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THE RISE OF THE JEWISH WORKING CLASS, NEW YORK, 1881-1905

City University of New York

PH.D.

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THE RISE OF THE JEWISH WORKING CLASS,
NEW YORK 1881-1905

by

HADASSA KOSAK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1987

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE RISE OF THE JEWISH WORKING CLASS, NEW YORK 1881-1905
by
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Adviser: Professor Eric Foner

This study examines the process of industrialization as experienced by Jewish immigrants during the first twenty-five years of their mass migration to the U.S. from Eastern Europe. As a labor force with a distinct cultural and socio-economic background, the immigrants were confronted with the unfamiliar modes of production prevailing in New York's garment industry and by the industrial values of discipline and individualism. The ultimate result of this experience was a process of the transformation of the majority of the immigrants into wage workers. This study identifies those values and expectations that guided the newcomers in their critiques of and resistance to the norms and ethos of industrial capitalism. It also explores the social and political organizations formed by the immigrants as they adjusted to their new status as wage workers.

The examination of these aspects reveals a unique bond of mutuality formed between the immigrant workers, moulded by the inherited ethos of communal values brought over from Eastern Europe and strengthened and re-tested by the communal networks that assisted the newcomers in the new land.

Through these links, workers brought their struggles into the community and, although resistance to capitalist norms was crystallized in the work place, the opposition to the capitalist ideology expanded to include the entire community in the struggle for a new social order. The Jewish community thus became an arena for labor's struggle, a cause in which ostracism, boycott and material assistance at times of strikes were essential weapons. The role of the community in labor's struggle was reinforced by the Jewish immigrant workers' demographic density on the Lower East Side and amplified by a shared experience in the garment industry. This industry was highly fragmented and volatile, small shops were the rule and clear lines of demarcation between employer and worker had not yet made their mark. These are among the factors which explain the origins and the success of industrial unionism in the ranks of Jewish workers. Moreover, their experience represents an important juncture in the history of the American labor movement. Jewish immigrants entered the American labor force at a critical moment which marked the beginning of labor's movement toward exclusionary craft unionism. Unlike their counterparts in steel or mining under the control of corporations, Jewish workers of the period successfully forged an alternative work culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The present study proposes to examine the process of industrialization experienced by Jewish immigrants during the first twenty-five years of their mass migration to the U.S. from Eastern Europe. The year 1881 marks the beginning of mass Jewish immigration from Russia; and the first decade of this century serves as the terminus of the study, as those years saw the arrival of growing numbers of Jewish workers who had already experienced the process of industrialization and its concomitant changes in Russia. According to some historians, these newcomers, who possessed ideological fluency and organizational experience acquired as participants in the various Russian and Jewish socialist revolutionary movements, were instrumental in the founding of stable unions characterized by an articulate and systematic socialist ideology.

These first Eastern-European Jewish immigrants, a labor force with a distinct cultural and socio-economic background, entered the fast-growing clothing industry in New York, already the garment center of the world. They were confronted by a mostly unfamiliar economy characterized by the wage system, mass production, sweatshops, factory work, speed-ups, and falling wages.

The new economic setting introduced the Russian-Jewish

immigrant not only to an unfamiliar mode of production directed to a mass market, but also to a new employer: the German Jew, who expanded his role to include guardian, charity organizer and philanthropist. The German Jews had arrived in large numbers in the United States between the 1830's and the 1860's and controlled the needle trade by the 1880's. The role of philanthropist and employer allowed the German Jew to assume cultural control and to transmit to the newcomers the American industrial values of work discipline and individualism.

This study is an examination of the encounter between the immigrants, the new modes of production and the concomitant ethic of individualism. The essence of this experience was the transformation of the majority of immigrants into wage earners, a process marked by a diversity of responses. Of different orientations and divergent resources whether rooted in the Old World experience or acquired in America, the newcomers set out to fulfill their expectations of the new land while guided by varying norms and values. Those seeking success through business endeavors in the expanding economy of the city, and particularly, through its fast-developing garment industry, embraced values of individualism and personal initiative. Mobility, individualism and, subsequently, the well-known Jewish immigrant success story, the themes of much contemporary research, are the legacy of that experience.¹ At the same time, others encountering industrial capitalism underwent a

divergent experience, one marked by a collective rather than an individual ethos. This inquiry into the unfolding of the latter experience reveals the cultural and economic sources for immigrant workers' critique of and resistance to the norms of industrial capitalism.

A study of the immigrants' processes of adaptation reveals that, whether they accommodated or clashed with industrial capitalism, they depended heavily on their families and ethnic community to facilitate their entries into the unfamiliar economic system. Moulded by the inherited ethos of Eastern European communal values and strengthened by a web of familial and communal ties, these networks were both essential sources for entrepreneurial success and a source of strength in the workers' collective struggle. Moreover, old community ties and geographic closeness, further underscored by the tenuous status of the small manufacturer-contractors, indicate the absence of clear lines of demarcation between separateness and involvement, between employer and worker. The period under consideration, therefore, was not yet marked by the Jewish immigrants' espousal of the values of individualism and their concomitant entry into the mainstream of American society. As early as 1900, an East European middle class made its presence felt in the New York's Lower East Side and Yiddish speaking millionaires moved beyond the immigrant ghetto into upper Manhattan and Brooklyn.² In a form of simultaneous counterpoint, however, the Lower East Side became the hub of

union activity, of workers' strikes, of consumers' protests and of a thriving Yiddish working-class culture. Thus, in the period under consideration, the Jewish ethnic community was the arena of struggles between alternative norms and orientations, rather than a "transition zone" where newcomers readily and harmoniously embraced the values of the dominant culture.³

The focus of this study of the working class is, therefore, the development of communal links, and the variety of formal and informal networks which became conduits for workers' struggles and the means for mobilizing support for their cause. For although opposition and resistance to industrial norms crystallized in the workplace, they did not remain limited in scope to the purely economic relations between wage workers and their employers. Rather, the critique of industrial norms also informed the opposition to the ideology of individualism as practiced in the wider community. Thus the struggle of the shop floor to reorder the relations of production expanded to include the entire community in the struggle for a new social order informed by the principles of social justice and communal ethics.

The importance of these aspects is manifold. It should be stressed above all that immigrant studies are inseparable from studies of American labor, especially during the 1880's and the 1890's, years of rapid influx of newcomers from Eastern and Southern Europe. Of different subcultures, work habits and expectations, these immigrants, when introduced to

the American industrial system, stood out in high contrast within the context of the existing labor movement. For example, while segments of American workers found organizational strength in their craft tradition, the semi-skilled or the unskilled immigrant workers had to draw strength from their ethnic community as well as from their common work experience. Striking Slav miners in Pennsylvania, to cite one example, effectively exerted their strength when their ethnic community ostracized scabs at the time of a strike. The "un-American" violent behavior of Slav women, the communal public spectacle of shaming scabs and similar expressions of community activity were the butt of criticism of contemporary Americans and a cause for organized labor's despair.⁴ It is perhaps this critical role of the ethnic community that explains the usual characterization of the immigrant worker as an unorganizable and undisciplined union member.

Moreover, the comparison of these two distinct models of behavior -- one of the skilled organized workers and the other of the Jewish and other immigrant workers -- casts a light on the discontinuity of working class formation in America, which was similarly rooted in the diversity of ethnic subcultures. Although hardly new in the history of American working class, by the late 19th century community centered activity and protest was becoming a theme of the past. That pattern of behavior was being supplanted in many parts of the country by craft organization and craft protest.

Little communal protest, for example, remained among the shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts in the 1880's and the 1890's.⁵ Thus, the immigrant ethic of mutuality, as evidenced in the Jewish immigrant experience, is the means to broaden our understanding of what Herbert Gutman termed the "continual adaptation" of peoples of diverse cultures entering the American labor force and of the process of recomposition of the American working class.⁶

Finally, it should be pointed out that Jewish immigrants entered the American work force at a critical moment in its history. The decade of the 1880's, years of organizational strength founded on the grass roots democracy and industrial unionism of the Knights of Labor and the struggle for the eight-hour workday, gave way to labor defeats in the 1890's. The failures of these years sapped labor's vitality and resulted in strengthened managerial powers at the expense of workers' claims for control over the work process. Moreover, the older industrial unionism practiced by the Knights of Labor gave way to exclusionary craft unionism, which renounced the goals of social reform in favor of narrowly defined economic gains.⁷ It is at this moment of regrouping that Jewish immigrants entered the American labor force. And, unlike their American counterparts in steel or mining under the control of corporations, Jewish workers, employed for the most part in small workshops, forged communal support and organizational strategies, with membership based on ethnicity rather than

skill, that emerged in the 1910's as the core of militant-industrial unionism.

The present study grew out of a set of questions developed during the last twenty years by historians of the working class who challenged the traditional economic model. This model, characteristic of the Wisconsin school of labor history and of the Marxist tradition, viewed the wage earner as motivated solely by economic interests, either individually or preferably within a union. Traditionally, therefore, that school of thought has limited its inquiry to chronicling labor battles and labor's achievements in the war against employers, and no allowance was made for the workers' cultural, ethnic, or religious background. The laws of the market, it was assumed, made no distinctions in the human material that was unopposedly shaped and transformed by capitalism. This narrow view was challenged by the historians Herbert Gutman, David Montgomery, and David Brody among others, all of whom have broken away from the exclusively economic framework and have focused on workers' experience of the process of industrialization and on the impact industrialization had on the social structure, values and traditions of a previous way of life.

Some recent works have illuminated the social, cultural, and economic adaptations of ethnic immigrant workers to the process of industrialization. However, relevant studies of Jewish immigrants and Jewish labor, e.g. Melech Epstein, Jewish Labor in the U.S.A. (New York, 1950),

Moses Rischin, The Promised City (New York, 1964), Irving Howe, The World of Our Fathers (New York, 1976), while all emphasizing broadly cultural orientations, formal traditional values of education, communal help and philanthropy, all view the strikes and the struggles of Jewish immigrants of the 1880's and the 1890's as mere birth pangs that culminated in the successful unionization of the 1900's. Because these writers feel that only unions and articulated socialist ideology could achieve for Jews a posture of self-respect as well as respect from their employers and contemporaries, they tend to underplay or overlook other forms of community behavior. Thus, when unions which were considered the ultimate standard of success appeared in the 1900's, their success was explained primarily through the outside beneficial influence of the urban-progressive-sympathetic reformer (Moses Rischin and Melvyn Dubofsky, When Workers Organize (Amherst, 1968) for a later period) or by the appearance of recently arrived ideologues from the ranks of the Jewish Russian revolutionaries (Irving Howe, Melech Epstein).

What emerges from these existing accounts of the early period of immigration is, therefore, marred by a perspective of anticipation for later organizational successes, an attitude that derives its legitimacy from viewing the early immigrants as a lost generation, stunned by the impact of an alien culture -- in Howe's words, a generation to which "nature had given no voice ... history no claims."⁸ The

creation of unions as a historical result of the first-generation immigrants' experience remains unjustly unexamined -- although the variety of protest doctrines such as socialism, unionism and anarchism eventually gained a strong following among Jewish immigrants, we need more information about the actual protesters themselves and the various organizations in which they were participants before we can understand the appeal of these doctrines. In this vein we may ask whether the revolutionary socialist consciousness acquired in Russia and transplanted to New York was really sufficient to mount the organized form of protest as embodied in Jewish unionism. Rather, this study concludes that it was a stage in a process that had started a generation earlier and was rooted in the cultural and economic experience of the wave of immigrants arriving in America in the 1880'S.

FOOTNOTES

¹Thomas Kessner, The Golden Door. Italians and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City 1880-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) is the most recent study on the subject. It concludes that the Jewish urban experience, the hunger for material success brought over from Europe and especially the high representation of skilled occupations among the newcomers afforded them economic opportunities which were unavailable to their Italian counterparts. Moreover, the congestion and the density of the Jewish ghetto initiated the immigrants into petty retailing and business opportunities. With the expansion of economic and residential opportunities, the reliance on the ghetto weakened and the geographic mobility out of the ghetto gained in force. Large scale construction in Harlem, for example, coupled with relatively low rents marked the beginning of the movement uptown, according to another study. Among those who moved, many, however, were crowded out of the Lower East Side when their homes were torn down to make way for the construction of large factories and public parks. Jeffrey Gurock, When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870-1930 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), ch. 2.

²John Bodnar, The Transplanted. A History of Immigrants in Urban America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 120.

³Ibid., p. 118.

⁴Victor R. Greene, The Slavic Community on Strike. Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1968), p. 141-144.

⁵Paul Faler, Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution, Lynn, Massachusetts, 1789-1860 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981). Also Alan Dawley, Class and Community. The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). Both works discuss the strike of Lynn's shoemakers in 1860 as the watershed which marked the community's changing role.

⁶Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," American Historical Review 78 (June 1973), pp. 540-543.

⁷James Green, The World of the Workers in Twentieth Century America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), ch. 1.

⁸Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 77.

CHAPTER 1

JEWISH EMIGRANTS TO THE U.S. 1881-1905:

THE DECLINE OF THE TRADITIONAL AND THE ATTRACTION OF THE NEW.

During the years 1881-1905, approximately three quarters of a million Jews emigrated from the Russian Empire and settled in the United States.¹ The newcomers were part of a large wave of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who changed radically the social character of the laboring population of industrialized America. Although the process of adaptation was shared by all immigrant groups who came from rural parts of Europe and entered a developed and industrialized society, they responded differently to the culture and the society they encountered. In order to bring out the distinctive process of adaptation of the Jewish newcomers, the following points deserve particular attention. Why did the Jews leave the Old Country at that point? What kind of society did they come from? Who were those most likely to embark on the decision to leave their homes and their communities? What were their expectations of the new country? The examination of these questions will suggest the social and cultural determinants which guided the newcomers in their encounters with the new.

Much of the answer to these historic questions lies in

the decline of native social and economic structures and the search of the Jewish inhabitants of the Empire for new alternatives. Though spurred by economic necessity, emigration was also contingent upon the decline of the corporate-medieval functions and structure of the Jewish communities, which had been previously regulated by governmental authority. The members of the new voluntary communities were thus released from old allegiances and were set free to seek new and uncharted directions. It was against the backdrop of these changes that large numbers of Jewish residents of the Russian Empire decided to emigrate.

Among the emigrants, one group distinctly stands out in its numerical importance. An examination of the occupational structure of the Jewish immigrants indicates a marked presence of skilled workers and artisans.² The skilled immigrants accounted for 64% of all Jewish immigrants between the years 1899 and 1914 while representing only 37.7% of all gainfully occupied Jews in Russia in 1897.³ It is of interest to note that predominant among the skilled immigrants entering the United States were tailors and seamstresses who, together, comprised 44% of all skilled newcomers, and who represented 37.6% of the skilled Jewish population in the Pale.⁴ The next largest group, representing 21% of all Jewish immigrants of the 1899-1914 period, consisted of laborers and servants, classified by U.S. immigration as unskilled workers, all of whom

represented 18.5% of all gainfully occupied Jews in Russia in 1897.⁵ In contrast to these two groups, the commercial and professional occupations, whose combined representation among all Jews in Russia amounted to 30%, accounted for only 6.8% of Jewish immigrants.⁶

What emerges from this data is the higher proportion of skilled workers among the immigrants than their proportion of the base population. What were the reasons for this pronounced tendency of craftsmen-artisans, and especially of those engaged in the manufacture of clothing to emigrate? The socio-economic and the cultural situations of that group provides some of the answer.

The propensity to emigrate among the members of the skilled group resulted from the numerical growth of that group and from the declining opportunities open to that group for earning a livelihood in Russia. The swelling of the ranks of artisans and their concomitant impoverishment were in part the results of the dramatic growth in Jewish population from 1.6 million in 1825 to 3.98 million in 1880 and to 5.175 million in 1900.⁷ Simultaneously with the growth in Jewish population there was a noticeable reversal of Jewish occupational structure, characterized by a marked increase in the numbers of those engaged in handicrafts as opposed to a decrease among those engaged in trade. Thus, the data available for 1818 indicates that in sixteen Russian provinces those engaged in trade accounted for 86% of all

Jewish occupations while only 12% of Jews engaged in handicrafts. By 1897, however, the category of trade occupations shrank considerably and represented only 32% of all Jewish occupations, while the proportion of the handicrafts increased to 37.7%.⁸

Even more telling are the data available for the period between 1887 and 1898 which indicate that the absolute and the relative numbers of Jewish artisans increased considerably in fifteen out of twenty provinces of the Russian Pale, while the remaining five provinces witnessed only slight decreases.⁹ It should be noted that within the increasingly swelling ranks of handicrafts, tailoring and related occupations took precedence over other skills, representing 38.7% of all Jewish artisans. In some provinces especially in the South their ratio was even higher. In the city of Ekaterinoslav for example, clothing artisans comprised 46.4% of all artisans.¹⁰ This preponderance for handicrafts, and for tailoring in particular, reflected a disadvantageously high ratio vis-a-vis the local population, a cut-throat competition and an ensuing poverty.¹¹

The impoverishment of the Jewish artisans in general, partly the result of their growing numbers, had its roots in the legal restrictions of domicile imposed upon the Jewish population and in the general impoverishment of the Russian inhabitants. Most Jews, apart from large-scale merchants and professionals with higher education, were forbidden to live

outside the restricted areas of the Pale, and within the Pale they were excluded from the countryside and confined to the provincial towns and incorporated villages.¹² Geographical confinement was accompanied by economic restrictions. Jews were barred from land ownership, real estate ownership outside the urban areas, and from liquor manufacture -- the latter had a particularly severe impact on the Jewish economy.¹³ Of equally grave consequence for the Jewish economy was the recession among the local Russian population. Although the emancipation of the Russian peasants took place in 1861, it did not grant them sufficient land for a viable economic base. Their situation became further aggravated with the worldwide fall in the prices of grain in the 1870s, affecting the economy of the Pale as a whole and Jewish merchants and artisans in particular.

The ensuing economic decline of the Jews in the Pale prevailed during the last decades of the 19th century. A committee appointed by the Russian government in the 1880s reported that 90% of the Jews living in the Pale constituted "a proletariat living from hand to mouth in poverty and under the most trying and unhygienic conditions."¹⁴ The growing numbers of itinerant beggars and the increasing numbers of charity recipients further reflect the vast scale of impoverishment. In 1898, for example, the number of families requesting Passover assistance reached 132,855 representing nearly 19% of all Jewish families in Russia.¹⁵ Among the

needy, artisans ranked first, followed closely by manual laborers and beggars,¹⁶ and though there is no specific data to indicate the process of impoverishment among those engaged in the manufacture of clothing, it would probably be safe to assume that the tailors and related occupations, the largest segment of the handicrafts and whose numbers "could supply clothing for half the population of the Russian Empire," were the worst off in the declining Jewish economy.¹⁷ Thus, for instance, though the national average annual income of all tailors in 1897 was 250-400 rubles, the same contemporary source stated that in reality, "the average income is only a dream for most artisans-tailors; a dream which will never be fulfilled," and that the majority of the tailors, as well as shoemakers, had to subsist on 80-120 rubles a year.¹⁸

The economic decline among artisans on the one hand and their simultaneous numerical growth on the other, though seemingly two irreconcilable phenomena, should be understood in light of the general impoverishment of the Pale. The declining economy had far-reaching effects on the occupational structure of the Jewish population resulting in the increase of the skilled artisanal occupation at the expense of occupations related to commerce and religion. And, though there is a lack of statistical data on this, other sources confirm that economic decline undermined the foundations of the religious professions, e.g. melamdim (teachers), rabbis, rabbinical scholars, slaughterers. In

the first three categories especially, poverty and the general economic decline of the community undermined the ability to provide for years of learning and dimmed the chances for earning a respectable living in the future, forcing many to seek alternative ways of earning a living. Thus, for many, the acquisition of skill became hardly a choice but a necessity dictated by their economic circumstances.¹⁹

Economically, the transition to the ranks of artisanal occupations appeared relatively attractive primarily because of its short and cheap apprenticeship (an issue discussed later in this chapter) and because of the absence of capital requirement true for all skills in the shtetl economy. Thus, tailoring or shoemaking, for example, was done mostly by hand, and the most frequent form of production were individual orders for local customers, who supplied the necessary materials. Manufacture for a large entrepreneur was "relatively rare."²⁰ As a result, the sewing machine did not make a widespread appearance among the Jewish tailors, and as late as the 1890s the typical small town tailor worked "with his own two hands, each had his workshop, or a workroom or at least a work table."²¹ For some, the acquisition of a sewing machine seemed probably prohibitively expensive and hardly worthwhile.²² Others, according to one personal account, stubbornly refused to believe in the abilities of the sewing machine, which "will not and cannot tell between

good and evil" and was incapable, therefore, of performing work of quality. Declaring that no seam "sewn by machine could be stronger than a seam sewn by human hand," the same old-fashioned tailor refused to buy a machine despite the growing competition of the more mechanized tailoring shops.²³

Absence of capital was compensated by intensive use of labor and particularly of apprentices. Thus, the typical tailoring establishment, in order to be profitable, would employ apprentices but rarely wage workers. For instance, in Vilna and Kovno, two of the main provinces of Lithuania, fewer than one-half of the master-artisans in 1898 employed one worker and over one-half engaged the services of an apprentice, defined as a child aged 10 to 15.²⁴ The same statistics for seven out of twenty provinces of the Pale (not counting Poland), indicate that tailor bosses employed children rather than qualified adults. In the remaining provinces the average shop employed one to three wage earners while the larger shops were exceptions confined to the larger towns of the Pale.²⁵ Thus, in reality, though for the most part independent, Jewish artisan-craftsmen, far from being able to earn their own living, could hardly employ other workers.

Use of apprentice labor, combined with poor training of future artisans and absence of specialization, contributed to work of inferior quality. Theoretically, in order to achieve the status of master-artisan, boys of 10 to 14 had to undergo

a period of apprenticeship of three to four years; in reality, many apprentices left their masters before completing their training in order to set up as independent craftsmen, while others skipped their apprenticeship altogether.²⁶ As a result, "one could encounter a self-taught artisan whose products will not be satisfactory outside the poor districts of the shtetl; in large cities these artisans could not survive."²⁷ Furthermore, the impoverished Russian peasants who were the main recipients of Jewish artisanal products, discouraged any form of specialization. Thus, for example, the limited and simple needs of the local population dictated the presence of an all-purpose tailor rather than a number of tailors specializing in different garments. According to the recollections of one immigrant, the extent of the demand in his home town required the services of tailors each capable of making for the peasants "a fur coat or an overcoat, or a pair of linen trousers or linen dress for women."²⁸ Tailors providing more specialized services were confined to the larger towns. For example, in the town of Spola, in the Kiev district, with a population of 12,000, half of which was Jewish, two categories of tailors existed, those who catered to the richer clients and those who sold their services to the poor. The former category specialized in making coats of superior quality: fur coats, sheepskin coats, long coats of superior cloth to be worn on the Sabbath, while the latter

used to make "trousers of cheap black shining material, short jackets of wool and cotton."²⁹

The wretchedness of artisanal existence was matched by its equally inferior social standing in the Jewish community, and had its origins in the limited religious learning of that group. The lifelong devotion to scholarly activity, traditionally affording high social esteem, presupposed an existence free of economic worries -- a luxury open to few, while the majority were forced to seek more practical pursuits at an early age. Antagonism between the class of laborers and community leaders who held their authority by virtue of religious and often economic position, permeated the life of Jewish communities. Thus, throughout the history of the independent Jewish communities, artisans were excluded from public offices, which together with the right to vote, were granted in exchange for a financial contribution.³⁰ Furthermore, the status of the Jewish community as a self-governing political unit until the middle of the nineteenth century, allowed its leaders vast executive power in the internal affairs of the community, and, between the years 1827 and 1844, the crucial function of supplying recruits for the Russian Army. The provisions of the draft laws were particularly cruel: the length of service was twenty-five years and boys often as young as eight years of age were recruited to the army as an effective means of removing them from their religion.

The quota of recruits was allotted to the community as a whole and the administration and the execution of the law were handed to the community leaders, who, in turn, apportioned the number of recruits to be supplied by the individual families. In light of a law exempting rabbinical students and sons of merchants from military service, a disproportionate burden of the draft fell on the poor. As one immigrant recalled about his father and the injustices of the draft: "It came the turn of my father's family to send a son to serve in the army. And because my father was the only artisan [a tailor] among them, the whole family decided to send him to the army as a scapegoat. And because he was an orphan nobody objected."³¹ Moreover, in order to meet the demands of the Russian government, the administration of the community had the right to draft idlers or vagrants guilty of irregularity in the payment of taxes, or of offenses not tolerated by the community.³² Thus, short of self-inflicted mutilation, there was no escape for the poor, the artisans, the laborers and other socially marginal Jews. Moreover, attempts to circumvent the law on their part or to escape were thwarted by the communal authorities who often resorted to services of kidnappers or informers, and, though a new recruiting law of 1874 decreased the role of community leadership in supplying the annual quota of recruits, the memory of the injustice and the climate of resentment continued in a folksong:

It is right to draft the hard working masses;
shoemakers or tailors - they are only asses!
But the children of the idle rich
Must carry on without a hitch.³³

The kahal, the community representatives, exercised further control over its laboring class through its power to grant or revoke charters of the artisanal guilds and through supervision over their affairs.³⁴ The two bodies often found themselves at odds: the guilds were anxious to congregate separately to worship in order to have a greater share in the honorary functions centered around religious ceremonials; the kahal, on the other hand, was eager to centralize the places of worship for tax collecting purposes.³⁵ Secession from established synagogues was a means of cultural and social self-determination at all levels of society. Thus, Jewish artisans, as a class apart, strove to hold services in separate places of worship and with the decreasing opportunities to become master-artisans, many journeymen seceded, in turn, from the artisanal synagogues to establish their own place of worship as well as to form their own guilds and mutual benefit societies.³⁶ Ladies' tailors journeymen in the town of Moghilev, for example, split away from the parent guild in 1850 and formed their own organization which remained active into the 1900's. Upon their secession, the journeymen not only established their own synagogue, but their own loan association and cared for

their sick. Free of the masters' scrutiny, they were free to express their own tradition and ritual. Thus, every year, the journeymen took great pride in the annual celebration commemorating the release of their leaders who had been imprisoned at the instigation of the master-tailors and the local government.³⁷

Antagonism between the artisans and the well-to-do communal officials was also expressed in open clashes as in the case of the town of Keidany where a worker entered a synagogue on New Year's day wearing a silk skullcap, a privilege reserved for the rich. That evening he was summoned before the elders of the community who fined him and ordered him to surrender his silk cap. As a result of this treatment, the local artisans demonstrated in the synagogue, all wearing silk caps, velvet gabardines and fur caps. The administration of the community then denounced the undisciplined artisans to the local Polish noble, who submitted the rebels to corporal punishment. Only after physical attacks on the respectable Jews, a settlement between the two clashing parties was reached allowing artisans to wear silk and velvet. The new settlement resulted also in the inclusion of the artisans' representative on the administrative board as well as an appointment of a rabbi of their choice in all legal cases.³⁸

With the abolition of the autonomous Jewish communities in 1844 and later, with the changes in the laws regulating

taxation and the draft which followed in 1863 and 1874, the power of the official leadership decreased noticeably. The tax reform of 1863 abolished the mutual responsibility for the payment of taxes, which were thereafter paid directly to the Russian authorities on income and property and, according to the military reform of 1874, all twenty-one year old men had to come before a draft board and the recruits were picked by lot for a four year service. Officially, at least, the reforms -- and especially the new draft law -- liberated the Jewish masses from the unlimited authority and power of their own leaders who, as a result, were deprived of an effective means of disciplining the recalcitrant members of the community.³⁹

The legal equality of all Jews before the Russian authorities did not significantly change the traditional cultural attitudes and the social differentiation within the community. Traditional esteem for Jewish scholarship and the growing dependence on the rich to provide for the needs of the community, further underscored the marginality of the artisans and laborers. Class differentiation prevailed in synagogues and religious schools. According to the recollections of one immigrant who grew up in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century, "I always felt that my two teachers-rabbis never hit me because my father was a respectable well-to-do Jew and not just an artisan as the fathers of the other children." The only artisan who reached

respectability, according to the same account, was a shoemaker who employed other workers and had some learning. But even he was excluded from the respectable group meeting at the rabbi's house on the Sabbath.⁴⁰ In view of the low esteem assigned the laboring classes the threat of joining their ranks loomed a fate "worse and more sinful than converting to Christianity" according to one immigrant.⁴¹ With the increasing poverty in all quarters of the Pale in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, however, many teachers, rabbinical students, slaughterers, as well as petty merchants stood face to face with the prospect of joining the ranks of the Jewish proletariat.

Many fought tooth and nail against the possibility of social degradation and clung to the old values of "clean work" fearing the loss of their previous status. One immigrant remembered his grandmother's grief who, when widowed, was forced to give her five year old son away as an apprentice to a tailor -- a trade held in low esteem. All her life she grieved over the "great tragedy" imposed on her by poverty to

give away her son to learn a trade. She was the daughter of Rabbi Solomon and the daughter-in-law of Rabbi Abraham Schechter and among her relatives on her father's side there was not one artisan. And now? Her only son, one of thirteen sons she bore to her husband, of whom twelve had died before having reached the age of studies, her one child had to become an artisan. 42

Similarly, a widowed mother who couldn't afford a fair dowry to marry off her two daughters respectably refused to

consider artisans as future sons-in-law. It

wasn't to her liking because in those days [1860s] an artisan was considered crude and boorish. And she insisted on the respectable lineage of her late husband as well as her own lineage, since she herself came from religious parents and was a learned woman well versed in Yiddish and could translate the whole Bible [into Yiddish]. 43

Others clung tenaciously to their slipping economic status by refusing to admit their poverty and by doing a lot of "cheek pinching in order to get the color" so as to pass as respectable well-off Jews even though "poverty whistled in all corners."⁴⁴

Among the different craft groups, it was the tailors whose skills and occupation brought upon them the most disrepute within the Jewish community. A young future immigrant, who decided not to "live on air any longer" and contemplating learning a trade found it impossible to do so in Russia because "it would have shamed my family. My father-in-law used to say that if one finds a needle in the stomach of a chicken, the chicken is treyf [non-kosher] what can one say then about a tailor who holds in his mouth so many needles. And that was also the rule for other trades."⁴⁵

Added to low social esteem which characterized the prevailing attitudes toward all trades, tailors were accused of cheating their customers by retaining a portion of the cloth provided to them by their clients. Thus the tailors of the town of Spola, who were described as unreliable,

especially in the days before the High Holidays, liked vodka, and, like their English counterparts,

all took off some of the cloth given to them by their customers, claiming that it was 'left over'. Although some used to deny it vehemently in the name of all that was holy, some ... would say in jest: "Get one yard more, because whether you provide it or not, I will have to take the equivalent of my vest." People used to say that this custom of remnants was the means for some tailors to become rich and respectable. 46

It was in defense against similar accusations, that a humble tailor on his death bed asked the head of the Burial Society of his town

to have his coffin made of the board of his work-table which he had used for thirty years. These boards will be the testimony on Judgment Day that "I have never stolen any of the cloth provided to me and that I did my work with honesty." [His wish was fulfilled] ... They carried his table which they broke into boards to the cemetery. The boards served as sides of the coffin and the legs of the table as tombstones. 47

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by decreasing economic opportunities for the majority of Russian Jews. Whether artisans, petty tradesmen or rabbinical scholars, by pressures of their growing numbers, residential and occupational restrictions and exclusion from the mainstream of the Russian economy, all experienced impoverishment. The economic dislocation and its concomitant social implications appear unmistakably linked to the growing waves of emigration.⁴⁸ Unmistakable as those links appear, their character would be incomplete without first examining emigrants' understanding of the image of

America and its multifaceted character. However, attention should first be paid to the newly secularized climate of the Pale and the weakening of the communal cohesion. These two factors were responsible for the release of drives which challenged traditionally accepted socio-economic and cultural patterns within the Jewish community and account, therefore, for the readiness to embrace the spreading news of America.

The decline of communal power had its roots in the legal changes imposed by the Russian government which aimed to curtail the autonomy of the Jewish community. The legal developments related to tax and conscription laws had far-reaching consequences and although the community as a unit and its leadership did not cease to exist, it retained its administrative functions by agreement rather than by vested authority. Moreover, whereas the community in its former corporate character represented all its members, the new laws were intended to expose the individual to the power of the government. The decline of the kahal's authority and the new position of the individual vis-a-vis the Russian authorities, both fostered a new spirit of individualism, and contributed to its declining cohesion. Moreover, these centrifugal tendencies were now aided by a spirit of secularism and modernism.

While the community as a corporate-autonomous unit was shedding its medieval character, the world view of its subjects was changing simultaneously. Thus, for instance,

a new individualism became manifest in the changing character of charity distribution. The traditional charitable services provided by the community and the mutual help associations had deteriorated with the economic decline and the general impoverishment.⁴⁹ New rules and guidelines of charity distributions were introduced and, unlike their traditional counterparts, the needy could no longer ask for alms unless they proved their need.⁵⁰ Moreover, in their efforts to discourage a life of laziness and the eating of charitable bread, the new philanthropists thought it necessary to reeducate and to discipline the poor. To this end they embarked on new efforts, especially in the larger communities, to centralize all charitable funds, thereby hoping to prevent excesses of demand and distribution of assistance by putting an end to the custom of accosting the well-to-do. This was the new spirit which entitled the needy of Bialystok to receive booklets in which each weekly stipend was duly marked, while out-of-town poor were allowed to appeal directly to the well-to-do on three designated days and were entitled to receive from the local charities food and a railway ticket good for three stops.⁵¹

Contemporary sources reacted with alarm to the new mood of "each one for himself and each little minyan [group of ten meeting for the purpose of worship] for itself" which replaced what some concerned contemporaries perceived as the hitherto harmonious cohesiveness and solidarity of the Jewish

community.⁵² Lamenting the demise of the old unity, one critic, alarmed at the frequent cooperation of community leaders with the Russian government against the individual, reported a damning incident from the town of Berditchev. According to a newspaper report, the leaders of the town came to the local town official asking him to use his authority to coerce a local elderly Jew to pay a poll tax for himself and for his long-deceased son. The town clerk ordered the elderly Jew to pay, but his inability to do so landed him in jail. Although two well-to-do members of the community eventually paid the debt, the author of the article marvelled "how a respectful and large community as this would miscarry justice."⁵³ The article concluded with the remark: "The emigration to America from our town has not abated, and three to four families leave every day. Most of them are artisans, few adventurers and young men who have to flee the military draft board this year."⁵⁴ In a similar case which illustrates the necessity to fend off not only the Russian government but also one's coreligionists, a future immigrant of draft age assumed his dead brother's name to avoid military service. He, however, failed to carry out his scheme and was forced to emigrate because of Jewish informers who demanded pay in exchange for not revealing his secret to the authorities.⁵⁵

These, and similar cases, weakened the individual's allegiance to the communal entity and further sharpened his

critical view of Jewish leadership. One immigrant who brought "no sweet memories of youth" from his home town, recalled his mother's embittered understanding of the town's Jewish notables who "study Talmud day and night ... [and] provide for the cost of the synagogue and the religious school, but they charge high interest from the poor who come to borrow a few pennies. They squeeze out his soul but to others they appear as great scholars and so they fulfill the command of 'righteous life'."⁵⁶

The loosened communal ties, the major force behind release of social and economic discontent, was further stimulated by the secular trends and the resulting new mentality permeating the Pale. Generally, the foremost expression of the secular mentality was a new orientation which, contrary to the traditional religious "timelessness" of Jewish historical experience, came to emphasize the concept of the future in secular terms. While previously religious beliefs held out the promise of future redemption, the social changes undermined the quietism and the belief in a divinely ordained history.⁵⁷ This new secular mood released hitherto unknown aspirations and promoted new challenges to old ways and to the established order. The challenges were not uniform, and while the better-off Jews who were exposed to secular learning and to contemporary radical political climate of Russia, joined the Narodniks, the socialists, the anarchists and the Zionists, Jews on the

social and economic margins of society experienced these changes differently. For the most part and especially in the days before the activity of the Bund, which was mostly confined to the large cities and the industrialized workers, they remained untouched by the political movements of the day. Nevertheless, as the presence of a unique orientation toward the future in immigrants' accounts testifies, they too were influenced by the new currents. They were unwilling to make their peace with the economic misery and the wretchedness looming ahead. The new mood as expressed in the accounts, challenged primarily attitudes of the older generation of parents who, through the experience of economic and social decline, clung with determination to their status. "To go on and suffer so much will never satisfy us the young," declared defiantly one future immigrant. Consequently, at the age of thirteen, he decided to stop his Talmudic studies because "Talmud will not provide a livelihood."⁵⁸ Similarly, another immigrant, when fourteen years of age weighed the possibilities of "what next", rejected the career of a rabbi and a slaughterer who did not earn enough for water to prepare kasha."⁵⁹ Although he expressed a preference for the tailoring and shoemaking skills, he was forced to relinquish these plans until emigrating because his parents considered themselves "respectable people."⁶⁰ Yet another immigrant who eventually left home and moved to the town of Ekaterinoslav and then

emigrated to America, rejected his parents' plan for a good match with a sizeable dowry which would finance a peddling stand: "Though I was young ... I understood that this is no practical solution for me."⁶¹

Rejection of traditional livelihoods coupled with practical considerations for their own future as well as the future of their children prevailed, according to the accounts, behind many decisions to emigrate. One father, a religious teacher, "didn't see great hopes for his children in the old country"⁶² and therefore decided to emigrate. Similarly, another immigrant was torn between the desire to return to his native Russia where he left his wife and his children and between his concern for their future because, "In Russia, there was no possibility for Jewish children to achieve a goal, not in commerce and not in learning a profession ... people had to leave home and look for luck abroad. But my children were still small, one was five and the other was three. Do I have to worry already about their future?"⁶³

This was also a generation which was ready to defy the dictates of religious authorities, as the very decision to emigrate constituted a defiant act in view of the prevailing image perpetuated by the rabbinical authorities of America as a "treyf land". The image was intensified through future contacts with emigrants who became a living confirmation that Jews forsake their religion in the new land and their

children "don't know the difference between middle of the week and Sabbath."⁶⁴

The process of secularization which had a weakening effect on the exclusive authority of religion, did likewise for the traditionally circumscribed roles of women. Women of the period not only defied the tradition by seeking secular education, but also by seeking better fortunes overseas. Like men, they too wanted to leave behind the poverty and social degradation and, by emigrating, they rejected their socially accepted roles. As one immigrant recalled, his sister decided to leave home because she knew that the lack of adequate dowry meant "no future" for her.⁶⁵

In the changing climate within the Pale the news of America found a receptive audience. At times, stories surrounding America assumed a mythical character synonymous with the apocryphal tradition reserved customarily for the Holy Land. Folk imagery of Hassidic tales spoke of the advent of the Messiah who would lead the exiled to the Holy Land through subterranean tunnels, while America "is located under our feet and we are walking on the heads of the Americans and if one were to dig a tunnel into the ground one could reach America," according to a childhood story of one immigrant.⁶⁶

Stories which gave America's image an element of the fantastic and the magical befitted the land which came to epitomize the land of freedom. America's freedom was

interpreted by future immigrants not only as the land "where everybody is free to move around and do what he pleases" or as the land of plenty where "one can pick up money lying around in the streets."⁶⁷ America also held the promise of other freedoms: "I heard that it was a new land and I was young - twenty two years of age - I wanted to see the world, to see what the world looks like and to see whether I could take part in the direction life takes."⁶⁸ It also carried the promise of freedom from religious oppression for the religious deviants who found it impossible to escape the watchful and intolerant community. It was in this vein that one immigrant likened his struggle for religious freedom in the old country to that of Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth century Jewish philosopher who was excommunicated by his coreligionists of Amsterdam.⁶⁹ In another immigrant's search for a "free Republic," he traveled to Austria and Germany and finally set his heart on Switzerland, which he thought to be a land of freedom, and only because of Switzerland's stringent immigration laws did he eventually decide to emigrate to America.⁷⁰ Similarly, a group of immigrants in transit in the town of Brody on the Austrian side of the Russian border, likened their exodus from Russia and their hopes for America to the goals of the French Revolution. Before setting out on their voyage from Brody to America, they printed the story of their exodus in a gold-lettered scroll, bound it together in tri-colored silk threads, the

colors of the French Revolution, and then handed it to the officials of the Alliance Israelite Universelle.⁷¹

The diverse freedoms of America, the land free of limiting social convention was associated in the minds of future emigrants with a promise of "new beginnings." As one immigrant to America recollected, when thirty years of age, a head of a family and when forced to look for new sources of livelihood found himself:

in a frame of mind which led me to think that I had to do something drastic. I felt I had to 'smelt' over my old personality into something new, to 'knead' out a new being out of the old components. To learn a trade and to become an apprentice and so to become a new 'being' that could not happen, not in my old home. ⁷²

Similarly, an immigrant who had been a teacher in Russia decided to emigrate in 1883 because, he recalled, "I often used to consider the matter of changing my occupation and the happy idea of emigrating to America occurred to me."⁷³ Above all, the images of America came to convey a land unfettered not only by the confines of political and religious intolerance, but also free of the traditional social stigmas perpetuated within the Jewish community. The same immigrant who sought to become a new being set out to reach the shores of a country "where it is no shame to work, on the contrary, it is even an honor and this country is America. So, I am going to America."⁷⁴

America's image and promise, as well as the economic prospects of the new country were all part of the decision to emigrate. Moreover, all factors appeared inseparable as

disseminated by contemporary Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers which carried abundant stories and reports of America. Most of them were in favor of emigration, but the newspapers differed on the desirability of destinations. Yudishes Folksblatt, for example, influenced by the budding Zionist ideology of the 1880s, favored Jewish exodus and settlement in the historical homeland. Ha-Melitz, one of the two major Hebrew newspapers of the period, tended, on the other hand, to favor America as the future homeland. In this spirit it presented America as the land of tolerance and of plenty, where, under the Homestead Act, Jews would receive free land. In contrast, Palestine was presented as an undeveloped and uncivilized land where new settlers did not have much opportunity to find a reward for their toil.⁷⁵

Newspaper accounts, whether glowing or disparaging, recede in their importance and influence when compared with the role of personal information communicated in letters from friends and relatives.⁷⁶ Reports from those already in America were an invaluable source of information in view of the limited readership of newspapers, but also because "no one can tell the relative difference of conditions between this country and the old as well as those who have tried them both."⁷⁷

First-hand experience related by a friend or a relative well acquainted with the needs and the expectations of the future immigrant carried infinitely more weight than images

propagated by other agencies. This is illustrated in the example of a father who, fearing America's corrupting influence upon his religious son, refused to let him go. His fears were alleviated only after a visiting emigrant who brought regards from his sister in America, assured him that in America "one can be as religious as in Baltermanz [name of the village]." ⁷⁸

In correspondence received from friends and relatives in America, the use of images and idioms familiar to the correspondents served as a convenient shorthand in conveying impressions and making comparisons. ⁷⁹ One immigrant, for example, informed the recipient of his letter that "I live here a much better life than many Polish noblemen." ⁸⁰ Another immigrant, a cloakmaker, though unemployed at the time, expressed regret for not having emigrated earlier and compared enthusiastically the plentiful diet in America to the basic wants and hunger in his old home. ⁸¹

In a much less enticing letter, another immigrant informed his reader that "we are suffering here more than soldiers in the Czar's army. We work hard from morning till late at night to earn a few dollars to guarantee our livelihood." ⁸² The new experience of work in America determined the tone of other letters. "Here in America it's not so good ... here as you know if one doesn't work, one doesn't have anything. And now, my husband doesn't work, but hopefully he will start working again soon," an illiterate

daughter informed her parents.⁸³ Working hard in America was the consensus of many of the letters.⁸⁴ Moreover, the insecurity of employment, long slack seasons and the desperate necessity to accumulate the means to survive the difficult times echo through the letters.⁸⁵ The hardships and disillusionment often prominent in the letters notwithstanding, only in one of the sixty letters the writer informed his wife of his intention to return home as soon as he marries off his son, explaining his decision: "It is difficult for an old man in America."⁸⁶ The remaining letters, though often expressing disillusionment and disappointment, tacitly or openly subscribed to the belief that America guaranteed a livelihood to all those willing to work hard and "whoever did not succeed in making a living here, will never make it."⁸⁷

Beyond the practical aspects of daily existence in America, the correspondence is replete with expressions of concern about families and relatives in the old country. Furthermore, the immigrants assumed tangible obligations towards their relatives. "I will support you both as long as there is life in my body," vowed one immigrant in a letter to his parents.⁸⁸ Another immigrant assured his sister and brother-in-law that, had it not been for his "limited wages" because of scarce job opportunities, he would have sent them the money they needed for a franchise.⁸⁹ An additional message in the same letter is a testimony of a friend who

attested to the immigrant's inability to send the money. Similarly, another immigrant defended himself against his widowed mother's accusation of having a "cruel heart" by explaining that the "few dollars I had were spent on doctors" taking care of his sick child who had died in the meantime.⁹⁰

The practical assessment of the chances in the new country based on the information communicated in letters, played a significant role in the decision to emigrate and its timing, an assumption borne out by the significant drop in the numbers of immigrants during the depression of 1893.⁹¹ However, the expressions of familial solidarity and obligations transcended by far in their importance the actual information and experience as related in the letters, and the mere presence of relatives in America became a powerful magnet which succeeded in drawing ever growing circles of immigrants.

