

# THE JEWISH LABOR AND POLITICAL ARCHIVE

May Day Demonstration in Nowy Dwór, Poland, ca. 1935. YIVO Archives.

# YIVO ANNOUNCES MAJOR PROJECT TO DIGITIZE ITS HISTORIC JEWISH LABOR AND POLITICAL ARCHIVE

YIVO is delighted to announce the digitization of its Jewish Labor and Political Archive. This eight-year project will conserve, process, digitize, and make available online free-of-charge its collections documenting Jewish political, labor, and social movements in the United States and Europe from 1870 to 1992.

The project, the largest archival digitization project in YIVO's history consists of approximately 3.5 million pages. The archive includes correspondence of major Jewish political and labor leaders including Vladimir Kossovskii, Raphael Abromovitch, Emanuel Scherer, Shmuel Arthur Zygielbaum, Morris Hillquit, Emma Goldman, and David Dubinsky; meeting minutes of clandestine revolutionary cells active in Europe from the late 1800s through World War II; ledger books detailing the activities of youth groups; manuscripts of speeches and lectures delivered by anarchists and revolutionaries; leaflets and flyers calling for protests and boycotts; posters advertising rallies and marches; sound recordings of members of the labor movement in the United States; and ephemera including flags, banners, and pins.

The Jewish Labor and Political Archive at YIVO is the most comprehensive resource on Jewish revolutionary, socialist, and labor movements in Europe and America. Many of the materials were originally collected by the Bund Archives, which was founded in 1899 in Geneva, Switzerland, to gather the organizational records and revolutionary literature published in the underground printing shops of the then-nascent Jewish Labor Bund.

The result of an impoverished Jewish working class in the Russian empire and the spread of secular ideas, the Bund was founded in Vilna in October 1897. It functioned as a kind of labor union and political party whose membership consisted of Jewish workers, intellectuals, and youth who fought against the oppressive forces of the Tsarist regime, the capitalist order, and the hierarchical Jewish community.

The Bund founded sports organizations, summer camps, Yiddish secular schools, and sanatoriums throughout Lithuania,

Poland, Russia, the United States, and other countries across the world.

In the 1930s, the Bund stood at the forefront of the struggle against antisemitism in Poland by announcing a general strike in response to waves of anti-Jewish violence and pogroms. During World War II, the Bund organized underground resistance efforts and created a network of informants who brought news of Nazi atrocities to the world.

In 1944, the Bund Archives was captured by the Nazis. After the liberation of Paris in 1945, a large portion of the collection was found in crates abandoned several miles from the city. In 1951, the Bund Archives was brought to New York where it continued its collecting operations until 1992, when the entire Bund Archives was transferred to YIVO. The materials documenting the activities of the Bund help illustrate how the transnational activities of the Jewish working class were instrumental in the international labor movement.

“In addition to providing fascinating material about Jewish political activity in pre-Revolutionary Russia and interwar Europe, these collections reveal the impact of an important aspect of the Jewish immigrant community on American politics and social life and deepen our understanding of the American Jewish experience,” said Jonathan Brent, Executive Director and CEO at YIVO.

The Jewish Labor and Political Archive at YIVO have been used in hundreds of scholarly publications, multi-day academic conferences, college courses, and museum exhibitions. YIVO has held several adult education classes that draw directly from these collections and has hosted over a dozen free public lectures by scholars on the research they conducted using the collections.

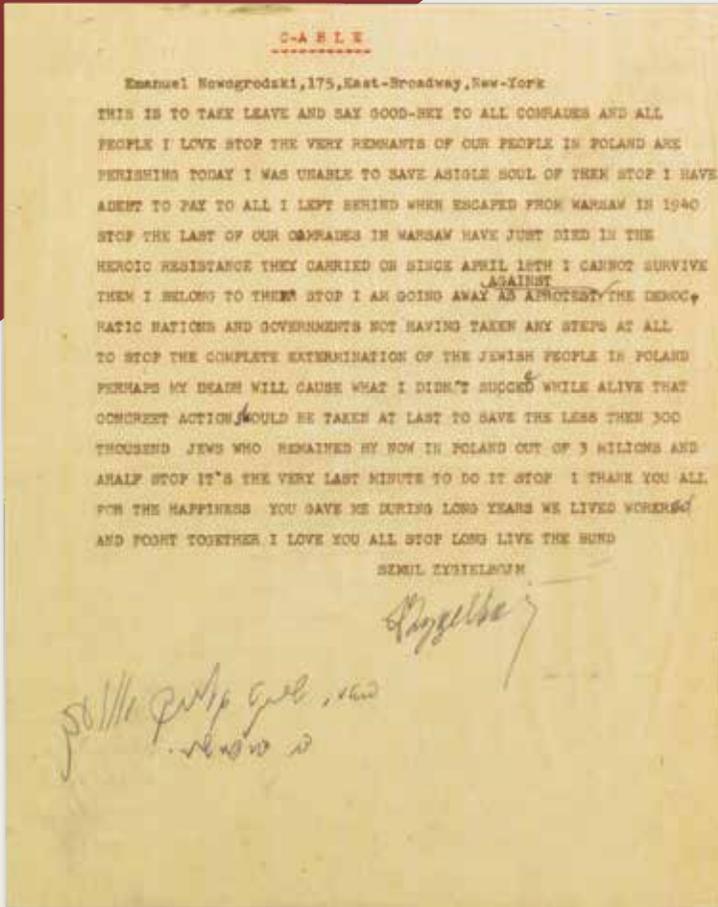
There are many possibilities for new scholarship, classes, public programs, exhibitions, archival outreach, and artistic and literary works that draw on the Jewish Labor and Political Archive at YIVO.

