.
You should break the ruler's walls,
And bring the light of freedom.

And when you, my child, find out
Where your father is now,
Who bound and locked him in chains
And threw him in towers.

Great vengeance shall awake in you
For your father's blood,
No chains, no towers should scare you
away,
And you shall courageously take revenge.

Your father fought like a hero
For rights and justice.
Proudly he stood against those
That bloodied the slaves.

Your father swore
To shoot the tyrant,
And his blood was spilled
Like a proud man.

Rulers, executioners came
And killed your father,
They took his life from him,
Like robbers in the night.

And they buried him
Together with his holy sentiments;
Rulers and executioners have made it
through
And your father is left silent.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 60

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 40:55

88. Ikh Hob Shoyn Nit Keyn Koyekh

איך האָב שױן נײַט קײן כוח

I Have No More Strength

In this song set to a *freygish* melody, a woman pleads with a man to marry her so that she will no longer have to work all day in a factory. The man replies that he wishes to marry her, but will not be permitted to do so until his older sister becomes a bride. This song suggests that some women may have seen marriage as a potential way out of their grueling labor in factories and sweatshops.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 208

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 207
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 60
- *Yidishe Folkslider mit Melodyes* (1956), 204 (variant)

89. Kh'Hob Gekontset Di Akht Klasn

כ'האָב געקאָנטעט די אַכט קלאַסן

I Finished Eight Grades

Children were often eager to join in the revolutionary activities of the adults. When ignored or barred from participating in the official Bund organizations, some children formed independent groups commonly referred to as the *Kleyner Bund*.¹⁷⁵ The adult members' efforts to discourage these children's groups from putting themselves in danger repeatedly failed. Some members of *Kleyner Bund* groups were killed in the violent confrontations of the 1905 Revolution.¹⁷⁶ In this song, a boy is entrusted with an illegal task. Despite his young age, he is arrested and thrown in jail. The minor melody is lyrical and evocative, a fitting complement to the shock and despair of the boy.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 254

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 103

¹⁷⁵ Jacobs, "SKIF," 30.

¹⁷⁶ Jacobs, 31-32.

90. Lipson iz a Balebos

ליפסון איז אַ באַלעבאָס

Lipson is a Boss

This song tells the story of a strike by girls employed in a cigarette factory owned by Yosl Lipson. According to Beregovski's notes the factory was located in Skvyra, Ukraine, and Lipson was well known for mistreating his workers.¹⁷⁷ The union they form proves a formidable opponent; at the end of the song, the tough boss Lipson is almost in tears because, "the blasted girls are sucking his blood." According to A. Litvak, songs of this type, that reported events in a particular town were often reworked to fit similar circumstances in other places.¹⁷⁸ This song is a part of a group of songs based on the same source material, including "*Herts Oys, Mentshn*" (song #108), "*Der Bunt iz Gevorn Iber a Nabavke*" (song #106), and "*Af Maloarnautske un Pushkinske*" (song #103). Lehman also includes a number of variant texts for the melody.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 248

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 71

91. Mir Kumen On

מיר קומען אָן

We Are Coming

Text: Nokhem Yud

Music: Yankl Troupianski

"*Mir Kumen On*" was composed in 1935 for the soundtrack of the film of the same title, released in the United States as "Children Must Laugh." The film was created to fundraise for the Medem Sanatorium, opened by the Polish Bund in 1926, and is a propagandistic depiction of daily life in the institution. The Medem Sanatorium was a facility for youth with increased risk from tuberculosis, where they lived in a cooperative environment guided by the ideology and values of the Bund. The song became popular in Yiddish socialist youth organizations, and was used as the anthem of the Bundist Camp Hemshekh in 1960s and '70s.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 271

¹⁷⁸ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

¹⁷⁹ Eleanor G. Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, *Songs of Generations*, 18.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 18

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 18

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 42:54
- ©YIVO Digital Archive on Jewish Life in Poland, *Mir Kumen On*, from the soundtrack of the film *Mir Kumen On*: <http://polishjews.yivoarchives.org/node/452>
- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, Box 1, tape 25, side B
- ©Workmen's Circle Chorus, Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 45
- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 86, side B

92. Oy, Bay Mayn Arbet Tu Ikh Tsien

אוי, ביי מיין ארבעט טו איך ציען

Oy, I Sit at My Work

The text of this song is very similar to the song “*Ba Di Mashinen*” (song #81). While the mother beams with pride as the singer is married, she is filled with despair. She dreads losing the strength and health not taken from her by her grueling work by becoming a mother.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 244

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 53

93. Proletarke, Shvester Mayne

פראָלעטאַרקע, שוועסטער מיינע

My Sister, the Proletarian

The singer attempts to agitate her proletarian sister by convincing her that she will never be able to adequately provide for herself with the work she is able to get. “You are a victim of capitalism,” she explains.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 25

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 39
- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 25
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 111

Recordings:

- ©Rothenberg, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Proletarke shvester mayne*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5408>

94. S'loyfn, S'yogn Shvartse Volkn

ס'לויפן, ס'יאָגן שוואַרצע וואָלקן

Dark Clouds Race and Rush

Text: Hersh Nomberg

In this *freygish* lullaby, a mother sings to her child not to fear the roaring wind outside, as it brings a message from his father exiled to Siberia. She tells him that he will grow up to be a great hero, like his father. Like the other lullabies in this category, it appears that this song has the dual purpose of educating the child and reassuring the mother.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 79

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 78

Recordings:

- ©Zusye Levitan, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1958, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Es royshn, es yogn shvartse volkn*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5321>

95. Shlof Mayn Kind

שלאָף מיין קינד

Sleep My Child

Song played an important role in communicating socialist values and beliefs, particularly to young children. In this lullaby, a mother sings to her child that when he grows up, he will learn the difference between rich and poor. She illustrates the injustice of this arrangement by pointing out that the workers build beautiful houses for the rich, while they themselves live in squalor.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 70

Singable English Translation: Socialist and Labor Songs (2014), 10 (“Ancient Jewish Lullaby”)

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 69
- Socialist and Labor Songs (2014), 10 (“Ancient Jewish Lullaby”)
- *Yidishe Folkslider mit Melodyes* (1956), 311
- ©*Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 320
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 57 (“*Viglid*”)
- ©*Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 104
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 96

Recordings:

- Susan Leviton, *Zingendik!* Track 11

96. Tog Azoy Vi Nakht

טאָג אַזוי ווי נאַכט

Day and Night

A seamstress longs for a handsome man to marry her and free her from her work. As in the song “*Ikh Hob Shoyn Nit Keyn Koyekh*” (song #88), she sees marriage as a path out of the grueling work that consumes her days.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 243

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 49
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 61

Recordings:

- © Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Tog azoy vi nakht*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5416>

97. Viera

ווייערע

Viera

A tribute to a fallen comrade whose name, “Viera,” means truth. True to its values of gender equality, women participated in all areas of the Bund’s activities, including underground political operations, illicit demonstrations and paramilitary self-defense units.

Translation

Many thousands of voices are shouting and
clamoring
Out from the hearts of the people.
Sighing and sobbing are heard there,
All mixing together.

There lies a girl grievously wounded,
She breathes her last breath.
Take vengeance together, brothers!
Overthrow the tyrant now!

You are fallen, faithful Vera,
In the struggle as a hero.
Your words will live on long,
Long in this world.

Your words will live
Long, long after your death.
With your blood
Our flag will be colored red

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 68

98. Vos Drikstu Muter?

וואָס דריקסטו מוטער

What Troubles You, Mother?

A mother cannot bear her only child leaving her to join the revolutionary struggle. Involvement in radical groups was often a source of tension in families, particularly between generations. Many young people who joined the Bund became estranged from their families. The mother and the child in this song reach an impasse, where neither can understand the other's values.