What has been revealed here is the impact of modernization and secularization on the traditional economic and social relations in the Jewish communities of the Old Country. Released from religious and social constraints and free to escape their class-ridden communities, the immigrants set out to seek an auspicious society free of social bias and of economic misery. The traditional social institutions of their old communities, however, served as indispensable tools of survival in the immigrants' encounters with new social biases and economic difficulties in the new land.

FOOTNOTES

¹By 1914 the number of immigrants reached a million and a half out of a total Jewish population in Tsarist Russia of over five million. Samuel Joseph, Jewish Immigrants to the United States From 1881 to 1910 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 93. For data on Jewish immigration after 1910, see Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," Perspectives in American History, 9 (1975), p. 39. Since Jewish immigrants did not constitute (in the U.S. documentation of immigrants) a separate category until 1899, both Joseph and Kuznets base their estimates for the years 1881-1899 on unofficial data from reports of Jewish aid societies in the three main entry points of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. For a discussion of the problems presented by a lack of official United States data for 1881-1899 and for other related issues, see Joseph, Jewish Immigrants to the U.S., pp. 87-92, Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews," pp. 36, 37, 40, 41.

²It should be noted that though prior to 1899, statistical data about Jewish immigrants from Russia is scanty, non-statistical sources--mainly autobiographical materials--indicate that neither the causes for immigration nor the composition of the immigrant group differed to any great extent from those in the later period of 1899-1914. For the purposes of this study, the data pertaining to the later period will provide the basis for insights into the period starting in 1881. For the analysis of the occupational structure of the immigrant group for the years 1899-1914, see Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," pp. 100-112. It should be mentioned that according to Aaron Antonovsky, the socio-economic character of the immigrants who arrived in the pre-1900 period differed from the later arrivals. The proportion of immigrants who had been previously engaged in petty trade and immigrants without defined occupations hailing from small shtetls rather than towns or cities with little or no capital, most of whom came out of economic necessity rather than choice, was higher in the earlier period, maintained Antonovsky. Aaron Antonovsky, ed., The Early Jewish Labor Movement in the United States (New York: YIVO, 1961), pp. 71-72. Yudishes Tageblatt remarked in a similar vein that the immigration of the late 1890s was made up of a better class of people than in the preceding years, Yudishes Tageblatt, May 3, 1892. Contrary to these two impressionistic views, however, the findings of Kuznets indicate that like the earlier immigration, it was mainly

economic necessity and dislocation which also motivated the immigrants of the later period to leave Russia.

The relevant autobiographical material consists of three unpublished collections located at the Jewish Institute for Social Research (YIVO). The largest body of material--Record Group 102--is the result of a contest conducted in 1942 by YIVO on the theme, "Why I Left Europe and What I Have Accomplished in America." The collection contains 250 autobiographies, some of them added during subsequent years. The second collection, Record Group 113, part of the YIVO Oral History Project directed by M. Kligberg in 1964-68, consists of 43 transcribed interviews with labor leaders and activists. The third group, Aaron Antonovsky Editorial Records, consists of several questionnaires filled in by retired Jewish workers of Los Angeles, some of whom had worked in the garment industry in different parts of the country.

³Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews," p. 101, Table 11, p. 105.

⁴Ibid., pp. 109, 110, Table 12. The Pale of Settlement was the name given to the geographic areas where Jews were allowed to settle. It included 15 out of 50 western provinces of European Russia and 10 provinces of Russian Poland. Barred from the countryside inside the Pale, Jews were restricted to incorporated cities and to villages constituting 58% of the urban population of Lithuania and White Russia but only 26% of the newly-settled southern parts of the Pale. Approximately 4,900,000 Jews lived in the Pale in 1897, representing 11.5% of the local population and 94% of all Jewish population in Tsarist Russia. Ibid., pp. 69-72.

⁵Ibid., p. 105.

⁶Ibid., p. 109.

⁷Ibid., p. 63

⁸Ibid., pp. 73, 77, 110.

⁹Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux sur la situation economique des Israelites de Russie, 2 vols. (Paris: Alcan, 1906-1908), 2: Appendix Table 40, 1: 237).

¹⁰Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 1: 242, 382. The south and the Crimea profited from a demographic shift following new laws which opened these territories to the Jews. According to one source, the absence of established kahals, a more egalitarian draft system and the availability of land, attracted many inhabitants from the northwestern provinces in search of new opportunities. Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews. The

Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia 1825-1855
(Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), p. 165.

¹¹It is known, for example, that in some towns of the Pale there was one tailor for every twenty inhabitants, Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 1: 308.

¹²Within the borders of the Pale, Jews constituted 11.5% of the Russian population, and, of the total Jewish population of Russia, numbering over five million in the 1900s, only 4-6% met the standards required for domicile in the interior and the major cities, (Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews," pp. 69, 71). It should be noted that the categories of those privileged to reside outside the Pale included also master craftsmen pursuing their crafts. In practice, however, a variety of restrictions applied by Russian guilds outside the Pale and the arbitrariness of local governments, prevented artisans from taking advantage of the law. Ibid., p. 69. For a short summary of the Tsarist policies toward the Jews and the concomitant legal changes, see Bernard D. Weinryb, "East European Jewry (Since the Partitions of Poland, 1772-1795)," The Jews: Their History, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Schocken Books, 1972). For statistics and the ratio of Jewish population to Russian population within the Pale compared with the ratio outside the Pale for the 1860s and the 1870s and the economic opportunities afforded to the Jews living in the interior of Russia, see Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), 1:166.

¹³The manufacture and the distribution of vodka was often farmed out by the government to nobility who, in turn, leased their rights to Jews. In the course of the second half of the 19th century, however, this profitable trade was progressively taken away from Jews by a succession of legal enactments. Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, pp. 171-174.

¹⁴Quoted in Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 1: 160.

¹⁵Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 2: 225, 227. Baron notices an increase of 27% in the numbers of paupers between the years 1894 and 1898, Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew Under the Tsars and the Soviets (New York: MacMillan Co., 1964), pp. 128-29. According to Baron, in many communities as many as 50% of the population depended on charity during Passover. Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁶Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 2: 227.

¹⁷Ezra Mendelsohn, Class Struggle in the Pale: The

Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 14.

¹⁸ Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 1: 266, 227.

¹⁹ Though difficult to gauge, the policy of the Russian government might have contributed to the changes in the occupational structure of the Jewish population. The Russification of the Jews, the broad goal of the government, was to be accomplished by granting legal and economic rewards to the productive elements in Jewish society. A statute issued in 1835, for example, allowed Jews acquiring a craft to reside outside the Pale. Similarly, economically useful estates were granted special privileges in series of laws of 1846, and later, under the new reforms of Alexander II. Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 49; Weinryb, "East European Jewry," The Jews: Their History, pp. 363-365. Although this policy opened the provinces of the interior to merchants, graduates of universities and artisans, the great masses of Jews lacking the means and unable to challenge the administrative difficulties involved in the geographic move, remained confined to the crowded Pale faced with limited economic choices.

The economic pressures notwithstanding, it would be incorrect to conclude that all those forced out of their religious and commercial occupations capitulated to the downward pressures and to the social degradation synonymous with joining the menial occupations. The phenomenon of luftmensch which became part of the social and economic landscape of the shtetl in the second half of the nineteenth century, proves the tenacity with which many clung to their previous status. The class of unemployable luftmensch became the target for attacks of the proponents of modernization and restructuring of the Jewish economy. Mendele Mocher Sfarim, one of the fathers of modern Yiddish literature, became the most acerbic and vocal critic of that class, attacking its laziness and the refusal of its members to cure their poverty by becoming productive members of the community.

²⁰ Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 1: 260, 262.

²¹ David Cohen, "Baaley melacha be-Spola," [Artisans in the Town of Spola] He-Avar 7 (1960) 170.

²² The price of a sewing machine was 60 rubles (the equivalent of 30 dollars). According to one testimony, after a down-payment of ten rubles the rest was paid in weekly installments of one ruble for two years. According to the same account, the tailors of Mogilev depended on loan sharks in order to acquire their machines. Isaac Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917 (Jerusalem: Posner and

Sons, 1981), p. 150. The interest on these loans was as high as 100%. Sara Rabinowitsch, Die organisationen des judischen proletariats in Russland (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1903), p. 61.

²³Abraham Solomon Melamed, Hayim kemo shehem [Life As It Was] (Constantinople: 1922), pp. 33, 119.

²⁴Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 1: 247, 249, 276, 282, 283, 2: Appendix Table 41.

²⁵Ibid., 1: 249. 1901 data for Minsk, Vilna, Vitebsk indicate the existence of larger shops employing ten to forty workers. Ezra Mendelsohn, Class Struggle in the Pale, p. 10.

²⁶Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 1: 256, 257. Apprentices, as a rule, spent their first year helping the masters' wives in household work and child care. After three years of apprenticeship, young boys were paid small wages amounting to 40, 50 and 75 rubles annually. Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 256.

²⁸M. Alper, YIVO RG 102 no. 30, p. 9.

²⁹Spola, 170.

³⁰Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia 1772-1844 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), pp. 128-29.

³¹Melamed, Life As It Was, p. 9.

³²Levitats, Jewish Community in Russia 1772-1844, p. 63.

³³Quoted in Levitats, Jewish Community in Russia 1772-1844, p. 65. Azriel Shochat, "Leadership of the Jewish Communities in Russia After the Abolition of the 'Kahal'" (Hebrew), Zion, 42, 1977, 182-83.

³⁴Y. Schatzky, "Amolike Yiddishe schneider fareinen un hevros" ("Tailors Associations and Societies"), Fortschrit 5 January, 1923, 10.

³⁵Weinryb, "Texts and Studies...", p. 101. According to M. Wischnitzer, unlike the Christian guilds which had a say in the management of the town, the Jewish guilds were deprived of comparable influence. A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds, p. 273.

³⁶Wischnitzer, A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds, p. 244; Levitats, Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917, pp. 149, 150, 151. The masters' guilds and the kahal, however, strove to suppress and frustrate these journeymen's attempts. Ibid., p. 244. Levitats, Jewish Community in

Russia, 1844-1917, pp. 149, 150, 151.

³⁷Rabinowitsch, Die organisationen des judischen proletariats in Russland, pp. 54, 57, 59. Similar associations of journeymen existed in Moghilev among cabinet makers, printers, painters, shoemakers, etc. In the case of the painters, however, the repeated secessions were of temporary nature, and on each occasion the journeymen rejoined their parent guild, bringing back their Torah scroll which was then placed in the Ark of the masters' synagogue. Ibid., p. 74. These associations of journeymen survived into the twentieth century and became the base for the activities of the Bund.

³⁸Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772-1844, p. 239. Levitats does not give the date of the incident in Keidany. Stanislawski notes separatist tendencies on part of Jewish artisans who, in one case, demanded representation on the town's council independently of the recognized Jewish authorities. Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 131.

³⁹In reality the leadership remained in power and was known at times to cooperate with the Russian authorities by indicating whom to draft. Azriel Shochat, "Leadership of the Jewish Communities in Russia After the Abolition of the 'Kahal'," (Hebrew), Zion 42, 1977, 194. Also, though theoretically the community lost its taxing power, in practice the indirect taxes on candles and meat continued to finance community expenditure. Similarly, rabbinical judicial power, though illegal except in civil and religious matters, remained in effect. Ibid., p. 211.

⁴⁰B. M. Laikin, YIVO, RG 102 no. 144, pp. 3, 11, 12.

⁴¹Dr. S. J. Levy, YIVO, RG 102, no. 32-32a, p. 7.

⁴²Melamed, p. 8.

⁴³M. Alper, YIVO, RG 102 no. 30., p. 3. Though she eventually had to marry one daughter to "a builder of wooden houses," her only consolation was that the groom was "a bit of a scholar and came from a good family." Ibid.

⁴⁴A. Berlow, YIVO, RG 102, no. 70, p. 4.

⁴⁵Anon. YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 22.

⁴⁶D. Cohen, "Artisans in Spola," He-Avar, vol. 7, 1960, p. 171. The custom of appropriating remnants of cloth -- known in English as 'cabbage' -- was a widespread practice among English tailors of the eighteenth century and was also considered by them as part of their remuneration. John Rule,

The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century English Industry (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 126.

⁴⁷ Melamed, Life As It Was, p. 122. The stigma attached to the status of the artisan and the worker persisted into the twentieth century and became a target for Bund's propaganda and attack. Bund's agitators and organizers taught "that the worker is indispensable because he produces with his hands and blood all that we need. And that even God wasn't ashamed of being a tailor ... and he himself sewed the first garment for Adam and Eve." Ben Joseph, YIVO, RG 102, no. 81, p. 17.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the role of 'transferability of skills' in the greater propensity of the skilled poor to emigrate in contrast to the poor peddlers and poor religious teachers, see Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews," p. 106. It should also be pointed out that emigration to America existed simultaneously with geographic mobility within the Russian Empire, especially in the regions of Russian Poland, where fewer restrictions allowed more freedom of movement, and though many cities in Russia were closed to the majority of the Jewish population, larger cities within the Pale attracted many in search of new fortunes. Thus, Ekaterinoslav, profiting from its railway links, grew rapidly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century drawing many Jews from the rural areas. Similarly Odessa attracted many Jews from the Ukraine and southern Russia. It is interesting to note that similarly to the response of the German-Jewish population of New York to the waves of immigrants, the better-off Jews of Odessa also sounded a warning to the hopeful immigrants to get rid of the notion that "in Odessa one can dig up gold in the streets with spades." Yudishes Folksblatt, May 29, 1885, p. 314.

⁴⁹ Traditionally, there were two types of charity organizations. One category under the jurisdiction of the kahal was financed by indirect taxes imposed on the members of the whole community. The other category included all voluntary organizations attached usually to a synagogue and supported by voluntary donations of its members. With the general economic decline, however, the financial sources diminished as well, and the charities became increasingly dependent on an affluent few. And so, for example, though the benevolent voluntary associations continued to exist, they often became dependent on financial assistance and on individuals who were not members of the synagogues, thus losing their previous fraternal character. Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de materiaux, 2: 231.

⁵⁰ Traditionally, Jewish beggars could demand alms, "as if it were his due," and often became abusive when refused. Jacob Paperna, "From the Era of Nicholas I: Reminiscences,"

Perezhitoe, 2, (1910), quoted in Baron, The Russian Jew Under the Tsars and the Soviets, p. 128.

⁵¹Knesset Israel, 1 (1886/7), 712.

⁵²Ha-Carmel, no. 46, 1869, p. 359.

⁵³Ha-Melitz, no. 148, October 30, 1886, "A Letter From Elizavetgrad."

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 29.

⁵⁶B. Reisman, YIVO, RG 102, no. 38-38a, pp. 2-3. Refers to a Talmudic passage, "Which is the righteous path of life a man should choose?" The answer reads: "The path which will enoble man's deeds."

⁵⁷Irving Howe, The World of Our Fathers, p. 11. The new idea of time informed, according to Howe, the Zionist and the socialist movements of the day.

⁵⁸A. Berlow, YIVO, RG 102, no. 70, pp. 30, 23.

⁵⁹J. Esrick, YIVO, RG 102, no. 138.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Anon., YIVO RG 102, no. 24, pp. 10, 22.

⁶²P. Bernhardt, YIVO, RG 102, p. 4.

⁶³Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 75, pp. 29, 30.

⁶⁴Yudishes Folksblatt, February 12, 1887.

⁶⁵A. Berlow, YIVO, RG 102, no. 70, p. 18. Also women, like men, relied on friends and relatives in America to send tickets and to extend a helping hand upon arrival.

⁶⁶S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 57, p. 3. The miraculous discoveries which America produced, all of which surpassed human imagination, further magnified its mythical character. Thus Edison's awesome invention which "by turning a switch can light all of America" lent to America the magical and the incredible. M. Zeidman, YIVO, RG, no. 36, p. 6.

⁶⁷Ben Joseph, YIVO, RG 102, no. 81, p. 12.

⁶⁸B. Fenster, YIVO, RG 113, p. 1. Looking back on his life in America the same immigrant concluded that unlike the old country, in America, "We participated in things but in

Europe we did not participate." Ibid.

⁶⁹S. Ginsburg, YIVO, RG 102, no. 156, p. 7.

⁷⁰A. Gummer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 44, p. 102.

⁷¹Yudishes Folksblatt, November 1881, p. 126. These refugees viewed the French Jewish philanthropic organization, which was instrumental in enabling them to sail to America, as a living symbol of the achievements of the Revolution and as a fighter for its ideals.

⁷²Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 1.

⁷³E. M. Wagner, YIVO, RG 102, no. 45, p. 143.

⁷⁴Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 22.

⁷⁵Sanford Ragins, "The Image of America in Two East European Hebrew Periodicals," American Jewish Archives, November 1965.

⁷⁶Though personal reports carried more weight than printed accounts, the latter found nonetheless attentive reception in some segments of the population. One immigrant, for example, recalled that his decision to emigrate was influenced largely by articles of Ha-Melitz. Melamed, Life As It Was, p. 225.

⁷⁷U.S. Congress, House, A Report of the Commissioners of Immigration Upon The Causes Which Incite Immigration to the U.S., 52nd Congress, 1st Session, 1892, p. 120. Also, U.S. Congress, Senate, Immigration Commission Reports, Senate Report 633, 61st Congress, 2nd Session, 1907, Vol. I, p. 188.

⁷⁸Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 117, p. 12. Moreover, the importance of reports transmitted in letters from relatives and friends should not be viewed only on the basis of their credibility but also as an effective means of disseminating information reaching large audiences of neighbors and friends. Ibid.

⁷⁹The letters discussed below are part of a collection of letters in Polish, edited by Witold Kula, Nina Assorodobraj-Kula, and Marcin Kula, Listy Emigrantow z Brazilii i Stanow Zjednoczonych 1890-1891 [Letters of Polish Emigrants from Brazil and the United States 1890-1891] Warsaw: 1973. The collection also contains some sixty letters translated from Yiddish, sent by Jewish immigrants, mostly from the United States, to their relatives in the towns and villages of the Plock region. The letters, containing for the most part receipts for ship tickets, train tickets, money or instructions relating to America, were intercepted and

withheld by the Russian authorities determined to stop the flow of emigration.

⁸⁰Witold Kula et al., Letters of Polish Emigrants, letter 273.

⁸¹Ibid., letter 322.

⁸²Ibid., letter 266.

⁸³Ibid., letter 320.

⁸⁴"One has to work harder here than in Poland." Ibid., letter 282.

⁸⁵Ibid., letters 268, 273, 294, 295, 316, 320, 332.

⁸⁶Ibid., letter 295. While some letters warned the readers of the inability to maintain one's Jewishness and of the difficult life awaiting the older immigrant, one son promised his father a good old age and a guarantee that in America one could be as religious "as at home." Ibid., letter 285. According to Kuznets, the number of returnees was highest for forty-five and over and lowest for the younger group. Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews," p. 99.

⁸⁷Ibid., letter 262, 282. In some letters, success stories served to illustrate the optimism of the writer and used incitement and persuasion to those reluctant to come. Letter 273, for example, informed the recipients of the letter at home of a cousin who learned tailoring and within one year saved one hundred dollars. See also letter 262, 284.

⁸⁸Witold Kula et al., eds., Letters of Polish Immigrants, letter 323.

⁸⁹Ibid., letter 261.

⁹⁰Ibid., letter 286. See also letters 313, 330.

⁹¹Joseph, Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910, p. 93. The number of immigrants dropped to 25,161 in 1893, compared to 64,253 in 1892. The numbers of immigrants, thereafter, decreased steadily reaching the lowest number 13,063 in 1897 and increasing thereafter to reach a new peak of 125,234 in 1906 and beginning to decrease again for several years thereafter.

CHAPTER 2

ASSISTING THE IMMIGRANT:

GERMAN-JEWISH CHARITIES AND INFORMAL NETWORKS OF ASSISTANCE.

While family and community contacts in America were crucial to individual decisions to emigrate and to provide the money for passage, Jewish charitable institutions attempted at the same time to impose some kind of order on the chaos of migratory impulses. The official project of assistance to emigrate and to settle embodied the prevailing cultural and social attitudes of well-established American Jews. Their values and ideas, however, contrasted sharply with those of the newcomers and in the resulting clashes the immigrants rejected the alien ethic. Although the organized project, the first one of similar endeavors to follow, was short-lived, its failure is of interest because it formulated the role of cultural distinctiveness of the immigrants for future conflicts between labor and capital and it foretold the weakness of superimposed organizations in comparison to the strength of community and family networks.

The Brody Experiment: The Beginnings of German-Jewish Involvement

The immigration of 1881 received its first impetus from the pogrom in Elizavetgrad following the assassination of Alexander II. What followed was a mass exodus which was, in its character, suggestive of bygone Messianic movements. The mass exodus was inspired by a faith and confidence in the power of modern Western Jewry to deliver its downtrodden brethren out of virtual slavery. The spark was ignited by a letter published in August 1881 and ascribed to Sir Moses Montefiore, the British Zionist and benefactor, known for his concern with the political and economic welfare of Jews throughout the world. The content of the letter, which spread rapidly throughout the Pale, claimed that the Alliance Israelite Universelle, an organization of French Jewish notables, urged the Russian Jews to go to America. The Alliance, it was rumored, would provide the emigrants and their families not only with the money for the trip but once in America, it "will give everybody a plot of good and fat land, a house equipped with the necessary things ... and everyone will live happily."¹

Vigorous denials by the Alliance notwithstanding, thousands of Jewish refugees sold all their belongings and flocked to the town of Brody located on the Austrian side of the border, expecting the French benefactors to take them to America. Strong warnings issued to the leaders and the rabbis of the Pale to discourage further refugees were of no avail. News that the French agents were in Brody spread

quickly and thousands of immigrants continued to arrive daily putting their trust in the hands of the Alliance. Their persistence and their unlimited faith in America astonished the French representatives in Brody. "I could never persuade them that they are committing a grave mistake," complained one agent, "they insist on going to America no matter what. They do not ask anything of the committee in New York, they only ask for funds for the trip."²

Soon, however, it became clear that the Alliance did not intend to send everybody to America and that the desperate economic state of the refugees, their exile from Russia and their sincere willingness to work hard in their adopted country were not sufficient to win the sympathy and assistance of the Alliance.³ Families with large numbers of children stood the least chance of being sent to America. After being refused because of the number of children, one applicant pleaded with the committee: "If Lord gave me children, shall I now drown them?"⁴ The Alliance also warned the prospective immigrants, "not to count on us to accept married men and fathers of families."⁵

The tests of selectivity were applied with cruel ruthlessness. Those who were denied passage to America or to any of the Western European countries were eventually sent back to Russia. And though the prevailing opinion among those in charge of the project was that in Russia the returnees stood a better chance of establishing themselves

than they did of starting a new life in America, the heartbreaking scenes of those forced to board the train back to Russia bore striking evidence to the contrary.⁶

The stiff application of tests and standards in selecting the desirable immigrants was an expression of the fears and the pressures of West-European-assimilated Jewry and its American counterparts, neither of whom was willing to accept the Russian refugees into their midst. The American Jews, though not represented in Brody, played an important role in the episode. Their main concern was to hold in check the pressures of the immigrants clamoring to be sent to the United States. This policy became inseparable from their battle against the key Jewish European charities -- the French Alliance and the British Mansion House Committee -- both keen to alleviate the fate of the Russian Jews and be rid of them at the same time by sending them en masse to America. Shortage of the funds necessary to maintain the newcomers who were bound, in the view of American Jews, to become charity cases, was but one argument of the American Jews against sending the immigrants. Another strong fear was that the clannishness of the refugees, their preference for peddling, and their lack of hygiene, all viewed as genetic characteristics of the Eastern European Jews, would not only be a social embarrassment, but might also cause anti-semitism. Their own position in America, maintained the German Jews, "is not such that they can well afford to run

any risk of incurring the ill feeling of their fellow citizens,"⁷ and as newly accepted members of the American community, the German Jews of New York felt that it was their foremost civic obligation to prevent "the infliction of permanent paupers upon the already over-burdened city."⁸

The attitudes and the fears of American Jewry resulted in strong pressure on the immigration representatives in Brody for a strict and a systematic selection of the fittest among the applicants for immigration. "Absolute paupers must on no account be chosen for emigration," HEAS of New York admonished the agents in Brody, and only "those having a trade or willing to settle on the lands of the Society, or to work as labourers on railways and otherwise should be selected for emigration."⁹ Single mechanics or actual farmers or laborers were preferable to married men who would leave wives at home, become homesick and "cause us trouble."¹⁰ Moreover, all prospective immigrants must be told in advance that "they must work hard for daily wages at anything that comes their way, and that a rigid adherence to the rites of Judaism will in many cases be entirely impossible." The New York relief organizations insisted also on numerical¹¹ restrictions and recommended an annual allotment of 3,000-5,000 immigrants, an optimal number for a successful settlement of the newcomers that would not overburden the labor market and the finances of the societies.¹² Lastly, the committee in Brody and all other

involved European charitable societies were advised to discourage the hopes of future immigrants and to resist "our humane impulses and check the tide of emigration [even] at the cost of much human misery."¹³

It soon became apparent, however, that the European committees of Brody, London and Paris failed in their task of sifting and selecting the most desirable immigrants. Of all the newcomers, complained the New York refugee committee, "fully one third ... possess none of the requisite qualifications and ... their unfitness must have been apparent to your agents if they exercised any discrimination whatever."¹⁴ Attacks and recriminations between Europe and New York gained in frequency and strength as the waves of immigrants, many of whom were assisted by charities at points of embarkation, mainly London, Antwerp and Hamburg, continued to arrive.¹⁵ Thus, New York refugee committees accused Mansion House Committee of inundating New York with Jewish refugees at the rate of 3,500 a month.¹⁶ These refugees, it appears, reached England through their own efforts and were given unselectively 8 pounds each to go to America. Moreover, the New York committee blamed London for indiscriminately sending all refugees, some of them just plain "schnorrers" disguised as Russian refugees.¹⁷ In addition to their charge that America was becoming the dumping ground for all the unassimilable Jews of Europe and Russia, the American Jews also complained that the expenses

incurred by the refugees were depleting their financial resources which were "moderate" in comparison to the fortunes of their European counterparts,¹⁸ and "had American Jews in possession of a fiftieth part of the riches of the European Jews, the American Jews wouldn't be asking for help."¹⁹ European Jews, however, turned a deaf ear both to the demand to stem the number of immigrants and the demand for financial help.²⁰

Similar to America's reluctance to accept large waves of refugees, the unwillingness of European Jewry to accept the Russian refugees into their midst stemmed from fears of anti-Semitism, which could be provoked by the presence of a large army of foreign unemployable and unassimilable paupers.²¹

In view of the reluctance of both American and European Jews to accept in their midst all those fleeing from Russia to Brody in the years 1881-1882, the numbers of those whose passage was paid to the United States amounted to 6,000-7,000 while the 10,000-12,000 who remained in Brody by June 1882 were expected to be returned to Russia.²² By August, 1882, the number of the refugees in Brody reached 14,000 and a special conference in Vienna of all organizations involved in the Brody rescue project decided that no refugee shall be directed to a Western destination unless it could be proved that his repatriation to Russia might endanger his life.²³ Eventually, approximately 8,000 were returned to Russia,

while the rest were sent to Egypt, Turkey and Western Europe.

The Brody project came to an end in December 1882 when all organizations involved decided to withdraw their support from the task of assisting the Russian refugees to reach America. Simultaneously, the Austrian government changed its liberal policies towards the fleeing refugees and closed its Russian frontier. In all some 10,000 emigrants were subsidized by the various committees and eventually reached America.²⁴

The Brody experiment, as well as other similar experiments which followed accentuated the importance of family and community resources. According to one source, for example, out of 19,000 new arrivals in the years 1881-1882, 10,000 immigrants reached America through financial assistance of the charities. Significant numbers, however, immigrated on their own.²⁵ The observations of a steamship agent explain how the immigrants of 1881 managed to come: "The transportation expenses were paid by their brothers, sisters, sons, etc. Those who were already in America and had earned money there, had sent me money for bringing over their parents."²⁶ The commitment and familial obligations indicated in the letters of the immigrants to bring the wives, the brothers, the sisters, the parents, and the in-laws corroborate the observation of the steamship agent, and confirm that for the period under consideration it was

through family and community contacts that the bulk of Russian immigrants reached America.²⁷

Patterns of Immigration and First Contacts

Having relatives abroad was an asset not only for immediate family but also for other members of the community, sometimes for total strangers. Steamship tickets which arrived for designated relatives who, for a variety of reasons, gave up their right to the tickets, were passed on to others on the promise to repay it in America.²⁸ Others, who did not have relatives or the luck of an accidental ticket, borrowed money for the purchase of a ticket with the promise of repaying the loan by sending money from America.²⁹

The dependence on relatives or on local sources to finance the passage to America was influential in shaping the pattern of immigration into an immigration of individuals rather than one of whole families. According to the observation of the steamship agent in 1881, "women and their children are not accompanied by their husbands. The husbands of those women have gone by themselves because of not having the necessary money for taking their families, but once they earned money they brought over their families."³⁰ Men serving as "avant-garde" who later brought over the rest of their families was the preferred pattern mainly because of financial necessity.³¹ An exception to this pattern of

sending men first was the emigration via Brody characterized by a large number of wives and children. It should also be pointed out that the phenomenon of migration of individuals did not preclude the form of migrating in groups. The Brody period, for example, witnessed emigration of groups organized for the purpose of settling on farmland in America. We hear of a group of seventy people from the Elizavetgrad who came to Brody with their families requesting passage money to go to Texas where they intended to till the soil. Only a small group of young men was singled out from the larger group and offered free passage to America, but they refused to accept, explaining that they decided to go together "in order to work and help each other."³² Another group of emigrants, the fusgeyer (walkers) gained its fame when in 1899 its members decided to walk all the way from Romania, their homeland, to Hamburg.³² Similarly, smaller groups of immigrants banded together for the duration of the journey in the different communities of the Pale.³⁴

For the majority of emigrants who lacked the appropriate exit permits, the arduous journey to America began with the illegal crossing into Germany. Obtaining exit permits was a lengthy and expensive procedure and the legal stamps required for the numerous certificates, the trips to the provincial capital, and the frequent use of bribes were all costlier than the fees paid to professional smugglers operating along Russian borders. Despite the dangers and hardships of

illegal crossings, setting foot on German soil was an exhilarating experience -- "We all cried hurrah ... This is a free land, here we are not downtrodden." The enthusiasm, however, soon gave way to the first disappointments resulting from the rough handling of foreign passengers on the part of suspicious German authorities.³⁵

Further difficulty awaited the immigrants in Hamburg and Bremen: the newly arrived found themselves besieged by the different shipping agents who, according to reports, mercilessly fleeced the gullible passengers. Reports sent back to Russia warned prospective immigrants about dealing with unscrupulous shipping agents as well as boarding house owners, most of whom were monopolized by the shipping agents.³⁶

The hardships and the ordeals endured at Hamburg and Bremen were only the beginning of the trying boat journey. Scanty supplies of kosher food, shortages of drinking water, and hostility and contempt on the part of the crew and better-off passengers were the lot of the steerage immigrant.³⁷

For some, however, the most arduous and trying crossing could not dim the prospect of America. "Nothing was missing from my happiness. I had my whole future before me," was one immigrant's recollection of his trip.³⁸ Moreover, the first glimpse of New York confirmed the hope and the promise: the sky which "seemed bluer and the sun much brighter than in the

old country," corresponded to one hopeful immigrant's image of the Garden of Eden.³⁹

For others, the "seven stages of hell" of the long and grilling procedure of immigration formalities and the unnerving questioning of Jewish charities in Castle Garden or Ellis Island soon dispelled America's image as the Garden of Eden. When finally set free, the immigrant was met by money changers, hotel and boarding house owners and sometimes labor agents all competing for potential clients and victims.⁴⁰ Their appearance had little to prove of their success in the new country: "We were all shocked looking at our little Jews who were standing around Castle Garden, their appearance as black as Egyptian darkness, all dressed in torn rags. I asked them: "Brethren, what is this? Can it be that there are poor people in the Golden Land? 'Wait, wait,' they said, 'you will soon see.'"⁴¹ The unsettling first encounters were further aggravated by the crowds and the sheer size of the city. In the experience of one newcomer, New York was "like a huge anthill with millions of ants, each ant wants to snatch a granule of grain for itself. How will I, a newcomer, one little ant without money, without language, without trade, be able to fight all other ants and get for myself a granule of grain?"⁴²

One of the most important single elements helping the newcomer in his new surroundings and assisting him in his first steps in search for shelter, skill and job, was the

presence of relatives, landsleit (plural form of landsman, immigrants originating from the same European community) and all other immigrants of New York willing to share their accumulated experience with the newcomers. The help of the more veteran immigrants, preferably landsleit, given to those who did not have relatives, was invaluable. As one immigrant, who prior to his emigration from Russia had uprooted himself from his native town and moved to the city of Ekatrinoslav in 1889, and reflecting upon the two exiles, concluded, "The green years [first years] in America were like paradise in comparison to the first years in Ekatrinoslav. In Ekatrinoslav there were no landsleit to extend you a helping hand."⁴³ And in the words of another immigrant: "Brothers meeting in their native town are not as happy as strangers from the same town meeting in exile."⁴⁴ Moreover, the extra-familial networks of the landsleit, exceeded in importance the role of family and relatives in their function of constructing the social, economic and cultural milieu for the newcomer. A recently arrived immigrant whose relatives took him to Massachusetts, decided in spite of his relatives' presence and a satisfactory job, to go to New York where, amidst his fellow immigrants, he finally "felt at home."⁴⁵ Similarly, newcomers often refused employment opportunities outside of New York because of the absence of landsleit and friends.⁴⁶

Immigrants who, on the other hand, lacked the necessary

contacts of landsleit, relatives or friends, had to resort to the available charities for food, shelter, and jobs.

According to the reminiscences of one immigrant, Hachnasat Orchim, an immigrant hostel on 210 Madison Avenue, did not extend a warm welcome to the needy. A suspicious Jew who welcomed the immigrant and his wife:

first did not believe that we were married ... and why we looked so young. We were lucky because we had our ketuba (marriage certificate) with us and my Russian passport. After he saw that we were married, he began to yell that there were enough schnorrers already without us and that he cannot do anything to help us. When I explained to him that I am not a schnorrer and that I have enough money to last for a few months and that I only wanted advice from him, only then he calmed down. 47

The sour and demeaning attitude of the shelter's management stood in stark contrast to the assistance and the welcome that the same immigrant experienced when reunited with his uncle:

Within one hour I saw about ten landsleit among them my second uncle and my rabbi, who taught me Talmud. They immediately rented rooms for me at the back of a store belonging to a landsmen. We bought some old furniture and I became my own master. 48

In a similar vein, another immigrant recollected his first time in a synagogue on the lower East Side of New York in the early 1880s:

After it was over, I was not quite sure that I was transplanted. In that synagogue alone, I met enough relatives to form another Shupowitcher clan. Some I remembered; others, long away, I had only heard about. Groups had gathered all around, talking and looking at me and nodding. Some had drawn something from their pockets and handed it to one man who gave it to Fetter Itselle. I did not look, but I felt that all the hubbub concerned me. Finally, Fetter Itselle called me aside. Handing me some American money, the value of which I did not know, he said, "This is for you." 49

In addition to answering the immediate needs for survival, the presence of relatives and landsleit, provided the newcomer with a sense of continuity and served as a pool of information linking the newcomer with his former community in Russia. One immigrant who arrived in 1893 fondly recalled the meetings of his landsleit which used to take place on Norfolk Street in a small watch shop that had belonged to a landsman. The shop became the address for many letters and a gathering place where "we would drink a glass of tea and receive news and regards from home."⁵⁰ Similarly, the house of a relative of another immigrant became a clearing house for news and information as well as a shelter open to the newly arrived who, in search of work, drifted frequently in and out of the city.⁵¹

It is interesting to note that the assistance of the landsleit notwithstanding, the social status of the "old timers" and their accumulated experience tended to create an unbridgeable cultural and social gap in their daily contacts with the newcomers. In the experience of one immigrant who arrived in New Haven in 1904, the friendliness of the landsleit amongst themselves was not reflected in their attitude to the "greener". He remembered the smugness and the self satisfaction of his already Americanized friends who "in my presence all spoke English, which I didn't understand and soon began to criticize my Yiddish which I mixed with Russian words. I felt their contempt for me."⁵² The

experience of the immigrant in New Haven might explain the allure of the large immigrant community, such as New York, which tempered the exclusive dependence on an unfriendly landsleit or relatives (characteristic of small towns) by offering a much greater variety of social contacts.

Assisting the Immigrant: Philanthropy and Communal Networks

In contrast to those immigrants who had the protective advantage of the experience accumulated by previously arrived immigrants, the new and unfamiliar reality and the task of daily survival presented an awesome reality to those who could not avail themselves of the informal assistance of the community, as was the case for the new arrivals in the early 1880s. These immigrants had to become the objects of often half-hearted charitable efforts of the German Jews.⁵³ Aleksander Harkavy told of his hungry and wandering fellow-travellers of the Am Olam group who "like babies dependent on their mother's milk so were they dependent on aid from charitable organizations" for food, shelter, and job.⁵⁴

Though it could be argued that the members of the Am Olam group who adhered to the romantic ideal of settling on land were least prepared to meet the hardships of the new land, their experience was shared by many other new arrivals of the early years. The HEAS (Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society)

and other Jewish charitable organizations of New York maintained shelter facilities for immigrants and their families in three main locations: Castle Garden, Ward's Island and Greenpoint. With the increase in the numbers of newcomers to 3,500 a month in 1882, these charities also rented boarding houses in New York to house the additional immigrants.⁵⁵ According to HEAS reports, the average stay for immigrants and their families was from four to six weeks, incurring an average expense of 23 cents a day for each immigrant in the shelters and 60-75 cents in the boarding house.⁵⁶ The shelters, especially the one at Castle Garden, also served as clearinghouses where many non-resident immigrants congregated in search of employment, and where prospective employers would come in search of cheap labor or scab labor.

In addition to the housing facilities, kosher meals were provided in subsidized kitchens in the city to hungry immigrants upon their submitting a necessary certificate.⁵⁷ Testimonies of needy contemporaries attested, however, to the poor quality and small quantities of the meals offered to the immigrants. As a result, many hungry immigrants "used to fake the pieces of paper in order to fill their empty bellies."⁵⁸

The efforts of the German-American Jews to exert control through assistance met with resistance and even rebellion. The events of October 1882 in the Ward's Island shelter, a

quarantine for the poor, ailing and aged immigrants, illustrate such a clash, and the hardships of the immigrants who were placed there came to signify the fate of all those who, forced by circumstances, became the beneficiaries of German-Jewish good-will. Their fate, remarked a contemporary sympathetic observer, was "worse than the fate of the black slaves. They are literally captives of the charities ... which use them to get more money out of the European Jews for support of Russian refugees."⁵⁹ The incident itself resulted from an accumulation of grievances on part of the immigrants. The Russian immigrants, held on the island practically as prisoners and forbidden to leave without permission, complained of poor nourishment, a punishment, according to the report, for their refusal to work on Saturdays. Furthermore, the tyrannical superintendent of the facilities, Blank, known for his contempt for his wards, insisted under the threat of punishment on being addressed "Sir" instead of the customary first-name familiarity. Corporal punishment was administered under the merest pretext under the claim of lack of discipline. According to the testimony of Isaac Goldstein, one of the 'inmates', his hands were tied together behind his back, a punishment he suspected was due to his habit of holding his arms behind his back, a seemingly disrespectful posture which provoked the ire of superintendent Blank. A particularly sadistic and vengeful demand was made by Blank to include his name in a Hebrew

prayer of thanks which in Russia, at the insistence of the Russian government, included the name of the Czar. The resentment at the high-handed treatment was expressed by the immigrants during a sermon on Saturday when the allusion was made to the "local tyranny" in front of the congregation. Thus formulated, the grievances became an open rebellion on the same day at dinner. It was touched off when one of the inmates questioned the meager portion of food and expressed preference for helping himself rather than receiving his food from one of the administrators. He was refused and was asked to leave the island. His supporters beseeched him to stay and the whole group proceeded to take revenge upon the hated superintendent. The full scale riot which developed with the arrival of police from Manhattan, ended only after the hated superintendent was forced to flee the island by swimming to the opposite shore and the dissatisfied inmates were promised a grievance committee. On the following day the strikers demanded "bread and humane treatment" and release from "this prison." The committee, however, decided that the main cause for agitation was the inactivity of the immigrants and decided to employ the inmates at half the standard wage in a factory owned by a Jewish philanthropist. This plan, however, did not fulfill the committee's expectations, as the dissatisfied workers decided to demand an "American wage" for "American work," forcing the benevolent employer to raise the wages.⁶⁰

The treatment of the newcomers on Ward's Island taught one immigrant that America was not "half the country he once thought it was, and that he would be glad if he were back in Russia."⁶¹ Another account confirmed the despair. The prisoners of Ward's Island wished "that the Lord will take our children to him. We then will be ready to drown ourselves in this river flowing in front of our eyes so to put an end to our terrible slavery."⁶²

The Ward's Island incident exasperated the German-American Jews by further confirming their worst fears of the unmanageability, lack of discipline and unassimilability of the Eastern European Jews. Moreover, consistent with their objectives of discouraging the parasitic instinct of the newcomers and of discouraging further waves of immigrants, the local philanthropies soon decided to abandon the project of the shelter facilities. In June 1882 the Russian Aid Society of New York informed the Castle Garden Commission "that they are no longer responsible for Russian-Jewish emigrants arriving there. They now wash their hands of all connections with them. This results from the indefensible conduct of these emigrants, who think they will be supported indefinitely without work."⁶³

A similar project, whose goal was to find employment for the newcomers and which was undertaken by the German-Jewish charities as soon as the first arrivals reached the United States, also met with frustrations and seemed to justify the

worst fears expressed to the Brody committee. Primarily, the German Jews viewed the immigrants as the most disadvantageous of the labor groups to have arrived at the American shores. In addition to the lack of skills and the large numbers of dependents, the decided disadvantage of the immigrants, according to American Jews, originated with their native country, which did not provide them with experience in "mercantile activity and therefore unlike the previous immigrants of Continental Europe, the Jews were to suffer the hardships of simple and arduous jobs, very much like the poor Italian 'Lazzaroni'."⁶⁴

In order to check the growing concentration of unskilled paupers in New York, the organized charities began sending the newcomers to other cities in the United States. The immigrants, the organizers maintained, were dispatched upon requests of the different Jewish communities which had presumably sent orders for mechanics, farmers and laborers. Thus, in a letter published in the Yudishes Folksblatt, a son informed his father that two days after his arrival in New York, he and thirty other immigrants were sent to Pittsburgh, where they were promised \$1.50 a day, until such time as they could get employment.⁶⁵ Similarly, a group of immigrants arrived in Cincinnati and was reported to have favorably impressed the local people because the immigrants were "well dressed and combed in a European fashion."⁶⁶ Though nothing else is known about the Pittsburgh or the Cincinnati group,

other similar groups were soon sent back to New York and some of the immigrants even begged to be returned to Russia. According to an account of HEAS, the local Jewish committees in the different cities complained of having "their patience sorely tried" by the recalcitrant Jews who refused to work and became burdens to the local charities.⁶⁷ Other accounts, however, bear evidence that HEAS and other New York organizations, in order to be rid of the newcomers and to shed the financial responsibilities incurred by their presence, hastened to send them to other localities without complying with their previous requests and without consulting the newcomers. Protests from the different communities were quick to follow. St. Louis protested against being considered by New York societies as a "distributing depot for Russian immigrants who are sent to Southern and Western states."⁶⁸ In October of the same year St. Louis resented not only New York's shipping off her unwanted wards but also complained about other neighboring cities which shipped their own poor to St. Louis. St. Louis issued a strong warning that "any person sent here who may become a subject for our charities will be immediately retransported to the place whence the same have been sent."⁶⁹ New Orleans complained about the last shipment of over 100 immigrants of whom only five or six were "practical or laboring men."⁷⁰ A similar letter from Texas read: "Texas is no country for paupers ... of peddlers and petty merchants. There are more than enough

in the state ... and ... we can no longer afford to act as wet-nurses for the helpless people that have been sent us."⁷¹ Detroit protested the presence of thirty new paupers who were originally requested as laborers by a lumber merchant from Grayling, Michigan. After having worked in the woods for four days, they were paid three dollars a person and turned adrift. They walked 24 miles to Grayling, which was quick to send them off to Detroit.⁷² Detroit, however, was looking for skilled mechanics and complained about the quality of the immigrants sent by New York, men who were "so little able to help themselves."⁷³ Similar complaints received by the American Israelite and by the New York refugee committee, demanded an end to shipments of immigrants by New York, and the majority of Jewish communities which received immigrants were keen to send them back and were quick to finance their return to New York.

