

Your moral support will strengthen the cause of America and of Israel.

Faithfully,
BENJ. SCHULTZ
Exec. Director

* * *

March 19, 1948

Dear Mr. Schultz:

You will notice that I do not address you as "Rabbi." Being for many years now a sincere scholar of Jewish life both during the past and in the present, I cannot but feel that even to couple your name with the term "Rabbi" is to profane all that is honorable and decent in Jewish life.

This is in reply to the infamous letter which you sent me asking me to join your American Jewish League Against Communism. Why you sent me this letter, I cannot imagine, since my views are fairly well known. But I presume that your egotism is boundless enough to include anyone whose name may occur to you. The nature of your League is readily apparent to any one who glances at what you so cheerfully call the National Organizing Committee. A more incredible list of sponsors could hardly be gathered, and I do not think that there are many Jews, if any, in this America of 1948, who can be taken in by that.

But, aside from that, I must say something to you about this plan of yours. It is a new step in the old, and rather shameful tradition, of those Jews who have contributed so readily to fascism. It can only be interpreted as a move to build an organization which will promote and work for a horrible and senseless war with the Soviet Union—with the one country on the face of the earth that makes anti-Semitism a crime, with that country which, during the

recent war, saved the lives of a million Jews. In times so immoral as these, I presume it is pointless to discuss the staggering and hideous immorality of your plan. That you and your curious companions are doomed to defeat is quite obvious.

I do not doubt that millions of American Jews will disown your kind, that they will consign this miserable little organization of yours to the silence and the obscurity it deserves. But what will remain with me as a burning shame which I must carry to my grave is the fact that you, and the people around you, are Jews. I have great pride in my Jewishness—and in the heroism, the lasting courage, the devotion to freedom of millions of Jews who have fought and died in freedom's struggle. I must call on that pride, and on the deeds that these people did to force out of my memory and out of my conscience, too, the fact that you and your friends are of the same people.

HOWARD FAST

* * *

Dear Mr. Fast:

I read your letter of March 19th, for purposes of relaxation, to our Board of Directors, who were greatly amused by it.

You speak of "a burning shame which I must carry to my grave."

I assume that this sets a limit to the period of time during which the American people must tolerate your antics.

But must they?

Sincerely,
BENJ. SCHULTZ.

Further comment is superfluous.—The Editors

THE MARTYRDOM OF HIRSCH LECKERT

By Sholom Levine

Translated by Joseph King

HIRSCH LECKERT was born into poverty in 1880, in the small Lithuanian town of Hanushishok, Kovno Province. As a child he was apprenticed to a shoemaker. Like all other apprentices at that time, he received "training" in handling the slop-pails, tending the children of his master and being punished. This was all part of "learning the trade."

In 1898, at the age of 18, Hirsch Leckert came to Vilna. The workers of Vilna were then conducting a bitter struggle against their employers and against the police who were helping the bosses. Young Leckert was soon drawn into these struggles.

SHOLOM LEVINE was active in the underground movement in Russia prior to the October Revolution. The above is taken from his autobiography, *Unsererdishe Kempfer*.

A youngster who had not even had a chance to go to school, he was happiest when one of his friends in the "movement" would read to him something from the illegal literature. The revolutionary "movement" revealed a new world to him, gave him a belief, opened up wide fields where he could use his impetuous, youthful energy.

In the early summer of 1900 the underground movement issued a declaration in connection with the first anniversary of the victory of the Vilna hosiery workers in their hard strike. Rumors had spread that the employers were planning to take back what the workers had won the year before. The leaflet called upon the workers to be on guard. As in all other leaflets published at that time, this one also contained slogans of struggle for the overthrow of the tsarist government.

Elia Reitchuk and two girls were arrested for distributing the leaflets. The police headquarters to which the arrested comrades, with a batch of undistributed leaflets, were taken, was located in a section that had a large working class population. As soon as the workers found out about the arrests they began to collect around the headquarters. News of the arrests also spread to Zavalnia Street, where the workers' "market" was then located. Hirsch Leckert and several others went to the police headquarters where the prisoners were being held.

