



# Jewish Revolutionaries Singing: Puzzling Lives from Lodz Factories to the Butovo Mass Graves

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## Jewish Revolutionaries Singing: Puzzling Lives from Lodz Factories to the Butovo Mass Graves

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This investigation started with two discoveries, accidental in a way: first a series of Yiddish songs recorded live by a professional ethnomusicologist in February 1935 at the Society of former Prisoners and Exiles in Moscow, therefore labeled as “revolutionary songs” although the Pushkinskii Dom Sound Archives has no documentation related either to the performers or the lyrics, except a handwritten list of family names and titles in transcribed Yiddish and recording place and date indicated both on the wax cylinders boxes and in a registry<sup>1</sup>. Then the discovery, by searching the name of one of the performers on the Internet, that the latter unfortunately belonged to the long list of the Great Terror Victims shot and buried in Butovo, a NKVD precinct located not far from Moscow city<sup>2</sup>.

Old archival depositories and new technologies merged, in a sense, to point out to a true story that assembles areas of knowledge scholars usually cautiously separate in unconnected research fields. If it is not unusual to link both Soviet Revolution Veterans Societies with the Great Terror, pre-1917 revolutionary culture and the attempt by the veterans themselves to memorialize this heritage in the new Soviet, Bolshevik-dominated context, have been far less explored<sup>3</sup>. It is true regarding those who used to be part of the more powerful revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted to the head of the Phonogramm Archive in Saint Petersburg, Iurii Ivanovich Marchenko for having shown me these particular recordings and also for having answered to so many questions on the entire collections.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sinodik.ru/index.php?q=bio&id=96100>. On Butovo both a place where people were shot and buried and its present memorialization, visit its website <http://www.martyr.ru/>, and Kathy Rousselet, « La création d'un lieu de pèlerinage sur une terre de massacre », *Politix*, 2007, n° 1, p. 55-78. For a careful history of all categories of victims, see Серия «Бутовский полигон». 1937—1938. Книга памяти жертв политических репрессий. Вып. 1-7", М., 1997—2003 г. г. Издание общества «Мемориал».

<sup>3</sup> The literature focuses mostly on a distinct albeit correlated issue, namely how the Bolsheviks succeeded in imposing a unique reading of the revolutionary process and therefore unique memorialization. See a.o. Emilia Kustova, « De la « fête partisane » à la « fête d'Etat ». Les célébrations et les rituels révolutionnaires au lendemain d'Octobre, *Le Mouvement Social*, 2005, n°3, p. 59-76. O. Figes, B. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution. The Language and Symbols of 1917*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999. Frederick C. Corner, *Telling October. Memory and the Making of the Russian Revolution*, Cornell University Press, 2004. For a recent accounting of the reappraisal of the revolutionary past at the very time the Jewish revolutionary songs stored at the Phonoarchive were recorded, see David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism. Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*, Harvard University Press, 2002, *Propaganda State in Crisis. Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination and Terror under Stalin, 1928-1941*, Yale University Press, 2011, Kevin Platt, D. Brandenberger, (coed), *Epic Revisionism. Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*, Wisconsin, 2006.

force in Imperial Russia before being suppressed by the Bolsheviks (or by the course of history, depending on the kind of narrative you will support), namely the SRs<sup>4</sup>, and even truer regarding less represented political parties including the Bund, which had been the main political current among revolutionaries in a significant part of the Russian Empire, the Pale of Settlement<sup>5</sup>. As for the history of Soviet live recording, it has been an understudied research field so far, although a recent published volume containing invaluable archival material related to an ethnomusicologist's campaign of recording among revolutionary veterans in the mid-1930s strongly contributed to guide the present research<sup>6</sup>. One document, or archival file, leading to one another, I should first mention the investigation files related to a so-called SR-Bundist terrorist organization among old revolutionary veterans, started in 1938, ending up with posthumous rehabilitation of the convicts, which are stored at the Russian State Archive in Moscow, as well as the tsarist Police department files that shed some light on the underground activities of the same, with slightly different, far less Russified names. While the history of the Western Provinces labour movement that led to the crucial events of 1905 is still to be investigated in Moscow and Petersburg archives mostly, and not in local or national archives of today's and decades-long independent states, basic biographical information is to be found in Poland and probably, as it will be explained below, in other countries. By the same token, music sheets and compilation of Russian revolutionary and convicts songs were consulted in the Music Department of the former Lenin Library, opposite the new erected Prince Vladimir's colossal statue, while an attempt to identify the recorded Yiddish songs benefited from the wealth of the Medem library in Paris that provided Russian, Soviet, US-based compilations of Yiddish songs as well as a copy of an History of the Bund in Lodz written in Yiddish and published in New York<sup>7</sup> that featured the names (but not the post-revolutionary fate) of the song performers shot in Butovo<sup>8</sup>.

To evoke an archival journey is not to describe an erratic quest but to point out, firstly, split memories and, secondly, to advocate for an approach where historians would transgress, literally too, intellectual but also political (and therefore linguistic) frontiers and to articulate what has been most of the times violently separated in order to shape a simplistic and distorted narrative<sup>9</sup>. What is at stake here beyond a recurrent claim for a global and transnational history is both decentering October and rethinking what October, both the event, i.e. the victory of the Bolsheviks, and the Bolshevik invention, made to our spatial and

<sup>4</sup> On SR and other socialist and anarchist activists' fate in interwar Soviet Union, see the long-term project directed by K.N. Morozov, Memorial and its publications <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/history-of-repressions-and-protest/protest/left-resistance/>

<sup>5</sup> On the Bund during the Civil War and its liquidation, see Oleg Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdu krasnymi i belyimi, 1917-1920*, ROSSPEN 2005 (recently translated as *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, transl by Timothy J. Portice, University of Pennsylvania Press)

<sup>6</sup> M.S. Druskin. *Sobranie sochinenii v 7-mi tomakh*, t.5yi : *Russkaia revoliutsionnaia pesnia*. Sostavlenie, vstupil'naia stat'ia, materialy, publikatsiia pisem i dokumentov, komentarii S.V. Podrezovoi, iz-vo Kompozitor. Sankt-Peterburg », 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Sholem Hertz, *Di Geshikhte fun Bund in Lodzsh*, Farlag unser tsait, , Farlag unser tsait, New-York, 1958. (also available on line <http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yiddish-books/spb-nybc200458/hertz-j-s-jacob-sholem-di-geshikhte-fun-bund-in-lodzsh/spb-nybc200458>)

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the Sound archives, this research owes to many past and present archivists of GARF, RGAE (Moscow), to librarians at the Russian State Library and to Memorial in Russia, to the archivists of National archives of the Polish States in Kielce and Lodz and to the Genealogy Department of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw in Poland, to the librarians of the Medem Library in Paris. Special thanks also to Michal Trebacz, Lodz/Warsaw.

<sup>9</sup> This research benefited from a TEPESIS grant.

chronological framing of history. Revolutionary veterans referred to in this paper were not alien to this way of thinking that aspired to make the past a blank slate that would lead to a much distorted reading of the past but they happened to be, clearly, among the losers of history. However, the present investigation is not about dissent memories, since it is difficult to label dissenters people who performed songs, even with a non-Bolshevik revolutionary background, while being the members of a veterans Society created by the Soviet regime, even though it was about to collapse. By the same token, ethnomusicologists who worked hard to record their performance probably did not consider themselves as dissenters, even if to some degree some of them must have somehow smelled whiffs of trouble. After all, it was no exception in Soviet Union, especially under Stalin's rule. It should be added that since the investigation is lacking so called ego-documents that would offer the expression of dissenting thoughts, we should leave this issue open<sup>10</sup>.

Instead, we decided to gather as much evidence in various archives and libraries as we could that would allow a kind of archeological approach, trying to portray people who both actively and consciously contributed to one of the most important event of the 20th Century, the Russian Revolution, and who lived and died anonymously and most of the times, on both sides of 1917's watershed, tragically. The attempt was to discover what looked like an isolated island, namely former Bundists surviving in the Soviet Union's capital before being shot and buried in a common grave as hundreds of thousands of other inhabitants of the Soviet Union who all had been the victims of the Stalinist terror, that is, in a sense, of the October Revolution. The relationship to the prerevolutionary past in the Soviet context, i.e. the means to memorialize it but also, by many aspects, to keep it vivid, at least in the private sphere, was all the more intriguing in the case of people condemned from the onset for being potential outcasts of a new society shaped by the Bolsheviks and, by their former political obedience, language and cultural background, both close and alien to a Bolshevik Russian culture.

Let us focus on the main performer. Khaim Shimon Abram Frush alias Efim Abramovich Frush, born in 1893 in Radoszyce, in the Radom province, who moved to Lodz after 1905, was arrested several times before being exiled to the Irkutsk province where he stayed until the Revolution, thereafter spending the Civil War years in Ukraine before moving to Moscow in the mid-1920s. Taking also into account his fellow performers we were able to identify, we came across several sets of interactions, both within this small group of Yiddish-speakers and larger communities, leading way to a broad range of life experiences, from Lodz factories at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the Siberian exile and erratic trajectories during the Civil War, and above all to their desire to make sense of it, including by collecting old songs. In other words, they urged to memorialize their past while experiencing an illness- and poverty-plagued present life in interwar Soviet Moscow.

In order to present these various entangled communities circles in which our Yiddish song performers happened to be embedded on the long-course at distinct periods of life, the present paper will first describe the mid-1930s recording campaign of revolutionary songs as an attempt to feed a new Soviet mass culture. It will then address former Bundists' own attempt to settle a genuine historic and cultural inheritance, including songs, that ended to the 1938 fabricated case of a so-called terrorist Bundist organization. Finally, it shall raise the issue of personal ties these Moscow-based Yiddish-speakers revolution veterans possibly maintained with people who were then living in other geographical and political spaces.

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<sup>10</sup> Malte Griesse, *Communiquer, juger et agir sous Staline. La personne prise entre ses liens avec les proches et son rapport au système politico-idéologique*, Francfort-sur-le Main, Peter Lang 2011 in addition to Anna Krylova's, Jochen Hellbeck's, Igor Halfin's etc discussion on a Soviet self.

## **I/ Recording revolutionary songs in USSR in the 1930s**

We know very little about the Jewish songs' live recording of Efim Abramovich Frush and his comrades that Sofia Magid conducted in Moscow in February 1935, but we still can learn more than suggested by the poor indication she wrote down on the label on the wax cylinder at the Pushkinskii Dom Sound Archives located in Leningrad and from the few remarks hastily scribbled in the register. The recordings in fact are both an exception: they remained unexploited and were the by-product of a broader project that was part of a long-term and quite broad attempt to collect revolutionary songs from revolutionary veterans who used to sing them in the heroic age, when the Revolution was still in the making (or utopia with no future, depending on one's view about the philosophy of history).

### ***Ethnomusicology among Revolution Veterans***

Born in 1892 in Saint Petersburg to a Jewish intellectual family (her father was a bibliophile and a historian, her mother a dentist), Sofia Davydovna Magid acquired an academic music training on both sides of the revolutionary years, first in the Saint Petersburg's Conservatory from 1912 until 1917, and then in the Russian Institute for the History of Art<sup>11</sup>. She started to work as an ethnomusicologist in the second half of the 1920s, taking part in the expedition of the Folkloric Section of the Historical-Jewish Society, an emanation of the liberal Jewish intellectual milieu created on the eve of the collapse of the Russian empire. It had collected invaluable ethnographic documentation among the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement. The Society outlived the Revolution but was closed down in 1929. Nevertheless, collecting ethnographic material, including music, remained an academic albeit vulnerable option. Sofia Davydovna recorded Jewish songs in Volhynia and in the Mogilev area, published several articles on Jewish folklore at the beginning of the 1930s, before defending her dissertation, entitled "The Ballade in Jewish Folklore" in 1938. Not only was Sofia Davydovna partly specialized in traditional Jewish folklore: she had already recorded some Jewish revolutionary songs of members of the Leningrad branch of the All-Union Society of the Former Political Prisoners and Exiles, in 1933. An article published in *Sovetskaia Etnografiia* in 1936 aimed at summing up her findings, in a stereotyped language that tells nothing of her informers.

At the very same time, the first volume of a series on Jewish Folk Music analyzed by another ethnomusicologist, Moisei Iakovlevich Beregovskii (1892-1961), based in Kiev, was published in Moscow by the publishing house Muzgiz under the title "Workers' and revolutionary songs about recruitment and war"<sup>12</sup>, a publication we shall address later. Similarly to Sofia Davydovna did on the registry and the wax cylinders, Beregovskii reproduced Yiddish language using Latin letters, following a transcription system distinct from the YIVO one<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> L.I. Petrova, « Sof'ia Davydovna Magid v Pushkinskom dome », *Iz istorii russkoi fol'kloristiki*, vypusk 8, Saint-Petersburg, 2013, p. 147-204.

<sup>12</sup> Moisei Beregovskii, *Rabochie i revoliutsionarye pesni. Pesni o rekrutchine i voine*, M. Muzgiz, 1934. Decades later, this book was translated and published as part of *Old Jewish Folk Music. The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregowski*. Edited and translated by Mark Slobin, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> On interwar collaboration and competition prevailing among Soviet and YIVO scholars see Claire Le Foll, « The institute for Belarusian culture: the constitution of Belarusian and Jewish studies in the BSSR between Soviet and non-Soviet science (1922–1928) », *Ab Imperio*, 2012/ 4, 245-274.

Although the recording of Frush and his comrades apparently were left unexploited, it probably occurred at a time when Sofia Magid was an active member of a brigade headed by the already renowned musicologist Mikhail Druskin (1905-1991). Dedicated to the collection of revolutionary songs of the revolution's veterans, the brigade was an academic emanation of the Institute of Anthropology, Archeology and Ethnography's Ethnographic Section of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. A recently published collection of documents from the archives of the Institute of Russian Literature, the famous Pushkinskii Dom, that still hosts the Sound Archives, remarkably documents the way the brigade, set up in 1934, worked on the field, crossing written information given by a whole range of specialists, authors of revolutionary songs and more often their relatives and witnesses of the old revolutionary times, with the recordings of songs performed by old revolutionaries, be they members of the Society of the Old Bolsheviks or members of the Society of former Political Prisoners and Exiles. Created in 1921, the latter aimed at bringing together the former members of Socialist non-Bolshevik parties that rallied October and the triumphant Bolsheviks<sup>14</sup>. Many of them were former SRs, with small groups of various former obediences, including Bundists, but also a few survivors of the narodniki movement among the older ones<sup>15</sup>.

Druskin's brigade was obviously committed to fixing on paper and on wax cylinders this living memory of the past, a musical heritage that meant so much for the former participants of underground activities, which was most of the time followed by arrests, years if not decades-long jail sentences and exile to Siberia. As one of the brigade member, the young folklorist Vladimir Ivanovich Chicherov (1907-1957), reported to Druskin, recording sessions were all the more a moving experience because performing old songs conveyed a whole range of past and intense emotions. "Memories came back, I could not sleep all night through, I had visions of all that occurred"<sup>16</sup> said one of Chicherov's informers, Elizaveta Nikolaevna Koval'skaia (1851-1943), who was already 74 years old, but was not supposed to be especially mild of character. One of the still alive narodniki, she was a member of the Black Repartition and spent twenty years in tsarist prisons and exile before being forced to leave Russia and to migrate to Western Europe. She was back in Russia at the end of 1917.<sup>17</sup>

Among the five brigade members, Sofia Magid's skills seem to have been instrumental in recording all these voices from the past live. Before the arrival in Moscow of her colleague based in Leningrad and frequently on the road for the purpose of her field work, Chicherov had already made a beautiful job, preparing a listing, for months, of all the virtual informers and the songs that should be recorded in Moscow in February 1935, of the old revolutionaries he had previously met or heard of.

Investigating who could be the best informers to be recorded, the young Chicherov heard of several individuals more or less well-established in the social and political hierarchy of the new Soviet Society. He consulted for example Felix Kon, born in 1864, with a decades-long

<sup>14</sup> M.S. Druskin. *Sobranie sochinenii v 7-mi tomakh*, t.5yi : *Russkaia revoliutsionnaia pesnia*. Sostavlenie, vstupitel'naia stat'ia, materialy, publikatsiia pisem i dokumentov, kommentarii S.V. Podrezovoi, iz-vo Kompozitor. Sankt-Peterburg », 2012. On the history of the brigade and Druskin's decades-long activity in the field, see S. Podrezova, " M.S. Druskin – sobiratel' i issledovatel' russkoi revoliutsionnoi i rabochei pesni", in *Russkaia Revoliutsionnaia pesna*, op.cit., p. 6-42 and the excerpts of Druskin's memories, *ibid.*, p. 43-46.