## Featured Artifact

### SHMUEL ZYGIELBOJM'S FINAL STATEMENT

After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Shmuel Zygielbojm, a member of the Bund's Central Committee who had spent many years helping to unionize Jewish workers in Warsaw and Łódź, joined the defense committee of Warsaw during the siege of the city. After Warsaw fell, Zygielbojm became an organizing member of the underground movement of the Bund in Warsaw as well as a member of the Warsaw Judenrat. When the Nazis tasked the Judenrat with establishing a ghetto in Warsaw, Zygielbojm publicly opposed the order, a move which put him in danger and led his fellow Bundists to arrange for his escape from Poland. He arrived in the United States in September 1940 and spent the next two years working with the American Branch of the Bund, attempting to convince Americans that the situation in Europe was dire. In April 1942, Zygielbojm went to London to serve as the Bund's representative in the Polish National Council, an advisory body to the Polish government-in-exile. His pleas on behalf of Polish Jewry to the British political elite and the Polish government fell on deaf ears.

After learning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the ghetto's destruction in April 1943, Zygielbojm understood that his efforts had been futile. Zygielbojm decided on a radical move that he felt would focus attention on the fact that the Jews had been abandoned by the Allied powers and shock them into saving what remained of Polish Jewry: on May 12, 1943, Shmuel Zygielbojm took his own life. In Zygielbojm's final letters addressed to the heads of the Polish government-in-exile, he sharply denounced the free world for allowing what he called "the greatest crime in the history of mankind" to be carried out.



Last statement of Shmuel Zygielbojm before his suicide, May 12, 1943. YIVO Archives.

“ The significance of this undertaking for researchers around the world cannot be overstated...YIVO's digitization project will make the rich history of the Bund, which includes everything from labor protest to Yiddish-language education to anti-Nazi resistance, widely and freely available for the first time.

[...] I consider YIVO's digitization project to be the most important archival project of its kind in the United States presently.

— TONY MICHELS  
George L. Mosse Professor of American Jewish History  
University of Wisconsin

“ The Bund Archives is exceptionally important... Over the course of more than half a century, materials located in the Bund Archives have formed the foundations for groundbreaking books by both world-renowned and emerging scholars.

— JACK JACOBS  
Professor of Political Science  
John Jay College and the Graduate Center  
City University of New York



## YIVO WELCOMES YOUR SUPPORT OF THE JEWISH LABOR AND POLITICAL ARCHIVE PROJECT (JLPA)

To date, the project has raised over \$1.2 Million towards its \$8.5 Million goal. This diverse collection includes items related to the Holocaust, labor unions, Jewish political activism, and much more. Together they offer invaluable insights into how Jews in Europe and the United States responded to the momentous events of the 20th century.

Join us on this journey as we make this historic archival collection available to a global audience.

*Levels of support:*

- \$1,000,000+ **Builder**
- \$500,000+ **Partner**
- \$100,000+ **Benefactor**
- \$50,000+ **Patron**
- \$25,000+ **Sponsor**
- \$10,000+ **Supporter**
- \$5,000+ **Contributor**
- \$1,000+ **Friend**

We are profoundly indebted to Irene Pletka for her generous lead support of this extraordinary collection.

YIVO gratefully acknowledges and thanks Ruth and David Levine, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Slomo and Cindy Silvian Foundation for their generous support of this project.

For more information and naming opportunities, please contact Melissa S. Cohen at 212.294.6156 or via email at [MCOHEN@YIVO.ORG](mailto:MCOHEN@YIVO.ORG).



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