Translation

What troubles you, Mother, causes you
grief,
What do your fine intentions express?
Are you doubt that the world must be
freed?
Would you allow the tyrant to reign?

It is you that brings me grief, my only
child,
I want you to be together with me.
You are still too young to die
And to languish in Siberia.

Akh, no, Mother, don't try to stop your
child,
Let me go where I want;
Enough tyrants will do that to me,
My heart is enslaved enough.

Oy, I won't live much longer,
And I won't have my child,
And who will give me another
When you are woefully buried?

Enough with your crying to me, Mother,
Enough already with your begging,
Mother,
I don't hear jealousy* from the time of
struggle,
I have no ode to give you now.

Lay your hand on my heart, my child,
Then you will know,
You will know the kind of pain I will have
When blood flows from you.

And the mother is dead,
She dies as if voluntarily,
A black sorrow enveloped her,
And covered her face as well.

*Word is partially illegible

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 49

99. Yugnt Himen

יוגנט הימען

Youth Anthem

Text: Shmerke Kacerginski

Music: Basye Rubin

Shmerke Kacerginski wrote the “*Yugnt Himen*” for the Youth Club organized in the Vilna ghetto. The song later became a popular anthem in Jewish socialist youth groups, as in the summer camp *Kinder-Ring* run by the Workmen’s Circle.

Translation

Singable English Translation: Yes, We Sang! Songs of the Concentration Camps and Ghettos (1985), 141

Sources

Print:

- Yes, We Sang! Songs of the Concentration Camps and Ghettos (1985), 141 (with keyboard accompaniment)

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 16
- ©Shmerke Kacerginski, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*undzer lid iz ful mit troyer- Yugnt himen*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/1882>
- ©Sarah Israel, “Workmen’s Circle Chorus and the Youth Hymn,” Yiddish Book Center’s Wexler Oral History Project, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XBczeSmVB0

100. Zingendik

זינגענדיק

Singing

This song was composed for the soundtrack of the film “*Mir Kumen On*,” released in the United States as “Children Must Laugh.” The film was created as a fundraiser for the Medem Sanatorium, a facility for youth at increased risk from Tuberculosis established by the Bund in interwar Poland and informed by its ideology.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 89

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 88

5. Economic Agitation

עקאָנאָמִישע אַגִיטאַציע

As the founders of the Bund formed deeper relationships with artisans and factory workers, they began to better understand the immediate concerns of the working class. They quickly realized that they would need to appeal to these needs in order to recruit workers to the revolutionary movement. At the end of the 19th century, the central principle of the Bund's agitation campaign was, "From economics to politics." Though their ultimate goal remained an end to autocracy in Russia, the intellectuals hoped that the fight for better working conditions would introduce a wider segment of Jewish workers to socialist ideas, eventually leading them into political struggle.

When Bundist leader Shmul Gozansky coincidentally discovered an old law from the reign of Catherine II mandating that the workday be limited to a maximum of twelve hours, the twelve-hour workday became the rallying cry of a massive eruption of strikes throughout the Russian empire. In large factories and shops with as few as three employees, Jewish went on strike, demanding safer conditions and better pay in addition to a shorter workday. To support their efforts, they organized *kassi*, unions that collected funds from their members to help defray lost wages. Thousands of workers participated in the strikes, which quickly spiraled beyond the influence of the intellectual leaders who had sparked them. Many of the strikers succeeded in forcing their employers to yield to their demands.

While the labor rights issues that concern us today look different than those that motivated the Jewish strike movement, a deeper examination reveals many parallels. The lynchpin of the Bund's economic agitation campaign was the call for a twelve-hour limit to the workday. A century of organization by the American labor led to the establishment of the eight-hour work day and forty-hour workweek, codified in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. However, many types of workplaces are exempt from these regulations. These standards are further weakened as more work takes place digitally and remotely, blurring the boundaries between time on and time off. Many people today report feeling like they never really leave work. Though these new challenges demand innovative solutions, at the core is the same human need that motivated the Jewish strike movement; time and energy to devote to pursuits other than earning a living. The songs in this section, which tell stories of the strike music and highlight the unjust disparities between workers and their employers, will resonate with anyone who has felt overworked and undervalued.

Suggested Practical Applications

- Organizing and actions related to unjust corporate practices
- Organizing and actions related to economic inequality
- Organizing and actions related to organized labor and collective bargaining rights

- Commemoration of May Day and Labor Day during services and community gatherings
- Passover seders
- Study of the laws of Shabbat or the Jubilee year
- Discussion or text study focusing on Jewish perspectives on work-life balance
- Curricula on the history of Eastern European Jews
- Curricula on the role of Jews in organized labor movements
- Curricula on Jewish activists
- Many of the songs in this category that tell the story of a particular were spread from workplace to workplace, where the name of the employer and other details were altered to fit the singers' circumstances. A creative way to make these songs relevant to current events is to write your own updated lyrics to the melodies, either as part of an educational program or social justice action.

101. A Gut Morgn Aykh, Rabinovits

א גוט אייך ראבינאוויץ

Good Morning, Rabinowitz

An imagined conversation between the owners of a factory during a strike. According to Beregovski's notes, Rabinowitz and Yosl Lipson were the owners of a cigarette factory in Skvyra, a town near Kyiv, and were known for mistreating their employees.¹⁸⁰ This song is an example of a type that spread from town to town, with singers modifying the details to reflect their own situation.¹⁸¹ Beregovski's collection includes two other variants of this song where the names of the employers have been changed.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 248

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 74
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 75 (variant)
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 76 (variant)

¹⁸⁰ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 261.

¹⁸¹ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

102. A Sobrane Hobn Mir Zikh Sobirayet

אַ סאַבראַנע האָבן מיר זיך סאַבירייַעט

We Gathered an Assembly

A spy reports an assembly of workers and they are arrested. In the third verse, the singer explains that they work from eight until ten, and sometimes eight until six the next morning. A twelve-hour workday was one of the most common demands of striking Jewish workers. Beregovski notes that Lehman attributes the tune of the version of this song notated in *Arbeyt un Frayhayt* to a Ukrainian revolutionary song titled “*Oy, tse gore nas rabochikh.*” The melody of “*Ver Tut Stroyen Movern*” (song #74) is similar to this song, and perhaps both were based on the same source.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 252

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 92
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 90

103. Af Maloarnautske un Pushkinske

אַף מאַלאָאַרנאַטשקע און פּושקיןסקע

At Maloarnautske and Pushkinske

Striking factory workers demand a raise. The police are called to the factory, and they curse at the Jews and threaten violence. For this part of the song, the language switches to Russian. Songs about current events were often borrowed and changed to reflect the circumstances of the singer, and this song is an example of that phenomenon.¹⁸² It is similar to “*Der Bunt iz Gevorn Iber a Nabavke*” (song #106), “*Lipson iz a Balebos*” (song #90), and the variant of that song titled “*Herts Oys Mentshn*” (song #108), suggesting that all of these songs are variants of the same source.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 248

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 77

¹⁸² Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

104. Akht Shoah In Tog

אַכט שעה אין טאָג

Eight Hours a Day

The twelve hour workday was the rallying cry of the strike movement supported by the Bund. The workers in this song are more ambitious--they are striking to cut their workday down to eight hours. With the advance of technology blurring the boundaries between work time and liesure time, it is a message that takes on new meaning today.

Translation

We want to work eight hours a day,
And when the ninth comes, go home.
The master will not give in,
We'll make a general strike.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 32

105. Arbetsloze Marsh

אַרבעטסלאָזע מאַרש

March of the Unemployed

Text and Music: Mordechai Gebirtig

Unemployment, whether during strikes or between jobs, was a major problem for Jewish artisans and factory workers. This song is a rallying cry to the unemployed to join in the fight for a better world. The composer, Mordechai Gebirtig lived in Krakow from his birth in 1877 until he was murderd by Nazi gunfire during the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto, during which time the Bund was an active political party in Poland. This song reflects Bundist ideology, and was first published in his song collection titled *Mayne Lider* in 1936. The singable English translation by Daniel Kahn puts a current spin on this song, and would not sound out of place at a contemporary demonstration or protest.

