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Romance, Revolution & Reform

Jewish-American Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century: A Case Study of Anarchist Radicalisation in New York City

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ABSTRACT: Isidore Wisotsky was a young Jewish immigrant to the United States at the end of the long nineteenth century. Having arrived to live the American Dream in New York City, this young Jewish man, who had left not only Eastern Europe but also parts of his family's identity behind, became radicalised amid the spatial and temporal context of the city. Wisotsky became an anarchist. The extent to which New York City and a particular politically radical Jewish element played a role in this transformative development will be discussed in detail in this article. It will show that nineteenth-century radicalism in the United States was not imported, but rather created by the exploitative means of a capitalist industrial complex that shattered the hopes and dreams of many first-generation immigrants, as Wisotsky's case represents. I will rely on Wisotsky's autobiographical notes as an ego document that serves as a contextual frame within which the story of Jewish immigration to, and radicalisation in, the United States can be told.[1]

KEYWORDS: Anarchism; Jewish Anarchism; Jewish Radicalism; New York City

IN THE YEARS before the United States entered the First World War in 1917, New York City, as historian Tony Michels remarks, 'could be considered the [...] unofficial capital' of the Jewish labour movement.[2] Jewish political radicalism seemed to flourish in the United

[1] I would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers as well as the journal's editorial board members, whose invaluable comments and remarks helped a lot to improve the present article.

[2] Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 6.

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States metropolis.[3] Jack Jacobs, who has worked extensively on the Jewish Left in the United States, emphasises that 'Jews played highly visible roles, over an extended period, in the leadership of leftist movements—including socialist, communist, and anarchist organizations—around the world'.[4] In reference to this Jewish influence within the American Left, a stereotype was gaining ground from the late nineteenth century, one that categorised Jews as radicals from abroad, particularly since around two million Jews from Eastern Europe reached the United States metropolis between 1880 and 1924.[5] This 'foreign menace' stereotype was particularly prominent during the Red Scare after the Russian Revolution of 1917, when foreign radicals, and especially anarchists, were considered to be a threat to the integrity of the United States.[6] After their arrival on American shores, 500,000 Jewish immigrants stayed in the city of New York and would become an essential part of its radical milieu, being employed 'in the hyper-exploitative sweatshops of the city's booming garment industry' that acted as 'ideal breeding grounds for radicalism'.[7] Considering the political impact of the Jewish immigrants, the question of where and how these new citizens of New York City had been radicalised is of particular interest, especially since their political radicalism was regularly depicted as something foreign by the authorities and the mass media and, eventually, in the broader public opinion as well. In the case of the radicalisation of Jewish immigrants in the United States metropolis, to cite Arthur Liebman, '[a] theory seeking to explain the politics of this minority cannot rely on one factor or several

[3] On Jewish radicalism in general, see *Jewish Radicalisms: Historical Perspectives on a Phenomenon of Global Modernity*, ed. by Frank Jacob and Sebastian Kunze (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019).

[4] Jack Jacobs, 'Introduction', in *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender*, ed. by Jack Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1-28 (p. 1).

[5] Anarchists themselves, Jewish or not, were often depicted or imagined as terrorists, especially within the popular culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mike Finn, *Debating Anarchism: A History of Action, Ideas and Movements* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 3.

[6] Frank Jacob, 'The Russian Revolution, the American Red Scare, and the Forced Exile of Transnational Anarchists: Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and their Soviet Experience', in *Yearbook of Transnational History: Volume 4*, ed. by Thomas Adam (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2021), pp. 113-134.

[7] Kenyon Zimmer, 'Saul Yanovsky and Yiddish Anarchism on the Lower East Side', in *Radical Gotham: Anarchism in New York City from Schwab's Saloon to Occupy Wall Street*, ed. by Tom Goyens (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), pp. 33-53 (p. 33).

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factors that characterise or affect virtually all Jews'.[8] It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the individual experiences of Jewish immigrants who became radicals to better understand this transformative process.

In this article, I will highlight this process of the radicalisation of Jewish immigrants, specifically in the anarchist milieu of New York City, by providing a close reading of an individual case study: Isidore Wisotsky Autobiographical Typescript, henceforth IWAT. Instead of considering more prominent cases, like those of the well-known anarchists Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Milly Witkop, or Rudolf Rocker, who were also radicalised in the United States context, I look at this lesser-known case of the young Isidore Wisotsky (1895-1970), whose radicalisation nevertheless matches similar experiences of other Jewish immigrants who turned towards anarchism in the spatial context of New York.[9] Wisotsky arrived from Eastern Europe (specifically the area that is now Ukraine) in 1910 and was attracted to anarchist ideas after his personal experiences with the United States' exploitative labour system.[10] He shows a set of

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[8] Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: Wiley, 1979), p. 25.

[9] See Frank Jacob, *Emma Goldman: Identitäten einer Anarchistin* (Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2022), pp. 41-54; Paul Avrich and Karen Avrich, *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012), pp. 7-60. See also the forthcoming Frank Jacob, *Alexander Berkman: Zwischen Gefängnis und Revolution* (Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2023); Rudolf Rocker, 'Milly Witkop-Rocker, 1877-1955: Zum Gedachtnis', Rudolf Rocker Papers, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam. See also Augustin Souchy, 'Milly Witkop-Rocker zum Gedächtnis', Rudolf Rocker Papers, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam; Mina Graur, *An Anarchist Rabbi: The Life and Teachings of Rudolf Rocker* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); based on Yoysef Kahan, *Di yidish-anarkhistishe bavegung in amerike* [The Jewish Anarchist Movement in America] (Philadelphia: Radical Library, 1945), pp. 16, 303, 308, 425, 435. There is an entry on Wisotsky in the *Yiddish Leksikon*: Joshua Fogel, 'Izidor Visotski (Isidore Wisotsky)', *Yiddish Leksikon*, 13 June 2016. His case is also mentioned by Sarah Schulman, 'When We Were Very Young: A Walking Tour through Radical Jewish Women's History on the Lower East Side 1879-1919,' in *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*, ed. by Melanie Kaye and Irene Klepfisz Kantrowitz (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 125-148.