Elia Reitchuk, who was known as "the bear" because of his strength, was a shoemaker, and a very close friend of Leckert's. When Leckert discovered that his friend, the bear, was among the arrested, he immediately set about organizing their escape. First of all the telephone wires to the headquarters were cut, so that the sheriff, the police and the detective who carried out the arrests would not be able to call for help. When the sheriff and his aides saw the big crowd gathered around the headquarters, they decided to wait till morning, when the workers would have dispersed, before transferring the prisoners.

But Leckert and his organized group did not leave. Instead they hid in the surrounding courts. In the morning, when the sheriff and his deputies were certain that the workers had gone, they began to bring out the prisoners. But no sooner had they come through the gate and stepped into the open, than Leckert's whistle was heard. At this signal, the workers pounced on the police. The sheriff fired into the air and quickly slammed the gate again.

Revolutionary Spirit

The workers, however, stormed the locked gate, forced it and began to throw stones, pieces of wood and anything else they could lay their hands on into the windows of the police headquarters. When they forced their way inside and approached the stairs to the office, an officer appeared holding an unsheathed sword and shouted the warning that anyone who dared mount the stairs would be cut down.

Chone Feivke, a good friend of Leckert, and known to be able to lay them out when necessary, grabbed a stone, cried "Free the prisoners," and flung it at the officer. The stone missed, and the policeman swung his sword at Feivke's head. Bloody and seriously wounded, Chone Feivke was carried away by comrades. The workers became even more enraged and excited. The hail of stones became even heavier. Not a single window-pane remained in the entire building. The sheriff then decided to free the prisoners, who were carried with great joy on the shoulders of the workers.

I have gone into details of this incident because it gives a good idea not only about the spirit of the organized Jewish workers of that time, but also of the broad masses of the unorganized and their relation to the revolutionary movement. For many hours from evening until the following morning a struggle with the police continued, witnessed by hundreds of residents of Novgorod, and not one either

wanted or dared to inform the police at the next headquarters, of what was going on.

The Novgorod incident also gives some idea about the young hero, Hirsch Leckert, about his daring, his revolutionary temperament, his loyalty to comrades, his readiness to face any difficulties.

The police sent word to all the doctors that when a man with a split head was brought to them, or if they were called to a home where such a person was to be found, they were to notify the police immediately. This soon became known all over town. Hirsch Leckert and the wounded Chone Feivke dressed in women's clothes and travelled to Volkotmir, a small town near Vilna. But there they were arrested and sent back to Vilna. Leckert himself escaped on the way, but Feivke was brought back and placed in a hospital.

Leckert did not rest. He immediately began to work out a plan to free Feivke from the hospital, where he lay in a ward under police guard. This was the plan. A group of visitors would come to visit Feivke. When the officer on guard left the room for a minute, some of the people would engage him in conversation in the corridor. In the meantime Feivke would dress in women's clothes, which would be brought to him, and he would leave the hospital. The plan succeeded. But a short time later, Chone Feivke and Leckert were again picked up.

Chone Feivke was placed in the Vilna Antokoler prison. He immediately began to plan another escape. When he was taken out on the daily short exercise walk in the court of the prison, he waited for the guard to turn away for a second. Then he nimbly climbed a pile of lumber that lay near the wall of the prison and leaped over to the other side. Dragoons, who were watering their horses at a nearby river, saw a man with a bandaged head jump from the prison wall. They began to shout and chase him. But in the tumult Chone succeeded in escaping.

Hirsch Leckert was kept in the Antokoler prison for nine months, and in the Petersburg prison, Kresti, another six months. After his prison sentence, he was exiled for two years in Yekaterinaslav under police guard. In early spring of 1902 he returned illegally to Vilna where his young wife and close friends were located. And although he was in great danger of being arrested again, he participated in the May First demonstration that year. . . .

May Day, 1902

On the first of May, 1902, Vilna gave a war-like impression. Cossacks rode through the main streets in order to break up the expected May Day demonstration. All kinds of rumors spread. Some said that von Wahl, the tsarist governor of Vilna, was planning to whip all those arrested during the demonstration, and that von Wahl's "enlightened Jew," Kliatschko, had put him up to it. Nevertheless, the demonstration began on Deitscher Street at seven, the hour agreed upon, when workers come home from work.

As soon as the workers unfurled the red flags and shouted a few revolutionary slogans, Cossacks dashed from their

hiding places in nearby courts, and beat and arrested the demonstrators. But that same evening, when von Wahl attended the State Theater, May First leaflets were showered from the balcony.