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. V, 179

Singable Translation by Daniel Kahn: https://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77_MARCH_OF_THE_JOBLESS_CORPS.pdf**Sources**

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. V, 177

Recordings:

- Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, *Lost Causes*, Track 4 (Sung in Yiddish and English)
- Zupfgeigenhansel, *Jiddische Lieder*, Track 5
- Amelia Lavranchuk, *Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism*, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 48:09 (Sung in Yiddish and English, singable English translation by Daniel Kahn)

106. Der Bunt Iz Gevorn Iber a Nabovke

דער בונט איז געוואָרען איבער אַ נאַבאָבקע

The Uprising Started Over a Raise

This song describes an uprising at a factory owned by Landesman. In the final verse, the singer recounts that the employers have accused the striking workers of being socialists who don't believe in God. The resentful way in which this is stated reflects the fact that many workers who participated in the Jewish labor movement supported by the Bund were not members of a socialist party or organization, and retained traditional religious beliefs. Songs that told the story of current events, like strikes, were often spread from town to town reworked to fit different circumstances.¹⁸³ This song seems to share a common source with “*Lipson iz a Balebos*” (song #90), “*Af Maloarnautske un Pushkinske*” (song #103), and “*Herts Oys Mentshn*” (song #108).

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 249

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 78

107. Di Mashines Klapn

די משינעס קלאָפּן

The Machines Knock

The singer exhorts his fellow factory workers not to weep over their arduous work, because soon the owner will sell the business and the jobs will move to Odessa. He reassures them that they will survive this as they've survived challenging circumstances

¹⁸³ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

in the past, and encourages them to focus on the liberation of Russia from the black-hearted Tsar Nicholas II.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 246

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 65
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 119 (variant)

Recordings:

- © Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Di mashines klapn*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5385>

108. Herts Oys Mentshn, Vos Hot Zikh Farloyfn הערטס אויס מענטשן, וואָס האָט זיך פאַרלויפן

Listen, People, to What Happened

The story of a strike at Berke Brener’s shoe factory in Warsaw.¹⁸⁴ The workers band together, post leaflets on the walls, and threatened to set their finished work on fire. Daniel Lipkovitch, who sang this song to Ruth Rubin, remembers standing with other children across the street from the factory and singing this song during the strike, around 1905.¹⁸⁵ This song seems to be based on the same source material as the strike songs “*Lipson iz a Balebos*” (song #90), “*Der Bunt iz Gevorn iber a Nabovke*” (song #106), and “*Af Maloarnautske un Pushkinshke*” (song #103). It was common for these kinds of songs to spread from town to town, with the singers altering the details to fit their purposes.¹⁸⁶

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 250

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 250
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 34

¹⁸⁴ Rubin et al., *Ruth Rubin Archive*, 250.

¹⁸⁵ Rubin et al., *Ruth Rubin Archive*, 250.

¹⁸⁶ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

109. In Ale Gasn Vi Men Geyt

אין אלע גאסן ווי מען גייט

In Every Street Where You Walk

This song belongs to a group of parody songs, intended to mock the workers and the constant strikes. According to Beregovski, they were probably composed by the kind of street singers who were hired to perform at Jewish weddings and parties, and thus were directed at a middle-class audience. This group was not particularly sympathetic to the workers, but the strikes proved to be ubiquitous for the singers to ignore.¹⁸⁷ This version takes a jab at the young intellectuals, mocking their lack of facility in Yiddish.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 249

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 80
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 83 (variant)
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 85 (variant)
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 87 (variant)

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 11

110. In Droysn Iz Finster

אין דרויסן איז פינסטער

It's Dark Outside

The Bundist agitators worked to foster a sense of class consciousness among the Jewish workers by emphasizing divisions between employees and their better off employers. While she cries over her sewing in the sweltering room, thinking of how she has given all of her young years to work, the owner and his children drink tea, eat chocolate and read the paper. "How can we not be jealous?" she asks.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 246

¹⁸⁷ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 271.

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 66
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 54

111. Ot Azoy Neyt a Shnayder

אָט אַזױ נײַט אַ שׂנײַדער

That's How a Taylor Sews

In Beregovski's collection, this well known folk song depicting a tailors repetitive work is adapted for use as a strike song. "A year ago, not today, we worked the whole night. Our instructions came from the committee, and we won't work from eight [am] to eight [am] anymore!" read the additional verses. The chorus is well known, and the repetitive text and music vividly depict the monotonous sewing of the tailor, as well as being easy to teach for group singing. The verses are rhyming couplets, a simple structure that lends itself well to the creation of new original verses for the song.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 247 ("The Tailor Works All Week")

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 70 ("*Arbet der shnayder a gantse vokh*")
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. III (1983), 161
- *Yidishe Folkslider mit Melodyes* (1956), 435
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 24

Recordings:

- Mark Levy, I'm a Little Taylor, Track 11
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 47:00
- © Bessie Dux, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1964, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*Ot azoy neyt a shnayder*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5976>
- © Freda Lobell, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, "*Ot azoy neyt a shnayder*": <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5418>

112. Un Du Akerst un Du Zeyst

און דו אָקערסט און דו זײסט

And You Sew and You Plow

Text: Chayim Zhitlovski

Sung from the point of view of the wealthy who benefit from the endless labor of the workers, the song challenges those who produced all of these treasures, asking what they have to show for their toil. Instead of continuing to dedicate their great strength to the further enrichment of the wealthy, the song encourages them to marshal their hammers to the task of breaking the chains of slavery. In her article, “A Comparative Approach to a Yiddish Song of Protest,” Ruth Rubin explores the themes of exploitation this song” and how they are represented in examples folk songs from Europe and the United States. She traces Zhitlovski’s poem to its publication in the Jewish Daily Forward and the *Arbeter-Tsayung* (Workers’ Newspaper) in the early 1890’s, where he attributes it as a loose translation of a poem by radical German poet Georg Herwegh.¹⁸⁸ The four-line refrain does not appear in Zhitlovski’s original rendition, and must have been added to the song later. Herwegh’s poem was published in his 1877 collection titled *Neue Gedichte* (New Poems) and is titled “*Bundeslied für den Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitverein* (Anthem for the General Jewish Labor Union).” An English translation of his poem appears in Upton Sinclair’s collection *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest*, published in 1915.¹⁸⁹ The history of this song’s provenance illustrates the resonance of its message across time and cultures. The song’s onomatopoetic chorus is easy to learn and lends itself well to group singing with adults and children.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 247

Singable English Translation: Theodore Bikel, *Folksongs and Footnotes* (1960), 186

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 6
- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 247
- Folksongs and Footnotes (1960), 185

Recordings:

- Theodore Bikel, *While I’m Here*, Disk 2, Track 3 (mistakenly titled *Tsum Hemerl*)

¹⁸⁸ Ruth Rubin, “A Comparative Approach to a Yiddish Song of Protest,” *Studies in Ethnomusicology II* (New York: 1965), 55.

¹⁸⁹ Upton Sinclair, *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest* (New York and Pasadena: Upton Sinclair, 1915), 67, <https://archive.org/details/cryforjusticean01sincgoog/page/n10>.

- ©Zhukovsky, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1956, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Un du akerst un du zeyst*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5345>
- ©Esther Zuker, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Un du akerst un du zeyst*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5342>
- ©Workmen’s Circle Chorus, Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 45
- ©Audio recording of the Jewish Labor Bund at Town Hall, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 86, side B

113. Viazoy Zol Ikh Nit Mekane Zayn

וויאזוי זאל איך ניט מקנה זײן

How Can I Not be Envious?