[10] Emma Goldman similarly argued that it was this labour experience in particular, in combination with the events related to the so-called 'Haymarket tragedy', that made her politically aware and an anarchist: 'Then came America, America with its huge factories, the pedaling of a machine for ten hours a day at two dollars fifty a week. It was followed by the greatest event in my life, which made me what I am. It was the tragedy of Chicago, in 1887, when five of the noblest men were judicially murdered by the State of Illinois. […] The death of those Chicago martyrs was my spiritual birth: their ideal became the motive

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overlapping identities — those of a first-generation Jewish immigrant, an anarchist, and a metropolitan New Yorker of the early twentieth century — which all, in one way or another, stimulated his radicalisation.[11]

It is important to consider the living and working situation of the immigrants who lived in New York's Lower East Side, i.e., their particular 'Jewish space,' as a breeding ground for radicalism which was fed by poverty and the exploitation of workers in the thriving garment industry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[12] While, of course, many immigrants had already been in contact with radical ideas in their Eastern European homes or in transit hubs like London, where they waited for their final transfer to the United States, many Eastern European Jews arrived with hopes and dreams, but their default positions would lead to their eventual radicalisation on American soil. The history of Jewish radicalism therefore interacts with other factors, such as immigration and labour, debates about assimilation, identity, and gender, as well as social struggles within the urban space of late nineteenth-century North America.[13] The Jewish immigrants who were part of these multiple histories and debates were therefore not simply immigrating radicals but radicalised immigrants, whose political radicalism was due to their experiences of shattered hopes and dreams in the United States.[14] The United States was actually less open and democratic than many immigrants had expected it to be, especially when they were confronted with repressive

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of my entire life.' Emma Goldman, 'An Anarchist Looks at Life' (London: 1933) in Emma Goldman Papers, International Institute for Social History No. 191 (Amsterdam), pp. 4-5.

[11] Frank Jacob, 'Radical Trinity: Anarchist, Jew, or New Yorker?' in *Jewish Radicalisms: Historical Perspectives on a Phenomenon of Global Modernity*, ed. by Frank Jacob and Sebastian Kunze (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 153-180.

[12] Albert Waldinger, *Shining and Shadow: An Anthology of Early Yiddish Stories from the Lower East Side* (Selingsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006). For an important introduction on this theoretical category for the study of Jewish history, see Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup, 'Introduction: What Made a Space "Jewish"? Reconsidering a Category of Modern German History,' in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. by Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017), pp. 1-20.

[13] On these issues see, among other works *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. by Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany, SUNY Press, 1996) and Thomas Mackaman, *New Immigrants and the Radicalization of American Labor, 1914-1924* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2017).

[14] Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 176-199.

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state actions towards labour rights.[15] Many Jewish immigrants were also more attracted to radical political ideas that were being shared within other immigrant communities, for example the German anarchist community in New York City, than to the capitalist ideals considered to be part of the English-American tradition.[16] Jewish radicalism also relied upon what Paul Buhle refers to as 'a peculiar cosmopolitanism'.[17] Buhle argues that

> The Jewish Left of the United States has been a conscious part of a physically (and not just emotionally) international movement, in several senses different from other immigrant radicalisms. Its intimate international relationships included not only the European emigrant homelands and Soviet Russia […] but every land where Yiddish speakers gathered. […] Coupled with their own sense as a persecuted people and sympathies for others similarly pressed, Jews could see the possibilities and indeed the outline of a future cooperative world system, to be built in part through their connected efforts in Moscow, Vilna, Budapest, Paris, Sofia, London, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Jerusalem, and New York, all the way across wide America to the chicken farms of Petaluma, California.[18]

Regardless of the transnational and respective impact factors for Jewish radicalisation within the United States context, one also has to consider local experiences of these 'foreigners' who arrived in numbers, intending to make a new life for themselves, but instead became the backbone of a new leftist political movement whose representatives demanded the end of exploitation and a better world for all members of the working class, Jews and non-Jews alike.[19] In the first part of this article, I will

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[15] Andrew Kolin, *Political Economy of Labor Repression in the United States* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 120.

[16] Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2007); Deborah Dash Moore et.al., *Jewish New York: The Remarkable Story of a City and a People* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), pp. 155-186.

[17] Paul Buhle, 'Themes in American Jewish Radicalism', in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. by Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 77-118 (p. 78).

[18] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[19] Zimmer, p. 35. The anarchist movement itself was transnational in nature, yet the decision to join it was often and initially determined by the individual and her/his local experiences. On the transnational perspectives on anarchism, see Constance Bantman, 'Internationalism without an International? Cross-

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therefore briefly reflect upon the general idea of a Jewish radicalism before describing the role of New York City as a breeding ground for its formation. Then, I will turn to the case study of Isidore Wisotsky to show how a young Eastern European Jew transformed into an American anarchist in the Jewish spaces of New York City.

Jewish Radicalism

Jewish immigrants could be found in trade unions, political parties of the American Left, and clubs of all sorts, visibly representing the radicalism of a United States metropolis at the turn of the century. When considering the Jewish labour movement, it can be stated that '[n]o movement won more support or inspired greater enthusiasm among Jews during the four-decade era of mass immigration between the 1880s and 1920s'.[20] Nevertheless, many of those who reached the shores of New York City at this time were not genuinely radical, but rather disillusioned with their personal American dream once they realised that poverty and exploitation were the natural allies of the economic success stories in their new home. In Eastern European *shtetls*, people

> described life in America in glowing and enthusiastic terms. The workers [...] were paid high wages for very little work. [...] Anyone who did not work in a factory made easy money by picking up valuables from nearly nothing in junk yards and selling them at enormous profit. People were rich and had gold in their teeth! [21]

Channel Anarchist Networks, 1880-1914', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 84.4 (2006), 961-981; Constance Bantman and Bert Altena, 'Introduction: Problematizing Scales of Analysis in Network-Based Social Movements', in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, ed. by Constance Bantman and Bert Altena (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 3-22; Constance Bantman, 'The Dangerous Liaisons of Belle Epoque Anarchists: Internationalism, Transnationalism, and Nationalism in the French Anarchist Movement (1880-1914)', in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, pp. 174-192; Frank Jacob and Mario Keßler, 'Transatlantic Radicalism: A Short Introduction', in *Transatlantic Radicalism: Socialist and Anarchist Exchanges in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. by Frank Jacob and Mario Keßler (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), pp. 1-20.