Though the exact number of immigrants dispatched from New York to other cities by the charities is not known, according to one report, in 1882, the second and the last year of the project, the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society sent a total of 3,693 Jewish immigrants to other cities. Of these, 2,145 were men, 508 women and 1,040 children. The result of this largely unsuccessful attempt of 1881-1882 to provide the immigrants with jobs, was an army of hundreds of pauperized drifters tossed between American cities, further aggravating the traditionally negative view of Eastern European Jews as

parasites, schnorrers, deceivers and idlers.⁷⁴

Other unsuccessful methods of securing employment for the immigrants resulted in reinforcing the negative image of the immigrants, especially in the circles of contemporary American labor. As a result of their concentration within the confines of shelter facilities, the immigrants became easy prey to questionable hiring practices on the part of employers who were given a free hand by both the American immigration authorities as well as the Jewish charities. The availability of the large pool of labor in the immigrants' hostels and shelters lent itself to the hiring of newcomers as strike breakers. Thus, a group of immigrants was sent off the boat to do scab work during a freight handlers strike which ended in violent clashes between the strikers and the immigrants.⁷⁵ This and similar incidents provoked the bitter remark of the vice-president of the Freighthandlers Union who summed up the causes of the defeats of strikes in the 1880s: "It's that ---- ---- Castle Garden that's killing us."⁷⁶

In yet another project to find employment for the immigrants, Emigrant Aid Committee, which served as a labor exchange used often by the newcomers, was reported to exploit the fervor of the young idealists of the Am Olam group by placing them to work on farms in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. There, submitting to hard work "harder than in Egypt" in ploughing, milking cows and washing pigs, "they take the place of the Negroes who with great effort had won

their freedom from slavery."⁷⁷ Though many of these jobs were accepted with great fervor by the would-be Jewish farmers, the job meant severing one's ties with other Jewish immigrants and condemned them to a life of cultural isolation without the ability to communicate with the members of their new social community. Aleksander Harkavy, who found his first job as a farmhand in Pawling, Dutchess County, New York, decided to leave after one month even though he was to be paid one-half of his monthly wages if he did not stay for the whole season. While walking back to New York (in order to save train fare) he came upon a crew of ditch diggers in White Plains. When offered a job digging he refused and hurried back to his friends in New York. In New York, his friends reproached him for forsaking a paying job in view of the desperate job situation in the City. The whole group then decided to walk back to White Plains to find employment with the same group of ditch-diggers. However, jobs were no longer available there and they walked back to New York.⁷⁸

Obtaining employment through charitable bodies and the different labor exchanges taught the immigrants that, although there were job possibilities for the unskilled outside New York, the cultural and social isolation inevitably resulted in exploitation and helplessness. Similar to the experience of Harkavy was that of an immigrant who related his experience in a letter to the Yudishes Folksblatt.⁷⁹ He was placed in his first job by an

unidentified labor exchange which promised a group of newly arrived immigrants jobs in Baltimore each paying thirteen dollars a month and free lodging. In Baltimore, he was taken to a boat and to his surprise found himself employed in an oyster fishing operation, working under insufferably hard conditions from early in the morning until the evening, "the sweat running like rivers, feet and legs buckling under ... We slept in cages where we couldn't even sit up and at night I used to crawl out on all fours to catch a breath of some fresh air."⁸⁰ At the end of the second week on the job he was told that, after deducting \$6.60 for the train fare and \$5.60 for the clothes provided to him, the company owed him a balance of 80 cents. The immigrant and a friend decided to escape in a small boat. When they finally landed in an unfamiliar place, they ran into a wood where "broken twigs and branches fell on our heads and it seemed to us that the whole wood pursues us and hits us with sticks. We flew like birds until sundown." Their escape was foiled, but a second attempt brought them freedom. The moral of this bitter lesson was, according to the letter, a warning to each Russian Jew "not to trust strange people to find a job for him. No immigrant should sign papers which he doesn't understand." He concluded with the advice that "the best thing is to turn to Castle Garden where there are representatives of the government who can find easy jobs for the immigrants."⁸¹

The hardships of the first days and the difficulties encountered by the newcomers, especially by the recipients of charitable assistance, evoked a wave of pessimistic reports and warnings. Under pressure from organized charities, many young and able men had to accept the jobs they were offered, read one report, and, if they refused those jobs, they were denounced as lazy and were probably denied all forms of help. As a result, the report continued, the lines of those clamoring to go back to Russia were growing daily. "We left our homes because we were promised paradise on earth," read one complaint, "and now we are guilty if we ask for bread, not free bread, God forbid, but bread in exchange for work, or ask to be sent back where we came from."⁸² The Jewish aid societies were not founded to help the poor, a recent arrival informed his Russian readers. Although the charities in Castle Garden customarily ask the new arrivals where they intended to go and whether they had any money, those were dangerous questions, warned the writer. If the immigrant replied that he has no financial means to reach his destination and hoped that he would be provided with the necessary amount, the charities would want to send him back to Russia. These fears were not unfounded: between 1882 and 1889, for example, a total of 7,850 Jewish immigrants were asked to be sent or were deported back to Russia by the United Hebrew Charities. Over 4,000 of the total were returned on cattle ships paying their way by feeding and

cleaning cattle on board, thus not only saving the United Hebrew Charities the expenses for their passage, but also bringing in a profit of five dollars for each returning immigrant.⁸³ One immigrant witness concluded, therefore, his letter with the advice: "When you come to America scream at the top of your voice that you have money and even though you may not have eaten for three days, say that you have enough to live and so you will avoid a tragedy."⁸⁴

The philanthropic experiments of the early 1880s ended in failure.⁸⁵ Fearful of urban congestion and its accompanying vices, German Jews were determined to instill in the newcomers the values of work and economic independence. They embarked, therefore, on a project to provide jobs for the immigrants and to disperse them at the same time. These endeavors, however, fell short of their goals partly because of inefficient coordination and organization, but mainly because their organizers failed to take into account the preference of the immigrants for remaining within their community. And while the philanthropies were striving to solve the problem of unemployment through dispersion, the immigrants fended for themselves by tapping employment opportunities within the growing ethnic community.

The need to find employment was the most pressing need confronting the newcomer. Upon arrival, he was informed by the welcoming relatives that "in this country everybody works. Nobody will give you anything for nothing. There is

no eating by day here."⁸⁶ Employment opportunities, however, for the masses of skilled and unskilled Jews were limited. They neither had the necessary connections for gaining apprenticeships nor the ethnic ties of the veteran workers in the city for gaining access to skilled jobs. It was only with the growth of community and ethnic networks that the immigrants would gain access to the market of unskilled and skilled jobs.

The importance of skills was secondary to that of connections. According to one immigrant, after a disappointing stint at peddling, he finally found a job in a cigarette factory through his cousin, who also trained him in the skill of rolling cigarettes.⁸⁷ He soon learned that the Irish foreman did not treat all workers equally. For example, while he allowed the old-time Irish workers to continue working during slack time and granted them small benefits on the floor, he inflicted hardships on the new workers. Thus, the foreman placed the Jewish newcomer near the steam pipe, which tended to dry up and break the tobacco leaves, lowering considerably his take-home wages. Only several months later, as a result of a bribe, did he agree to move the immigrant to a better spot.⁸⁸

Another experience was described by Aleksander Harkavy. It was also through an acquaintance who had been in New York for some years, that he found his first employment in metalwork, even though he lacked the skill or the

experience.⁸⁹ In his first job, which consisted of filing metal objects, he was paid two dollars a week. He was soon promoted to a more specialized job working ten hours a day at a filing machine and received a considerably higher weekly wage of six dollars.⁹⁰ Having lost his job at the metal factory three months later because of a slow season, he found a new job in a soap factory also through the help of acquaintances.⁹¹ Though content with his job and his weekly wage of five dollars, he had to leave the soap factory because of the harmful effects of the chemicals.⁹²

In both the iron and the soap factory examples, an introduction to the job through an insider was more important than skill. In reality, however, job opportunities for the unskilled immigrant were few and he was often forced to accept unskilled jobs offered by Jewish employers who exploited the helplessness of the immigrant and his lack of familiarity with the job market. In these jobs the immigrant fared worse than he did in jobs outside the immigrant community. Harkavy's experience in a matzo factory will again serve as a case in point. Having learned about the job through an ad in a paper he soon learned that the bosses preferred immigrants because it was easy "for the bakers to cheat them and to suck their blood like leeches."⁹³ On Harkavy's first day of work his employer at the matzo bakery informed him that he would let him work for a whole week to see how much his work "will be worth to him" -- a standard

practice in hiring "greeners". Working nineteen to twenty hours a day and sustaining himself on matzo, Harkavy waited impatiently to see his reward at the end of the week, hoping to get at least five dollars. His wages at the end of the week, however, amounted to \$2.50 only. He then left the "cursed job" only to learn that washing dishes in a restaurant owned by an immigrant paid one dollar for two weeks' work.⁹⁴ This and many similar cases of exploitation prompted the Yudishes Folksblatt to publicize the accusation that Jews in New York "are worse than strangers ... they take advantage of the fact that we are like mute animals."⁹⁵

Lack of jobs for the unskilled and often for the skilled immigrant presented peddling as the only alternative. For many, however, this was a last resort and, with the exception of the older and probably more orthodox generation of immigrants, peddling was the least preferred occupation. The aversion to the profession of peddling was summarized by one immigrant who quoted the succinct definition of the writer Elyakum Zunser: "What is peddling if not begging."⁹⁶ Immigrants forced to undergo the experience told of humiliations which were part of the daily rounds of the peddler.⁹⁷ Moreover, peddling within the confines of the Lower East Side brought meager profits; in order to make it a profitable business, it was necessary to venture outside of the familiar surroundings.⁹⁸ Although peddling often became part of an immigrant's experience, especially in hard times

when no other jobs were available, many were happy to exchange the status of a peddler for the life of a wage earner.⁹⁹ For example, one immigrant decided to leave his profitable peddling business in Perth Amboy and become a worker despite strong words of discouragement from his father.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Baron de Hirsch Fund survey of 1890 found that, while 76.5% of the Jewish population on the Lower East Side were employed as wage earners, only 16.8% were engaged in peddling.¹⁰¹ Although the immigrants rejected peddling, landsleit and relatives recommended it as the fastest introduction to American life and as a useful schooling to the newcomer.¹⁰² Moreover, it appears that the oldtimers often favored peddling as an occupation for the newcomer because landsleit and relatives who had gained access to the supplies of the wares to be peddled found it profitable for themselves to convince the newcomers to take up their wares.¹⁰³

The key role of the landsleit and relatives in directing the immigrant to his first employment or in helping him to acquire a skill, cannot be underestimated. These networks became particularly essential in channeling the newcomers into the clothing industry, which was destined to become a socializing process and a mechanism which introduced the newcomers from all walks of life to new skills and a new way off life. Petty tradesmen, skilled craftsmen whose skills proved obsolete or not applicable as well as immigrants

previously engaged in religious or quasi-religious occupations, were all warned by the oldtimers that "whoever comes to New York must forget all he knew in Europe, because all his knowledge or wisdom will not bring him one cent in return. Unless he becomes a different person he will never find his way here."¹⁰⁴ For numerous immigrants the prospect of acquiring new skills motivated their decision to emigrate.¹⁰⁵ Others, however, had to enter the clothing industry, failing to obtain employment in their skills due to lack of proper contacts and familiarity with the labor market. A newly arrived carpenter who eventually found a job in carpentry recalled his difficulties in finding a job in his skill because neither his relatives nor his landsleit knew much about the skills of a carpenter. Instead, they offered him many different types of advice and finally talked him into peddling newspapers on East Broadway. Soon after he began his new job, he was approached by yet another well-meaning Jew who advised him: "Young man, you'd better start with a 'machinke' [sewing machine]; you will be better off."¹⁰⁶

It was through the networks of community and family , ethnicity and religion that the majority of Jewish immigrants entered the clothin industry. The mechanics of this process, which brought about their numerical preponderance in that industry, were an enigma to the contemporary American public. An inspector of factories in New York State marvelled:

... Who it is, or what powerful influence is brought to

bear upon them that thus diverts these people into an occupation which is no longer remunerative or attractive, and confines them in dense masses in foul quarters, where they must labor extraordinarily long hours for a mere subsistence.¹⁰⁷

In his attempt to shed some light on the problem the same inspector voiced a suspicion that there existed:

some sort of arrangement, the precise nature of which it is difficult to determine, by which the Polish and Russian Jewish immigrants are controlled so that they may be easily congregated and utilized in the clothing industry. 108

The attempt to impose control over the newcomers had failed. The immigrants questioned and rejected the paternalistic power which was assumed under the guise of economic solutions and assistance. Instead, they opted for an alternative which, though a puzzle to some contemporaries, appeared clearly charted within their cultural and social context.

FOOTNOTES

¹Quoted in an article denying the existence of the letter in Yudishes Folksblatt, 8 October 1881.

²H. Schafier, Alliance agent in Brody to Central Committee of Alliance in Paris, 21 September 1881. YIVO, RG 406, docs. 324, 325.

³See requests for passage money received by Brody committee YIVO, RG 406, docs. 821-1031.

⁴YIVO, RG 406, doc. 830.

⁵H. Schafier to Central Committee of the Alliance in Paris, 21 September, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, docs. 324, 325.

⁶Minutes of Conference in Vienna, 2 August, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 251.

⁷M.A. Kursheedt, Secretary of Russian Emigrant Relief Fund of New York to H.S. Goldschmidt of French Alliance in Paris, 21 October, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 583.

⁸Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (HEAS) Report, 21 July, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 681. Consequently, German Jewish American relief circles hinted that money towards the upkeep of the undesirable immigrants in the European points of embarkation would be made more available rather than for their support in the United States. M.A. Kursheedt, Secretary of the Russian Emigrant Relief to N.S. Joseph of Mansion House Committee, 9 June, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 635.

⁹"The Emigration of Russian Jews," an official letter of HEAS published in the London Jewish Chronicle, 27 January, 1882.

¹⁰M.A. Kursheedt, Secretary of Russian Emigrant Relief Fund to S.H. Goldschmidt of the Alliance in Paris, 21 October, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, docs. 569-584. Settling the newcomers on land seemed also to the European philanthropists a constructive solution. The example of the successful settlement of the Mennonites in the United States further strengthened the convictions that agricultural settlements would guarantee to the newcomers their freedom of religion, while, at the same time provide them with a sound economic base. Printed circular of the Alliance, 24 March, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 55.

¹¹M.A. Kursheedt to S.H. Goldschmidt, 21 October, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 581.

¹²Ibid., doc. 575.

¹³Ibid., doc. 577.

¹⁴M.A. Kursheedt to S.H. Goldschmidt of Alliance, 21 October, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, docs. 570-571.

¹⁵Aleksander Harkavy, a member of the Am Olam group, tells of a Jewish society of Hamburg which purchased ship tickets for the whole group. Aleksander Harkavy, Perakim Mehayay (Chapters From My Life) (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1935), p. 39.

¹⁶HEAS Report, 21 July, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 681.

¹⁷M.A. Kursheedt to N.S. Joseph of Mansion House Committee, 14 June, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, docs. 637, 638. Also, W. Seligman of New York to Zadoc Kahn, Chief Rabbi of Paris, 28 June, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 647. It also appears that Mansion House Committee used the tactics of dispatching refugees from England directly to Boston and other east coast cities which would then promptly get rid of the new arrivals by sending them to New York. M.A. Kursheedt to N.S. Joseph, 14 June, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 637.

¹⁸William Seligman to N.S. Isaacs, June 19, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 641.

¹⁹William Seligman to N.S. Isaacs, 20 June, 1882, RG 406, doc. 642.

²⁰According to one source, Mansion House Committee refused to support the American organizations on the grounds that they forced upon the immigrants non-kosher food and employment which necessitated the abandonment of religion. Augustus A. Levey, Secretary of HEAS, June 4, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 689, 692.

²¹F. Wertheimer of Vienna to Baron Edmond de Rothchild of Paris, 1882, n.d., YIVO, RG 406, doc. 389. Also Julian Goldsmid to Baron Edmond de Rothchild, July 11, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 387. N.S. Joseph, July 11, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 201.

²²N.S. Joseph to M. Veneziani, a personal delegate of Baron de Hirsch in Brody, June 27, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 644.

²³Minutes of the conference in Vienna, August 2, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 251.

²⁴ Aaron Antonovsky, The Early Jewish Labor Movement in the U.S., p. 59.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Henri Strauss, steamship agent in Antwerp to Senator Bischoffsheim in Brussels, July 9, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 548.

²⁷ The statistics existing for the years 1908-1914 indicate that the passage of more than six-tenths of all Jewish immigrants was financed by relatives. Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," p. 113. Though there is a lack of comparable data for the earlier period, it appears that this pattern was inseparable from the process for immigration since its beginnings. Kula et al., (eds) Letters of Polish Emmigrants, letters 287, 302, 306, 323, 326, 331. With the arrival of relatives, the burden of financing the passage of those remaining in Europe was shared by the oldtimers and newcomers alike. An immigrant who came in 1892, two years later, brought over a sister and together they shared the expenses of financing the trip of two younger brothers, and ten years later, all sent passage money for their father and his family. J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147. See also Kula et al., (eds), Letters of Polish Emmigrants, letter 284.

²⁸ Samuel Cohen, Transplanted (New York: 1937), p. 71. Cohen tells of his brother who, in 1880, at the age of eighteen decided to emigrate and purchased a ticket with the financial help of local relatives. Before his departure, however, he became engaged to a young woman who had in her possession two tickets of her own -- one for herself and one for her original fiance, who had backed out of the engagement. Cohen himself came to America with his bother and sister-in-law by taking advantage of the available ticket.

²⁹ S. Ginsburg, YIVO, RG 102, no. 156, pp. 8, 9. Ginsburg borrowed money in his village, and once in America decided that 6% interest was a fair decision because "I saw that one had to work hard to earn, much harder than I imagined." He also advised his wife, who remained in Russia, that if the lender would question the amount of interest she should bring the case to a rabbi, would weigh he case and have the final say in the matter.

³⁰ Henri Strauss of the National Steamship Company, Antwerp, to Senator Bischoffsheim in Brussels, July 9, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 548. It should be pointed out here that though men served as an "avant-garde", the assertion that the large number of females among Jewish immigrants indicates a pattern of family migration should be reconsidered. Joseph, Jewish Migration to the United States from 1881-1910, pp.

127-32; Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," pp. 94-99. The letters and the autobiographical evidence point to the tendency of unmarried women to emigrate, and the marked presence of women, therefore, does not necessarily mean wives. Equally wanting is the assertion that the high presence of children defined at times as those under the age of fourteen and at times as under the age of sixteen is a further proof of a family movement. Joseph, *ibid.*; Kuznets, *ibid.* The claim that Jewish migration took the form of family movement requires therefore further substantiation.

³¹ Sending tickets even for wives and children often had to be postponed for several years because of the inability to raise the money at times of slack or economic crisis.

³² H. Schafier, an agent of the Alliance in Brody to Paris committee, September 21, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, docs. 324, 325. Similar groups, part of the Am Olam movement from Kiev, Vilna and Minsk, motivated to emigrate in order to establish agricultural communes, were for the most part, told upon arrival to the United States that there was no land available, put in hostels for newcomers, and left to their own devices to survive. Aleksander Harkavy, a member of the Am Olam group, recounted his experiences in Perakim mehayay [Chapters From My Life]. See also YIVO Bletter, vol. 19, p. 277. Only a few of the agricultural plans came to fruition and resulted in short-lived experiments in Louisiana, North Dakota and Colorado.

³³ Irving Howe, The World of Our Fathers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1976), pp. 32-34. This group, however, differed from the Am Olam group because it was organized for the journey across Europe without a common goal of settling as a group in America.

³⁴ An immigrant who came in 1888 joined such a group of about twenty people from his wife's home town because "we wanted to go together." E.M. Wagner, YIVO, RG 102, no. 45, p. 143. Banding in a group was not unusual in cases when the emigrants did not have an exit permit and had to be smuggled across the border to Germany or Austria.

³⁵ Yudishes Volksblatt, January 22, 1887, pp. 55-57; Cohen, Transplanted, p. 93. With the unstemmed flow of immigrants to the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen, the German authorities tightened their control over the movement of the transit passengers. Those arriving in Berlin were detained until their departure to Hamburg or Bremen in special facilities located in the and were forbidden to enter the city. U.S., Congress, House, Report of the Commissioners of Immigration Upon the Causes Which Incite Immigration to the United States, 52nd Cong., 1st sess., 1892, p. 23.

³⁶Yudishes Folksblatt, January 9, 1885, pp. 19-23; January 22, 1887, pp. 55-57.

³⁷A. Berlow, YIVO, RG 102, no. 70, pp. 37, 38. Cohen, Transplanted. U.S. Congress, Senate, Education and Labor Committee, Report Upon The Relation Between Labor and Capital, vol. 2, p. 1216. German ships, which carried the majority of the Jewish immigrants, were reported to have mistreated their passengers more than they were mistreated on British ships. The German ships also lacked sanitary facilities and were slower than the British ships, which made the trip from Liverpool in ten days as opposed to the nineteen days that it took a German boat to reach New York from Hamburg. Yudishes Folksblatt, January 9, 1885.

³⁸Anon., Carpenter from Mohilev, YIVO, RG 102, no. 83, p. 39.

³⁹E.M. Wagner, YIVO, RG 102, no. 45, p. 150.

⁴⁰Yudishes Folksblatt, February 5, 1887, October 14, 1882. Howe, World of Our Fathers, pp. 42-50.

⁴¹Yudishes Folksblatt, February 5, 1887.

⁴²Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 31.

⁴³Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 12.

⁴⁴Melamed, Life As It Was, part 2, p. 239.

⁴⁵A. Balson, YIVO, RG 113, p. 8.

⁴⁶M. Havelin, YIVO, RG 102, RG 102, no. 21, pp. 20, 21. A weaver by profession, Havelin rejected job opportunities until he found friends from the army. When he finally met them, they helped him buy a grocery store.

⁴⁷J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 41.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁹Cohen, Transplanted, p. 103.

⁵⁰J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 44.

⁵¹Cohen, Transplanted, p. 181.

⁵²Anon., "Hamesaper", YIVO, RG 102, no. 75, p. 24.

⁵³See or example J. Dyenson's experience in the inhospitable Guest Shelter quoted above.

⁵⁴Aleksander Harkavy, Prakim mehayay [Chapters From My

Life), p. 52. Harkavy, who came in 1881, was the compiler of the first Yiddish-English dictionary.

⁵⁵HEAS to H. Makower of the Central German Committee for Russian Jewish Refugees in Berlin, July 21, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 681.

⁵⁶Ibid. Statements by HEAS probably tended to exaggerate its expenses as the report intended to impress upon European Jewish charities their need to assume a share of the financial burden.

⁵⁷Yudishes Folksblatt, 19 November, 1881, p. 126. The same source informed its readers in Russia that the amount of \$1.50 was paid by the aid committee to the newly arrived.

⁵⁸Harkavy, Chapters From My Life, p. 53.

⁵⁹Ha-Magid, November 15, 1882, p. 357. Ha-Magid, a Hebrew newspaper published in Lyck in Eastern Prussia, reported the Ward Island story through its special New York correspondent.

⁶⁰Ibid. Also Ha-Magid, October 25, 1882, p. 335, November 22, 1882, p. 365, American Hebrew, October 20, 1882, New York Tribune, October 15, 1882, p. 7, New York World, October 15, 1882, p. 1, October 16, 1882, p. 1. Also Leo Shpall (tr.), "The Memoirs of Doctor George M. Price," Publication of American Historical Society, vol 48, December 1957, pp. 105-109.

⁶¹New York World, October 16, 1882, p. 1.

⁶²Ha-Magid, October 25, 1882, p. 335.

⁶³William Seligman to Zadoc Kahan, Chief Rabbi of Paris, June 28, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 647.

⁶⁴A. Levey, Secretary of HEAS to N.S. Joseph of Mansion House Committee of London, 14 July, 1882, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 668. In contrast to the 'old immigrants' whose vitality, resourcefulness and energy were tested by the arduous journey, the present-day immigrant, complained contemporary critics of the 'new immigration,' lacking money, trade and skills and benefitting from the low ship fares, presented an altogether inferior and weaker race of newcomers. George Price, "The Russian Jews in America", reprinted in Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, nos. 1 and 2, September and December, 1958. Himself a Jewish immigrant from Russia who came in 1882, Price was echoing in the 1890's the prevailing views of his time.

⁶⁵Yudishes Folksblatt, January 14, 1882, p. 2.

- ⁶⁶Yudishes Folksblatt, November 19, 1881.
- ⁶⁷M.A. Kursheedt of the Russian Emigrant Relief Fund, to Alliance in Paris, October 31, 1881, YIVO, RG 406, doc. 576.
- ⁶⁸American Israelite, vol. 28, no. 38, 17 March, 1882, p. 298
- ⁶⁹American Israelite, October 13, 1882, vol. 29, no. 15, p. 128.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., December 9, 1881, p. 190.
- ⁷¹Ibid., August 18, 1882, p. 50.
- ⁷²Ibid., January 20, 1882, p. 238.
- ⁷³Ibid., February 17, 1882, p. 266.
- ⁷⁴YIVO, RG 406, docs. 726-732.
- ⁷⁵Yudishes Folksblatt, August 13, 1882, pp. 483-485.
- ⁷⁶Quoted in Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, 4 vols., (New York: International Publishers, 1955), vol. 2, p. 18.
- ⁷⁷Yudishes Folksblatt, August 13, 1882, 483-485.
- ⁷⁸Harkavy, Prakim mehayay, pp. 46, 47.
- ⁷⁹Yudishes Folksblatt, February 19, 1887, pp. 120-122.
- ⁸⁰Ibid.
- ⁸¹Ibid.
- ⁸²Yudishes Folksblatt, August 13, 1882, "A Letter From Zvi Linkever", pp. 483-485.
- ⁸³Zosa Szajkowski, "Deportation of Jewish Immigrants," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, June 1978, vol. 67, no. 4, p. 301.
- ⁸⁴Yudishes Folksblatt, August 13, 1882.
- ⁸⁵Though the New York charities ceased to send newcomers to other cities in 1882, they continued to maintain employment services in New York. Moreover, the abandoned project and its objectives were revived in 1904 with the establishment of the Industrial Removal Office, managed and financed by the same charities.
- ⁸⁶Cohen, Transplanted, p. 105. 'Eating by day' refers

to the custom which called for the better-off members of the community to provide meals to poor religious students. Cohen, orphaned at an early age, lived on charitable handouts of Jews in nearby villages. The necessity to work hard was also the consensus of the letters sent by newcomers to their relatives in Europe. Kula et al., Letters of Polish emigrants, letters 266, 320, 282.

⁸⁷Cohen, Transplanted, p. 116. After acquiring some experience, Cohen, in turn, brought his brother to work in the same factory.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 132.

⁸⁹Harkavy, Chapters From My Life, p. 55.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 59. In the soap factory Harkavy's job was to immerse balls of natrium in tar.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., p. 58.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Yudishes Folksblatt, August 13, 1882, pp. 483-85.

⁹⁶M. Turitz, YIVO, RG 102, no. 121, p. 5.

⁹⁷See minutes of Hearing by Commissioners Appointed by the Mayor of the City of New York to Investigate the Riot on July 30, 1902. The document contains testimonies of the East Side peddlers given at a hearing investigating Rabbi Jacob Joseph funeral riots. YIVO.

⁹⁸Samuel Cohen in Transplanted told of his peddling saga in the early 1880's in different parts of New England, pp. 137-41. Louis Glass, who as a child of thirteen was told by his father immediately upon arrival to peddle in the Perth Amboy area, reported an income of 100 dollars a week. L. Glass, YIVO, RG 113, p. 5. J. Dyenson, on the other hand, reported that his daily peddling profits on the Lower East Side amounted to forty-eight cents. J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 44.

⁹⁹S. Ginsburg, for example, who was forced to peddle because he could not find employment during the economic crisis of 1893, told of his longing for wage work after his stint in peddling. S. Ginsburg, YIVO, RG 102, no. 156, pp. 17, 18.

¹⁰⁰L. Glass, YIVO, RG 113, p. 5.

¹⁰¹Out of 26,078 working persons surveyed 2,440 were engaged in peddling. Baron de Hirsch Fund Papers, Jewish Historical Society, box 16, file: Census 1890. By 1900, the number of peddlers doubled, reaching 4,215 while the number of wage earners more than quadrupled reaching 113,048. Jewish Encyclopedia, 1905 ed., s.v. "United States."

¹⁰²M. Touritz, YIVO, RG 102, no. 121, p. 4. Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 4.

¹⁰³J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 44.

¹⁰⁴Melamed, Life As It Was, part 2, p. 189.

¹⁰⁵Aware of the shrinking economic base of the Pale, many of those employed on the fringes of the religious professions--teachers, slaughterers, etc.--were propelled to America to seek more secure "paying trades". See M. Alper, YIVO, RG 102, no. 30, who came in 1888 after rejecting the prospect of becoming a melamed (a religious teacher). Also E.M. Wagner, YIVO, RG 102, no. 45, a disenchanting melamed came to America in 1888 hoping to find a favorable environment to learn a trade.

¹⁰⁶Anon., ('Mohilev Carpenter') YIVO, RG 102, no. 83, pp. 40, 42. Similarly, Haskell, YIVO, RG 113, a weaver, who came in 1898, failed to find a job in his skill and had to become a skirt operator. A. Balson, YIVO, RG 113, another case in point, was a shoemaker in Russia but became a reefer maker upon arriving in the United States in 1906. B. Goblin, YIVO, RG Antonovsky Interviews, though a chair maker at home, began work in construction and eventually became a presser because, in his case, the construction union in Chicago refused to accept Jews. When he finally gained admittance to the union, he worked both in construction and in garments, depending on the season.

¹⁰⁷New York Labor Department, Inspection Bureau, Annual Report 1892, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

JEWISH IMMIGRANTS AND THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY OF NEW YORK

The expansion of the ready-made clothing industry began in the second half of the 19th century with the introduction and the widespread adoption of the sewing machine in 1847. New technological developments followed this innovation. The cutting machine was introduced in 1874, followed by steam, gas and eventually electrically powered machines. These technological advances had an enormous impact on the industry and the labor force. They ushered in a new era of mass production and of sub-divided tasks, facilitated the absorption of unskilled immigrants, lowered wages and increased hours.¹ These new developments diluted the traditional skills of the artisan-tailor who fought unsuccessfully to protect his wages and hours.² The transformation of the industry resulted ultimately in a new type of labor organization and unfamiliar struggles which superceded the traditional craft unions.

The Manufacture of Clothing: From Craft to Industry

Table I reflects the dramatic growth of New York's garment industry in the years 1860-1910.

TABLE 1
THE NEW YORK GARMENT INDUSTRY, 1860-1910

Years	Men's clothing establish- ments	Hands employed	Value of product in dollars	Women's clothing establish- ments	Hands employed	Value of product in dollars
1860	351	24,728	19,621,302	47	2,119	2,699,667
1870	739	17,084	34,456,884	213*	4,857	4,374,882*
1880	736	47,647	60,798,697	230	12,366	18,930,553
1890	2,060 1,619	41,275 37,081	76,576,787 76,280,414	737 437	24,791 17,704	42,779,286 39,682,666
1900**	2,716	42,928	124,453,831	3,429	55,324	118,489,784
1910	2,630	77,543	218,411,030	2,995	110,567	266,477,381

Data taken from Census of Manufactures of the relevant years.

* Includes children's clothing.

** Includes data for Brooklyn.

The impressive growth of the industry after 1870 was largely due to the development of the ready-made sector, and especially, to the fast-expanding category of women's ready-made garments.³ Though practically non-existent before the mid-1880's, the mass production of women's cloaks, and, later, waistshirts, suits, skirts, kimonos, and dresses showed unprecedented growth in the years after 1890. At the peak of this development in the years 1899-1909, the number of establishments manufacturing women's garments nation-wide grew by 86%, the number of wage earners employed in the industry by 111%, and the value of the products by 159%.⁴ New York's share and lead in the expanding women's ready-to-wear was impressive. In 1909 it produced 69.3% of the total national value, its share amounting to \$266,477,000, followed by Philadelphia as a distant second producing only 7.8% of the national output at the value of \$30,130,000.⁵ Within the ready-to-wear women's garments, the manufacture of cloaks was the first to enjoy a striking expansion. Meyer Jonasson, for example, a leading cloakmaker of New York, increased his business fifteen times between the years 1874 and 1885, bringing his sales from \$110,000 to \$1,700,000.⁶ The industry of waistshirts enjoyed a similarly rapid development. Though in 1895 still a fledgling industry, by 1900 it employed 17,922 workers, and by 1907 the number of workers increased to 34,234, half of whom were women.⁷

The rapid expansion of New York's clothing industry had a direct effect on the mode of production. According to Conrad Carl, the veteran New York tailor, tailoring work had been traditionally divided along the lines of the different garments: coats, vests and pants.⁸ The limited degree of division of labor in the 1840's and the 1850's therefore required the services of competent tailors, especially in the better quality clothes. The production of suits, which was the largest source of employment to the artisan-tailor, was monopolized by several houses specializing both in wholesale and custom-made clothing. The leading houses, as a rule, maintained a large labor force of 'outside' tailors, employing only few workers on their premises.⁹ The outside tailors worked at home on all stages of production on the pre-cut garments that they received from the manufacturing houses and utilized labor of their families for non-skilled finishing jobs. The master tailors of these years produced, in the words of Charles Miller, a New York cutter, a suit of clothes "clean out."¹⁰

In the 1860's and 1870's, however, a formal and detailed division of labor was adopted along the lines of basting, trimming, felling, finishing, button-hole making, etc., thus diluting the skills of the traditional tailor.¹¹ The direct result of the new division of labor was the team system of production, favored mainly in the manufacture of coats and cloaks. First introduced in 1877, it was, according to John

Commons, the outcome of the immigrant's will to change the mode of production by using the sewing machine and division of labor to which the American tailor showed a decided aversion.¹² In its basic form the team consisted of an operator, a baster and a presser, utilizing additional non-skilled labor in finishing and buttonhole making, tacking and felling. The size of the shop and the number of teams in it were dictated by the optimal services of the presser. Usually, two pressers could iron the coats produced by three teams, bringing the size of a coat shop up from ten to twenty people.¹³

The system of team work, carried with it a method of payment based on the 'task', i.e., a set number of coats to be finished per day. It meant that though the workers were paid weekly, in reality the wages were determined by the amount of work completed, computed on the basis of its proportion to the daily task which, as a rule, was more than just a day's work. As time went on, tasks increased, and from eight to ten coats a day in the 1880's, it became twenty two coats a day in the 1900's.¹⁴ Repeated speed-ups, often reluctantly adopted by the workers themselves, were the inevitable result of the task system. According to the testimony of Conrad Carl, it was mainly the operator who dictated the pace of work: "If a piece comes from the machine to the presser it has to be done just as quick as the other ones. One has to work as quick as the other. They all

are good workers and have to work together; one wheel goes into the other wheel and they have all to run together."¹⁵ Despite working twelve to sixteen hours a day, it was rare that a team of men could make more than four and a half or five tasks; consequently, they received weekly wages which corresponded to four and a half or five days' work.¹⁶ By 1892, based upon the prices paid per task that year, in order to earn three dollars a day or eighteen dollars a week, a machine operator had to work sixteen hours a day in order to finish sixteen to eighteen coats.¹⁷

Unlike the team method of production, which was confined to small shops, the 'Boston system' also known as the 'scientific' system of production, characterized by a more detailed and minute subdivision of labor, was used in large shops and factories employing 100-200 workers, where all the stages of production were executed under one roof.¹⁸ This system, which enabled the employer to hire low skilled labor was prevalent in the manufacture of shirts and vests.¹⁹ According to Weinstein, who served as a secretary of the United Hebrew Trades, vest manufacturers, for example, seeking cheaper labor as an alternative to the old-time Jewish vest makers centered mainly in Manhattan and Brownsville, opened new large shops in Brooklyn, where, within a short period of time, they were successful in training new workers.²⁰ Similar to the manufacture of shirts, the making of shirtwaists, the most important branch

of the fast-growing women's garment industry, was performed in larger shops and followed the same principle.²¹

Another new feature of the clothing industry in the period of its expansion, was the full scale development of the contracting system, whereby the manufacturer who was the owner of the raw material and of the finished garment, had no control over the production of garments, except for the cutting. The production of the garments was contracted out to a middleman, who, in turn, either employed others and thereby supervised the process of production, or distributed the work out to individual shops, often tailors or seamstresses, who completed the garments in their homes. The system had decided advantages for the manufacturer in that it enabled him to realize major savings on rent, fuel, oil, and machines. The contractor's profits were the difference between the price he received from the manufacturer and the wages he paid his workers, and were, therefore, contingent upon his ability to find sources of cheap labor.

It should be pointed out, however, that contracting was the natural and inevitable result of the putting-out system which predated the entry of Jewish immigrants into the industry. However, unlike the situation existing in the shoe industry, for example, mechanization did not end homework and the relatively inexpensive sewing machine enabled its continuation and proliferation. Large wholesale houses of the 1850's which employed large outside working forces of

independent artisan tailors working on pre-cut garments, eventually gave way to the phenomenon of the tailors-contractors. These tailors "are hungrier than the others" testified Conrad Carl, and by corrupting the foreman of the large manufacturing houses they succeeded in getting larger assignments which they completed not with the help of their families, as the other tailors did, but by employing "poor men and women."²²

Contracting, solidly entrenched by the 1880's, was further intensified with the influx of unskilled Jewish immigrants in the 1880's. Their employment, which was conditioned on the simplification of stages of production, brought about the expansion of the system, whereby contractors began to subcontract garments to smaller contractors or subcontractors for the unskilled operations of finishing, button sewing and felling.²³ The system gained further strength with the growing role of the contractor as the link between the German Jewish manufacturers dominant in the industry and the new immigrants looking for employment. Moreover, the contractor's ability to recruit labor on short notice due to his acquaintance with his neighbors and fellow countrymen, further enhanced his importance.²⁴ In addition to the obvious savings to the manufacturer, the services of the contractor enabled the manufacturer to remove himself from the process of production, thus making all aspects of labor management the responsibility of the contractor. In the

words of one manufacturer when questioned about the workers involved in the production of his garments, "I have addresses of these people [the contractors] who have our work and that is about all."²⁵

Contracting existed at all levels of production and for all garments. The sizes of contracting shops differed. While some coats and pants shops employed as many as 200-300 workers, other shops, in vests for example, employed only 10 workers, and still smaller shops produced garments employing members of a family and sometimes lodgers.²⁶ The prevalence of the system is undisputed. In 1892, for example, out of 350 major wholesale clothing manufacturers in New York, only five had their work done on their premises, and in the same year, of the 60,000 clothing workers in the city, two-thirds worked in tenements and were, therefore, probably employed by contractors and subcontractors.²⁷ By 1907 the situation had not changed markedly, and of the 850 major wholesalers surveyed in the three boroughs, only one did all its manufacturing on premises.²⁸

The changes in the industry were mirrored in the changing labor force. Tailoring had been since the 1820's the trade of immigrants.²⁹ In the 1850's, leading wholesalers in coat and cloak manufacturing employed large numbers of German and Irish tailors. By 1885, of the 12,609 tailors in New York, 12,109 were foreign born; of these 6,709 were German and 4,171 were Irish.³⁰ Similar ethnic

composition could be found among owners of large tailoring establishments for custom-made garments: out of 403, 159 were born in Germany, 81 in Ireland, and 23 in England.³¹ Here, however, unlike their representation among the tailors the immigrants accounted only for 65% of the total number of owners; native-born accounted for the rest.

Tailoring continued to be an immigrant occupation in the era of mass production, and, while in all other occupations the foreign born males constituted 26.12% of the work force, among tailors the foreign born represented 73.1%.³² Thus, while the garment industry continued to serve as the traditional refuge of the immigrant and, in the words of John Commons, "the school of his Americanization," the ethnic composition of the work force changed, and the German and Irish presence in the trade was overshadowed by a numerical preponderance of Jews.³³

The presence of Jews in the labor force of clothing manufacture was first noted by the census of the East Side conducted by the Baron de Hirsch Fund in 1890. According to the findings of the census, out of a population of 26,058, 14,770 were engaged in the production of clothing, representing about 25% of all hands employed in the manufacture of the ready-made clothes in New York for that year.³⁴ By 1897, according to the New York Factory Inspector, there were approximately 49,875 Jewish clothing workers, constituting 75% of a total of 66,500 workers

employed in garments on the Lower East Side.³⁵

The changing modes of production and the new composition of labor in the manufacture of garments, had adversely affected women's role in the industry's labor force. Shop production, which replaced home production, reshaped the industry in such a way "as to assign a less important place to women," particularly in the large garment centers of the East.³⁶

Once essential to the home production unit, women were being displaced by male workers and relegated to inferior and poorly paid tasks performed now mainly by Italian immigrant women. Thus, Jewish employers in men's clothing, for example, preferred to employ men rather than women, especially in operating and basting. Bohemian and German shops, however, continued to employ women in these tasks, as in the days when production was structured around the nucleus of the family rather than individual machine operator.³⁷ Preference for male workers coupled with the tendency of Jewish women not to seek employment after marriage explains the relative decrease of women workers. Thus, while in 1888 women employed in cloaks represented 45.5% of the total workforce in cloaks, in 1891 they represented 39.1% and in 1896 their presence dropped to 29% and to 23.6% in 1900. It is of interest to note that the number of women workers in absolute numbers kept pace with the growing labor force of the garment industry as a whole.³⁸ In 1890, for example, the

number of women was 11,798 and it increased twofold to 25,318 in 1900. In spite of the significant increase men's presence grew even more dramatically, and while there were only 5,906 men workers in 1890, their number tripled and by 1900 it increased to 19,132.