This song appears to be a variant of “*In Droyasn iz Finster*” (song #110). A weary worker sings of her envy for her cruel boss’s comfortable life.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 247

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 67

6. Confrontation and Detention

קאָנפֿראָנטאַציע און אַרעסט

When they saw that the strike movement had stagnated, the leaders of the Bund began to shift to a more explicitly political message. They relied increasingly on illegal actions and demonstrations, which involved only the most devoted and trustworthy members of the *kassi* and local organizations. Secret meetings were held in the dark forests on the outskirts of towns. The *birzhe*, a type of alleyway labor market, served as the main arena for sensitive communication, where it could easily be hidden amid the noise and bustle of the street. Leaders of the Bund and members who participated in these illicit activities were in constant danger of arrest, interminable prison sentences, and exile to work camps in Siberia. Police response to strikes and demonstrations was unpredictable and sometimes violent, and self-defense was a necessity. The Bund trained groups to protect demonstrators from groups of thugs employed as strike-breakers. In response to the outbreak of pogroms that swept Russia in the early twentieth century, they also organized paramilitary groups of men and women, called BO Units, in an attempt to protect Jewish communities.

Though the Bund's leaders vehemently discouraged aggressive force, they had limited influence over the actions of the mass movement. Groups of striking workers sometimes attacked those who refused to participate. Occasionally, workers allied with the Bund resorted to terrorism. The most famous example was Hirsh Lekert's assassination attempt on the governor of Vilna. Lekert was executed by hanging, and soon became a folk hero, to the deep dismay of the Bund leadership.

The zenith of the Bund's influence came during the Revolution of 1905. On Sunday, January 9th, a group of Russian workers approached the palace in Saint Petersburg demanding an audience with the Tsar. Hundreds were slaughtered by gunfire from the royal guards, sparking a yearlong wave of political strikes and violent confrontations between demonstrators and police. The Bund participated enthusiastically. With a membership of around 34,000, in many areas it was the largest and most organized socialist entity. Frequently, the Bund served as the leader and coordinator of all revolutionary groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Today, people around the world still live under the rule of autocracies. In these countries, political expression can still be punished with the same brutal measures experienced by the revolutionaries who created these songs. Even in the democracy of the United States, mass incarceration is more prevalent than in any other country in the world. Leaders in law enforcement look the other way as incidents of police brutality leave members of marginalized communities living in fear of those who are supposed to protect them. Draconian immigration policies have separated children from their parents and consigned asylum seekers fleeing violence to indefinite detention in deplorable conditions. For many, these songs are still their reality.

Suggested Practical Applications

- Organizing and actions around mass incarceration
- Organizing and actions around immigrant detention
- Organizing and actions around immigrant family separation
- Organizing and actions around police brutality
- Sermons on immigration, police brutality and mass incarceration
- Memorials for victims of government sponsored violence
- Passover seders
- Curricula on the history of Eastern European Jews
- Curricula on Jewish activists
- Discussion of the Jewish ethics of self-defense and resistance
- Singing during services as an opportunity to reflect on recent events of government sponsored violence

114. A Geroysh, a Getuml

א גערויש, א געטומל

A Noise, a Tumult

Political strikes were an important tool during the 1905 Revolution. Unlike the strikes of the economic agitation period, which were used to put pressure on a particular employer or industry, political strikes were directed toward the government. This song shares its melody with settings for Rosenfeld's poem "*A Mashine*" (song # 1) and Winchevsky's "*Tsum Arbeter-Fraynt*" (song #46).

Translation

A noise, a tumult, the streets are boiling,
 The rich, they ask what it means;
 Many workers are going around in masses,
 The rich, they fear a political strike.

You tyrants, you rich bourgeois,
 Why are you so good and scared of the workers?
 You just see the workers going around in the street
 And your blood dies inside you.

The rich are for the Russian Tsar;
 They support him, they don't let him fall--
 They allow him towers, they allow him chains,
 They allow him horses, they allow him stalls.

We need no towers, no Siberia, no chains,
 We need no ruler, no capitalist,
 We only need all of the strikes,
 So we can show what socialist means.

“We will not lay down the flag!” comes a shout,
 With struggle and sword in hand
 Until we have freed Russia,
 Until we have freed all of Russia!

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 30

115. Barikadn

באַרִיקאַדן

Barricades

Text: Shmerke Kaczerginski

Born in 1908 in Vilna, Shmerke Kaczerginski was active in the communist movement in the years following World War I and was arrested several times.¹⁹⁰ It was around this time, during the mid-1920s, that he wrote the song *Barikadn*, according to his conversation with Ruth Rubin on the field recording listed below. Barricades were erected as a protest tactic, provoking confrontations with police, a strategy employed by Bundist groups in several instances during the 1905 Revolution. In Kaczerginski's depiction, everyone takes part: mothers and fathers take to the streets as part of armed groups of workers, and children throw stones. The melody's insistent eighth note rhythm helps lend the song the frenetic energy of an improvised confrontation.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 85

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 84
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 13
- © *Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 79

¹⁹⁰ Avraham Novershtern, “Shmerke Kaczerginski,” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kaczerginski_Shmerke.

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 3
- The Klezematics, Rise Up! Track 9
- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 52:56
- ©Shmerke Kaczerginski, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*tates, mames, kinderlekh*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5991>

116. Borukh Shulman

ברוך שולמאן

Borukh Shulman

In 1906, 19-year-old Borukh Shulman assassinated the Tsarist police chief of Warsaw Konstantinov with a bomb. Though the exact circumstances are unclear, he died in the ensuing confrontation. The song casts Borukh Shulman as a martyr in the fight against tyranny. A. Litvak reports that the song was known only in Poland, and did not spread to Jewish communities elsewhere.¹⁹¹

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 23

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 258 (variant, “*Veyn Nit, Bruder, un Veyn Nit, Shvester*”)
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 23
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 63

Recordings:

- ©Leo Summergrad, Yiddish Song of the Week, An-sky Jewish Folklore Research Project: <https://yiddishsong.wordpress.com/2019/07/25/borukh-shulman-nokh-a-keyver-nokh-a-korbn-performed-by-leo-summergrad/>
- ©Yankl Goldman, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Erev yom-kiper nokhn halbn tog*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/2785>

¹⁹¹ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

- ©Sore Kessler, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1949, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Erev yom-kiper nokhn halbn tog*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/2798>

117. Dem Nayntn Yanuar

דעם נײַנטן יאנואַר

The Ninth of January

After the arrest of their comrade, a group of revolutionaries vows to destroy the jails with explosives and free the captives. The arrest takes place in the *birzhe*, a busy alleyway labor market used by the Bund in many cities to clandestinely relay messages and distribute propaganda.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 252

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 94

Recordings:

- Tsibele, *It's Dark Outside-Indroysn iz Finster*, Track 1

118. Der Arbeter Kamf

דער אַרבעטער קאַמף

The Workers' Struggle

A defiant declaration that the revolutionaries will continue their battle despite the ruthless response of the regime.

Translation

The workers' struggle goes on and on,
 The victims pile up,
 The bravest fighters fall,
 They are pursued without mercy.

They are placed in dark tents,
 Torn far away from human life,
 They are sent away to cold Siberia,
 The die for freedom.

And the iron chains, under the iron tyrant,
 There they sit and languish in love and faith,
 You must not forget what agitation means,
 To renew and better our lives.

The working days shorter, the pay greater,
 They write and print all that we wish for,
 So that our lives will become much better,
 We must not lose our struggle.

Thus says the ruler and thus says the regime,
 In order to further suppress the workers' struggle,
 Towers and Siberias and all sorts of torments,
 To suffocate the workers' spirit.

