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Working-Class Jewish  
Youth and Adoption of  
Revolutionary Identity  
During the 1905  
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No. 2001, June 2009

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ISSN 0889-275X

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*The Carl Beck Papers*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the construction of a revolutionary identity among the working-class Jewish youth of the Pale of Settlement through the prism of changes taking place in their attitudes and behavior standards. I claim that these changes, caused initially by worsening economic and social conditions for the Jewish community in the Russian empire, resulted in the creation of a new image a young Jew could choose for her/himself, that of a working-class Jewish revolutionary. This new image widened the options for secularization available to working-class Jews and signaled a greater openness within the Jewish community to an idea of a secular Jew. The availability of a new secular, activist identity also allowed the working-class revolutionary youth to create for themselves a new political space within the hierarchy of the Jewish community, a space dependent on their combined new and old identities as revolutionaries and Jews.

Many young working-class Jews adopted revolutionary ideas as a better answer to the difficulties they encountered than Jewish traditional ideas or the Maskilic (Jewish Enlightenment) notions. The problems they faced derived from a combination of anti-Jewish legislation with popular anti-Semitism, which together ensured that industrialization meant impoverishment of the vast majority of Jews in the Pale of the Settlement. For many young Jews, the main symbol of their exclusion from the advantages of the modern industrial society was a decision to close government educational institutions to all but a tiny percent of Jewish applicants. The Jews' rebellion against their lowly social status often centered on education.

While revolutionary ideas provided the ideological focus around which the young Jews, resenting their lowly status determined by both class and ethnicity, could organize, self-education circles provided the social and the emotional focus. Socially, self-education circles provided space for the Jewish youth, often uprooted from a small community and a family and making their way in the big city, to get practical advice, assistance from their peers, and emotional support. They also gave young, working-class Jews, who felt their lack of education to be acutely humiliating, a belief that the education they received outside of either Jewish tradition or the government system, was somehow superior in its ability to train them to deal with modernity. A new identity—the working-class Jewish revolutionary—was the result. Linked with modernity and education, this new identity eventually became socially respectable within the Jewish community.

This study is based on examination of two groups of archival sources: autobiographies of working-class Jewish ex-militants from the files of the Society of Ex-Political Prisoners and Exiles and full or partial texts of young Jews' letters retained in the archive of the political police.

## Why Adopt a Revolutionary Identity?

Young working-class Jews residing in the Russian Pale of Settlement during the early twentieth century joined the revolutionary underground hoping to forge a new sense of identity and a new community. The revolutionary ideas at the time competed successfully against both religion and other possible secular identities (e.g., liberalism, Zionism), providing working-class Jewish youth with the new ideological framework they needed to understand their situation and to justify their struggle against the specific hardships they had to face. Even though Jewish radicalism as a mass phenomenon disappeared shortly after, along with the specific historical conditions from which it derived, it left behind a new notion of what a Jew might be: a working-class, secular revolutionary.

In order to understand why and how this cultural change took place, I examined many personal documents of contemporaries who became involved with the revolutionary movement precisely when it was attractive to the masses (rather than just to especially zealous types)—during the 1905 revolution.<sup>1</sup> My interest here is in a mass phenomenon rather than in individual development. Individuals only slightly involved with the movement were much more important to me than the relatively small political and intellectual leadership elite. I also consciously preferred to look for similar approaches in numerous documents composed by a large number of different people, rather than researching the personal development of a small number of activists. While I did look at documents produced by the revolutionary parties, the political police, and the local authorities, I focused on documents composed by the young revolutionaries themselves, since I was interested in their perception of the change they experienced rather than the change itself.

These documents are 800 private letters written around the time of the 1905 revolution and retained (fully or in part) in the archive of the political police, as well as 430 autobiographies composed between 1924 and 1934 and submitted as part of a membership application to the Society of Ex-Political Prisoners and Exiles. Close reading of the autobiographies provided me with an understanding of how people constituted their stories as revolutionaries, and the letters provided a useful means of control. The letters helped me recognize what parts of the autobiographies resulted from the Soviet culture of the early 1920s, and were therefore irrelevant to my questions concerning the revolutionary period of 1905–1907.<sup>2</sup> The autobiographies also complemented the letters by providing coherent life stories, where people explained issues they would not have had to explain in a private letter. Both types of sources were intended for communication—the autobiographies with society members,

who apparently went through the same life experiences as the applicants; and the letters primarily with friends or siblings. While analyzing the texts I studied what the writers tried to convey to their correspondents—how they presented themselves and the way they portrayed the role of revolutionary politics in their lives. I did this textual analysis under the assumption that the writers approached their task with a certain self-consciousness, that they wrote about themselves by fitting themselves to a certain cultural pattern or expectation. I assumed that one's personal story is constructed in communication with others; rather than trying to see some authentic story behind the texts, I tried to see what in these texts could inform us about the intellectual, cultural, and emotional reality of these people as a group.

Particularly with the autobiographies, I concentrated on those written by people who found writing texts strange and uncomfortable and were not familiar with the conventions of a Soviet-style autobiography (as evidenced by their grammar and by their oversupply of information, compared to the more sparse texts of the educated).

This difference between the better educated and the uneducated pushed me to concentrate on the latter, rather than write of young revolutionary Jews of the Pale as a whole. Another reason for my decision was that although there are numerous works on middle-class Jewish politics (Nathans, Safran, Lederhendler),<sup>3</sup> as well as works concentrating on educated Jewish revolutionary leadership (Frankel, Levin, Haberer),<sup>4</sup> and some of these works deal with the subjective dimension of political involvement (Haberer, Krutikov),<sup>5</sup> the scholarship focusing on the poor, who were in fact the vast majority among the rank and file of the revolutionary struggle during 1905–1907 (Mendelsohn, Rafes, Bukhbinder),<sup>6</sup> covers the subjective dimension of their politicization only in short comments. While proceeding with my research I began to realize just how rare educated Jews were in the Pale and how important it is to write specifically about the persona of the Jewish revolutionary that was familiar at the time—the barely educated and the poor. These people's attitudes and expectations were not the same as those of their revolutionary leaders. The interaction between the groups highly affected the nature of the revolutionary movement among the Jews—not just, as pointed out by Frankel, Levin, and many others, in the direction of Jewish nationalism inside the Bund, but also in terms of the accepted lifestyle, emotional attitudes, and cultural definitions of what a revolutionary should be. This subjective dimension, as shown by work on the emotional politicization of contemporary Russian workers (Haimson, Steinberg),<sup>7</sup> is providing an important additional dimension to research on the history of the revolutionary movement. The

political attitudes of the revolutionaries are incomprehensible if we do not attempt to understand how they perceived their reality and their place within this reality.

The process of identity formation began with the young Jews' perception of their harsh contemporary conditions, in reaction to which their new identity was created. Both workers and students bitterly addressed their lack of access to secular education. This was their most frequently cited cause of resentment. Since students accepted to the state schools as part of the Jewish quota were usually wealthy and could afford to bribe the school principals, the issue of education came to symbolize for the poor the discrimination they suffered both because of their ethnicity and their economic situation. The traditional importance of education in establishing one's status in the Jewish community undoubtedly played a role in enhancing secular education as a symbol.

Alternatively, the political groups that attracted young working-class Jews to radicalism supplied the newcomers with both general and political education. Education included reading and writing, as well as some general (and very basic) courses on science, history, and culture. Political education mostly involved reading and discussing short propaganda pamphlets published by the revolutionary parties. Considering that the circle, the framework in which both general and political education usually took place, had a short life span during the 1905 revolution, the education people received at that time (rather than in earlier circles) was highly superficial. Still, it was more than what was available to other, nonpolitical Jews of their generation and class. The young Jews educated in the circle felt they knew more than others in their community and were responsible for that community due to their knowledge. This education provided them with an enormous source of pride and communal prestige.

Russian language, being the dominant language of culture in most of the area of Jewish habitation, became a symbol of enhanced educational status (although in Poland this role was played by Polish as well as Russian). Most of the letters I read were composed in Russian, even if the writer had difficulty with the language.<sup>8</sup> Yiddish or, more rarely, Hebrew, was used mainly for conspiratorial purposes (people wrongly assumed that the secret police would find these languages more difficult, and they included in letters otherwise written in Russian sentences in Hebrew or Yiddish on issues they obviously considered secret). The number of Jews literate in Russian in most Jewish communities of the Pale was so small that even someone who marginally mastered the language was considered highly educated. As Fridman, a Bundist worker and a member of the Society of Ex-Political Prisoners, relates about his period of political activism:

I was considered a good speechmaker in Yiddish, people listened to me, invited me to give talks. We had there one typesetter, he came and asked me to give a talk. . . . On the way he said: "If you could say something in Russian, it would be very good." I said that I cannot speak Russian very well. "That does not matter, nobody knows Russian anyway . . . the less they will understand the more they will feel respect, and otherwise they will not believe any talk!"<sup>9</sup>

The Russian language symbolized education and an openness to the world outside the Jewish community. Often this attitude toward the Russian language and Russian culture in general created a problem between Jews and non-Jewish local nationalists who saw this as support for Russian cultural imperialism.<sup>10</sup> While working-class Jews resided among populations that were or were rapidly becoming nationalistic (such as Poles, Ukrainians, or Lithuanians), at the time they rarely derived their identity from modern ideas of nationality or spoke its language (Zionism at this time attracted middle-class and better educated supporters). Yiddish was no more than a vernacular, and Hebrew was too holy and culturally remote for the scarcely educated majority, so adopting the culture that offered the most in terms of social and cultural advancement seemed a matter of common sense rather than a political decision. Since Eastern European Jews could not help but take their Jewish identity for granted, and since the Jews of the Pale grew up within a Jewish environment, they did not see the linguistic issue as a cultural threat. For people with no pretensions of national dominance in the territories where they resided, loyalty to Jews as a community and to certain elements of culture, rather than language, made a person Jewish. Adopting the Russian language was thus a sign of cultural and social mobility rather than cultural assimilation. This mobility, especially if gained through education, invited respect from other Jews. Fridman mentions in his story the effect of education on the attitude toward female workers in his factory: "Some girls came to the factory with books in their hands, and the books were in Russian. . . . Thus some girls went out of the circles being able to read books in Russian. It was considered a sign of very good education and they were treated with a lot of respect."<sup>11</sup>

Self-education circles were the only way for these girls to achieve respect within their community and among their peers, and they valued it highly. For them, knowing Russian and reading Russian books demonstrated a cultural achievement that was inconceivable for a simple worker, and they could use it to demand the respect they had not been entitled to before, according to communal values. Fridman notes later that the same women who learned to read Russian managed to put



up a successful fight against sexual harassment in the factory. Their new standing as cultured people undoubtedly helped them to gain the necessary social support for such an action.