Although in the trade as a whole women's presence relative to men's was declining, women were significantly present in greater numbers in large shops and factories. Thus while in a shop employing less than 25 workers there were 4 males to 1 female worker, in shops of 26-50 workers this ratio declined to 3 men to 1 woman. And, while the same ratio applied to shops of 50-100 workers, in factories larger than that, the ratio was less than 2 males to 1 female.³⁹ This pronounced presence of women in large shops, a trend characteristic of the women's garment industry and to a lesser extent of the men's clothing, may explain the mass women strikes of 1909 and the organizational successes of the ILGWU. Conversely, the employment of men in smaller shops casts light on repeatedly frustrated attempts to organize.

Earnings and Hours of Work; "The angel of work in this country is one whose name is Hurry Up."

The artisan-tailors viewed the influx of foreign labor and the increasing mechanization as a cause of their impoverishment and the degradation of traditional skills.

The sewing machine, a labor saving device for the tailor, soon became the tool of oppression, according to the testimony of a veteran New York tailor.⁴⁰ It became clear that it was the bosses who "got their work quicker, and it was nicer." The worker on the other hand, soon learned that the manufacturer gradually began to depress the rates paid for the job. Moreover, it was the machine which facilitated quick adjustment of the nonskilled immigrant to his work. Without it, "this class of people could not do it," maintained a New York cutter.⁴¹ Consequently, the "cheaper element," the "very ignorant class of people" and their contractors who offered to work for lower wages, were regarded as the culprits responsible for the woes of the tailors and their declining wages.⁴² However, while the 1860's were noted by tailors as the golden age of their profession, the process of the declining wages and increasing hours had begun in the early 1870's, before the mass entrance of Eastern European Jews into the industry. According to Conrad Carl's testimony, while prior to the Civil War he earned 8-10 dollars a week, in the years 1864-73 his weekly wages rose to 20-25 dollars, declining to 8-9 dollars in 1882.⁴³ Similarly, Charles Miller, a cutter of men's suits, the most skilled and best paying among the tailoring jobs, reported that his weekly earning rose from 15 dollars, to 20-25 dollars and even 30-32 dollars a week in 1869, and plunging to 15 dollars or 640 dollars a year in the early

1880's.⁴⁴ The era of prosperity came to an abrupt end in 1873. Skilled tailors like Conrad Carl joined the ranks of workers in mass produced garments, earning only 8-9 dollars weekly at the going piece rate, even though they turned out two to three times more work than before the war.⁴⁵

Although the period of expansion until 1873 was profitable for skilled workmen, the wages of tailoresses, seamstresses and other needlewomen, did not increase at the same pace. Women workers continued to be paid subsistence wages having obtained smaller increases in the period of expansion. By the 1870's they too were back at the 1860's levels.⁴⁶ In the early 1880's, tailoresses who were engaged in the production of cheaper goods such as boys' and mens' pantaloons, overalls, and shirts, while working seven days a week, earned only \$3.81-4.50 a week or half the amount earned by tailors in the same period.⁴⁷

The decline in wages experienced by the artisan-tailors of New York in 1873 continued thereafter for the industry as a whole. Numerous difficulties present themselves, however, in an inquiry into the area of wages particularly of the semi-skilled immigrant worker. The data gathered by the New York State Bureau of Labor and published in its annual reports beginning 1889 and after 1897, in its more detailed quarterly reports, relied on information supplied by unions. The membership in unions, however, reached only one-fifth of the total workforce in garments at the end of the century.⁴⁸

Moreover, while unionized workers tended to represent labor employed in shops, immigrant labor found employment in tenements and the latter therefore is not accurately represented in the sketchy comparisons of wages earned by organized and non-organized labor compiled by the State Labor Bureau. All this hampers attempts to draw meaningful conclusions for immigrant labor.⁴⁹ The difficulty presented by the differences in the earnings of unionized and non-unionized labor is compounded further by wage differentials within the same industry and even for the same work.⁵⁰ Even among organized workers there were wide differentials: some coat makers earned as little as 1 dollar a week, others earned 15 dollars per week. Tailors, mainly sample makers earned as little as 3 dollars and as much as 50 dollars per week.⁵¹ Lastly, when considering wages in the industry, the seasonal fluctuations in wages should be considered as the key element in its economic and social implications. Generally speaking, the winter and the summer constituted the dull season while spring and fall were the busiest seasons. In the women's garment branch, for example, the busy season began in the middle of September, reaching its highest point in the middle of October. The slow period began in November and continued until February. By the middle of February the second busy season began, lasting well into May. The months between May and August constituted the second dull season.⁵² In 1897, for example, the number of days worked fluctuated

between 217 to 255 for men and 228-272 for women.⁵³ Thus, though the dull season did not mean complete inactivity, the payroll of the shops tended to drop considerably and, on the average, the workers in the industry lost three to four months of work a year, and while some succeeded in finding temporary employment at much reduced wages, others spent their period of unemployment in comparative idleness.

The inquiry into the length of the workday presents a similar problem. As in the issue of wages, little is known about the number of hours worked by the unorganized, tenement and home workers. Generally, however, it can be stated that the type of shop and the nature of its labor force determined the number of hours worked. In tenement and home shops, where the majority of workers were immigrants or women, the workday was often as long as twelve to sixteen and eighteen hours, while in manufacturing establishments which had their work done on premises, workers worked a considerably shorter day averaging eight to ten hours.⁵⁴

Despite the limitations of the data concerning wages and hours, the information gathered for the 1880's and the 1890's demonstrated some discernible trends characteristic of the industry. Thus, the United States Industrial Commission found that though since 1880 the productivity of coat operators and basters in New York increased by two thirds, their weekly earnings dropped by 6.2%, the piece rates fell by 50%, and their work hours increased by 20%.⁵⁵ Similarly,

the wages of pressers fell by 10%, the piece rate having fallen by 40% and the hours increased by 20%.⁵⁶ These long-term trends indicate that only by working increasingly longer hours and with the supplement of their wives' and their children's earnings, could the garment workers secure a minimal yearly income.

The extension of the workday and the intensification of work became an issue which separated old labor from new. While 'old' tailors, according to Henry White, the General Secretary of United Garment Workers of America, had in "their nature to get a fair compensation or not to work, and take their chances," among the Hebrew tailors "such a consideration does not obtain at all; it is a matter of work, and that is all. They take no chances. If they cannot make a living working 12 hours a day, they will make it working 14 or 16 hours. They will go to any limit in order to live by working, and it is just because of that that he is enslaved." Perceived by contemporaries as sheer energy sustained by greed as the motive which makes the Russian Jew "deliberately" starve himself "to the point of physical exhaustion," in reality, the newly-absorbed immigrant workers needed at least two to three years to enhance their skills and speed.⁵⁷ Thus, in order to earn a living wage, they were forced to work longer hours.

Unlike the immigrant worker who had to accept the long working day during his first years at least, veteran tailors

viewed a long work day as an infringement on their rights. The assault on traditional work habits began when, using the machine at home, the tailor was forced to intensify his pace of work because of the decreasing prices paid by the manufacturers.⁵⁸ The fate of the skilled artisan and the new quality of his life under the system of mass production was summarized by Conrad Carl: "We work now in excitement -- in a hurry. It is hunting; it is not work at all; it is a hunt."⁵⁹

These changes were viewed by the skilled tailors as denials of basic rights and of a customary way of life. A questionnaire sent by an unidentified tailors union in the early 1880's reflected some of the grievances shared by the tailors. With the intention of reporting the miserable conditions, the survey asked questions about Sunday work, children's schooling and leisure pursuits such as "time and the means to visit Central Park or any other places of pleasures."⁶⁰ The answers to these questions could not but reconfirm the deteriorating situation of the qualified tailors. Their battle for an eight-hour day aimed to remedy these wrongs. A shorter day, it was argued, would not only reduce the amount of production and thereby reduce the number of unemployed and increase wages but would also provide "greater opportunities for intellectual growth, more comfortable and healthy living apartments, through greater command of time for living at a distance from place of

employment."⁶¹ And, according to the New York Chapter of Journeymen Tailors' Benevolent and Protective Union, more leisure time would raise the moral and social condition of the people and make them better citizens and "thereby add to the general peace and prosperity of all."⁶²

The old-time tailors abhorred the new pace of work and resented the degradation of their skills; their critique of the industry's evils, however, could not have any influence on the mass influx of Jewish immigrants into the ranks of the very same industry. This inexorable process which brought about the numerical preponderance of Jews in an industry where they had to work long hours for small remuneration, was an enigma to the American public.⁶³

Routes of Entry Into The Garment Industry

How was it that despite the absence of suitable prior skills, Jews succeeded in entering the industry in great numbers and in becoming in the end the dominant group in the industry? The answer, according to an inspector of factories in New York State, lay in their co-religionists who "became familiar with the language and customs of the country, do not scruple to take advantage of the ignorance and poverty of their newly-arrived brethren."⁶⁴ The Inspector's grasp of the ethnic and religious links and their role in channeling the newcomers into the garment manufacture was accurate. The marked presence of German Jews among major clothing

manufactures, and their role as the self-appointed guardians, Americanizers and philanthropists for the newly-arrived, endowed them with influence and control over the low paid Jewish immigrants. They exercised control through the mediation of a vast network of middlemen-contractors in whose shops the newcomers acquired skills and found their employment. However, the newcomers' entry into these shops was not the result of a conspiratorial arrangement of powerful economic interests, as suspected by the Inspector.⁶⁵ Rather, the community at its grass root level acted as the propelling agent which directed the immigrants into the shop.

Lacking familiarity with local conditions, the guidance of their veteran brethren proved invaluable in gaining access to skills and jobs. Old world community networks were important, but no less instrumental were new contacts which extended beyond family and landsleit networks. In one case, it was the landsman of an uncle of his landlord with whom he boarded who introduced one immigrant to the trade of vest making.⁶⁶ A weaver who was unable to find work in his trade because of absence of the proper labor contacts, was eventually introduced to his first shop where he learned the skills of a skirt operator from a neighbor who shared the same courtyard on the Lower East Side. A daughter of a ritual slaughterer, she heard that "a greener had come and had nothing to do."⁶⁷

The introduction to his first garment shop brought the

immigrant, probably for the first time, face to face with the unfamiliar world of an industrial shop. The grim exterior of the building reminded one immigrant of a prison in her native Vilna, while another was reminded of army barracks.⁶⁸ In view of the starkness and the discipline of the interior, the image of barracks was appropriate: no conversation or singing was allowed in Triangle Waist Company, remembered Pauline Newman.⁶⁹ The dingy quarters of small subcontractors were as memorable as the numerous wooden stairs the workers had to climb daily carrying bundles or their sewing machines weighing 12 to 25 pounds.⁷⁰ Inside, the noise produced by 60 to 80 machines was as deafening as the thunder of Niagara Falls, remembered one immigrant.⁷¹ Another newcomer to a garment shop recalled this memorable scene:

dirty workers sitting undressed, almost naked. They work furiously with their foot under the machine. The eyes glued to the needle of the machine. And they snatch with the hand different pieces of cloth and push it under the needle. And the flies and the noise. Difficult to imagine. I saw dark in front of my eyes. And I think -- this is what I will become -- a machine. But there was no time to think. My landsman brought me over to an operator and said to him: "This is the greener, do you want to seat him down?" ... The operator asked: "Can he thread a machine?" "No," said I. "Well," he said while starting to sew at the same time because time is money, "He has to pay ten dollars and work one month free and then we shall see." ⁷²

After introduction to the contractor or a skilled worker within the shop, some of whom were entitled to train the newcomers, the learner was to pay his teacher a prearranged fee which ranged from five dollars in pressing and ten dollars for learning the skills of a knee-pants operator or

of a collar maker, to thirty dollars for learning the skills of a necktie cutter and fifty dollars to become a skilled cutter of garments. The length of apprenticeship depended on the skill to be learned and varied from two weeks for the simpler sewing tasks to six weeks for the more specialized skills. Because of the high costs and the long apprenticeship, pressing and operating a sewing machine, rather than garment cutting were the more popular skills among the newcomers. The payment of fees came from a variety of sources. Newcomers often had to borrow the necessary amount from relatives who had come earlier and accumulated some savings. Others started working in other jobs, peddling for example, and only later opted for learning a skill, considering tailoring a respectable way of making a living.⁷³

An alternative way of training was available through the United Hebrew Charities (UHC), an organization funded and run by the 'uptown' German Jews, who were in close contact with the leading manufacturers in the garment industry. The organization sent the applicants to several contractors with whom it had made an agreement to train the 'greeners' in exchange for a payment defrayed by the Charities. As a rule, these shops employed the immigrants at lower wages, lowering thereby the wages in the trade.⁷⁴ The Charities were also accused of sending their trainees to scab in shops on strike. The owner of Lichtman's shirt factory in Union Hill known for its ties with UHC provoked the ire of labor on yet another

account. He, according to the Arbeiter Zeitung, divided the work process in his factory in such a way so that each trainee learned only a minuscule part of the production process.⁷⁵ In another case, the employer forced workers to learn cutting after eleven hours of daily work so as to exploit their services.⁷⁶ Trainees who expressed their discontent with Lichtman, spoke of physical abuse from the boss's men and were refused further help from the Charities.⁷⁷ In a similar case of Wallach's factory in Heightstown, New Jersey, immigrants who were sent to work and dared to express discontent at the low wages, were threatened by Charities with arrest because of vagrancy if they returned to New York.⁷⁸ The uselessness of the skills taught by the United Hebrew Charities, known also as 'eight street' because of the address of their main office, was also the subject of a young woman's complaint. In her case, the Charities refused to pay her rent and board for one month while a relative taught her a trade and instead offered to teach her button-sewing in Lichtman's factory. Teaching button-sewing, "a job that any woman can do anyway," was but a pretext to gain access to cheap labor, as it was in the case of able-bodied men who were forced by the Charities to spend four weeks learning shirt packing, hardly a marketable skill which required an 'apprenticeship.'⁷⁹

The exploitative links between the charities and garment manufacturers were most obvious in the case of Woodbine, New

Jersey. Established in 1891 as an agricultural colony, it was financed by Baron de Hirsch with the goal of assisting Jewish farmers to achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence. Soon, however, the trustees of the Fund, among them German Jews with strong ties to the garment industry, changed the course of their policy. Impatient with their role as charity givers, which they viewed as retarding the independence of the settlers, they enticed some of the leading garment manufacturers to open branches in Woodbine. Free accomodation and the promise of a geographically immobile and therefore docile labor force, were the attractions offered by the Fund. Thus the lofty ideal of a new generation of self-sufficient farmers living outside the traditional Jewish ghetto was compromised by making Woodbine another venture in the manufacture of clothes with an admixture of garden trucking economy.

Newcomers as a rule were exploited - not only those depending on charities. Easily identifiable because of his foreign attire and appearance and often because of the smell of disinfectants clinging to him for days after landing, the greenhorn was an easy target of exploitation, contempt and abuse by his employer and fellow-immigrants alike.

"Yesterday's greenhorns made fun of us," recalled one immigrant.⁸⁰ The same immigrant, however, after being taken to a bath, a barber and after acquiring shoes with buttons and after having learned to say 'all right,' was ready to

stand and mock a train full of other greenhorns.⁸¹ Lack of familiarity with work in an industrial setting - its wages, hours and its daily life - rendered the newcomer an easy target for exploitation. "You are a greener, you are an apprentice and that's it." Thus was summarized the lowly rank of the newcomers to the industry.⁸² The length of apprenticeship, though discussed and agreed upon at the outset, was often lengthened under the pretext that the worker had not mastered his new skill. One immigrant learning the trade of machine operator was told, after the initial four weeks, that he could not sew and was asked to pay an additional five dollars. Two weeks later, the boss still refused to pay him wages, claiming that he was an apprentice.⁸³ Similarly, another immigrant though introduced by a landsman to a shop where he was supposed to learn the skills of a machine operator, was used throughout his apprenticeship period of four weeks for carrying bundles. After finishing his term, he had to apprentice again, this time as a dress operator in exchange for an additional five dollars.⁸⁴

Lack of familiarity with industrial experience contributed to further exploitation even after the period of apprenticeship was over. As was often the case, upon completion of his apprenticeship, the immigrant stayed in the same shop to become a wage earner. The opportunities to exploit the new worker were numerous. Terms of employment,

wages and hours and even tools were left undefined when they concerned the uninitiated worker. Thus, agreeing to work for four weeks without pay in exchange for learning the skills of an operator, one immigrant remembered the boss saying that his wages would be determined later according to "how much I was worth."⁸⁵ Numerous examples confirm the widespread exploitation of the new workers. One immigrant learning to be a cutter was told only that after his apprenticeship of six weeks, the boss would determine his pay.⁸⁶ Another newly-graduated cutter Abraham Melamed, after completing his apprenticeship, discovered that the boss paid him only five dollars as his weekly wage. When the low wage was contested, Melamed was told by the boss that no newcomer would be paid as much as a veteran worker even though the newcomer might do better work.⁸⁷ When the same immigrant asked his employer when he would 'green out' and be properly paid, he was told: "Fruit that ripens falls off the tree by itself." Taking this as a hint, he decided to look for another job.⁸⁸ Lack of confidence characteristic of the newcomer, put the workers at the mercy of the employer for some time. Even at his second attempt to find employment the same cutter gave false information about the length of his experience, but he did not dare insist on a wage and allowed the boss to decide on the matter after the first week of work. He soon realized that his attitude gave him away and that the boss "suspected my green color because an old timer would have demanded a

certain pay."⁸⁹ After two weeks, however, Melamed moved on to another job which paid 20 dollars a week, and soon after he found a new job paying 24 dollars a week. Another immigrant who went looking for another job in pressing, a low skilled job, was never told of a specific wage, but after pressing a whole day, he was given one dollar and was told by the boss that even that was too much but "he sees that I am trying and he hopes that I will become faster."⁹⁰

Likewise, hours and days of work were a puzzle to the newcomer and as one immigrant observed, "one worked without a clock."⁹¹ Since dexterity and speed determined a worker's earning power, long hours were often initiated by the workers themselves. Moreover, the new worker soon realized that unless he conformed to the pace dictated by the boss he had no future as a worker. "That bench must bring me profit and you sit on my bench and I don't have any profit from you," one slow beginner was told and sent away.⁹² Long hours were the norm for the industry and especially for the newcomer. Hours of work were unlimited and workers competed with each other trying to begin their workday as early as possible. Those paid by the week were not remunerated for overtime and their early start was a means of showing loyalty to the job and the boss. One immigrant who could not afford a watch, rather than being late used to come as early as six o'clock to the shop finding there, to his surprise, many others working at that early hour.⁹³ Pauline Newman also remembered

that the length of day was the decision of the boss. Overtime was not a choice but a must for workers paid by the week as well as for piece workers. Protests meant usually a loss of job and workers would be simply told on the same day that they had to work overtime.⁹⁴ The misery of the green workers was summarized in the following words:

The angel of work in this country is one whose name is Hurry Up. And even though our brethren the green workers are complaining silently about their bosses saying that they work as hard as in the days of the golden calf [days of slavery], their complaint does not receive any attention because who can arbitrate between them and the mighty bosses and also the stomach demands its share and that is why the green workers work as hard as they can for a very small remuneration. 95

It should be mentioned parenthetically that exploitation by employers of apprentices and workers was particularly pronounced when the latter were religious Jews. Unless self-employed, their opportunities of work were more limited mainly because shops which did not work on Sabbath were in the minority and were usually small, which in turn invested the bosses with virtually monopolistic powers. Observant Jews had often to undergo repeated apprenticeship. Unlike the rest, however, their wages remained at persistently low levels. One immigrant, for example, after repeated periods of training and after several years of experience could never earn more than four dollars a week, about half of the average wage.⁹⁶ Many who had originally clung zealously to their religious beliefs soon learned that they could not earn their livelihood and succumbed eventually to the "temptation of

evil" and began working on Sabbath.⁹⁷ One immigrant who found out that he could not support his family on his meager wages began working on the Sabbath justifying his decision with the Talmudic law: "A life in jeopardy overrules the Sabbath."⁹⁸ Forsaking religion created unbridgeable rifts in families and especially between the newcomers and the old-timers, the former identifiable by their unshaken and uncompromising religious convictions. Thus an immigrant who came in 1894 and began to work on Saturdays, when joined by his wife a few years later, was presented with an ultimatum either to stop desecrating the Sabbath or grant her a divorce since she refused to bear "a criminal's child."⁹⁹ These and similar cases helped create the image of America as a godless land where all Jews sooner or later bit from "the American tree of knowledge," and forsook their religion.¹⁰⁰

The new arrivals were also a target of criticism from labor quarters. A pool of green newcomers constantly being replenished by new arrivals, had, they claimed, an adverse effect on wages and on the labor movement: not only did the immigrant accept work at lower wages thus displacing older and better paid labor, but zealous to gain skill and experience he also became a weapon in the employer's fight against unions.¹⁰¹

Gradually, however, through hard work, inhumanely long hours and increased skill and pace, the immigrant's earning ability began to increase. The most noticeable increase

occurred after five years of residency and work. Thus, while 21% of Jewish workers with less than five years residency earned less than \$7.50 a week, only 4% earned so little after 5 to 10 years' residence. Conversely, the group earning at least fifteen dollars a week doubled from 25% to 49% with the same increase in years of residence.¹⁰² Additional advantages were gradually gained from acquiring familiarity with the new economy and the community. In the experience of one immigrant, his new status of a "greened out" immigrant was achieved after ten years of eking out a living in the garment industry. He worked first as a worker and then as a contractor, when he decided to look for a position outside the industry, because being in a garment shop meant to him "remaining a greenhorn."¹⁰³ His first job as a collector of payments for a furniture shop "was no great fortune, but I greened myself out a bit," he remembered. The new position offered new contacts and afforded him with new activity within the Jewish community in local charitable societies and in funding a landsmanschaft society which rewarded him with greater respectability.¹⁰⁴ In another case, the new status of a newly-greened-out immigrant was equated with accumulating enough experience and a network of connections which led to the establishment of an independent business venture.¹⁰⁵ Small contractors, for example, used their skills and their contacts with uptown suppliers to gain entry into the world of manufacturing. Especially successful were

those who were quick to discover the growing demand for women's clothes, many of which were until the 1890's produced at home. Thus, one immigrant's success was due to the new fashion of wrappers and kimonos.¹⁰⁶ Although their existence was as insecure as that of the contractors, these small manufacturers believed that their modest beginnings would lead eventually to ultimate success. As one immigrant who began by peddling his homemade aprons in the neighborhood remembered fondly: "We were starting from scratch, yet almost at once we understood that there were no boundaries to the progress we could make."¹⁰⁷

For the immigrant who remained a worker, the accumulation of experience yielded different results. For some, acquiring familiarity with their new life as wage earners changed the stance of passivity customary for newcomer-apprentices. One cutter, for example, stipulated his wage instead of leaving it to the boss.¹⁰⁸ Others did likewise.¹⁰⁹ This privileged position of individual bargaining was limited, however, to the more skilled and better paid categories of workers in the clothing trades, of which cutting and pattern making were the foremost examples.¹¹⁰ The vast majority of operators, pressers, finishers, button sewers, etc., who were in much larger supply, were hardly in a position to rely on their bargaining power as individuals. For them, once they became familiar with the wage worker's economy, the collective rather than

the individual stand became their distinctive mark.

FOOTNOTES

¹Unlike other industries, the expansion of production did not fully transfer workers into the factory and although production based on the family gave way to shops utilizing hired labor, the home worker employing his family continued to exist, especially in the production of vests and pants. U.S. Senate Report on Conditions of Employment of Women and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, S.Doc. 645, 61st Congress, 2nd sess., 1910, vol. 2, p. 492.

²The immigrants also tended to replace skilled women workers, especially in the manufacture of men's garments, relegating to them the least skilled and the lowest paid work. *Ibid.*, p. 495.

³The census figures, with the exception of 1890, do not distinguish between custom-made and ready-made clothes; it would be safe to assume, however, that the ready-made sector's impressive share of the total remained at least as sizeable if not greater in later years. According to the census figures the number of workers in the men's ready-made clothing sector in 1890 constituted approximately 85% of the total, and the value of ready-made men's clothes amounted to about 80% of the total. These figures surpassed the proportion of ready-made clothing for the nation as a whole which had risen in 1890 to 60% of clothing produced that year. U.S. Congress, House, Report of the Committee on Manufactures on the Sweating System, 52nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1893, Introduction IV.

⁴U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Regularity of Employment in Women's Ready-to-Wear Garment Industries, Bulletin 183, Miscellaneous Series No. 12 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 22.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶The New York Times, August 18, 1885, p. 4. This expansion continued at a similar pace. In 1890, the manufacture of cloaks employed 10,000 workers, in 1900 the number of workers reached 24,000, and by 1910, their number reached 50,000. Louis Levine, The Women's Garment Workers (New York: Arno 1969; reprint ed., New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1924), p. 168. According to the Immigration Commission Report, cloak and suit manufacturers of New York employed in 1907, 68,466 workers, half of whom were women. U.S. Congress, Senate, Immigration Commission Report, S. Doc., 633, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., 1907, vol. 11, p. 387.

⁷Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 145, Immigration Commission, vol. 11, p. 387.

⁸U.S. Congress, Senate, Report of the Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, 48th Congress, 1st sess., 1885, vol. 1, p. 414.

⁹The House of Brook, for example, employed 28 people on their premises and 1,500 outside tailors, and in 1849, Lewish and Hanford, another leading manufacturer, employed 72 inside tailors and 3,600 outside tailors. Egal Feldman, Fit for Men: A Study of New York's Clothing Trade (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1960), pp. 96, 98.

¹⁰Report of the Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1, p. 746.

¹¹Different degrees of division of labor along the lines of the different operations had already existed within the family as a unit of production with finishing lines relegated to women.

¹²U.S. Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 346.

¹³Ibid., p. 345. Also, Martha H. Willett, Employment of Women in the Clothing Industry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1902), p. 41. According to Pope, the most economical structure of a shop employed two operators, a presser and one or two workers performing the less skilled labor of sewing buttons, trimming and finishing. Jesse E. Pope, The Clothing Industry in New York (Columbia, Mo. University Press, 1905), p. 67. Varieties of the size of the shop and of the method were developed from the basic division. According to the testimony of a New York contractor, he employed six operators, four basters, two pressers and one trimmer. U.S., Congress, House, Manufactures Committee, Report on the Sweating System, H.R. 2309, 52nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1893, p. 116.

¹⁴Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 336. Also, Willett, Employment of Women in the Clothing Industry, p. 36. The exploitation of the workers through the task system was directly relevant to workers' militancy as will be shown in Chapter 4.

¹⁵Report Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1, p. 417.

¹⁶Willett, Employment of Women in the Clothing Industry, p. 37.

¹⁷Report on the Sweating System, p. 234. The demand for speed and the progressively longer day resulted also, according to John Commons in the exclusion of women--mainly tailors' wives--from basting and finishing processes, which they had performed up to that time within the home production unit. Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 346.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 366. U.S., Congress, Senate, Report on the Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, S. Doc. 645, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., 1910, vol. 2, p. 425. See also Bernard Weinstein, Di Yiddishe Unions in America (New York: United Hebrew Trades, 1929), p. 248.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 277, 278, 281.

²⁰Ibid., p. 278.

²¹U.S. Census of Manufactures, 1900, "Special Reports on Selected Industries," p. 301. The system was also introduced in the coat industry, where the detailed division of labor was said to save 50% of labor costs. These savings, according to the report compiled for the first decade of the twentieth century, came to depend on the utilization of highly skilled labor together with cheap non-skilled labor employed in finishing, both employed in conditions of full-scale mass production. Report on the Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, vol. 2, p. 426.

²²Report Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1, pp. 418, 420. Contracting proliferated on a large scale also in the manufacturers of shirts, overalls, pantaloons and cheaper grade goods. Starting with the large scale production of uniforms during the Civil War, large manufactures of Boston, Philadelphia and New York contracted work out to women in the outlying rural areas. Report on the Sweating System, pp. 11, 13, 16. Feldman, Fit for Men, pp. 103, 104. Industrial Commission, vol. 7, p. 193.

²³New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1892, p. 12. Another variation of the principle of contracting was the system of 'inside contracting,' whereby the contractor, though working on the premises of the manufacturer or a shop, did the hiring of 'helpers' and was responsible for their wages. The system of contracting at all its stages aimed at further reduction of labor costs and became synonymous with sweating.

²⁴Industrial Commission, vol. 15, pp. 320, 321.

²⁵Report on the Sweating System, p. 7. A contractor often worked for more than one manufacturer and large manufacturers employed numerous contractors. E.S. Benjamin, for example, a partner in one of the largest New York manufacturers of cloaks testified that his firm employed as many as 200-300 contractors. Ibid., p. 23. According to his testimony, 40 contractors did half of the total work of the firm; the rest, it appears, received small assignments only. Work distributed to contractors was divided along the lines of different operations as well as different garments.

²⁶Immigration Commission, vol. 11, p. 385, Report on the Sweating System, Introduction, pp. vi, vii.

²⁷New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1892, pp. 12, 66.

²⁸Immigration Commission, vol. 11, p. 384. The degree to which contractors could replace production on premises provided by the manufacturer depended on the type and the quality of the garments. In the cloak industry, for example, out of 100 cloak firms in New York in 1892, only six made their garments in their own factories, while the rest had them made by contractors. New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1892, p. 10. Similarly, the manufacture of pants, coats, vests and overcoats was mostly contracted out. Report on the Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners, vol. 2, pp. 421, 422. Cloak manufacture underwent a marked decrease of contracted work and in the 1900's only 25% of all cloaks and suits were manufactured by contractors. Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 169. According to John Commons, the place of contractors was taken by small independent manufacturers who began acting as their own agents selling finished goods directly to wholesalers and mail order houses. Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 322.

²⁹Many tailor-artisans were enticed to emigrate from their native country by wages reportedly one third higher than those in England. The promise that tailors were the best paid tradesmen in America was confirmed by entrepreneurs, also immigrants, who were keen to attract European labor. Feldman, Fit for Men, pp. 94, 95.

³⁰Ibid., p. 95. The labor force in the manufacture of shirts, collars and cheaper grade goods was dispersed in rural areas and employed a high proportion of Irish and American women.

³¹Ibid. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, out of 241 establishments of ready-made garments in 1888, 234 belonged to Jews. Jewish Encyclopedia, 1905 ed., s.v. "United States." Most probably, Feldman's 'clothiers' included large houses specializing in custom-made clothes, which would explain the difference between his set of figures and the Encyclopedia's findings.

³²Children of immigrants, however, represented only 14.9% among all tailoring occupations, while in all other occupations they represented 18.13%. Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 319.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Waltham, Massachusetts, American Jewish Archives,

Baron de Hirsch Fund Papers, Box 16, File: "Census 1890."

³⁵New York State Labor Department, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1897, pp. 43, 45.

³⁶United States Labor Bureau, Report on the Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners in the U.S., vol. 2, p. 495.

³⁷Ibid., p. 493, 422. Also Willett, Employment of Women in the Clothing Industry, p. 34.

³⁸Pope, The Clothing Industry in New York, p. 58.

³⁹Information courtesy of Ron Mendel from his forthcoming dissertation.

⁴⁰Report Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1, p. 414.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 749.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 749, 752.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 414-417.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 748.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 414, 417.

⁴⁶Report on Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners, vol. 9, p. 151.

⁴⁷Report of the Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, Samuel Gompers' testimony, vol. 1, p. 284. Women as a rule earned considerably less and often as little as half that of men's earnings. See New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fifteenth Annual Report, 1897, pp. 446-451 for some comparison of men's and women's earnings as reported by different garment workers unions. The average annual earnings of men in 1897 ranged from \$415.30 to \$580.78 while the average earnings for women for the same year ranged from \$245.28 to \$312.98 only. Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 338.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹In 1892, approximately two thirds of all clothing workers in New York City were employed in tenements. New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1892, p. 66. Wages received by non-organized and organized cloakmakers in 1885, for example, ranged from 8 dollars to 12 dollars a week respectively. New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report 1885, p. 519. See also Annual

Report 1896, pp. 736-743 for similar comparisons of wages earned by the organized and the non-organized in the different clothing skills.

⁵⁰The earnings of a machine operator at the turn of the century were as low as 11 dollars per week and as high as 60 dollars for those in the custom-made trade. Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 335.

⁵¹Ibid. In 1888, according to New York State Bureau of Labor, some machine operators earned 6 dollars per week, while others earned 13 dollars, and the wages of organized cutters ranged between 12 dollars to 35 dollars a week. New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report 1888, vol. 1, p. 483. For wage differences among women workers for the same year, see Ibid., pp. 403, 501, 508, 515.

⁵²U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin no. 12, Regularity of Employment in the Women's Ready-to-Wear Garment Industries, p. 31. The definition of busy and dull seasons differ, and, according to another source, May, June, July were the busy seasons for manufacturing winter clothes, while during October, December and January, summer clothes were made. Immigration Commission, vol. 11, p. 388.

⁵³Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. 338.

⁵⁴New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report 1890, pp. 279, 280, New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1892, p. 26, Immigration Commission, vol. 11, p. 386. According to James Reynolds of the University Settlement, some pants makers, for example, worked eighteen hours a day for \$1.50 as the day's wage. New York Times, June 2, 1897, p. 3.

⁵⁵Industrial Commission, vol. 15, p. xxviii.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 368. For comparisons of wages for shorter periods of three to four years, see New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report 1896, pp. 736-743 for the years 1891-1895. For years 1897-1899 see Industrial Commission, vol. 15, pp. 335-338.

⁵⁷Industrial Commission, vol. 7, p. 192, testimony taken in 1899. John Swinton also criticized the newcomers for their willingness to work long hours: "They cannot understand that every garment made after 6 o'clock, or after a ten hour day's work, is only a weight to pull them down." John Swinton's Paper, August 23, 1885, p. 4. Jacob Riis quoted in Rischin, The Promised City, p. 182.

⁵⁸Report Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital,

vol. 1, pp. 413, 414. According to one testimony, as opposed to the years prior to the adoption of the machine, tailors were forced to work during daylight hours because of the noise. Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 414.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 418.

⁶¹New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report 1890, p. 542.

⁶²Ibid., p. 565.

⁶³New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Inspection, Annual Report 1892, p. 10.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶J. Guterman, YIVO, RG 113, p. 1.

⁶⁷Haskell, YIVO, RG 113, p. 1.

⁶⁸E. Wolf, YIVO, RG 113, p. 7; I. Schoenhaltz, YIVO, RG 113, pp. 1, 2.

⁶⁹P. Newman, YIVO, RG 113, p. 6. Also E. Wolf, YIVO, RG 113, p. 4.

⁷⁰Operators and apprentices, as a rule, had to provide their own sewing machine costing in the 1890's 40 to 60 dollars. In some cases the employer would rent machines and deduct a fee from the weekly wages. Operators used to carry their machines with them from job to job and also because of fear that the boss might confiscate or steal them.

⁷¹I. Schoenhaltz, YIVO, RG 113, p. 12.

⁷²Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 32.

⁷³S. Ginsburg, YIVO, RG 102, no. 156, p. 13; L. Glass, YIVO, RG 113, pp. 9, 10; Cohen, Transplanted, p. 114; J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 52; S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, p. 57. Langer learned to be a presser in exchange for sleeping in the shop and rendering the services of a watchman.

⁷⁴Arbeiter Zeitung, May 29, 1891, p. 5.

⁷⁵Ibid., August 28, 1891, pp. 1, 5.

⁷⁶Ibid.

- ⁷⁷Ibid., September 28, 1891, p. 1.
- ⁷⁸Ibid.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., August 1891, p. 1.
- ⁸⁰Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, p. 30.
- ⁸¹Ibid., p. 31. Also, Cohen, Transplanted, p. 102.
- ⁸²J. Gershin, YIVO, RG 113, p. 30.
- ⁸³S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 57, p. 21. Langer eventually received two dollars back after an appeal to the Industrial Removal Office, an arm of the UHC, which sued the boss. He was finally apprenticed to become a presser in a shop where he worked as a watchman whose responsibility was to make a fire for the irons every morning.
- ⁸⁴Anon., YIVO, RG 102, no. 24, pp. 32, 33.
- ⁸⁵S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 57, p. 21.
- ⁸⁶L. Glass, YIVO, RG 113, p. 9.
- ⁸⁷Melamed, Life As It Was, p. 205.
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹Ibid.
- ⁹⁰S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 57, p. 25.
- ⁹¹Ibid., p. 26.
- ⁹²B. Fenster, YIVO, RG 113, p. 13.
- ⁹³A. Herschowitz, YIVO, RG 113, pp. 1, 2.
- ⁹⁴P. Newman, YIVO, RG 113, p. 4; A. Barlow, YIVO RG 102, no. 70, p. 48.
- ⁹⁵Ha-Ivry, August 6, 1893.
- ⁹⁶J. Werlin, YIVO, RG 102, no. 71-71c, p. 52. Also E. Wolf, YIVO, RG 113, p. 5.
- ⁹⁷B. Fenster, YIVO, RG 113, pp. 9, 10.
- ⁹⁸E.M. Wagner, YIVO, RG 102, no. 45, p. 173.
- ⁹⁹L. Rosenman, YIVO, RG 102, no. 31, p. 17; A.A. Scherer, YIVO, RG 113, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰Yudishes Folksblatt, October 14, 1892.

¹⁰¹Newcomers often displaced experienced workers. A newlytrained cutter earning only five dollars replaced his predecessor who had earned twelve. L. Glass, YIVO, RG 113, p. 10. Also, S.J. Levy, YIVO, RG 102, no. 32-32a, p. 31; Arbeiter Zeitung, May 29, 1891, p. 5. Immigrant workers displaced more experienced workers also in other industries. A newly-trained worker in brass lamps and a spindle machine operator were chosen in preference to more experienced workers. B. Reisman, YIVO, RG 102, no. 38-38a, p. 74; S. Ginsburg, YIVO, RG 102, no. 156, p. 24. Similarly, another immigrant who found his first employment in a grocery shop through an ad in the paper was dismissed after one month to make way for another "green boy." A. Berlow, YIVO, RG 102, no. 70, p. 45; Arbeiter Zeitung, January 5, 1894, p. 3.

¹⁰²Immigration Commission, vol. 11, pp. 380, 381. It appears, however, that at some point beyond the ten-year period, gains in earning capacity slowed down considerably and became dependent on factors other than length of stay and more on education, to cite one example. Thus, Jewish immigrants other than Russian showed greater gains in earnings beyond residency of ten years, an advantage shared also by Northern Italians over their counterparts from Southern Italy. *Ibid.*, p. 380.

¹⁰³J. Dyenson, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 59.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.* The same immigrant became later a conductor on the Third Avenue El but because of troubles with thugs and "the slavery of the job," he changed his job again, becoming eventually a collector for an insurance company and then a travelling salesman. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵A. Gummer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 44, np.

¹⁰⁶Cohen, Transplanted, pp. 217, 256.

¹⁰⁷Borgenicht, The Happiest Man, p. 220.

¹⁰⁸Melamed, Life As It Was, p. 205.

¹⁰⁹L. Glass, YIVO, RG 113, p. 9.

¹¹⁰Cutters, for example, considered the aristocrats of the clothing workers, used to wear top hats to work in the 1890's.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING A HOME AND EARNING A LIVING ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE

Demography and Economy of a Neighborhood

The Jewish East Side of the 1900's was an area of one and a half square miles stretching from the East River to Third Avenue and the Bowery in the West, and from 14th Street to Monroe Street in the South. It was the result of over twenty-five years of settlement of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in an area previously inhabited by the German and Irish middle class and in some parts, by Irish poor. By the 1900's this quarter of the city, which became closely identified with Jewish immigrants, was also enjoying the dubious distinction of being the most highly populated area in the city, if not the world. Already overcrowded in the 1870's, the Jewish population of the Lower East Side kept growing steadily. From the 1880's, when New York boasted only a few thousand Jews, the numbers increased steadily, reaching approximately 168,750 in the early 1890's, to 290,000 in 1900, and to a new peak of 542,061 in 1910.¹

The density of the Tenth and Thirteenth Wards, both heavily populated by Jews, increased respectively from 523.6 and 428.6 inhabitants per acre in 1890, to 700 and 600 inhabitants per acre in 1900.² According to a report of the University Settlement Society, the overcrowding on the Lower

East Side surpassed that of the worst sections of Bombay.³ The congestion, however, did not deter the growing numbers of newcomers who, in search of a refuge among their compatriots, made the Lower East Side their first stopping place. Although eventually new Jewish settlements in Williamsburg and Brownsville as well as Harlem diverted some of the newcomers, the Lower East Side remained the mainstay for the majority of new arrivals.⁴

Gross overcrowding, the result of influx, was also an economic must. Jewish families which numbered on the average 6 persons, also took in lodgers who made it easier to pay the rent, which averaged 8 dollars for a large room or 10-20 dollars a month for a four-room apartment in the 1890's.⁵ Testimonies of overcrowding are abundant. According to George Price who served as Health Inspector on the Lower East Side in the 1890's, one unit consisting of three rooms served as home to a family of husband, wife, their six children and thirteen lodgers.⁶ One newly-arrived immigrant confirmed the crowded conditions in a letter he sent back home. His new habitat of two rooms was shared by six boarders and a family of eight. The apartment served also as a shop to one of the boarders--a shoemaker, and to the two daughters of the landlord, who sewed at home. The father of the family, a teacher by profession, used the apartment as a classroom for Jewish boys, and, on occasions, the apartment was converted to a synagogue. Though crowded "like herrings in a barrel,"

each one had enough space, surely, according to the correspondent, "this being one of the miracles which happen to our brethren the children of Israel in this country."⁷

The teeming humanity enclosed within the area of one and a half square miles shared some common demographic characteristics. Large numbers of children and women were the norm among the immigrants. According to one estimate, in the years 1886-1898 women over 16 constituted 41.6% of the population, and in the years 1899-1914, women averaged 44.03% of all Jewish immigrants.⁸ Only the Irish immigration had a higher proportion of women, reaching 51.29% in the years 1899-1914.⁹ The second most important characteristic of the Eastern European immigration was the number of children below the age of 14, averaging 24.9% of all Jewish immigrants between the years 1899-1910, with higher averages of 26.5% in the years 1902, 1909, and 28.4% in 1906. Among other immigrants, such as the Poles, Russians, Hungarians and Roumanians, children averaged only 12.3%.¹⁰ Moreover, according to a study conducted in 1903, Jewish families in New York had the highest birth rate. While Catholic families averaged 2.03 children, and Protestant families 1.85, Jewish families headed the list with 2.54 children.¹¹ There were few elderly people among Jewish immigrants during the years 1899-1914, with only 5.8% of all Jewish immigrants Jews over the age of 45. In contrast, the same age group among non-Jews represented 17.8% of immigrants.¹²

This was an almost classic example of large households and high birthrates making survival possible. As one contemporary observed:

He whom God has not blessed with sons, daughters, and a large household where all can contribute by doing their own work; he who will not turn his small house into a boarding home for twenty workers and peddlers, subsisting on their leavings and taking upon himself to sleep on the earth ... such a one will never see an extra cent in his purse. 13

The hardships of economic survival during seasonal unemployment as well as familial obligations to those left behind in Europe presented the newcomer with insurmountable hardships. A family of six required for its survival in 1890 an income of 40 dollars a month.¹⁴ But seasonal slackness and the need to send tickets to families left in Europe reduced incomes on one hand and increased needs on the other.