But all of us workers strive for freedom,
 We laugh ourselves silly at all of these weapons,
 To join the brave struggle, we call:
 Sisters and brothers, come here!

We will support our victims
 With love and with faith and with courage,
 And we will defeat the enemy
 Unto the last drop of blood.

Sources

Print:

- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 74
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 44

119. Di Bikher mit di Sekretn

די ביכער מיט די סעקרעטן

The Books with the Secrets

All anti-governmental action was illegal under the tsarist regime, so secrecy was imperative for the revolutionaries. In this song, a book of sensitive information has been lost, placing the revolutionaries in jeopardy. The singer is arrested, beaten and interrogated, and then thrown in jail.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 48

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 102

120. Di Lena

די לענא

The Lena

Text: Abraham Liessin

The Lena river flows through eastern Siberia, the setting for this depiction of an exiled political prisoner.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 83

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 83

121. Di Trit Fun Tiranen

די טריט פון טיראנען

The Steps of Tyrants

The singer expresses his grief over a friend that has been arrested and exiled to Siberia. According to Beregovski's notes, this song is based on "*Elegie Levanda*" a song composed by Eliakum Zuser in 1888. The last verse of the version of this song transcribed by Beregovski borrows the tune of the song "*S'loyfn, S'yogn Shvartse Volkn*" (song #94).

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 255

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 110
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 85 (variant)

Recordings:

- ©Max Makofsky, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Di shrit fun tiranen*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5323> (variant, as notated in Lehman, *Arbeyt un Frayhayt*)

122. Doloy Politsey

דאָלוי פּאָליציי

Down With the Police

According to Lehman’s notes in *Arbeyt un Frayhayt*, “*Doloy Politsey*” was among the most popular and well-known songs of the 1905 era.¹⁹² Alternating with the chorus, sung in Russian, many additional verses in Yiddish and Russian were improvised by demonstrators. Some of the most common themes for these are curses on Tsar Nicholas II and tributes to arrested or fallen comrades. Because of its improvisatory nature, the song appears in print in an enormous number of variations. Many examples of alternate verses and stanzas are given in Lehman’s notes.¹⁹³ Continuing this tradition, “*Doloy Politsey*” has received updated treatments by a number of contemporary artists, including the English adaptation by Geoff Berner and the rendition by Spanish punk band *Bestiario*, which both focus on the issue of police brutality. The simple rhyming couplet structure of the verses makes it easy to create your own modern take.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 257 (“*Shvester un brider, lomir zikh nisht ertsn*”)

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 257 (“*Shvester un brider, lomir zikh nisht ertsn*”)
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 9 (variant, “*Brider un Shvester*”)
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 22 (“*Shvester un brider*”)

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 11
- Geoff Berner, Victory Party, Track 6 (*Daloy Polizei*, English version, EXPLICIT)
- Bestiario, Este Infierno, Track 9 (*Daloy Polizei*, Spanish version)

¹⁹² Lehman, *Arbeyt un Frayhayt*, 158.

¹⁹³ Lehman, 158.

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 54:24 (Sung in Yiddish and English)
- © Hannah Rosenberg, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Shvester un Briday*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5980> (variant)
- © Workmen’s Circle Chorus, Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 45

123. Es Dremlt in Turme

עס דרעמלט אין טורמע

The Prison is Slumbering

Based on the love song, “*Es Dremelt in Shtetl*” by Joseph Heftman. The melody is adapted to a song of suffering prisoners, who defiantly affirm their commitment to the struggle for freedom despite their detention.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 249

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 249
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 37 (“*Es Dremelt Di Turme*”)
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 95 (“*Di tirme mit kraten*”)
- © *Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 86

Recordings:

- © Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Es dremelt in turme*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5322>

124. Frayhayt Himen

פרייהייט הימען

Freedom Anthem

Text: Aaron Kurtz

Music: A. Davidenko

This march reassures that no matter what brutal reprisals the regime inflicts on the revolutionaries, they will not be defeated because their work will be taken up by the next generation.

Translation

Friends, fortify the lines,
Steel yourselves for the battle,
You must free your homeland,
Freedom and honor for your class.

Let them throw us in dungeons,
Let them burn us in flames,
Let them send us to die,
Exhaust us again and again.

Refrain:

And if the tide turns against us,
Shoved into prisons and tents,
Our work will shine on,
And be taken up by new generations.

Sources

Print:

- © *Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 68

125. Genesye iz Fun Ir Arbet Gegangen

גענעסיע איז פון דער אַרבעט געגאַנגען

Genesye Came From Work

A worker is murdered by the police in cold blood. This song borrows its melody from “*O Liber, Mir Hobn Geshlosn*” (song #134). In the sources below, the name of the subject of the song varies, suggesting that it was adapted to memorialize particular people. This is the inspiration behind the version by *Koyt far dayn fardakht*, which is a tribute to Mya Hall, a transgender woman killed by police in Baltimore.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 253

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 98

Recordings:

- *Koyt far dayn fardakht, Mya Z'fun Ir Arbet Gegangen (Khaverim in Kamf)/Mya Left Work (Comrades in Struggle)*, Bandcamp: <https://koytfilth.bandcamp.com/> (Sung in Yiddish and English)
- © Lifshe Schaechter-Widman, Yiddish Song of the Week, An-sky Jewish Folklore Research Project: <https://yiddishsong.wordpress.com/2010/05/12/khavele-iz-fun-der-arbet-gegangen-performed-by-lifshe-schaechter-widman/> (“*khavele iz fun der arbet gegangen*”)
- © Chinke Ashke, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Khanele iz fun der arbet gegangen*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5399>

126. Hert Nor Um

הערט נאָר אום

Just Listen

A revolutionary tells of his arrest and the brutal conditions of the Siberian prison where he is incarcerated.

Translation

Just listen, dear brothers,
Oy, what happened to me:
From the most beautiful splendor, from the
most radiant gleam,
They arrested me.

I was given a new name,
They call me Prisoner.
Oy, the chains are my guards,
They lead me to Siberia.

I broke no locks, I didn't stab anyone,
I have not been convicted of murder.
I will wait in every little tower
And remain faithful to my brothers.

Oy, there goes a procession of prisoners,
Socialists walking nearby,
Oy, the chains ring
From the gate to the arsenal.

They led me into the first yard,
Naked, barefoot, onto a bit of straw,
Torn clothes and no boots,
So I suffer for truth.

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 251 (variant)
- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 80

Recordings:

- ©Anne Kline, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1964, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Ikh hob keynem nit geshosn*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5331> (variant)

127. Hirsh Lekert

הירש לעקערט

Hirsh Lekert

Hirsh Lekert was shoemaker who became involved with the Bund. He participated in an illegal May Day demonstration in Vilna in 1902, during which the governor of Vilna, Victor Von Wahl arrested and beat 26 of the demonstrators, mostly Jews. Several weeks later, Lekert attempted to assassinate Von Wahl, shooting and wounding him. He was apprehended during the incident and publicly hanged a short time later.¹⁹⁴ Though terrorism was not condoned by the Bund, Lekert became a folk hero. According to A. Litvak, folk songs memorializing Lekert, like this one, spread throughout the Jewish world.¹⁹⁵

Translation

Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 20

Sources

Print:

- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 22
- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 94
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 96 (variant)
- ©*Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 92

Recordings:

- Yale Strom & Hot Pstromi, City of the Future: Yiddish Songs from the Former Soviet Union, Track 5
- ©Yankl Goldman, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Der zeyger hot tsvelef geshlogn* (fragment)”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5967>

¹⁹⁴ Dov Levin, “Hirsh Lekert.” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, August 24, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lekert_Hirsh.

¹⁹⁵ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 234.