<sup>15</sup> The most recent work on the Society, Marc Junge, *Die Gesellschaft der ehemaligen politischer Zwangsarbeiter und Verbannter. Gründung, Entwicklung, Liquidierung (1921-1935)*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 2009, offers some insight into ideological conflicts with the Bolsheviks but says nothing on the Bundists, a tiny share of the membership, nor on musical and vocal activities

<sup>16</sup> "Vspomnila, dazhe noch' ne spala, vse pered glazami prokhodilo". P. 565

<sup>17</sup> See her personal file in GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 900.

revolutionary experience, now a member of several high Soviet institutions, who willingly answered his questions although his secretary said later that, as he was extremely busy.<sup>18</sup> Chicherov was provided with many details of people who were known to have a good memory and some musical sense, capable of remembering but also singing the songs of the old days. Such was, for example Aleksei Mikhailovich Filippov, a typographer who used to print illegal literature before 1917, including the lyrics of revolutionary songs and who had kept them alive, since he was at the head of a choir in a Leningrad factory. He is heavily quoted in a collection of revolutionary songs edited as late as 1984 by one member of Druskin's brigade, Pelageia G. Shiriaeva<sup>19</sup>

In his correspondence, Chicherov never alludes to the informers' political affiliation as a negative or problematic issue, which does not mean that conscious or unconscious biases had not been applied. Most notably, there is no hint of any interest in non Russian-speaking revolutionary heritage, for example the Bundist one, and we do not know whether it had been ever discussed or whether it was a self-evident precondition. Among the criteria Chicherov obviously valued, as any ethnomusicologist would, were a good memory, first-hand knowledge of the songs and the context in which they used to be performed, with a significant attention to the authorship's issue. Last but not least, musical skills mattered all the more because recording melodies were at stakes as much as the lyrics. In his letters to Druskin, Chicherov used to comment on the capacities of some of his informers he had previously tested, for example Nikolai Leonidovich Meshcheriakov (1865-1942), a former member of the People's Will, who later joined the Social Democrats and was now, among other high-ranking positions he occupied after the Revolution, the Small Soviet Encyclopedia chief editor. Writing extensively on the revolutionary past, Meshcheriakov had published the melody and lyrics of the Trukhanskii March as an appendix of his published recollections on exile<sup>20</sup>: "Meshcheriakov cannot be used to record notes. Delo bylo v ego kabinate v MSE<sup>21</sup> . He made the demonstration that he is not able to sing. I did not believe it. And he started singing! My goodness!!! Nothing can be understood, even the most basic sound." Further, he reported an opposite case: "Shapovalov apologizes, he was ill and too busy for answering your letter. His sense of hearing is slightly better than Meshcheriakov's (Meshcheriakov pronounced wonderful words "I love music. The thing is I understand nothing. I take all at face value, everything seems to be as it should be!). But he promised he would sing something". Moreover, Shapovalov had recommended good performers among his acquaintances: "he has never heard a better performer of "Arestant (Arrested)" (Noch' temnaia (dark night)) than Krizhanovskii who happens to be a rare tenor;;;; In Leningrad lives a friend of Vl. Il. Lenin, Mikh. Aleksandrovich Sil'vin. Shapovalov mentions him as a man with a good musical memory and highly recommends to contact him". The tribe, nevertheless, had its idiosyncrasies, and the more the informers fitted the project, the more they could be impeded to sing, for various reasons ranging from reluctance to age and illnesses. Therefore, the researcher had to know how to behave with them, notably with the Narodniki: "Teodorovich is a nice old man (milyi starik) but he does not grasp at all what we are doing. He claimed that nobody would remember anything and would be able to sing. Moreover, he convinced the narodniki themselves. And then the meeting started. I "poignantly" addressed the audience and I was so successful among the old guys that one gave me his call number, another his address, and a third both his/her call number and address". Listing then the volunteers and their respective repertoire, Chicherov noted for instance: "Gedeonovskaia

<sup>18</sup> P. 525, 548.

<sup>19</sup> P.G. Shiriaeva, *Folklor fabrichno-zavodskikh rabochikh v revoliutsii 1905g.*, id, 100 pesen russkikh rabochikh Leningrad, Muzyka, 1984, including photographs of Filipov and the choir.

<sup>20</sup> N.L. Meshcheriakov, *Kak my zhili na ssylke. Zapiski starogo Bolshevika*, M. 1934

<sup>21</sup> A Bolshevik, Meshcheri

Ekat. Mikh (in three weeks' time, not earlier, she is ill these days. She made up her mind after the letter you sent to the Narodniki)"<sup>22</sup>

At the eve of Sofiia Davydovna's arrival in the capital, Druskin sent her a letter making clear the priorities of the forthcoming recording session, as well as their practical conditions: "in case the wax cylinders are needed, it is crucial to write down aurally." Druskin also recommended to get help from Viktoriia Viacheslavovna Senkevich-Gudkova, a folklorist specialized in Siberian languages<sup>23</sup>, which illustrates the fact that the knowledge at stake was mostly viewed as one of recording and approaching potential informers, veteran revolutionaries being in a sense more or less comparable to the members of small-numbered tribes. Another option was to contact the Union of Soviet Composers, in order to get in touch with Belyi, with whom Druskin had already arranged an agreement<sup>24</sup>. A member of the Prokoll, an avant-gardist proletarian-oriented group of composers, Belyi had already been involved with the process of recording revolutionary songs and reworking them, as we will see below. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized, that Prokoll members intensively participated to the development of a Soviet ethnomusicology as well, notably in the non-European republics of the new Soviet Union. The purpose was to collect a non-written musical heritage in order to build a genuine national culture. Thus, first-hand collection of songs and music performances combined with an arrangement clearly based on Western musical conceptions was their brand, which, in a sense, is also to be found in the way they addressed Western working-class culture.

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether Magid and Chicherov followed Druskin's proposal. In a letter to the head of the brigade, Magid alludes to a heavy "dictafon"<sup>25</sup>, which she is not ready to push by herself and we do not know how this issue was solved, but the recording sessions in both Societies took place indeed from February 13 until February 28 1935<sup>26</sup>. Chicherov noted, with great satisfaction, on February 22: "the material we are gathering is of the highest interest"<sup>27</sup>. Recordings of Frush and his fellows are dated February 27, they belonged thus to one of the last sessions, and we do not know whether Chicherov included them in his appraisal.

Nevertheless, it was not until after the war that the sources of this fruitful recording campaign were clearly mentioned. A few months later, the Societies were dissolved and Druskin's editorial project of an extensive revolutionary songs anthology was eventually rejected. Nevertheless, Druskin succeeded in publishing a collection of 50 revolutionary songs in 1938, without mentioning any of his informers, in an obvious contradiction with the ethnomusicological methodology his brigade had followed. Only after Stalin's death would he, along with other former brigade members, quote his sources....without mentioning (and perhaps without knowing) that some of them had been subjects to repression and had died during the Great Terror. That their fate was a problematic issue had yet been clearly evoked at the heart of events, as a letter Chicherov addressed to Druskin testifies at the end of May 1937 in which he suggests to scrap the usual editing of a name index: "I raise the question whether it seems relevant to edit such an index name. We do not know the people we recorded. I do not accuse them, but I cannot assert that they all are crystal clear. You don't know them,

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<sup>22</sup> Chicherov to Druskin, February 9, 1935, p. 571-

<sup>23</sup> V.V. Senkevich, "Moia poedka k khantam (ostiakam)", *Sovetskoe kraevedenie*, p. 47-48, Moscow-Leningrad, 1935, n° 1; id, "Folklor Obskogo Severa", *Sovetskaiia Artika*, 1935, n°5, p. 66-71, quoted *ibid.* p. 521.

<sup>24</sup> Druskin to Magid, February 5, 1935, p. 569-570.

<sup>25</sup> Magid speaks of a "pudovy diktafon", a reference to a prerevolutionary unit of measure corresponding to approximatively 16 kgs.... Magid to Druskin, Moscow, February 11, 1935, p. 577.

<sup>26</sup> Footnote \*\*p. 577, footnote \* p. 578

<sup>27</sup> Chicherov to Azadovskii, February 22, 1935, p. 578.



neither do I, nor does Magid. Recent events have shown that even among people who used to play an important role, there were enemies of the people. It makes you think. Isn't it a little bit irresponsible to print a list of people about whom we only that they performed songs for the sake of a scientific publication? I oppose the name index."<sup>28</sup>

### *Revolutionary Songs, high music and mass Soviet culture*

This dark outcome could be misleading if it hid the fact that, as already mentioned, collecting and recording old revolutionary songs, far from being a dissent project, was quite an institutionalized field during all the interwar period. More precisely, the people acting in this field, as in so many others, walked on an edge, acting apparently at the core of the official Soviet culture but walking very close indeed to the abyss of political repression.

Publishing revolutionary songs could even generate some competition in the mid-1930s. Despite the good will and spirit of collaboration emanating from the correspondence between Chicherov and several members of the Societies, some tension obviously occurred at some point as Chicherov reported to his boss, Mikhail Druskin: "the situation in the Society of Old Bolsheviks has totally reversed. Having collected some material, they have decided to publish it as a sort of mass literature (sbornik popularizatorskogo tipa) and found irrelevant the use of this material in our publication. The issue of recording melodies via the Society will be examined on January 31. If they refuse to make some comrades available for the recordings, I will chase them on my own. In that case, they would miss something, since they would not receive a copy of the melodies recordings".<sup>29</sup>

For its part, the Society of former Political Prisoners and Deportees had already published in 1930 a short anthology of 40 songs, which offered a basis for Druskin's own publication in 1938, although he would by far not reproduce the same titles. In a short introduction, the anonymous editors of the 1930 compilation explained that they had tried to meet the pressing demand of a whole range of cultural institutions such as clubs, theaters, organizers of demonstrations and celebrations. The anthology appears to be the result of the close collaboration between the living memory of the revolutionary veterans, embodied by the Choir of the Society, and avant-gardist composers who reworked the songs they had recorded: "the authors of the reworking aimed above all at restoring the lyrics, heavily distorted in the existing publications. They were helped by the members of the Society of Political Prisoners, who met several times in their club in Moscow (Lopukhinskii per, 5), singing the lyrics they knew of the recorded songs, as they used to sing them in the past (v svoe vremia) and hearing out the text that had been recorded."<sup>30</sup> These composers dedicated to revolutionary art had their names in the table of contents, in front of the songs they had reworked: Alexandr Davydenko, Boris Shekhter, V. Belyi already mentioned and some others, who belonged to the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) and to the Production Brigade of Composers (Prokoll), that brought together students of the Moscow Conservatory. Decades later, Boris Shekhter accounted for this experience in a book collating memories on his friend Alexandr Davydenko, who untimely died in 1934. He explains how the available repertoire of published revolutionary songs seemed too narrow to the young composers and how they decided to broaden it by excavating the "deposit" of popular revolutionary culture, in order to rework it and to give it back, now a piece of art, to its original author, the people (Narod). "Therefore we went to the All-Union Society of Political Prisoners and Deportees that existed

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<sup>28</sup> Chicherov to Druskin, p. 594.

<sup>29</sup> Chicherov to Druskin, January 29, 1935.

<sup>30</sup> *Pesni katorgi i ssylki*, Iz-vo Vsesoiuznogo Obshchestva Politkatorzhan i ssylno-poselentsev, Moscou, 1930, p. 8.

at the time, in order to rediscover, record and publish, as a reciprocal project, Russian revolutionary songs that laid deep down within the people. This initiative was met with the highest enthusiasm. Old Bolsheviks gathered groupings of around 30-40 people several times and they sang for us fight songs of the Bolshevik underground... From this interaction with the old Bolsheviks the idea was born of writing a new opera called 1905. The song collection ("Pesni katorgi i ssylki") appeared as a "prelude" of its own to this major work.<sup>31</sup> Despite the confusion he made between the Old Bolsheviks and the Society that brought together former non Bolsheviks revolutionaries, Boris Shekhter's recollections testify to the vivid participation of the Society's activists, that is the non-Bolsheviks veterans. The interest of the latter is still to be felt regarding Druskin brigade's new project, although the participants seem to have been far less numerous 5 years later, on the eve of the Society's liquidation occurring a few months later.

In the meantime, the monopolistic Soviet records company Gramplastrest issued at least two records from the official choir of the Society of former Political Prisoners and Exiles of the Soviet Union. In its 1934 catalog, as head of the section "Songs and instrumental music of the peoples of the Soviet Union", one can read: "Zamuchen tiazheloi nevolei", a mourning song written by the narodnik G. Machtet, presumably commemorating the death in jail as a result of tuberculosis of a student of Chernyshev, his funeral in Saint Petersburg turning into a mass demonstration. The song was published for the first time in London in 1876, and became one of the most widespread anthems among the narodniki facing intense repression. Very famous in the first half of the 20th century, it is supposed to have been one of Lenin's favorite songs<sup>32</sup>. In the spring of 1936, Druskin exchanged some letters with Taras Grigor'evich Machtet, a poet who used to have connections with Esenin and lived now on Arbat Street in Moscow, because the young musicologist had just published an article that falsely attributed the song to another writer. Very gently, Machtet Jr. shared family memories with Druskin, including his own prerevolutionary college years in Yalta, confirming that his father had to be the author and announcing the forthcoming publication of his own collection of revolutionary songs and poems.<sup>33</sup> The second song included in the Gramplastrest catalogue, the no less famous "Solntse vskhodit i zakhodit", features in Gorky's play "Na dne" (The Lower Depths, 1902). It belonged as well to the repertoire of the prison songs that was at the core of the musical heritage that the Society of former Political Prisoners and Exiles was so strongly committed to transmitting and spreading throughout the new Soviet society.

Gramplastrest records featured in full the name of the Society and of his choir leader, Evgenii Gavrilovich Petrov.<sup>34</sup> At this stage, it has been impossible to find any additional

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in N. Martynov, A.A. Davydenko. *Tvorcheskii put'*, M. 1977., p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> According to Druskin, the song was performed at Lenin's funeral by the Boshoi Teatr Choir. P. 408. In 1976 Melodiia released a vinyl record for the centenary of Lenin's birth, whose contents "Zamuchentiazheloi nevolei" in the rendition delivered by the All-Union Radio Great Choir <https://www.discogs.com/fr/Various-%D0%9B%D1%8E%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BC%D1%8B%D0%B5-%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%98%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B0/release/4171988>

<sup>33</sup> Mashtet to Druskin, May 31, 1936, Machtet to Druskin, June 4, 1936, p. 656-671.

<sup>34</sup> See « Besnuites', tyranny on one face ([http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=14950](http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=14950)) and « Krasnoe znamia » on the other one ([http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=14952](http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=14952)); see also, probably for export, Solntse vskhodit i zakhodit on one face ([http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=24172](http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=24172)) and Zamuchen tiazheloi nevolei ([http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=24171](http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=24171)).

information on Evgenii Gavrilovich (not even, fortunately, among the lists of victims of the repression now available on the Internet). His personal file is missing both in the archives of the Society and in its published directories. One can yet portray two of his brothers: before 1917 already, the elder one had become a relatively famous writer, Stepan Gavrilovich, nicknamed Skitalets by Maxim Gorkii who took twice the hobo under his wing, the first time at the dawn of the 20th century, then in the middle of the 1930s when he succeeded in convincing the old writer to come back from a 10 year-long exile in Kharbin and to pursue his conversation with the peasants who had become members of the collective farms (and had been decimated by deportations and mass hunger some years before, but on these topics neither Gorky nor Skitalets ever published a single word), which Skitalets did until he died, on the very eve of the German invasion of the Soviet Union<sup>35</sup>. The second brother, Arkadii, born in 1882, had been a member of the Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles since 1925<sup>36</sup>. In Skitalets's published memories, like in the short autobiography written by his younger brother Arkadii and stored in his own personal file in the Society's archives, one reads the same evocation of a poor serf family of the Samara area experiencing both misery and forms of intellectual emancipation. Their father, Gavril is said to have lost his leg while serving in the army during the Caucasian wars. Coming back to the village, he became a carpenter struggling to make ends meet and to feed his large family. Stepan remembers how he also used to travel with his father, telling tales accompanied by the *gusli* a popular instrument similar to the cithar. While Gavril was a rural poet of his own kind, the grandmother was a village teller. Reflecting this family background, Skitalets's works are all devoted to the description and glorification of peasant life in the Volga area, including villagers fighting for their access to the land. Lenin is supposed to have highly appreciated his prose, although the political affiliation of the writer is not clear, the contrary to that of his younger brothers. In his autobiography intended for the Society, Arkadii indeed describes his own early engagement in the SR Movement that led him to Siberia, although he succeeded in escaping while being deported. A gifted schoolboy, he mentions early literary writings but describes himself primarily as a qualified technician, holding high positions even before the Revolution. He must confess to his total lack of involvement in the social activities of the Society (for which he is blamed in 1932). Yet Chicherov mentions him as one of his informers, as he mentions the fact that G.M. Krzhizhanovskii had recommended to contact Skitalets, "who came back some time ago to the USSR, sings (he has a fine bass voice), knows a lot of songs including those with his own lyrics that they used to sing. Gorkii could speak about him."<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Chicherov does not mention the familial ties between the three brothers, nor do we know whether Evgenii, the leader of the Society's choir, had also a bass voice or whether he used to sing in a church choir before the Revolution like, apparently, his elder brother Stepan.

Evgenii and his two older brothers were probably at the crossroads of a Russian rural singing culture and a revolutionary one, which did not hinder him and his choir from performing for the Soviet record industry, even if the demand was strikingly lower than the one for *Estrada*

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<sup>35</sup> [http://историческая-самара.рф/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B3/%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D1%81/%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%86-\(%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2\)-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87.html](http://историческая-самара.рф/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B3/%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D1%81/%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%86-(%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2)-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87.html)

<sup>36</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1531

<sup>37</sup> Chicherov to Druskin, 9-10 February 1935, p. 576

(entertainment music)<sup>38</sup>. However, the songs they performed had to be included in the record company's repertoire and they remained part of the Soviet official culture long after the Society was dissolved and the names of Petrov and his choir disappeared from the Gramplastrest sales catalog, replaced by the renditions of the State's choir led by the former regent Danilin, of the Bolshoi Theater choir, the All-Union Radio choir led by the former regent Aleksandr Sveshnikov<sup>39</sup>, the Red Army's choir led by Aleksandrov etc<sup>40</sup>.

Yet before their names were erased and the memory of what they represented disappeared from the public Soviet space or outlived Stalin's death in a mutilated manner exemplified by Shekhter's memories, the Society's activists, under the auspices of Emelian Iaroslavskii who patronized the Society of Old Bolsheviks as well<sup>41</sup>, gained access to a new mass culture: they were supposed to participate in the production of Soviet movies, the radio broadcasted their voices recalling years of fighting and suffering, in addition to booklets and books issued by their own publishing house based in Moscow<sup>42</sup>.