How was the income supplemented? Children and women most probably contributed their share to family economy. Though difficult to assess, the estimate of children attending schools was surprisingly low. The survey of the Baron de Hirsch Fund of 1890 showed that only one third of all children, including those under six as well as fourteen years and over, attended school. Several factors contributed to this low attendance. Jewish children, though probably staying in school for the required four years between the ages of 8 and 12, and for the mandatory six years after 1903, did not stay longer than required by law and began working soon after fulfilling the legal requirements.¹⁵ The survey

of 1908 confirms the tendency among Jewish parents to utilize their children's labor. Over one half of the Jewish children in school that year were in grades 1-3. The numbers, however, declined considerably after third grade, most children leaving school after the mandatory 6th grade.¹⁶ Moreover, rather than keep their children in school until the age of fourteen, with the new Compulsory Education Law, Jewish parents were keen to send their children to classes offered by the Educational Alliance. Unlike the public schools, the Educational Alliance offered a shorter school day, thereby allowing its pupils to work after school hours and thus to supplement their parents' income.¹⁷

Wives, too, shared responsibility for contributing to the family economy. Though, according to one source, "It was by no means typical of immigrant life that wives should continue to be or become the breadwinners," women in Jewish households supplemented household income by having lodgers and boarders.¹⁸ Earnings from renting living space and services ranged from \$3.12 to \$8.00 a month.¹⁹

The household in its entirety with wives, children, relatives, as well as lodgers, became a production unit in clothing manufacture. Establishing such a venture was relatively easy: a small capital of 50 dollars, a few sewing machines which could be obtained on easy credit and the use of one's own kitchen or bedroom, were the basic ingredients.²⁰ Having made the contacts with manufacturers,

the household unit paved the way for many aspiring workers to become contractors and sometimes, independent manufacturers. One worker, already an experienced machine operator, decided to venture into contracting by employing his two sisters who were quick at the sewing machine, as well as a brother.²¹ Similarly, another immigrant began making and selling aprons, having been taught and assisted by his wife.²² Production within the family unit was particularly suited to a cutthroat industry where underbidding was the rule. Abraham Bisno's family, for example, contracted jobs without employing any outsiders: it was Bisno, his brother and his parents who worked in their shop.²³

Though the ambition of many, the contractor's fate was far from enviable and his existence was precarious. Working late into the night, their earnings did not exceed the earnings of hired hands.²⁴ Though financial benefits hardly justified their hard work, other benefits made it worthwhile. "Since I was twelve I've been working for others. Now it's time to start on my own. That's why I came here," was the way one immigrant who ventured into contracting and later into manufacturing summarized it.²⁵ On a similar note, another immigrant describing his fifteen-hour workday, a total of eighty-two hours a week, justified his contracting business: "At least no boss to nose around about my work."²⁶ A contemporary observer-anarchist summed up the situation in a similar vein: "Everybody had the drive to become

independent and they all tried hard. Everybody was tormented and suffered and tried in order to succeed."²⁷

The road to contracting and, possibly, manufacturing was full of difficulties. Unpredictable market and slow seasons made the dream of upward mobility often a two-way ladder and many found themselves reduced to being a waged worker in times of need. The precarious status of the contractor reinforced his commonality with his workers. Small contractors complained at being called exploiters. "We work harder than you. We earn sometimes less than you, in any case never more than you. We suffer from the hands of the manufacturers, what kind of exploiters are we?"²⁸

Isidore Kopeloff, an anarchist, confessed: "I didn't have an answer to their argument ... Because of my anarchistic principles I couldn't admit that employer is right vis-a-vis the worker. But deep down I felt and clearly saw that not all those who are called 'bosses' are exploiters."²⁹ Blurred lines of distinction between workers and small bosses when the two often exchanged places and the sense of camaraderie strengthened by common experience, fate and memories, is borne out by Kopeloff's accounts of his work in a shirt-making shop. His description of the singing of Russian songs in a shop, where the majority of workers were young Russian educated Jews with only a minority of elderly Jews, is particularly telling:

We were all inspired and joined in and sang: the boss, his wife and their grown children, all sang with gusto and with feeling. Even the old Jews hummed and tapped with

their feet to the rhythm... All those who were choking with sorrow, sang their heart out. Often the whole crowd sang a long time into the night. And when we ended singing, we began talking and discussing. The discussion was then something completely new. We felt a special liveliness and a new strange tenderness. It was a true unity and togetherness. Not only all the workers--women workers as well as the old workers--it was a unity that included the boss, his family and also me, an outsider. 30

Communality of shared memories, culture and immigrant fate, imbued the relationship of workers and contractors with ambiguities. Many within the labor movement considered contractors as much a part of labor as workers. Israel Barsky, one of the first union leaders in men's clothing to emerge in the 1880's, called for all those involved in clothing industry to belong to one union. He wanted this industrial union to include all grades, from the lowliest baster to the highest well-paid cutter, as well as the contractor. Even the contractor was exploited, maintained Barsky. The only real bosses, those who "do not put their hand in cold water and like to put out the fire with other people's hands" had no place in the union, according to Barsky.³¹

Affinity of interest and a common enemy--the manufacturers--united on occasions contractors and workers.³² The Socialist leadership in unions, however, saw these attempts as an aberration of union ideals. During a shirtmakers' strike, for example, when contractors wished to join workers to fight their common enemy, the union doubted their honesty, warning of the "wolf-like nature" of the

contractors who at the first opportunity will always try to exploit their workers and lower their wages and increase their hours.³³

The ambiguity of the relationship between workers and small contractors notwithstanding, waged work confused old world ties and shared experiences. Strikes in small shops which aimed to re-order and redefine that relationship spoke in a modern idiom of workers' rights and bosses' obligations.³⁴

Self-help and Social Organization

In New York, immigrants had to face economic hardship and attacks by American opinion, American labor, as well as their own brethren, the German Jews. They had little support from outside their community and had to seek it in the communal traditional institutions of synagogues, landsmanshaftn and mutual aid societies of the Lower East Side. Although they were apparently conservative bodies, they answered new social and economic needs and became, therefore, imbued with a new content.

Although to the outsiders all inhabitants of the Lower East Side appeared as "Russian Hebrews," cultural and ethnic differentiation and proliferation of organizations and institutions were characteristic of the Jewish community.

Ethnic lines divided the geography of the community. Hungarian, Russian, Roumanian and Galician Jews clustered in distinct ethnic groupings. Hungarian Jews, for example,

settled in the area north of Houston Street, while the Russian Jews huddled in the Southern parts of the Lower East Side south of Grand Street to Monroe Street, and the Galician Jews occupied a smaller area between Houston and Grant Streets.³⁵ Ethnic divisions were transposed to the workplace. Jews from Hungary and Western Poland were employed at making the better types of garments, while the cheapest work was done by the Polish and Lithuanian Jews of the neighborhood.³⁶ Young intellectuals from Russia found employment in shirtmaking--easy work which didn't demand much physical strength--while Roumanians who "knew how to make and drink schnapps" and who were "simple but strong," worked as pressers.³⁷ The ethnic divisions created rifts within the labor camp: animosity between "Litwacks," Hungarians, etc., as well as between religious and non-religious Jews marked the relationship between workers.³⁸

In addition to ethnic distinctions, there were religious ones. Religion failed to exert as much control in the new land as formerly, and to the regret of the orthodox tradition, America came to symbolize a spiritual wilderness and the destruction of old and cherished values. Scholarly-religious prerogatives were forgotten and spiritual values were replaced by a growing materialism, and so complained critics, steeped in the old tradition. Even traditional, spiritual leaders, abandoned the world of spirit and instead:

They concern themselves with affairs of the stomach ...
They sink up to their necks in a torrent of present-day
banalities and material possession, just like all the rest

of their Jewish brethren in this city and land. 39

Sabbath observance was first to go under the pressures of economic needs. The majority of workers worked on that sacred day and most businesses were open.⁴⁰ This was anathema to the newly-arrived. A newcomer, a carpenter who settled in Pittsburgh, still steeped in religion and tradition, viewed with bewilderment the liberated ways of his brethren in America:

My first Sabbath in America made a most painful impression on me. My brother-in-law arrived home from work Friday. ... He made Kiddush (a ritual of wine blessings on Sabbath eve), my sister-in-law prepared a good, Sabbath, home-like meal ... Everything was fine and pleasurable that evening. On the morrow, on the morning of Sabbath, seeing my brother-in-law dress in his overalls, take his saw and leave for work, the entire Sabbath eve of America turned sour for me. 41

A similar experience was conveyed by a man newly-arrived in New York in 1888. Not wanting to transact business on the Sabbath, he was warned by his sister-in-law: "If you feel that way about it, you'd better take the first steamer back. We do things differently in America."⁴² When the same immigrant questioned why some synagogues were well attended, the same sister-in-law retorted that those attending were rich Jews and that "landlords like them can afford to waste time."⁴²

In spite of the relaxation of the religious code, the majority of immigrants retained much of the cultural practices and form which had been traditionally linked to life in Eastern European communities. Synagogues and

communal organizations proliferated on the East Side. The numerous synagogues, however, served not only as places of worship, but also as meeting places of social and cultural character. Synagogue affiliation was determined by several factors. Immigrants hailing from the same localities established their own synagogues or were drawn to the same ones. There, the newcomers could find old acquaintances, make valuable contacts and find jobs, lodgings, etc.⁴⁴ Family ties were of equal importance and newcomers, at least initially, joined with their families in the same places of worship. In some synagogues, however, affiliation was based on skill and occupation and often the worshippers not only hailed from the same locality in Europe, but were also employed in the same trade and were members of the same union.⁴⁵ Bernard Weinstein, a secretary of United Hebrew Trades, tells, for example, of a meeting of religious pressers, all bearded elderly Jews wearing yarmulkas (skull caps) with some younger men wearing hats, all of whom belonged to one union and one synagogue.⁴⁶

Synagogues on the East Side served also as nuclei for institutions which were traditionally linked to places of worship: burial societies, charitable groups, study groups, schools, etc. The secularization of the community, however, introduced new types of benefit societies, which were the expression and the extension of the landsmanshaftn, or organizations of immigrants coming from the same town or

region. It was the landsmanshaftn, rather than the synagogues, which served as an anchor for the secularized newcomers, and naturally therefore, spawned an array of social institutions which answered a host of many practical needs concerning employment, security, burial, financial needs, etc.⁴⁷ They were a mainstay for the newcomers in time of need and, therefore very popular among immigrants, especially among the workers. According to the available data, the number of immigrant members peaked in the years 1903-1909, the high point of immigration, and though there is no reliable evidence as to workers' participation for the early years, it is known that 75% of the members in 1938 belonged to the working class, while 15% were small businessmen and 10% were professionals.⁴⁸

The landsmanshaftn were more successful than the unions in providing for the needs of the immigrant worker, especially in time of want, and showed workers' preference for community organizations based on common roots and familiar institutions. I. Barsky, a leading labor leader of the 1880's, formulated the needs of his fellow workers and the shortcomings of contemporary unions. The latter, according to Barsky, founded on purity of ideology were divisive because of their principles of organizing along craft lines, while disregarding the communal and the economic needs of the workers. In contrast to the narrow scope of the unions, Barsky envisaged a large industrial union where

workers from all branches of production would be welcome. Every member of that union would feel that "he belongs to one large family and will never go under. In the times of greatest misfortunes, he will know that there is someone he could lean on."⁴⁹ Thus, according to the same source, it was the failure of contemporary unions to provide for the needs of the workers in time of dearth which explained the swelling ranks of lodges and other benefit societies.⁵⁰

Workers' preference for mutual benefit associations based on hometown links was seen by some historians as a factor in retarding successful unionization. Moses Rischin, for example, maintains that, "While Jewish workmen paid respectable dues to landsmanshaftn and benevolent societies, unions melted away from lack of funds."⁵¹ In response to this claim, it should be pointed out that some landsmanshaftn developed a distinct working class character and adopted a working class ethic. Thus, for example, the Breziner Sick and Benevolent Society stipulated in its by-laws that "if any member shall be found working in a shop at the time of a local strike therein, such working shall be considered immoral conduct for which such member may be expelled."⁵² Abraham Cahan, to quote another example, testified to the existence of two seemingly identical mutual aid societies under the auspices of one landsmanshaft. In this case, a clear differentiation between working class and other members took place, when all members were asked to declare their

belief in God. This demand alienated workers as well as "free thinkers" of the society, who founded an alternative mutual aid society. Eventually, similar splits led to the founding of the Workmen Circle (Arbeiter Ring), a national confederation of workers' benefit societies.⁵³

Voluntary associations of which landsmanshaftn were the obvious example should not be viewed as antithetical to unions, but as associations which contained the essential factors in the formation of working class solidarity and mutual aid.⁵⁴ These communal associations were in fact the vehicles for the later political discourse within the Jewish community and in the Jewish unions, thus contributing to the unique development of the Jewish working class. Similarly, religion, links to synagogue, as well as common national heritage and historical experience, were of importance in contributing to the articulation of social awareness among the laboring immigrants. For instance, the symbol of deliverance from slavery drawn from familiar historical episodes, was a recurring theme which inspired reflection upon present-day slavery and misery. In this vein, coatmakers strikes which occurred with predictable regularity in the months of July and August of every year, had their roots in the religious and historical significance of the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av. On that day of fast, according to one coatmaker, when the Jews mourn the destruction of the Second Temple and their enslavement by the

Romans, the wail for the events of a by-gone era assumes a fresh spirit:

We shed tears on that day, we lament the loss of our independence and glory, we sigh over the fate of the women and children who were outraged and tortured by the brutes of Rome. Well, it often happens that while we are at it we also weep over our own misery and utter groans for our own wives and children, who are starved and tyrannized by those brutal bosses of ours. 55

Not surprisingly, therefore, it was on the day of shared memory that as many as 20,000 coatmakers were about to begin in 1899 their strike with the predictable timing and coordination.⁵⁶

The Great Divide: German Jews and Immigrant Community

The Lower East Side epitomized a class apart from other American Jews. It stood for everything that was non-American and perhaps even un-American - a community ripe for transformation and even eradication. Separated by geography and culture, the Jewish East Side developed its tempo and its unique institutions. The Jewish quarter, however, was not invisible: its culture and its poverty drew the disapproval and the concern of the German Jews as well as the American public and its reformers, and its labor movement attracted the attention and the criticism of its American counterpart.

From the beginnings of mass immigration, German Jews embarked on well-publicized efforts to assist their less fortunate brethren. Ostensibly they aimed to relieve the misfortunes of the immigrants, but they imbued their charitable efforts with the intent of transmitting to the

immigrants their own class values: the spirit of individualism, industry and competition. Thus, though the subsequent attempts to help were presented under the claim of helping the newcomers and protecting them from the hostility of American society, in fact, their philanthropic activities were motivated by interests of regulation and domination of a distinct class and its distinct culture.

Jewish immigrants received on most occasions negative publicity prompted by fear of their unassimilability. Unlike the German Jew who adopted himself readily to this country, the Jews from Russia, claimed the prevailing opinion, seem "to have been a mixed injury, economically, socially and politically."⁵⁷ A Jewish contemporary, himself a recent arrival, echoed the chorus of the critics: "Immigration is a good nourishment for this land, but too much of it, particularly if it is an inferior quality as the recent immigration is, becomes unassimilable and is apt to upset the American stomach and is likely to become very dangerous."⁵⁸ The waves of immigrants who "looked exactly like the Polish riff-raff," confirmed the worst fears.⁵⁹ Viewed as servile and "despondent," their lowly state was attributed to their life in Russia which hardly trained them towards the understanding of the privileges and the obligations "of a resident of America or Western Europe."⁶⁰ They were poor, incapable of earning a living because of their unproductive occupations, devoid of skills, and not used to the new

freedoms of the "great Republic." These characteristics, as well as the threat posed by the large numbers of the newcomers, were a disadvantage to the future of all Jews in America. Thus, to prevent the prospects of having their status undermined by their less-than-desirable relatives from the East, the German Jews became closely involved in projects aimed to uplift the culture and the economy of the inhabitants of the East Side.

"Normalization" through dispersion was the priority of the German Jews as the desirable corrective to the "un-American" and "un-Jewish" anomaly of congestion and life in a ghetto. Although the existing density, congestion and tenement work received wide publicity in the 1890's through the work of reformers concerned with hygiene, sanitation, and child labor, German Jews, like many other contemporaries, understood too well the socially explosive dangers stemming from the high concentration of the poor, and the role of the closely-knit neighborhood and community. Not only was the ghetto a disgrace which reflected negatively on all Jews, but it was the site which fostered rebellion, strikes and resistance to new values which the German Jews valued.⁶¹ The ghetto was an impediment to Americanization; there the immigrant continued "his unsavory habits, his jargon, his manners, his association, his modes of thought."⁶² There, being in contact with his countrymen, whether workers or employers, resulted in cohesion and homogeneity, which are

"so often harming the interest of the needle industry, carried on among the dense Jewish population of our city."⁶³

Resettlement of Jews in the country, in uncongested rural areas, where the settlers were to be engaged in agricultural pursuits, was to become the preoccupation of the German Jewish philanthropists. Dispersion of the immigrants would not only bring them in touch with more "American" surroundings and thus change the anti-immigrant public sentiment. It would also ease the competition in the labor market and thereby stop the inexorable process of depressing the wages of laboring men.⁶⁴ Moreover, to the German Jews who had an important stake in the economy of the clothing industry, the resettlement of the ghetto and the removal of "tailoring surpluses" was of importance to the future health of the industry. They were concerned with the new competition from the ranks of immigrants who successfully expanded their activity into manufacturing, and were determined to relieve their own business people who were being forced out of existence by the "aggressive competition" of the newcomers.⁶⁵ Resettlement in the country would usher in more profitable work and ensure a better regulated industry by eliminating the Eastern European competitor who was viewed as even more dangerous than the specter of native and anti-Semitic agitation.⁶⁶

Serving the interests of the needle industry was the guiding principle on the agenda of the charities. Thus,

although the agricultural colony in Woodbine, New Jersey began as the lofty consummation of charitable impulses aiming to create a healthy Jewish society of farmers, it soon became essentially an industrial colony and a haven for New York manufacturers.⁶⁷

Similarly, other charitable plans were colored by economic motives. Schemes to help the immigrant were changed by other considerations than the commitment to assist newcomers. The guiding light behind their efforts was the conviction that charity giving would pauperize its recipients.⁶⁸ Traditional charity was criticized. Its principle of giving "without a system, without accounts, and without investigations" was harmful and wasteful. As a result, the practice of charity by German Jews was a departure from the custom. As viewed by one of the East Side critics, it was "conducted like a business, a railroad, or a clearing house."⁶⁹ They were firm believers in the educational value of giving, not as ad hoc aid in time of need but rather an enterprise which would bear fruit and would transform the recipients into new individuals. These charities did not subscribe to donations which had "fostered a habit of relying upon individuals and congregational institutions, and in proportion weakened the instincts of manliness, self-reliance, and honor."⁷⁰ Instead of the dole, the German Jews decided to teach the newcomers that "to earn a living in this country means nothing more nor nothing less

than hard, very hard work."⁷¹

Charity became, therefore, the channel to instill American values, as well as to control immigrants' cultural and economic life. True to the American prevailing principles of 'survival of the fittest' the Jewish institutions stuck closely to the rule of "aiding those who aid themselves."⁷² For example, "alms giving" and charitable relief were excluded from the philosophy of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, so as not to "cripple the tendency to self-aid." These principles were shared by other philanthropic institutions.⁷³ The ethics of self-help and its rewards were evident in the principle to grant aid only to those who during a brief residence have "already demonstrated their capacity for existence and progress in this country."⁷⁴ Thus, the aim of the large and well endowed Baron de Hirsch Fund which was run and managed by a roster of prominent German Jews, was to help immigrants who had been in this country no less than six months and no more than two years.⁷⁵

In this vein, though the philanthropists were strong believers in the regeneration of the Jewish life through agriculture, the agricultural colony in Meridian, South Dakota, which was founded by the idealists of Am Olam group, was considered "undeserving" because its members were "persons who have immigrated to the U.S. as long as seven or eight years, and who have failed as agriculturalists."⁷⁶ Similarly, because of the belief in business-like principles,

money advances to settlers in Woodbine, were considered strictly as loans, rather than contributions.⁷⁷

Thus, cautious so as not to encourage idleness, Jewish philanthropists followed the principle of withholding assistance from a vast category of the "non-deserving," which included among others "Nihilists, Socialists, or anarchists elements."⁷⁸ One charitable organization summarized succinctly this stand, by suggesting that:

The word 'charity' could be stricken from the language, for it covers a multitude of sins. ... It is a matter of common belief, for instance, that it is a deed of Charity to give anything to any person who, from necessity or a vicious instinct, will accept it, and this notion leads to the encouragement of mendicancy and pauperism. ⁷⁹

And, true to its principles, the same Report recommended the abandonment of the term charity and its substitution by the principle of "social improvement."⁸⁰

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that committed to the principle of the transformation of the newcomers into American individualists, Jewish charities invested hopes and money in the idea of education, which they designated as "the new charity."⁸¹

In this spirit, efforts were to be made to train the immigrant children and to raise them "above their surroundings and giving them a taste for manual work, promoting self-reliance and industry ... towards developing their moral nature and also fitting them for technical and mechanical fields of work."⁸²

The success of Americanization via education was,

however, obstructed by the institution of the cheder (religious school). Viewed as the foremost enemy and a dangerous rival to the American school, the cheder, according to the charities, was "filthy, ill regulated and hurtful physically, morally and mentally."⁸³ The greatest danger of the cheder was its closeness to home, family and the traditional values. Conducted "in the sleeping, eating and washing room of the teacher," in the traditional modes of learning, using the "hateful lingo" and "ireful" gesticulation," this traditional religious education reinforced the very values with the Americanized Jews set out to undo.⁸⁴ It became, therefore, of importance to offer and to press for an alternative school system, one which will be managed along professional lines and would wrest the control over the children away from parental and ethnic influences. The young immigrant child must be taken out of his familiar surroundings and parental control, and must be introduced to a new setting of public school. Public school was the hope of the charities:

From the moment our cheder pupil has marched to the sounds of the piano from the assembly room to his classroom, he cannot help comparing the American methods of teaching with the Polish. The spacious schoolroom, with their high windows ... the dignified bearing of his lady teacher, her decorum, her un-rebbe like, gentle manners, everything must vividly strike the child's imagination. In the course of a few weeks he will begin to understand and to speak English. He will speak it in his school, at play, he will even use it, much against the wish of his parents, when addressing them. 85

It was hoped that ultimately the child would not only reject

the use of Yiddish "jargon" but also the lifestyle and the culture of his parents. An unbridgeable rift would thus be created between him on one hand and his parents and their community on the other. Ultimately, according to the scheme of the charities, it was through this alienation of the child from his surroundings that a successful Americanization was to be achieved.

Commitment to this goal explains the willingness to finance English classes for children and adults and special classes for children, which aimed to counteract the attraction of the cheder, and where some Biblical and religious instruction complemented the English courses.⁸⁶ Special English classes were also offered to melamdim (religious teachers). Their curriculum included English, American history, political history, history of American institutions, DeTocqueville's Democracy in America as well as the Book of Psalms in English translation.⁸⁷ These classes were, as a rule, considered a useful device to impart American values. The superintendent of the school for immigrant children prided himself, for example, that "through my daily inspection in the classroom I have cured many a mother from the dread of water, discharging her dirty offspring from school, and re-admitting it only on her promise that she would keep it clean."⁸⁸ The problem of attendance, though never a major complaint according to the Educational Board, was most pronounced on Fridays, the

children being kept home by their parents to help in preparations for the Sabbath. The solution applied to keep in check "this evil habit" was to discharge the delinquents from school on the following Monday.⁸⁹ The success of the Free English classes was summarized in the thrill of seeing "the little immigrants with their pile of books on their way to the Public School thoroughly Americanized even to the fashion of wearing the cap on the back of the head, and on the high road to an honorable, useful, and let us hope prosperous future."⁹⁰

In addition to English classes, trade classes, it was hoped, would contribute to the change and economic transformation of the newcomers. Thus, 60 percent of the richly endowed Baron de Hirsch Fund was to be invested in educational institutions. In addition to the English classes, as specified by the Fund, vocational schools would be established and would teach newcomers "easily acquired trades, or the knowledge of the use of tools, so that they may become 'handy men' in shops."⁹¹ Women, similarly, it was hoped, would be trained as "house servants, cooks, children's nurses."⁹² Some of these programs once established, provoked the criticism of American labor. For example, the products manufactured in the workshops training the immigrants in carpentry and metal wires were sold on the open market at low prices, provoking unfavorable reaction from trade unions for reducing the standard of wages and for obstructing the

struggle for a shorter work day.⁹³ Moreover, during the height of immigration, when the influx of immigrants strained all available resources, the management of the Baron de Hirsch Fund admitted that local charities were compelled to teach the immigrants needle trades which could be acquired quickly through special agreements with manufacturers.⁹⁴ As a result of this plan, greenhorn-learners were sent to work in factories in New York and New Jersey, where they remained indentured to the employer until they mastered the simplest "skills" while working in the meantime for reduced wages. Thus, in fact, under the pretext of philanthropy, German Jews became effective conduits of cheap labor, aiding the manufacturers in their exploitation of the newcomers.⁹⁵ These arrangements, hardly popular in the circles of Jewish labor, were accompanied by an openly anti-labor stance on the part of the charities. Applicants for charity were scrutinized and "socialists" who "do not go to the synagogue" were denied assistance, as were those with contacts to strikes and unions.⁹⁶ "If they strike on account of their union, let them suffer for it ... let them starve," it was reportedly said by the United Hebrew Charities during a cloakmakers' strike in 1890.⁹⁷

The people of the East Side resented and resisted the goal of philanthropy to wield social control through economy and charity. The Jewish labor press attacked the "pseudo philanthropist" who "exploit their brethren mercilessly" and

who demand obedience to the new ethic of free competition and individualism.⁹⁸ The anti-union stance of the "Eighth Street"--the location of charitable offices--and the pro-business attitude provoked frequent attacks in the Jewish labor press.⁹⁹ Similarly, the disdain and the contempt of the Germans toward their "wards" won the resentment of the immigrants. "They seem to imagine uptown that all those downtown Jews are a herd of Hottentots who must be civilized in the mould of the uptown, just as Europe wants to civilize the Chinese," was the criticism voiced by the Forverts.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the same report accused the "bediamonded hands" and "alabaster fingers" belonging to the "cream of the uptown Jewish capitalist society," of viewing the downtown Jews as "poor, corrupt, dirty and sinful."¹⁰¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, the biased and the calculated charity dispensation as practiced by the German Jews won the following condemnation: "Better the whip of Fonye (the Tsar) than the charity of Eighth Street".¹⁰²

New York Labor and the Jews

The distinct cultural and economic life of the East Side accounted also for the few links between the Jewish community and contemporary New York. Some of the contacts were outright hostile. Irish neighbors, for example, viewed the Jewish settlement on the East Side as territorial encroachment, and openly persecuted those who dared cross the

geographic boundaries between the two groups. Areas bordering on the East River and Catherine Street and its nearby sections, were danger zones for Jewish peddlers because of the Irish "loafers" who "sat in the sun or browled on the docks."¹⁰³ Irish policemen, never kindly to the Jewish population, demonstrated their bias openly during the famed Rabbi Jacob Joseph funeral riot.

Contacts with outside labor were equally scarce, especially during the first years of Jewish settlement. The insular character of the Jewish ghetto and its labor was evident, for example, in the events of 1886 in Chicago. The episode, as told by Abraham Bisno, concerned striking cloakmakers who were completely unaware of the dramatic events which took place in the McCormick Harvester works in the adjoining neighborhood. Nor were they aware of the fateful Haymarket events which took place one day earlier. The marching strikers eventually learned of the events after being chased and beaten mercilessly by the Chicago police.¹⁰⁴ The well-known case of the use of New York Jewish immigrants as scabs in the freight handlers strike of 1882, was the effect of a similar isolation of the first immigrants. And, though first contacts of the Knights of Labor with Jewish labor were already established in 1880, they met with some success among the cutters only.¹⁰⁵ There is also some evidence that one of the first unions, the Cloak and Suit Makers' Union, became a local of the Knights of Labor. Its

members, however, were Jews from Austria, Galicia, Germany and even American-born women.¹⁰⁶ Similar attempts of the Knights to organize Russian Jews were frustrated by economic, cultural, and ideological differences. In Chicago, for example, Bisno and fellow cloakmakers could not identify with the eight-hour movement sweeping the skilled labor of America in the 1880's. In contrast, to Jewish cloakmakers, even a ten-hour work day seemed a desirable though an unattainable goal.¹⁰⁷ Generally, attempts to link contemporary labor organization with Jewish workers were made futile by the unique characteristics of the clothing industry and its workers. "It was common talk amongst our people that storekeepers, bricklayers and blacksmiths don't know anything about clothes," observed Bisno, referring to a Knights of Labor committee which was to negotiate with the cloakmakers' employers in 1886.¹⁰⁸ Abraham Rosenberg of New York reported of his disbelief and suspicion of the initiation ritual and the secrecy practiced by the Knights of Labor. At the ceremony initiating the Dress and Cloakmakers' Union as an Assembly of Knights of Labor, the District Master-Workman and several other members, all Irish, delivered speeches in English to an uncomprehending audience of Jewish greenhorns. The ritual which followed drove the two groups further apart. To the amazement of the cloakmakers, one of the Irish Knights drew a large chalk circle on the floor and told those present to stand around it, while another deputy put a small sword on

the table and hung a globe over the door. "Many of us," tells Rosenberg, "On seeing this sword, feared that either we would be slaughtered or we would be inducted to military service ... Many of us believed that our end has come."¹⁰⁹ Few of those present understood the symbolism of the ceremony, i.e., that if any of those under oath would not be loyal to the interests of labor, the avenging arm of the Knights of Labor would reach him anywhere in the world.¹¹⁰

Ideological differences compounded the existing cultural gap. The prevailing socialist ideology within the Jewish unions who modelled themselves on the German-speaking socialist unions in New York, clashed with the ideology of the Knights on the issue of the inclusion of employers in the unions.¹¹¹ Propaganda against the Knights of Labor gained force during the splits plaguing the party in the early 1890's, when DeLeon gained ascendancy in the District Assembly 49. Jewish unions which joined DeLeon were ostracized by the rival Socialist groups and their members were purged.¹¹² Similarly, despite some ideological similarities between the Central Labor Union, the city-wide labor organization of the 1880's and the 1890's, and the nascent United Hebrew Trades, CLU's efforts to assist the immigrants in labor organizing stumbled against cultural and social barriers. Abraham Cahan reported that several important delegates opposed the admission of Jews, arguing that the Jewish masses came from countries which afforded

them lower standard of living and lower wages.¹¹³ Communication with CLU also faltered on cultural and language differences. Isidore Kopeloff, for example, tells of his experience in 1886 as a worker in a factory making cheroots. When the workers struck that year, the only help they could get came in the form of speeches delivered in English by the representatives of CLU, speeches which Kopeloff and his fellow immigrants did not understand.¹¹⁴ Moreover, according to Weinstein, the secretary of the United Hebrew Trades, CLU was a conservative organization with strong ties to the old working class community and to Tammany Hall politics, both of which were alien to the non-skilled, socialist minded Jewish workers.¹¹⁵

Not surprisingly, therefore, daily meeting points between Jewish and American labor were few. Jewish workers wanted to form their own unions, and, as one immigrant in the building trades testified, "They wanted their own people on whom they could rely, who will be able to protect them and that was because they were greenhorns and strangers in the land."¹¹⁶ The founding of the United Hebrew Trades was the affirmation of this need. Initiated in 1888 by Yiddish and Russian speaking Socialist members of the United Labor Party, its goal was to unify all the existing unions and "progressive labor societies" into one central body.¹¹⁷ Similar in its rhetoric to the Central Labor Union, its emphasis was on central labor organization, rather than

separate trade and labor unions. It proclaimed its commitment to the "mutual protection against the oppression of capitalism" and to an active struggle to bring about "a truly human society, where each individual shall receive the full value of his labor."¹¹⁸

In spite of the fast-growing number of Jewish workers and the growing need for Yiddish speaking labor organization, the presence of "Hebrew" trade unionism, Gompers warned, "will have evil consequences." Trade, rather than religion or nationality, should summon workers' loyalty and Jews, according to the same view, should have gotten their knowledge and experience in labor organizing by means of "mingling with the working men in those trades of other religions and nationalities."¹¹⁹

Contrary to Gompers' view, New York's labor was willing to grant some recognition to the growing presence of Jewish labor. It came, for example, in the form of Yiddish speakers, alongside English and German on occasions of city-wide May 1st celebrations, the one and only day when all divergent labor groups became united, and, in the words of Abraham Cahan, "marched together to one tune and one flag."¹²⁰ By the same token, in another city-wide celebration of the Labor Day Parade of 1894, nowhere were the differences between the two labor camps more blatant. According to one contemporary report, all trades "marched well, they were dignified and orderly, they were well dressed

and self-respecting looking; they were true specimens of American labor."¹²¹ The Horseshoers' Union made a particularly fine appearance, commented the same report. "They are a sturdy lot of men ... and yesterday they looked particularly well in uniform aprons, shirts and caps. Their only ornament was a red horseshoe painted on a leather apron."¹²² Nothing could have offered a more striking contrast to the colorful parade, than Jewish coatmakers on strike observed on the day following the parade. Though some of the strikers were "robust looking," others struck the observer as "famine-stricken."¹²³ The strikers were button makers, fellers, operators and finishers, the new slaves to the system of mass production, who did not share the proud tradition of the New York mechanics seen in the parade. The diverse character of the two groups, meant also differences in goals, strategies and rhetoric, which emphasized their uniqueness as well as insularity.¹²⁴

The distinct character of the clothing industry, the remoteness of contemporary labor and the class-motivated efforts of the German Jewish charities, contributed to the isolation of the Jewish community in general and of Jewish labor in particular. This isolation created inescapably unique relations of mutuality and trust between Jewish immigrant workers and their community. Though united by ethnicity, culture and religion, it would be mistaken, however, to view this community as a "family" society.

Rather, it was a community rife with conflict. Breaking away from the old communities by immigrating and the loosening commitment to religion, meant also the breakdown of old deferential patterns. Jews in America, according to a contemporary observer, were no longer awed by authority and they were not as submissive as they were in the old country. As soon as he crosses the ocean, a Jew acquires an excess of self-confidence, observed the same critic. It is as if

an angel of forgetfulness sits at the door leading to America, slapping the newcomer on his face. He, in turn, forgets his sins, his humble origins, his lack of education and becomes immediately a holy, saintly, wise man, a know-all. 125

The Lower East Side thus became the arena of cultural cohesion, where Jewish workers could freely evoke traditional values and common historical experience while waging their struggle.

FOOTNOTES

¹Moses Rischin, The Promised City (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.: 1962), p. 93. The figures for the 1890's and the 1900's are approximations. According to Rischin, 75 percent of the total Jewish population in 1892 lived on the Lower East Side, in 1890 that population reached 225,000. In 1903, only 50 percent of 580,000 lived on the Lower East Side.

²Rischin, The Promised City, p. 79.

³Quoted in Irving Howe, The World of Our Fathers, p. 69.

⁴The proximity of the Lower East Side to the Houston Street ferry and the Grand Street ferry, and after 1903 to the Williamsburg Bridge, facilitated the expansion of Jewish settlement into Brooklyn, which had already begun in the 1880's. M. Rischin, The Promised City, p. 92.

⁵Ibid., p. 84, George Price, "The Russian Jew in America," Publication of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 48, September 1958, p. 56. Non-payment of rents plagued the poor of the Lower East Side: in the years 1891-1892, in two court districts on the East Side, 11,550 dispossession warrants were issued. M. Rischin, The Promised City, p. 84. Also, Walter Scott Andrew, "Law and Litigation," (New York) in Charles Bernheimer ed., The Russian Jew in the United States (John C. Winston Co., Philadelphia, 1905), p. 342, Maurice Fishberg, "Health and Sanitation" (New York), Ibid., p. 289.

⁶Price, "The Russian Jew in America," in Publication of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 48, September 1958, p. 54.

⁷Ha-Ivry, July 2, 1893, "Letters to Lithuania."

⁸Salo W. Baron, Steeled by Adversity, Essays and Addresses on American Jewish Life (Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1971), p. 281.

⁹Ibid. The presence of women among Jewish immigrants in some years was as high as the proportion of women among the Irish: in 1894, for example, it reached 51.3%. Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid. The survey of the Baron de Hirsch Fund found in 1890 the number of children much higher: out of a surveyed population of 111,690, children below the age of 14 comprised 44,690, or 40% of the population.

¹¹Ibid., p. 274.

¹²Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," pp. 95-97.

¹³Moses Weinberger, People Walk on their Heads, Moses Weinberger's Jews and Judaism in New York, Jonathan D. Sarna, translator and editor, Holmes and Meier Publishers, New York, 1982, published originally as Heyehudim vehayahdut benuyork [Jews and Judaism in New York] p. 58.

¹⁴Maurice Fishberg, "Health and Sanitation" (New York) in C. Bernheimer, ed., The Russian Jew in the United States, p. 286. The Baron de Hirsch Survey of 1890 found the average family 4.81; maximum 5.28 and minimum 3.67 persons in family. George Price, "The Russian Jew in America" Publication of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 48, September 1958, p. 56. Isaac Max Rubinow, "The Jewish Question in New York City 1902-1903," Publication of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 39, December 1959, p. 95.

¹⁵Selma C. Barrol, "Education and Economic Mobility: The Jewish Experience in New York City 1880-1920," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, vol. 65, March 1976, p. 259.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁷Superintendent Emmanuel Marx, Acting General Agent of Baron de Hirsch Fund Papers (henceforth referred to as BHF), April 12, 1904, Box 57, Educational Alliance. It should be also pointed out that insufficient educational facilities often failed to accommodate the fast growing child population of the Lower East Side, and in the 1890's as many as 50 to 60 thousand children in the elementary grades were turned away because of lack of space in the available schools. Selma Barrol, "Education and Economic Nobility: The Jewish Experience in New York City 1880-1920," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, vol. 65, March 1976, p. 259.

¹⁸Howe, The World of Our Fathers, p. 173. Howe's statement is based on the findings of Herbert Gutman's examination of the 1905 census. The wives predominantly stayed home, according to these findings, and only 2 wives out of 118 households were listed as employed housekeepers. Ibid., p. 142. It is of course possible that women's work has always been underestimated in census data.

¹⁹Rischin, The Promised City, p. 84, George Price, "The Russian Jews in America," Publication of Jewish Historical Society, vol. 48, September 1958, p. 56. Baron de Hirsch Survey of 1890 found 10 cents a night the average fee per night paid by a lodger, reaching the monthly average of \$3.12. According to one memoir, a payment of seventy-five cents per

week, entitled a boarder in the 1880's to a morning coffee and laundry services provided by the landlady. Cohen, Transplanted, p. 119.

²⁰Epstein, Jewish Labor in the United States, vol. 1, pp. 89, 91.

²¹Cohen, Transplanted, p. 184.

²²Borgenicht, The Happiest Man, p. 214.

²³Bisno, Abraham Bisno Union Pioneer, p. 48. In some cases the manufacturer dispensed with bidding, offering bundles and paying "as little as he saw fit." Ibid.

²⁴Isidore Kopeloff, Amol in Amerike (Once Upon A Time In America), (Ch. Brzoza, Warsaw, 1928), p. 289.

²⁵Borgenicht, The Happiest Man, p. 193.

²⁶Cohen, Transplanted, p. 186.

²⁷Kopeloff, Once Upon A Time In America, p. 426.

²⁸Kopeloff, Once Upon A Time In America, p. 290.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 294, 295.

³¹Folkszeitung, February 6, 1888, p. 2; February 20, 1888, p. 2.

³²Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, pp. 243, 360.

³³Arbeiter Zeitung, June 9, 1893, p. 2.

³⁴See Chapter 5 for a discussion of strikes in contracting shops.

³⁵Rischin, The Promised City, p. 77.

³⁶A. Cahan, Bleter fun mein Leben, vols. 1 & 2, p. 300.

³⁷Ibid., vol. p. 58.

³⁸Folkszeitung, February 6, 1888, p. 2.

³⁹Moses Weinberger, People Walk on Their Heads p. 61. Weinberger, a rabbi, was one of the vociferous critics of the Jews of New York in the 1880's.

⁴⁰Rischin, The Promised City, p. 146. A contemporary

survey found that only 25% rested on the Sabbath and 60% of stores were open. Charles Liebman, "Religion in American Jewish History," Jewish Journal of Sociology, vol. 9, December, 1967, p. 231.

⁴¹Ezriel Pressman, YIVO RG 102, no. 189, p. 114, quoted in Moses Kligsberg, "Jewish Immigrants in Business: A Sociological Study," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, vol. 56, March 1967, p. 313.

⁴²Borgenicht, The Happiest Man, p. 190.

⁴³Ibid., p. 191.

⁴⁴Cohen, Transplanted, p. 103.

⁴⁵Arthur Goren, New York Jews and the Quest for Community, The Kehillah Experiment, 1908-1922 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 20.

⁴⁶Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, pp. 266, 269, 270.

⁴⁷Howe, The World of Our Fathers, pp. 184, 187.

⁴⁸Di Yiddishe landsmanshaften fun New York, WPA 1938, pp. 16, 17. Also, Howe, The World of Our Fathers, p. 189. In 1938, there were still half a million members in the New York organizations and a quarter of a million in the rest of the country. Di Yiddishe landsmanshaften fun New York, Ibid.

⁴⁹Folkszeitung, February 13, 1888, p. 2.

⁵⁰Ibid., February 20, 1888, p. 2.

⁵¹Rischin, The Promised City, p. 182. See also Michael Weisser, A Brotherhood of Memory, Jewish Landsmanshaften in the New World (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 83.

⁵²Weisser, A Brotherhood of Memory, p. 83.

⁵³A. Cahan, Bleter fun mein leben, vol. 3, pp. 421, 422. According to Cahan, the members of the Arbeiter Ring came under close scrutiny; those voting for "capitalist and scab parties" were expelled.

⁵⁴For an enlightening discussion of the role of voluntary associations in the formation of the French working class, see Maurice Agulhon, "Working Class and Sociability in France Before 1848," in Pat Thane, Geoffrey Crossick and Roderick Floud, eds., The Power of the Past, Essays for Eric Hobsbawm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁵⁵Quoted in Moses Rischin (ed.) Grandma Never Lived In America. The New Journalism of Abraham Cahan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 379, 380.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷New York Sun, May 3, 1891.

⁵⁸Price, "The Russian Jew in America," Publication of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 48, December 1958, p. 106.

⁵⁹Quoted in Harold Silver, "Some Attitudes of the East European Jewish Immigrants Toward Organized Charity in the United States in the Years 1890-1900." Unpublished Dissertation, Graduate School for Jewish Social Work, New York, 1934, p. 40.

⁶⁰Report of the President of the Baron de Hirsch Fund Trust, 1893, BHF, Box 35, File 3, Reel 1, Memorandum of Judge Isaacs, no date, Ibid., File 2.