- ©Fegyl Sultan, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Ven Hershke iz fun shtub aroysgengangen* (fragment)”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5967> (variant)

128. In Dem Vaytn Land Sibir

אין דעם ווייטן לאַנד סיביר

In Far Away Siberia

A prisoner suffering in the brutal conditions of Siberia imagines the day when he will receive word of the revolutionaries success. He also describes meeting all of the greatest thinkers and philosophers in Russia, who are incarcerated there with him.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 256

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 114
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 115 (variant)
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 116 (variant)
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 36 (*In Dred iz Nikolai*)

129. In Kamf

אין קאמף

In Struggle

Text: David Edelshtadt

“*In Kamf*” was one of the most popular songs based on the poetry of David Edelshtadt, beloved by both American union workers and prisoners in Russian jails.¹⁹⁶ “You can only kill our bodies, you will never destroy our spirit!” declares this revolutionary anthem.

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 80

Singable English translation: Daniel Kahn, https://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77_IN_KAMF.pdf

¹⁹⁶ Levin, *While Messiah Tarried*, 125.

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 80
- Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV (1987), 27
- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 131
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 5
- ©*Yidishe Folks-lider* (1938), 80
- ©*Gezang un Kamf* No. 6 (1938), 50 (SATB choral arrangement by E. Sheinin)

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 5
- Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, Lost Causes, Track 5 (Sung in Yiddish and English)

130. Ir Balbatim, Ir Merder

איר באַלעבאַטים, איר מערדער

You Bosses, You Murderers

Employers sometimes hired thugs to attack striking workers, resulting in violent confrontations. The workers in this song refuse to be intimidated. “There may be thunder and lightning, the whole world may come to an end, we’ll sit here eight hours a day,” they declare. In his notes, Beregovsky remarks that he believes that the reference to the Petlyurovites (Ukrainian separatists led by Symon Petlyura) was a later addition, as the song predates Russo-Polish War.¹⁹⁷

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 247

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 69
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 38 (*Strayk-lid*)

¹⁹⁷ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 271.

131. Men Firt Mikh Arayn in a Fintstern Kheyder מען פירט מיך אריין אין אַ פינצטען חדר

They Lead Me Into a Dark Cellar

A variant of “*Ver Tut Stroyen Movern*” (song #74). The melody of both songs is similar to “*Hert Nor Um*” (song #126). The singer is a “half-intellectual” who left Yeshiva to join the revolutionary movement. Now, imprisoned in a dark room with no pen to write, he sings a mournful song instead.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 254

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 105

132. Mit Eyn Hant Hastu Undz Gegebn di Konstitutsie מיט איין האַנט האָסטו אונדז געגעבן די קאָנסטיטוטסיע

With One Hand You Gave Us the Constitution

Under the pressure of the wave of strikes and demonstrations known as the 1905 Revolution, the Tsar issued the October Manifesto, which created the representative body known as the Duma. This conciliatory measure was followed by the 1906 Constitution, further outlining the structure of the new government. It was a hollow victory for the revolutionaries, as the Duma’s legislative power was hamstrung by additional laws, and the first elected body was dissolved after only three months, due to the Tsar’s dissatisfaction with the election’s outcome. The Bund, who regarded the Duma as a sham democracy, refused to participate in the first elections.

Translation

Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 252

Sources

Print:

- Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Archive (2007), 252

Recordings:

- ©Anne Kline, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1964, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Mit eyn hant hastu undz gegeben di konstitutsie*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5329>

133. Nit Keyn Rathuz

ניט קיין ראטהוז

No Town Hall

A declaration that the revolutionaries not be intimidated from their fight by government retaliation.

Translation

No town hall,	So the enemy
No shmown hall	Wants someone
Will intimidate our spirit,	To throw in the dungeon.
For everything	But we will cause a commotion
That is not equal	Brothers,
We will cry out in protest.	We will continue to protest.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 98

134. O Liber, Mir Hobn Geshlosn

א ליבער, מיר האבן געשלאסן

Oh Beloved, We Have Sworn

Text: Khayim Miller (Khayim Aleksandrov)

A pair of lovers swear to stand together in battle, in life and in death. A. Litvak writes in his memoir that this was among the most popular songs of the revolutionary years, 1905-1907.¹⁹⁸ Litvak records the song beginning with the words, “*O liber...* (Oh beloved),” but it appears in many other sources with the title “*O Brider, Mir Hobn Geshlosn* (Oh Brothers, We Have Sworn),” as well as the title “*Khaverim in Kamf* (Friends in Struggle).” This lyrical minor melody was also adapted in a number of other songs, including “*Genesye iz fun der Arbet Gegangen*” (song #125).

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 75

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 134 (*Brider, mir hobn geshlosn*)

¹⁹⁸ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 240.

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 75
- ©Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider (1941), 6 (*Brider, mir hobn geshlosn a farband*)
- ©Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider (1940), 11 (*Brider, mir hobn geshlosn a farband*)
- *Gezang un Kamf* No. 6 (1938) ,56 (*Brider, mir hobn geshlosn a farband*, SATB choral arrangement by Max Helfman)

Recordings:

- Amelia Lavranchuk, Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 57:20
- ©Ruth Rubin, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1948, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Brider, mir hobn geshlosn*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5400>
- ©Rosenberg, Field recording by Ruth Rubin, 1955, The Ruth Rubin Legacy: Archive of Yiddish Folksongs, “*Brider, mir hobn geshlosn*”: <https://exhibitions.yivo.org/items/show/5400> (variant)

135. Oy Mitvokh iz Pervi May

אוי מיטוואך איז אַ פּערױי מײַ

Oy, Wednesday is the First of May

Shortly before the first of May, a day marked by the labor movement strikes and demonstrations, a group of revolutionaries mourn their comrade after he accidentally drowns while swimming in the river. As they carry his body to his mother’s home, they are harassed by police. They honor his revolutionary contributions by hanging a red flag over his grave.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 253

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 99

136. Oy Vey, Shvester un Brider

אוי וויי, שוועסטער און ברידער

Oy Vey, Sisters and Brothers

A lament of a group of revolutionaries who are arrested after someone tips off the police about their illegal meeting. In the last verse, they exhort their parents not to weep and wail, but to be proud of the sacrifices their children have made for the sake of others. In the first verse, as the revolutionaries declare, “We truly love each other,” the word “truly” is punctuated with a descending augmented second, suggesting the Ukrainian dorian mode. In his essay, “The Altered Dorian Scale in Jewish Folk Music,” Beregovski illustrates that this mode is often deployed in folk music to evoke a feeling of lament.¹⁹⁹ This melodic gesture does not appear in the following verses, suggesting that it was added by the singer that Beregovski recorded it from to give the line particular emphasis. Additionally, the melody employs a stepwise descent from the third to the tonic as a cadence, recalling the cadential phrase used in the cantillation for the book of Lamentations.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 251

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 89

137. Oy, Oyf di Felder di Toyte

אוי, אויף די פעלדער די טויטע

Oy, in the Fields of the Dead

Political prisoners swear to blow up the tower that holds them captive and free themselves.

Translation

Oy, in the fields of the dead,
There stands a red brick tower,
And the living who go inside,
Look like the dead after.

Oy, there, they go to eat
And the bread is very black.
You can't digest it,

¹⁹⁹ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 552.

It burns the heart.

O, brothers, let us swear--
The flags are red with blood,
Let us free ourselves from the tower
With bombs and dynamite.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 99

138. Shabes Batog iz a Yomer Mit a Klog

שבת באטאג איז א יאָמיר מיט אַ קלאָג

Saturday Afternoon There's Weeping and Wailing

The *birzhe*, an outdoor labor market, served as an important arena of agitation for the Bund. There, revolutionaries could distribute propaganda and pass messages under the cover of the bustling street, which was difficult to monitor and police. This song opens with the police rounding up workers in the *birzhe* and bringing them to jail. The singer urges those remaining to bomb the jail and free the captives. "Nick and the government should go to hell!" he sings.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 252

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 94

139. Unter der Sofievke

אונטער דער סופיעבֿקע

Near the Sofievke

The singer reports a big group gathering in the Sofievke, a park in Uman.