At the beginning of 1933, Chicherov himself, drawing on the collection of songs published by the Society in collaboration with the Prokoll composers in 1930, produced a draft on revolutionary songs obviously targeting radiobroadcast programmers, submitting various thematic programs which alternated revolutionary songs in an artistic rendition and the reading aloud of literary texts dedicated to the memory of the tsarist repression and the revolutionary fighting, Dostoevsky and Pushkin side by side with Vera Figner<sup>43</sup>.

Despite the negative referees sent by two prominent members of the Society, Chicherov's drafts were in tune with a general trend of the Society and its provincial branches since after the Revolution. Music played an important role in the commemoration of the main past events, especially February 1917 that was celebrated not only as the collapse of the tsarist autocracy but actually as the event that released the former convicts from tsarist cells and places of exile. Celebration evenings usually included several speeches followed by a concert. The latter was supposed to be less of an image of a bourgeois entertainment than the embodiment of the close association of a revolutionary, popular culture with high music, from Rimskii-Korsakov to the avant-gardis composers mentioned above. The performers themselves would be prominent professional artists from the highest cultural institutions. In April 1924 the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the movement "Going to the People (Khozhdenie v narod)" took place on the stage of the Bolshoi Theater, former participants, such as Vera Figner and Maxim Frolenko, relating their recollections in the first part of the evening, while the second part was entirely devoted to "songs of prison and exile", performed by a whole range of singers of the Bolshoi Theater and other troupes and musical formations<sup>44</sup>. Like the performers', the repertoire was an artistic one, mostly from the collection of songs that the composer and folklorist Gartevel'd<sup>45</sup> had collected among

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<sup>38</sup> see the print run by categories in RGAE, f.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Soln'tse vskhodit i zakhodit performed by the Radio Committee Choir led by A. Sveshnikov, a 1934 record here: [http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=17629&sessionid=156qj8rcc7v3bp3do9np551r44&l=russian](http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=17629&sessionid=156qj8rcc7v3bp3do9np551r44&l=russian)

<sup>40</sup> See various examples here: [http://www.russian-records.com/search.php?search\\_keywords=%ED%E5%E2%EE%EB%E5%E9&l=russian](http://www.russian-records.com/search.php?search_keywords=%ED%E5%E2%EE%EB%E5%E9&l=russian)

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Sandra Dahlke, Individuum und Herrschaft im Stalinismus. Emel'jan Jaroslavskij (1878-1943).

<sup>42</sup> See Katorga i ssylka, n° 4 (53°, 1929, p. 206.

<sup>43</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 423.

<sup>44</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 5, d. 168, l. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Vil'gel'm Napoleonovich Gartevel'd, *Pesni katorgi*, 1912. see also *partitions Pesni katorgi. Pesni sibirskikh brodiag i katorzhnikov dlia solo, khora s akkompanimentom fortepiano. Sobrany i zapisany V.N. Gartevel'dom, na predpriniatoi spetsial'no dlia etoi tseli poezdki v Tobol'skuu katorzhnuu tiur'mu*, A. Iugansen', s.d. that included the notes of five songs, each one sold 40 kopeck: N°1 Idet on ustalyi (Nerchinskaia katorga) starinnaia

deportees and convicts during a trip in Siberia in 1908 and published after his musical arrangement with a great success on the eve of WWI<sup>46</sup>. In a way, this kind of program, which also included some romances of composer Shvedov, who was about to leave the Soviet Union, made a bridge between this post-revolutionary commemoration and pre-revolutionary years that were characterized by the expansion of a sort of “convict folklore” in mass culture, including the records industry. Eighteen months later, in December 1925, the Society again organized the double commemoration of the Decembrist uprising and the Revolution of 1905 at the same place, the artists of the Bolshoi Theater performing Vladicheslav Zolotarev’s new opera, “The Decembrists”<sup>47</sup>. Even when the repertoire was made of songs initially performed by the convicts themselves, the rendition in these celebrations used such instruments as pianos and opera voices, singing solo as well as in chorus, in an artistic rendition probably as far as possible from the original one.

In any case, performing “Songs of hard-labor and exile” was probably not framed in terms of authenticity but to the extent to which the performing would dignify experiences of deprivation, humiliation, hardships and sufferings. Chicherov included several times Kandal’nyi Marsh (Iron legs March) in various radio programs he drafted in 1933. It was one of the most famous legacies of Gartevelde’s collection, which requested the use of genuine iron legs and grebënki, a popular musical instrument made from a comb with cigarette paper<sup>48</sup>. It contained a single stanza, echoing slang and idiomaticisms from the convict world. In Chicherov’s proposal, the fortepiano and the voice of a baritone were added. In 1937, Muzgiz released a quite different version, under the same title and an extra subtitle: “revolutionary song of 1917”. Lyrics now glorified “the red eagles” which had freed the convicts. Iron legs or combs had been definitively replaced by fortepiano with a leitmotiv sounding as significant concession to the theme: “Dzin’, dzin’, dzin’, tra-lia, lia, lia, lia, lia”. No Kandal’nyi marsh is to be found in collections based on veterans memories, neither in the Society’s one, nor in Druskin’s anthology of 1938. More generally, slang and suspicious overlapping with the criminal culture was banished from the new vision of the past promoted by the veterans themselves, contrary to the folkloristic business born on the eve of WWI. Handcuffs and iron legs indeed appeared more as a symbol of the tsarist prisons, and even more as musical gadgets, they were realities of the tsarist prison the Society had to document, asking systematically its members: “how long were you clamped in handcuffs/iron legs”. Given that their mission was to display them for the new Soviet generations, these items occupied a

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etapnaia n°2 Akh! Ty dolia (Tobolskaia katorga) n°3 Zvezda, prosti! Pora mne spat’ (Tobolskaia katorga) u katorzhnikov eta pesnia nazyvaetsia “Mechta uznika” n° 4 Vecherkom krasna devitsa (Akatuevskaiia zhenskaia katorga) n°5 Zachem ia malchik urodilsia (Tobolskaia, vorovskaia) One of the most famous of these songs, Po dikim stepam Zabaikal’ia, in a contemporary rendition but with some visual illustration of the world of convicts and exiles as represented in the mass visual(urban culture) at the end of the tsarist regime:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrenuYBSYDQ>

<sup>46</sup> On the popularity of convicts’ song and connected genres, such as tramp, labor, soldier songs in late Imperial Russia and their public performing and commercialization thanks to the tsarist censorship’s relaxing after 1905 see Maksim Kravshinskii, *Istoriia russkogo shansona*, containing photographs of various bands performing this new urban folklore while suggesting they used to be genuine convicts, notably a Siberian tramps Quatuor (kvartet sibirskikh brodiag). On convict songs and records industry prior to WWI see Aleksandr Tikhonov’s publication [http://www.russian-records.com/categories.php?cat\\_id=161&l=russian](http://www.russian-records.com/categories.php?cat_id=161&l=russian) and this series of records see [http://www.russian-records.com/search.php?search\\_keywords=%EA%E0%F2%E0%F3%E8&l=russian](http://www.russian-records.com/search.php?search_keywords=%EA%E0%F2%E0%F3%E8&l=russian)

<sup>47</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 5, d. 30, l. 5.

<sup>48</sup> See « Handcuffs March. March of vagrants, with grebënka and handcuffs (grebënka is made with a comb and cigarette paper) », performed by a « Choir of convicts of the Tobolsk penal colony (katorga)” [http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=28944&sessionid=156qj8rcc7v3bp3do9np551r44&l=russian](http://www.russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=28944&sessionid=156qj8rcc7v3bp3do9np551r44&l=russian).

central place in the exhibit the Society had designed for its Museum<sup>49</sup>. This new iconography representing tsarist hard labor and jail appears indeed as a startling feature of Soviet visual culture at the very time when Gulag camps were tremendously growing. By the same token illustrations for Druskin collection printed in 1938 echoed the overfull Butyrka and Taganka prisons at the height of the Great terror as well as the transport of Soviet convicts in remote areas.

### *Shared legacies and Bolshevik unique reading of the past*

While erasing from the start non-Bolshevik parties memory in the public space (and repressing to death or putting in jail and in camps most of their activists), the Bolsheviks thus tolerated the survival of a few of them, provided they had publicly rallied the Bolsheviks and recognized October as a positive achievement entirely due to the Party of Lenin. These survivors served as witnesses of the past, most of the time without a clear label for their former affiliation, to the exception of the older ones, the *narodniki*, who had preceded the Bolsheviks (and of course the Decembrists). Clearly enough, one of the main editorial project of the Society, a biographical dictionary in 9 volumes embracing the main figures of all the revolutionary movements in the Russian Empire “from the predecessors of the Decembrists until the collapse of tsarism”, released only the volumes called: “From the predecessors of the Decembrists to the end of the “People’s will”, “The years 1870””, “The years 1880s” and “The Socio-Democrats” .(l’augmentation du nombre d’adhérents)

Druskin’s recording campaign of 1935 is to be understood in this context, that would abruptly change a few months later, for reasons that were already there when his brigade was recording revolution veterans.

Not that repression was not a permanent feature: in a letter to Druskin, a former prominent member of the Commission for Literature and publications, Nadezhda Aleksandrovna Iurgenson-Golovina (1855-1943), revealed that she and Iosif Ivanovich Zhukovskii-Zhuk had worked as the editors of the 1930 collection of revolutionary songs, but she had not a clue where “com. Zhuk-Zhukovskii” was to be found now.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Zhukovskii-Zhuk was a maximalist SR who had fought Kolchak during the Civil War. Refusing to give up his previous political convictions, he spent several years in exile after the Revolution, interrupted by times of release. Strongly dedicated to the history of the revolutionary movement, he served during this short time of release as an editor of *Katorga i ssylka* (penal colony and exile), the review of the Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles. A victim of the so called “Narodnicheskii tsentr delo”, he was again arrested in 1933 and exiled to Novosibirsk. Whether Nadezhda Iurgenson-Golovina really did not know what had happened to his former coeditor is an open question, as she probably did not know afterwards that Zhukovskii-Zhuk was executed in August 1937, having been arrested in February and hastily convicted of being a member of a so called “Japanese-SR terrorist organization”<sup>51</sup>. Of course, the fate of Zhukovskii-Zhuk is just one example of the repression that could target any member of the Society, before being systematized during the Great Terror. When he and Golovina made the

<sup>49</sup> See illustrations in V. Svetlova, “Tsentral’nyi muzei katorgi i ssylki”, in *Desiat’ let 1921-1931. Sbornik stat’ei i vospominanii k desiatiletнему iubil’eu obshchestva politkatorzhan*. Pod redaktsii L. Starr, V. Pleskov i G. Kramarova, izd vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssylno-poselentsev, M., 1931, p.116-128.

<sup>50</sup> Golovina-Iurgenson to Druskin, November 22, 1934, p. 616-617.

<sup>51</sup> [https://ru.openlist.wiki/%D0%96%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%96%D1%83%D0%BA\\_%D0%98%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%84\\_%D0%98%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87\\_\(1889\)](https://ru.openlist.wiki/%D0%96%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%96%D1%83%D0%BA_%D0%98%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%84_%D0%98%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87_(1889))

compilation published in 1930, did they have in mind what the SR Ekaterina L'vovna Olitskaia (1889-1974), who remained most of the years between 1929 and 1956 in Gulag camps, reminded much later in her memories, namely the lyrics of one SR anthem now performed in the Solovki by their former comrades? The convicts would sing « Pust' nas po tiur'mam sazhaiut/ pust' nas pytaiut ognem/ Pust' v Solovki nas ssylaiut/ pust' my vse kary proidem ».<sup>52</sup> Not all the lyrics had to be modified : songs officially performed in Soviet Union could be as well be heard among political convicts in the camps, with no less solemnity and meaning, notably the famous mourning song « Vy zhertvoiu pali »<sup>53</sup>.

As a result of his research and the recording campaign of 1935, Druskin published his short anthology entitled *50 Russian revolutionary songs* in 1938, at a time when both Old Bolsheviks and former members of non-Bolshevik parties were arrested and executed en masse. Contrary to the methodology of ethnomusicology followed by his brigade, that would have commanded to indicate systematically the name and identity of their informers for each song he published, his book remains silent on the subject, although he clearly mentions the 1930 collection of revolutionary songs published by the Society of former Political Prisoners as well as the recordings conducted among the members of the same Society. Boris Shekhter had again worked on the compilation's prerevolutionary songs, while Alexandrov had arranged the Civil War songs. Unlike the 1930 compilation that distinguished the Narodniki songs, Druskin had simply partitioned the content of his anthology in two sections: old revolutionary songs and Songs of the Civil War. In his introduction, he stressed the fact that the prerevolutionary songs could sound very estranged for the hearing of new Soviet generations. In a sense, he both revived and rejected to an undifferentiated past all this musical heritage, that had lost political peculiarities but stand now as a musical and literary object and the cornerstone of a new Soviet musical culture. For example, the song already mentioned "Smelo druzia ne teraite", entitled "anthem of the People's Will" in the 1930 volume, had lost this qualification in Druskin's anthology, including in his long historical commentary. Yet he would come back to this label in his publications and lectures after Stalin's death, indicating as well that the anthem's melody had given birth, thanks to his popularity among Polish revolutionaries, to the March of the Dombrovskii Battalion during the Spanish War<sup>54</sup>. Perhaps at the same time, the performance of "Smelo druzia ne teraite" in *Kaznenye na rassvete*, a film devoted to the life of Vladimir Ilich's elder brother and released in 1964, would again deliver the song in his historical context<sup>55</sup>.

At the time Druskin published his 1938 compilation however, Soviet movie industry offered to the audience a far less sophisticated interpretation of the revolutionary past. Directed by Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, the famous trilogy devoted to the formative years of a young factory worker, Maksim, who becomes a Bolshevik at the eve of WWI before being appointed State commissar in charge of the National bank at the wake of October, is an excellent illustration of this narrative. It, was released on Soviet screens between 1935 and

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<sup>52</sup> E. Olitskaia, *Moi vospominaniia*, Posev, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, t. 1, p. 267. compare with an older version « Pust' nas po tiur'mam sazhaiut/ pust' nas pytaiut ognem/ Pust' v rudniki nas ssylaiut/ pust' my vse kazni proidem ».

<sup>53</sup> E. Olitskaia  
Old Comrades<sup>54</sup> In *Istoriia pesen*, n.d., p. 382-455, p. 414-417. See  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM3MTLicRq0>

<sup>55</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh9xdWr1GnQ&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh9xdWr1GnQ&feature=player_embedded)



1939, thus following a chronology strikingly and by no means coincidentally parallel to Druskin's project. Moreover, the first draft of this historical drama, sketched at the end of the 1920s, intended to set the plot in the Western part of the Russian Empire and was inspired by the early biography of Maxim Litvinov, whose real name was Meer-Genokh Ballach. This initial project ended with a clearly russified version, the story taking place in the working-class neighborhoods of the Tsarist capital and Nizhnii-Novgorod, with Boris Chirkov, and not Solomon Mikhoels as previously intended, playing the main character. The premiere of *The Youth of Maksim*, the first part of the trilogy, was held one month before Magid and Chicherov started to record the aged revolution veterans. Revolutionary songs served not only as a soundtrack but were performed in acts, giving to the young generations both a monolithic and distorted vision of the past and a reconstitution of pre1917 revolutionary ritual, as the impressive scene of the funeral of two young factory workers, with the workers singing "Vy zhertvuiu pali" that was to remain for a long time after 1917 the favourite funeral anthem for revolutionary leaders (as well as a song performed by political convicts in Gulag camps as mentioned above)<sup>56</sup>. The funeral procession turns into a kind of demonstration, the workers's crowd marching in the streets to the cemetery, supporting the coffin of the deceased, slowly and solemnly performing the funeral anthem, showing hence their strength and determination, thus shaping a strong identification both for themselves and for the growing number of passers-by.. Prerevolutionary songs put in their historical context appeared thus as the main weapon of the proletariat struggle against the tsarist regime, as illustrated in the no-less impressive scenes featuring streets fighting and barricades of 1905<sup>57</sup>. Drawing from a common musical heritage, the trilogy gave nevertheless a unique reading of the past, heroizing the Bolsheviks and mocking other revolutionary currents, using by contrast a popular song "Tsyplenok zharennyi" associated to a SR, or a grotesque march for the anarchists. In this soundtrack due to Chostakovich, the romance "Krutit'sia, vertit'sia shar goluboi" comes several time as a sentimental touch accompanying the revolutionary fighting, although one can also view (hear it) as a serious concurrence to the martial revolutionary songs, as it appeared indeed in the printing numbers of the Soviet record industry. The existence for this romance of a Yiddish version, dated back from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, adds to this ambiguity and leads back to the initial, though silent, inspiration of the scenario<sup>58</sup>.

## II Writing the History of the Jewish revolutionary movement

The history of the Druskin's brigade recording campaign helps us to track the performers of the isolated wax cylinders stored in the Pushkinski Dom Sound Archives, although Druskin's correspondence never mention the Jewish revolutionary musical heritage, and even less his long-life publications on revolutionary songs. First, Frush and his comrades were off the main tracks: they were not Old Bolsheviks, although we have seen that Druskin brigade did not hesitate to contact former *narodniki* and SRs of various obediences. Moreover Frush and his fellows represented a non-Russian culture, a fact which was probably decisive in disqualifying their own tribute to the preservation of a revolutionary heritage that had been more or less construed, in his public, large-scale expression, as part of an ageless Russian popular culture, which explains the wide-range of performers we can find for a lot of songs

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2ZYjTZBICU>

<sup>57</sup> 1905 is at the core of the second part of the trilogy, *Vozvrashchenie Mksima* (the return of Maxim) and included performances of Varshanka, Marsel'ez and Smelo tovarishchi v nogu.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5fkVntedHk> for the Yiddish version:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_IAFj4M3yEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IAFj4M3yEA) ; for the quite postierous Barry Sisters' rendition in Yiddish and English <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFCSZlfrMQo>; for a word by word explanation:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_UyUkRGXIhc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UyUkRGXIhc)



published in the compilations mentioned above, including prerevolutionary and émigré artists, as well as contemporary musical formations far from being revolutionary-oriented.