The education issue was the main grievance even for revolutionary workers who did not end up engaging in academic studies. Jewish workers were bitter about their working conditions as apprentices, but their major complaint concerned insufficient training in their craft—a complaint ranking higher than the sixteen- to eighteen-hour work day and continuous abuse.<sup>12</sup> Acquiring a craft seems to have been a source of pride for the workers, and they believed that the lack of proper training cheated them of their rightful opportunities for economic and social advancement. Apprentices ran away time after time, attaching themselves to other masters who, they hoped, might actually teach them a skill.

Both prospective artisans and prospective students encountered enormous obstacles. These derived from their economic condition and from the discrimination against them as Jews by the state, local officials, prospective employers, and local non-Jews competing against them for jobs. Both attempted to use education to achieve economic independence and respect within the Jewish community, as well as geographical mobility and personal and intellectual independence. They sought something that could make them into free, enlightened individuals rather than poor shtetl Jews, downtrodden and living in fear of the authorities, Gentiles, and richer Jews. They sought an alternative to spending their lives in a desperate struggle for survival.

Yet both students and workers quickly saw that their individual goals would be impossible to achieve as long as they struggled alone. Scarce economic and intellectual resources did not allow workers to achieve their individual ambitions. Although most apprentices eventually became artisans, the majority could only hope for a meager existence at the bottom of the social world in the Jewish community. They wanted general and professional education, as well as a different view of their place in the world. The students, on the other hand, needed economic, intellectual, and emotional support during their years of struggle against the official educational system. Both students and workers could hope to get this from one source—their peers—who also viewed education as a symbol as well as an instrument for individual freedom, self-respect, and independence, and who would be willing to take part in a mutually supportive youth milieu focused on educational issues.

This milieu did indeed come into existence in many of the larger cities of the Pale. It offered assistance to young Jews struggling for education, like Rosa Ginsburg, a girl from a poor Jewish family residing in a village near Gomel who later

became a social-democrat. Ginsburg writes in her 1903 autobiography that while the poor had no chance to get into schools, the attraction of education to Jewish youth was very strong:

The better-off studied with hired teachers, others studied by themselves, but many found teachers who would assist them without pay, since it became a norm that every student taught a free set of lessons. Not to teach for free was considered unacceptable. When I, in my village, found out about those good habits in the city, I wished to go there. When I was fifteen or sixteen, I found myself in the city [Gomel]. Immediately I got lucky: I found a teacher who would work with me for free and two or three students willing to pay two rubles for private lessons. I was so happy.<sup>13</sup>

Ginsburg found a milieu supportive of prospective Jewish students, the promise of which was sufficient to prompt her to leave her small village and go to Gomel. There she expected assistance not from relatives or friends, but from her peers—other Jewish students. These students, recognizing her as one of their own, not only were ready to teach her at no charge but also took responsibility for her well-being. They found her a job that permitted her to continue her studies. Although education was the center of her aspirations, becoming part of the youth milieu that focused on study shaped her social experience. While this enforced her commitment to study, it also enforced her commitment to the particular youth community in Gomel. Studying and joining this community became inseparable for her.

An educated Russian from an Old Believer family, G. F. Kalashnikov, elaborated on the intersection of education and youth community among the Jews in Gomel:

The striving for education in the late 1890s in Gomel was so enormous that the number of teachers was insufficient. Therefore, when students came to the city, people made lists of how many free lessons and whom will they be teaching each day, as their contribution to education in Gomel. Thus it was among the Jews. . . . By 1903 Gomel became a very interesting city. Young people did not dare to just take a walk. They were embarrassed to walk just like that without a book. They had to look as if they were going somewhere for a purpose, or either to or from the library.<sup>14</sup>

Operating as a studious community was at the center of this milieu's self-definition, but since studying challenged the discriminatory policies of the state and the class-based perceptions of traditional Jewish elites, it had a political connotation that would not apply in other circumstances.

The desire for education created the Jewish youth community, and this community created a culture of its own, centered on scholarship. The young Jews involved did not live apart from the Jewish community as a whole, but created their own culture within this community and in constant interaction with it. People wrote of many negative experiences with the traditional Jewish community, but completely avoiding contact with it was economically and socially impossible. Synagogues were used as a convenient space for political meetings, Yiddish was used as a language of conspiracy, and the generally negative attitude of the Jews toward the authorities meant that they rarely informed on the young revolutionaries. During pogroms, Jewish revolutionaries felt committed to protecting the Jewish community.

Simultaneously, however, the young people who subsequently, within the youth milieu, became revolutionaries wished to assert their own individuality against both the Jewish community and the state. Education was a tool in this effort, but education on its own was not sufficient. The personal struggle to achieve the status of an educated person provided young Jews with a feeling of self-worth. High school and university students, who acquired an education in official institutions, still felt the need for another community, such as the self-education circle. The high school student and future socialist-revolutionary Brailovskii-Petrovskii spoke with pride of being accepted into a self-education circle, even though he was not prevented from getting a formal education.<sup>15</sup> An apprentice, Moisei Khilkevich (who started as a Bund member but later became a Bolshevik), was enormously proud of being invited to join a self-education circle, even though it did not assist him in his professional goals.<sup>16</sup> Even more important, in none of the autobiographies does the author describe him or herself as a passive recipient. To acquire an education, general or political, a person needed to reach out, to take a risk, to perform an individual rather than a communal action, even though the ultimate success was dependent on the support of the youth community. This meant going alone to Gomel for a young country girl like Rosa Ginsburg, or taking interest in the older worker constantly reading a newspaper like Khilkevich. This need for personal assertion created a conflict with parents and with the Jewish community at large—a conflict in which a young Jew was assisted by his or her peers, who were ready to intercede in family or community conflict on the side of the rebellious young person.

Next to education, young Jews complained most about discrimination from the state and attempts at control from the family and the Jewish community. They also expressed anxiety at having to deal with expressions of popular anti-Semitism. Jewish workers were habitually excluded from the better-paid, more highly skilled jobs. Applicants to the Society of Ex-Political Prisoners, as well as contemporary

historians like Naum Bukhbinder, mention that Jews were kept from the more mechanized employments and the bigger factories.<sup>17</sup> The main issue for Gentile workers was economic competition, but the fact that this competition developed around ethnic/religious issues troubled the Jews who found themselves on the receiving end of discrimination and violence. Under these circumstances, a Jewish revolutionary was constantly reminded of his or her Jewish identity and had to consider it when making political decisions.

The widespread pogroms of 1905–07 made the young Jews feel that the only way to protect their newly acquired identity, based on personal initiative and education, was to get back to the Jewish community and protect it. The pogroms and the discrimination from non-Jewish coworkers, as well as economic hardship, made the individualist identity that had developed in the mutually supportive self-education circles seem less tenable. Instead of using the youth community as a tool to assist their personal development as individuals, young Jews came to see this community as having an inherent value in itself. It was the only place where they felt accepted, and it was the basis for collective action against whatever threatened their newly acquired individual identity. Iosif Novak, who sympathized with the socialist-revolutionary party, sustained an enormous struggle against both his family and his economic situation to achieve the goal of education; although involved in political activism before 1905, he could not keep from joining a self-defense unit during 1905.<sup>18</sup> Not to do so would have contradicted all he fought for, the identity he tried to develop for himself. As an extern he already had the connections in the youth community that made joining a self-defense unit easy. The connections he developed for support while striving for an individual identity as an educated person, were used instead to return to and protect the Jewish community. Being part of the youth community became a major component of his identity.

These youths returned to the Jewish community, but did so as part of the new subculture they had created for themselves, as a different type of Jew. By doing so they changed not only themselves but the Jewish community as well, since they provided an alternative identity of what it could mean to be Jewish.

## **What Were They Leaving? The Community and the Family**

To understand the communities the youth formed in the revolutionary movement, we must first understand the communities they left and what leaving meant to them. All the Jewish revolutionaries' autobiographies document the availability

of a minimal education in the *heder*, the Jewish elementary school. Those who later became revolutionary activists wrote disparagingly of the education they acquired in the heders or in the yeshiva, yet we have to assume that growing up in a community that valued education enough to subsidize poorer children had to affect their general attitude toward education. The community obviously took interest in the education of children, both religious and secular, and not educating children was seen as wrong.<sup>19</sup>

Even the poor, sickly, tailor father of the future social-democrat Isaak Sorokin, who habitually abused his family and did not care much for learning, was proud of his son's scholarly success. As a father, he had to submit to the opinion of his neighbors and provide his child with some secular as well as religious education. Sorokin, who complained about his father's disparaging attitude toward education, described how his father at first sent him to study Judaism. The child excelled, impressing the old people in the neighborhood to the point that they considered him a future Talmud scholar. His father, however, wanted to teach the child his craft—tailoring. But being illiterate and understanding the difficulties involved, he found Sorokin a private teacher for Russian. When the child learned to read and write in that language and became an avid reader of fairy tales, the father decided again that it was time to teach him a craft. Sorokin writes: “As for me, I really did not want to learn my father's craft, I wanted to study. Due to my begging and the advice of the neighbors I was sent to a three-grade municipal school.”<sup>20</sup> It is clear that even a father who did not really value secular studies and wanted to introduce his child to his craft could not withstand community pressure. His own attitude was obviously ambivalent. Although Sorokin remembered his father as constantly insisting that he start work rather than study, the father, who was obviously very poor, was willing to provide the child with much more education than he had received, due to the social pressure to let a gifted child study. Even orphans, the poorest of the poor, were given some schooling with the assistance of relatives or the community. The orphan Isaak Shipkevich, who later became a Bundist and still later an anarchist-communist, told of acquiring some Jewish and craft education paid for by the Jewish community, as well as “stealing” (apparently unhindered) some secular education by eavesdropping on lessons taught to wealthier children.<sup>21</sup> Thus education was not only a major component of the identity the youth strived for, but was rooted in the values of the Jewish community they grew up in. While many autobiography- and letter-writers describe acquiring secular education as rebellious, this aspect of their rebellion was often supported by some of their nonrevolutionary elders and respected by others.

Acquiring secular education in the context of revolutionary politics, however, often meant distancing oneself from communal values (e.g., religion or segregation of the sexes) and from one's family. Attaining this education in illegal self-education circles could also lead to trouble with the authorities, both on the communal level (employers) and the state level (police). Jewish families were highly aware of this and strongly opposed secularization of their children. The children, on the other hand, tended to react by openly rejecting the kind of lives their parents lived, including religious observance; adherence to communal customs; language; dress; and modes of behavior toward their peers, their elders, non-Jews, and the authorities.

Some young people flaunted their new independence. The food in the youth gatherings was often nonkosher, and eating it was a sort of initiation ceremony. Sara Agronina-Ageeva, for example, describes her struggles with eating nonkosher food. The first time she tried to eat a pastry cooked in lard, with another Jewish friend on a dare, both girls ended up vomiting. But at her first Bund political meeting she decided that her loyalty was ultimately with her Bundist friends and not with Jewish religious values, and she ate whatever food was there. For her this signaled a break with the old tradition and initiation into a new one, a tradition created by her new revolutionary friends.