Translation

Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 251

Sources

Print:

- Old Jewish Folk Music (2000), 92

140. Zumer in a Finstern Ovnt

זומער אין אַ פינסטערן אָונט

On a Dark Summer Evening

An incarcerated revolutionary, though he has managed to protect his secrets from the police, laments his bitter fate in a tsarist prison.

Translation

Oy, on a dark summer evening,
I sat in a house and thought,
Oy, suddenly I discover, oy, heavy
footsteps,
I had awoken police with gendarmes.

As they flung open my door,
They said, oy, “come with us now!”
My parents were terrified,
“Oy, they’re taking away our child!”

As they brought me to the police station,
They opened the desk,
But I planned well,
They found nothing but a board.

They wrote my charges
On a piece of red paper
And they drove me into a tower,
That would be my door now!

They tore me away from my best dear
brothers,
Such anger cannot be,
I was left alone, just one alone,
Until I fell silent.

They sent me a doctor,
He gave me a prescription,
I thought to myself:
I can’t live much longer.

I will die in the tower on the plank bed,
My enemy will have his revenge,
I won’t have anyone to mourn me,
No brothers, no sisters, no good friend.

Oy, when my life is at an end,
The procession will be silent,
The tyrants will bury by body,
That is the result of my noble sentiments.

Sources

Print:

- © *Arbeyt Un Frayhayt* (1921), 92

7. Memory and Legacy

זכרון און לעגאט

After the February Revolution of 1917, the Bund was deeply divided over how to proceed under the new Bolshevik government. Soon, the Bund was declared illegal in Russia, and its remaining leaders either emigrated or were imprisoned. The center of the Bund moved to Poland, where it briefly thrived in the interwar period, and then, with the onset of World War II, to New York.

What sociologist Sylvia Klingberg called the “human continent” of “Yiddishland,” the native home of Bundism, was wiped off the map by Nazi genocide and Stalinist terror. But its fusion of Jewish nationalism and socialist idealism survives. Bundists who arrived in the United States played a pivotal role in the formation of the American labor movement, employing tactics they learned in the streets of Russia. Scattered throughout the world, Bundists constructed a network of organizations, schools, and summer camps and memorialized their history in literature, theater, art and music. Institutions like the Workmen’s Circle and Camp Hemshekh were founded in order to carry on the Bund’s ideological legacy and secular Yiddish cultural creativity. The history of the Bund’s heyday was memorialized by the descendants of its participants, and its story was told through Passover seder-like revues combining narration, poetry and song at celebrations and conferences.

The Jewish socialists saw the pursuit of justice as the purpose of their existence as a nation. They created a Yiddish culture that celebrated Jewish distinctiveness while maintaining the equality and dignity of every human being as its core tenet. What made the Bund arguably the most successful mass labor movement in eastern Europe was its leaders’ ability to navigate the narrow road between pragmatism and idealism. They made an honest effort to listen to the people they organized, and when a particular strategy proved ineffective, they were unafraid to change tactics. While the Bundists always operated in the world as it was, they never lost sight of the world as it should be, even when that vision seemed utterly impossible. As progressive Jews, searching for an expression of Jewish identity grounded in universalist values and a spirit of creative renewal, we can learn much from their example.

Suggested Practical Applications

- Discussions of modern Jewish identity
- Passover Seders
- Solidarity and community building activities
- Commemoration of Labor Day and International Workers’ Day (May Day)
- Discussion how contemporary Jews relate to Jewish history
- Reflective moments in services after challenging world events

141. Ale Brider

אלע ברידער

All Brothers

Text: Morris Winchevsky

The text of this song is based on Morris Winchevsky's poem *Akhdes*, published in *Arbeter Fraynd* in 1890.²⁰⁰ The song was first published by A. Litvin, a Yiddish folklorist, in 1920, who notes that it "was the most popular folk song that was sung in the old country, mostly at Bundist parties...each time it was sung something was added by each singer extemporaneously."²⁰¹ The lively nonsense syllable refrain makes this song ideal for group singing, and the improvisatory tradition described by Litvin could also be continued by creating new original verses in English.

Translation*Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 160**Sources**

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 160

Recordings:

- The Klezmatics, Brother Moses Smote the Water, Track 10
- Itzhak Pearlman, In the Fiddler's House, Track 11

142. Di Shvue

די שווע

The Oath

Text: S. An-sky

"*Di Shvue*" is the official anthem of the Jewish Labor Bund, and can usually be heard at the conclusion of its gatherings. The poem was written by S. An-sky while living in Switzerland, and was published along with "*In Zaltsikn Yam*" (song #36) in *Der Yidisher Arbeter* (The Jewish Worker) in 1902.²⁰² According to the Israeli radio program "Voices and Sounds Not Usually Heard," the melody, a solemn minor march, was composed by

²⁰⁰ Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, Theodore Bikel, and Tsirl Waletzky, *Mir Trogn a Gezang!: Favorite Yiddish Songs of Our Generation* (New York: The Workmen's Circle, 2000), 160.

²⁰¹ Mlotek et al., *Mir Trogn a Gezang*, 160.

²⁰² Gabriella Safran, "Rapoport, Shloyme Zaynvl." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, November 26, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Rapoport_Shloyme_Zaynvl.

G. Beck, the conductor of a socialist choir in London, based on popular Russian and German melodies.²⁰³ According to the memoir of A. Litvak, the entire poem was rarely sung, but rather only the first and last verses.²⁰⁴

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 98

Singable English Translation: Samuel H. Friedman, *Socialist and Labor Songs* (2014), 37

Sources

Print:

- *Socialist and Labor Songs* (2014), 37 (with keyboard accompaniment by Dorothy Bachman)
- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 98
- *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs Vol. IV* (1987), 17
- ©*Rebel Song Book* (1935), 47 (with keyboard accompaniment by Dorothy Bachman)
- ©*Di Shvue* (1929, SATB choral arrangement by M. Posner)
- ©*Di Shvue* (SATB choral arrangement by Jacob Schafer)

Recordings:

- *In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund*, Track 16
- Amelia Lavranchuk, *Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism*, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 1:09:10
- ©*Workmen's Circle Chorus*, YIVO Digital Archive on Jewish Life in Poland: <http://polishjews.yivoarchives.org/audio/bund-jewish-labor-songs-di-shvue>
- ©Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 45

143. Ergets Vayt

ערגעטס ווייט

Somewhere Far

Text: Leivick Halpern

Music: Lazar Weiner

The poem “*Ergets Vayt*,” which depicts a prisoner in Siberia during the Tsarist regime, was inspired by Halpern’s view from his window in Philadelphia on a snowy night in

²⁰³ Israeli radio program “*Di Bundishe Shvue*,” on cassette tape. RG 1400, box 3, tape 134, Bund Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

²⁰⁴ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 238.