As already noted, studies on Jewish revolutionary songs heritage albeit tenuous were openly conducted in the mid- 1930s, although they would be interrupted after 1936 in the general context of the Great Terror that renewed deathly attacks against both the former opponents to the Bolsheviks and any non-Russian national expression. Soviet records featuring Yiddish songs were printed the whole thirties but they concerned exclusively so called Jewish folklore.

### *Old and new connections*

Druskin brigade recordings campaign allowed us to connect this Jewish performers with the Society of former Political prisoners and therefore to clearly identify the five people the name of which had been scrawled on the wax cylinder: Efim Abramovich Frush<sup>59</sup>, born in Radoszice in 1893<sup>60</sup>, Isak Mikhelevich Grokhar<sup>61</sup> born 1884 in Warsaw, Oskar Solomonovich Meer<sup>62</sup> born in 1891 in Sedlets, Efraim Borisovich Beirakh<sup>63</sup>, born in 1874 in Vitebsk and probably Boris Samoilovich Bernshtein, born in 1887 in Orel<sup>64</sup>. While their respective native

<sup>59</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2143

<sup>60</sup> we have established this birth date according to the Radoszice population registry. In the tsarist police reports, in Frush' personal file stored in the Society's archival fund as in the investigative file of 1938, 1891 and 1892 are alternatively given. See below.

<sup>61</sup> GARF, f. 533, op.2, d. 535

<sup>62</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1236

<sup>63</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 142

<sup>64</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 171. The fact that Sofia Magid did not write the performers' first name and patronym could cast some doubt, especially for very common names. Yet there is no other member with the name of Bernstein among the personal files stored in the archival fund of the Society (yet a not totally exhaustive depository) nor in the members directory published by the Society (to the exception of a Ionov-Bernshtein, alias Il'ia-El' Ionovich, born in 1887). Cf *Politicheskaia katonga i ssylka*, p. 216. Chicherov's correspondence mentions several times a woman called M.S. Bernshtein among her informers, as well as her mother, R.S. Bernshtein describes the latter as "close to the revolutionary movement", sings to our days (despite her advanced age); she has acquaintance with some veterans of the Revolution and started to work with them. Up to now she has recorded 10 songs, among which 7 I had never heard of before. These songs used to be performed in Minsk in the 1860s-1870s". Chicherov to Druskin, November 2, 1934, p.526-527. Apparently, R.S. Bernshtein belonged to the Narodniki's Circle of the Society, which fits with the repertoire she was collecting but not especially with a revolutionary Yiddish one. (Nevertheless, one should check whether R.S. Bernshtein is not Rokhl' Bernshtein, a Yiddish speaking poetress, native of Minsk as her husband, Shmuel Bernshtein, both being involved with the Russian and Yiddish –speaking revolutionary movement since the 1880s. After the Revolution, Rokhl' used to write for the Bundist Newspaper based in Minsk *Der Veker* and in 1925 she issued under her pen name Egudis (ЕГУДИС) a play devoted to the Jewish revolutionary movement at the eve of 1905, *Der Ershter mai* (The First of May, Дер эрштер май), , that included revolutionary songs. <http://www.vivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yehudis>. Nevertheless, born in 1869, she died in 1942 after having been evacuated from Minsk to Moscow in June 1941, which could imply that she did not live in the capital at the time Magid and Chicherov recorded the old revolutionaries and was not a member of the narodniki Circle. Rokl', the patronym of whom we still do not know, was the grand-mother of the translator Inna Maksimovna Bernshtein (1929-2011), which could also be a mean to check the complete identity of R.S. and M.S. Bernshtein.). Moreover Rokl Bernstein had an entry, albeit very short and evasive, in the multi-volumes dictionary *Deiateli Revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia* edited by the Society of former Political Prisoners we mentioned above. <http://elib.shpl.ru/ru/nodes/4170-t-3-vosmidesvatve-gody-vyp-1-a-v-sostavlen-m-m-klevenskim-e-n-kushevoy-a-a-shilovym-1933-xvii-1-s-1-690-stb-fot#page/172/mode/inspect/zoom/4>.

place and birthdate do not point any commonality, they all have an entry in the directories edited by the Society of Former Prisoners, all as former Bundists<sup>65</sup>. Unfortunately, searching their names on Internet allows to point another common feature since they all were arrested in February 1938 and shot the same year, to the exception of Grokhar, who had joined the Bolshevik's party in October 1920, which, to a certain extent, could explain his apparent good fortune.

Additionally, biographies sketches contained in their personal files give hints of personal ties that could linked them for decades. In the forms the candidates had to fulfill for the Society, questions as: "who were your sotsprotessniki? Who can testify for your revolutionary struggle? Who can testify for your jail experience? Who can testify for your exile experience?" had to be answered, allowing us to reconstruct networks dating back to the prerevolutionary era (and for the oldest Society's members to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century). These networks would overlap for a single person, since people tried together tended to share an experience of political struggle at the same place, and to serve their sentences at the same place as well. These networks, by construction, brought together several Society's members (everyone could choose how many witnesses he would mention), as a kind of subunits within the Society's membership. They were probably characterized by a certain amount of mutual trust (even if it happened that someone called as a witness by another member would ignore him in his own form, quoting other names, that, however, generally overlapped with the ones mentioned by the first fellow). Yet it would be hazardous to make a statement on friendship or regular interaction between these former fellows. The fact that our five performers were recorded singing together is therefore a significant addition to information referring to the past and sometimes provided more than 10 years earlier.

Prerevolutionary personal comradeship is of no doubt for at least two of them, Meer and Grokhar, who had been "soprotessniki", which means that they had been tried at the same trial and had therefore spent time together both in the revolutionary daily struggle as in jail.<sup>66</sup>

As for Frush, he indicated Lipskii and Lifshits as main soprotessniki, the trial having taking place in Moscow in May 1916. Frush had been arrested several times as a Bundist activist in Lodz, where he used to live and work as a weaver between 1908 and 1913. His last arrest occurred in 1913, he spent some times in jail in Lodz then in Petrokov (polish Piotrkow Tribunalsky), the Province capital, before being evacuated to the Russian part of the Romanov's empire at war, first in the Orel prison and then in the Moscow Taganka and Butyrka prisons, and tried by the Moscow Court Palace<sup>67</sup>. Sentenced with his comrades to permanent Siberian exile, he had been sent to the village of Shamonovo, in the Tulun district of the Irkutsk province. As witnesses, Frush mentioned for both his revolutionary activities

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**The fact that Boris Samoilovich Bernstein was arrested in 1938 in a way similar to the other performers gives some consistency to the hypothesis along which he was the one who participated in the recording.**

<sup>65</sup> Politicheskaya katorga i ssylka. Biograficheskii spravochnik chlenov obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssylno-poselentsev, Iz-vo Vsesoiuznogo Obshestva politkatorzhan i ssylno-poselentsev, Moscow, 1929 and its revised edition of 1934. The 1929 version available on line : <http://elibrary.shpl.ru/ru/nodes/157-politicheskaya-katorga-i-ssylka-biograficheskii-spravochnik-chlenov-obshchestva-politkatorzhan-i-ssylno-poselentsev-m-1929#page/1/mode/grid/zoom/1> and the one of 1934 : <http://elibrary.shpl.ru/ru/nodes/158-politicheskaya-katorga-i-ssylka-biograficheskii-spravochnik-chlenov-obshchestva-politkatorzhan-i-ssylno-poselentsev-m-1934#page/1/mode/grid/zoom/1>

<sup>66</sup> Besides Grokhar, Meer had indicated as main soprotessniki the names of Vinnokamen and Baum. Abram moiseevich Vinnokamen' was born in 1889 in the Warsaw Province. Baum

<sup>67</sup> Moskovskaya sudebnaia palata

and the time he spent in jail and in exile « com. Lipskii<sup>68</sup>, Shetlikh<sup>69</sup>, Raichuk<sup>70</sup>, Khaim Kantor<sup>71</sup> and tov Unshlikht<sup>72</sup> », a quite composite brigade that corresponds in fact to several layers of his prerevolutionary life<sup>73</sup>, a common feature being the time they had spent together in the Orel prison that contained evacuated political prisoners from several parts of the Western provinces, including the famous Bundist leader Vladimir Medem, but also Feliks Dzerzhinskii, who had been tried by the same Muscovite tribunal during the spring of 1916, and to whom Frush refers warmly in his autobiography, claiming that Dzerzhinskii, the head of the commune created by all the prisoners that shared the same cell in the Orel prison, taught him Russian language and arithmetics, and happened to be his « best and closest friend ». These strokes had been written at the end of the 1920s, when both Dzerzhinskii, dead in 1926, and Unshlicht had for long created the Bolshevik terror institutions that would sentenced to death ten years later Frush and, among others, most of his former Bundist comrades, and also Unshlicht himself, executed at the end of July 1938. Nevertheless, referring to these two Polish Bolsheviks can be interpreted alternatively as a mark of complacency to the Bolshevik masters or as a genuine sympathy for the former inmates with whom he had shared the tsarist Orel prison hardships as well as the spirit of comradeship that prevailed among the political prisoners. In addition, it would then fit the somewhat intriguing positive personal image of Iron Felix portrayed by contemporaries.

***“Section for studying the history of the revolutionary movement among the Jews”***

No less relevant is the fact that all the five performers recorded by Magid appear, along with most of their Jewish comrades enumerated above, on the list of the members of the “Section for studying the history of the revolutionary movement among the Jews”, the secretary of which was actually one of them, O.S. Meer.<sup>74</sup> Under the auspices of the Society of former Prisoners, the section gathered around forty Society’s members, to whom around sixty non-members should be added. The latter included Moisei Grigorevich Rafes, for whom two addresses are mentioned in the Section’s file: Malaia Bronnaia Ulitsa, d. 6, kv. 10, in downtown Moscow, and Tashkent, ul. Dzerzhinskogo 49, k. 5, in a form dated May 30, 1935 where he indicates that he serves as the head of a Science Committee, an episode that is not documented in the few indications available about the last years he spent before final arrest and death<sup>75</sup>. One should add that if Beirakh, a Bolshevik since 1920, is included in a first list as a member of the Section, his name disappears from the following ones.

At the beginning of the 1930s, former revolutionaries classified as Jewish accounted for approximatively one fifth of the members of the Society but Bundists for slightly over 4% of them<sup>76</sup>. This could explain the general lack of documentation on the Bund in the Society’s

<sup>68</sup> Iakov Naumovich Lipskii, a Bundist textile worker born in Lodz in 1890, tried to exile in October 1916.

<sup>69</sup> Aleksandr Vilgel'movich Shetlikh, born in Warsaw in 1866.

<sup>70</sup> El'ia El'iashev Raichuk, a Bundist, born in 1873 in Wilno. See also his wife, Khaia Natanovna Raichuk, born in 1885 in Kishinev.

<sup>71</sup> Khaim Natanovich Kantor, a born in 1895 in the Podolsk Province, a Bundist since 1912.

<sup>72</sup> Iosif Stanislavovich Unshlicht, Jozef Unszlicht in its Polish spelling, born in Mlawka in 1879.

<sup>73</sup> GARF, f. 533 op 2 d 2143

<sup>74</sup> F. 533, op. 1, d. 467

<sup>75</sup> F. 533 op. 1 d. 467 l. 18

<sup>76</sup> A.Pigit, “Obshchestvo politkatorzhan v tsifrakh”, *Desiat' let 1921-1931. Sbornik statei i vospominanii k desiatiletнему iubil'eu obshchestva politkatorzhan* pod redaktsii L. Starr, V. Pleskova i G. Kramorova, Iz-vo vsesoiuznogo O-va politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, Moskva, 1931, p. 129-142.

publications, although the weight of the non-Jewish Russian-speakers in the literary and historical works of the Society points to another explanation.

The overrepresentation of a non-Jewish memory in the Society's publications make all the more striking Oskar Solomonovich Meer's involvement in both the scientific activities of the Society on the whole and in this specific Section devoted specifically to the ambiguous notion of "revolutionary movement among the Jews". The section had been created in the fall of 1926, among other sections devoted to historical research on precise topics. An account on its activity published in the Society's review in 1928 stated that the Section met regularly, alternating oral recollections of former participants back to the People's Will movement and presentations based on archival and literary documentation. While mentioning the birth of the Bund, it remained silent on the key issue of the language spoken by its leaders, rank-and-file activists as well as the ordinary workers targeted by the Bund<sup>77</sup>. According to Meer, documentation was particularly scarce, because of the conspiracy's skills of the prerevolutionary Jewish activists, which explained the lack of valuable material in the tsarist police files the members of the Society had access to. Moreover, Jewish veterans were still reluctant to publish memories. In order to remediate this issue, the section had met twelve times in a single academic year, bringing together around 40-60 mostly aged people. During these evenings, former activists had related the events they had participated in and they had been witnesses of. Recollections had been followed by commentaries or questions raised by the other participants<sup>78</sup>. They would continue to meet in the following years. Meer is probably the one that wrote the verbatim recording of all the evenings, including the lively discussions that arose, a hint of which is to be read in the book that the section succeeded in publishing in 1930, with a print run of 4 000 copies, although it failed to publish the second part<sup>79</sup>. For example, speeches and discussions of the meeting that was held on April 24 and May 4, 1935, that is on the eve of the Society's closure, are reported in Russian, which does not exclude that at least some parts of the live conversation could have been sprinkled with Yiddish formulations<sup>80</sup>. As a matter of fact, the issue to what extent the Jewish proletariat had a good command of the Russian language was at stakes in the Section's publication.

Meer was not at all exclusively dedicated to the history of the Bund. For instance, in a short necrological article in memory of Leonid Samoilovich Zalkind, born in 1861, "one of the few Jewish narodniki", and a member the Circle of former narodniki nested within the Society, he reported the "long conversations we had with L.S. the last five years when resting at Mikhailovskii (rest home)"<sup>81</sup>. More generally, Meer's methodology combined a scrupulous study of archival material with a use of oral history that make his writings in the Society's review a model of the kind of historical school developed more in the West, for instance by the YIVO. On the whole scrupulosity was a trademark of most of the contributions in the Society's review, especially when, as in the Meer's case, the wish of defending the memory of past figures and past events by former actors of the revolutionary struggle was combined

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<sup>77</sup> Katorga I ssylka, 41, 1928, p. 191. The Section's board included Kantor, Lur'e, Dimanshtein, Dushkan, Meer, Baum and Sheinis

<sup>78</sup> Katorga I ssylka, 48 (11°, 1928, p.

<sup>79</sup> Sektsiia po izucheniiu revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia sredi evreev pri obshchestve politkatorzhan I ssyl'no-poselentsev, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie sredi evreev*, sbornik pervui, predislovie S. Dimanshteina, Iz-vo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan I ssyl'no-poselentsev, Moscow, 1930

<sup>80</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 462 Stenogramma zasedaniia sektsii po izucheniiu revoliutsii dvizheniia sredi evreev. Vospominaniia Kogana, Maletskogo o revoliutsionnykh sobytiakh v Varshave, 20 apr., 4 Maia 1935, 94 l.

<sup>81</sup> *Katorga I ssylka*, n° 60 (11°, 1929, p. 176-177. In the volume devoted to the Jewish revolutionary movement quoted above, Meer publish an extended obituary to Zalkind, quoting his unpublished memories, portraying in details Zalkind background, thus giving some social and cultural background far more complexe than the usual Soviet Marxist vulgate. *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie sredi evreev*, op. cit., p.282- 286.

with the methodology of a professional scholar, as Meer and other members of the Society had become. Indeed, Oskar Solomonovich had become a librarian after the Revolution, he was appointed to the Soviet National Library, nicknamed the Leninka, and would still work on request as a bibliograph at the eve of his arrest. That Rafes happened to be a member of the Section is all the more intriguing albeit logical, since he had been both an active agent of the liquidation of the Bund, after the Party rallied to the Bolsheviks, and its chronicler<sup>82</sup>. In the several books he devoted to this history, a steadily deletion of his self is to be observed. His early account on the last months under the hetman's rule in Ukraine at war mostly staged his own experience as the Bund leader, in a both dramatic and sometimes jocular tone<sup>83</sup>. In his account published in Moscow in 1920 on the revolution in Ukraine, Rafes still allows himself to write « a few words pro domo sua », warning the reader he had played a significant role in this story, the evolution of his own views reflecting mostly the parallel evolution of the Bund. It was a flaw, he stated with some coquetry, that yet ensured the reader a first-hand historical account<sup>84</sup>. This coquetry was no more allowed in his subsequent, far more didactic Soviet publications, be they devoted to the history of the Bund<sup>85</sup> or to the recent revolutionary events in China<sup>86</sup>. It was now impossible for the reader to get that he had been an important player of the first one and a privileged witness of the second. Nevertheless, even in his last, selfless accounting of an history in the making he had demonstrated a great sense of analysing complex historical situations, playing with multiple factors both sociological and cultural in a quite remarkable manner, somewhat isolated in Soviet literature yet not unrelated with Meer's own capacities.