[20] Michels, p. 3.

[21] *Shtetls* is a Yiddish term that had been used for smaller towns or villages in Eastern and Central Europe that were predominantly inhabited by Ashkenazi Jews. Michael L. Zlatovski Papers, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota, IHRC2914, p. 32.

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It was only a matter of time before reality shattered these dreams, and '[t]housands of people, who knew nothing of Karl Marx or his ideas before stepping foot on the island of Manhattan, were soon marching and striking and educating themselves in his name'.[22] The experience of labour exploitation that was shared by so many was an important factor that stimulated individual radicalisation, as we will see in Wisotsky's case.

Of course, Jews were not the only immigrants who developed a radical agenda in the United States because, to quote David P. Shuldiner, the 'trade union and socialist movements in the United States had a multiethnic character'.[23] The Jewish factor within the radical American Left is nevertheless particularly visible because many leaders of Jewish origin held prominent positions and consequently became increasingly identified with the political movements they represented.[24] The radicalisation of Jewish immigrants in New York City was not only political radicalisation, but also, more generally, secularisation and a change in the Jewish way of living.[25] Such changes were also closely related to other radical elements within the city, like German communities of anarchists or socialists. The city space seems to have naturally stimulated an overall transformation from religious heritage to political engagement as well, from '*shtetl* Jews' to atheist political actors within the United States context.[26] How Jewish the

[22] Michels, p. 4.

[23] David P. Shuldiner, *Of Moses and Marx: Folk Ideology and Folk History in the Jewish Labor Movement* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), p. 1.

[24] Percy S. Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews* (London: Academic Press, 1980), pp. 2-4.

[25] Robert Wolfe, *Remember to Dream: A History of Jewish Radicalism* (New York: Jewish Radical Education Project, 1994), p. 7. Political radicalisation is understood here as a leaning towards political activities or identities that were considered to be radical in their respective contexts. For example, orthodox Jews considered more secular Jews, who joined the political left and claimed to be atheist, radical, while the latter would be considered radical by conservative forces solely due to their political identity, while other leftists would not consider them to be radical at all. The terminology 'Jewish radicalism', which is applied here, is consequently related to contextual categories, especially since people like Wisotsky probably do not appear so radical today.

[26] *From the Shtetl to the Metropolis*, ed. by Shlomo Berger (Amsterdam: Menasseh ben Israel Institute, 2012) and Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman, 'Jewish Ethnicity and Radical Culture: A Social Psychological Study of Political Activists', *Political Psychology*, 3.1/2 (1981/82), 116-157 (p. 118).

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radicals ultimately remained is a question of context, as Liliana Riga emphasises with regard to the Jewish Bolshevists or Bolshevist Jews:

> I revise the traditional argument that [...] the Bolsheviks of Jewish origin were highly assimilated 'non-Jewish Jews' whose Jewishness played no role in their political radicalism. Instead, the claim is made that for the Jewish Bolshevik elite ascriptive Jewishness was a social fact mediated by ethnopolitical context, and therefore a dimension of varying significance to their radicalism, even for those for whom Jewishness was not a claimed identity.[27]

Other scholars have pointed to the role of orthodox religion, as well as growing antisemitism in Eastern Europe in the radical potential of the younger generation of Jewish migrants.[28] There have been warnings not to overemphasise the Jewishness of American radicalism, as 'most of the evidence for the connection between Jewishness and radicalism is 'impressionistic' 'not statistical'.[29] However, it cannot be denied that many Jewish immigrants turned towards radical ideas once they arrived on American soil. This was, nevertheless, a socio-religious transformation, in which many young immigrants became more political and less religious as '[t]heir radicalism … involved the abandonment rather than the intensification of their faith in Judaism as a religion'.[30]
One must be careful not to identify a generalised Jewish tradition of radicalism, but rather consider the specific spatial and temporal context, such as the industrialising US metropolis at the end of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century, which played an essential role in the development of a new generation of Jewish radicals who, like Wisotsky, lived, worked and debated political ideas and utopian ideals on the Lower East Side of New York City.[31] I consequently disagree with Robert Wolfe's argument that '[i]n short, modern Jewish radicalism is a secularized expression of

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[27] Liliana Riga, 'Ethnonationalism, Assimilation, and the Social Worlds of the Jewish Bolsheviks in Fin de Siècle Tsarist Russia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48.4 (2006), 762-797 (pp. 762-763).
[28] See Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Liebman.
[29] Cohen, p. 2.
[30] Allen Guttmann, 'Jewish Radicals, Jewish Writers', *The American Scholar*, 32.4 (1963), 563-575 (p. 563).
[31] Arthur O. Waskow, 'Judaism and Revolution Today', in *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*, ed. by Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 11-28 (pp. 11-12).

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traditional Jewish Messianism'.[32] I argue instead that it is the combination of individual suffering as part of an exploited labour force, and a particular consequence of Jewish identity, that became a trigger for antisemitic violence and exclusion on the one hand, and the existence of radical ideas or a radical milieu where such ideas could be exchanged and debated on the other, that established modern Jewish radicalism. A poor Jewish immigrant, whose dreams of a better life in North America had been shattered, could therefore have found no better place to radicalise and become part of a transnational anarchist movement than New York City. That Jews turned to the Left when politically radicalised, however, is not a surprise. According to Percy S. Cohen, the relationship between the two can be explained very simply:

> [Jews] were, for two reasons, less opposed to radicals, as such: first because radicals were often opposed to anti-semitism, seeing it as a device for displacing the anger of the masses from its true object, the ruling class; second, because the religious leaders of Jewish communities in the older diasporas felt no solidarity with the upholders of tradition in the wider non-Jewish society whom they often saw, rightly, as aiders and abettors of anti-semitism.[33]

How Jewish the radicals ultimately remained, and whether they considered themselves radical Jews, Jewish radicals, or something in between, can often only be answered in relation to individual cases. As a critical mass, however, there were many Jewish radicals or radical Jews within the United States labour movement, where they built a substantial cadre of rank and file members. To better understand the phenomenon, it has to be placed in its geographical and chronological context.[34] It is therefore essential to take

[32] Wolfe, p. 10. This argument was previously made by Moses Rischin, who stated that '[f]or most Jewish socialists, although often unaware of it, socialism was Judaism secularized' in Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 166. See also Moses Rischin, 'The Jewish Labor Movement in America: A Social Interpretation', *Labor History*, 4 (1963), 227-247.