The following morning, von Wahl executed sentences that enraged not only Russia, but had repercussions throughout the world. Twenty-six of the arrested demonstrators, 20 Jews and six Poles, were subjected to public whipping. Von Wahl himself was present when the punishment was inflicted, as well as Vilna Police Chief Nazimov, Captain of the Gendarmes Fastrulin, Dro. Mihailov and other officials. Each prisoner was undressed and laid upon a bench. Two Cossacks held his hands and feet firmly, while his naked body was lashed with a wet knout. The doctor, in the meantime, watched the pulse of the victim, and advised how many lashes each could take, while von Wahl commanded urgently, "Harder! Harder! Harder!"

It is difficult now, almost a half century later, to communicate the terrible impression that this horrible punishment made upon the workers. Everyone felt that if something were not done soon to avenge this degrading insult to the revolutionary movement, everyone would be ashamed to look into his comrade's eyes.

The Russian social democrats¹ (the Bund² included) were outspoken in their opposition to individual terror because it weakened the initiative, the activity and the struggles of the broad masses. But in the statement they issued, they indicated that the horrible tactics adopted by von Wahl would drive the masses to acts of terror.

It was felt that such a disgraceful, and until then unheard of, act by a tsarist governor could not be left unanswered. Everyone waited for the act of vengeance to come as soon as possible.

Leckert Organizes Retribution

It was natural that a temperamental and impetuous young revolutionary such as Hirsch Leckert would be one of the first to want to answer von Wahl in language that was quite simple for Leckert—a bullet. Leckert went to work to organize a special group for the act of vengeance.

The group was composed of four Jewish and two Polish workers. As already indicated, both Vilna organizations—the Bund and the social democrats of Lithuania and Poland—opposed terrorism. But both organizations were aware of the existence of Leckert's group. When approaches were made to the local executive committee of the Bund to aid the group, the leader replied that the committee officially could not participate in it. But individual members, who sympathized with the act which the group was preparing to carry out, were ready to aid.

On May 5, at midnight, when von Wahl and his en-

¹ Prior to 1912, both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were known as social democrats. In 1902, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was still a united organization.

² The Bund was the organization of Jewish social democrats, which up to 1903 was affiliated with the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party as an autonomous body.

tourage left the circus at Lukishka, Leckert fired two shots at von Wahl, one hitting his hand, the other a foot. The plan of the group was that when Leckert fired his shots, another member of the group would begin firing away, and in the tumult that would follow Leckert would have an opportunity to escape. But the police knew Leckert too well and they arrested him immediately on the spot.

Ten days later, a military court condemned Leckert to death. On May 28 at sunrise, Hirsch Leckert was hanged at the military grounds. Present at the hanging were four battalions of soldiers, the Vilna *Rabbiner*,³ Rabbi Nemzer, a doctor, the prosecutor and other officials. Hirsch Leckert replied with contempt to the suggestion of the prosecutor, the *Rabbiner* and the rabbi that he confess, that he admit he regretted his act, that he tell who aided him, and other such proposals. He met his death courageously, proudly. Even the tsarist officials admired his heroic behavior to the last second of his life.

Thus was Hirsch Leckert murdered in his youth. With his act and his death he wrote a heroic and unforgettable chapter in the history of the revolutionary movement of the Jewish workers in Russia. Leckert passed into history as one of the heroes who fought and sacrificed their lives for the Russian revolution. (A short time after his death, his young wife gave birth to a child.)

Revolutionary Hero

The triumphant Russian Revolution of October 1917 valued the heroic Leckert as he had deserved and in the center of Minsk a Leckert memorial was erected. A whole literature in Russian and particularly in Yiddish has been written about Leckert. There are dramas, songs, accounts of his life and struggles, of his spirit, devotion and contributions to the revolutionary movement.

No act of terror at that time had gotten so much sympathy, so much acceptance among the workers as Leckert's attempted assassination of von Wahl. Even among other sections of the people, among the middle class, intellectuals and even among the richer circles there was satisfaction with Leckert's act. This opinion was expressed in the general approval of the statement that we printed for the Vilna committee.