To what extent Meer and Rafes shared the same vision of how history should be written remains unfortunately an open question<sup>87</sup>. It concerns both the claim Meer had made regarding the attention the historian should pay to life experiences, drawing on sources where the self would be expressed at most, and the degree of truth that could be expected in the years during which the Section's members used to meet. In 1923 Rafes had dared publish the plain text of the Bund Resolution stating on November 7(20) 1917 its complete opposition to the Bolshevik coup and its call to resist and to ensure the victory of the revolutionary democracy<sup>88</sup>. This document nor any of this kind would not appear in the book Rafes wrote approximatively on the same topic at the end of the 1920's. What he did expect from his participation to the Section's workshops, we unfortunately have no idea, but he probably was not alien to Meer's commitment to publish not only first-hand account but also written in the first person.

### ***Identifying the recorded Jewish songs***

Collecting Jewish revolutionary songs appears as a by-side product of this attempt to fix a specific Jewish historical heritage. In the book edited by the Section in 1930, Meer stated that

<sup>82</sup> On Rafes during the Civil War, see Oleg Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymi i belyimi, 1917-1920*, ROSSPEN 2005 (recently translated as *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, transl by Timothy J. Portice, University of Pennsylvania Press)

<sup>83</sup> M.G. Rafes, *Nakanune padeniia getmanshchiny. Iz perezhivaniia 1918 goda*, Kiev, 1919.

<sup>84</sup> M.G. Rafes, *Dva goda revoliutsii na Ukraine*, Gosizdat, Moscou, 1920. The introduction is dated December 1919.

<sup>85</sup> M.G. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii Bunda, Moskovskii rabochii*, Moscou, 1923.id, *Ocherkiistorii evreiskogo rabocheho dvizheniia*, Gosizdat, Moscou 1929.

<sup>86</sup> MG. Rafes, *Kitaikaia revoliutsiia na perelome*, several editions, see 3<sup>e</sup>, *pererabotannoe i znachitel'noe popolnenoe izdanie, Moskovskii rabocjii*, Moscou-Leningrad, 1927.

<sup>87</sup> To start with, we were not able to find any documentation on Rafes effective participation to the Section's proceeding, even less to the nature of his possible intervention.

<sup>8888</sup> M.G. Rafes, *Ocherki, op. cit.*, p.421-422.

the commission in charge of collecting songs had so far remained inactive due to a lack of funding<sup>89</sup>, but obviously it met some achievement afterwards.

Whether Frush was associated from the outset with this project or not, it appears clearly from his personal file that he eventually played a significant function in this area. As a matter of fact, the former weaver, now a binder in one of the Society's manufacturing workshops (artel), a cardboard factory called Poligrafrud, was provided at the beginning of the 1930s with a piano, lent by Muztrest, a facility he probably lost after the Society's dissolution in August 1935. The lease agreement was regularly directly negotiated by the Society's secretariat. A statement (spravka) from a teacher of the Polytechnicum Museum, V. Mordvinov, stated that Frush had vocal and teaching (learning?) activities.<sup>90</sup> Considering the poor living conditions of Frush, it is not clear whether the piano stand in his flat or in another building, for instance in the Society club, on Lopukhovskii street. By the same token, the fact that the Society cared for the piano tells nothing about the repertoire Frush used to gather and to practice. According to the hints given by the Druskin's brigade documentation, it was both Russian and Jewish songs, although Magid apparently recorded with her *dictafon* only Jewish songs, perhaps because of the few informers able to perform them. As a matter of fact, Frush is quoted in the brigade's documentation as an informer for the lyrics of « Trud i gore, kapli pota », a Russian work song written in the last third of the XXth Century by the peasant poet Spiridon Dmitrievich Drozhzhin (1848- 1930), that typically describes a hopeless life of hardship and work, with no revolutionary prospect<sup>91</sup>. He was also recorded in 1935 by Sofia Magid and Pelageia Shiriaeva, a folklorist and a member of the Druskin's brigade, singing "Na desiatoi verste ot stolitsy", a mourning song dedicated to the victims of the Bloody Sunday. Druskin published it the same year but he did not select it three years later, for his 1938 compilation. It is also lacking in the 1930 compilation, despite Davydenko's musical setting<sup>92</sup>. Ironically, Shiriaeva would quote this recording in her own compilation issued in 1984, mentioning Frush as informer with the same confusion we already met in Shekhter's memories published in 1977 between the Society of Old Bolsheviks and the Society of former Political Prisoners, and with no mention of his tragical fate.<sup>93</sup>

As already explained, Magid did not finish the work, since she did not transcribe the lyrics and the melodies she had recorded (or more exactly even if she completed the job, she did not give the result to her institute, to the contrary of the other recordings she had conducted) and we do not have even the canonical titles of the performed songs, only some words from the lyrics she had captured in the process. Moisei Beregovskii's compilation published in 1934 in Soviet Union allowed us to recover part of the original titles. Based in Kiev, the

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<sup>89</sup> *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie sredi evreev, op. cit.*, p.291.

<sup>90</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. I. 25, 26, 34-36

<sup>91</sup> p. 763. The song goes : « Trud na gore, kapli pota/ Popolam s slezoi,/ I tiazhelaia zabota/ C vechnoi nuzhdoi/ Lomota v kostiakh, mozoli/ S griz'iu na rukakh,/ Zhizn' bez schast'ia i bez voli/ V chetyrëkh stenakh/ I v stenakh ugriumykh li'iutsia, /Plachut golosa, /A nad pesneiu smeiuetsia/Vzmakhi kolea/ (« Trud na gore, kapli pota... » 1875

<sup>92</sup> *100 pesen russkikh rabochikh*, sost Shiriaeva, Leningrad, Muzyka 1984

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3V4p-rhULU>

<sup>93</sup> <http://a-pesni.org/starrev/na10verste.htm>

ethnomusicologist made a brief description of the state of art, referring to Shmuel Lehman's works, who had collected 73 Jewish workers' and revolutionary songs, mostly in Poland, very few in Ukraine and even fewer in Belorussia and had published them in new Poland in 1921<sup>94</sup>. For his part, Beregovskii had found informers in Soviet Ukraine and Belorussia in 1928-1931 but had still not transcribed the latter at the time he prepared the compilation. Most of them were workers or craftsmen: A. Belskii, 49 years was a worker in a Kiev shoe factory, Gor, 50, a bristle worker in Odessa, Rakhil Pesina a seamstress also in Odessa, Avrom Langer, 45, a tailor in Uman, Stefanskaia a worker and Ts Lakhman a house painter both in Kiev, but Beregovskii quoted as well A. Iuditskii and E. Spivak, researchers, and Kh. Leibovich a bibliographer, all of them living in Kiev with a similar background to Meer's one, in addition to the informers recorded during the An-ski ethnographic expeditions of 1912-1914.

According to the confrontation between Bergovskii's publication and the hand-written listing left by Magid, Frush, on February 27, 1935 sang most probably, among others, a song also collected by Lehman under the title "Vi hejlik iz di natur" that Beregovskii commented as following: "The performer remembers this song from 1895-1896. While singing it for the phonograph (June 1930), Comrade Gor, a bristle worker, forgot the first verse (n°61) and began with the second. Finally, he, along with Comrade Levin (also a bristle worker), recalled the first stanza and sent us the full text. He noted that he sang it to the melody of "kol'slaven". Comrade Levin writes, "I think that this song has great historical value, as one of the first [Jewish] revolutionary songs before the founding of the Bund."<sup>95</sup>.

He also sang, among the various revolutionary songs using the basic vocabulary borrowed from the XIXth Century Western Socialists, "Vos viln di her^sher /What Do the Rulers want", recorded and published as well by the Polish Lehman and the Soviet Beregovskii, the latter from Avrom Langer, 45, a tailor in Uman in 1930<sup>96</sup>.

Unfortunately, we still did not find the lyrics of the song quoted by Magid as "Ho?xt nit, Karl Marks"...

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<sup>94</sup> Probably *Arbet un frayhayt*, published in Warsaw in 1921. Much of the invaluable collection of the folklorist was lost in the Warsaw getto, where he died in October 1941.

[http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lehman\\_Shmuel](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lehman_Shmuel)

<sup>95</sup> Old Jewish Folk Music. The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski. Edited and translated by Mark Slobin, Syracuse University Press, 2000, .p. 272.

<sup>96</sup> n° 64 p. 124, 219, 257 (section rev songs) :

Vos viln di her^sher, vos viln di lampirn (vampirn), /Zej capn fun dem arbeter dos lect bisl blut/Un dan vet ir visn, vos se hejst eksplatirn, /Ajn besern lebn cu zuxn zix far ajx

Dem Arbeters kamf gejt vajter un vajter, /^stelt zix in kamf far dem arbeter klas./Un dan vet ir visn, vos se hejst eksplatirn, /Ajn besern lebn cu zuxn zix far ajx.

What Do the Rulers want ?

What do the rulers want, what do the vampires want/They take the last bit of blood from the worker/And then you'll know what exploitation is/To seek a better life for yourself

The workers' struggles goes farther and farther/Put yourself in the fight for the working class/And then you'll know what exploitation is/To seek a better life for yourself

One can assume as well that Grokhar, Frush, Meer and Beirakh sang along “Der frajhajts-gajst”, which starts with the famous: “ In di gasn, cu di masn fun gedrikte felkerrasn ruft der frajhajts-gajst” (Magid had just indicated “ in di gasn cu di masn”), that is “ The spirit of liberty calls in the streets to the masses of oppressed peoples”<sup>97</sup>. The song is attributed to Morris Vintshevsky, pseudonym of Lipe Ben-Tsien Novakhovitsh (1856-1932), who is called “the first Yiddish socialist pamphleteer” by Tony Michels in an article where he argues that most of Yiddish revolutionary literature, including protest songs, that arose in the Russian Empire before 1905, came mostly from the émigré milieu living in the United States<sup>98</sup>. The fact that Frush also performed a song with lyrics referring to Hester Street, the core of New York Jewish neighborhood, and another one including the yiddishified English world “workshop” (spelled in Magid’s transcription “vork^shop”), fits to this theory and makes all the more intriguing the conservation of this repertoire in the 1930s Moscow (albeit partially documented as well by Beregovskii working among Jewish informers in various Soviet cities).

Besides work and revolutionary songs, Frush probably performed as well songs categorized by Beregovskii and so many folklorists of the Russian Empire before him “Draftees and Soldier Songs”. Under the words “Mir zajnen soldatn/Wir sind soldiers” one should probably recognize the song “In the year 1915” recorded by Beregovskii from Risya Kigلمان in Belaia Tserkov’ in 1929, or an earlier version, published in pre WWI collections, that all played with the Jewish identity of the new recruit (in one version of “In the year 1915” recorded by Beregovskii, the draftees are impeded from going to a shabbat evening because of a late military inspection), in addition to the common suffering of all rank-and-file draftees of the tsarist army who have no choice but to serve as cannon fodder, mixing the Russian words used by the army officials with the Yiddish language of the draftee (and its intended audience)<sup>99</sup>.

<sup>97</sup> P. 267, translated by M.Robin.

<sup>98</sup> Tony Michels, « Exporting Yiddish Socialism. New York’s Role in the Russian Jewish Workers’ Movement », *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 16, n°1, Fall 2009, p. 1-26.

<sup>99</sup> n° 125, p. 236 for the lyrics, 267 for the English translation :

n tojznt najn hundert un fufcetn jor/iz arojs a prikaz, /az jeder foter zol firn zajn kind/vi cum ^sojxet a hin

oj vos ken er undz helfn, vos ken er undz ton, /mir zajnen in meder^se hent, /oj vej brider, mir zajnen soldatn,  
/mir hobn far^spilt undzer velt.

Axt xado^sim hot mix majn mame getrogn, /In najntn hot zi mix gehat, /lct, az ix bin alt gevorn ejn un cvanzik  
jor/Darf ix ^sojn zajn a soldat

Me firt mix in prisutstvie : god’en, prinat, /-Ty bud’e^s xoro^sij soldat ». /Mir lign in di okopes, /Se svi^s^cen di  
pul’es, /Se flien granatn, /Mir faln vi snopes

Vos konen mir helfn, vos konen mir maxn, /Mir zajnen in merder^se hent, /Mir hobn genumen jidi^se  
texter/Un hobn farvist zejer velt

In 1915 /an order came out/that every father should lead his child/like a hen to the slaughterer/oh how can he  
help us, what can he do for us/We ‘re in murderous hands/Oh vey, brothers we’re soldiers/We’ve lost tour  
world

My mother carried me for eight months/In the ninth she bore me/Now I’m twenty-one/And have to be  
soldier/They take me to the recruiting station : suitable, accepted/You’ll be a good soldier/We lie in trenches



For his part, Meer accompanied by a choir performed both a Yiddish version of the French “ça ira” (e’ vet gjn) and an antisionist song that is also to be found in Lehman<sup>1921</sup> as in Beregovskii’s published collection under the title “Oj, ir nari^se cionistn/ Oh you foolish Zionists”, that the Soviet ethnomusicologist had recorded in 1931 from Ts. Lakhman, a house painter in Kiev<sup>100</sup>.

Magid also recorded from Grokhar, Frush, Meer and Beirakh a song classified by Beregovskii as a “parodistic strike song”, entitled “In ale gasn, vu me gejt”, created by street singers around 1905 and equally popular among workers and non-workers listeners. One can only hope, with no certainty, that it was a reflection of the good mood this choir activity could arouse among them. According to Beregovskii’s comments, the song had several versions that all started with a parody of the usual claims leading to strikes and then portrayed various workers, mostly young female, and one male “intellectual”, going to strike, the last stanza ending with the mundane claims of a lady threatening her husband with strike if he does not provide her with new clothes and a dacha<sup>101</sup>.

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The bullets whistle/ Grenades fall /We fall like sheaves of grain/ What can we do , how can we help it/ We’re in murderous hands/ We’ve taken Jewish girls/And ruined their lives.

<sup>100</sup> n° 66 Oj, ir nari^se cionistn p. 125 (melody), 219-220 (lyrics), 257(English translation). The song goes oj, ir nari^se cionistn/mit ajer nari^sn sejxl, /ir megt dox gejn cu dem arbeter/un lernn bai m sejxl/Ir vilt undz firn kajn Jeru^solajm, /Mir zoln dort golodajen, /Mir veln beser zajn in Rusland/Mir/ veln zix bafrajen translated by Mark Slobin as Oh you foolish Zionists/ With your silly minds/ You should go to the workers/ And learn some sense from them/ You want to take us to Jerusalem/ So we can starve there/ We would rather stay in Russia/ And liberate ourselves.

<sup>101</sup> see R-821 « a jungerman a tiligent= and Beregovskii, n° 34-37. The last version, n°37 (p. 87 for the melody, 207 for the lyrics, 250-251 for the English translation), goes :

In ale gasn, vu me gejt, /Hert man zabastovkes, /Jinglex, mejdlex, kind un kejt, /Zej redn fun parbavkes./Genug ^sojn, oj, cu borgn, cu lajen, /Hobn lebn fraj, /Un di arbet varft avek/Un arbetn getraj:/Genug ^sojn, oj, dem ^slextn bur^zuj/Ajx cu zejgn vi a pjavke./On fantaz’e, brider, /Un maxt a zabastovke.

A mejdl kumt fun di arbet/Tojt cu flien, /Zi ^srajt : « oj, genug cu zajn a knext/Un fercn ^so zix mien ! »/Vi lang iz zi geven gor prost/Un gevust nor di modistke, -/Hajnt gejt zi, oj, di hor celozt, /A piskele vi ajn artitske./^sisn ^sist zi, oj, mit verter, /A gance filozofke, /Zi ^srajt : « di arbet varft avek/Un maxt a zabastovke ! »

A jungerman a tiligent/Vincik vos ge^slifn, /Cum ^srjbn hot er gildene hent/Un lipex af ^srojfn./Rusi^s redt er on a ^sir, -/Jidi^s nit kjn vort, /^svarce ojgn, blondike uses, /a kapcn perve sort./Me nemt im cu in vald far kasirer, /Er maxt a sortirovke, /Er lejdiht ojs di kase biz a firer/Un maxt a zabastovke.

Ajn muter ^srajt : « vej iz mir, /Majn toxter iz me^sige, /Zi hot cuton mit pek papir (**here an explanation from Beregovskii : »revol’ucionere literatur, gedruckt af papiros-papir (bibule)** : revolutionary literature printed on Russian cigarette paper) /Epes mit a knige ». /Ajn muter zogt : « Majn toxter iz/ Gevorn greblex, dike.-/ Zi krenkt ^sojn draj-fertl jor/Fun der zabastovke.

A vajbl krigt zix, oj, mit ir man, /Zi darf hobn gel taf klejder, /Se kumt ^sojn di vareme cajt/Cu forn in di vareme bejder./Zidlt im mit paskudne rejde, /Zi ruft im on « doxl’ace », /Zi zogt : « du, zlidn’e, krenk inderhejm, -/Ix darf hobn a da^ce./Megst afile tancn carom, /Muz ix hobn a javke/Az ix vel nit ojsfirn-/’el ix maxn a zabastovke ».

As you walk in all the streets/ As you walk in all the streets/ You hear about strikes/ Boys and girls / Kith and kin/ Talking about raises/ Enough, oh, of borrowing and loaning/ Let’s have a free life/ And discard work/ And

On the whole, the deciphering of all the songs recorded by Magid would probably uncover a mix of various songs repertoire, classified as revolutionary but also as worker's songs, soldier's songs, folk songs, as well as antireligious songs, this latter category being totally absent from the collection published by Beregovskii but obviously represented by various titles in Frush's and his fellows' performing.

We don't know how this various repertoire had been preserved for our Muscovite performers: as living memories of their prerevolutionary struggles in various cities of the Polish Kingdom and other places of the former Russian empire? Did they had in hand published compilations, edited in the former Empire, in Soviet Union or abroad, or did they had recorded the songs by themselves, from their own memories and the memories of other former Yiddish-speaking activists? Since we do not know what implied concretely the activity of "collecting Jewish songs" mentioned by Meer, we are not able to answer. However, the piano serving at some point Frush's musical activity points out the fact that he now evolved in a musical environment that pretend to an artistic rendition of a song heritage that could have been performed in the past on a quite different manner.