It was a personal decision of enormous import to many people. As with learning the Russian language it did not mean disloyalty toward the Jewish community altogether, but it meant a rejection of its old hierarchies and religious values.<sup>22</sup> The revolutionary youth community enforced this decision, not because it was so important on political grounds but because they were building a new culture to which they wanted to attract people. This culture was built on adherence to certain aspects of secular life and revolutionary values, which emerged as an alternative to the values of the old Jewish community rather than only to its politics. In order to exist, the new culture had to struggle against the old. The old culture was still far too powerful in people's minds for the young revolutionaries to treat it with indifference or distant sympathy.

Agronina-Ageeva had to choose between loyalty to the revolutionary youth culture and the religious values she was raised with, but leaving religion behind was hard. Like Agronina-Ageeva, Fridman wrote of his own conflicts and difficulties with abandoning religion. He and several other workers went to meet a Bund propagandist who agreed to teach them. His friends, including a brushmaker and a glovemaker, were highly suspicious of the Bundist, who immediately attacked their religious beliefs. The workers first suspected he wanted them to convert, but then, when he tried to prove to them the absence of a God, they understood that he was

a socialist rather than a Christian missionary. The Bundist (John Mill, one of the leaders of the Bund), attacked their religious beliefs not with a theological argument, but by arguing that if God exists he should prove his existence on demand, for example by killing the speaker on the spot. He assumed, correctly, that for these workers religion was more about cultural adherence and magic than about theology and that for them this proof would be much more powerful. Indeed, the workers expected Mill to die instantly; when nothing happened they were frightened and emotionally shattered. Only then did they agree to study with him, and their religious faith began to evaporate. Fridman himself later told a fellow worker that no God exists and was slapped for it.<sup>23</sup>

Proof of God's nonexistence of the sort provided by Mill was surely not the only thing that affected the religious faith of people like Fridman and his friends. They all felt their situation as workers was hopeless and that secular education might show them a way out. This explains why the workers did not just run away from the propagandist, even though they were truly afraid when he tried to attract God's wrath. Both they and Agronina-Ageeva wanted the education that only socialists offered them, and they wanted the status that came with education. The self-education circles organized by socialists were the only escape from the workers' lowly social status, and many were ready to accept the cultural changes required of them.

For their part, propagandists tried to shake the new followers' religious faith, since religion implied adherence to a whole system of values and a way of life that had no place in the revolutionary culture. Since the people I describe here did not have much religious education, religion to them meant mostly adherence to the lifestyle and values of the traditional Jewish community. Shaking their religious faith was a way to gain their conversion to the new values and way of life proposed by the revolutionaries. As Max Rodzinskii writes of his initial concerns about joining the Polish Socialist Party: "I liked all of this very much, but I could not accept their rejection of God. Then the agitator gave me several books dealing with the religion issue, I read them and I started doubting. After a hard internal struggle I became free of my faith and could, with all my soul, join the party."<sup>24</sup> It was surely not just a matter of reading books. For Rodzinskii, choosing between the party and his religion was a necessary step in breaking with the Jewish community and establishing a new identity as well as finding a new community. The same choice was made by Fridman, and by Agronina-Ageeva and her friend Genia. The pastries they ate were symbolic of their readiness to enter a new life, with new ways of thought and new beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

This wish to break with the old values and the old community was clear not only to the young revolutionaries, but to their families and neighbors. The young people who joined the self-education circles repeatedly wrote about harsh conflicts with their families, who suspected them of wanting to convert. As Fridman noted, this suspicion existed among the community as a whole toward anyone espousing new ideas or even adopting a different mode of behavior. Fridman talks about his extended family persecuting him and his wife when they first became politicized, burning their books, watching them constantly, and even beating them out of fear that they were going to convert.<sup>26</sup> The neighbors tried to interfere as well, and not only the wealthy heads of the community whose economic interests were jeopardized by the new assertiveness of the workers. People whose religious sensibilities were hurt by the youths' new modes of behavior also intervened. The Bundist functionary Moisei Rafes writes that "on the outskirts of Vilna, Warsaw, Belostok you could often see how 'respectable' but fanatical Jews attacked the Jewish working youth and beat them up for going to the street on Sabbath with a walking stick."<sup>27</sup> Though outright conversion to Christianity was not considered acceptable for a Jewish revolutionary, and among the files I examined I found only two cases of conversion, young Jews were rejecting communal values for new values that were no less threatening to traditional Jewish authorities.<sup>28</sup>

Parents were especially concerned about the effect of their children's behavior on their position in the Jewish community. No one was happy about the neighbors or the police coming to complain about their child. When a child was involved in illegal activity the entire family could be discredited or endangered in the eyes of the authorities, but if that same child also took part in an expropriation (a robbery or extortion performed for a political cause), the family was discredited in the eyes of the local community. Avram, a small-town boy and a former expropriator who left his family and went to Kiev, writes to a fellow party member: "Comrade! I got a letter from home, where they write that somebody came to my father in the store and started yelling, how could he let his son go to Liubinichik and demand from him twenty-five rubles. Then, they shouted to everyone that I went to 'install democracy,' as they put it. Make them shut up, since this can have a bad effect on both me and the organization as a whole."<sup>29</sup> Avram had probably taken part in an expropriation on behalf of his party, but being a young, unmarried man could easily leave his town. His family, on the other hand, had to deal with the consequences within their local community. He tried to mobilize his local comrades to protect his family, but his family could not have been happy about the situation.



A visit from the police, or even the possibility that this might occur, often scared parents enough to pressure their children into distancing themselves from the revolutionary youth community and the revolutionary movement. Naum Nemzer, a high school student expelled for possession of revolutionary proclamations and later a Bundist, was thrown out of his house by his father after a visit from the police.<sup>30</sup> In most cases the parents' reaction was not quite so extreme but, as in the case of Fridman and his wife, parents could make life difficult for their rebellious children. As Shteinman, another member of the Society and a Bundist, wrote: "Wherever you went you saw a real struggle between the parents and their children. If you wanted to do anything you had to hide from your parents, and if some parents knew that their son or daughter worked in the revolutionary movement, then scandals began. I am not even talking about the affluent families, but even among the workers there were some really impossible situations."<sup>31</sup> Most young people hid their involvement in radical activities from their parents. Yakov Raibshstein, a member of the Polish Socialist Party (the left fraction) wrote: "When we had to read some booklet or *Iskra* we waited until our parents went to sleep. My brother and I got under the table with a candle, covered ourselves with a tablecloth and studied until the candle went out."<sup>32</sup>

Parents were afraid for their children and their own reputations, but they also did not want to relinquish control over their children.<sup>33</sup> This was an especially acute issue for parents of young girls. Many Jewish girls, especially from working-class origins, took part in the revolutionary youth culture. The relative prevalence of female employment among Jews and the fact that secular education contributed to a girl's social status inside the Jewish community made political involvement especially attractive to young, Jewish, working-class women.<sup>34</sup> The easy intermingling of the sexes characteristic of the youth culture was highly unusual in the Jewish community. Parents became truly anxious about controlling the sexual behavior (and therefore the marriageability) of their daughters.<sup>35</sup>

In this context the revolutionary movement provided assistance to girls aspiring to a freer life, like the young woman from Starodub writing to her fiancée in Warsaw: "I got really tired of the dull local life. What pushed me toward a revolutionary path? You think that only the reigning despotism and the faraway ideal of socialism? No, not only this, but the life of a revolutionary, full of danger, the unexpected, joy over victories and anger at the defeats. And I can escape this place."<sup>36</sup> Other girls sought to escape traditional families by seeking employment among revolutionary circles. A typical letter reads: "We have here one comrade (a young woman) who suffers from living with her parents, she wants to leave home. She talked to me and I promised

to ask you about some work for her. At first she could take a role as the keeper of a party apartment. If you need one, write and she will come immediately.”<sup>37</sup> Since women submitted to greater family restrictions, such requests often provided an opportunity for personal autonomy. Another small-town young woman wrote to a friend after escaping to Odessa: “This is my fifth day here. I left home with a bang, that is, almost put an end to my relationship with my family. There were attempts at stopping me, but they were afraid of our gang. . . . Only sitting in the train carriage did I start to believe that I finally managed to escape.”<sup>38</sup>

Sometimes both political and sexual issues fueled a girl’s wish to get away from family pressure. After arriving in Odessa, this same young woman planned to live with her boyfriend and work with him for the movement. Another young girl, Polia from Ananiev, used revolutionary activism to negotiate a complicated settlement with her parents. She wrote to her non-Jewish boyfriend from Odessa:

I explained to my parents that immediately after finishing the gymnasium I will go to Odessa. If they let me go with no support, I will throw myself into the stormy sea of the revolution in which I will soon perish; if they give me money for travel and will go on supporting me, then I will work occasionally, when I feel like it. They agreed to the second option, but only under the condition that I would not be meeting you. They said: “We know you love him, but he is a Christian. Fall in love with whomever you want, as long as he is a Jew.”<sup>39</sup>

The very fact that such negotiation was possible shows how feasible the revolutionary option appeared to some young women and their parents.

The revolutionary youth community offered children who wanted to stay at home, especially young girls, protection from family authority. One revolutionary mentioned that he and his comrades often

had to defend children from the fury of their parents. . . . We had cases when, for example, we had to hide a daughter from her father until he came running to the *birzha* [weekly or bi-weekly gathering], demanding “give me my daughter back.” Then we stated some conditions—not to forbid her going to the *birzha* or meetings, not to beat her—before we would give her back. And he agreed. Some of the organization members were seventeen- or eighteen-year-old girls and there were many cases when the parents simply terrorized their children, so we had to do something.<sup>40</sup>

The youth culture provided an alternative to traditional support structures—the community and the family. Religion was replaced by socialism, and religious education by the secular and political education offered by socialists. Challenging

traditional norms of behavior, such as observing the Sabbath and dietary laws, constraints on socializing with the opposite sex, early marriage, or avoiding trouble with the authorities became almost the norm. The youth adopted new modes of behavior, such as casual socializing; mutual support against parents, employers, and other kinds of authorities; geographic mobility; and postponement of marriage. Their new lives emphasized constant study, personal dignity, and individual initiative. The young people also considered themselves free individuals pursuing personal development, rather than community members pursuing an ancient way of life.

The particular kind of commitment expected from a revolutionary made a wish to appear sexually attractive highly inappropriate. Young revolutionaries, whose identity was rooted in their political values as well as their political ideas, viewed people of the opposite sex primarily as comrades, and had to prove their moral uprightness to an essentially conservative, Jewish, working-class audience. It was too easy to end up being discredited as immoral if youth activists accepted (even partially) the old rules of the game between the sexes. Young revolutionary men and women were to see each other primarily as partners in a mutual undertaking, and socializing or residing in the same place was part of the revolutionary lifestyle rather than an indication of sexual freedom. This was characteristic of Russian revolutionary movements in general, though the prevalence of working-class female activists was specific to Jewish revolutionaries. The non-Jewish female activists came mostly from the intelligentsia and seldom interacted socially with workers.<sup>41</sup> Jewish working-class male revolutionaries, however, worked with women of their own class and adjusted the nature of their social interaction with women to the egalitarian ethos of the Russian revolutionary movement.