[33] Cohen, p. 4.

[34] Wolfe, p. 13.

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a closer look at New York City's Lower East Side, where Jews 'played an extraordinarily disproportionate role in socialism and other radical movements'.[35]

New York City as a Radical Hub

The Lower East Side at the end of the nineteenth century was, according to Hasia R. Diner, typical of Jewish life in nineteenth century New York City: a 'warren of crowded, dirty, and mean streets', where immigrants would live in poverty, 'thick with the smells, sounds, tastes, and noises' of Eastern Europe.[36] Similar images are continuously used in writings about Jewish life in New York City by other authors, too, and thereby have turned into stereotypical perceptions of the Lower East Side in American popular culture. Wisotsky initially lived on Suffolk Street and later described the area as follows:

> Suffolk Street, New York [...] full of sounds and shrieks, an assortment of men, women and children, shouting, yelling screaming [...] a symphony of discordant noises. Everyone bent on selling his wares—from pushcart, his hand or from pieces and scraps that lay on the crowded sidewalk. From early morning until late night, there is no calm. Wagons, autos, streetcars, a five-cent movie house and a harsh music that plays a kind of ear-grating music designed to draw a cord.[37]

Considering recent studies on Jewish topographies which have argued that '[n]o space is a given—and Jewish space even less so when compared to the spaces of societies that have been more or less continuously settled within the boundaries of a stable territorial power', the Lower East Side must also be understood as a space that was adjusting and had been adjusted by the existence of thousands of Jewish immigrants who were trying to find their own place in this particular space. [38] Wisotsky was one of

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[35] Gerald Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 1.

[36] Hasia R. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 20.

[37] Isidore Wisotsky Autobiographical Typescript (IWAT), Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, TAM.071, p. 1.

[38] Anna Lipphardt, Julia Brauch and Alexandra Nocke, 'Exploring Jewish Space: An Approach', in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. by Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 1-23 (p. 1).

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them, but for him, the existent environment also turned into a more political and radical space. The people there were disillusioned when they arrived into a new form of poverty, exploited not by a landowning nobility, but by the mills of capitalist production. Nevertheless, their new American home offered some alternatives as well as '[t]he recurrent themes of oppression, constriction, and danger, on one hand, [were] followed by the expansiveness of liberation, on the other.'[39] Therefore, regardless of its elements that reminded a visitor of Eastern European Jewry, the Lower East Side was a 'kind of transitional zone' for the Jewish immigrants, wherein they 'underwent an ordeal of cultural reeducation as they learned to be free'.[40] While most reached this radical hub as Jewish immigrants, many turned into active supporters of the American labour movement in almost no time at all. The oppression that was common in Czarist Russia was no longer accepted, and in the United States, every man and woman had the right to take a stand against exploitation by capitalist factory and sweatshop owners. The Lower East Side consequently did not provide 'a mere replica of eastern European Jewry' but 'served as a laboratory of political and cultural innovation that influenced eastern Europe in ways historians are just beginning to recognize'.[41]

Anarchists would meet at the drinking hall of Justus H. Schwab, a German immigrant, on 50 East 1st Street, where political ideas were exchanged as often as drinks went across the bar.[42] It was, however, not only drinking halls where political radicals met. There was also a Jewish coffee culture in the city, and at Sachs', Schmuckler's, and Sholem's, politically interested people could get involved in all kinds of theoretical debates while enjoying a hot cup of coffee.[43] It is therefore not surprising that Tony Michels concludes that '[i]f one were to identify a capital of Jewish radical politics in the late nineteenth century, it would have to be New York City.'[44] When one considers New York City as a transatlantic hub of Jewish radicalism at the end of the nineteenth century,

[39] Diner, p. 20.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Michels, p. 5.

[42] Tom Goyens, 'Introduction', in *Radical Gotham: Anarchism in New York City from Schwab's Saloon to Occupy Wall Street*, pp. 1-11.

[43] IWAT, p. 74. Shachar M. Pinsker, *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

[44] Tony Michels, 'Exporting Yiddish Socialism: New York's Role in the Russian Jewish Workers' Movement', *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, 16.1 (2009), 1-26 (p. 8).

one also has to emphasise that the stream of politically radical ideas was not only stimulated by Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, but also created ties that would send radical thoughts, mostly in the form of newspapers and journals, back across the ocean.[45] Yiddish print products crossed the Atlantic and reached those who were still in Europe, and, as such, New York's radicals must be understood as part of a transatlantic network of Jewish radicalism. Socialist ideas, to name just one example, were consequently re-exports of those who had not yet left their homes in Eastern Europe. The workers' movement, the parties of the Left, and leftist intellectuals in the United States and Eastern Europe alike were consequently products of a globalised and interconnected political space, connected by a radicalising ocean between.[46]

Michels is therefore correct with regard to his overall evaluation of a suitable methodology to study and understand global Jewish radicalism:

> [I]nstead of a core-periphery model for understanding the relationship between American and Russian Jewry, it would be more helpful to adopt a transnational framework in which individuals, ideas, publications, money, and organizations moved between countries, sometimes in one direction, other times reciprocally.[47]

This transnationalism is especially visible with regards to the Jewish radicals who became active during the 1890s in New York City, where they acted first and foremost within their own community. Yiddish became the language of the labour movement on the Lower East Side, where the United Hebrew Trades were the most important unions. Alongside the *Arbeter Tsaytung,* the press organ for Jewish activists and workers, and the Socialist Labor Party, with its Yiddish-speaking branches, these represented the three pillars of the politically active Jewish immigrant in the 'New World'.[48] Due to its connections with Eastern Europe, Yiddish, next to German or Russian, became the lingua franca of Lower East Side radicalism since the new waves of immigrants, who

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[45] On the role of the Atlantic Ocean see also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). On print capitalism and its historical impact see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[46] Michels, pp. 1-2.