This was probably the case for a category of songs that should be included in the repertoire recorded by Magid that embraced otherwise a wide range of topics related to folk life, work and protest: the prison and exile experience.

### *Years of Siberian exile, years of Civil War*

For one song, Magid put in brackets "Motiv Dolia", referring to one of the most famous Russian convicts songs, "Ekh, ty, dolia, moia dolia"<sup>102</sup>. "Ziser got "had been performed by Meer and a choir"<sup>103</sup>.

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working hard/ Enough, oh, the bad bourgeois/ Sucking you like a leech/ Without fantazing, brothers/ Go out on strike

A girl flies in from work/ Half-dead. She shouts – Oh enough of being a slave/ And toiling fourteen hours/ For so long she was very simple/ And only knew about being a seamstress/ Now she goes, oh, with her hair down/ A face like an actress/ Pours a stream of words/ A regular philosopher/ She shouts – discard your work/ Go out on strike

A young man of the intelligentsia/ Very unpolished/ Has golden hands for writing/ And lips on hinges/ He talks Russian endlessly/ But not a word of Yiddish/ Black eyes, blonde moustache/ A first-class poor man/ He was hired as a lumber cashier/ He sorts things/ Empties the till down to a nickel/ And goes out on strike

A mother shouts, -Vey iz mir/ My daughter is crazy/ She's involved with revolutionary literature/ Some kind of book/ A mother says : -My daughter has gotten fat and plump/ She's been sick three quarter of a year/ From the strike

A wife fights with her husband / She needs money for clothes/ The warm times are coming/ To get into warm beds/ She attacks him with terrible words/ She calls him a consumptive/She says, -you pest, sick at home/ I need a summer cottage/ You can dance (unclear) I have to have a (unclear)/ If I don't get it /I'll go on strike

<sup>102</sup> The version as published in the 1930 compilation and Druskin 's anthology, respectively n°30 in section "Mass workers movement" p. 82-83 and n°14 p. 56-59, Druskin attributing the lyrics to D. A. Clements, a supporter of the "People's Will" party:

Ekh ty, dolia, moia dolia/ Dolia gor'kaia moia, /Akh, zachem ty, zlaia dolia, / Do Sibiri dovela?

Ne za pian'stvo, za buianstvo/ I ne za nochnoi razboi – storony rodnoi lishilsia/ za krest'ianskii liud chestnoi.

Prerevolutionary Siberian life of both convicts and exiles represented a significant part of the Society's publications and activities on the whole, and songs were definitely part of this reconstruction. Songs included in the revolutionary repertoire used to stress the martyrdom of deceased prisoners, that would turn into funeral anthems as in the narodniki anthem quoted above, that balanced the death of one political prisoner with forthcoming generations that would achieve the struggle he and his comrades in jail had launched. Yet other songs, mostly folk songs, only reflected the despair of prisoners serving an endless sentence in dark prisons and in the most remote and hostile parts of the Russian Empire.

However, the Society's activists did not just collect "songs of prison and exile": they also stimulated the publication of memories, some authors specializing in this area, regularly issuing stories about their Siberian experiences that were published by several Soviet publishing houses intended to a mass young audience. Several distinctive motives were to be found, notably the attitude of the prison guards, comradeship among cellmates, transportation to Siberia, the discovery of a life plagued with hunger, bitter cold, illness and isolation. They gave some hints on the way the exiles tried to survive, going to work at odd jobs by villagers or escaping the villages in order to make a living in town or even in greater cities, as craftsmen or workers. Some of them did succeed in using their qualifications as teachers or medical assistants. While encountering Siberian peoples that were mostly illiterate in Russian and lacked any facilities, political exiles formed small communities bound by political convictions, the distinction from criminals being a common feature with the prison life, at least on paper. Political activities allegedly went on in Siberia, the exiles being involved with underground activities that culminated with the Revolution and the Civil War, the now freed convicts and exiles becoming the key elements of the new political life in Siberian cities and countryside after February (and probably even before as explained in Meer's account we will discuss below).

Less heroic trajectories however were also related in the Society's publications and even more in the unpublished recollections recorded by the Society's "zemliachestva" that aimed at bringing together veterans who had served their prison or exile sentences in the same Siberian province. For instance in a meeting of the Irkutsk province veterans held on December 12, 1930, participants mostly evoked cases of suicides among exiles the name of whom had sometimes been lost or never known. The psychic stress put by a life of deprivation, with no real prospect of a coming back to the Empire's European part was described at length. To a lesser extent, political and sociological considerations were also invoked: the harsh repression that had followed the revolutionary events of 1905 and the apparent lack of any possible political victory, as well as an earlier massification of the revolutionary struggle that have

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V god golodnyi, god neschastnyi/stali podat' sbirat', / I krest'ianskie pozhitki, / I skotinu prodavat'.  
 Ia s krest'ianskoi chelobitnoi/ k tsaria russkomu poshel, / Da skhvatili na doroge:/ Do stolitsy ne doshel./  
 Ochutilsia ia v Sibiri / v shakhte temnoi i syroi. Tam tovarishcha ia vstretil:/ zdravstvui, drug, i ia s toboi./ Daleko  
 selo rodnoe, / A khotelos' by uznat', / udalos' li odnosel' tsam/ s shei podat' skachat'.

As for most of folk songs, a variety of versions circulated, the key point being the exact reason why the singer had been sentenced and sent to Siberia: see : ne sterpeo moe serdtse/ ia uriadnika ubil, /I za eto prestuplen'e/k vam, druž'ia, ia ugodil

Teper's sizhu v t'iurme kholodnoi, /v temnoi shakhte pod zemlei, /Tut ia vstretilsia s družiami and so on.  
 (<http://a-pesni.org/popular20/ahtydola.htm>)

In the published version of the Gertevel'd collection, the singer, after having deplored the way the peasants are pressured, lands directly in Siberia (Ochutilsia ia v Sibiri/ v tesnoi shakhte i syroi...and so on) in the undated version we consulted in the Russian State Library. Druskin however states that the 1908 version published for the first time the version featuring the policeman's murder. Druskin noted also, that his version skipped a couplet of the original version published in 1873 that read: I po tsarskomu velen'iu/ Za proshen'e muzhikov/ ego milosti platel'shchik/ spodobilsia kandalov". Ibid, p. 232.

replaced by a flow of revolutionary activists with peasant or worker uncultured background, therefore unable to cope with the situation, a bunch of educated rebels exiled earlier, who used to gain an acceptable position even in exile society and to use their skills in order to intellectually benefit from the situation but also to give the benefit to their environment by performing ethnographic studies or any other paracademic activity. The former exiles remembered comrades they sometimes had hardly known who had committed suicide by hanging, poisoning, by shooting themselves in the head or by setting fire<sup>104</sup>. Confidences shared at this meeting echoed letters from exiles published in prerevolutionary journals, as suggested by Nikolai Ivanovich Titerin's study published in *Katorgaia I ssylka* in 1924<sup>105</sup>. A Social-Democrat born in 1887 in a peasant family, he had spent 7 years in Siberia until he was released by the February Revolution. Drawing on this published material, he refreshed the traditional theme of the exile transformed into a desocialized tramp, by exposing a whole range of dramatic cases where psychic as well as material and legal aspects played a major role, with suicide as a threat or already a matter of fact.

Other ghosts haunted the former exiles' memories and required special recognition as well, for example those who had lost their lives during the Civil War, sometimes in totally unknown circumstances: a former SR, Pavel Denisovich Ponomarev, born in 1887 in the Tambov province, who had been exiled to a remote part of the Irkutsk province in 1910 before escaping and living in several Siberian cities, headed the project. Several sources had been mobilized, the Society's archives, including information given by the zemliachestva, published sources as well as communications from individuals. On the whole, 60 destinies had been exhumed and far from being complete, the list was supposed to grow thanks to additional testimonies. We do not know however the fate of this list.<sup>106</sup> Oskar Solomonovich Meer is among the comrades that had transmitted information on a dead comrade, here Boris Mendel'son sentenced to exile to the Irkutsk province under the "Poalei-Tsion case", who had actively participated to the Union of Siberian Workers, an underground grouping of around 25 persons that arose at the beginning of 1915 in Irkutsk in connection with the Bolsheviks and faded away after most of them had been arrested in the following summer. A member of the Communist Party after October, Mendelson allegedly died while fighting within the ranks of the Red Army...on the "Kronshtadt front" in 1921.

Meer's contribution to the Ponomarev's listing project narrowly preceded or followed the publication in 1934 of a volume edited by the zemliachestvo that brought together former exiles of the Irkutsk province, including a contribution under Meer's pen. Entitled "Exile in Irkutsk during the war years"<sup>107</sup> it related the future librarian's first experience of the "Biriul'sko colony", named after the Siberian village to which he and his bundists mates had been sent from Warsaw in 1913. Meer portrayed the colony as a model organization with its library and mutual assistance fund. Yet the core of Meer's account was the activity of his group in Irkutsk where they all had found a job ultimately, mostly in factories, Baum in a Sytin's filial bookshop. Meer's account is remarkable for the historical and sociological background he gives, especially the key role played by the Jewish refugees expelled from the Western part of the Empire who abounded in Siberian cities since 1915, but also, for instance,

<sup>104</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 1014 Zasedanie Irkutskogo zemliachestva

<sup>105</sup> N. Teterin, "Sukhaia gil'otina", *Katornaia I ssylka*, n° 3 (10), 1924, p. 179-185. see id, "Politicheskaiia ssylka v narodnoi poezii Kirenskogo uezda", *Katorga I ssylka*, n° 6(13), 1924, p. 200-203

<sup>106</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 1, d. 376 (Spisok politssyl'nykh Irkutskoi gubernii, pogibshikh vo vremia Grazhdanskoi Voiny 1917-1921 podgotovlen Ponomarevym P.D.).

<sup>107</sup> O.S. Meer, "V gody voiny v irkutskoi ssylke", *Irkutskaiia ssylka. Sbornik irkutskogo zemliachestva, pod redaktsiei I s predisloviiem V.V. Bustrema. Istoriko-revoliutsionnaia biblioteka. Vospominaniia, issledovaniia, dokumenty I drugie materialy iz istorii revoliutsionnogo proshlogo Rossii*, 1934, n°4-5 (XCIII-XCIV), Iz-vo Poltkatorzhan, Moscow, 1934, p. 198-214.

the Chinese workers who used to be part of the workforce of a growing, due to the army procurements, shoe and leather industry. The portray of Fuchs, a former criminal exile now a factory boss who used to put at key positions political deportees whose skills were far above the average workers, thereby helping them unwillingly to gain authority in the factory and therefore to organize a successful strike movement at the end of 1916, has the same analytical qualities already mentioned for Meer's article on Zalkind. Among his close comrades, Meer refers several times in this published account the names of Grokhar, without mentioning, however, the latter's involvement in the activities of the Siberian branch of the Bund during the Civil war. Documentation stored in Moscow archival depositories could tell us more in details about this unwritten page of the history of the Bund, the name of Grokhar coming back very often in the archival documentation of the Siberian Branch of the Bund at the wake of the Revolution.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless it was a sticky situation for those of the revolution veterans who have had to survive Revolution and Civil War years without being genuine Bolsheviks and without choosing, for various reasons, the road to exile abroad.

Autobiographies written at the time they were candidates to become members of the Society contained all a description of what had happened to them in these troubled years. The complicated trajectory described for instance by Frush probably reflected the experience of most of former convicts and exiles freed by the February Revolution who found themselves in situation of total deprivation, whose previous personal ties had been destroyed or were disseminated in areas that war and revolution had made inaccessible to them. They also had to rebuild a political identity while being confronted to hegemonic forces no less murderous than under the tsarist regime. When the Revolution broke out, Frush used to live in Tulun, the small town he had escaped to after having been transported to the remote village of Shamonovo and having experienced for a few months the harsh life of rural Siberia. Aided by a new Committee created to help the convicts and exiles to be formally released and to receive material assistance, Frush made his way to Moscow and found there a factory job. He claims that, still a member of the Bund, he was now close to the current ready to rally the Bolshevik positions. Some months later, in August 1918, he moved to Kharkov to join "his comrades". The fact that Frush had previous connection in Ukraine is not clear, since he had spent all his previous life in the kingdom of Poland before experiencing prison and exile in Orel, Moscow and Siberia. Ukraine however would be the area where he would spend all the Civil War years, working as a weaver in various factories and, still a Bundist activist, escaping repression from the German occupiers and the hetman in Kharkov, then Denikin in Sumy and Glukhov. Afterwards he had moved to Kiev and then to Moscow, pushed by unemployment he would anew also encounter in the Soviet Union capital in the late 1920s. In June 1934, Frush delivered a new version of his activity after February. He added new episodes, as election propaganda for the Bund in the Vitebsk province at the eve of the Constituent Assembly's elections, his participation in self-defense *druzhiny* in Kharkov that brought together opponents to the counter revolution, including Bolsheviks. He stressed again his participation in the trade union movement in all the Ukrainian cities he happened to be. In 1919, he was allegedly sent by the Bund to Kremenchug as a plenipotentiary of the Evobshchestkom, the Communist-oriented organization that had gained control on the aid devoted to the pogrom's victims. While highly detailed, these accounts are puzzling both because on some aspects they look contradictory, but also because one wonders which means, if any, did the Society bureaucracy have in order to check these biographical information.

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<sup>108</sup> RGASPI, f. 271, op. 2, d.107.

One should examine in details the accounts of Frush and his comrades and try to cross these autobiographies with other sources in order to detect what is true, what is false, where are the significant flaws in these biographical reconstructions, a probably complicated if not totally impossible task owing to the scarce archival information left for this troubled period and disseminated in many depositories due to their high mobility as a rule.

While assuming that potential flaws had mainly political basis, one should not forget other set of reasons, based on age, sentimental life and so on, that could have overlapped. Notably, prerevolutionary documentation provided the whole list of convicts who had been sentenced to permanent exile along with Frush, as well as their actual place of exile. One learns thus from the tsarist Police Department that in addition to Frush, Maer-Leib' Abramov' Iakovlev' Neiman, 25 years old, Sura Ides' Abramova Markovich', 23 years old, were sent to Shamonovo<sup>109</sup>. Yet, while the tsarist police documentation provided the researcher with some biographic elements and photographs of a beautiful young woman at the time of her arrest in Lodz, nothing is to be found about her further fate after her arrival in Shumanovo, to the contrary of Frush, and also of Neiman, who became as well as member of the Society of former Political Prisoners and used to live in Rostov /Don since 1919. In his autobiography, Frush wrote that he arrived in Shumanovo 'with two other comrades, without naming them, and without naming neither of them among the witnesses of his exile years, as mentioned above, whereas recalling the memory of a SR who happened to be the head of a cooperative shop in the village and sheltered the young exiles, arrived on foot from Tulun, hungry and no money in their pocket, helping them to find a living, a situation echoed in many accounts on exile. In his autobiography, Neiman wrote simply "I arrived in Shamonovo in October 1916", without mentioning his companions in misfortune, but contrary to Frush he quoted as witnesses a whole range of rank-and file veterans, namely, in addition to Frush himself, Lifshits, Lipskii, Shetlikh already equally cited by Frush, and also Ia. N. Iakubovich and Gering<sup>110</sup>. Sura Markovich is thus nowhere to be found, and we do not know whether she died or not in exile or during the Civil War, whether she had the opportunity to leave the Soviet Union, whether the silence of her former fellows has to do with political or obscure personal reasons.

Possibly because he was far from the capital, Neiman had some difficulty to find accreditation when he submitted his candidacy to the Society. After a while, another provincial veteran, M. Ia Iakubovich, living now in Perm sent a written confirmation that he knew comrade Neiman since the Orel prison, and Frush did the same. We do not know whether this accreditation was the opportunity for the former fellows to renew contact after being out of touch for more than ten years: after all, Neiman was in Irkutsk, that is around 400 kilometers away from Tulun, when the Revolution broke out. His further peregrinations probably did not cross Frush's itinerary. Moreover Neiman probably had some moments to hide or to disguise. As a returnee, he was probably in such a bad shape that the Moscow Committee for helping former Exiles sent him directly to the medical resort of Kislovodsk in the North Caucasus. In January 1919, ill from typhus, he was not evacuated from Vladivostok's hospital when the Red Army left the city but allegedly succeeded in moving to Rostov some months later.

Whether Frush and Neiman developed personal relations after 1928 is an open question. In any case, due to the lack of mobility of ordinary Soviet citizens plagued by material and administrative difficulties, this relationship would have been limited to private correspondence.

Frush also applied to the Irkutsk province zemliachestvo and received a positive answer in April 1928<sup>111</sup>, but to the contrary of the Section for the history of revolutionary movement

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<sup>109</sup> GARF, f. 102, D-7, op. 213, 1916g, l. 158 ff

<sup>110</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1373

<sup>111</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. l. 45

among Jews, his membership left no trace, as for his fellows, to the exception of Meer's article already mentioned.