⁶¹M. Isaacs to Baron de Hirsch, May 22, 1890, BHF, Box 35, File 2, Arthur Reichow to Jacob Schiff, December 8, 1898, Ibid., File 3, Reel 1.

⁶²M. Isaacs to Baron de Hirsch, May 22, 1890, BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁶³Arthur Reichow to Jacob Schiff, December 8, 1898, BHF, Box 35, File 3, Reel 1.

⁶⁴Plan for action by the Jewish Alliance of America with Regard to Russian Jewish Immigration 1891, YIVO RG 406, Doc. 2911.

⁶⁵Arthur Reichow to Julius Goldman, June 9, 1897, BHF, Box 35, File 3, Reel 1.

⁶⁶Ibid. Also, Arthur Reichow to Julius Goldman, June 8, 1897, BHF, Box 35, File 3, Reel 1.

⁶⁷See Chapter Three.

⁶⁸Report of Clifton Levey, Secretary of Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society, August-September 1890, BHF, Box 57, New York Educational Alliance.

⁶⁹Quoted in Harold Silver, "Some Attitudes of the East European Jewish Immigrants," pp. 119-122.

⁷⁰Michael Heilprin to Oscar Straus, January 18, 1888, BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁷¹Untitled, undated, BHF, Box 36, File 5. Various histories of the Fund.

⁷²Michael Heilprin to Oscar Straus, BHF, January 18, 1888, Box 35, File 2.

⁷³A circular from the Central Committee of the Fund, New York, December 1, 1890, BHF, Box 35, File 2; also Julius Goldman to Jewish Colonial Association in Paris, February 9, 1897, BHF, Box 35, File 3, Reel 1.

⁷⁴Judge Isaacs to Baron de Hirsch, November 11, 1889, BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁷⁵Henry Rice to Baron de Hirsch Fund, August 15, 1889, BHF, Box 35, File 2; Isidore Loeb to Judge Isaacs, February 19, 1890, BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁷⁶Judge Isaacs to Baron de Hirsch, November 11, 1889, BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁷⁷Judge Isaacs to Baron de Hirsch, May 22, 1890, p. 46; BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁷⁸As part of the resettlement scheme, the American public was promised that these unwanted elements would not be tolerated. The New York Times, April 27, 1891.

⁷⁹The Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of United Hebrew Relief Association of Chicago, 1886-7.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Introductory Report submitted by Clifton Levey, August-September 1890, BHF, Box 57, File: Outside Correspondence, Educational Alliance.

⁸²B. Hoffman to the President of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, December 1891, BHF, Box 57, File: Outside Correspondence; Educational Alliance.

⁸³Clifton Levey to the Central Committee on Education, August 19, 1890, BHF, Box 57, Educational Alliance.

⁸⁴Ibid. Report of Louis Schnabel submitted to the Education Committee of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, September 4, 1890, BHF, Box 57, File: Outside Organizations' Correspondence; Educational Alliance.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Weekly Report (No. 5), September 9, 1890, BHF, Box 57, Ibid. Clifton Levey to the General Committee on Education,

August 19, 1890, Ibid. Also, Clifton Levey to the Subcommittee on Education, August-September 1890, Ibid. Louis Schnabel to Committee on Education, October 1, 1890, BHF, Box 57, Ibid.

⁸⁷Samuel Joseph, History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1935), p. 257.

⁸⁸Report of the Superintendent, December 31, 1891, BHF, Box 57, Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Louis Schnabel to A.S. Solomon, February 28, 1895, BHF, Box 57, Ibid.

⁹¹Circular from Central Committee of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, New York, December 1, 1890, BHF, Box 35, File: Materials re establishment of the Fund.

⁹²M. Isaacs to Baron de Hirsch, May 22, 1890, p. 44, BHF, Box 35, File 2.

⁹³New York Herald, May 28, 1893.

⁹⁴Julius Goldman to Baron de Hirsch, October 6, 1896, BHF, Box 35, File 3, Reel 1.

⁹⁵For examples of arrangements between charities and manufacturers, see Silver, "Some Attitudes of the East European Jewish Immigrants, pp. 153-155.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 148.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 147.

⁹⁸Price, "The Russian Jew in America," Publication of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 40, December 1950.

⁹⁹See Chapter Three, pp. 100, 101.

¹⁰⁰Forverts, November 21, 1900, p. 1.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Arbeiter Zeitung, August 28, 1891, p. 5.

¹⁰³Borgenicht, The Happiest Man, p. 222. The same immigrant made his tours into Italian neighborhoods without fearing for his life.

¹⁰⁴Bisno, Abraham Bisno, Union Pioneer, pp. 79, 80.

- ¹⁰⁵Epstein, Jewish Labor in the U.S., pp. 109, 110.
- ¹⁰⁶Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 90.
- ¹⁰⁷Bisno, Union Pioneer, p. 73.
- ¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 72, 73.
- ¹⁰⁹Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 10.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 10, 11.
- ¹¹¹Arbeiter Zeitung, September 9, 1892, p. 3; September 8, 1893, p. 2.
- ¹¹²Ibid., February 5, 1892, p. 3; February 19, 1892, p. 2; April 22, 1892, p. 3. Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 169.
- ¹¹³Abraham Cahan, The Education of Abraham Cahan (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), p. 265.
- ¹¹⁴Epstein, Jewish Labor in the United States, vol. 1, p. 78.
- ¹¹⁵Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 331.
- ¹¹⁶Oscar Feuer, YIVO RG 113, p. 6.
- ¹¹⁷Morris Schappes, "The Political Origins of the United Hebrew Trades," Journal of Ethnic Studies, vol. 5, Spring 1977, p. 24.
- ¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 24, 25.
- ¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 31.
- ¹²⁰Arbeiter Zeitung, March 4, 1892, p. 3; A. Cahan, Pages From My Life, vol. 3, p. 64.
- ¹²¹New York Sun, September 4, 1894, p. 3.
- ¹²²Ibid.
- ¹²³Ibid., September 5, 1894, p. 1.
- ¹²⁴For elaboration of these differences, see Chapter Five and Chapter Six.
- ¹²⁵Ha-Ivry, July 10, 1892, "Concerning the leaders of the community."

CHAPTER 5

THEMES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

According to David Montgomery, the study of collective action holds great fascination because it provides the historian with "revealing glimpses of class relations and attitudes, which arise from but are disguised by the daily production and distribution of commodities."¹ Historians of the Jewish working class, however, viewed the period and its strikes mainly as an introduction to later organizational successes and victorious battles with employers. Jewish workers, the protagonists of these accounts, emerge as an anarchic proletariat which had to learn how to organize and act collectively.² This description offers but a partial understanding of the Jewish working class. The view that unions are an essential base for strikes insulates the workers in one exclusive set of economic relationships with their employers. It disregards other factors such as horizontal links within the immigrant community which made no less a contribution in shaping collective action. Moreover, the economic model of the workers' world which underlies the theories of the "biological" concept of strike history is a narrow prism obstructing the variety of factors which

contributed to the strikes on the Jewish East Side. A closer examination of these forms of protest reveals that some of the industrial norms which Jewish workers encountered were abhorrent to their values and consequently, resisted.

Economic grievances were not the only cause for protest. Workers collectively resisted employers' unlimited control over the work force especially on the shop floor. The prerogative assumed by the boss to abuse his workers verbally, to punish them physically, to hire and fire at whim, were some of the popular causes for protest. A second large category of strikes were those collective actions which rejected the economy of the market place and aimed to radically reshape the industry by introducing order and uniformity into cutthroat competition. With this goal in mind, Jewish workers wanted to abolish the contracting system, the task system and piece work, replacing them with uniform pay and conditions of "inside" work.

Some collective actions, however, defy any clear-cut definition. As Michelle Perrot and David Montgomery suggest, these acts, which were not initiated as a means for obtaining well-defined demands, were inspired by a total repudiation of the capitalist system.³

Above all, the study of Jewish immigrants in New York shows that workers' collective actions initiated in the workplace, reached out beyond the confines of the factory into the community itself. The partial answer to the much-

criticized "anarchism" of Jewish workers stems from this mutual relationship.

Some Traditional Interpretations of Labor Unrest

The themes of insularity and helplessness due to the backward consciousness of the immigrant-worker especially in the years preceding organized mass unions, were much discussed issues in the ranks of contemporary Jewish and American labor circles, as well as by the chroniclers of the Jewish labor movement. Focusing on the inability of Jewish workers to organize and to maintain unions, contemporary writers viewed the Jewish workers as either militant, albeit misguided and undisciplined, or as apathetic because of lack of class consciousness.

Testimonies from the period confirm the latter view - that at the beginning "everybody was a world for himself," and that the consciousness of the collective was slow to develop from the spirit of isolation prevailing in the shop.⁴ Competition was fierce among the workers. During the months of employment workers competed for better quality bundles and for more numerous bundles to ensure survival during the months of slack. The contractors or the foremen in charge of distributing the assignments, were known to take advantage of their position of power by collecting "loans" from the workers which were never repaid.⁵ Everyone seeking work was

"deep into his own problems and troubles and had to worry about sending some money to his parents. I had to send some money home and that is why everyone also was for himself and worried about his own troubles," testified one immigrant.⁶ Similarly, another worker employed as a button maker by Hart, Schaffner and Marx of Chicago, explained that her fast pace of work was due to "an urge ... the more money I made, the sooner we could send for my mother and her six children."⁷ One worker remembered that "you didn't tell fellow-workers how much you made, and therefore one worker would rush the others, hoping that the boss would give him a raise."⁸

Piece work, the underlying cause for speed-up, promoted a climate of hostility and suspicion, and "made us each other's enemies."⁹ Moreover, workers had brought with them habits of mockery and humiliation.¹⁰ Strict discipline reinforced the isolation of the worker. In many shops there was no verbal communication because of speed-up and fear of informants. Strict rules forbade conversation among workers.¹¹ Pauline Newman, for example, remembered the discipline at the Triangle Shirt Company, where: "No conversation and no singing were allowed ... it was probably true of all other shops. Discussion among workers, even if they sat together, was not allowed."¹² Furthermore, employers fomented existing discords among workers by paying small "prizes" to select employees.¹³

The absence of the collective spirit and particularly

the absence of collectivity in stable unions, led some to believe simplistically that the immigrants were "stupid, uninformed and enslaved people without education and without working class awareness. We even had to teach them how to read a newspaper. They fell into a stupefying and enslaving atmosphere of the shop where they were not considered human."¹⁴ The Zukunft, a journal of the Jewish socialists, expressed a similar opinion which it shared with John R.

Commons:

The Jewish masses were not a genuine proletariat and lacked class consciousness of other immigrant groups. The Jewish worker regarded his laboring status as a temporary stepping stone leading to some respectable bourgeois position. When working conditions were bad, he turned to the union. 15

Other critics reproved Jewish workers for their militant spirit as expressed in anarchic and ineffectual outbursts. The propensity to strike was praised on the one hand but on the other, the unruly membership of short-lived unions was criticized by contemporaries and scholars alike. "It was difficult to hold everybody together," according to Abraham Rosenberg who recalled how new members, who were won over to the union cause at the height of the strike of 1888, did not have much patience for negotiating concessions and, in opposition to the advice of caution by the leaders, called to precipitate strikes.¹⁶ In the same vein, Henry White, the general secretary of the United Garment Workers, declared in 1901 his disapproval of an impending tailors-coatmakers strike which threatened to involve 25,000 to 50,000 workers:

We do not think that these strikes do any good, for the reason that they originate from organizations which grew up overnight, so that when they are victorious they are not in any position to reap the benefit of their victory. They cannot enforce their contracts and the union goes to pieces soon after their victory is assured." 17

These walkouts, without specific demands, appeared to the observers as yet another symptom of the anarchic character of Jewish workers. Strikes, according to some reports, were declared without a coherent list of complaints because they were aimed at obtaining redress to innumerable grievances.¹⁸ Furthermore, because they lacked the respectability and the restraint of union direction, the "angry and vindictive nature" of the strikes disturbed the contemporary public and labor alike. It is in this vein that the Tribune warned its readers to expect a "strike of a race" and not a strike of a union, when referring to the impending strike of Jewish tailors in 1893, the year of depression.¹⁹ In a similar tone, John Swinton warned the Jewish strikers of 1885 to use less violence declaring: "These poor fellows must learn how to conduct strikes."²⁰

Militant members, however, did not heed the advice for long-range plans for well coordinated and strategically organized actions. Union officers could not hold their members in check. Such was the case in 1897, when thousands of tailors demanded the abolition of the task system, and refused to heed their Executive who advised them to wait until affiliated with a central labor organization. Even Joseph Barondess, the once fiery leader of cloakmakers'

strikes in earlier years, warned the militants that their strike would be a failure, and counselled delay. While still in its preparatory stages of planning and drafting demands, crowds of tailors holding a vigil outside Walhalla Hall threatened to break the doors to the room where the closed meeting of the Executive Committee was in process. "Have you no pity for our wives and children who are starving," cried the men waiting in the street. Eventually, the crowds broke into the room and the Executive Committee gave the order to strike.²¹ Similarly, on the eve of the mass strike of 1910, hundreds of workers "beleaguered the offices of the union clamoring that the strike be called at once," blaming the vacillating leadership for having exploited the idea of general strike as a means for collecting dues.²²

Union leadership grew critical and weary of excitable members who joined the union only in anticipation of a strike. When 300 skirtmakers employed by John Bonwit applied to join the ILGWU they were suspected of being already on strike.²³ In the spirit of encouraging well-grounded unions, the Arbeiter Zeitung applauded 800 knee pants makers who gathered for a meeting to discuss strike funds even though there was "no strike nor slack. It was a real business meeting."²⁴

Though leaders did not believe that the object of unionization should be strike action, they wanted to build up strong organizations and were not deterred from using strike

rhetoric in order to recruit new members. In the case of the preparations for the cloakmakers strike of 1909, for example, the ILGWU forsook the traditional propaganda for the recruitment of new members and adopted strike agitation instead.²⁵ In order to organize the union among shirtwaist makers, the leaders decided to exploit the fact that "the trade was surcharged with restlessness and that a big venture [a strike] might catch the fancy of the workers."²⁶

In order to combat spontaneous and unauthorized actions, union leaders resorted to constitutional devices. The United Pants Makers' Union, for example, resolved in 1892 that, "No strike in any shop will be recognized without first informing the executive committee."²⁷ Similarly, the International Cloakmakers Union of New York and Brownsville resolved that no member shop had the right to go on strike without requesting it first from its local.²⁸ And, the cloakmakers of New York resolved in 1896 that "when a shop or a firm go on strike without the approval of the union, the union will not be responsible for such strikes."²⁹

Undisciplined strikes were not merely an illustration of the "scrapping spirit" of the strikers, as the historians described them. Such a description is the result of the traditional analysis which charted working class history in the isolation of the work place rather than in the setting of the community climate. The close involvement of the community in the affairs of the trade and vice versa, reveals

a host of issues overlooked by those who searched for the narrowly defined component of labor.

The Culture of Collective Action

Jewish militancy flourished as part of community action, in a climate of shared religious tradition, residential closeness and Old World ties. Moreover, everyone was in the same trade and the contractor was a well known figure. The workshop was in the neighborhood, sometimes at home, and never too far from the synagogue. The involvement of the community in the affairs of the trade was intimate. No wonder then that the neighborhood reflected the pulse of the trade.

The strength of these links was noted by contemporaries. Interpreted by the public as "strike fever," the spreading of strikes throughout the East Side, and then to other Jewish concentrations in Bayonne, Astoria, Brooklyn and Long Island mystified some observers. In this vein, the Tribune warned its readers that the impending strike of the tailors in 1893 will be an "impulsive and possibly of an angry and vindictive nature ... It will be a strike of a race."³⁰

The Tribune's remark concerned the involvement of the East Side in the affairs of its workers. Strong community ties transcended categories of trades and crafts. Moreover, the dividing lines between the trades were not yet clearly

established among immigrants who had been newly introduced to skills and crafts.³¹ The cloakmakers' strike in 1894, the year of severe economic depression, attracted not only cloakmakers, but also peddlers, expressmen and even liquor merchants. They all clamored to be part of the strike and to enjoy the unstinting support of the community which provided food and other services to the strikers.³²

Strike solidarity crossed lines of trade, craft and class not only in cases of assistance to needy strikers. Acts of violence, boycott and ostracism against transgressors of the working class code, were a communal act rather than a trade action. In 1901, for instance, during a strike of coatmakers, two expressmen who sympathized with the strikers were held on 500 dollar bail each on charge of "malicious mischief." Both were accused of leading a crowd of 75 striking coatmakers on a wrecking mission against coatmaking boss Abraham Samuels whose employers would not join the strike.³³

The communal-residential links, the glue which held together workers and their sympathizers, drew further strength from the common cultural heritage. The rhetoric of ancient enslavement became the vocabulary of rebellion for Socialists, Anarchists and unionists alike.

The "haranguing" Jewish orators and the packed meeting halls puzzled contemporaries. As a rule, the numerous East Side meeting halls where continuous meetings took place

for the duration of the strike, were all packed beyond capacity. Jewish workers oblivious to heat unbearable to Americans, according to one observer, crowded in suffocating conditions and listened fascinated to the words of the speakers.³⁴ At times of labor unrest, large crowds of strikers would move from one hall to another in order to attend every event. Large crowds would squeeze onto staircases or stand outside after being turned away because of lack of space inside the halls. The strikers, mostly men, would huddle in a manner similar to the traditional group praying or studying holy books, listening attentively. The imagery evoked by the speakers was drawn from the historical and religious experience of the listeners.

Jewish slavery in Egypt became the symbol for the toiling garment workers and Pharoah's scheme for enslaving Jews became a fitting parallel to contemporary employers who, like the autocratic and mighty kings of Egypt, were attempting to quell the spirit of workers through inhuman toil and sorrow.³⁵ "Fellow slaves," was Joseph Barondess' call to striking cloakmakers in 1894, while Meyer Schoenfeld, the leader of the coatmakers, reminded his men that their forefathers were also enslaved by their taskmasters in Egypt, and they must therefore follow their example and throw off their yoke.³⁶ In a similar vein, John Swinton reminded the Jewish workers that they are in the Land of Egypt, "in the house of bondage, WANTED, A MOSES."³⁷

The national-religious collective memory not only legitimized rebellion and facilitated the understanding of the industrial experience; it also made the synagogue a natural base for labor organizing. A group of religious Jews from Galicia, all old pressers of children's jackets, organized themselves and based their union in their synagogue. In one of their meetings, according to the account by Bernard Weinstein of the United Hebrew Trades, the president of the local delivered a union sermon evoking religious and historical symbols and traditions. To the question posed: "Who was the first walking delegate?," he provided the answer: "The first walking delegate of the Jewish people was Moses, and the Elders of the Sandedrin were the first executive board."³⁸

Black slavery and the familiar experience of oppression under the Czars, were other images frequently evoked as a parallel to industrial slavery and in contrast to the immigrants' vision of America. Thus, Barondess urged the strikers of Jonasson's factory to rebel against the slavery wages which were lower than the wages paid to black slaves.³⁹ Although the case of black slavery had been avenged, Jews became the new slaves who "took place of the Negroes who with great effort had won their freedom from slavery."⁴⁰ Another speaker jolted his listeners' memory of their life in their old country when he referred to Jewish workers as "white slaves" whose conditions he described as "worse than soldiers

in Russia."⁴¹ It was in this spirit that the Arbeiter Zeitung attacked the employers of Baltimore who demanded affidavits from previous bosses testifying to good behavior of new workers. "Are we in the dark Asiatic Russia or in free America?," asked the report on the situation of the Baltimore strikers.⁴²

The fiery speeches evoking the graphic language of slavery ancient and modern, were supplemented by the unorthodox conduct of meetings. There was "no program" to a meeting of striking tailors of 1901, for example, and "every now and then a speaker would get up and talk to the meeting in Yiddish."⁴³ Gatherings were not always addressed exclusively by leaders. During the strike of 1901, audience was addressed by rank and file members, the older speaking in Yiddish, the younger in English.⁴⁴

Strike meetings were attended not only by strikers. Prominent in their attendance were wives and children.⁴⁵ In 1894, for example, during a dramatic strike of cloakmakers, "a remarkable meeting" was conducted. In a hall filled to capacity with cloakmakers and their wives, the question of returning to work was put to a vote. "Do you want your husband working under the guard of Pinkertons?" asked Barondess. The question was rejected overwhelmingly, followed by verbal abuse, cries of "scab" and physical attacks against those who had returned to work and were present at the meeting.⁴⁶

The vocabulary of rebellion inspired and legitimized industrial action. These rebellions against the grievances imposed by the industrial system were not always of an economic character. The participants in some walkouts, for example, entertained the general and the vague hope of redress to a "multitude of grievances."⁴⁷ On occasions, the socialist leadership and the union, when successful in assuming control of these strikes, insisted on formulating specific demands.⁴⁸ Others, criticized by union leaders as wasteful and meaningless, never aimed to achieve any specific demands. The strikes which appeared unplanned and without stated objectives and which typically had a holiday atmosphere, indicate that not all organized actions of the period were a tactic to wring concessions from employers. Even the strikes which were conceived and planned by a union, were no less a channel for expressing general dissatisfaction. Dances organized by strikers, outings to Central Park and crowding the meeting halls were all celebrations of the successful, if short-lived, escapes from industrial discipline. The holiday atmosphere of these walkouts puzzled contemporaries and drew the criticism of labor circles. The so-called "beer strikes," criticized by union leaders, were initiated by workers of small shops without the knowledge of the union or the boss. Employers, familiar with the pattern, found their workers in Central Park and by bringing them a keg of beer and sometimes

guaranteeing small wage increases, they succeeded in bringing them back to work a few hours later.⁴⁹ Some contemporaries even reported that many bosses and workers were glad for a day off.⁵⁰

The cloakmakers' strike of 1894, despite the severe depression, struck observers with its festive spirit which pervaded the East Side, where a "crowd of men, many wearing greasy outing shirts, some of them carrying their coats on their arms, poured through the streets, moving from one hall to another to hear their speakers 'haranguing.'"⁵¹ The spirit of celebration accompanying strikes was particularly evident among women. When women who made children's jackets went on strike, they all got dressed in their holiday clothes, and danced while they met in Congress Hall to the music provided by the union.⁵² A Sunday-like atmosphere also marked the beginning of a strike of 2,500 women shirtmakers a year earlier. Dressed in white dresses and wearing yellow bonnets with green and red ribbons, traditionally timid women according to the World, sounded a resounding "yes" when asked to vote on strike action.⁵³ Similarly, 500 women who pledged to stand by the male cloakmakers who had walked out on a strike, celebrated their decision by dancing for several hours with the striking men.⁵⁴ Women employed in the tailoring trades also met to celebrate and to dance when they struck for a closed shop.⁵⁵

It is against the background of community ties and of

community identification with workers' struggle which transcended neat categories of disciplined union membership, that one should perhaps view the frustrated organizational attempts and the view of Jewish workers as an anarchic proletariat. The attempts to organize Jewish labor into sustained unions collided with the strong cultural ties linking together workers and the Jewish East Side community. Moreover, the relatively fluid lines between employments and skills, together with the unique function the community fulfilled in mediating between the immigrant and the sources of skill and employment, all stood in contradiction to unionism which ultimately aimed to draw distinct lines between the workers and the community as well as between the crafts themselves. Unions tried to supplant some of the functions which had been traditionally fulfilled by the informal community networks. On occasions, for example, unions tried to provide employment services to their workers by channeling them to places of employment. At times, however, union practices stood in stark contradiction to the practices within the immigrant community. Some older American unions, for example, attempted to rationalize the supply of labor and control the labor market through establishing control over apprenticeship. The union of overcoat and sackcoat makers, for instance, resolved "not to take any learners until there is a demand for workers in the trade."⁵⁶ With a similar goal in mind, the union of

cloakmakers of Chicago ruled that an operator can take only one apprentice-helper.⁵⁷ Similarly, cutters' union ruled that there would be one learner-apprentice for every ten cutters.⁵⁸

Above all, union philosophy aimed to divide labor along lines of crafts, a goal which ultimately would divide labor discontent into separate and tidy unionism. Workplace loyalties, however, were not entirely separate from community ties. It was the close ties between the two, rather than John Commons' notion that the instability and the unmanageability of Jews as union members were due to their inherently capitalistic and individualistic nature, which frustrated the early organizational efforts.

Struggles for Control of the Work Place

Workers rebelled against grievances inflicted by employers and against wrongs imposed on them by the industrial system. The employer, in many cases himself a newcomer to the industrial system, assumed the prerogative of physically and verbally abusing his workers and hiring firing at whim. This, in turn, inspired workers' resistance. Workers' militancy which challenged the unlimited powers of the bosses in the workplace, was characterized by its uncompromising attitude. Demands for immediate redress were much deplored by more experienced American labor leaders, by

the American public and even by Jewish Socialists. Ultimately, the grievance of lowly and inhumane treatment was obscured as other issues were proclaimed more crucial -- demands for better wages and hours and a closed shop. The former, in particular, were always more negotiable and more acceptable to employers and unions alike. Thus, in many cases, the immediate causes of strikes, which began as spontaneous demands for redress of grievances, were lost once the union and the socialist leadership took over the strike's control and began the process of drafting demands, and translating them into more concrete terms. The 1893 strike of 300 cloakmakers employed by Julius Stein, for instance, was triggered by "a lowly and degrading treatment" of the superintendent. It is not known, however, whether in addition to the wage increase demanded by the strikers, the issue of the superintendent was included in the final settlement.⁵⁹

Maltreatment and verbal abuse were both widespread practices. Max Paine, for example, later the Secretary of the United Hebrew Trades, recalled his own experience of receiving a beating from his boss in a knee-pants shop for having joined the union.⁶⁰ When other workers tried to restrain the angry boss, he shouted: "I will kill the green pumpkin. He wants to make revolts here? I will show him what America is!"⁶¹ In a dramatic display of anger, workers unscrewed their sewing machines and carried them out of the

shop. The demands presented later to the boss included recognition of the union, an increase in pay, no carrying of bundles of unmade clothes from the express to the shop located on the fourth floor, and payday every two weeks instead of irregular pay at the whim of the boss. Moreover, as part of the agreement, the boss himself had to carry the machines back to the shop and the boss' wife was to stop her curses and insults directed at the workers.⁶²

The first overwhelmingly Jewish strike of cloakmakers in August 1885, began also as a protest against lowly treatment of workers.⁶³ After the initial walkout, the strike and its organization were taken over by Jewish Socialist leadership which proceeded to formulate workers' demands, including shorter hours, increased wages, a uniform scale of prices for new styles which were to be determined by two experienced workers and the manufacturer rather than the superintendent, dismissal of scabs, reinstatement of all strikes and finally the demand for a closed shop. Though some contemporaries perceived the strike as a "revolt for bread and butter," others noted that the strikers of 1885 who "have been very roughly dealt with by their employers in the past," made a specific demand "to be treated with politeness and consideration."⁶⁴

Similarly, in a smaller strike, pressers staged a walkout in defiance of a hated foreman. It began after the dismissal of a presser for threatening the foreman with a

heavy iron, protesting the foreman's demand that he work overtime. As a result of the dismissal, 100 members of an independent union of "old pressers" walked out.⁶⁵ Another example of the importance attached to the code of behavior expected of the foremen was that even the successful wage settlement of 1909 did not guarantee the return of a group of women waistmakers until they had received a promise from the foreman to be treated more humanely.⁶⁶

Insults and maltreatment remained sensitive issues which could not receive due formulation within the legalistic procedure of peaceful settlements. In 1912 and in spite of the agreed Protocol for settling disputes, fifteen workers walked out in protest against one foreman's insulting behavior. According to the Protocol, an investigation through the established channels should have preceded the walkout; the workers, however, joined by comrades from other shops, refused to obey the Board of Grievances which called the workers to return to work within fifteen minutes. John Dyche, then the chief clerk of the Joint Board, retaliated against the unruly workers by sending others to take their places.⁶⁷

Ill treatment, physical and verbal abuse, as means of disciplining the work force, were supplemented by an equally contested weapon -- the right of the employer to hire and fire at will. Workers challenged this right formulating their demands in terms of union recognition and closed shop.

These demands which aimed to gain a share in the control over the work process were stubbornly resisted by the manufacturers who refused to agree to this encroachment on their prerogative. The cloakmakers' strike of 1890 demonstrated the importance of the issue in the struggle of Jewish workers, showing at the same time some basic differences between old and new labor.

The strike of 1890 began in the firm of Meyer Jonasson when the employers demanded that the workers pledge themselves not to join the union, hoping to avoid strikes at the height of the busy season. The workers refused and took action.⁶⁸ The first strikers were later joined by cutters.⁶⁹ A lockout of the cutters followed, resulting in a general strike-lockout including cloakmakers (operators), cutters and even contractors. Production of cloaks in New York came to a virtual halt.⁷⁰ The three sections of the workforce, united temporarily under the leadership of Consolidated Board, embarked on a battle against the Manufacturers' Association. The latter combined thirteen of the largest cloakmaking houses which vowed to resist and to fight the threat of workers' growing power. The Association guaranteed the loyalty of its members to the cause by demanding deposits of 1,000 dollars from each firm to be forfeited if the firm betrayed its commitment to the Association.⁷¹

Divisions in the camp of the workers were quick to appear. The major obstacle for continued harmony within the

labor camp lay in the diverse characters of its two main segments: the cloak cutters, the "aristocrats" of the cloak industry, many of whom were of German and Irish stock, and the Jewish cloakmakers, headed by Joseph Barondess, the manager of the Cloakmakers' Union and by Thomas H. Garside, their representative to the Consolidated Board. The cutters' demand centered around the issues of reimbursement for time lost during the lockout and the discharge of scabs. During the course of the negotiations, the cutters expressed a readiness for compromise. If the question of scabs were to be met by the manufacturers, they would be willing to drop the demand for reimbursement.⁷² The issue of scabs was ultimately settled when the cutters agreed to a symbolic gesture on the part of the manufacturers who promised to fire the scabs on Friday so they could join the union on the weekend and return to work on Monday.⁷³

The agreement with the cutters notwithstanding, the strike was, however, far from over. The major opposition to a successful comprehensive settlement of the strike came from the ranks of the Jewish cloakmakers who vowed to remain on strike forever, "before they would work with scabs."⁷⁴ The Jewish cloakmakers insisted therefore, that all hands employed in cloakmaking during the strike be discharged and "left for the union to dispose of as it sees fit," and that they only be hired if the union agreed by granting them a certificate.⁷⁵ The manufacturers refused to compromise on

the issue of scabs. Had it been a question of wages, they admitted, the issue would have been solved quickly.⁷⁶ Giving in to the demands of the cloakmakers, on the other hand, would be tantamount to a surrender of "all they have stood for," according to an editorial in the World.⁷⁷

Not all sections of the workforce stood behind the cloakmakers' demand. The skilled cutters were willing to settle with the Manufacturers' Association, and were therefore impatient with the cloakmakers who were adamant on the question of scabs. Dion W. Burke who represented the skilled cutters directed the 6,000 Jewish operators to agree to the terms offered by the manufacturers and to return to work, otherwise, "every labor organization would be arrayed against them, and the Operators' Union be entirely broken up."⁷⁸ Garside also wanted the operators to settle and admonished them for asking too much, for destroying the union and achieving nothing. Jewish leaders were similarly critical of workers contesting the issue of prevailing hiring practices, as in the case of a cloakmakers' strike of Philadelphia, when the strikers demanded that employers fire all scabs and drop the charges against two strike leaders. The editorial remarks of the Socialist Arbeiter Zeitung preached caution and moderation: "A strike is a battle against capital under the control of capital. In a revolution one can achieve anything, in a strike one must want only that which is possible to achieve."⁷⁹

The cloakmakers of New York remained unmoved, and earned a barrage of insults about anarchistic infiltration and faced a smear campaign against Barondess -- the "Czar" of the cloakmakers. "Every man familiar with the labor movement in this country knows that the concessions made by the cloak manufacturers gave all three of the unions a sweeping victory," reasoned Dion W. Burke, accusing Barondess and even Garside of anarchism, bent on creating a riot and using bombs "as they did in Chicago."⁸⁰

So important was this issue for the unskilled operators that they did not hesitate to destroy the Consolidated Board. The cutters returned to work after reaching an agreement with the manufacturers, followed shortly by contractors. The operators, on the other hand, voted 1,533 against 20 for the continuation of the strike. Despite the violence of the strikers and the doom-laden forecasts that the operators were "cutting their own throat," pressures of the busy season contributed to a favorable conclusion of the strike.⁸¹ The tone and the style of the final meeting between triumphant Barondess and the employers, amazed those present. Gabriel Schwab, one of the representatives of the manufacturers thus summarized the proceedings: Barondess "made the manufacturers give him what he wanted, ran the whole meeting, licked them thoroughly and...is laughing in his sleeve."⁸² Victory was celebrated on the East Side with red flags, a band playing the Marseillaise and enthusiastic applause for those who

brought it about.⁸³

In addition to the uncompromising attitude assumed by the Jewish cloakmakers on the issue of scabs, the strike of 1890 offers also a glimpse into the differences in forms of protest as practiced by the Jewish cloakmakers on one hand and the veteran and skilled cutters on the other. Violent attacks on scabs and employers who refused to stop production characterized Jewish conduct of the strike. The anarchic image of the strike -- described as being "stained by blood" -- was further reinforced by Barondess' threats to journalists for misrepresenting facts, by his alleged declarations that the capitalists should be "swept out of existence," and by the Jewish workers' plans to abolish private property and thus correct the mistakes made "by the heroic forefathers of this country."⁸⁴

These and similar statements as well as the violent behavior of the strikers occasioned sharp criticism from native Americans and trade unionists alike. "You are not an American citizen ... but you assume more authority than a native would. If you were in Russia you would be sent to Siberia for this," Judge Duffy of Essex Market Police Court admonished Max Abrahams, a cloakmaker arrested for ordering the workers of Meyer Goldberg and Son to stop work.⁸⁵ Arthur Dale, the chairman of the Consolidated Board representing the strikers, criticized the violent spirit of the strike in a similar tone: "As American citizens we are not accustomed to

such dictions or threats."⁸⁶

The strike of 1890 was one of the crucial and effective strikes of the period. It forged a strong union of 8,000 members headed by Joseph Barondess who led the cloakmakers to another victory in a lockout of 1891 and who again brought the manufacturers "to their knees."⁸⁷ Like the strike of the preceding year, the origins of the 1891 strike were not in wages but rather in the question of "who shall and who shall not be employed."⁸⁸ Similarly to the strike of 1890, Barondess and the defiant strikers continued to wage war on scabs and recalcitrant employers. This was a strike about the dismissal of thirty workers by an employer who claimed that they were not competent to do the work.⁸⁹ Barondess, however, demanded that the workers be retained and employed "in the same capacity."⁹⁰ Another manufacturer complained that Barondess ordered him to employ a worker who decided to switch from piece work to time work. The dismissal of that worker brought about a strike on his firm, a strike which was fully supported by Barondess.⁹¹

The demand of the workers for control of hiring and firing embodied in a demand for closed union shop, became the repeated trigger for strikes of cloakmakers and coatmakers almost annually. The demand for exclusive employment of union members at Meyer Jonasson, became the issue again in February of 1892.⁹² Similarly, the decision to stage a sympathy walkout because of unjustified dismissal was taken

by women shirtwaist workers employed in the factory of Goldsmith's and Co., in 1901. The circumstances of this strike were somewhat different. This was a case of workers who refused to abide exclusively by the timetable of the workplace and who insisted on bringing in their own idea of fairness and justice. The women employed by the firm complained that since there was little work for them to do, they thought it to be their right to do their own sewing on the job, which was forbidden by company regulation, even though they were on piece work, and they had to sit idly and wait. One Saturday, they rebelled and quit work at noon since there was nothing for them to do. When they reappeared to work on Monday, they were fired.⁹³

Employers resisted at all levels labor's attempts to control their workplace. Albert Hochstadter, the president of Clothing Manufacturers' Association said that employers "are not willing to have their business run by labor unions."⁹⁴ Comparing the clothing strike of 1901 to the steel strike, he stated: "The question is not now primarily one of wages, hours or sanitary conditions of labor, but a question of union or non-union shops."⁹⁵

The waistmakers' strike of 1909 drew similar reactions. The waistmakers' strike at the Triangle Waist Company began over dismissals and was another example of sympathetic collective action which had nothing to do with conventional union demands. "It is the most astonishing strike I ever

knew. The wage demands mean nothing. We are actually paying more than the union asks," declared the employers.⁹⁶

The demand for union shop, declared by the New York Times as "unAmerican," became again the inflammatory issue in July 1910 when the cloakmakers walked out on strike, soon to be joined by 6,000 waistmakers. The majority of strikers rejected the proposed preferential shop as outlined by Louis Brandeis and which had already been approved by strike leaders.⁹⁷ In opposition to the leadership, the rank and file rallied behind the call for closed shop.⁹⁸ It was reported that a crowd of "excited persons" attacked the offices of the Verheit on East Broadway because of an editorial in favor of the settlement proposed by Brandeis and the agitation for closed shop continued despite the injunction against picketing issued by the court.⁹⁹

Although the strike was ultimately settled on the basis of preferential shop, the shortcomings of the agreement became soon apparent. Some of the strikers, for example, were never rehired, while substitute workers retained their jobs.¹⁰⁰ Additional loopholes within the agreement provided ample opportunities for disagreement and consequently, throughout the period of the Era of Protocol, workers continued to contest the power of employers.¹⁰¹

Workers' militancy against inhumane behavior of bosses persisted well into the Era of Protocol. The newcomers into the industrial experience perceived it as an assault on their

basic rights and an offense to their customary notions of social norms. The rebellions were their attempts to establish norms of behavior which would limit employers' power. The idea and the urgency of the closed shop were the further articulations of these demands to curtail the prerogatives assumed by the boss.

The Struggle for Control of Production

The struggle for control of production involved wages and hours, particularly the task and piece system, but also the larger questions of organization of production in the industry.

One of the important issues taken up by the workers was the anarchic character of the garment industry. Employers vied with each other in exploiting the cheapest sources of labor. Small workshops in particular, known as the "kitchen and bedroom" shops, were the setting for unregulated work hours, low wages paid irregularly and unscrupulous bosses who often disappeared with their workers' wages. Workers aimed therefore to limit the exploitation of the smallest contractors, known also as the "cockroaches," who were associated with inhumanely long hours, speed-ups and derisory wages.¹⁰² For this reason the shirtmakers demanded in 1890 that a shop should have no fewer than fifteen sewing machines, hoping thereby to eliminate the abuses of the

smallest contracting establishments.¹⁰³ In 1894, in a less radical demand, the vestmakers defined a legitimate shop as having no fewer than three sewing machines and a boss who did no actual work.¹⁰⁴

Regulating work and the process of production in small shops was the goal of many small-scale actions. In one of the shops, for example, there was an incident of a strike with the modest but relevant objective of installing a clock.¹⁰⁵ Similar strikes in small shops aimed to define more precisely workers' duties and thereby put a limit to employers' power in workplace. For instance, there was the demand for the abolition of carrying bundles of unmade clothes from the express wagon to the shop, the demand to provide sewing machines for the workers, for free supply of electricity and for regular pay.¹⁰⁶

Other strikes, however, trying more ambitiously to reach beyond single-shop settlement and regulation, aimed to eliminate the system of contracting altogether. "Bosses, little bosses and tiny bosses" were all considered the plague of the trade.¹⁰⁷ The entire system of contracting and sub-contracting and the concomitant sweated labor were the target of workers' action aiming to smash the system by bringing the process of production out of tenement rooms into large factories supervised by employers and accessible to public scrutiny. This concentration of production, it was hoped, would help to eliminate the evils of unrestrained competition

in the industry and would achieve a uniformity of wages and hours, which, in turn, would put an end to competition among workers.

The attempts to abolish contracting were but one path chosen towards attaining the goal of uniformity and order in the industry. Battles for the abolition of task and piece systems were another means towards uniform and equitable wages.¹⁰⁸ The daily "task" was a particularly vicious type of exploitation, prevalent especially in men's garment industry, whereby the contractors could increase the task without altering wages accordingly. The "task" required a production unit of several workers to complete a number of garments (the daily task) for a set price. In 1886, the daily task of a team employing a tailor, operator and a finisher, consisted of 12-20 coats, compelling the workers to work 16-18 hours a day.¹⁰⁹ Thus, only the fastest among tailors could accomplish the day's task, while the others could hardly hope to earn 18 dollars, the weekly earnings set theoretically for accomplishing the daily tasks, six days a week.

Both demands -- the abolition of task and piece systems -- aimed also to abolish the wage competition among workers. By rejecting the opportunities open for individual gain and reward to the fast workers for working harder, Jewish workers rejected the individualistic ethos of the employers and elaborated their own form of solidarity as expressed in equal

wages and equal hours.