The presence of women and the interaction between men and women in the Jewish revolutionary movement had a critical impact on the behavior and values of those involved. Indeed, one of the leaders of the Bund, Moisei Rafes, saw women in the movement in the same way that they were viewed among the revolutionary intelligentsia of 1870s: he claimed that the large number of young women among the activists gave the movement a noble, pure character.<sup>42</sup> Considering that contact between unmarried people of different sexes among Jews was previously forbidden, this easy interaction between the sexes was viewed as important by many young revolutionaries and contributed to their experiencing the movement as a substitute family, but a better, more modern one. Relationships were viewed favorably only if they did not interfere with revolutionary activism.<sup>43</sup> Gudia from Ekaterinoslav wrote to her partner residing in Kiev: “About your offer to come and work for the store, I can say that under no circumstances will I agree. I spent so much time learning a

skill, only now am I starting to understand what is going on, and suddenly—to just leave. I cannot leave the technical work and I would find any other work hateful. Of course I would really like to work with you, but I cannot.”<sup>44</sup>

The revolutionary youth tended to postpone establishing families of their own, because this would interfere with their revolutionary duties. As a result, they were not as encumbered with family responsibilities and not as dependent on familial and communal assistance as their nonrevolutionary peers. Some among the young revolutionaries did marry and have children, but the percentage of marriages among revolutionaries was much lower than in the Jewish community as a whole. Most Jewish radicals married relatively late in life and in their mid-twenties still had fairly young children. Some, particularly women, did not marry at all.<sup>45</sup>

The attitude toward marriage in the revolutionary movement was complicated. On the one hand, it met with disapproval under the assumption that a married person would not be as ready for self-sacrifice. On the other hand, there seems to have been some approval for marriage to a fellow comrade. For Elia from Warsaw, unlike many others, marriage seemed an uncomplicated, happy issue. He writes in a letter to his (apparently sympathetic) father that he plans to marry his fiancée, who was also a comrade, as soon as possible.<sup>46</sup> The families of both seem very supportive, especially considering his illegal status. In Vitebsk, in fact, marriage ceremonies were used for political propaganda: “We used, for example, wedding celebrations. I think that many Vitebsk inhabitants remember this. Whenever it was possible we sent people there and when the guests ate their supper, we held our mass meetings. Often both Zionists and Bundists came, both wanting to hold their meeting. Sometimes it happened that the bridegroom was a Bundist and the bride was a Zionist and it all developed into discussions and arguments.”<sup>47</sup> It also seemed that unmarried but committed couples among the revolutionaries were viewed favorably by their comrades. Rosa, for example, a worker in the process of being radicalized and joining a circle, wrote to a friend about a social-democrat who agreed to pass letters between herself and her imprisoned revolutionary partner.<sup>48</sup>

Marriage was a problem in the eyes of many comrades both because it might interfere with revolutionary activities and because the risks taken by revolutionaries were seen as unreasonable for parents of young children.<sup>49</sup> Erukhimovich, an ex-anarchist, described the unfavorable attitude of his comrades toward his marriage: “People wrote later about us that we had to live like hermits, all our lives were to be dedicated to struggle against the government, so we could not fall in love and marry, since then we would not be free. . . . When I got married there was a huge scandal, I had to leave Minsk to deal with that conflict. People thought—what kind

of an activist is he, if he is married. Of course people got married . . . , but we still worked widely and with considerable success.”<sup>50</sup> Erukhimovich does not take the issue too seriously, but apparently his comrades did—rightly so, since having children and regularly risking imprisonment, exile, or death are rarely compatible. People do seem to have left activism when they did have children, or at least to have reduced the risks they took.<sup>51</sup> Members of the self-defense unit definitely tended to stay unmarried. The issue was even more important among anarchists, who took more risks almost as a matter of habit. Still, as Erukhimovich observes, people married, just not as many as would marry in other times.

Clearly there was a reluctance to establish new families, but each of the revolutionaries still had a family of origin, with parents and siblings. Families seem to have been in contact and caring for each other even after the young revolutionary initiated a break from the family’s values. Contact with siblings was easier because often when one of the family’s children joined the revolutionary movement others followed. The emotional bonding between revolutionary siblings seems to have been very powerful. A social-democrat, Fania Chizhevskaya, remembered: “When my brother was arrested I totally forgot about myself. I sent all my salary to the prison, to my brother and to the other prisoners.”<sup>52</sup> The authorities apparently tried to use such close ties to their own advantage. When a strike started in Chizhevskaya’s factory, a policeman tried to blackmail her into informing on other workers by threatening that her brother would be hanged. Chizhevskaya was proud of not submitting to blackmail, but the event left her in shock. She described being consumed with fear for her brother’s life.<sup>53</sup> Another activist, Georgii Shatunovskii, a socialist-revolutionary, tells a similar story about his intense feelings when his brother was badly beaten for illegally trying to see his imprisoned ex-wife in the police station: “This made a profound impression on me and for a long time afterward, going by a policeman, I found it hard to resist hitting him with a stone or a stick, no matter what.”<sup>54</sup>

In other words, emotional bonding in the youth community strengthened, rather than replaced, family ties. Ties with parents were more complicated than the ties with siblings, but even there many young revolutionaries note mutual care and support. Familial support was an immensely powerful emotional boost to revolutionaries whose families wholeheartedly encouraged them. The author of an anonymous letter from Odessa says with pride: “My mother keeps working and continues her work as an agitator. My mother is an amazing revolutionary, there is a reason they searched her house eight times.”<sup>55</sup> The mother of Esfir’ Glik, a Bundist fighting detachment member, was a simple woman and not an activist, but when she visited her daughter in prison she was there to support her: “When my mother came to see

me in prison, the prison warden told her: ‘Why do you, such an old woman, go to see such a bomb-thrower? She made bombs, she is against God and the Tsar, she wants to kill everybody. You should not come.’ But my mother did not understand Russian well and answered that she is not a thief. When she came to see me she told me in Yiddish: Be strong, be brave, do not surrender to the enemies.’<sup>56</sup>

Other parents, less political and equally worried about their children, tried to keep them away from trouble. Such parents exasperated their children, though they were still in contact and cared about their families. For example, Asia from Libava complained to a friend: “Dear Zina! I have been planning to write you in detail about myself for a while now, but I am sorry to say, nothing has changed. I stay at home, do nothing, and my parents watch my every move. Soon my brother Moisei will get to Warsaw. He will get my passport and then, no matter what, I will go somewhere. In the meantime, as you see, things are bad. What about your personal life? How is the work?”<sup>57</sup>

In most of the letters that I read the parents were not viewed as a threat; in fact, in most cases they were seen as needing protection. Children frequently tried to hide information that would scare or hurt their parents. Yakov from Romanov was unhappy that his father “had to go through a whole lot of berating because of me, he is really worried and warned me that things look bad.”<sup>58</sup> Misha wrote, apparently to a sibling: “We knew of Sasha’s arrest already on Thursday morning. Our father might also know, though I am not sure. I will have to tell him the truth and destroy his illusions.”<sup>59</sup> An anonymous writer, in a letter to her sister in Kharkov, says: “Insist, no matter what, on getting rights, since living illegally you may be captured, and you should try to avoid that in the name of love toward our parents, this will be harder for them than if it happened to me. Things are not that good. We should have had first of all to forget about our family, to which we are so connected, to cut off all relations and to throw ourselves into the wave of the struggle, as anarchists, to become conscious activists and do all we can for the liberation movement.”<sup>60</sup> Obviously, forgetting the family was not easy for the young activists, and they tried both to keep in contact with their families and to protect them as much as possible. The parents usually ended up accepting their children’s choices but still worried about them.

This modernized substitute family, the revolutionary community, seemed the only kind that could function under new conditions and provide the youth with the necessary identity and emotional support. Its socialist content was an important part of its appeal, as both modern and based on collectivist values. The youths’ initial pursuit of knowledge and individual identity, in place of a Jewish communal iden-

tity, was prevented by external conditions from developing into an individualistic liberal identity. Working-class Jewish youths were discriminated against not due to individual characteristics, but because they belonged to the “wrong” ethnicity and the “wrong” class, and therefore many saw a collective and political response as appropriate. The framework of existing revolutionary ideologies seemed most fitting for this response. These ideologies also offered the young Jews self-respect that derived from both rationalist political philosophy and romantically altruistic social values. The revolutionary movement combined collective political opposition with individual commitment to self-improvement through education. This process culminated during the 1905 revolution, when many young people were ready to adopt the revolutionary world view and lifestyle for their own, since it provided an answer to both their striving for an individualist self-assertion in a modern world and their need for collective support against the economic and political pressures experienced by the poor Jews in the Russian empire.

## **Radicalization of Students**

### **Finding Their Way to the Revolution**

There were two kinds of Jewish students in Russia: regular students and externs. The regular students studied in established educational institutions; externs wished to do so, but were rejected due to the quota allotted to Jews. Since they still wanted to get a certificate and the employment that could help them continue their studies, they studied by themselves, hoping to eventually enter a higher grade or pass the exams and get a certificate directly. Both kinds had to find a school in which the Jewish quota was not already met, and those seeking a certificate needed a place where discrimination against Jewish externs during exams would be less harsh. Therefore, students often lived away from their families. Most had families who could barely support them or could not support them at all. Though it was easier for regular students to find employment giving private lessons, both types led a precarious existence.

Many young Jews explained their political radicalism as stemming from resentment over economic and ethnic discrimination and viewed the educational quotas as symbols of this discrimination. A socialist-revolutionary, Brailovskii-Petrovskii, wrote: “My parents strove to give me an education, but because funds were scarce it was very difficult. I had to take the entrance examination twice but because of the quota, even though my exams were good, I was not accepted. This created in me

dissatisfaction with the existing regime, which with time developed into a certain attitude toward the government and the bureaucracy.”<sup>61</sup> Brailovskii-Petrovskii was eventually accepted at the gymnasium. He managed to support himself and even assist his unemployed father. Still, he joined a politically oriented self-education circle at the first opportunity. He talked about the circle with much more pride than he talked about the more difficult task of getting into an official educational institution.<sup>62</sup> In his view he had a right to attend a gymnasium and, by eventually entering it, did nothing more than exercise this right. The fact that he was initially obstructed from doing so because of his ethnicity seemed outrageous to him and made him view the government bureaucracy as a personal enemy. Brailovskii-Petrovskii mentioned economic difficulties, but the main obstacle he emphasized having to overcome was ethnic in nature—the quota.