1914.²⁰⁵ Lazar Weiner composed his setting of Halper's poem in 1936, a time of deepening crisis for European Jewry. The simplicity of the folk-like melody is contrasted by the chromatic harmony of the flowing piano part. For most of the song, the melody is in duple meter while the accompaniment is in triple, creating a sense of conflict and instability. Sung today, after the devastation of Nazi Germany and Stalin, the song takes on a new meaning. Now, it is the native world of the Bund, Yiddishland, that seems distant from us, and the "buried treasures" recall the ideology and culture that it created.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 84

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 84
- *Ergets Vayt*, Voice and Piano, Yibneh Edition: http://garfield.jtsa.edu:1801/view/action/singleViewer.do?dvs=1578786536395~988&locale=en_US&VIEWER_URL=/view/action/singleViewer.do?&DELIVERY_RULE_ID=10&frameId=1&usePid1=true&usePid2=true

Recordings:

- Meir Finkelstein, Lazar Weiner: *The Art of Yiddish Song*, Track 3
- Amelia Lavranchuk, *Hear Our Voice! Songs of Revolutionary Jewish Socialism*, Senior Recital at HUC-JIR, New York, <https://livestream.com/huc/events/8861715/videos/199334014>, 1:03:30

144. Eybik

אייביק

Forever

Text: Leivick Halpern

Music: Shalom Secunda

This song was written as a concluding number for Leivick's play *The Poet Became Blind*, about the life of Morris Rosenfeld.²⁰⁶ Rosenfeld's poems became the texts for a number labor songs beloved by Jewish workers in the United States and Eastern Europe.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 199

²⁰⁵ Liner notes to *Lazar Weiner: The Art of Yiddish Song*, Naxos B000EBEH04, 2006, compact disk.

²⁰⁶ Mlotek et al., *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, 199.

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 199

Recordings:

- Yiddish Art Trio, Yiddish Art Trio, Track 4

145. Hof un Gleyb

האָף און גלייב

Hope and Faith

Text: Y. L. Peretz

Music: Eliyahu Hirshin

The poem by Y.L. Peretz uses springtime imagery to convey a sense of hope that a better future is not far off. The cheerful major melody and choral arrangement was written by Eliyahu Hirshin in Warsaw and published in 1924. In his setting, Hirshin alters the last line of Peretz's poem, which in the original reads, "there will be light, fragrance singing *on our graves* as well," to "*in our lives* as well."²⁰⁷ It is interesting to consider which version resonates more with contemporary listeners.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 86

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 86

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 1

146. Hulyet, Hulyet Beyze Vintn

הוליעט, הוליעט בייזע ווינטן

Howl, Howl Evil Winds

Text: Avrom Reyzen

Reyzen's depiction of raging winds reflects the desperate and tenuous situation of the Jewish communities of the Russian empire at the turn of the twentieth century. According to A. Litvak, Reyzen's text resonated so deeply with the workers who sang the song, they

²⁰⁷ Mlotek et al., *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, 86.

often assumed it had a folk origin.²⁰⁸ However, it seems that Reyzen's poem was a little too dark for their tastes--Litvak recounts that the worker singers always modified the final line, "summer is *still* far off," to "summer is *not* far off." In their bilingual rendition of the song, Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird include both versions. Which version best resonates with contemporary listeners is a fruitful prompt for discussion of the song.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 66

Singable English Translation: Daniel Kahn, https://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R73_Beyze_Vintn.pdf

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 66
- Anthology of Yiddish Folk Song Vol. IV, 25
- ©*Di Fraye Muze* (1918), 14

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 9
- Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, The Broken Tongue, Track 1 (Sung in Yiddish and English)

147. Makhnes Geyen

מאַכנעס גײען

The Masses are Marching

Text and Music: Mikhl Gelbart

Mikhl Gelbart, who played a major role in shaping the musical culture of the Workmen's Circle, composed this song as a tribute to the socialist volunteers who went to fight in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War in 1936.²⁰⁹ The folk-like quality of the rousing melody helped this song achieve popularity in the Jewish labor movement. It was performed during the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund by the Workmen's Circle Chorus.

Translation

Mir Trogn a Gezang (2000), 84

²⁰⁸ Litvak, *Vos Geven*, 238.

²⁰⁹ Mlotek et al., *Mir Trogn a Gezang*, 84.

Sources

Print:

- *Mir Trogn a Gezang* (2000), 84

Recordings:

- Milken Archive of Jewish Music, Volume 12, Album 1: Legend of Toil and Celebration - Songs of Solidarity, Social Awareness, and Yiddish Americana, Track 5
- ©Workmen's Circle Chorus, Audio recording of the Fifth World Conference of the Jewish Labor Bund, YIVO Archives, RG 1400, box 2, tape 45

148. Mayne Khaveyrim

מיינע חברים

My Comrades

Text: Joseph Mlotek

Music: Jacob Glatstein

This song was sent to the compilers of the *Songs of Generations* anthology by members of the *Tsukunft* (Bundist youth movement) chorus.²¹⁰ The poem was set to music by Jacob Glatstein (Yakov Glatshetyn), director of the *Tsukunft* choir in interwar Warsaw, and compiler of the anthology of Yiddish workers' songs *Di Fraye Muze*. The song identifies the bonds of friendship as the source of hope in a worker's difficult life.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 90

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 90

149. Motl der Apreyter

מאָטל דער אַפּרײַטער

Motl the Operator

Text and Music: Chayim Towber

This song was written for Towber's play "*Motl der Apreyter*," which was made into a film in 1939. It tells the story of a strike in New York's garment district, led by Motl, who is

²¹⁰ Eleanor and Joseph Mlotek, *Songs of Generations*, 90.

killed in a confrontation with strikebreakers.²¹¹ The exaggerated, melodramatic tail reflects the real risks and challenges faced by Jewish workers who tried to organize.

Translation

Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 249

Sources

Print:

- Pearls of Yiddish Song (1989), 248

150. Shnel Loyfn di Reder

שנעל לויפן די רעדער

The Wheels Turn Fast

Text: David Edelshtadt

Music: Lazar Weiner

This poem by David Edelshadt, writer of the texts of many of the most popular Yiddish workers' songs, depicts the brutal and dehumanizing conditions of sweatshop work. It was set to music and arranged by Lazar Weiner a generation later for the Workmen's Circle chorus.²¹²

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 80

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 82

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 13

²¹¹ "Motel the Operator," National Center for Jewish Film, accessed January 22, 2020, <http://www.jewishfilm.org/Catalogue/films/motl.html>.

²¹² Eleanor and Joseph Mlotek, *Songs of Generations*, 90.

151. Vilne

ווילנע

Vilna

Text: A.L. Wolfson

Music: Alexander Olshanetsky

Vilna was where the socialist intellectuals launched their campaign of economic agitation, and the location of the General Jewish Labor Bund's founding in 1897. The version in *Songs of Generations*, transcribed by Shmerke Kaczerginski, refers to the work of the socialists and the secret meetings they convened in the nearby forest. "Vilna sewed the first thread of our flag of freedom," the song asserts.

Translation

Songs of Generations (1997), 151

Sources

Print:

- Songs of Generations (1997), 151

Recordings:

- In Love and Struggle: The Musical Legacy of the Jewish Labor Bund, Track 16
- Robert Abeblson and Joyce Rosenzweig, *A Leyter tsum Himl/A Ladder to Heaven*, Track 10
- ©Khor Vilne and Yekhiel Burgin, YIVO Digital Archive on Jewish Life in Poland: <http://polishjews.yivoarchives.org/archive/index.php?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=4857>

152. Yontev May

יום-טוב מײ

May Holiday

Text: L. Miller

Music: Albert Bitter

International Workers' Day, or May Day, is celebrated around the world on May 1st. It honors the achievements of the organized labor movement, and is used as an opportunity for celebratory parades as well as strikes and demonstrations.

Translation

Today is a holiday, today is spring.
 Our spring--the first of May,
 May and spring are our twins,
 Spring holiday, freedom holiday.

The sound of drums, listen, remind
 That today no one goes to school.
 Factories and banks come to a halt.
 And the streets are filled with joy.

Let's drum in time to the step
 A song of freedom, of May and sun.
 The song should carry far
 To where these things are not known.

Come into the street and let's march
 To the beat of drum and song,
 The sky is blue and the flags are red,
 Our may has blossomed.

Sources

Print:

- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 60 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1940), 83
- ©*Zing-A-Lid: 50 Arbeyter un Folkslider* (1941), 62

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