Workers' attempts of reform met with opposition from manufacturers and contractors alike. In 1886, the striking cloakmakers demanded to be employed in quarters provided by the manufacturers and not in rooms and lodgings owned by contractors. The manufacturers condemned the demand as "unjust," and Meyer Jonasson, announced in response to the workers' demand that "it would be absolutely impossible to allow them to work in buildings owned by the manufacturers as there would be no room for them."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, claimed Jonasson, Jewish immigrants, and especially observant Jews, were better off working in small workshops, where Sunday laws did not apply.¹¹¹ In the end, manufacturers who were eager to settle the strike, made a promise to the arbitration committee that they would extend assistance in establishing cooperative shops and some even agreed to the suggestion to "do away with the contract system entirely."¹¹² But when the workers became sufficiently weakened by the strike, the manufacturers declared that the demand to abolish the contracting system was unrealistic, reiterating their earlier refusal:

They demand us to completely revolutionize our business before July 15 by the abolition of contract work and the establishment of factories. The question is not one of prices. Had they demanded that the question would have been settled long ago ... The system [of contracting] is a necessity, having been an adjunct of the cloak trade for fifty years, and it would require much time to change it."¹¹³

Clearly more than just money was at stake -- the abolition of the contract system and the initiation of some sort of cooperation would endanger not only the sweating and cheap labor but the system of control as a whole.¹¹⁴

The strike of 1886 came to an end only when a promise was given that no tenement house work would be permitted and that no union member would be forced to work for contractors who ran fewer than five machines. This last provision was intended to prevent the worst abuses of the smallest contractors.¹¹⁵ However, this agreement constituted a weak compromise on the fundamental issue, with the manufacturers merely promising "we will do what we can to control the contractors," a commitment which could hardly prevent future abuses of labor in tenement sweat shops.¹¹⁶

The obvious failure of the strike was blamed by contemporary labor on its ill timing -- during a short season -- on the Jewish strikers who did not coordinate their action and heed the advice of a central labor organization, and, above all, on the ill-advised objectives.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the wasted effort and the futility of the strike when thousands of workers returned to work for the very contractors they aimed to put out of business, could not escape the notice of contemporary commentators. However, despite the criticisms, Jewish workers believed that they had succeeded in dealing a death blow to the hated system. In celebration of their victory, they poured onto the streets of

the East Side carrying brooms intended to symbolize that the sweating system was swept away once and for all.¹¹⁸

The same year also witnessed a strike of tailors (employed largely in men's garment industry) demanding the abolition of the task system and its substitution by regular weekly wages to be determined "by what the men's services may be found to be worth."¹¹⁹ Coat contractors, were quick to reject these demands claiming that the new wage scale would drive them out. Some, however, under pressure because of the busy season settled with the workers, signing an agreement to abolish the task system, to employ union men who were to work ten hours a day for five days and nine hours on their sixth day of work, and who were to receive weekly wages, uprooting once and for all the hated task system.¹²⁰ The task system, however, was not abolished in the coat industry, the workers achieving only token reduction of two coats.¹²¹

The task grew enormously and reached, in 1894, due to the unemployment of the continued depression, 38 coats a day -- an impossible target even for the fastest tailor who could not finish more than 20 coats a day.¹²² Exploitation flourished especially in smaller shops employing 5-20 workers.¹²³ The average weekly pay of that year amounted to 9 dollars, although the contractors claimed that tailors could earn 18-19 dollars weekly.¹²⁴ According to one coat maker on strike of that year, it took him two days to earn one day's pay and although he made 100 coats within four days

working 18 hours a day, he indignantly reported: "they called me lazy."¹²⁵

"A fair living wage for a fair week's work," was the slogan of thousands of strikers that year.¹²⁶ The East Side became charged with strike activity uniting temporarily rival unions and different trades, witnessing violent outbursts of strikers punishing employers and scabs. The demand to abolish the sweating system and piece work was at the core of coatmakers' and cloakmakers' strike of that year, which coincided with the second year of economic depression. Wages were falling, hours were increasing and new tasks were being imposed on the workforce especially in the small contracting establishments. The years of depression witnessed also an attempt on part of the manufacturers to expand their powers. It was alleged, for example, that Meyer Jonasson insisted his workers give him a two dollar-deposit to be forfeited if they went on strike. If they returned to work after an attempt to strike, they were to lose two dollars of their pay over the next nine months.¹²⁷ The manufacturers, united in an Association with a 500,000 dollar capital, declared that they were willing to negotiate on wages but refused to submit to other "unjust demands," denouncing the strike, the power-hungry Barondess and other "unscrupulous agitators."¹²⁸ Jonasson declared that such concessions as the workers demanded "would be equal to giving up our business to our workmen," and threatened to move his enterprise from New York

to other parts of the country or even abroad.¹²⁹ Daniel Richman, the Chairman of the Manufacturers' Association, accused labor leaders of being "more rum besotted and whiskey soaked than the leaders of any other trade union."¹³⁰

The coatmakers, unlike the strikers in cloak manufacture of the same year, got a speedy settlement, which was regarded as a positive step toward the elimination of small contractors.¹³¹ The cloakmakers were, on the other hand, met with firmness helped by an escalated police participation, active in protecting strike-breakers and property.¹³² In contrast to the stand taken by the police, public opinion, in sporadic shows of sympathy to the plight of the Jews on the East Side, looked forward to the elimination of the sweating and tenement work, when 40,000 Jewish families will "assuredly possess privileges as never before, in all their lives, have belonged to them anywhere."¹³³

The strike ended in a defeat and in a return to work at reduced wages. The defeated strikers were plagued by hunger, despair and the cold winter, depended for survival on the good will of settlement societies and employment in public works such as street cleaning. The defeat served to further deterioration of work conditions and to growing tasks especially for tailors.¹³⁴ In July of 1895, at the height of the depression, the Brotherhood of Tailors which had 15,000 members in men's clothing, also struck in an attempt to abolish tenement sweat shops.¹³⁵ Again their plight and

their "model strike" won the sympathy of the public alarmed by the health hazards and the spread of infectious diseases through garments manufactured in homes with poor sanitary conditions. The New York Tribune, for example, found that "public welfare is commonly invaded and universally menaced by the system," and argued for the workers' demands.¹³⁶ The strike also won the approval of the Tribune for its model conduct and workers' determination to avoid any association with Emma Goldman.¹³⁷ Although an agreement was signed by mid-December, employers repudiated it reserving the right to hire and to fire and to impose upon the workers the obligation to finish a day's task even if it took more than 10 hours, which meant that workers had to finish it in their own time.¹³⁸

In 1896, the coatmakers were again preparing for a strike attempting again to deal a death blow to the ever increasing task system.¹³⁹ Although the strike of 1896 was successfully concluded by the striking coatmakers, like preceding strikes, it did not destroy the task or the contracting system, and in 1897, the coatmakers embarked on another strike. The violence, characteristic to all Jewish strikes, provoked John Swinton in 1897, for example, to urge the strikers for patience and perseverance. Like many of his contemporaries, Swinton also regarded the attempt to establish a time system in the place of the task system, as a pipe dream. Using apt historical-traditional metaphors, he

compared the struggle against the coatmaking bosses to that of the Israelites against their traditional enemies, the Amalekites, Jesuits and other oppressors. But, like the Israelites who suffered forty years in the desert, "there are very few lentils to eat at present ... the men must have patience."¹⁴⁰

Repeated attempts to eradicate both contracting and task continued into the twentieth century. In 1901, a mass strike of 50,000-70,000 workers, mainly tailors, demanded to abolish the contracting system and to force the manufacturers to deal directly with the workers.¹⁴¹ The strike met again with opposition of labor circles. Henry White, the general secretary of the United Garment Workers, the parent organization of the Brotherhood of Tailors and the traditional sponsor of tailors' strikes, stated that "we do not think that these strikes do any good, for the reason that they originate from organizations which grow up overnight, so that when they are victorious they are not in any position to reap the benefit of their victory. They cannot enforce their contracts, and the union goes to pieces soon after that victory is assured."¹⁴² Under the pressure of UGW, the tailors dropped their original demand to abolish contracting, postponing it until the following year.¹⁴³ Instead, they demanded that all contracts must be made with the manufacturer and not the contractors, thus making the manufacturers responsible for the conditions of work in the

contractors' shops.¹⁴⁴ Also, in the same settlement, strikers demanded of the manufacturers to withdraw work from contractors if proper and sufficient cause were shown by the union.¹⁴⁵

Simultaneously with the industry-wide demands for greater workers' control over the system of production, some segments of the industry, and sometimes even workers of individual manufacturers, aimed to settle for agreements regulating pay, hours and wages between one manufacturer and his contractors, rather than tackling the contractor-worker relation in the industry as a whole. Such was the settlement of the Shirt Makers' Union strike in 1894, and, this was the goal of 250 cloakmakers employed by five contractors all of whom received work from one manufacturer, who sought together in 1892 a uniform rise in their piece prices.¹⁴⁶ In general, however, the attempts to transform the system of production met with short-lived victories.

The small shop system of garment production proved durable and resistant to change. The persistence of the small-size shops, the inherent inability of the manufacturers and the contractors to control their work force and the futility of workers' attempts to transform the system of production, all had far-reaching implications for the future success of industrial unionism. Thus, unlike conditions in the steel industry, for example, where centralized capital successfully stemmed the growth of industrial unionism

through wage incentives and orientation toward business unionism, garment manufacturers' associations were short-lived phenomena. Their efforts to control the labor force were repeatedly cut by fierce competition. Furthermore, the receding importance of such skilled workers as cutters and the predominance of unskilled and semi-skilled workers whose unity was further underscored by geographic closeness and by the closely-knit fabric of the community, allowed immigrant clothing workers of the ILGWU to mount in the 1900's a broadly organized opposition based on trade rather than craft.¹⁴⁷

FOOTNOTES

¹David Montgomery, "Strikes in Nineteenth Century America," Social Science History 4 (February 1980): 81.

²Melech Epstein, for example, traced the growing strength of Jewish labor from "Early Failures" (Chapter 7) to "Maturity" (Chapter 19) and "The Taste of Victory" (Chapter 20). Melech Epstein, Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 2 vols. (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1950). Similarly, the successful organization of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in 1900, marked for the historian Louis Levine the end of the period of "darkness." Louis Levine, The Women's Garment Workers (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1924), "Darkness and Revolt," pp. 105-195.

³Ibid., p. 85.

⁴J. Guterman, YIVO, RG 113, p. 3.

⁵E.M. Wagner, YIVO, RG 102, no. 45, p. 187; B. Lilienblum, YIVO, RG 113, p. 37.

⁶J. Dubna, YIVO, RG 102, no. 147, p. 13.

⁷R. August, YIVO, RG Antonovsky Editorial Records (Los Angeles Interviews), np.

⁸A. Gummer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 44, np.

⁹A. Balson, YIVO, RG 113, p. 30.

¹⁰B. Fenster, YIVO, RG 113, pp. 12, 13; S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 57, p. 26.

¹¹A. Herschowitz, YIVO, RG 113, p. 3. Arbeiter Zeitung, September 28, 1894, p. 2, reported on a shirt shop on Monroe Street known for its discipline.

¹²P. Newman, YIVO, RG 113, p. 6.

¹³S. Langer, YIVO, RG 102, no. 57, p. 26.

¹⁴Z. Scher, "The Shop: The Every Day Life of the Worker," in United Hebrew Trades: Fiftieth Anniversary, 1888-1938 (New York 1938), pp. 211, 212. Scher was an organizer for the United Hebrew Trades.

- ¹⁵ Zukunft, April 1892, p. 18, quoted in Bernard H. Bloom, "Yiddish-Speaking Socialists in America: 1892-1905." American Jewish Archives 12 (April 1960).
- ¹⁶ Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, pp. 12, 13.
- ¹⁷ New York Tribune, July 20, 1901, p. 2. John Swinton criticized the unions for disappearing quickly after winning gains in strikes. John Swinton's Paper, August 23, 1885, p. 4.
- ¹⁸ New York Times, July 23, 1901, p. 3, March 4, 1897, p. 4.
- ¹⁹ New York Tribune, March 29, 1893, p. 1.
- ²⁰ John Swinton's Paper, August 23, 1885, p. 4.
- ²¹ New York Times, May 17, 1897, p. 10.
- ²² Rosenberg quoted in Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 178.
- ²³ Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 139. The incident occurred probably in 1907. Though Bonwit workers were not on strike, they had begun negotiating the new prices for the coming season.
- ²⁴ Arbeiter Zeitung, June 2, 1893, p. 2.
- ²⁵ Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 188.
- ²⁶ Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 151. The rhetoric of the strike proved highly successful in 1909 when two thousand new workers joined the union and after Clara Lemlich's fiery speech in Cooper Union meeting, 15,000 joined the ranks of the already striking workers. Ibid., pp. 153, 154.
- ²⁷ Arbeiter Zeitung, May 20, 1892, p. 3.
- ²⁸ Ibid., January 5, 1894, p. 3.
- ²⁹ Ibid., March 6, 1896, p. 3.
- ³⁰ New York Times, July 24, 1901, p. 2. An "epidemic" of strikes was also reported in 1896. Ibid., July 30, 1896, p. 3. New York Tribune, March 29, 1893, p. 1. The Tribune also promised its readers that whatever its outcome, the strike "will be full of interest to the student of sociology." Ibid.
- ³¹ The switching of trades was common on the East Side.

It was in this vein that Israel Barsky, one of the leaders of the United Brotherhood of Tailors stated in 1888: "According to my opinion, pantsmakers, cloakmakers, vestmakers, shirtmakers, all should belong to the same union ... we see very often that a cloakmaker becomes a vestmaker, a pantsmaker becomes a jacketmaker, a shirtmaker becomes a pantsmaker, and the other way around." Folkzeitung, February 20, 1888, p. 2. Barsky was an advocate of an industrial union which would embrace all garment workers from humble and least-skilled buttonhole makers to custom tailors. These communal ties received their most concrete expression in the cases of unions whose members were all landsleit -- hailing from the same home town or the same region. In one such case, pressers of children's jackets who all hailed from Galicia, were all members of one union and one synagogue. Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, pp. 270, 268, 269.

³²Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, pp. 80, 83.

³³New York Tribune, July 24, 1901, p. 2. Additional forms of community action will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁴New York Times, July 22, 1901, p. 2.

³⁵Arbeiter Zeitung, September 7, 1894, p. 2.

³⁶New York Sun, September 8, 1894, p. 2, September 5, 1894, p. 1.

³⁷John Swinton's Paper, August 23, 1885, p. 4.

³⁸Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 270. Sanhedrin was a political council and a religious court in the second century B.C. Weinstein reported another case where the secretary of the Jacket Makers' Union was also a sexton of a synagogue in Pitt Street as well as a treasurer of "an old-fashioned lodge" referring probably to a landsmanshaft of old immigrants. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

³⁹Yudishes Tageblatt, February 22, 1892, p. 1.

⁴⁰Yudishes Volksblatt, August 13, 1882, pp. 483-485, "A Lament From America."

⁴¹Arbeiter Zeitung, January 5, 1894, p. 1.

⁴²*Ibid.*, July 8, 1892, p. 3; July 15, 1892, p. 5. The issue of the affidavits became one of the reasons for a strike of the Baltimore tailors.

⁴³New York Times, July 22, 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., July 23, 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Arbeiter Zeitung, May 23, 1897, p. 1.

⁴⁶ New York Sun, November 5, 1894, p. 1. Wives were also targets for pressure by manufacturers and their superintendents who combed the East Side to persuade them to get their husbands back to work. The employers and their emissaries on this and other occasions were met with verbal and physical attacks. Ibid.

⁴⁷ New York Times, July 23, 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁸ A strike of Children's Jacket Makers' Union was one case of a walkout preceding demands. Ibid., July 30, 1896, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 12.

⁵⁰ New York Tribune, July 25, 1900, p. 14.

⁵¹ New York Sun, September 6, 1894, p. 1.

⁵² New York Times, February 21, 1895, p. 2.

⁵³ New York World, September 23, 1894, p. 7.

⁵⁴ New York Times, July 31, 1901, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., July 3, 1904, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Arbeiter Zeitung, July 8, 1892, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., July 1, 1892, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., April 20, 1893, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., May 26, 1893, p. 6.

⁶⁰ The incident occurred probably in the late 1880's. Quoted in Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 258.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 259.

⁶³ The numerical preponderance of Jews among the cloakmakers in that strike is confirmed by the World which reported the case of four tailors, the only English speaking members of the Cloakmakers Union, who "could not get any satisfaction from the union, which transacted its business in Hebrew." New York World, August 24, 1885, p. 2. According to Abraham Rosenberg, the chronicler of cloakmakers'

struggles, the strike began as a local walkout because the contractor slapped a worker, spreading eventually to many cloakmaking establishments. Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, pp. 7, 8. It is difficult to determine whether Rosenberg's account refers to the 1885 strike or to the cloakmakers' strike which took place the following year.

⁶⁴New York Sun, August 23, 1885, p. 9; New York World, August 18, 1885, p. 2; New York Times, August 20, 1885, p. 8; Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, pp. 32-43. Eventually, the demand for a closed shop was substituted in the final agreement by a concession for preferential shop.

⁶⁵The strike failed to achieve its aim mainly because of the disintegration of the union, according to Rosenberg's account. Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 149. According to the same account, the union could have survived had it not been for the unrestrained behavior of the pressers. However, the strike and the union failed because of the reluctance of the ILGWU to support a sympathy strike of all workers employed in the firm.

⁶⁶Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 364.

⁶⁷Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, pp. 251, 252.

⁶⁸New York Sun, May 27, 1890, p. 5.

⁶⁹Ibid., June 15, 1890, p. 1.

⁷⁰According to Rosenberg, the strike began as a walkout when a union worker employed by the firm Goldschmidt and Platt was fired for insubordination after playing a prank on one of the bosses. Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, pp. 19, 20. The demand to reinstate the fired worker was refused by the firm and all workers were locked out. Ibid. The New York Times and the New York World gave yet another version of the causes for the strike. They reported that the manufacturers locked out their cutters because of a successful national boycott against goods manufactured by Alfred Benjamin. Other firms joined in the lockout fearing a similar boycott. New York Times, July 10, 1890, p. 5; New York World, July 12, 1890, p. 3.

⁷¹New York World, June 17, 1890, p. 4.

⁷²New York Sun, July 12, 1890, p. 6.

⁷³New York Sun, July 16, 1890, p. 1. Once the agreement was reached, the cutters were willing to admit the scabs to the ranks of their union for the high fee of 100 dollars. Ibid., July 17, 1890, p. 1, July 22, 1890, p. 5.

⁷⁴New York World, July 17, 1890, p. 5. According to the World and much to the surprise of the manufacturers, only 500 skilled operators could be found to fill the places of the strikers. Ibid., July 26, 1890, p. 5.

⁷⁵New York Sun, July 17, 1890, p. 1; New York Times, July 19, 1890, p. 3.

⁷⁶New York Sun, June 26, 1890, p. 3.

⁷⁷New York World, July 21, 1890, p. 12; New York Times, July 19, 1890, p. 3.

⁷⁸New York World, July 20, 1890, p. 3.

⁷⁹Arbeiter Zeitung, September 12, 1890, p. 2.

⁸⁰New York World, July 23, 1890, p. 8. In its effort to discredit Baroness the World consistently spelled his name "Baron-Deess" thus attributing a megalomaniac image to the charismatic leader of the cloakmakers. Also, New York Times, July 25, 1890, p. 8.

⁸¹New York Sun, July 21, 1890, p. 7, July 24, 1890, p. 5; New York World, July 4, 1890, p. 12; New York Times, July 4, 1890, p. 1.

⁸²New York Sun, July 25, 1890, p. 2. The agreement provided that scabs were to be discharged and encouraged to join the union. However, in contrast to a previous draft rejected by the strikers, there would be no time limit during which the union was committed to accept the strikebreakers. Among other concessions, there were increases in wages, a closed shop in the cloak industry, abolition of inside contracting, reinstatement of all those who had been dismissed and employment only of those committed to union membership. Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴New York Times, July 23, 1890, p. 2; New York World, July 4, 1890, p. 12, July 17, 1890, p. 5.

⁸⁵New York World, July 24, 1890, p. 8. Judge Duffy's eloquence, however, was wasted, since his audience did not understand English. New York Sun, July 24, 1890, p. 5.

⁸⁶New York World, July 22, 1890, p. 8. The tactics of the cutters will be analyzed in Chapter 6.

⁸⁷New York Sun, March 20, 1891, p. 1.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²New York Times, February 20, 1892, p. 9, March 1, 1890, p. 2. This strike, however, witnessed the weakening of Barondess' leadership. His involvement in the "Jamaica affair" (see Chapter 5) of the previous year, his imprisonment and the ascendance of rival leaders and rival unions, all weakened the union's stand in its struggle. Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, pp. 53-63.

⁹³New York Times, June 4, 1901, p. 6.

⁹⁴New York Times, August 4, 1901, p. 2.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶New York Times, November 26, 1909, p. 5. The New York Times wrote that the women didn't even know why they were striking and knew very little about unions. Ibid., December 4, 1909, p. 20. The striking women demanded to be informed by the foreman during quiet season as to how many hours of work they were to get on the following day so that they could attend to their daily affairs. They also demanded equal pay, weekly pay and the abolition of piece work. Ibid.

⁹⁷New York Times, December 28, 1909, p. 8, August 28, 1910, p. 3. The preferential shop meant that though employers would give preference to union men, they retained the right to hire non-union labor when the latter were more competent than union workers.

⁹⁸"We want the closed shop," was the slogan on banners carried in a parade of strikers. Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid., August 28, 1910, p. 3, August 28, 1910, p. 1. The injunction was issued on the basis that the demand for a closed shop constituted a conspiracy in restraint of trade.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., September 7, 1910, p. 20.

¹⁰¹The Bureau of Labor reported, for example, that 75% of complaints submitted to the arbitration between April 1911 and October 31, 1,913 cases were grievances relating to wages and "unjustifiable discharges." U.S. Bureau of Labor, Bulletin no. 14, 1914, p. 20, quoted in Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 238.

¹⁰²Arbeiter Zeitung, March 21, 1890.

¹⁰³Ibid., March 14, 1890.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., September 21, 1894, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵J. Dubna, YIVO, RG 113, p. 14. The strike occurred while Dubna was working there between 1908 and 1910.

¹⁰⁶A. Balson, YIVO, RG 113, p. 3; B. Rabinowitz, YIVO, RG 113, p. 2; J. Werlin, YIVO, RG 102, no. 71-71c, p. 66; Arbeiter Zeitung, July 8, 1892, p. 3, August 19, 1892, p. 3, August 26, 1892, p. 2. According to the rules enforced in many shops, workers had to supply their own sewing machines (or to pay for the use of the employer's machine) and had to pay for the use of electricity where machines were power-operated.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., September 21, 1894, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸It should be noted, however, that while workers always considered the task system their foremost enemy, their stand on piece work was not uniform. In 1890, for example, shirtmakers demanded to be paid weekly, as did the pants makers in 1894. Men's tailors, however, wanted in 1901 to abolish the task system but preferred piece work to a standardized weekly wage. Arbeiter Zeitung, March 14, 1890, September 21, 1894, p. 2; New York Times, July 23, 1901, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹New York World, May 21, 1886, p. 3. According to another report, the daily task in 1886 was 10 to 16 coats, requiring a work day of 14 to 15 hours. Ibid. The difference in quality of the garment might be responsible for the disparity in the figures.

¹¹⁰New York World, March 26, 1886, p. 1; New York Sun, March 19, 1886, p. 3.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²New York World, March 24, 1886, p. 2; New York Sun, March 30, 1886, p. 1.

¹¹³New York World, April 1, 1886, p. 2.

¹¹⁴Criticism of the strike's goal of abolishing contracting, came also from the quarters of American labor. John Swinton, for example, criticized the Jewish workers for hoping to destroy the very core of the industry -- folly in view of its long-standing presence and its role in the development of the trade. John Swinton's Paper, April 11, 1886.

¹¹⁵New York World, April 1, 1886, p. 2.

- 116 Ibid.
- 117 John Swinton's Paper, April 11, 1886.
- 118 Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, pp. 7, 8.
- 119 New York World, May 21, 1886, p. 3, May 25, 1886, p. 2. The strikers set the lowest wage at 16 dollars a week for a machine operator and 25 dollars a week for "first class" men. Ibid., May 26, 1886, p. 2. The wages demanded for basters, workers of lower skills, ranged from 14 dollars to 22 dollars. Ibid.
- 120 Ibid., June 8, 1886, p. 2.
- 121 The two sides arrived at a strange compromise agreeing that a failure to finish the daily task will not result in reduced pay, as the weekly pay was to remain the same. Ibid., June 13, 1886, p. 7.
- 122 New York Sun, August 31, 1894, p. 5; New York World, September 4, 1894, p. 8.
- 123 New York World, August 29, 1894, p. 9.
- 124 New York Sun, August 31, 1894, p. 5.
- 125 Ibid., September 5, 1894, p. 1.
- 126 Ibid., August 31, 1894, p. 5.
- 127 Ibid., October 14, 1894, p. 5; Arbeiter Zeitung, September 28, 1894, p. 1.
- 128 New York Sun, October 15, 1894, p. 3, November 10, 1894, p. 5.
- 129 Ibid., October 15, 1894, p. 3. Henry Seligman, of Seligman Brothers, echoed this view: "I do not think that the day is at hand when we should stoop to treat with the labor organizations which now affect our trade." Ibid.
- 130 Ibid., October 16, 1894, p. 1.
- 131 Ibid., September 17, 1894, p. 6.
- 132 Police Superintendent Byrnes met with representatives of the manufacturers offering them his services. Ibid., October 17, 1894, p. 7.
- 133 Ibid., September 17, 1894, p. 6.
- 134 New York Times, February 22, 1895, p. 5.

¹³⁵Ibid., July 15, 1895, p. 1, July 29, 1895, p. 1.

¹³⁶New York Tribune, August 1, 1895, p. 6.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸New York Times, December 15, 1895, p. 9.

¹³⁹Finishers, for example, among the least skilled workers in the coat industry, had their wages reduced by 35% and were required to finish 48 coats, an increase of 13 coats over the previous task of 35 coats. Ibid., February or June 13, 1896, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., June 2, 1897, p. 3.

¹⁴¹New York Tribune, July 20, 1901, p. 2, July 21, 1901, p. 2; New York Times, July 21, 1901, p. 1. Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, pp. 248, 249. It should be noted that, though the increase in wages was not an issue in the strike, the workers who insisted on union wages demanded wages based on piecework rather than week-work. New York Times, July 23, 1901, p. 2.

¹⁴²New York Tribune, July 20, 1901, p. 2, Jewish Daily Forward, July 23, 1901, p. 1.

¹⁴³New York Times, July 22, 1901, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., July 23, 1901, p. 3. In a similar attempt at a new tactic to make the manufacturers responsible for their contractors, the Executive Committee of the Brotherhood of Tailors threatened in 1897 to bring out 500 men in the factory of Fechheimer, Fischel and Company, unless the firm paid 75 dollars owed by a contractor to his employees. Ibid., September 8, 1897, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶Arbeiter Zeitung, October 5, 1894, p. 2, March 7, 1897, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷For a discussion of industrial unionism in mining, steel and garment industries, see David Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, Segmented Work, Divided Workers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1892), pp. 157-162.

¹⁴⁸Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 81.

CHAPTER 6

THE POLITICS OF MORALITY:
JEWISH WORKERS AND THE ETHNIC COMMUNITY

Sporadic outbursts of violent protest which punctuated life on the East Side reveal not only the discontent but also a critique of the economic and social order. They illustrate some of the ethical standards which guided immigrant strikers and protestors in their punitive forays against their opponents. The social code which pervaded these actions, was one of collective goals and loyalties overriding individual objectives. The underlying collective moral code not only lent the workers the right to take action against their enemies, but also to bring their battles out of the workplace into the community. Workers turned to the community for support and to its influence as valuable weapons in their battles. Appeals to the community for economic boycotts, ostracism and for assistance essential at times of strikes, were some of the means used in combatting scabs, defying employers and other transgressors of the ethic of mutuality.

The primacy of the collectivity over the individual drew its sanction from the inherited standard of the historic Jewish community as well as from the new importance of the new transplanted community, which was central in introducing

the newcomer to his new industrial livelihood. While tradition and new community ties gave strength to the collectivity, labor struggles gave it a precise definition and content. Strikers took their grievances to the community seeking redress. The community, in turn, used the language of labor in pursuing those who followed the new code of individualism. It is in this context that women meat boycotters of 1902, for example, who referred to themselves as "strikers," called others who did not abstain from buying meat "scabs" and borrowed militant strike tactics in waging their campaign.¹ Similarly, it was reported that a tough landlord who increased his rent beyond what was considered "fair" filled his vacant apartments with "scabs" after ruthlessly evicting 19 families.² In yet another case, a perplexed reader sent a query to the Bintl Brief department of the Forverts, asking whether it would be fair and honest to buy coal from a new and cheaper coal merchant. The old coal merchant called his new competition "scab" because the latter undercut unfairly the existing price.³

In the above cases, protestors and the commentators assumed that the Jewish community was bound by a code of shared sacrifice and "fair" prices, in contrast to pursuit of personal gain through market place. The battles which ensued among the two camps had far reaching consequences. Not only was the community split but family ties were put on trial by the stress of social conflict; daughters denounced their

fathers and brothers as traitors to the cause and traditional ties from the Old World broke under strain. A new class cohesion was emerging in the place of the old ties.

An Alternative System of Justice: Workers' Courts,
Sabotage, Violence

Workers' battles against employers extended into the community by mobilizing sympathizers from all walks of life and by waging retaliatory attacks against those who pursued the new code of individual gains and of market economy. The targets of popular action were thus not only the employers, but also scabs, as well as profiteering butchers and landlords. In their struggles to enforce the code of collective goals upon the transgressors, the upholders of the code enunciated new rules of justice to justify new modes of behavior. "Women don't count in times like these," shouted the strikers and pushed the contractor's wife defending the shop.⁴ Similar acts of force and compulsion, as well as acts of more peaceful persuasion and other sanctions all made up the judicial system which was invoked to enforce the moral code of communal ethics.

Strikes and other militant acts served the working class to delineate the expected norms of behavior. Teaching tenets of solidarity was the aim of workers in their forays to induce their fellow-workers to bring work to a stop. "Two

hundred ill dressed men marched down Rivington Street and through Suffolk 4 p.m. yesterday," it was reported during the first known Jewish strike of cloakmakers in 1885.⁵ This strange contingent, headed by "a small man with a roll of paper" was a scouting committee appointed by the strikers to inform all cloakmakers of the strike in process and to bring all work to a stop.⁶ "Brothers, get up and stop work," announced a similar group of cloakmakers who trailed from one shop to another in 1891, followed by groups of men, armed, according to one boss, with "long knives and shears" -- the tools of their trade.⁷

The message of solidarity and identification with working class code of behavior was directed not only at workers of the same trade; other members of the working class were expected to comply. In one such case, the offender was Charles Katzenstein, an expressman. He was accused of disregarding the strike of cloakmakers of 1886 and of cooperating with the employers by transporting materials and finished cloaks for manufacturers who refused to come to terms with the strikers.⁸ The strikers threatened Katzenstein with a boycott and demanded also that he appear before the Executive Committee of the strike of the Cloakmakers' Union: "In case you do not appear before this Board by 2 p.m. we will take suitable action to set a boycott on your business."⁹ Katzenstein appeared and was duly charged by the cloakmakers "with aiding their employers by

carting materials and manufactured goods."¹⁰ The Committee also informed the accused that unless he paid a 1,000 dollar fine, a boycott on his services would be imposed. It appears that the case against Katzenstein was not the first of its kind; he complained that he was forced to pay 100 dollars once before in order to avoid a threatened boycott on his carts. On this occasion, however, Katzenstein decided not to pay the fine and he brought the case to Judge Duffy of Essex Market Police Court, asking for the arrest of the Executive Committee. Justice Duffy issued a summons against three members who were charged with blackmail. Eventually, they were discharged for insufficient evidence.¹¹

A similar example of justice embodying the workers' code was applied during a cloakmakers strike of 1891 against a contractor who pressed charges of harassment against two cloakmakers. A committee representing the union came to inform him that he had been fined 200 dollars for prosecuting the two men; unless he paid up and withdrew the charges, the union would blacklist his company.¹²

Punishing offenders through imposition of fines was a weapon soon to be relinquished, because it was used by manufacturers to discredit labor leaders in well-publicized court cases when they pressed charges of bribery and blackmail. The most famous among these cases implicated Barondess who had been instrumental in imposing a fine of 500 dollars for "non-compliance" with the rules of the

cloakmakers' union on the firm Popkin and Marks during a cloakmakers strike of 1891.¹³ The firm, however, charged Barondess, the leader of the union, with extortion and had him arrested. These judicial procedures, not always effective and often detrimental to the interests of labor, were supplemented with more forceful measures of sabotage of machines as means to force all workers and employers to stop production. Thus, the striking cloakmakers in 1885 and 1886 walked away with parts of sewing machines, or the main screw, effectively bringing work to a halt.¹⁵ Similarly, "messing up" or strewing uncut pieces of garments, as well as the more extreme acts of destroying and damaging goods, were all means of sabotage used successfully in disrupting production.¹⁶ In one such case, 200 striking cloakmakers destroyed the completed jackets made in the shop of Billet, a contractor for the firm of Benjamin and Caspary, who continued work despite a strike declared against the firm.¹⁷ The tactic of damaging goods was, however, abandoned after the incident of 1891, which eventually led to a series of trials implicating Barondess and his co-leaders.¹⁸ The case resulted in eleven arrests. The trials and the prison sentences which followed failed to discredit Barondess who was considered the militant inspiration behind the attack. The negative publicity, however, promoted a new respectability and put an end to organized sabotage.

More awesome and powerful than organized incursions to

damage goods and property was the power of the strikers and the community to terrorize and haunt the profiteers. Workers, brandishing scissors, flatirons, revolvers, clubs and old European bayonets, invaded shops and assaulted bosses and scabs, and on other occasions followed them in the streets of the neighborhood attacking and abusing them verbally in public. Scabs and unpopular employers, all of whom had roots in the neighborhood, could not escape workers' ire, despite police protection. The cloakmakers' strike of 1894, for example, like many other strikes, was fraught with violence. The scabs employed by Jonasson, were confronted daily by their tormentors, many of them women, who gathered in front of the factory "greeting" the strike-breakers coming to work and leaving at the end of the day, attacking the working girls, "tearing their hair and clothing and endeavoring to maul their faces."¹⁹ Strike-breakers received a similar welcome from the striking women, who, disregarding the presence of police, furiously attacked them, tearing their whiskers, while "others made a rush for the non-union girls and tore their clothes and pulled their hair."²⁰ Zetta Bloomberg, one of the women arrested following the attack, had a record of similar assaults. When asked: "Why did you engage in such an affair as this?," she answered passionately:

How can I help it? My children cry for bread, I ask my husband for food to give them. He says, "Can I take the flesh off my bones to feed them? What else have I when my place is taken?" So I go out to fight for him. 21

Another group justified their attacks on women strike-breakers: "Those women had no right to take our places and the only way to stop them is to frighten them."²²

Scabs had their homes invaded and their lives threatened. Strikers who saw it as their right to exert moral and physical pressure made no distinction between public and private. Thus, potential strike breakers -- members of a cloakmakers' union who wanted to return to work, were put under house arrest and watched closely by the strikers.²³ During the particularly violent strike of 1894, two workers broke into the home of two women strike-breakers and beat them "severely."²⁴ In a later incident during the waistmakers' strike of 1910, strikers initiated an intimidation campaign against a scab by visiting his wife four and five times a day, demanding to know the whereabouts of her husband and threatening to kill him "on sight."²⁵

No one could escape the watchful eye of the community. When employers who tried to evade the constant threat of attacking strikers, tried to pass work on to subcontractors, they were unsuccessful; word passed around and their shops were duly attacked.²⁶ Contractors who attempted to escape the reign of terror, the frequent strikes and persecutions, hoped to find safe haven in Yonkers, Long Island, Queens and Brooklyn. Strikers, however, continued to haunt scabs and employers, following them to their new locations. The cloakmakers's strike of 1891 gained notoriety because of the

incursions of strikers from the East Side into the new territories of Jewish employers. The most famous was the Jamaica attack against Greenbaum and Billet, but in another case, scabs from Jamaica, Long Island, were forced to join a group of 40 strikers to go to New York to hear "incendiary speeches" of the cloakmakers' leaders.²⁷ In yet another case during the same strike, police were alerted to a group of 100 defiant cloakmakers who were reportedly leaving Manhattan "to do some persuading" in the shops of Brownsville.²⁸ And yet another incident of the same year involved two brothers contractors, who, rather than yield to demands, moved their shop uptown to 157th Street and began employing 30 scabs. Eight strikers, all former employees of the Vogel brothers, accompanied by a bulldog went to their shop at closing time, attacked the owners who, "holding each other's hand for courage," shook "like leaves in the wind."²⁹ In the same year, at the height of Barondess' popularity, Meyer Jonasson, the largest employer in cloaks, threatened to open a factory in Berlin, "where there will be no Barondess to keep our people in turmoil."³⁰

Violence was also the expression of indignation at the behavior of those who pursued the code of individualism through the workings of the market economy, especially where an inelastic demand allowed an unrestrained raising of prices. The profits of butchers and landlords who raised prices beyond their "acceptable" levels, were considered

unfair and became the targets of villification.

The kosher meat riots and the boycott of 1902, was triggered by a fifty percent price increase for the Jewish customers.³¹ Although the campaign was initiated by small butchers against the meat trusts, they soon settled their dispute by reaching a mutually satisfactory agreement with the wholesalers. The struggle was then taken up by East Side women who vowed to bring down the exorbitant prices to their previous more acceptable level.³² As one of the protestors stated the case:

Our husbands work hard. They try their best to bring a few cents into the house. We must manage to spend as little as possible. We will not give away our last few cents to the butchers and let our children go barefoot. 33

The objective justified a widespread destruction of meat as a punishment of butchers who cooperated with the meat trust. Viewing themselves as "soldiers" and "strikers" women and their sympathizers from the community sowed terror among butchers and those who did not join in the boycott, known as "scabs." Sabotage was used. Women besieged butchers' shops, pouring kerosene, oil and carbolic acid on the goods.³⁴ In Brooklyn, as in Manhattan and the Bronx, the enraged consumers travelled from shop to shop trying to force butchers to close shop. In one instance, the angry boycotters of Brooklyn dragged huge sides of meat from their hooks trampling upon it, while others threw the meat into the street using it to play football.³⁵ In another incident, piceces of meat were thrown at the police present on the

occasion, while yet another group of protesters raised the meat on painted sticks carrying it around in the crowd "like red flags."³⁶

The issue of meat consumption during the boycott, was considered a matter of public concern. Patrons of butcher shops "met with mob's fury" and if spared physical abuse, they were followed throughout the neighborhood and then forced to give up their purchases.³⁷ Moreover, according to one report from Brooklyn, when crowds of protesters got through with sacking butcher shops, boycotters proceeded to enter private homes, "picking up whatever meat they could find to throw on the street where it was caught and pitched about and trampled upon."³⁸ When asked by a judge, "What do you have against a woman who has bought meat?," one of the women arrested for disorderly conduct justified her violent behavior by pointing to the organic link of the individual to the community and by arguing that meat consumers were disregarding the community's welfare: "It doesn't matter to me what others want to do. But it's because of others that we must suffer."³⁹

The tenants movement of 1907-8 was another important example of community action. The movement which peaked with the anti-high rent activity in 1907-8, questioned the very right of the landlord to his profit. Thus, the strikers of 1894 declared that payment of rent was wrong in principle and that they could not and would not furnish income to the

landlords while they themselves had no income.⁴⁰

The frequent increases of rent on the East Side and in other locations of Jewish concentration, were considered equally unlawful. Posters in English and Yiddish and demonstrations and protests were the expression of disapproval against the landlord-speculators who bought buildings and then raised rents.⁴¹ In one instance, angry crowds besieged the landlord's apartment, throwing stones and mud at his windows because he had raised the rent and served dispossession notices on forty families who refused to pay the higher rent.⁴² The activities against him culminated on the day of evictions with the entire block in an uproar and a large stone-throwing crowd in front of the landlord's apartment.⁴³

An all-out open war against landlords flared up in 1907-8, a year of economic depression and of unemployment. The rent strike of that year mobilized one hundred thousand strikers and spread to Harlem, Brooklyn and Newark.⁴⁴ The community became the main base for action, winning the support of the Socialist Party of the Eight Assembly District as well as the support of several unions, all determined to fight the landlords and the rising rents.⁴⁵ The action, however, was initiated on the local block, remembered Pauline Newman:

We lived so close together we knew each other. And everybody agreed that they really could not give the landlord the increase in rent. And so by word of mouth you got everyone from the same street and from the next street and we called a meeting. ⁴⁶

In one of the meetings organized by the strike group, landlords received a violent reception. One landlord who tried to persuade those present that the houses he owned were his merchandise and that "he had the right to ask whatever he wants for his merchandise," was shouted down and forced to leave the platform.⁴⁷ The resolutions of the meeting called for the organization of a federation to force the landlords to lower rent "to affordable level" due to the difficult times, followed by a demand to decrease the rent by 20-30 percent.⁴⁸ These demands were accompanied by calls to the community to boycott landlords who evicted their tenants and by an openly defiant attitude of the strikers who hung red flags and posters from their windows and fire escapes. These acts, in turn, provoked violent confrontations with the landlords who had the full support of the police and the services of the East Side thugs.⁴⁹

Individualism, the foremost expression of the culture of capitalism, was resisted not only on the shop floor but also in the community. There, it was challenged by an alternative code of communal morality. Its proponents argued their legitimacy by militant actions against the violators of the code. The conflict between the two world views permeated all walks of life of the Jewish East Side.

The Jewish Community and Institutionalized Justice

The ethical code upheld by the Jewish workers and their sympathizers clashed with the principles of the established system of justice. The two systems came in direct conflict when official justice was invoked to protect those who breached the community code.

In their attempt to counter the violence of the East Side crowds, the small employer was forced to rely on scissors, shears and, on occasions, even on guns, but the established manufacturer turned to the police for help, or hired the protection of Pinkertons. During the cloakmakers' strike of 1894, for example, Police Superintendent Byrnes promised full cooperation in protecting the factories surrounded by the strikers and policemen guarding scabs and employers became a common sight.⁵⁰ The strike-breakers employed by Friedman Bros., a large manufacturer of cloaks, were escorted daily by the police to their hotels or to the safety of the street car.⁵¹ Similarly, during the tailors' strike of 1896, policemen were stationed in centers of tailoring contractors who resumed work.⁵²

The presence of the police did not, however, deter the crowds. On the contrary, the sight of "hostile policeman on guard" was sufficient to provoke the anger of demonstrators.⁵³ The relations between Jewish population of the East Side and local police, tenuous at best in time of peace, were quick to deteriorate into violence when they moved in to quell outbursts threatening existing peace and

social order.⁵⁴ In one such case, police trying to arrest strikers harrassing scabs who wanted to enter a cloak factory on Broadway, provoked the fury of "a small mob who swooped down upon a policeman to recover their comrade," beating him severely.⁵⁵ Although the crowd of strikers was finally deterred by a gun, the hostile throng marched with their arrested comrades to the police station.⁵⁶ In a similar incident during a tailors' strike of 1894, the ire of the crowd turned against a Jewish policeman who tried to disperse strikers assembled near the tailors' headquarters on Suffolk Street. A crowd of people who "seemed to rise out of the ground" began pushing and striking the policeman, trying to free the prisoner. The policeman was finally rescued by reservists who arrived on the scene.⁵⁷ During a cloakmakers' strike of the same year, a policeman off duty who tried to prevent the assault of 150 strikers on a tenement at 316 Delancey Street which housed a large number of scabs working in the tenements, was clubbed and beaten mercilessly by an angry crowd shouting: "He is a policeman, do him up."⁵⁸

The meat boycott of 1902 was also accompanied by anti-police outbursts. Policemen who came to protect the butchers and their property were greeted with flying pieces of meat and in one case a policeman who tried to make an arrest met the resistance of a whole crowd who "tore his clothing to rags, broke his helmet and tried to pull him down on the ground, when they would have made short work of

him."⁵⁹ The policeman finally managed to escape under a shower of rocks, vegetables, eggs and stolen meat.⁶⁰ In a similar case a policeman using violence was set upon by a crowd who took away his helmet and club and carried them away to parade as trophies.⁶¹ In another incident which took place on the East Side, a large scale battle against the police ensued after several policemen under the pretext of clearing the street, began clubbing boycotters "below their waists."⁶² On the following day, a huge crowd of 3,000 gathered in front of Essex Market Police Court hissing and shouting at policemen who were giving protection to butchers.⁶³

Demonstrations in the vicinity of the law courts became a ritual for further expression of hostility against the police and the judicial system. Arrests provoked hostile gatherings by attracting onlookers who then followed the arrested through the neighborhood to the police station. When five striking cloakmakers were arrested in 1885, "a mob" of 300 strikers marched to the police station and demanded their freedom or imprisonment for themselves.⁶⁴ During a tailors' strike of 1896, "a howling crowd" of 500 followed those arrested for disturbing the peace. When finally scattered by the police, they reassembled in a more peaceful mood.⁶⁵

Hostile demonstrations also greeted those who turned to the existing legal system and pressed charges against

offenders. Crowds gathering at courts and police stations, directed curses, threats and physical abuse as a means of intimidating the plaintiffs. During a coatmakers' strike of 1886, Calman Klein was arrested for entering the shop of a contractor and for refusing to leave. Consequently, he was held on a 300 dollar bail to keep the peace for a month. The sentence angered the crowd of strikers who followed him to the court and the contractor who pressed the charges had to be escorted by several policemen taunted by cries of "Hang him! String him up!"⁶⁶ A similar form of intimidation convinced Bernard Steague, a coat contractor, not to make a complaint against the ring leaders who stormed his shop.⁶⁷ In 1909, to cite another example, during a coatmakers' strike, seven offenders to peace were sentenced to the workhouse for storming the shop of Hyman Horn. Horn, however, told the court magistrate that he did not want the men to be sent to jail "as it might tend to injure him." The prisoners were duly discharged.⁶⁸

Police attempts to protect the law and to quell violence on the East Side met with little success. According to Police Inspector Byrnes the reason for the failure to restrain the violent outbursts was mainly tactical. He claimed that unlike the longshoremen or New York car drivers, Jewish cloakmakers were incompetent and lacked the courage for "a decent riot" and they "wiggle about like so many eels, and it's the hardest thing to get your hand on them."⁶⁹

Attempts by union leaders to lend to the Jewish strikers the respectability necessary to avoid the harsh prison sentences and high fines, were equally unsuccessful. The strike instructions of 1910, for example, advised workers: "Pick no argument and enter into no discussion with employers, with members of the firm or with other employees ... show the world that you are an organized, disciplined, well-behaved body who know your rights and are law-abiding citizens."⁷⁰ The new strike rules were, however, often disregarded by the cloakmakers. Thus, for example, a crowd of 400 strikers held a vigil near the factory of Joseph D. Wein despite police warnings. The strikers threatened the owner of the factory: "We have killed Generals in Russia and may be able to do better in this country."⁷¹ During the same strike fraught with assaults on employers, scabs and destruction of property, some manufacturers of cloaks were ultimately obliged to cease work rather than risk the continual bloody confrontations between scabs, strikers and the police.⁷²

Violence had often successfully restricted the power of authority and legitimacy. The role of the police and the institutionalized justice which were called upon by the manufacturers to quell violence, emphasized further the presence of class war on the East Side.