Solomon Gillerson, another prospective student and later a Bundist, emphasized the economic obstacle. A graduate of a private preliminary school, he passed entrance exams to the gymnasium with high grades, but the gymnasium accepted instead the son of a rich Jewish merchant who offered a substantial bribe. “I remember how I went with my mother to the assistant director to find out what the result was and he took a piece of paper, wrote some number on it with a pencil. My mother became pale and said that the most she could give was about 150–200 rubles. He shook his head in refusal and we went away. My mother cried.”<sup>63</sup> Gillerson’s hard-working mother eventually managed to put together enough money to send him to a newly opened, commercial private school in Riga. Like Brailovskii-Petrovskii, he was lucky. It seems that with enough persistence and geographic mobility it was possible to get an education, even for a poor Jewish boy or girl.<sup>64</sup> But as he told the story years afterward, Gillerson still remembered his mother’s grief and humiliation at not being able to afford a bribe. He became involved in revolutionary activism shortly after starting his studies in Riga. The reasons he gave for his politicization—his family at one time residing illegally in Riga and hiding from the police, the Kishinev pogrom—all involved his resentment of discrimination against Jews. Gillerson saw the Russian revolutionary tradition as the antithesis of the ideas behind this discrimination. His reasons for politicization all involved his perception that he had been deprived of a basic human right—education. The struggle for other human rights also plagued him, such as personal security in the context of illegal residence, and being able to start a personal relationship and a family. Gillerson described the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev in this way: “This pogrom shocked me profoundly. I saw that under conditions of lawlessness and oppression, I, being a Jew, had no moral right to create a family or to have children, since with the next Jewish pogrom organized



by the State Police Department, my wife and children might be tortured and killed, like those 2000 women, children, and old people who were victims of the Kishinev pogrom.”<sup>65</sup>

Security and education were the only things Gillerson demanded from the state. Since the state refused to provide them he turned to the revolutionary movement, enjoying the companionship and personal pride it offered, as well as the hope for change. Both Brailovskii-Petrovskii and Gillerson embraced the revolutionary movement to reject their status as people who could be discriminated against with impunity. Considering that the basis for discrimination against them was both ethnic and economic, the ideals of economic, social, and ethnic equality promoted by the contemporary revolutionary movements in Russia seemed to offer a good ideological solution. The fact that Brailovskii-Petrovskii became a socialist-revolutionary and Gillerson a Bundist was due to the specific circumstances of their politicization, rather than to an ideological decision; each joined the party that was available locally.<sup>66</sup> For each of them, becoming a revolutionary was deeply meaningful in asserting a new Jewish identity. This was a personal reply to the state’s attempt to make them less than equal to others in the Russian Empire on the basis of poverty and ethnicity.

Brailovskii-Petrovskii and Gillerson were among the lucky minority educated in an official institution who could use this to make a living. Their participation in the revolutionary youth culture was a matter of personal choice, since they had other options for continuing their education and becoming professionals. This choice was dictated by a combination of personal pride and assertiveness in the face of discrimination. Still, each would probably have had a more comfortable life without engaging in revolutionary activism. Their choice derived from emotional needs for which socialism was a timely answer. They wanted to create a new life where any kind of discrimination would be inconceivable. Some tried to do this through liberal or non-socialist Zionist politics, but these routes provided an answer only to ethnic discrimination, not economic. They were also attracted to positions of leadership, which they could expect when working with less-educated and less-affluent young Jews. They could acquire this position only through an ideology that combated class discrimination and rejected ethnic discrimination—at the time, either socialism or anarchism. Socialism was especially attractive because it valued the thing they had fought so hard to acquire—education—and therefore gave political meaning to their long struggle to acquire it. The revolutionaries also felt that they could teach other people, and they understood this as an important individual contribution. For people like Gillerson or Brailovsky-Petrovsky, this new ability was very important. In addition, socialism centered on the organization of the urban workers rather than

peasants. The students, who could expect to become propagandists and who wanted their achievements appreciated, keenly preferred to work in their own communities, mainly due to popular anti-Semitism. Still, for them revolutionary politics meant leadership positions in their peers' struggle for equality.

The situation was different for young people who did not manage to enter state or private educational institutions and had to study on their own. The majority still tried to study according to the official educational program in order to pass state examinations and reach a certain level of economic security.<sup>67</sup> This was an exceptionally difficult undertaking, both emotionally and financially. Emotionally it meant studying in isolation while encountering negative feedback at every step from the family, the community, and the educational establishment, all of whom agreed that young people of no means should be working rather than studying. Financially it meant a constant search for ways to earn the pittance necessary for survival and living permanently on the verge of hunger. But it also meant that, unlike those in regular educational institutions, these students were especially dependent on the youth community. There they could socialize with people of similar aspirations, acquire information on possible ways to earn money and other practical issues, get emotional support and social approval of their way of life, and generally feel more at home than in any other setting. Often such socializing took place out in the open, right on the street. Rosa Ginzburg describes these gatherings:

In the fall of 1904, the birzhas appeared—these were clubs on the street. A street would be declared to be a birzha and the workers would gather there after work. The *Iskra* supporters were on one side of the street, the Bund and SR supporters on the other. Here meetings were arranged, conspiratorial addresses were given, and discussions took place. A birzha was attended not only by the politically conscious workers—members and supporters of revolutionary organizations—but the gray, politically unconscious mass also went there from the airless workshops. Then somebody started to work on them. The birzhas were very important for our agitation.

Becoming part of the revolutionary youth milieu also meant being surrounded by socialist ideas. Iosif Novak, a poor extern, told of being assisted by the youth community and especially by other externs in his struggle to continue studying with no funds. The youth community helped him become financially independent and provided him with much-needed emotional support. Novak's family strongly objected to his studies and insisted he should concentrate on working for wages. Before he encountered the youth community he received

no support from anyone for his desire to study. But the youth community also introduced him to its culture of revolutionary politics. He wrote: “Socializing with students I started reading some contemporary political literature and got to know some comrades who dedicated themselves fully to the revolution. . . . I started going to illegal meetings, speeches, and discussions, and from time to time went to some political birzha, where you could find out the latest political news, meet people and organize, or listen to a discussion.”<sup>68</sup> It was some time before Novak’s involvement in revolutionary politics went beyond passive interest in revolutionary ideas. His studies were his first priority. But the community of young people who stayed together, studied together, helped each other, and dreamed of a revolution became his new family. Novak, who until then had fought his battles alone and was proud of it, discovered that in times of need he could rely only on others like himself, young Jews joining in solidarity to find their way despite ethnic and economic discrimination. Among them he acquired socialist ideas, which justified for him his striving for secular education and his rejection of the worker’s life that his family expected him to lead.

Like others, Rosa Ginzburg gave up on the official educational system altogether and chose to pursue education exclusively in the revolutionary community. Unlike Novak, Ginzburg entered a Bundist self-education circle and shortly after became a revolutionary activist. Her initial educational goal was individualistic but, unlike Novak, she was happy to integrate into the youth culture and accept its values, putting her educational goals in second place. The dilemma of choosing between revolutionary activism and individual development had an easy solution, since for her self-improvement and revolutionary activism went together. This attitude was usually more characteristic of the apprentices and workers than the students. The students usually had some resources of their own to fall back on, either financial or educational. Novak, for example, was a typesetter and was able to make some money this way, while the apprentices (or people like Ginzburg) had only their contacts in the youth community to sustain them.

The students’ view of the anti-Jewish educational quota as a symbol of discrimination against them both as Jews and as working class meant that socialist politics, which fostered education as the key to political liberation, became the ideological framework for the new community the young Jews created.

### **What Revolutionary Politics Meant to the Students**

If young Jews had to struggle only against ethnic discrimination, there would have been no reason to embrace socialist ideology. There were many nonsocialist

Jewish organizations pursuing exactly this aim at the beginning of the century. Class issues played a role as an additional source of discrimination, making socialism a viable political choice. In fact, it was precisely the combination of class and ethnic discrimination that prompted the self-assertion of working-class youth. This was the key to what socialism, as an ideology of struggle against these forms of discrimination, meant to the young Jews of the Pale. While ethnic discrimination was coming from the outside, either directed by the government or as an expression of popular anti-Semitism, class discrimination against poor Jews took place mostly within the Jewish community itself.

Becoming a socialist did not mean simply upholding a certain political ideology. It meant changing broader notions of social equality, especially concerning class and gender. It meant changing one's lifestyle, not simply through clothes and frugal living but by focusing on self-education and displaying self-respect in public. It meant looking like, rather than just feeling like and believing oneself to be, a revolutionary.<sup>69</sup> For these students, the youth culture was as much about behavior and attitude as about personal and political goals. The future Menshevik Vladimir Levitskii (Tsederbaum) provides an outsider's view of some female externs from the Pale who studied midwifery and pedagogy in St. Petersburg:

Always half-hungry, living from a pennies-worth private lessons and similar occupations, surviving on bread, tea, and sausage, overwhelmed by the persistent thirst for knowledge which to them, as the renegades in Russian society, was refused by the Tsarist government, close to the working masses by their origins and their social status, they combined in themselves a practical ability and an understanding of the needs of the mass movement, a total loyalty to the revolution and to socialism, with a somewhat limited political and theoretical understanding and, at times, with fanatical sectarianism, strengthened for many of them by a strongly developed Jewish national identity. . . . similar striving toward knowledge and a revolutionary mood brought us close to each other.<sup>70</sup>

According to Levitskii, who came from an affluent St. Petersburg Jewish family, the poor educational background and a related tendency toward sectarianism were, in addition to poverty and political dedication, characteristic of Jewish revolutionary intelligentsia from the Pale. He mentions the girls' poverty as both their actual economic situation and a source of political radicalism for Jewish revolutionaries from the impoverished Jewish Pale. The youths' rejection of the Jewish elite had moral as well as political overtones, as we saw in Gillerson's bitterness about the rich merchant who paid a bribe to get his son into school. This rejection perhaps

began as a matter of necessity, but it developed later into a matter of pride. Jewish students, like other Russian revolutionaries affected by the character of Rakhmetov in Chernishevskii's widely imitated novel *What is to be Done?*, chose to spend their time on what was considered of value: studies and political activism. To spend more time than absolutely necessary on earning money was considered antithetical to the spirit of the youth community.

Levitskii admired the girls' knowledge of working-class life and their practical experience. The emphasis on practical experience, however, might well have been a part of their identity as self-reliant, individualistically assertive pursuers of education. Levitskii was probably correct in assuming that their educational level was not high. They probably realized this as well, but they could still feel superior to a big city radical like Levitskii since they alone, they believed, could communicate with the poor based on mutual life experience.

The self-education circles to which girls like these belonged characterized the revolutionary movement in the Russian Empire at large, but the Jewish revolutionary circles had some special characteristics. They were rarely ethnically diverse, since the various anti-Semitic pressures forced Jews into certain occupations as well as certain neighborhoods. As a result of these trends, their acquaintances, people whom they knew well enough to invite to join an illegal circle, were almost always Jews. The other reasons included the anti-Semitic attitudes of non-Jewish workers and the need to conduct a circle in Yiddish (sometimes the only language sufficiently understood by potential participants). Since the percentage of secularly educated Jews in the Pale was small, and since the number of educated Jews who could speak Yiddish was even smaller, an arrangement characteristic of the Russian revolutionary movement was impossible among Jews. Such a system depended on the educated conducting circles for the workers, but this made no sense in the Jewish context. The educational differences between Jewish teachers and students were usually very small, and the students expected to shortly become teachers themselves.