[47] Ibid., p. 3.

[48] Ibid., p. 8.

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after 1900 could also have been radicalised in the Bund or the Poale Zion in Russia, could easily be integrated into an already existent movement. By reading or attending lectures and debates, the Jewish immigrant, who was used to the autocratic and repressive environment of Czarist Russia, could use the advantages of the politically less suppressed environment of New York City to involve her- or himself in the workers' movement to eventually live the American Dream: a better life in a different world. Until the First World War, when immigrants would arrive already radicalised, having been in contact with leftist ideas in Eastern Europe, it was often the spatial context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New York City that would drive the Jewish workers into the arms of a radical movement directed against capitalist exploitation and social inequality.[49] The Second World War would destroy this 'revolutionary Yiddishland, a world that is more than lost, being actually denied', whose remains and actors were only alive in their legacy, which became as much American as it used to be Eastern European, or as Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg put it: 'Having failed to achieve its hopes, its utopias, its political programmes and strategies, broken on the rocks of twentieth-century European history, Yiddishland survives, in the account of the past, as a culture, a lost treasure entrusted to antiquarian remembrance'.[50]

New York City could not have been any more different from the world the Jewish immigrants came from, such as the *shtetl*, although many of them had had previous experiences in larger European cities such as Warsaw or London on their way to the United States.[51] They had lived in a society divided by class in their Eastern European 'homelands' too, where orthodox traditionalism was a form of resistance against the ruling elites.[52] This space stimulated the wish, and sometimes the necessity, to start a new life abroad, and the United States seemed to offer more freedom. The political radicalisation of many young Jews consequently also took place along the lines of a generational conflict, between them and their parents:

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[49] Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier, 'Introduction', in *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*, ed. by Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. xv-liv (p. xvii).

[50] Alain Brossat and Sylvie Klingberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism*, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016), p. xi.

[51] Sorin, pp. 11-18. Susan L. Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-14.

[52] Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, 'The Oppression of America's Jews', in *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*, ed. by Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 29-51 (p. 31); Sorin, p. 16.

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> Breaking with the old […] meant […] a break with the condition of the Luftmensch living on air, on expedients, on tricks, on little jobs […] for a different and more solid [world], broader and with positive values: the world of the workers.[53]

Jewish immigrants began to redefine their different identities, forming a new milieu that was rather more radical than Jewish, but which was nonetheless still Jewish in heritage. Radical Jewish women faced even more problems, which were related to the overlap of their different identities. 'Their dilemma', as Melissa R. Klapper remarks, 'was at once unique and representative of the many other American ethnic and immigrant groups that were continuously renegotiating their identities'.[54] In addition, the identity of the radicalising Jewish immigrants was contested by an existent Jewish financial elite. The new arrivals were consequently 'subjected to powerful assimilative pressures from the already established Jewish community of New York'.[55] The latter had mostly arrived during the 1840s and 1850s from Germany and were financially successful and were therefore interested in 'the quick and total Americanization of the new immigrants' to avoid a wave of antisemitism, which would have threatened their own established position of wealth. [56]

The new immigrants consequently had to deal not only with poverty, which was an unavoidable part of their lives on the Lower East Side, but also with pressure from other Jews, who disliked the continuation of their previous 'lifestyle', expressed first and foremost by the use of the Yiddish language. The struggle against classism and workers' exploitation was consequently also an inter-Jewish struggle.[57] The radicalisation of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants was therefore primarily due to their working experiences and the frustration they felt in their new lives. As David P. Shuldiner correctly expresses it, '[p]olitical activism was for many an immigrant worker an essential

[53] Brossat and Klingberg, pp. 36-38, 41.

[54] Melissa R. Klapper, '"Those by Whose Side We Have Labored": American Jewish Women and the Peace Movement between the Wars', *The Journal of American History*, 97.3 (2010), 636-658 (p. 638).

[55] Selma C. Berrol, 'In Their Image: German Jews and the Americanization of the Ost Juden in New York City', *New York History*, 63.4 (1982), 417-433 (p. 418).

[56] Ibid., p. 419.

[57] Ibid., p. 422.

part of the struggle for economic survival'.[58] The immigrants wanted to escape a life of sorrow and suffering, and socialism, anarchism, and communism presented suitable ways out of their misery.

Many of the radicals, like Wisotsky, were immediately thrown into a world where work determined their daily routine but could not save them from poverty. Resistance was often punished and stimulated further radicalisation, though the latter's geographical and temporal contexts must also be kept in mind. The United States garment industry played an important role in that process because its low wages, long working hours, and non-existent of workers' rights provided fruitful ground for radical ideas to gain influence.[59] In the sweatshops, where subcontractors were hired, the situation was even worse than in the factories, and '[e]xploitation [...] was more than intense'.[60] Since many Jewish *landsleit* worked in the shops, the creation of a radical Jewish milieu within a community that provided some kind of homogeneity was a natural consequence.[61] An almost natural solidarity made the organisation of strikes and protests much easier, and their communal identity became even more intensified. The suppressed members of this community acted as a unit, as '[t]hey were organized around articulated interests that were shaped by social change, hardship, class-consciousness, and cultural background'.[62] As such, these men and women were also a phenomenon of a global modernity which allowed them to move across borders and become essential elements in a foreign labour movement. When distinguishing between the important features of this process, one would have to conclude, as Gerald Sorin did, that a mix of 'increasing proletarianization, exploitation, and Jewish culture', factors that were all present in New York City around 1900, were responsible for the establishment of a larger protest movement, which, as a whole, not only consisted of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, but also Germans, Russians, Italians, Irish, and many other radical immigrant communities. [63]

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[58] Shuldiner, p. 1.

