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### Introduction

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## Introduction

In 1997, in conjunction with the centennial of the formation of the Jewish Workers' Bund, the Jewish Historical Institute and the Erich Brost Foundation sponsored a full-scale academic conference in Warsaw.<sup>1</sup> A number of established scholars delivered papers at that conference, which dealt primarily with topics relevant to the Bund in the years of the Russian Empire, the Bund in inter-war Poland, the history of the Bund during and immediately after the Second World War, and the relationships of the Bund with other socialist parties and institutions.<sup>2</sup> A handful of witnesses to or participants in events discussed by panelists – including, most prominently, Marek Edelman – also attended conference sessions.<sup>3</sup>

In the period since the centennial conference, a new generation of scholars has begun to emerge. Members of this new generation created an online network devoted to scholarly research on the Bund (Bundism.net). Discussions among members of Bundism.net led to the idea of convening a meeting of those currently conducting research on the Bund – and these discussions, in turn, ultimately resulted in a workshop, convened in Warsaw in May 2012 and intended for students and junior scholars.<sup>4</sup> The academic interests, and the backgrounds, of those participating in this workshop were notably different from those of the scholars who had gathered in 1997. An open call for papers to be delivered at the 2012 workshop elicited a number of proposals from individuals conducting research on Bundist-oriented educational institutions and activists, the implications of local or micro-histories of specific Bundist organisations, the history of the Bund in the decades following the Second World War, the implications of the use of transnational approaches, the activities of Bundists in countries to which they had emigrated, and the historiography of the Bund. There were no proposals at all from students or junior scholars currently working on the Bund in pre-Revolutionary Russia, or on the fate of Bundists in Europe during the Holocaust.

The students and junior scholars who delivered papers at the workshop were, by and large, markedly younger than had been the participants in the 1997 conference, and signalled a globalisation of Bund studies.<sup>5</sup> Workshop participants came from Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Poland, Switzerland, and the US – that is, from a larger number of countries than had their predecessors.<sup>6</sup> The proportion of women delivering papers at the workshop, moreover, was markedly higher than had been the proportion of women who had addressed the conference held 15 years earlier. Several of these young women shed new light on the roles played by women in Bundist affairs. There were, tellingly, only a few papers accenting the histories or biographies of Bundist women at the event that took place in 1997.<sup>7</sup>

Working with new sources, and from their own perspectives, the workshop participants regularly arrived at significant conclusions – and at conclusions that, in some cases, differ from our own. Two examples (with apologies for the self-referential

nature of these remarks): Agnieszka Wiercholska's current research leads her to present a rather upbeat assessment of relations between Bundists and members of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) in the city of Tarnów, somewhat different in tone from Gertrud Pickhan's discussion of PPS–Bund relations in inter-war Poland, which was published in 2001.<sup>8</sup> Yuu Nishimura, similarly, is more inclined both to accent the successes of the Central Yiddish School Organisation (TSYSHO), and to present TSYSHO as a Bundist-oriented system, than was Jack Jacobs in 2009.<sup>9</sup> These differences, of course, are healthy and appropriate. We are delighted by the ongoing scholarly interest in matters pertaining to the Bund, and by the new directions and outlooks manifest in the works now in progress.

We therefore are happy to present, in this issue of *East European Jewish Affairs*, a select group of articles derived from papers delivered at the Warsaw workshop. It is our sincere hope that this issue will stimulate additional research, and scholarly dialogues – and that other workshops or conferences on the Bund will be organised in the future.

### Notes

1. The conference was organised in cooperation with the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, the Bund Institute, University of Haifa, and the German Historical Institute, Warsaw.
2. Jacobs, *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*; Tych and Hensel, *Bund 100 lat*.
3. The tenor of the conference and Edelman's significant, symbolic, role in it are mentioned in Shore, *The Taste of Ashes*, 164–7.
4. The workshop was graciously hosted by the Jewish Historical Institute. Frank Wolff, Agnieszka Wiercholska, Gertrud Pickhan, Jack Jacobs, and (initially) Rebecca Denz served on the workshop organising committee. The Freie Universität Berlin, the Jewish Historical Institute Warsaw, and Bundism.net co-sponsored the workshop, which was made possible by the generous financial support of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. Our sincere thanks to our fellow organising committee members, to the event's co-sponsors, and to the Luxemburg Foundation.
5. Several senior scholars, including Ezra Mendelsohn of Hebrew University, Feliks Tych of the Jewish Historical Institute, and the authors of this introduction, served as commentators. For additional information on the workshop, see the insightful report by Brendan McGeever, "Beyond Internal Paradigms."
6. Young scholars from Israel and Scotland attended the workshop, but did not deliver papers at that event.
7. Besides a piece by Beate Fieseler, published in Tych and Hensel, *Bund 100 lat*, 187–99, the only exception to this generalisation were the remarks prepared for the 1997 conference by Irena Klepfisz.
8. Pickhan, "Gegen den Strom", 326ff.
9. Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland*, 62.

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