Time of exile and Civil war did not only leave a legacy of flawed memories. The poor health state of most of the veterans, while needing to be compared to the average Soviet population of the same age, is partially to be explained by the years spent in prison and exile, that obviously left marks, including psychic ones. The fact that their previous life was also plagued by poverty and endless days of work in factory workshops or at home did not help. The veterans rooted in the prerevolutionary proletariat, including Frush, started to work very early, had experienced so many days of hunger and very poor living conditions, sharing small space with other workers in Lodz. The form designed by the Society of former Political Prisoners tried also to document detention conditions experienced by each veteran. As already mentioned, handcuffs and iron legs were the ultimate mark of cruel and humiliating conditions made by the tsarist regime to its political opponents. In addition, time of solitary confinement in cell, physical and psychological torture were also taken in account, as much as acts of resistance (hunger strike, escape and so on). Nevertheless, Frush did not really insist on conditions made by the prison guards and officials but in his autobiography he pointed to another element of prison life, that was as much crucial for him and his comrades on the whole, namely the relations with the criminal convicts, often nicknamed the Ivans. "All my stay in Petrokovskii jail [id est in Petrokov (polish Piotrkow Tribunalsky )] was like a nightmare, tortures and mistreatments perpetrated by criminal convicts were horrible and I could not stand it. Up to now I still remember these days with dread". This topic comes very often in political prisoners and exiles' memories, echoing once more the forthcoming Gulag literature. It should be added that in some published memories, hints are made, even on an ironical tone, about the change in-progress among tsarist prison officials, defending a new approach in the treatment of the political convicts, notably regarding the use of handcuffs and leg iron, while forced cohabitation with cruel and uneducated criminals remained to the end a key issue.<sup>112</sup>

At the beginning of the 1930', Frush was declared invalid of the third group (he was then in his forties). In July 1929, Labour Medicine Service's experts of the Moscow City Health Department established that Frush suffered from fibrous adhesive lung tuberculosis, left-side pleurisy, heart myasthenia gravis, a state of severe hysterion-neurasthenic depression<sup>113</sup>. One year later, they found the beginning of brains arteriosclerosis and miokardiopatiia. In June 1934, Frush requesting his pension to be raised argued "I become exhausted very fast and remain with no strength at all" (he was then in his early fifties)<sup>114</sup>. The Society provided his members with some access to medical facilities, small jobs in Society's workshops less demanding than regular ones in factories and supported requests for personal pensions. Frush to some extent benefited from all of this, which did not prevent him to live in a state of high depravity and probably depression. Moreover, statements in order to receive material assistance frequently describe his wife and daughter as suffering from various illnesses : in

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<sup>112</sup> See for instance G.G. Sushkin, *Po etapam (iz vospominanii politicheskogo ssyl'nogo)*, Izd-vo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ss-poselentsev, Moskva 1929. Sushkin and his wife happened to be major informers for the Frushin's brigade. An active member of the Society's review editorial board, G.G. Sushkin was arrested and executed in 1938 as a member of a terrorist Menshevik organization".

<sup>113</sup> " fibroznyi tuberkulez legkikh slichivy; levostoronnyi plevrit; misteniia serdtsa; tiazheloe istero-nevrastenicheskoe sostoianie. GARF, f. A-539, op. 3, d. 8009, l. 21

<sup>114</sup> I ustaiu do bezsila" GARF, f. 533, op. 2, l. 44

1932 he enumerated for his wife heart disease, gout, rumatism and so while stating another year that his daughter was at risk of blindness. To what extent these poor health state did also reflect the extremely low standards of living of Soviet urbans in general and the Frush family's ones in particular, and even a situation of quasi starvation we can only speculate. We only know that Frush used to live since 1928 in a small one-room apartment in a former monastery, that he describes as dark and damp.

Among the many cases that can be found among the other members of the society, Frush's situation echoes to some extent the one of a former woman exile he does not mention but who had been evoked by his fellow Neiman, Rivka Iakovlevna Gering, born in Dvinsk in 1891, a weaver since her early teens, who had also lived and fought for the Bund in Lodz, before spending years in jail and exile. Still a bachelor, she lived now in Moscow in no less appealing living conditions, in charge with her mother. She suffered among other illnesses from tuberculosis and a slight hysterical depression<sup>115</sup>. Among other goods, the Soviet revolution had brought her the opportunity to receive additional education in a rabfak, although her handwriting in Russian reflects either serious handicap and/or a still very weak command of this language, which is by no means surprising for a whole range of former activists grown up either illiterate or educated in Hebrew, whose native language was Yiddish with some command of Polish. Even when political activities had expanded their intellectual horizons, their access to written works had been exclusively in Yiddish prior to the Revolution, as proved by the political literature seized at their living place and enumerated in tsarist police reports<sup>116</sup>.

Gering was also a member of the Section for the history of the revolutionary movement among Jews, that can be viewed as a meeting place for veterans of various social and educational background, with a majority rooted in the Jewish proletariat and some offspring of a better-off Jewish bourgeoisie. It would be worth studying as well their respective trajectories within the new Soviet society and social hierarchy. For instance, Grokhar, back from Siberia, sold or repaired shoes in a Univermag on Petrovka 2, two streets off the Bolshoi and the Lubyanka, while Beirakh, a former typograph, served temporarily after October as a librarian for the Komintern, then a propagandist appointed by one of Moscow central districts and afterward a teacher in the Military Academy Frunze. In the mid -1930s however, some of them had received a job in one of the Society's workshops (arteli), formally administered by the Union of Cooperatives for invalids after the Society's dissolution. Even there, they would get distinct occupations: Boris Samoilovich Bernshtein, an educated propagandist in his early fifties and the father of a famous academic slavist, worked as a watchman at the artel' Khimkraska, while Grokhar had become its vice-director. As already mentioned, Frush worked as a binder at Poligraftrud, another former Society's artel but he probably had other commitments in the so-called social (obshchestvennyi) sphere in relation with his artistic skills. Three days before his arrest, Tsentrosoiuz, the All-Union Union of Consumer Societies, asked Poligraftrud to give Frush a day off on February 23, since he should go to Vladimir with the Tenstrosoiuz club for amateur activities to celebrate the 20 years of the Red Army...<sup>117</sup> Their respective living conditions contrasted as well. While we do not know how Frush

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<sup>115</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 437.

<sup>116</sup> See for instance GARF, f. 102 D-7 1911 g., op. 208, d. 798, f. 102, D-7, op. 209, 1912g, d 446.

<sup>117</sup> GARF, f. A 539, op 3 d 8009, l. 13.



received a living place in a former monastery, a lot of (former) members of the Section for the history of revolutionary movement among the Jews used to live in the far more comfortable new building on Mashkov pereulok/ Chaplygina ulitsa, dom 15, close to Chistye Prudi. No less than 23 members of the Society would be arrested in this house during the Great Terror, a number of them as participants of the so-called terrorist SR Bundist organization, among whom Grokhar<sup>118</sup>. By any means however the Section probably served as a meeting place with both helpful and painful interaction between former veterans sharing at least memories but also a common language, the Yiddish, and a common cultural and political identity they might have some difficulty to express elsewhere in the Soviet capital. Yet it was not the only opportunity to meet: the working place for some of them, perhaps their living place even if we do not know whether the mutual visits and personal conversations frequently mentioned in the NKVD interrogations had any foundation, and may be, as suggested by the very recording made in 1935, meeting in the Society headquarters or in the club located next building in order to train and perform Yiddish songs. Some particular event could also provide an opportunity to meet, above all funerals that had in any case such a deep meaning in the revolutionary movement prior as after 1917. In his diary, Emel'ian Iaroslavsky had sadly commented the burial ceremony of a former old Bolshevik (and an informer for the Druskin brigade), Fridich Vil'gel'movich Lengnik : « I took the role of the organiser of the funeral for F.V. Lengnik , one of the few members of the Union for the Liberation of the Working Class « still alive. The two days I spent with dead Lengnik generated sad thoughts about aged people who are no more in politics. It was difficult for me to deliver speeches during the mourning period, I hardly hold back tears. But in the cemetery I said the last goodbyes with heart and firmness and gave the last escort to the old fighter » (Entry of 6.12.1936)<sup>119</sup>. Unfortunately, we do not know how former Bundists's funerals were conducted , whether speeches were delivered in yiddish, whether yiddish Bundist anthems were performed, prior as after the Society's dissolution, before many of them were shot and buried in common graves.

### ***The “ SR-Bundist terrorist organization case “ of 1938 as a NKVD reading of decades-long relationships***

While we can only speculate on the way they socialized, all these clusters of socialization were heavily instrumentalized by the NKVD when it started to accuse by the dozen former members of the Society of former Political Prisoners to be part of terrorist underground organisations, be they of SR or Bundist obedience, ending with the charge of a joint SR-Bundist organization. It has been long noticed that the various workshops by which the Society used to provide some of its members with jobs had been pointed by the NKVD's

<sup>118</sup> <http://mos.memo.ru/shot-72.htm>

<sup>119</sup> Sandra Dahlke, *Individuum und Herrschaft im Stalinismus. Emel'jan Jaroslavskij (1878-1943)*, Oldenbourg Verlag, München 2000, p. 353. (Ich habe die Rolle des Organisators der Trauerfeier für F V Lengnik übernommen, eines der wenigen noch lebenden Mitglieder des « Bunds der Befreiung der Arbeiterklasse ». Diese beiden Tage, die ich bei dem toten Lengnik verbracht habe, haben mir schwere Gedanken über die Alten hervorgerufen, die keinen Anteil mehr am politischen Leben haben . Mir ist es schwer gefallen, die Rede auf der Trauerzeit zu halten . Ich konnte die Tränen nicht zurückhalten. Aber auf dem Friedhof habe ich die Abschiedsworte mutig und fest gesprochen und dem alten kämpferisch das letzte Geleit gegeben. »)

investigators as the main conspiracy places<sup>120</sup>. Arrests were obviously conducted along this line, each case regrouping the workers and salaries of the same workshop. There was however some overlapping and by reading the minutes of interrogations extracted from the arrested, one can reconstitute the NKVD's understanding of a conspiracy network constituted by various clusters. In the bundists case, the workshops, but also the former Section for Studying the History of the revolutionary movement among the Jews and the OZET organization appeared regularly as the places where the alleged conspirators would meet and discuss the means to expand a noxious cobweb. The arrested were mostly charged indeed of recruiting new members to the underground organization, not a single act of terrorism was to be investigated. Mirroring former political doctrines, NKVD's investigators stated that Bundists had been first reluctant to any terror action before rallying SR positions that assumed that only violence could allow them to achieve their common goal, namely the collapse of the Soviet regime. As Alain Blum stated elsewhere, interrogations can be read mostly as the description of personal interaction that were suddenly suspected of having political meaning and counterrevolutionary purpose<sup>121</sup>. Thus interaction more than hypothetical acts were put on trial with the expected outcome of jail, camp and death sentences for everybody involved with it.

Yet, while NKVD's investigators obviously wrote the script before any interrogation, asking the arrestees to sign testimonies written in advance, their weakness is to be stressed since they actually underscored the longevity and the nature of the personal ties that indeed linked together the arrestees and other mentioned Society's members, or non-members, as in the case of Rafes. The moving letters some wives of the arrestees addressed to Soviet official in the following months followed a codified argumentation arguing that their husbands had been committed to the cause of revolution and to the Soviet state as far as they had knew them, adding few details and no mention of any fellow, trying thereby to delete the alleged network their husbands were supposed to belonged to. Frush's wife apparently reported that her husband spent all his free time singing and doing music, which did not prevent the Procuracy in 1940 from declaring unfounded the claims of the wives for a revision of the case of their husbands who had been actually shot and buried in Butovo two years earlier. More informative is the fact that the elegant handwriting of the letter sent by Frush's wife in 1941 is strikingly similar to the one of the Poligraf bookkeeper, pointing to some solidarity between this woman and the poorly educated – at least in Russian - Frush's wife.

Even the outcomes of the search conducted by the NKVD in the arrestees' flats do not provide us with any additional information, to the exception of two cameras confiscated in Oskar Salomonovich's flat, that would be scrupulously reimbursed to his widow after his post mortem rehabilitation in 1956.

Obviously, the Society's personal file had not been used, neither by the NKVD before WWII, that simply read the member registry *Politicheskaia katonga I ssylka* published by the Society, that contained information mostly on the prerevolutionary life of each member, nor by the KGB and the military procuracy proceeding to their rehabilitation in the mid 1950's. The latter asked the National archives to find additional material but the documentation they listed from the tsarist Police Department was probably of no use, since the juridical reviewing of the case leading to the rehabilitation simply had to demonstrate the internal weakness of the

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<sup>120</sup> Dolzhanskaia Liia, « Repressii 1937-1938 v moskovskikh arteliakh OPK » in *Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo politkatorzhan i sslynoposelentsev. Obrazovanie, razvitie, likvidatsiia*, 2004 p. 278-308. As an appendix, tables give the names and basic information on all the victims, including Frush, Grokhar, Bernshtein, and many others.

<sup>121</sup> Alain Blum, Yurii Shapoval, *Faux coupables*, CNRS Editions, Paris, 2012.

accusation formulated in 1938, only based on confessions obviously extorted and inconsistent one with another<sup>122</sup>.

### III A Small World? Kinship in Soviet context

in 1938 the NKVD investigator reversed the situation the Bolsheviks had created from the onset, that is building at best a golden cage or a zoological reserve for a few veterans, permanently threatened with ultimately sharing the fate of their former fellows already put in jail, in the Gulag camps, sentenced to death or forced to exile. They reproached the defendants for belonging to a small, narrow world, that is the Society of former Political Deportees, which would explain the trend to conspiracy, nostalgia for former revolutionary parties and, as a result, terrorist activities against the Soviet state that constituted the main charges against the former members of the former Society.

While we have established that our heroes definitely formed a small group interested in documenting and writing the history of their former revolutionary movement, maintaining close ties among each other after decades of comradeship that went back to the prerevolutionary era, most of the times to their youth in Poland, sometimes to their Siberian exile, an attempt to reconstruct some aspects of their private life, of which the NKVD investigators had obviously no clue, allows to cast some doubt on this vision of a narrowly confined social and intellectual space, artificially conveyed by the sledstvennye dela.

We tried indeed to learn more about Efim Abramovich Frush's family. As already mentioned, he used to live in the building of a former monastery for women, the Nativity convent on Rozhdestvenka street, 20, not so far from the Lubianka. While it is clear that Efim Abramovich lived there in a tiny, dark room with his wife, Enda Khaimovna, born in 1904, it is unclear whether Efim's daughter, Rebecca, born in 1920, lived with them: sometimes, she seems to spare this tiny space with the couple, at some point one can find evidence that she actually used to live far away, with her mother, in the Sumy region, according for example to the following attestation dated March 1934: "given to t. Frush Efim Abramovich, stating that 25 rubles per month from his wage received for his occupation in the Cooperative Poligrafrud are monthly shipped by mail to his daughter." Andhand written on the reverse side: "I inform you hereby that I maintain my daughter who lives with her mother in the city of Shostk, district of Glukhov. I supply monthly food parcels of various sorts to my daughter"<sup>123</sup>

In Frush's arrest record, in February 1938, one reads: "Daughter: Rebekka Efim. Frush – Volovin. Workplace: I do not know- Place of Residence: Glukhov"<sup>124</sup>.

As mentioned above, Enda wrote at least twice to the authorities after Efim's arrest, in order to get some news and to make his case revised. We do not know the exact content of her letter written before the so-called revision in 1940, but we have her letter dated 1941<sup>125</sup>, that does not mention Efim's daughter, nor do we find any news about Rebeccah in the several letters Enda wrote in 1956 after Efim's rehabilitation, requesting the Ministry of Social Welfare that the former Efim's personal pension benefit her, presenting herself as unable to work and totally isolated<sup>126</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> GARF, f. 10035, op. 1, d. R-50894 (3 volumes),

<sup>123</sup> GARF, f. A-359, op. 3, d. 8009, l. 17-17ob.

<sup>124</sup> GARF, f. 10035, op. 1, d. P-50894, t. 3, l. 5 (anketa arestovanogo)

<sup>125</sup> GARF, f. 10035, op. 1, d. P-50894, t. 3, l. 283.

<sup>126</sup> GARF, f. A-359, op. 3, d. 8009, l. 8, 11

We do not know to what extent Efim Frush succeeded in maintaining a relationship with his daughter, apart from these food parcels and money transfer. Did he stated in February 1938, at the time of his arrest, that he did not remember his daughter's workplace in order to protect her or because he had indeed not heard from her for a while? It is all the more striking that Efim Abramovich, although plagued by poverty and living in a society where fathers did not feel systematically obliged to supply their children whenever, for some reasons, the family had split, continued to send probably as much as he could to a teen-ager. According to the few evidence available in the archives, Rebecca was born in 1920, and the fact that she is supposed to live in the Sumy Region matches with Efim's autobiography written at the end of the 1920s, that reads that he had spent the end of the Civil War in this area and that mentions both Sumy and Glukhov, where he barely escaped a pogrom (By contrast, the autobiography's fragment dated 1934, although focusing on the Civil War he spent in Ukraine, does not mention Sumy any more). The striking point, in fact, is that the mother's name is nowhere to be found in all the attestations concerning Efim Frush's personal pension or his requests for material assistance, which speaks volumes on the way social welfare was allocated, at least for these former revolutionaries: obviously no attention was really paid to their relatives, to the contrary of his state of health, duly substantiated by annual medical expertise. In the same vein, it is quite remarkable that Efim, as most of his comrades, did not speak of his life partners, be it his current wife, his daughter, or the mother of his daughter, in the autobiographical accounts he wrote for the Society of the former Political Deportees, at the end of the 1920s and in June 1934<sup>127</sup>. By contrast, the fact that he has to maintain a wife, most of the time sick and unable to work, and a daughter, is systematically mentioned in order to receive some additional money through the Society. Since Rebecca bore the family name and the patronym of his father, one can assume that her parents were married when she was born, but we have no idea of her mother's identity, except that Volov(?) might be her family name.