[59] Sorin, pp. 54-57.

[60] Ibid., p. 61.

[61] Ibid., p. 96-97.

[62] Ibid., p. 8.

[63] Ibid., p. 3.

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The Lower East Side, like many other places in the city, was the stage for protests against a capitalist system that was built on the exploitation of the weak. The social transformations that were demanded in protests and strikes would eventually be the cause of changes within the traditionally foreign communities of the city as well. Foreign labourers became American citizens, demanding their rights, in the tradition of independence and the rights of man which went back to the Atlantic Revolutions, suggesting that they increasingly felt like Americans rather than foreigners, unlike their parents' generation. While the immigrants' community initially provided a space of convenience, those who became politically active found a place of belonging among others who demanded radical changes to the suffering that was so common within immigrant groups. These developments also created a better situation for those generations who would follow the path of the transatlantic community, as 'New immigrants, those arriving after 1890, were no longer coming to a wholly alien world. They endured many of the same hardships as the first wave, but in a milieu even more structured, more shielding, more *familiar*'.[64] Together with the German immigrants, who provided radical inspiration, the Jewish workers from Eastern Europe would eventually shape the American workers' movement.[65] However, as emphasised before, neither of these groups arrived as radicalised activists against the United States, rather, this was a result of the world they were part of in an American context.

Eventually, a new intelligentsia was established whose members spoke Yiddish and provided the Jewish American labour movement with theoretical works and debates, discussions, and lectures: in short, a rich canon of radical knowledge to which to refer. A second generation of Jewish immigrants stimulated further radicalisation, especially after the Kishinev Massacre of 1903 and the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, as those who were now arriving had already been radicalised within the Bund or the Poale Zion.[66] The Jewish intellectuals in New York City consequently argued on behalf of socialist, anarchist, and communist ideas, but they all agreed that change was necessary to achieve a better society for all. They used Yiddish to communicate and therefore relied upon a 'cultural code of communication' that had traditionally

[64] Ibid., p. 70. Emphasis in the original.

[65] Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 4-5.

[66] Shuldiner, p. 32.

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connected the two Jewish worlds on both sides of the Atlantic with each other.[67] A Yiddish-speaking labour movement eventually evolved from the Lower East Side, demanding better working conditions, better wages, and more social justice. The labour movement in New York City used many languages, one of which was Yiddish. Others included German, Russian, and Italian, but they all sang the same song: the International. The influence of the Yiddish-speaking radicals on the Lower East Side caused fear among those who had profited from a capitalist system.[68] The traditional Jewish language of Eastern Europe was looked down upon, but this attitude of the bourgeois German Jewry of the first generation of Jewish immigrants could not change the facts: the Jewish labour movement spoke Yiddish, and it gained more ground every day, as some Russian revolutionaries and other radicals even learned the language to gain more influence on the masses of workers in this part of the city.[69]

The success of the Jewish labour movement in the United States in general, and in New York City in particular, shows that the efforts to use Yiddish as a revolutionary language were not for nothing. In the 1880s, there already existed more than twenty unions for Jewish workers that were eventually merged to form the United Hebrew Trades (UHT), an umbrella organisation, in 1888. The unions could recruit members so successfully because the misery of the sweatshops created an unbroken stream of workers who were willing to join the unions to regain control over their lives and their workforce.[70] In 1890, the UHT consisted of 27 unions with around 14,000 members and sent delegates to the meetings of the Second International. While '[s]ocialism was [...] a vigorous and vital theme in Jewish immigrant life almost from the beginning', it was the sweatshops that stimulated its growing influence.[71] Between 1903 and 1912, the number of members of the Socialist Party increased from 15,975 to 118,045, and Jewish socialists became part of a mass movement, the success of which was not solely based on immigration but also on the fact that many workers were discontented with their working conditions and capitalism in general.[72] The militant members of the party,

[67] Ibid., p. 43.
[68] Berrol, p. 423.
[69] Zimmer, p. 36.
[70] Sorin, p. 78.
[71] Ibid., p. 86.
[72] Ibid.

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however, in contrast to the 'conservative leftists' from abroad (first and foremost immigrants from Germany, who especially left after the failed revolution of 1848 and due to anti-socialist policies in the years afterwards), were Americans, such as William Haywood, Jack London, and Frank Bohn. The left was further diversified by the failure of the Russian Revolution in 1905, which caused many revolutionaries to seek a new home in the United States, especially members from the Bund, who needed to leave Russia after the events of 1905, but at the same time resisted assimilation in the United States as '[t]hey desired to remain Jews—atheists, socialists, but Jews'.[73] In 1917, the *Forward*, a Yiddish socialist daily newspaper, sold 200,000 copies, highlighting the impact of the Jewish radical community in the United States, and which was particularly strong in New York City.

As has been shown, different waves of Jewish immigrants were responsible for the shaping of the radical milieu on the Lower East Side and for the success of socialist, anarchist, and communist ideas in the metropolis.[74] Further waves would follow in the 1920s, but they would find a radical world already existed in New York City that they could attach to and with which they would feel familiar.[75] To further emphasise these developments with regards to the Jewish radical milieu in New York City, a case study of Isidore Wisotsky will provide an understanding of the role the United States metropolis played in the political radicalisation of young Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in their new home across the Atlantic. His individual case study will serve as a frame within which the process described so far can be comprehended and understood. Examining Wisotky's ego document presents an opportunity to study a historical source that is emblematic of the named aspects of immigration and anarchist radicalisation within the Jewish community of nineteenth century New York City.

Isidore Wisotsky and Jewish Anarchism in New York City

Wisotsky wrote his autobiography in 1965, remarking that he felt obliged to do so despite having been 'a public school drop-out' at sixteen years old.[76] I argue that he

[73] Ibid., p. 93.

[74] For further details, see Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 26-68.

[75] Brian Horowitz, *Russian Idea—Jewish Presence: Essays on Russian-Jewish Intellectual Life* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), p. 124.

[76] IWAT, preface.