The circles contributed not only to socialist but also Jewish identity. Young revolutionaries used the circles as an entrance to an internationalist movement, but the way the circles were conducted—the fact that multiethnic circles were very rare—encouraged them to create for themselves both revolutionary and Jewish identities. This new kind of Jewish identity was created alongside, and influenced by the values of the internationalist revolutionary identity. The young Jews retained their Jewishness not necessarily due to some emotional attachment but due to anti-Jewish discrimination. To leave the Jewish community behind when it was under attack was perceived as treasonous. In fact conversion was one prevalent reason to

refuse admission to the Society of Ex-Political Prisoners and Exiles. While Jews were victimized by the government, conversion contradicted the values of the new, albeit atheistic, revolutionary milieu.

The young girls Levitskii described were still not full-fledged socialist activists, despite being close to the Bund and committed to socialist ideas. Levitskii explained this by pointing to their inferior theoretical preparation, but it was more likely a result of something different and considerably more important. For young girls, adhering to a certain revolutionary ideology and joining a party was much less important in expressing revolutionary commitment than for Levitskii. For them their lifestyle and their political commitment were the signs of their adherence to socialist principles. The students indeed took joining a political party very seriously, but the choice of one party over the other was often determined more by practical considerations than ideology. The prospective activists tended to ask themselves where they would be most useful, rather than where their political allegiances lay. Activism that promoted general principles of ethnic and economic equality was important on its own terms, not as a preference for one revolutionary ideology over another.<sup>71</sup>

As a student from St. Petersburg, Levitskii looked down on students from the Pale for their particular political culture, but not everyone shared his point of view. Grisha, studying in Kazan but originally from the Pale, was far more impressed by the political commitment of Jews from the Pale, even if their theoretical knowledge was less extensive: “The majority of the Jewish students are frivolous idlers and fops, and there are many like this here, who are easily recognizable as coming from central Russia. Those from the West are fewer and all of them make a much better impression with their conscious attitude toward the political parties and their more or less definite political credo.”<sup>72</sup> The difference of perspective between Levitskii and Grisha on the definition of a militant was prevalent among both kinds of revolutionaries. Living communally in poverty, working on self-improvement and teaching, as well as taking part in political activism were the proper activities for a serious socialist in the eyes of the poor Jewish students. This lifestyle indicated commitment to a new identity centering on self-respect and an active position toward life. The students used new socialist or anarchist ideas to struggle against what they saw as the main symbol of oppression—the education quota. While doing so they developed an alternative education system, an alternative lifestyle, and an alternative personal and political identity for themselves.<sup>73</sup>

## Radicalization of Apprentices

### Finding Their Way to the Revolution

For Jewish workers, artisanal apprenticeship provided the main grounds for radicalization. Just as obstacles to general education radicalized the students, obstacles to both general *and* professional education radicalized the apprentices. The main differences involved both the immediate source of the obstacles and the conceptualization of a radicalization process. While for the students the main enemy was the state, the apprentices had a much closer enemy to handle—the Jewish master who abused them and would not teach them a craft. Older coworkers usually took part in the abuse, so generational tension was much more immediate and acute than for the students. The connection to the Jewish community and the need to struggle against its authorities was also more acute. Unlike the students, the apprentices rarely had an external source of intellectual development and were dependent on the education offered to them by the Jewish community—a few years of study in the heder and some professional training. Their attitude toward the Jewish community, which usually supported the employers, was therefore deeply ambivalent. When their families could not protect them from the abuse or provide them with means to study, the revolutionary movement was there for them, often at a crucial moment in their lives. Although peer support was important for the poorer students, apprentices describe it as lifesaving.

Apprentices did not enjoy even the meager communal support that existed for students. Like the students, however, they describe their initial contact with the revolutionary movement as a result of their individual self-assertion, whether by moving to a large city or demanding their rights from an employer. The apprentices who later became revolutionaries deemphasized abuse in their autobiographies and emphasized their self-assertion in dealing with it. That self-assertion would be central to their later acceptance in revolutionary circles. Noi Giter-Granatshtein, an orphan from a small shtetl, who later became a Bundist and still later an anarchist-communist, presented his self-assertion as a choice between suicide and harsh exploitation, but he eventually took the less drastic step of moving to a large city. “My older sister tried to convince me to suffer a little bit more and that everything would get better for me, but I could not suffer anymore. I let her see my bruised body and, with her help, I ran away to a large industrial city, where there was only the smoke of the chimneys and the noise of the machines. And I thought this was paradise.” The revolutionary culture offered him nothing less than a reason to live.

The way he presented his story, he had to reject his previous life completely in order to reach out to this culture. He became a new person after joining the Bund, and the abused child was left behind: “[In Warsaw] my life began. I was sent to a workshop for a year and a half as a tailor’s apprentice. Here I heard for the first time the word *Akhtes* [solidarity], here I found an organization called the Bund Jewish Workers’ Party, which was named *Akhtes*, here for the first time I met comrade Abram who talked with me about the goals of that party, and I became an active member.”<sup>74</sup>

Another child-apprentice, the later anarchist Cecilia Shuster-Fishfeder, described her apprentice life as alternating between abuse and self-assertion. Her working life started at the age of seven when she convinced a neighboring jeweler to take her as an apprentice. Later the jeweler moved to another city and took his young apprentice with him. But he began to sexually harass the young girl and she ran away. Later the story repeated itself when the girl, again of her own volition, apprenticed herself to a tailor. Cecilia and her family eventually moved to Odessa to live with her older brother, and there she apprenticed herself as a gold polisher. She left that post because she was not willing to suffer beatings from a senior journey-woman; without interference or aid from her family she found another apprenticeship as a corsetmaker. She was ten years old at this time. Later, when she learned to repair corsets, she left to work as a helper in her cousin’s workshop, finally gaining a position higher than an apprentice; she was never abused on the job again. According to Cecilia, she never told her mother about the sexual harassment or the beatings, always dealing with the problems herself. She was expected to bring money to the family budget, but had to (and did) fend for herself in the labor market. She emphasized her pride in this in her autobiography.<sup>75</sup>

Fania Chizhevskaya claimed that her life path was determined when revolutionary fellow-workers intervened on her behalf after she rebelled against abuse. They may have done so simply to prevent the harsh beating of a young girl, but for Chizhevskaya this was an act of solidarity that affected her whole life. She described the horrific exploitation she suffered as a child apprentice in a factory that eventually drove her to seek escape in death. Her older brother prevented her from committing suicide, but when she returned to work she was more distracted than usual. The factory owner’s wife cursed her; Chizhevskaya, who had already decided she wanted to die and had nothing to lose, cursed her back and screamed about the injustice the workers, and she in particular, suffered in that factory. She described this moment as her act of self-assertion, the beginning of a new identity and a new life: “During the fight all the workers got up and insisted that the factory owner’s wife and daughter leave me alone, but they were so infuriated, they did not want



to listen. Then Grisha Kagan, a worker from Lodz, ran over and pulled them away, releasing me from these furious wild animals. After recovering from the fight I felt that I was not alone and I felt the power of workers. Until then I thought that the owners could do whatever they wanted with us, but now I knew this was not so.”<sup>76</sup> Like other apprentices, Chizhevskaya described her initiation into the workers’ community as an act of individual self-assertion. After proving her individual worth by defending herself, the other workers were ready to take her side and include her in their community.

Like Chizhevskaya, Shuster-Feder attributed becoming a revolutionary activist to a natural progression of self-assertion, though in fact she became a revolutionary under the influence of a neighboring family that took an interest in her. Her family was helpless to assist in her struggles, but revolutionary neighbors could offer a way to struggle against her inferior social status and difficult working conditions. They also offered the social and emotional support she lacked. Cecilia needed something more in her life than work, and she found it within the revolutionary culture: “At that time in the same house with us lived a social-democratic family, one of whose female members was in prison. That family was kind and they liked me, so I felt comfortable visiting them often. I could listen to them discussing politics and came to understand what one of the sisters was in prison for. The result of their frequent conversations with me was my interest in politics, expressed by carrying packages to the prison and fulfilling small errands related to illegal work. I was thirteen years old and I was a smart girl.”<sup>77</sup> For Cecilia, the revolutionary culture provided a substitute for the things she never received from her own family, including support, protection, and emotional security—but she also talks about, or hints at, ideas.

Chizhevskaya, Shuster-Feder, and Giter-Granatshtein were introduced to the revolutionary community by older people who took an interest in them, but they viewed their own journey as a process of self-assertion. They saw these substitute families as an alternative to the hopeless workers’ life, while for the students it was an alternative to either an individual struggle or a life as an artisan. Even without studying, the workers’ options were usually improved by contact with socialist circles, and they could hope to become skilled artisans of relatively high status, such as printers. Unlike Giter-Granatshtein and Shuster-Fishfeder, Chizhevskaya’s own family, especially her revolutionary older brother, became part of her alternative revolutionary family. Chizhevskaya did not need to leave her original family to become a revolutionary, not even symbolically, but her close relationship with her older brother evolved only after she earned her revolutionary credentials.

Giter-Granatshtein, Shuster-Fishfeder, and Chizhevskaya all describe their initiation into the revolutionary movement as a dramatic, lifesaving event, in which rescue from oppression as an apprentice is foremost in importance. Others, however, describe their initiation by an older authority figure through pursuit of knowledge rather than justice. In that sense some of the apprentices were similar to some of the students. For both, a self-education circle was the key to self-respect and a new identity, in their own eyes and in the view of their peers and the Jewish community as a whole. Moisei Khilkovich, a former yeshiva student and an apprentice in a typography shop who became a Bundist and later a Bolshevik, became interested in an older worker because he, unlike the other workers in the shop, was constantly reading a newspaper. Khilkovich says that the other workers were “corrupt” (by which he probably meant they drank, went to prostitutes, and so on), but this older worker was serious and friendly. The young Khilkevich “liked him so much” that he “even imitated his movements. . . . I desperately wanted to get closer to him and become friends. Probably comrade Farber noticed this, and once in the evening after work he invited me to walk with him for half an hour before I went home. I happily accepted his offer and we went for a walk. During the walk he talked to me about things I found hard to understand, but his questions attracted and interested me. The talk became longer and more interesting and we ended up walking not for half an hour but for three hours. This talk I will remember for the rest of my life.”<sup>78</sup> Farber talked to the young apprentice about the workers’ conditions and invited him to join a self-education circle. Khilkevich gladly accepted the invitation. His primary attraction to Farber derived not from a desperate situation at work, but from a desire for knowledge. Khilkevich initially became interested in Farber because he was reading a newspaper and could talk about interesting things, not because he offered the young apprentice protection or assistance.