By contrast, Efim Abramovich does mention his siblings in his autobiography written at the end of the 1920s, when he became a member of the Society. Indeed, the description of the familial environment in the formative years of the Society's member was a recurring motif to be met in most members' autobiographies, since it was not regarded as unwanted confession on one's private life but rather as the depiction of the initial social and intellectual background that was supposed to explain the conversion of future revolutionaries. In Efim Abramovich's case, we learn that he had five siblings, three sisters and two brothers. Actually, Efim leaves them behind very early in his account, at some point after the revolutionary days of 1905, that he had witnessed still living in his native town of Radoczice: "My mother died soon, as a result we all scattered in various directions, my sisters went to Warsaw, I to Lodz, and my younger brothers stayed "at home""<sup>128</sup>. Indeed, the register of the town of Radoszyce contains the name of all the children of Abram Icek Frusz (sic) and Riwka born Apelewicz, (plus two other children born out of wedlock, after the death of Riwka and probably the departure of Efim and his sisters): Haja Hudes, born 1878, Rojza born in 1887, Laja born in 1889, Hajm (that is Khaim, or Efim), born in 1893, Josek born in 1896, Litman born in 1902.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> GARD, f. 533, op. 2, d.2143, l. 3-8, 41-41 ob.

<sup>128</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 2143, l. 3.

<sup>129</sup> Panstwowa archiwum w kielcach, Akta gminy Radoszyce, 21/532, 43 and 47. According to this documentation, Rivka died in June (or July?) 1905, Abram on September 15, 1914, both in Radoszyce, where they both were born in 1859 and had married in 1879 (which casts some doubt on the real birth date of Haja Hudes, the oldest daughter. No one of the daughters has a birth record registered in the documentation of the Radoszyce, unlike their three brothers).

Josek might be the Iosif mentioned on Efim Abramovich (still Khaim Shimon)'s data sheet fulfilled by the tsarist police after his arrest in April 1911, at the entry “ “Brothers, sisters and other known relatives”<sup>130</sup>. At some point, he emigrated to France and tried to get some news from his elder brother, through the Central Committee for Helping Jewish Migrants (Comité Central d'Assistance aux Emigrants Juifs ), located 5 Durance Street in Paris. Joseph himself lived at 118 Bd de Belleville, in the neighborhood that counted one of the highest percent of foreigners, including a Jewish population coming from the Western provinces of the Russian Empire and subsequently from post WWI new independant states, with a reputation of leftist, communist-oriented craftsmen and workers. Joseph asked the Committee to help him join his brother who was supposed to be in Moscow since 1918. Obviously, Joseph had not heard from his brother's tribulations in Ukraine during the Civil War, but the family had known, probably by mail, that after the Revolution Khaim Shimon had left Siberia. There was no mention of a wife or of a child, nor did Iosif/Jocek/Joseph probably know his elder brother's precise date of birth, whom is described as someone “approximately 36 years old”<sup>131</sup>. The plenipotentiary for RSFSR, Ukrainian and Belorussian Soviet Republics was efficient enough to find, through Moscow City Addresses Board (Adresnoe Biuro), Khaim's, now Efim Abramovich, new address and to send a letter written in Yiddish informing his French counterpart that Efim had presented himself, taken his brother's Paris mailing address and assured that he would write the same day<sup>132</sup>. We hope he did but to this point we do not know Joseph's fate and even less whether the two brothers did keep in touch, at least in the first half of the thirties. Joseph is to be found in the French census of 1926, as a bachelor and a street vendor, surrounded by Armenian refugees living in the same building, but at the following one, in 1931, the Armenians were still there but Joseph had left, we do not know to which destination, two streets off his previous address or out of Paris or even out of France (he does not appear in the lists of foreigners who became French citizens in the interwar nor in the postwar period). Nor do we know from where and when he had moved to Paris and to what extent politics mattered in his life as much as it had shaped his brother's fate.

Polish archives kept also track, though relatively tiny and fragmentary, of the third brother, Lipman/litman: before 1932, he used to live in Lodz, outside of the traditional working class Jewish neighborhood: he is supposed to have shared a flat with a lot of people, including his wife, Perla Nayberger, at Piramowicza street 5, apt 1, in front of the Jewish high school attended by the girls of the Jewish bourgeoisie<sup>133</sup>. Apparently, they left soon thereafter for a new address, quite far from the city center, in a place that would become very soon a nice neighborhood for a new bourgeoisie dwelling bright new villas close to the radio station but that was probably at the time they left a place in turmoil (in the ul Tkatska 3 where they used to be registered stands now a 3-stored villa, allegedly built in 1936, part of a subdivision containing 10 twin houses). At the beginning of WWII, Litman is to be found on a card index of Pinsk refugees, without Perla but with their daughter, Rivka, born January 10, 1922 in Tomaszow Mazowiecki. According to this cards, Litman was a baker, who had left Lodz on November 8, 1939 (the year is actually impossible to decipher). He registered as a married man, and not a widow or a divorcee, and indicated Poludniowa 34 as his last address in Lodz. He was evacuated, probably with his daughter Rivka on April 27 1940, with no indication on the final destination<sup>134</sup>. Both had now the “BSSR citizenship”, that is they probably accepted to become Soviet citizen when Western Belorussia was passportized.

<sup>130</sup> GARF, f. 1742, op. 1, d. 38384

<sup>131</sup> RGAE, f. 7570, op. 1, d. 702

<sup>132</sup> Many thanks to Anna Przybyszewska Drozd who provided us with the translation.

<sup>133</sup> Panstwowe archiwum w Lodzi, Ksiega kontroli ruchu ludnosci, Lodz, Komisarjat V/4, 25352, st. 95.

<sup>134</sup> Many thanks to Yad Vashem Reference and Information Service for providing me with a copy of the cards stored in Pinsk Regional Archives.

Litman and Rivka survived the Holocaust, since they were registered in Lodz at some point at the end of the war by the Committee for helping Jewish Survivors. Then again, we lose track of them. Lipman probably had no clue of his elder brother's fate, executed in 1938 (nor did Efim's wife, as late as 1956, since he was supposed to be in jail from 1938 until 1942 and to have died in May 8, 1942.<sup>135</sup>) and for him as for many Polish Jews, Soviet Union was the place where they could be saved from the Nazi destructive madness, and that is exactly what happened. Did then Litman and Rivka stay in the postwar communist Poland or did they decide to leave, and perhaps to join other parts of the family abroad, we do not know, as we do not know what happened to Efim's sisters, except that one of them, Rozja, had married a man called Himelfarb and that they probably used to live in Opoczno at the beginning of the 1930s.

Even if we do not know whether Efim had some contact with his family in Poland, and even if the lack of any evidence tends to prove that he may have severed all ties with his family abroad, the possibility of an exchange, at least by mail, still exists. For example, his former comrade in exile, Lev Abramovich Neiman, asked the permission in February 1932 to transfer some money to his mother in Poland, "since she badly needs it there."<sup>136</sup> The most striking point is that the hasty NKVD investigations do not help at all to reconstruct the family background of the defendants, be it in Moscow, in Russia, or abroad. The following listing, contained in the data sheet of the former Bundist Moisei Iosifovich Polonovskii, born in 1882 in Pruzhany (in Latvia in the interwar years and now in Western Belarus'), who had then worked in Lodz and Warsaw and knew Meer and Baum from their exile in Siberia at the eve of the Revolution, appears as an exception from the point of view of the NKVD's striking poor knowledge, although it probably illustrates the family situation of most of these Jewish natives of the Western provinces of the former Russian Empire: a sister worked as a dentist in Lodz, a brother lived in California, another sister was a teacher in Paris, and another brother was a dentist technician in New York.<sup>137</sup> A letter of September 1993 gives some highlight to what extent transnational relationship could have been maintained: a grand nephew wrote from Paris to the service of the Ministry of Security of the Russian Federation in charge of the Rehabilitations, for he wanted to know the fate of his own grand-father's brother, who had "disappeared" in 1931 with his daughter Mira: what happened to him, when and why had he been arrested, how many members had his family at that time?<sup>138</sup> Moisei Iosifovich actually did not really disappear in 1931: he was then a member of the Society of former Political Deportees, he lived in Moscow, and he was not arrested before 1938. What the letter of the grand nephew suggests is that he had cut all ties with his family abroad at some point in 1931, and that is very likely what Efim Abramovich did too. By contrast, former Bundists born in the western provinces of the Russian Empire had relatives who had also made their way to Moscow. We already mentioned Gering's mother, we should not forget the sisters of Beirakh, the only one of the recorded Jewish performers who apparently was not arrested in 1938. During his 11 years detention in tsarist hard labor, Esfir Borisovna had worked in the political Red Cross and provided moral and material help to her brothers and other detainees. Therefore, Beirakh asked through the Society the admission of Esfir, a dentist, in additional training course in 1925. As for another sister, Liza Borisovna, a widow with no occupation, she was at his charge at the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>139</sup>

## Conclusion

<sup>135</sup> GARF, f. A-539, op. 3, d. 8009.

<sup>136</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 1373, l. 18.

<sup>137</sup> F. 10035, op. 1, d. P-50894., t. 1, l. 236

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, l. 425

<sup>139</sup> GARF, f. 533, op. 2, d. 142

By undertaking this reconstruction of Frush' and his his fellows's biographies, did we succeed in doing what one of them, Oskar Solomonovich's Meer, claimed to be the most important task for an historian, that is to give flesh to the past? Unfortunately, we lacked what Meer considered as the most relevant material, namely letters, diaries and memories or anything else we are now accustomed to call ego-documents. We even do not know whether they used to produce ego-documents, an irony of history given the fact that almost all of them were arrested and their flats searched by the NKVD in 1938.

They wrote indeed autobiographies for the Society of former Political Prisoners but whatever our position on the Soviet self's debate, these self-reconstructions of the past shared a common feature: while describing sometimes at length the birth of a revolutionary self (family's background, discovery of an outer world, mixed feelings and birth of political convictions thanks to a network of siblings and acquaintances making familiar new ideas and underground literature), they made the self properly disappear as the narrative of their revolutionary carrier progressed<sup>140</sup>. At the end, there is no more friends, comrades, nor siblings, readers are not supposed to know whether they got married, had children, even less if they were submitted to personal deceptions.

While one can argue (personally, I would not) that they sincerely viewed this narrative as the unique way to give historical sense to their past and present life, the contrast with the remaining documentation of their personal file is all the more striking, since it reads mostly on what one should call unambiguously albeit restrictively personal life: indeed, they were mostly married, had children, sometimes relatives they cared for. By construction, the impression gained by the reading of this documentation is a quite depressive one: after all, if they have not been ill, in need of material assistance and better living conditions, they would not have fulfilled the forms aimed to describe Society members' personal situation. Portraying these revolution veterans requires therefore, above these two extremes, sources that could highlight their daily life as well as the real nature of the various personal ties they had and eventually the way they would articulate political convictions, social activities and personal environment, whatever difficult the interpretation of ego documentation might appear.

Are songs a good way to replace an unfortunately lacking ego-documentation? And if not, what do they tell us that could be valuable for the historian's purpose to give flesh to the past? Lyrics are ambiguous hints, since, after all, Frush and his comrades did not fight in the Russian army in 1915 but were indeed experiencing the damp cells of the tsarist prisons and at some point of their sentences they had probably fear they would die in jail or in exile leaving to next generations the difficult albeit glorious task of to carry out the revolutionary project.

Nevertheless, lyrics describing workers going to strike, labour life hardships and convicts sufferings conveyed in a specific language, Yiddish, on melodies that partly followed genuine patterns are a good indication of a way to express a past world that mattered for the recorded singers, both in form and in content. The performing act is also a valuable indicator of the ties that had been created for decades and were still activated, adding some substance to this intellectual but also emotional reconstruction. The ethnomusicologists to whom we owe this recording are no less interesting players of this history and by no means easily to catch intellectually. To say the least, both the recorded singers who not coincidentally appeared to be the members of the Section for Studying the History of the revolutionary Movement among the Jews and, on another hand, Sofiia Magid and her colleagues, had a way to conceive the collection and the expression of past memory strikingly close to our Western

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<sup>140</sup> These rather short autobiographies sketching trajectories of rank-and-file veterans should be compared to recently analysed Vera Figner's autobiographical writings. See Lynne Ann Hartnett, *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner. Surviving the Russian Revolution*, Indiana University Press, 2014.

understanding, while participating in the functioning of a Soviet mass culture that had imposed a unique reading both of the past and of the present we would label at the very least as distorted and for some of us as totalitarian.

While October is by no means central neither in their autobiographies nor in the songs performed (nor in recollections published by the Society's Jewish Section), the Bolshevik victory is ubiquitous since it had shaped from the onset a distorted framework that allowed to express fragments of past political identity, provided that Bolshevik leadership, in a reconstituted past as in the present, would not be contested. At the end, the distorted framework would be simply replaced by death sentences even for those who had accepted the initial trade-off.

Did our recorded singers went to the place they belonged to, according to the famous Trotsky's formulation, namely "from now on— the speech is dated October 27, 1917—to the trash can of history (*v sornuiu korzinu istorii*)?" For sure, their goal to memorialize both their own revolutionary struggle and tsarist repression failed, as the memorialization project of the Society on the whole. For a majority of people inside or outside the former Russian empire, Orel prison, Aleksandrov penitentiary (Aleksandrovskaiia Tsentral') or the remote districts of the tsarist Siberian exile do not mean anything and do not benefit from any large-scale memorialization. They have been recovered by the memory of Soviet prison and camp system, under the catchword Gulag, with its dramatically multiplied number of victims.

To walk the city of Lodz in search of the former addresses of Bundists activists gleaned in tsarist police reports is to face the toothless streets of the huge former ghetto and to find most of the time a gap, wasteland or a parking place instead of the wanted building where they used to live, to meet, to hide underground literature. Only in the memorial which has been recently founded in the former freight railway station from where transports to extermination camps used to run is a model to be found representing the ghetto before destruction and therefore the original aspect of the neighborhood. Only there did I realize that former textile factories which used to be major places of political mobilization and strikes for a mostly Jewish labour force had served as camps during the Nazi occupation, and only there did I realize that the building inhabited for a short while by Frush before his arrest in 1910, Kostel'naia ploshchad', dom 6, kv. 3/ Plac Kościelny, 6/ Church square, 6 had been adjacent to the one where ghetto main facilities had been accommodated, as recalled by a plaque recently attached on the wall. It was also the place where the chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto had been written, as mentioned in the train station memorial, and two steps off the bridge built over Zgierska street in order to allow public transportation to cross the Western part of the ghetto.

One should add that in the ghettos set up in the big cities located in the Bund former historical area, Bundists played a significant role in the struggle against the Germans, but were subsequently erased from postwar public official memory, be it in recently Sovietized territories<sup>141</sup> or in communist Poland<sup>142</sup>.

Before this post-war outcome, chroniclers of several ghettos reported the stupor generated somewhere in 1943 by the news that two historic Bundist leaders, Henryk Ehrlich and Viktor Alter had been shot by the Soviets, followed by mourning events gathering Bundists trapped into the ghetto. For most of the Bundists shot during the Great Terror however, probably no news circulated at all, all the more so that ties with activists and relatives now living abroad had been already cut for a decade or two.

In 1958, Jacob Sholem Hertz (1893-1992), a Party activist, published in New York a history of the Bund in Lodz written in Yiddish, where Frush and other future members of the Soviet

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<sup>141</sup> Masha Rolnikaite, Pawel Polian, *Ia dolzha rasskazat'*,

<sup>142</sup> Michal Trebacz, *Młodzież bundowska w gettach*. Warszawa-Lodz-Białystok, Warsaw, 31.08.2017.



All-Union Society of former Political prisoners are mentioned among activists arrested by the tsarist police. Nevertheless nothing is to be found about their fate after the Revolution<sup>143</sup>. More generally, what happened to individuals who remained in Soviet Union became a blind spot even for their former fellows and probably their relatives. The obscurity surrounding the fate of Moisei Grigor'evich Rafes, once an important Bundist leader who had played such a significant role in the rallying of the Bund to the Bolsheviks, exemplify this general oblivion. Henri Minczeles (1926-2017) who had so many acquaintances in the Bundist milieu in emigration wrote that Rafes had not been repressed and died of natural causes, according to his former friends.<sup>144</sup> Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and a new access (though limited) to the relevant files the circumstances of his death remain all the more confused that he is now a relatively unknown historical figure, lost in a sea of victims of the Stalinist terror, as exemplified by the confusion made by the Sakharov center website which mixes up his fate with the one, very similar unfortunately, of his brother<sup>145</sup>, a mistake based on the misreading of a letter written in 1982 by Moise Grigor'evich's nephew, published and commented in *Novaia Gazeta* in 2010.<sup>146</sup>

Therefore, excavating the life stories of these people anonymously buried in Butovo, but also trying to learn from the songs recordings they left seems all the more valuable, for they still represent a significant part of the Bund political and cultural history. To our knowledge, such earlier live recordings (as opposed to paper publication) of Jewish political songs is quite a rarity and would occur much later in the West<sup>147</sup>. Paradoxically the Soviet Union had generated intellectual conditions leading to the recordings of voices it would suppress a few years after.

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<sup>143</sup> Jacob Sholem Hertz, *Di Geshikhte fun Bund in Lodzsh*, New-York, 1958.

<sup>144</sup> Henri Minczeles, *Histoire générale du Bund. Un mouvement révolutionnaire juif*, Austral, 1995, reed Denoël, 1999, quoting a.o. the editor of the series *Di Geschikhte fun Bund*, Jacob Sholem Hertz (1893-1992), who was also the author of *Di Geshikhte fun Bund in Lodzsh*.

<sup>145</sup> <http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=author&i=1753>

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2010/02/24/4576-pavel-rafes-pismo-smershevtzu-iz-proklyatogo-proshlogo>

<sup>147</sup> Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota : « Spiew jako narzedzie ksztaltowania tozsamosci i swiadomosci. Jankiel Trupianski, Josl Mlotek, Adrienne Cooper – tri muzyczne pokolenia », Warsaw, 31/08/2017