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considered the writing of his autobiography as an act of radicalism, as he wanted to preserve the existence of and knowledge about a world that seemed to have disappeared by 1965, especially since anarchism was already considered dead until it was globally reinvigorated during the events in relation to the global protests of 1968. Like many other Jewish immigrants in New York, Wisotsky grew up in a *shtetl* before his parents decided to leave for the New World. Several generations of his family had been born in Lypovets (part of present-day Ukraine), but the place 'was sunk in mud and poverty. There were no streets, no layouts. The houses were built of mud and straw'.[77] Wisotsky emphasises the class division in the *shtetl*:

> You seldom saw a brick house. If you did it belonged to a rich man. A thorough-fare paved with cobblestones was the main and only street of the town, and boards nailed together for about half a mile served as a sidewalk. When the mud rose you could not find it. There were also a few kerosene lamps that lit the street at night. That was your night life, hanging around those lamps.[78]

In school, the students were beaten by a violent teacher who used his cane as a pedagogical and disciplinary tool, which is probably why Wisotsky did not feel too attached to school and education. When his father experienced financial trouble,

> The have-nots of Lypovets came together in our house for a consultation, to help out Father. The only way out was to run away to America in the darkness of the night, so he could get rid of the money lenders. In America he will make a living.[79]

After a long wait at an immigrant house in Latvia, the family were able to board a boat — they had missed the first one — on which a 'few hundred passengers were stuck together', all on their way to a supposedly better life.[80] In New York, the family, comprising of Wisotsky's father and mother, Wisotsky himself, his four-year-old brothers Max and Abe, and his two-year-old sister Esther, rented a three-room

[77] Ibid., p. 3.
[78] Ibid., p. 4.
[79] Ibid., p. 34.
[80] Ibid., p. 3.

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apartment between Grand and Hester Streets.[81] In contrast to the quiet *shtetl*, the metropolis was loud and crowded.

Wisotsky later lived in one of the numerous tenement houses of the Lower East Side,

> with dark hallways, small gaslights on every floor, wooden stairs, no electricity and no steam, toilets, assigned to the living room, were strategically shared by two tenants. A big black iron stove in the kitchen used coal for cooking, for boiling the wash, and in winter, served as a heater for all the rooms.[82]

Other Jewish immigrants often came to visit him there, where they would discuss matters and enjoy time together: 'Refreshments consisted of beer, salted pretzels, [and] herring'.[83] During such meetings, news from the Old World was exchanged and stories about relatives shared. In America, all felt themselves to be freer, although working conditions were harsh in the sweatshops. Only Wisotsky's half-uncle Moishe seems to have escaped this sorrow:

> Round-shouldered, hoarse-voiced and glassy-eyed, a wandering drunk, Moishe had left his wife and children. He earned his living by going to Slavic neighborhoods throughout the country, miners' towns, and steel factories where Polish, Russians and Ukrainians worked. He spoke their language fluently and sold them portraits of their grandfathers, grandmothers, grandchildren, fathers, mothers. He would carry a large painted portrait which he would show his prospective customers as his sample. Then he would ask for a small picture of whom they would want, and make an enlarged copy. This cost them one dollar. When he brought the picture back, he would say, "You don't want this beautiful picture without a frame?" Then he charged whatever he could get. This was how Moishe earned his living, roaming from town to town. This was how he avoided the sweatshop. No bosses for him![84]

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 6.

[84] Ibid.

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In contrast to his uncle's 'bossless' life, Wisotsky's father worked as a skirt operator in the sweatshop mill, receiving $4 a week as an apprentice at his cousin's shop. He slept at the shop to save rent and 'did not earn much considering that he worked 60 to 70 hours a week'.[85] At the same time, the apartment was partly rented out to boarders, to whom Wisotsky's mother sold soup for 25 cents per meal. The young immigrant listened to their stories about politics, strikes, and other matters, coming into contact with the labour world of the Lower East Side.

When a strike was called, Wisotsky realised for the first time that the struggle for workers' rights was a violent business. The family was once visited by a finisher named Gussie, a 'middle-aged, well-built woman, with dark hair and black burning eyes', who was very angry about a strikebreaker called Becky, whom she wanted to confront at the sweatshop the next day. Gussie says: 'I would rather see her in the hospital!'[86]. The next day, the two women met and 'Gussie hit Becky with her pocketbook'. Becky fell, and '[l]ater, when Gussie was asked what she had in her pocketbook, she answered: "Nothing, only a half a brick"'.[87] Eventually, the strike was settled, but this episode had already provided Wisotsky with a deeper insight into the workers' struggle. Events like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 also made it clear that the lives of common workers did not count: '146 girls were burned because of locked doors. On a dreary, foggy, rainy day, thousands of workers cried and marched to bring them to their last resting place'.[88]

Instead of being interested in school, the young Wisotsky visited lectures by Saul Yanofsky, 'a maverick in the Yiddish Labor movement', and other anarchists, and he soon got involved with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).[89] Due to conflicts with his parents, Wisotsky eventually left home to live on the streets:

> The home atmosphere started to choke me [...] to prey on my mind [...] the congestion, the nagging, the misunderstanding, between me and my parents. My inability to get a half-decent job to help out the family chased me out into the street. On a hot summer evening, I left and moved into 7th Street Park, a three by three square block affair, an

[85] Ibid., p. 8.

[86] Ibid., p. 13.

[87] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[88] Ibid., p. 22.

[89] Ibid., p. 26.