The proclamation asserted that finally von Wahl had gotten something of what was coming to him. It was regretted that von Wahl had remained alive. The committee declared in the leaflet that the Vilna organization was proud that such a hero as Leckert was to be found in its ranks. The statement admitted that although social democrats did not believe in terror, they nevertheless joined all those who approved Leckert's act.

The same feeling of satisfaction with the effort to avenge the horrible punishment, spread through all the cities where

³ A rabbi appointed by the tsarist government to take care of Jewish local affairs and to act as an intermediary between the Jewish community and the government.

workers struggled against tsarism. What an effect Leckert's act had on the organizations of other cities, and the mood that it engendered can be seen from the following fact.

Several months after Leckert's act, in August 1902, the fifth conference of the Bund took place in Berdychev. It adopted by a large majority a resolution on "organized vengeance" as an answer to police terror. The resolution

emphasized the fact that this did not mean that social democrats recognize terror as a "means of struggle" against the tsarist government, but that it was an act "to take vengeance against a degrading insult." However, in order that such individual acts should not be transformed into a system of terror, the social democratic party itself, and not single groups, must organize such acts in tsarist Russia.

RUSTY LINKS IN BEVIN'S CHAIN

By I. Rennap

THE recent flare up in Iraq over the signing of the new Anglo-Iraq Treaty which brought down the pro-British puppet government of Sayid Saleh Jabr, was symptomatic of the changes taking place today in the Middle East, particularly in regard to Britain's position in this area. These changes are closely linked with the UN's decision to settle the Palestine problem by setting up independent Arab and Jewish states in Palestine after the mandate had been surrendered by Britain.

Britain is hostile to this decision. Forced to retreat from one of its advanced bases in the Middle East, the surrender of the Palestine mandate has forced her to carry out a complete strategic re-grouping of bases. British foreign policy is closely linked with America's expansionist aims in which converting the Middle East into a *place d'armes* against the Soviet Union and the world democratic movements figures prominently. But British imperialism is also desperately striving to maintain its dominant position in the Arab world in the face of increasing American penetration on the one hand and, on the other, against the growing liberation movements of which the recent Iraq incident is a typical example.

This is reflected in Bevin's plan for "a new series of treaties regulating friendship with the Arab world" of which the new Anglo-Iraq Treaty signed at Portsmouth, England, was the first. In fact, this is an attempt to dig in more firmly in the face of growing pressure from both sides, by a closer alliance with the most reactionary sections of the Arab upper strata who also fear the growing strength of the liberation movements in their countries and the growing influence of the Soviet Union. These Arab reactionaries are the most implacable opponents of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And this is largely why Britain opposes an independent Jewish state in Palestine.

Friends of the future Jewish state and social progress in the Middle East generally, will welcome the blow struck by the Iraqi people against imperialism and its native pup-

pets in refusing to accept the new Portsmouth Treaty. But if imperialist intrigues in the Middle East against the independence and self-determination of both the Arab and Jewish peoples are to be effectively combatted, then a clear understanding of the new relation of forces in the Middle East is essential.

Britain's Vital Base

"The Middle East still remains Britain's most vital base outside the U.K.," writes the Suez Canal correspondent of the *Tory Observer* (Jan. 25, 1948), commenting on Britain's withdrawal from Palestine and future British policy in the Middle East. "Since the British left India, the presence of strong British forces to cover the eastern Mediterranean as well as the Arab countries and Persia is even more important." Disturbed by the large number of British workshops and installations concentrated in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine and Egypt, together with the vast amount of war materials and trained military personnel, he concluded significantly that it is "imperative we retain control of the short sea and air route of the Mediterranean, thus safeguarding our communications with the Far East, Australia and New Zealand. To be able to operate this route our generals believe it is necessary to retain our war time air bases in Libya—in cooperation with America" (my emphasis—I.R.).

This "co-operation with America" has cost Britain in the Middle East very much in terms of strategic and economic spheres of influence. Weakened by World War II, Britain, under a Labor government that has long turned its back on international cooperation, has become so tied up with American war aims, that it has allowed its more powerful and rapacious "ally" to follow in Hitler's and Mussolini's footsteps.

Chamberlain's anti-Soviet "appeasement" policy led to Britain surrendering strategic key points to the fascists and permitting them to extend their influence into the Middle East countries. Today that same opposition to the Soviet Union and the strengthened liberation movements in the Middle East has led to Britain surrendering to America

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