Community as an Economic and Social Weapon

The force of law failed to control East Side's punitive actions. The clashes with the courts and the police reinforced the traditional distrust of the institutions of the state brought over from Eastern Europe. Jewish immigrant workers, unlike their American counterparts, rarely considered the politically suspect institutions as a potential source of help, turning instead to the community for support to their cause.⁷³ It was community assistance and resources which saw the strikers through their often prolonged periods of want. Moreover, the wide endorsement of the community in acts of boycott and social ostracism became an essential weapon in the war to enforce the lesson of mutuality and communality on the offenders.

The strategy which underlined the role of the community in the variety of popular actions was an important weapon for the immigrant workers: in contrast, the more established and Americanized skilled workers considered political institutions an important recourse for their cause. The cloakmakers' strike of 1890, for example, illustrates the approach of the latter group. The cutters, who represented a more settled and above all a more skilled section of the garment workers, engaged in appeals to the law and the institutions of the state, couching their appeals in the rich rhetoric of Republican ideals.⁷⁴ Thus, at the outset of the strike, Charles Miller of the Clothing Cutters' Union put forward a resolution condemning the Manufacturers'

Association as a capitalist combination seeking to destroy the workers. The Association, according to Miller, was not to be tolerated in "a civilized Commonwealth" because it caused the starvation of women and children.⁷⁵ The call to abolish the Association was then sent by the strikers to the Mayor of New York. Similarly, James P. Archibald, the secretary of the Central Labor Union, alleged that political life and Republican ideals had been corrupted, and demanded that capitalists should not be entrusted with honorific functions reserved for the deserving "fathers of the City." Consequently, it was resolved at a mass meeting to call upon the Mayor of New York to remove Abraham Schwab, a leading manufacturer of cloaks active in the forefront of the hated Manufacturers' Association, from his office as a Trustee of the Brooklyn Bridge, and to replace him with "a gentleman of more humane feeling and disposition than is shown by Mr. Schwab toward his underpaid and underfed slaves."⁷⁶

Not only were Republican ideals invoked but the institutions of the Republic were trusted. As the strike continued, the locked-out cutters turned to the law in an attempt to indict the Manufacturers' Association for conspiracy on the grounds that the association, by locking out the cutters, prevented them from following their trade as long as they belonged to a union.⁷⁷ The Grand Jury, however, refused to bring an indictment, to the disappointment of the cutters and the public alike. "These skilled cloakmakers

came to America in order to better their condition, and having learned by experience what a republican form of government meant," they were in their full right to unionize, remarked the World, adding pointedly that among the members of the Grand Jury was William Rockefeller and other officials of corporations and trusts.⁷⁸ Further allegations of corruption of the Grand Jury by business interests followed, and the Jury was accused of changing from "bulwark of liberty to a fortress of injustice in the hands of capitalists, and is now used in administration of criminal law against the poor and in favor of the rich."⁷⁹

The failure of the Grand Jury to indict the Association and the anti-labor remarks of the foreman of the Jury who openly stated: "I am not in favor of unions," caused resentment in labor circles and encouraged further protests and appeals for justice. These appeals, characteristic of the general strategy, criticized state institutions and Republican ideals for being corrupted by the power of business. Thus, at a mass meeting of the strikers, attended by Samuel Gompers, a resolution was passed calling for the abolition of the Grand Jury "as a relic of English feudal barbarism which should have no place in our American judicial system."⁸⁰ Following this condemnation, the cutters resolved to call upon the State of New York to "aid and defend the life and interest of its citizens who are the backbone of the republic."⁸¹

Similar strategies were employed during the war against the meat trusts waged not only by the East Side Jews, but also by other working people of New York, protesting the increasingly high prices of meat. Thus, the Board of Aldermen of the city condemned the meat trust which intended "to enrich the greedy corporations" and which would weaken "the strength of the working men."⁸² The Aldermen went further, demanding action by the Federal and State authorities to stop the "unlawful conspiracy for private gain in a food which is in actual necessity for the working classes of the city."⁸³ Copies of that resolution were sent to the President, the Attorney General, the Governor of New York and the Attorney General of New York State.⁸⁴

Jewish meat boycotters also resorted initially to a similar strategy. They, however, appealed to the District Attorney more directly by besieging his home and ringing his bell incessantly until late at night.⁸⁵ This form of protest was prompted by the belief that the District Attorney would be sensitive to women's plight since he lived on Rutgers Street and was also a member of the neighborhood community. The Jewish women's cry for help was not answered by the District Attorney. Instead, he reproached the protestors for "proving themselves bad citizens."⁸⁶ What followed this failed attempt to find recourse in institutional justice was a fully fledged war declared by the women against butchers and meat consumers, accompanied by violence against court

magistrates and the police. Similarly, in the matter of rents, the Jewish tenants brought the matter before the Alderman of the 12th District Assembly.⁸⁷ Soon, however, as in the case of the meat strike, this appeal was supplemented by a more vigorous policy of defiant protests and agitation of the community against the landlords.⁸⁸

Mobilizing the community and its support was the recourse chosen by the immigrants in their fights against the unfair practices of butchers and landlords, as well as scabs and employers. Strikes and militant activities came to depend on the good will of the community for financial support, crucial in the absence of stable unions with large strike reserves. Jewish unions, often in rivalry with each other and at ideological odds, were, with some exceptions, hardly in a position to extend more than a symbolic help to each other. Appeals to workers of other trades to send contributions, the impositions of taxes on workers whose firms had already settled, were some of the means which aimed to ensure a minimal financial help.⁸⁹ Sometimes the support was pitifully small. Jonasson's cloakmakers, for example, received a relatively large contribution of \$580.15 from other unions or other cloakmakers. Jonasson's employees in Woodbine, New Jersey received, on the other hand, only \$32.50. An even smaller contribution of \$5.15 was sent by the Shirtmakers' Union of New York together with \$2.85 in donations to the striking tailors of Baltimore.⁹⁰

Assistance from non-Jewish unions was not readily available. Even the famous strike of cloakmakers led by Barondess in 1891 did not succeed in eliciting positive response from other unions.⁹¹ And in 1894, a year of cruel suffering for the cloakmakers on strike, United Garment Workers refused to help on grounds of "bad management" and the failure of the strikers to organize "on an up-to-date basis."⁹² The strike of 1894 and its leaders were denounced by the Central Federation of Labor as "a farce" because workers in non-union shops were nevertheless enrolled on union books.⁹³ Meat boycotters were equally unsuccessful in rallying support among New York unions. While at the meeting of Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers' Union one delegate moved a resolution calling for all workers to abstain from meat, the socialist leader of the Cigar Makers' Union claimed that working men cannot live without meat and the motion was defeated by other Socialists.⁹⁴

There was no guarantee that the officially designated charitable societies, a potential source of help, would be ready to dip into their coffers to support Jewish strikers on the East Side. Maintained and financed mainly by German Jewish manufacturers themselves, East Side charities proved understandably reluctant to extend help to strikers in need. They were unwilling to furnish "the sinews of war to the enemy" and submitted all applicants for assistance to a close and rigorous scrutiny for their role during the harsh strike

of 1894. Those denied help because of strike activity, "must be held responsible for their own suffering," maintained the spokesmen of the charities.⁹⁵

It was at grass roots that members of the Jewish community extended their good will towards the strikers, offering the main source of support at times of need. Assistance was unstinting. "The neighbors on the East Side in strike affairs are not stingy," was the impression of one contemporary.⁹⁶ The sympathy to the plight of the Jewish poor became obvious at times of economic misery, especially during the crisis of 1893. Throughout that year, United Hebrew Trades channelled relief for the hungry unemployed. Numerous butchers, doctors, bakers and restaurants provided free food and free services to anyone presenting a ticket from UHT.⁹⁷ There was similar community support in Brownsville where individual donations of food were distributed through workers' organizations which called upon all those in need and too embarrassed to plead for help, to come forward and receive assistance.⁹⁸ In 1894, a year of continued depression, high unemployment and a prolonged strike of cloakmakers through the harsh winter months, it was the community which provided assistance to the desperate strikers. Refused help by the United Garment Workers and the AFL and faced with diminishing strike funds, the strikers depended on the great numbers of restaurants which sent dinner tickets, barbers and owners of Turkish baths who

provided free services and doctors who treated the sick without fees.⁹⁹ The cloakmakers established a relief depot distributing flour, potatoes, sugar, herrings and coffee, all contributions from well-meaning sympathizers.¹⁰⁰ Even East Side contractors were known in some cases to contribute money to strikers, not their own workers of course.¹⁰¹

In spite of the general assistance, it became clear by January 1895 that emergency funds and gifts of food from their community which had been suffering from the economic depression, could not meet the needs of the strikers.¹⁰² The long strike eventually dwindled away when all hope of employment was lost because of the termination of the winter season. The defeated workers were eventually saved from destitution through a scheme of the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, a non-Jewish charitable society which paid 10,000 dollars to strikers to shovel snow.¹⁰³

In addition to its essential, albeit limited financial assistance, the community and neighborhood were the natural and invaluable allies of Jewish workers in exercising its power as a weapon of social censure. The workers brought their grievances out into the community and by publicizing violations committed by enemies of labor, hoped to mobilize public opinion. Labor newspapers, unions, community networks, public spectacles, as well as violence, were used as means to advertise grievances. Thus, for example, thirty

three striking families from Brownsville appealed in the community newspaper not to apply for their jobs.¹⁰⁴ Those who did not heed the plea and who "sold out their brothers" as in one case of striking knee pants makers, faced the threat of being branded in labor press as shameless scabs.¹⁰⁵

Bosses known for their bad practices and dishonesty, were villified far and wide as means of alerting others. One employer who had embezzled wages, was awarded the following proclamation in the press:

Brothers and sisters, do not fall into the claws of a tiger! The boss who took your wages wants you to forget that he took 250 dollars from our poor workers and he opened a shop in Newark and he wants to open another shop in Bayonne. Shirtmakers, be warned and don't go to seek work there! 106

Appeals to boycott employment were supplemented by appeals to boycott other services offered by unpopular employers. Underpaid buttonhole makers on strike in 1886 issued an appeal to boycott the bakery and the grocery owned by their employer.¹⁰⁷ The threat of the boycott or the embarrassment caused by the notoriety due to the publication of the appeal in the Sun, forced the employer to reply. In a letter to the Sun, he stated that although "he didn't care for labor organizations," contrary to his workers' allegations that he paid only 6-7 dollars a week, he could prove that their earnings reached 25-30 dollars a week.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, striking suspender makers, called for the boycott of a restaurant owned by Weisman, the "scab suspender boss," until he recognized the union.¹⁰⁹

The effectiveness of some community boycotts in these and other similar cases is demonstrated in the case of a landlord, owner of two buildings in East 12th Street who increased rents and evicted 19 families. Although he was successful in reletting the apartments to "scab" tenants, the community boycott of his grocery store was so successful that ultimately he was forced out of business.¹¹⁰

All these were activities which were locally organized. The appeal to a nation-wide consumers and workers boycotts, potentially an effective weapon of workers in their struggles, was a tactic of limited use because it required a high degree of national organization.¹¹¹ In general, it was mainly the cutters, the best organized craft within the clothing manufacture, who could wield effectively the weapon of nation-wide boycott.¹¹² Other labor groups lacking a national backing, supplemented local economic sanctions and boycotts with the weapon of social ostracism through public denunciations and ritualistic parades aiming to stigmatize labor's foes. Scabs who "sold out their brothers" faced the threat of having their names branded in the labor press.¹¹³ Shaming a strike breaker was even more dramatic and effective when a woman striker denounced her own brother and her father as cowards in front of a crowd of tailors gathered near their headquarters.¹¹⁴ Another extremist tactic was used during the cloakmakers' strike of 1894, when a successful example of picketing achieved concrete results. During that strike

employers attempted to send work to outlying communities, but strikers, besides actively picketing the shops on strike, also kept a close watch over the ferries to prevent scabs, identifiable by their sewing machines, from reaching Manhattan. Brownsville was under virtual siege and those intending to come to Manhattan had to have a pass and were met by special committees guarding the elevated stations. Those scabs who succeeded in reaching Manhattan to take up work for New York manufacturers, had a "welcome they will never forget" when they went back to Brownsville to see their families at weekends.¹¹⁵ According to Rosenberg's account, they were brought in a police wagon, accompanied to the safety of their homes by a dozen police riding in front and back. Men, women and children of Brownsville went out "to welcome" the scabs, carrying black candles, an old-world symbol alerting the community to the danger of epidemic or a plague as well as a symbol of social ostracism, and shouting in Hebrew, "Righteousness delivers from death." Scabs did not dare to leave their homes and needed police protection to guard them, and on Sunday, they had to be reescorted to Manhattan.¹¹⁶

Similar campaigns aimed at intimidation, singling out and isolating the scabs in particular, were initiated on other occasions. In one instance, a scab working for the firm Caspary and Benjamin, the main culprit in the strike of 1891, was followed wherever he went by an "ugly and

threatening group."¹¹⁷ The effectiveness of these and similar campaigns of social ostracism was dramatically manifested in the tragic case of Joseph Katzman, a tailor of a good union standing. In 1897, however, Katzman, the sole supporter of his family, saw no choice but to continue work despite the strike and the pleas from his fellow workers to join the ranks of the strikers. The striking tailors turned Katzman's life into "a burden." He was jeered and called "hard names" whenever he appeared in the streets. In the end, he was forced to leave his family, probably to spare them embarrassment, took a room in a hotel and soon after put an end to his life by jumping from a third floor window.¹¹⁸

Strikers and protesters chose the synagogue as a strategic and effective forum for agitation and for public condemnation of their foes. Thus, women moved from synagogue to synagogue appealing to the men in the audience to encourage their wives not to buy meat.¹¹⁹ This was done despite the rabbinical objection to violent tactics employed by women in the boycott.¹²⁰ Workers also chose the synagogue for embarrassing and tormenting their foes. During the 1894 strike, workers followed two scabs into their synagogue where they carried out their attack.¹²¹ In the case of the strike at Simon and Co., the striking cloakmakers informed the worshippers at Simon's synagogue of the "good deeds" of their employer, asking all those attending the synagogue to ostracize Simon by avoiding all contact with him. Simon

stopped attending the synagogue for fear of his life. Determined, however, not to give in to the strikers, he resorted to the protection of police, who accompanied him to the synagogue on High Holidays.¹²²

The synagogue was also the forum where class loyalties and divisions were identified and drawn. The case of the Dorf brothers is a good illustration of how social conflict undermined family cohesiveness. During his first days as an immigrant, Max Dorf was assisted by his two brothers. Soon, however, he progressed from these humble beginnings and became a manufacturer of cloaks and a man of standing in his community and in his synagogue. There, with the support of his two brothers, he was elected a vice-president. His brothers, who became his employees, found Max Dorf to be a harsh employer who made them work sixty hours a week for starvation wages. Embittered, they joined a strike against their brother who complained that they were socialists who wanted to divide his wealth among them. He therefore vowed not to employ them ever again. On one Saturday, when the whole family came to worship at their Broome Street synagogue, the two brothers, joined by a cousin, also an employee of Dorf, walked out, making their protest clear to all.¹²³ The walkout was a latter-day form of protest employed traditionally by nineteenth century Jewish journeymen against the better-off established artisans, and like their nineteenth century counterparts, the employees of

Max Dorf joined a more friendly place of worship on Pitt Street. Moreover, the three workers, having severed their ties with their old synagogue, continued to torment their old boss in his place of worship where they continued to maintain occasionally a noisy vigil.¹²⁴

In the years marked by the absence of stable working class organizations -- parties and unions -- the source of working class power lay in its ties with the larger immigrant community. The community and the neighborhood were as much the focus of workers' battles as their workplace. Here Jewish workers exercised their right to impose sanctions upon their enemies in very immediate, daily ways. These often violent moments were statements about expected norms of behavior binding all members of the Jewish community. Thus, the immigrant working class challenged the rationality and the values of the industrial economy. It also strove in those years of transition to define a cohesive Jewish community based on an alternative moral order.

FOOTNOTES

¹Quoted in Paula E. Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," American Jewish History 70 (September 1980): 97.

²Jewish Daily Forward, May 18, 1904, p. 1.

³Ibid., December 7, 1909, p. 5.

⁴New York Times, August 4, 1896, p. 9.

⁵New York Sun, August 19, 1885, p. 3.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., March 3, 1891, p. 7. Also, New York Times, August 19, 1885, p. 5, August 20, 1885, p. 8; New York Sun, September 6, 1894, p. 1; New York Times, August 4, 1896, p. 9.

⁸New York Sun, March 30, 1886, p. 1.

⁹Ibid., March 31, 1886, p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., April 1, 1886, p. 1.

¹²Schultz, the contractor, brought his case to court and was advised to lay the matter before the District Attorney. Ibid., March 3, 1891, p. 7.

¹³Ibid., March 14, 1891, p. 5.

¹⁴Ibid., March 16, 1891, p. 8; Epstein, Jewish Labor in U.S.A., vol. 1, p. 226.

¹⁵New York World, August 19, 1885; p. 3; New York Sun, August 19, 1885, p. 3; New York World, March 31, 1886, p. 8; New York Sun, March 31, 1886, p. 3. In one case, as a counter-measure to sabotage, a contractor demanded his workers' watches as a guarantee that they would not tamper with the machines. New York Sun, November 16, 1894, p. 5.

¹⁶New York Sun, August 19, 1885, p. 3.

¹⁷New York World, July 4, 1890, p. 12.

¹⁸During the cloakmakers' strike of that year, Billet, an ex-worker-turned-contractor who had provoked the ire of strikers during the preceding year, in partnership with Greenbaum, another contractor notorious for hiring scabs, tried to escape effective persecution by moving their joint venture to Jamaica, Long Island. However, even that did not help. Despite barbed wire, guard dogs and the distance, a number of striking cloakmakers travelled to Jamaica to take their revenge. There, in a melee that ensued, the strikers used vitriol intended to damage the finished garments, but maimed Greenbaum's young daughter instead. New York Times, March 10, 1891, p. 12; New York Sun, March 10, 1891, p. 1, March 11, 1891, p. 1; Epstein, Jewish Unions in the United States, vol. 1, pp. 226, 227.

¹⁹New York Sun, November 8, 1894, p. 9.

²⁰Ibid., November 9, 1894, p. 9.

²¹New York World, November 12, 1894, p. 9.

²²Ibid., November 9, 1894, p. 7. Though anonymous crowds played a central role in punitive forays against scabs and employers, occasional attacks were of a more personal nature. Striking workers, for example, were apt to follow and to torment their former employers who hired strike-breakers and, similarly, individual strikers aimed their ire against scabs who were singled out for taking their places and livelihood away. New York Sun, November 1, 1894, p. 6; New York Times, August 8, 1896, p. 6, August 11, 1896, p. 3.

²³New York Sun, April 3, 1886, p. 1.

²⁴Ibid., October 21, 1894, p. 2.

²⁵New York Times, August 18, 1910, p. 9. During the same strike, a woman married to a scab who had gone to Philadelphia reported that two women and a man forced their way into her apartment threatening to kill her and her four children unless she induced her husband to return from Philadelphia by Saturday. Ibid., August 26, 1910, p. 16.

²⁶New York Times, July 21, 1905, p. 3. Paradoxically, even scabs were known to help strikers. In one such case, although the police promptly arrived on the scene, attackers were helped by strike-breakers and all escaped arrest. Ibid.

²⁷New York Sun, March 20, 1891, p. 1.

²⁸Ibid., March 10, 1891, p. 1.

²⁹ Ibid., November 1, 1894, p. 6; New York World, November 1, 1894, p. 6.

³⁰ New York Sun, October 25, 1894, p. 5. Manufacturers traditionally threatened to open factories in Germany where some of the New York's branches were already in existence. New York World, August 19, 1885, p. 3.

³¹ The prices rose from 12 cents a pound to 18 cents a pound. Quoted in Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest," p. 93.

³² Paula Hyman maintains that the strike aimed merely to curtail demand through the neighborhood boycott without fixing their target on a traditionally "just" or "fair" price.

³³ Yiddishes Tageblatt, May 15, 1902, quoted in Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest," p. 99.

³⁴ New York Times, May 13, 1902, p. 7, May 16, 1902, p. 6, May 23, 1902, p. 1.

³⁵ Brooklyn Eagle, May 18, 1902, section 1, p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid., May 18, 1902, section 1, p. 6, May 23, 1902, p. 1.

³⁷ New York Times, May 16, 1902, p. 6, May 7, 1902, p. 2; Brooklyn Eagle, May 18, 1902, section 1, p. 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jewish Daily Forward, May 15, 1902, quoted in Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest," p. 100.

⁴⁰ New York Sun, November 17, 1894, p. 8, November 19, 1894, p. 2. In some instances, the landlords showed leniency to tenants who owed back rents due to strike. On other occasions, however, encouraged by contractors who advocated a harsh attitude to the strikers, the landlords resorted to legal procedures which often granted them the right to evict their rebellious tenants. New York Times, July 31, 1895, p. 5.

⁴¹ New York Tribune, July 6, 1905, p. 4. In addition to the frequent sales of property on the East Side and in other boroughs, for speculative reasons which resulted in rent increases, the new municipal laws which were introduced in the 1900's and which defined more strictly mandatory repairs and the landlord's liabilities, were also blamed for the upward trend in rents. Arlene K. Newman, "Ethnicity and Business Enterprise: A Study of Jewish Mutual Insurance

Companies in New York" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1983), p. 61.

⁴²New York Tribune, July 6, 1905, p. 4. Cohen, the landlord, became a prisoner in his own apartment, venturing out under police protection only. Ibid., July 7, 1905, p. 10.

⁴³Ibid., July 12, 1905, p. 10. The show of sympathy was, however, marred by angry neighbors who tried to stop the noisy crowd by pouring buckets of water out of their windows. Ibid.

⁴⁴New York Times, December 28, 1907, p. 2; Jewish Daily Forward, December 31, 1907, p. 1.

⁴⁵New York Times, December 27, 1907, p. 4; Jewish Daily Forward, December 19, 1907, p. 6, quoted in Arlene Newman, "Ethnicity and Business Enterprise," p. 68.

⁴⁶P. Newman, YIVO, RG 113, p. 8.

⁴⁷Jewish Daily Forward, December 24, 1907, p. 8.

⁴⁸Ibid., December 24, 1907, p. 8, December 26, 1907, p. 1. Although some landlords gave in to the demands and lowered the rents, the strike continued to spread affecting many tenements on the East Side. Ibid., January 4, 1908, p. 1, January 6, 1908, p. 1. The strategy decided by the strikers called to stop payment by some tenants, a step which meant to bring about eviction notices. Those evicted were to be housed by their neighbors, thus remaining on the premises of the building. Ibid., December 24, 1907, p. 8.

⁴⁹Ibid., December 28, 1907, p. 1, December 31, 1907, p. 1, January 6, 1908, p. 1.

⁵⁰New York Sun, October 17, 1894, p. 7.

⁵¹Ibid., November 9, 1894, p. 9.

⁵²New York Times, August 4, 1896, p. 9.

⁵³New York Times, May 16, 1902, p. 1.

⁵⁴Police protection was hardly ever available in restraining the attacks of local thugs and Irish "loafers" against Jewish population, which culminated in the riot set off during the funeral of Rabbi Jacob Joseph in 1902. The resentment against the police is evident throughout the testimonies of witnesses heard at the hearing to investigate the causes of the riot. Minutes of Hearing by Commissioners Appointed by the Mayor of the City of New York to Investigate

the Riot on July 30, 1902, YIVO Archives.

⁵⁵New York Sun, March 6, 1891, p. 5.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., September 16, 1894, p. 6.

⁵⁸Ibid., October 16, 1894, p. 1.

⁵⁹Brooklyn Eagle, May 18, 1902, section 1, p. 6,
May 23, 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²New York Times, May 16, 1902, p. 1.

⁶³Ibid., May 17, 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁴New York Sun, August 19, 1885, p. 3.

⁶⁵New York Times, August 3, 1896, p. 5.

⁶⁶Ibid., August 4, 1896, p. 9; New York Sun,
July 24, 1890, p. 5.

⁶⁷New York Times, August 6, 1896, p. 3.

⁶⁸Ibid., August 4, 1909, p. 4.

⁶⁹Ibid., July 24, 1890, p. 5.

⁷⁰Ibid., July 8, 1910, p. 1. The strikers of that year faced harsher sentences in general and imprisonment in the Workhouse was not uncommon. Ibid., August 28, 1910, p. 1, September 2, 1910, p. 5.

⁷¹Ibid., July 28, 1910, p. 4.

⁷²Ibid., August 17, 1910, p. 5, August 18, 1910, p. 9, August 19, 1910, p. 5.

⁷³A similar attitude prevailed in the ranks of Jewish Socialists. Their negative view of political institutions was colored by their understanding of the state as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. This view contributed also to their critique of the American labor movement and especially the Knights of Labor. Thus, the United Hebrew Trades, modelled closely on the United German Trades, and under the leadership of Socialists, ridiculed the non-political character of the Knights of Labor and its naive

belief in the natural fraternity of all people regardless of class. The Arbeiter Zeitung, the organ of the UHT, published an acerbic farewell article on the occasion of Powderly's retirement as the Grand Master. The article, entitled "Adieu Powderly" not only ridiculed the idea of industrial army and of the cooperatives to be established with the help of the state, it also criticized Powderly's unwillingness to support Uriah S. Stephens' efforts to win political power through the Workers' Party. Arbeiter Zeitung, December 1, 1893, p. 2. A similar critique was voiced against Central Labor Union which, according to the Socialists, did not warrant confidence as both Democrats and Republican politicians served as delegates and because of its strong ties to Tammany and the old working class community. Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 331.

⁷⁴For a summary of strike see Ch. 5.

⁷⁵New York Times, July 7, 1890, p. 4.

⁷⁶New York Sun, July 7, 1890, p. 1; New York Times, July 7, 1890, p. 7.

⁷⁷New York World, July 10, 1890, p. 1.

⁷⁸Ibid., July 10, 1890, p. 1, July 11, 1890, p. 2.

⁷⁹New York Times, July 13, 1890, p. 8.

⁸⁰New York Sun, July 11, 1890, p. 2.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Brooklyn Eagle, April 22, 1902, p. 1.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵New York Times, May 16, 1902, p. 6.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷New York Tribune, January 16, 1906, p. 8.

⁸⁸Ibid., January 16, 1906, p. 8, March 7, 1906, p. 1, April 3, 1906, p. 4.

⁸⁹Arbeiter Zeitung, July 4, 1890, p. 1, April 24, 1891, p. 3, August 19, 1892, p. 3, December 23, 1892, p. 2, May 13, 1892, p. 3, September 14, 1894, p. 1. Rosenberg, Cloak-makers and Their Unions, p. 79.

⁹⁰Arbeiter Zeitung, March 25, 1892, p. 2, December 23, 1892, p. 3, July 15, 1892, p. 3. Direct appeals to workers who returned to work proved to be more substantial, as in the case of tailors who donated 15% of their earnings to the strike and an additional country-wide assessment of 25 cents. New York Times, August 4, 1895, p. 8. The strike was officially led by the United Garment Workers, an organization which included numerous trades in men's clothing. Similarly, in 1896, those working assisted the strikers through a donation of 175 dollars. *Ibid.*, August 30, 1896, p. 8.

⁹¹New York Sun, April 4, 1891, p. 2.

⁹²*Ibid.*, November 24, 1894, p. 3.

⁹³*Ibid.*, November 26, 1894, p. 6.

⁹⁴New York Times, May 19, 1902, p. 5.

⁹⁵New York Sun, December 18, 1894, p. 3.

⁹⁶New York Times, July 3, 1904, p. 16.

⁹⁷Arbeiter Zeitung, September 8, 1893, p. 2, reported of daily assistance to 400 families.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, September 15, 1893, p. 6.

⁹⁹Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 83. Gompers disapproved of the strike which was initiated by the cloakmakers in sympathy with striking coatmakers. Despite his advice not to strike, membership approved overwhelmingly in favor of a strike. Although the United Garment Workers approved of financial assistance to the strikers, it eventually recalled its vote after hearing an unfavorable report on the situation of the strike. Eugene V. Debs was the one major labor leader who supported the strike and compared it favorably to the American Railway Union strike. Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 81.

¹⁰⁰New York Sun, November 17, 1894, p. 8, November 22, 1894, p. 5.

¹⁰¹Arbeiter Zeitung, December 2, 1894, p. 2. Landlords' attitudes to strikers owing back rent varied. Strikers facing evictions because of back rent of one to three months, were shown on occasions leniency from sympathetic landlords and judges. New York Tribune, January 6, 1895, p. 9. Other landlords, however, formed a Protective Association to fight defaulting and militant tenants. The landlords, members of the Association, contributed 25 dollars each to their organization and vowed that no landlord would let an apartment to a tenant who could

not show a receipt of last rent paid. New York Sun, November 19, 1894, p. 2.

¹⁰²New York Tribune, January 1, 1895, p. 4.

¹⁰³New York Tribune, January 2, 1895, p. 7, January 3, 1895, p. 9, January 4, 1895, p. 4, January 5, 1895, p. 1. The original plan of channeling the wages through United Hebrew Charities was quickly abandoned following an outcry from the East Side community which preferred to have dealings with the Society rather than with the Jewish charities whose role in the industry and in the strike was well-known. In the end, the Society declared the strike suspended, thus circumventing its policy "never to assist strikers so to enable them to maintain their contest, however justifiable the issue at stake may be." New York Times, January 3, 1895, p. 14.

¹⁰⁴Arbeiter Zeitung, August 7, 1898, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., March 31, 1893, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., July 14, 1893, p. 2, July 21, 1893, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷New York Sun, March 29, 1886, p. 1, March 30, 1886, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., March 29, 1886, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹Arbeiter Zeitung, September 9, 1892, p. 3. Similarly publicized boycotts were undertaken against scab bakeries, music halls and theaters. Ibid., March 20, 1891, p. 2, July 21, 1893, p. 3. Labor reprimanded their enemies and rewarded their friends. During the cloakmakers' strike of 1886, expressmen Goldberg and Siegler received the thanks of the strikers for withholding their services from the manufacturers. New York Sun, March 30, 1886, p. 1.

¹¹⁰Jewish Daily Forward, May 18, 1904, p. 1, May 26, 1904, p. 1.

¹¹¹One exception to the rule was the case of suspenders makers, who sent letters informing the customers of Lobel and Coleman of the firm's vindictive treatment of their workers who dared to voice dissatisfaction with their starvation wages. Arbeiter Zeitung, April 13, 1894, p. 3.

¹¹²In one such case, the cutters employed by Alfred Benjamin, asked for a nation-wide boycott of the cloaks manufactured by their employer. The boycott damaged the company's business, bringing about a lock-out. Similarly, a boycott imposed by the cutters in 1893 and supported by representatives of other clothing trades who vowed not to

work on garments cut by scabs, brought the desired effect when the buyers from all over the country returned their goods to the manufacturers. New York Tribune, March 29, 1893, p. 1; New York Times, April 2, 1893, p. 11; Arbeiter Zeitung, March 31, 1893, p. 2, April 7, 1893, p. 2. In response to this boycott, the manufacturers sought legally to restrain the cutters from issuing boycott circulars; the court, however, refused to grant an injunction. New York Times, April 6, 1893, p. 8. In 1901, the cutters again embarked on a drive to boycott the goods of Cohen, Goldman and Co., describing in circulars sent to the firm's out of town buyers, the sweating methods employed by the firm and threatening to inform all workers in the vicinity of those buyers who were handling the "obnoxious products" of the firm. Ibid., September 7, 1901, p. 16. As a result of these circulars, the firm suffered serious losses. Ibid.

¹¹³Arbeiter Zeitung, March 31, 1893, p. 6.

¹¹⁴New York Times, July 3, 1904, p. 16.

¹¹⁵Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 81.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷The desperate scab resorted in the end to a gun for self-protection. New York Sun, March 20, 1891, p. 1.

¹¹⁸New York Times, May 26, 1897, p. 4.

¹¹⁹Jewish Daily Forward, May 18, 1902, quoted in Hymn, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest," p. 94.

¹²⁰New York Times, May 19, 1902, p. 5.

¹²¹New York Sun, October 11, 1894, p. 8. A meat wholesaler of Brooklyn going to synagogue was followed and attacked by an angry crowd of meat boycotters. Brooklyn Eagle, May 24, 1902, p. 1. These and similar provocations, brought about a police watch near synagogues during a strike in 1896. New York Times, August 9, 1896, p. 8.

¹²²Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 167.

¹²³New York Times, August 15, 1897, p. 10.

¹²⁴Arbeiter Zeitung, August 15, 1897, p. 1.

EPILOGUE

This has been a study of a "new" immigrant group entering an industrial society and economy, at the beginning of a recomposition process in American labor. Although "old" immigrants were still numerically preponderant, they were soon to be joined, and later replaced, by an influx of Slovaks, Greeks, Italians, and Jews. These newcomers, of different cultural and economic backgrounds, were an anathema and a target of criticism for their American contemporaries. Prompted by anxiety and xenophobia and doubting the newcomers' ability to assimilate in the adoptive American society, contemporary Americans judged the Jewish immigrants by their own experience and expectations, thus overlooking or misinterpreting that which was unique and deviated from the expected norm of assimilation. For example, John R. Commons and Beatrice Webb (who studied the Jews of London's East End in the same period) both singled out the Jews as a group with an inherently capitalistic-individualistic character, which sought to climb out of the ranks of working class by means of unbridled competition.¹ This view, prompted by the seemingly anarchic behavior of Jewish workers and by the absence of stable unions, was no doubt informed by Commons' Progressive

goal of stable unionism as the guarantor for industrial peace. Similarly, contemporary American labor's criticism of the Jews as unorganizable was informed by the prevailing organization along craft lines and by the concomitant expectations that Jewish workers should comply with the ideals of business unionism as practiced by the AFL.

As this study has shown, the first twenty-five years of Jewish mass immigration witnessed the articulation of views and behavior that contrasted with the prevailing goals of craft unionism and industrial peace, with its narrowly defined targets limited to gains in the industrial front. As a result, the model of assimilation within the existing labor structure condemned Jewish workers as undisciplined and unorganizable. Further shortcomings of the traditional approach are evident in their failure to broaden our understanding of the link between ethnicity and class experience of the newcomers. It is only if we expand our view beyond the worker-employer economic relationship to include a broader cultural fabric that a new picture of the Jewish immigrant experience and its distinctiveness will emerge.

Central to the unique pattern of Jewish class experience was the inherited consensus ethos of communality and communal responsibility that was reinforced by residential closeness and by the common experience of work in one industry. These aspects of the immigrant experience gave rise to class

politicization and they account for the broad appeal of the working class movement on the Lower East Side. Hence, the collective memory of oppression that inspired worker protest against the unchecked rule of the new "czars" of the garment industry fired the community imagination and ignited a broad neighborhood following. Thus, ethnic experience created bonds which disregarded craft and even class lines and provided vital support during strikes.

Although 1894, a year of economic hardship, witnessed the defeat of a mass strike and proved the shortcomings of community's help at a time of depleted resources, the outcome did not conform to the pattern of defeats in the rest of the country. Unlike the failed strikes in steel, mining and railroads in the 1890's, which were followed by dissolution of unions and by subsequent managerial reforms meant to destroy the power of the skilled trades, Jewish workers weathered the economic crisis of the 1890's and continued their struggles into the twentieth century. Cross-craft cohesiveness in the fragmented industry of garments and community support, rather than skill or craft differentiation, was their strength. And, although class divisions drawing their legitimization from the new ethos of individualism intruded full force upon the ethics of communality, activity rooted in community life, the basis for future industrial unionism, was to remain the strength and the hallmark of Jewish labor in the years to come.

The years 1905-1916 saw a dramatic growth of unions, especially the ILGWU. Although the workers' sustenance in matters such as unemployment and strike benefits, for example, began slowly shifting to the unions, workers continued to draw strength from their sympathizers and their followers in the community. Solidarity across boundaries of trade and craft continued to shape behavior, particularly during strikes. During a particularly riotous bakers' strike in 1905, a bakery owner disregarding the strike drew a revolver and fired into the crowd outside his shop, wounding a bystander. This act immediately aroused the ire of the neighborhood and within minutes approximately 5,000 men congregated, twice the actual number of striking bakers, provoking a battle with the police. Similarly, the reefer-makers strike of 1907 included picketing by non-strikers and by many workers from other branches of the industry who left their jobs and came to assist the strikers.²

The close links between crafts and trades and the communal bonds inspired the goal of industrial unionism. It also, however, vexed union leadership which aspired to organizational strength through craft unions and disciplined membership. Expressions of community participation in the affairs of the workers frustrated these efforts. With the mass uprisings of 1909-1910, when the philosophy of general strike based on industrial organization gained in force, the blurred lines which failed to distinguish workers from non-

workers were the subject of continual frustration to union leadership. Thus, during the strike of 1910, family attendance at meeting places, the custom of the East Side, horrified organizers who claimed that this practice hindered orderly conduct of the proceedings.³ Furthermore, the much criticized workers solidarity that transcended trade and craft, almost frustrated the attempts of ILGWU organizers in 1910 to coordinate the strike of that year. Although workers in many related crafts and those unemployed at the time clamored to join the strike, only the dress- and waist-makers, both strong crafts within the ILGWU, were allowed by the organizers to take part. It was only when the unemployed, nicknamed "orphans," threatened to scab if they were not admitted that the general committee decided to recognize them as full participants in the strike.⁴

Another issue that pitted union leadership against rank and file was the right to strike. Within the first four months following the inception of ILGWU, a body intended to coordinate and to direct the strike activities of the member industries, eighty-three strikes were called, none of which was officially endorsed by the ILGWU.⁵ The indulgence in strike activity continued to be the by-word of ILGWU locals to the despair of its leaders who declared that strikes erupting "because of any trivial thing" without the backing of the executive were "useless and avoidable." Accordingly, union leadership attempted to centralize union affairs

through close supervision of local finances and by establishing a procedure for strike-related decisions. Although ILGWU granted separate charters to each craft local all strikes had to be approved by the individual trades within the ILGWU. In a similar attempt to establish control, strike benefits were to be dispensed to participants of authorized strikes only.⁶ For the next ten years, however, and throughout the Protocol of Peace Era, in spite of additional centralizing measures, "illegal stoppages" continued to occur. Between March 1911 and July 1913 there were 304 shop strikes against 131 firms belonging to the Protective Association, the members of which were bound by the Protocol. The failure of the industrial peace was due, according to the ILGWU leadership and contemporary observers, to the workers' lack of experience with collective agreements and to the uncompromising and "scrapping" spirit of some of the old leaders whose only experience was that of fighting and striking.

The undisciplined strikes had their roots, however, in deep dissatisfaction with the goals of the Protocol, whose premise contradicted some of the traditional tenets held by workers. Job security, for instance, a traditional grievance among Jewish workers, challenged the principle of preferential shop, the core of the Protocol of Peace.⁷ Discrimination and unjustifiable discharge notwithstanding, International's leadership regarded these grievances as a

misconception of the nature of unionism and a source of trouble while confirming their faith in the machinery of arbitration set by the Protocol. Not surprisingly, therefore, with strike action now circumscribed by the Protocol, through compulsory arbitration procedure workers viewed themselves as "slaves of the protocol."⁸ The unbridgable gap between leadership, determined to keep the industrial peace, and the disaffected rank and file, soon became apparent: in one case of one unauthorized local strike, the ILGWU actually sent strikebreakers to replace strikers who refused to return to work because of an unanswered grievance concerning a foreman who insulted one of the woman-finishers.⁹ Moreover, workers began questioning the very basis of industrial peace as embodied by the Protocol. A "union which obtained the support of the manufacturers' association had no moral right to exist," declared the rebellious Joint Board.¹⁰ The principle of common interests between workers and employers, and the promise of industrial democracy, soon began losing its appeal, especially in view of the high price it exacted in exchange: the right to strike, the very essence of workers' power. The legacy of the years of the Protocol therefore, is the refusal to bargain for material gains at the expense of workers' power. Instead, Jewish workers reconfirmed in the years of the Protocol their broader definition of working class community and their rejection of compartmentalized

craft unions and above all their rejection of strategies favored by Progressives and by the business unionism of the AFL.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the years of discontent with the Protocol also saw the growth of Jewish support for the Socialist Party. The broader demands for social and economic justice voiced by the Socialist candidates, in contrast to the demands limited to gains on the economic-industrial front, attracted the support of Jewish neighborhoods and Jewish unions.¹¹ Thus, in 1916, the recently founded Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America proclaimed its support for the Socialist Party, the organization "which stands loyal to the working class, and whose aim is the emancipation of the working class from wage slavery."¹² Although causes for agitation had broadened to include, for example, opposition to war and election campaigns supplemented strike rallies and parades, mass support and forms of collective action drawing on traditional residential ties and closeness, continued to constitute the base upon which the Socialist party built its strength. In November 1912, Eugene V. Debs' campaign succeeded in drawing 40,000 marchers representing unions, clubs and societies of the Jewish neighborhood, while an additional 15,000 watched.¹³ And a familiar scene which came to symbolize the communal solidarity of the Jewish workers took place during Morris Hillquit's campaign for mayor in 1917, when thousands

of men and women came to hear Hillquit speak and "the whole East Side seemed to be on its feet."¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

¹United States Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor, vol. 15, pp. 319, 325-327. Beatrice Webb's view quoted on Selig Perlman, "Jewish-American Unionism. Its Birth Pangs and Contributions to the General American Labor Movement," American Jewish Historical Society, June 1952, quoted in Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 290.

²Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 131.

³Rosenberg, Cloakmakers and Their Unions, p. 213.

⁴Ibid., pp. 203-213. The unemployed, however, met separately.

⁵Ibid., pp. 113, 114.

⁶Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, pp. 120-122, Weinstein, Jewish Unions in America, p. 345. A strike by cloak operators, for instance, had to be approved by the cloak section of the ILGWU.

⁷Over 75 percent of a total of 7,656 complaints recorded between April 11, 1911, and October 31, 1913, were concerned with wages, discrimination of employers against individuals and cases of "unjustifiable discharge." Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 238.

⁸Ibid., p. 258.

⁹Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 250.

¹¹Melvyn Dubofsky, "Success and Failure of Socialists in New York City, 1900-1918," Labor History, vol. 9, Fall 1968.

¹²Ibid., p. 368.

¹³Charles Leinenweber, "Socialists in the Streets: The New York City Socialist Party in Working Class Neighborhoods, 1908-1918," Science and Society, vol. 41, Summer 1977, p. 159.

¹⁴Morris Hillquit, Loose Leaves From Busy Life, p. 188, quoted ibid., p. 158.

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