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> improvement on Hester Park. It had a couple of trees, spots of grass and a shanty where they sold a schooner of milk for one cent, and for one more penny, you could buy a salt pretzel. That made a good meal for the day.[90]

In addition to the park, Wisotsky also slept close to the East River on 8th Street. Nevertheless, he realised that the summer would soon end and began to look for a steady income. Initially, he cleaned tables in a cafeteria during lunch hours, making 75 cents for three hours of work a day, and stayed with friends or people he knew from anarchist meetings: 'Some comrades also helped by inviting me several nights a week to share their meals and lodging. When I worked, I did the same thing for those rugged-individualists who were in need'.[91] Working casual jobs before staying with friends or sleeping outside, Wisotsky lived from day to day. He nevertheless attended anarchist and IWW meetings, cheering for a soon-to-come revolution. The winter, however, was extremely tough: '[There was] no dock, no park, no cafeteria […] in fact, no place to hide from the cold'.[92] Wisotsky searched for shelter from the cold and found it in the library on East Broadway for a while, but then he became a member of a commune:

> We rented a two-room apartment on 5th Street on the top floor. There was no heat, no toilet, no water. Everything in the hall. Of course there was no bath and no hot water. One room was completely dark and without windows. The cost? Six dollars a month rent. The rooms were bare […] not one piece of furniture. None of us had anything. There were ten of us.[93]

This 'Don't Worry Group', as they called themselves, regularly had 'debates and discussions on all kinds of subjects—socialism, anarchism, individualism, philosophy, literature, vegetarianism, and men like Nietzsche, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Marx, Zola, Maxim Gorky, Jack London, Sholom Asch, Tolstoy, Peretz, Ibsen, Raisin, Strindberg and others'.[94] Wisotsky's political and intellectual horizon was consequently considerably

[90] Ibid., p. 38.
[91] Ibid., p. 40.
[92] Ibid., p. 42.
[93] Ibid., p. 44.
[94] Ibid., p. 45.

broadened, and he became more and more interested in the situation of the labour movement in the United States.

When he received his working papers a few months later, he had the 'inner feeling that I was no longer a child. I eagerly looked forward to being a man, finding a job, and going to work like all grown up men and adults'.[95] Regardless of his high hopes, it was obviously not easy to find a job where he would also be taught a trade, and found it difficult: 'And so it continued, every day for several months. I kept looking for a job, arriving home tired, heartbroken and disappointed'.[96] Wisotsky went from job to job, always fighting with his bosses in the end because he criticised them for exploiting their employees:

> I took any job: errand boy, bus boy, dish washer, apprentice operator on caps [...] I was a painter, I sold large picture paintings [...] I was a waiter [...] I worked in a printing shop. [...] All these jobs lasted from one day to several months and all these jobs wound up in a fight between me and the boss.[97]

For years, Wisotsky drifted between short-term jobs, nights in the park, and the IWW headquarters. When he has an accident, in which he burned his fingers on an exposed electrical wire, Wisotsky could make a case against his employer:

> I won the case. I got enough money with which to pay some of my debts, and three months rent. I also bought myself a new suit, new shoes, a few shirts and underwear, and I still had some money left over to live on for a few weeks. My Wobbly friends also had a good time on that money. They kibbitzed and now called me a bourgeois.[98]

In 1912, Wisotsky attended a debate at Carnegie Hall, at which Emma Goldman and Sol Friedman discussed the ideas of anarchism and mass strikes. This event was essential for the political socialisation of Wisotsky, who then became a member of Goldman's entourage.[99] Due to this engagement and his contacts at the IWW, he 'stepped into a

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[95] Ibid., p. 88.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., p. 90.

[98] Members of the IWW were called Wobblies. IWAT, p. 94.

[99] Ibid., p. 58.

new world of thoughts and ideas that [he] frankly did not understand clearly'.[100] Socialism, anarchism, and other radical ideologies became important to Wisotsky, who was easily radicalised, especially since he well understood what exploitation meant. He dove deep into the world of political debates in the many halls of the Lower East Side, where Goldman was one of his favourite speakers. Step by step, this autobiography traces how this young Jewish immigrant became an American anarchist. Wisotsky was evidently a product of his environment. Like many before him, he became radicalised on the Lower East Side, where young Jews entered a world that could not fulfil the dreams of those who had left the *shtetl* in Eastern Europe looking for a better future.

Conclusion

New York City produced its own radicals, including those who had originally come from different countries, like the thousands of immigrants from Eastern Europe. The Jews who had first left the *shtetl* and then the European continent did not find the American Dream, but rather a reality that was as oppressive as the one of Czarist Russia. Of course, they were politically free, but now they were being used as cheap labour within a capitalist system that was based on exploitative practices. The Jewish immigrants initially found work in sweatshops, but at the same time, they connected with others. As a critical mass, they became the backbone of the socialist, anarchist, and communist movements in New York City and began to organise Jewish trade unions, read Yiddish papers, and develop a culture of debate that discussed and developed alternatives to the capitalist exploitation of the working class.

The immigrants did not arrive as radicals in the US metropolis, but were instead transformed there into the next generation of political activists. The sweatshop experience became the catalyst for many to turn towards radical ideas and develop a political identity that would eventually replace their religious heritage. Jewish immigrants like Wisotsky, who I would consider to be a relatively representative case for Jewish anarchists within the city, then became disaffected with the capitalist system and naturally became important allies for those in the political struggle against the existent order. Many immigrants with different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds shared this experience, but many Jewish immigrants would, as a consequence of this experience and an almost traditional anti-Jewish ostracisation, end

[100] Ibid., p. 57.

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up in radical left circles of larger cities, not just in the United States. Ultimately, it can be concluded that the political radicalism of the Jewish immigrants in New York City was a combination of the Jewish struggle for identity in their new world and their personal experiences, especially within the world of labour.

The radical labour movement in the US was 'foreign' in the sense that it was the existent transatlantic network that allowed immigrants to reach American shores, but the radicalisation process was the consequence of local factors rather than the foreignness of those who joined the radical movements, especially in New York. The city would continue to be a hub of radical ideas for many decades, and radicalism continued to be fuelled by the potential of people who were considered to be, and depicted as 'foreigners' within the context of a nation of immigrants, and who were only searching for the safety that the United States promised. Eventually they would only find out that the American Dream was nothing more than a promise. In the end, they all had to adjust to a new environment that stimulated radical responses. Integration was partly possible within the immigrant community, but generational struggles, such as the one between Wisotsky and his parents, also drove young workers away from their Jewish heritage and into the arms of radical ideas, which promised a sense of modernity and a better world. Wisotsky might have been only one among many, but the fate of those many would eventually change the United States because, as a critical mass, the Jewish immigrants had a tremendous impact not only on the workers' movement but also on its positive achievements.

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