Interestingly enough, the older people who brought young people to the revolutionary culture disappeared from their autobiographical narratives immediately after they performed their role as intermediaries. Like the students, the apprentices describe joining a youth culture rather than a multigenerational revolutionary community, though their initiation usually took place through an older worker. The young age of their peers made them feel like equals who did not have to defer to older authority figures. There were, in fact, many more young Jewish revolutionaries in 1905, and the mature people who participated seem relatively rare. Youth became one of the components of the revolutionary identity, along with self-assertion, striving toward knowledge, and a powerful solidarity with other workers, students, or both.

None of these components was unique to Jews. Other young revolutionary workers aspired to similar things; were attracted to the revolutionary movement; studied in circles; and were proud of their new identity as educated, self-respecting people in control of their own lives. Leopold Haimson, for example, points out that the attraction of the Social-Democratic Party to Russian workers in St. Petersburg's Vyborg district was the important place this party granted workers in its political narrative.<sup>79</sup> He also points out that the kind of education provided in revolutionary circles enforced the workers' self-image as urban, sophisticated, educated people. It reinforced the differentiation between these workers and their village relatives as much as a similar education reinforced the differentiation between young Jewish workers and their orthodox elders. In both cases this differentiation had an important cultural and political meaning. Jewish workers shared with their Russian counterparts frustration that their new identity did not lead to a rise in social status.<sup>80</sup> They were all radicalized as a result.

The main differences between Jewish and Russian workers derived from the effects of state and popular anti-Semitism. In non-Russian areas of the empire where the sense of national oppression of the titular population was either overwhelmingly strong as in Poland, or rapidly increasing as in Lithuania and the Ukraine, Jews, a minority within a minority, were constantly discriminated against by both the government and the titular populations who were suspicious of their relative lack of nationalist sentiment and their tendency to adopt aspects of Russian culture. Competition over jobs was demarcated by ethnicity, and Jewish workers were left with the worst jobs in the least mechanized sectors of the economy.

These conditions meant that Jewish workers almost always worked for Jewish employers, and while the worker-revolutionaries conducted the antidiscrimination struggle against the government they also conducted a class struggle within the Jewish community. Jewish workers, almost all employed in small workshops, were socially segregated from non-Jewish workers and developed their socialist consciousness largely among themselves. Therefore the meaning of revolutionary politics for them was both like and unlike what it meant for Russian workers or, for that matter, for Polish workers who resented the political subjugation of Poland and were willing to collaborate with the middle classes in the rapidly industrializing Polish economy in exchange for better jobs. While Zionist ideas became prevalent at this time, especially among the more affluent, there was no clear goal to Jewish nationalism (as there was for Polish nationalism, for example) and many Jews were more interested in struggling for human rights and economic equality wherever they lived rather than in emigration to Palestine. For Jewish workers particularly, their

ethnicity was mainly an economic impediment, therefore the internationalist ideas of socialism were especially attractive to them. Since Jewish workers almost always worked for Jewish employers, and since Jewish revolutionaries often encountered bitter and even violent resistance within the Jewish community, national ideas were also a problem.

### **What Revolutionary Politics Meant to the Apprentices**

In most cases, class rather than ethnicity was still the key to initial politicization of Jewish workers. Unlike externs, apprentices' initial experience of discrimination took place within the Jewish community, in small, struggling workshops. Only later, when they developed aspirations for a better life, did they encounter ethnic discrimination face to face. Until then, unless they experienced a pogrom, they tended to either accept it or consider leaving the country. They tended to not struggle against it. As a result, most young Jewish workers entered revolutionary politics due to class-based problems, encouraged by older Jewish coworkers. Socialism for them was the key to an urban, respectable identity, and their first step toward it was liberation from submission to the employer, assisted by other politicized young Jewish workers.

Kalman Ostrovsky, an illiterate Warsaw worker from a small shtetl, tells how he became a revolutionary:

Sometime in 1902–1903, all the turners in Warsaw went on strike. Our master, to make sure he would not lose money, shut the windows (the workshop was on the ground floor) but one day some workers entered the workshop and said that we should also stop working. At night we took all our things, when the master was still asleep, and went to the place indicated to us by a comrade. The very next day one of those who ran away was arrested, but our comrades intervened and he was released. The strike soon ended and I went to work in another workshop for ten hours a day and fifty kopecks per day. From that moment my life changed. Comrades started coming to me and explaining things, pointing to all the injustice that was going on. Slowly I started listening.<sup>81</sup>

For Ostrovsky, an anarchist-communist, socialism had the same meaning as for the other apprentices whose autobiographies I have cited: a new identity. He started his story of politicization with a strike, presenting it as if the workers actually confronted the master. In fact, he and the workers waited until the strikers forced them to join the strike. The workers may not have minded being forced to participate, but none of them wanted to be considered the initiator of the strike. Nevertheless, the strike and his subsequent running away was an expression of self-respect that made

the “comrades” interested in him. Socialism provided Ostrovsky with a new notion of himself as an assertive person whose opinion counted. Here too, as in Chizhevskaya’s story, the initial expression of assertiveness was backed up by workers’ solidarity, when the strikers helped him and his coworkers run away from their master and then interceded with the police for the one who had been captured.<sup>82</sup> Ostrovsky had run away from masters several times in the past, but this time he was not alone. This solidarity, as well as respectful acknowledgement, was what the workers’ movement offered him. His immediate expression of his new identity was to join a self-education circle, where he had the opportunity to acquire some basic education. This process of studying enforced his new image as a self-respecting person who took part in a community committed to fighting for workers’ rights.

Another, much more assertive worker and Bundist, Iuda Orlov, expressed his newfound socialist identity by organizing a strike and becoming a local hero in the small city of Pogor. A socialist worker named Khaim-Leib came to Pogor and became Orlov’s friend. Orlov became interested in activism and went with Khaim-Leib to Starodub to ask the local Bundists for advice. They then decided the best strategy was to organize a strike in the workshop where Orlov worked. The strike, an unheard of phenomenon in the little city, was easily won, and the strikers became heroes to all the other local workers who followed in their footsteps.<sup>83</sup> These events took place in 1905, and are therefore not so unusual; but the interesting issue is that for both Orlov and Khaim-Leib, becoming revolutionaries meant taking personal initiative to organize a strike rather than simply following the orders of a revolutionary organization. They received only some literature in Starodub; the strike came from their own actions. At other times a strike would probably not have been the best method to create a local organization, but individual initiative was still key to the self-definition of the revolutionary. Immediately after the success of their organizing drive, Orlov and Khaim-Leib established a self-education circle. Here we have the components of their revolutionary identity—an act of individual initiative; education; and responsibility toward their community, the Jewish workers, whose life they were proud to improve.

Unlike Ostrovsky, Orlov and Khaim-Leib were initially the only socialists in their town. As for the larger cities where revolutionary organizations were better established, we have a detailed description from Fania Chizhevskaya of what it meant to be accepted by the revolutionary community. She continues the story of her older revolutionary co-workers protecting her from the beating by telling how the other workers, as well as her Bundist older brother, began to teach her about revolutionary politics. She was especially proud of her loyalty to her fellow workers, which she

expressed when a strike started and the police tried to obtain information from her, assuming she was too young to withstand pressure:

The police questioned me for two hours, hoping that they could use threats to get information from me about who taught me to strike, but they got nothing from me, since my hard childhood (in fact, my lack of childhood) taught me to hate those who prevented me from being a free, normal child and to support those like me. Since they got nothing from me, we all were released. I think it was the first major strike in Gomel, and so all the workers of Gomel were interested in its results and waited impatiently by the police station to find out about the result of our questioning (most of all they wanted to know how I behaved during the questioning, since my cousin and I were both the youngest and the least experienced), but when everybody found out that I handled myself during the questioning better than some older workers, they almost carried me on their shoulders as we left the police station.<sup>84</sup>

Chizhevskaya, who like Orlov became a local heroine because of her conduct during the strike, describes the revolutionary community as her new family: people who liked and trusted her and, most of all, gave her a reason to live. She was very young at the time and the distribution of illegal literature was a task usually entrusted to entry-level activists, but Chizhevskaya felt appreciated and respected for the first time in her life, and she believed that she earned this respect through her initiative and solidarity. For her, as for Ostrovsky, this solidarity was central to becoming a person who could protect herself and others, rather than someone expendable, someone barely existing at the bottom of the social order. This is what revolutionary culture meant to the workers on the emotional level.

Few apprentices could afford the independent life typical of the students. They were more dependent on their employers, their families, and the approval of neighbors. However, they did often end up sharing an apartment with other young, radicalized workers, including members of both sexes.<sup>85</sup> Generally the relationship between the sexes was more comradely than among nonrevolutionary workers. Belonging to the revolutionary youth environment made geographic mobility easier for a young worker searching for better employment. A worker would be better off being referred by the local organization, but even without it the local comrades would likely assist with accommodations, finding a job, and so on.<sup>86</sup> In fact, the workers passed on information about job opportunities through the channels of their party affiliations. Since many activists of different parties knew each other personally, these information channels often crossed party lines. This kind of information was

also available to any revolutionary worker at the local birzha. Considering that many of the apprentices, like Giter-Granatshtein, wanted to get to a big city where the work conditions were better and where there were better chances to study, supporting them in this endeavor gave the revolutionary youth community an important role. The support the radicalized apprentices and workers gave each other in their struggles against the employers also gave them a new and important role in their community, the community of Jewish workers. Although the apprentices received less assistance from the Jewish community than the students, they stayed closer to it and saw their new identity, initially individualistic, as a way to improve the lives of their fellow Jewish workers. Many of them either resided with or were in close contact with their families, and family opinions were important to them. The vast majority also took for granted their place as workers within the Jewish community, employed by Jews and working alongside other Jews. They redefined what the Jewish community meant to them, but never tried to leave it as the students did. For them the value of their new identity derived from a new ability to protect others, not so much from their ability for self-improvement as with the students.

Both apprentices and students experienced their newly adopted revolutionary identity as liberating in itself, beyond the actual material advantages that adopting this identity might have offered some of them. They were ready to risk their lives and freedom to uphold this identity rather than just the hope for the establishment of a socialist society.

## Notes

1. During the revolution the level of working-class radicalism soared. According to S. V. Tiutiukin and V. V. Shelokhaev, *Marksisty i russkaia revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1996) the number of strikers in January 1905 was more than 440,000, that is about 200,000 more than the total for 1901–1904.

2. The Jewish section of the Society of ex-Political Prisoners and Exiles intended to publish some of these autobiographies. In fact it published one volume of autobiographical narratives of the 1870s activists, but then was forbidden to continue with the project. Due to the publication intent some autobiographies include editorial comments, and in some files there are several versions of an autobiography. In addition the archive includes applications of members as well as of applicants who were rejected, with reasons for rejection. They also include debates over whether this or that individual was worthy to become a member while the applicant's behavior in past and present was debated. Thus the narrative the heads of the society were aiming for was fairly clear—it was a worker becoming politicized through the labor movement and, no matter which party he or she belonged to initially, ending up in the 1920s as a Bolshevik activist. Many of the autobiographies did not fall into that pattern. For example many workers who started their political activism in one of the social-democratic organizations joined the anarchist-communists starting with late 1905, when it became clear that the revolution would be defeated. Many working-class autobiography writers blamed the established revolutionary parties of passivity and thus claimed that joining the anarchists was the right thing for a revolutionary to do. The Society establishment was very uncomfortable about this and reacted by being extremely sensitive toward any allegation of criminality on the part of the applicants, whether these came from other members or from the police files.

3. Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 2001); Gabriella Safran, *Rewriting the Jew: Assimilation Narratives in the Russian Empire* (Stanford, 2000); Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (Oxford, 1989).

4. Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge, 1981); Nora Levin, *While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1881–1917* (London, 1978); Erich Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, 1995).

5. Mikhail Krutikov, *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905–1914* (Stanford, 2001)

6. Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge, 1970); M. Rafes, *Ocherki istorii evreiskogo rabocheho dvizheniia* (Moscow, 1929); M. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii "Bunda"* (Moscow, 1923); N.A. Bukhbinder, N.A. *Istoriia evreiskogo rabocheho dvizheniia v Rossii* (Leningrad, 1925), and *Materially dlia istorii evreiskogo rabocheho dvizheniia v Rossii* (Moscow, 1923).



7. Leopold Haimson, *Russia's Revolutionary Experience, 1905–1917* (New York, 2005); Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, 2002).

8. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, p. 38, mentions that a typical “enlightened” Jewish worker went about dressed “in a Russian black shirt, carrying a Russian book under his arm and with Russian on his lips.” It is interesting that while both contemporary letters and the autobiographies composed during the 1920s were largely in Russian, a considerable number of the oral presentations in the Jewish section of the Society of ex-Political Prisoners and Exiles were in Yiddish. Regrettably the texts were not retained in the files—we have records that they took place. Apparently the stenographer could record only in Russian. This is another indication that Russian was considered more respectable in written texts. I could not think of any other reason why the vast majority of the letters from and to Jews would be in the Russian language. This clearly has nothing to do with the selection of letters which were copied, since the letters in both Yiddish and Hebrew were all adequately translated into Russian (with the translation attached to the original). Thus the political police clearly by 1905–07 had sufficient translators not to make Yiddish or Hebrew an obstacle in understanding the texts.

9. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f. 533, op. 1, d. 457.

10. See, for example, Joshua Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality* (Madison, 2004).

11. GARF, F. 533, op. 1, d. 457.

12. Using apprentices as unpaid labor instead of teaching them a craft was a new phenomenon at the turn of the century and therefore went against the expectations of both the apprentices and their parents or other sponsors. Victoria Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914* (University of California, 1984), 50–51.

13. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 445.

14. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 288.

15. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 242.

16. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2161.

17. Bukhbinder, *Istoriia Evreiskogo rabochego dvizheniia*, 11; GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2122. A Jewish worker tells of being the only Jew among 12,000 workers employed by a Ekaterinoslav factory and being persecuted due to his ethnicity. He was protected and later politicized by another worker, a Ukrainian social-democrat (GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 183). The writer, who was employed in heavy industry, says that Jews were not employed there, and he needed an enormous level of patronage to get a job (GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2231).

18. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1402.

19. The level of education in the heder seems to have been abysmally low, mainly because the teachers were usually Jews unable to find other employment and therefore ready to accept the miserly wages offered. Violence toward children was prevalent within the schools.

20. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1902.

21. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2307.

22. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 765.

23. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 457. John (Yoisef Shloime) Mill (1870–1952) was born in Panevezys, Lithuania, to a maskilic (enlightened Jewish) family. Since his schooling took place within the Russian educational system he had to relearn Yiddish later in life, when he became a propagandist among primarily Yiddish-speaking Jewish workers. Mill became a militant while still a high school student in Panevezys and then in Vilna. While initially working within multiethnic revolutionary groups, in 1889 he joined a group intending to conduct propaganda among Jewish workers. This group subsequently became the Bund, and John Mill became one of its leaders.

24. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1646.

25. Things were a bit different in Warsaw where, unlike other places, there was a large Jewish proletariat working together in large factories and residing in specific neighborhoods. There it was common to keep the external signs of Jewish orthodoxy (clothes, and so on) alongside revolutionary activism. Although in many places it was common for revolutionaries to take over synagogues for their meetings, in working-class districts of Warsaw the synagogues were fully under the control of the revolutionaries (GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 462).

26. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 457.

27. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii "Bunda,"* 21.

28. The Society of Ex-Political Prisoners considered conversion a sufficient reason to reject an applicant, claiming this was an unprincipled and therefore unacceptable behavior for a revolutionary. Obviously what bothered them was not religious apostasy as such, but the fact that converts, being revolutionaries and therefore supposedly atheists, left a persecuted group (in this case Jews) for material advantages. The two cases of conversion both involved improving living conditions during exile. I encountered a few other cases where people converted in order to marry their non-Jewish partners, but these individuals were not condemned. In general it seems that for the poor, conversion was not common. It was more prevalent among the affluent in order to be able to work as a university professor, a lawyer, and so forth. For nonreligious revolutionaries it was similar to asking pardon from the tsar—compromising one's principles for material advantages, and therefore morally despicable—though even among the affluent this does not seem to have been a popular solution.

29. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 87.
30. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1379.
31. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 452.
32. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1650. *Iskra* was the Social-Democratic newspaper.
33. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 199.
34. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii "Bunda,"* 14–15.
35. For example, the Jewish populist Khasia Shur recounted how as a young girl she wanted to see a local boy whose opinions she had heard of and considered similar to her own. She knocked on the door of the family's house, asked to talk to the boy, and without saying a word his mother slapped her. Khasia Shur, *Vospominaniia* (Kursk, 1928), 33–34.
36. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 55.
37. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 133.
38. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 83. She used only two letters to identify the city she had just escaped.
39. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 176.
40. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 452.
41. See, for example, Heather Hogan, *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers, and the State in St. Petersburg, 1890–1914* (Indiana 1993), 20.
42. Rafes, *Ocherki*, 15.
43. There was some justification for suspicion since after children were born to revolutionary couples the women in many cases left politics and concentrated on taking care of their family. See an article by M. Levin, "HaMishpaha Behevra Yehudit Mahapkhanit—Normot veHalikhot Bekerev Havrei Habund," in *Maasaf—Mehkarim BeToldot Tnuat HaPoalim HaYehudit*, 13–14, 1982–1983, 1984.
44. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 195.
45. See Barbara Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, 1983).
46. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 95.

47. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 452.

48. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 74.

49. We must remember that discrimination against Jews existed also for those sent into exile. Wives or husbands found it hard to get permission to reside in Siberia, though this could be arranged. More problematic were children born elsewhere, who had to leave Siberia at the fairly young age of eight or nine. Unlike the non-Jews who were given permission after three months of exile to reside and accept work anywhere in the district, Jews could not leave the small settlement they were originally sent to. There was usually no work in that settlement, and the workers, whose allowance was smaller than that of exiled educated people, found it hard to survive on this, not to mention supporting a family. Single people also found it easier to live elsewhere with a forged passport (not a very grave offense, as long as they stayed in the district) or escape, but some people, especially those with families, were under sufficient pressure to convert in order to escape this Jewish exile status.

50. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 449b.

51. For example, Moisei Khilkevich. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2161.

52. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2236.

53. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2236.

54. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 195.

55. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 48.

56. GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 198.

57. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 104.

58. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 206.

59. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 213.

60. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 113.

61. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 242.

62. The task was indeed extremely difficult. For example, the historian Simon Dubnov never achieved this goal even though he tried for four years. Simon Dubnov, *Kniga Zhizni* (Moscow, 2004).

63. GARF, f. 533, op. 3, d. 633.

64. Rosa Grinberg tells of financing four years of study in a private primary school by gathering old nails and steel pieces. She was eight or nine years old at the time (GARF, f. 533, op. 3, d. 735).

65. GARF, f. 533, op. 3, d. 633.

66. According to Moshe Mishkinsky, “Regional Factors in the Formation of the Jewish Labor Movement in Czarist Russia,” in Ezra Mendelsohn ed., *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (New York, 1997), 78–100, the Bund was predominant in Lithuania and very weak in Ukraine. Its status in Poland depended on the exact location and the time period.

67. The students studied by themselves using the official textbooks and attempted each year to pass the final examinations. A student with a certificate noting four years of gymnasium could reasonably hope to support him or herself by private lessons. More ambitious students kept taking the entrance examinations hoping to enter the gymnasium, though perhaps not the first, but the second or the third grade. A good grade, as with Gillerson, did not mean they were accepted. They could study in private schools if the family had the funds (most families did not), and they could then hope to continue their studies in an institute of higher education, whether in Russia—where they again had to deal with the quota issue—or abroad. Things were easier for girls, since they had to deal only with family reluctance to invest money in their education and with local anti-Semitism rather than official discrimination. My impression from reading the autobiographies is that girls who really wanted to get into a gymnasium and whose families could afford to forgo their labor usually managed to do so. The girls among the externs were more politically motivated and were interested particularly in a political education.

68. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1402.

69. According to existing memoirs a revolutionary adopted aggressive and studious demeanor, kept his hair long or her hair short, dressed like a Russian worker and made sure his or her dress was cheap and simple. As for color scheme a red shirt with black skirt or trousers were prevalent.

70. Vladimir Levitskii, *Za Chetvert’ Veka* (Moscow, 1926–27), 128–29.

71. See Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905* (Stanford, 1988), 1: 184–85. This does not mean that there was no conflict among the parties in different localities. Indeed, since it was relatively easy for one party to attract working-class activists from another, the struggles conducted among the local party intelligentsia tended to be very bitter.

72. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 199.

73. This difference in opinion between the intellectual elite and the other activists was present in other parties as well. When the SR party asked a group of its young activists studying in Germany to give up their studies to work for the party in Russia, they refused, claiming that they needed a good educational background for their political work. The group included such future leaders

of the party as Nikolai Avksentiev, Vladimir Zenzinov, and Ilia Fondaminskii. Victor Chernov, *Pered burei* (Minsk, 2004), 191–92, 208. In his memoirs Chernov approves of their decision.

74. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 446. His memoirs were published in *Katorga i ssylka*, 1925, no. 5; 1930, no. 5–6.

75. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2345.

76. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2236.

77. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2345.

78. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2161.

79. Leopold Haimson, “Russian Workers’ Political and Social Identities,” in Reginald Zelnik, ed., *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1999), 152, 164.

80. Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867–1907* (University of California, 1992); Hogan, *Forging Revolution*.

81. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1460.

82. The police were often used by employers to enforce the employment or apprenticeship contracts.

83. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1447.

84. GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2236.

85. For example, GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 176.

86. GARF, f. 102, op. 265, d. 95; f. 102, op. 265, d. 121; f. 533, op. 3, d. 2148, and many similar documents.

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