CHAPTER 3

The French Bundist Movement after the Holocaust: Between Self and Collective Reconstruction (1944–1948)

Constance Pâris de Bollardière

As historian David Slucki has recently demonstrated, the Bund after the Holocaust ceased to be a party centered on Poland and took on an unprecedented international form.¹ Led by the World Coordinating Committee of Bund Organizations founded in Brussels in May 1947, the postwar Jewish Socialist movement survived as a federation of a dozen branches scattered around the world.² Although its founders and leaders were based in New York, the World Coordinating Committee remained active in France—specifically Paris and surrounding areas—which became Bundism’s main center in Europe.³ The French capital was indeed a lively and fecund gathering point for several generations of Bundists, the only city in the world where a Bundist daily newspaper, Undzer shtime [Our Voice], was still published.⁴ Although this Yiddish Socialist

2 Ibid., first chapter: “A New World Order. The Bund’s Postwar Transformation.”
3 Although a few Bundists also lived outside of the Parisian region and the Arbeter-ring administered a childrens’ home in the city of Le Mans between 1945 and 1948, a rest home for former deportees in Bouquéron (near Grenoble), and had a small short-lived subdivision in that town as in Lyon, most of the movement’s activities of the movement took place in or around Paris. On activities outside of Paris, see Dr. E. Minkovski [Eugène Minkowski], “A toig in Le Man” and F. K., “Di kvaln shlogn vider,” Di naye tsayt, May 26th, 1945, p. 8 and 9 and Jewish Labor Committee Records, Tamiment Library, Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, Part I (hereafter JLC I for Part I [1934–1947] and JLC II for Part II [1948–1956]), B 87 F 14 and 15.
daily constituted the most visible voice of French Bundism, we must keep in mind that the *Yidisher sotsyalistisher-farband in Frankraykh* (Jewish Socialist Union in France/Union socialiste juive en France)—the French branch of the Bund that published it—was not the sole Bundist force in Paris but was closely associated with the *Arbeter-ring* (Workmen’s Circle, translated as *Cercle amical* in French), a mutual aid society and cultural association which boasted 680 declared members in October 1947. Taking into account these varied and intertwined forms of Bundist activism in postwar France, this article deals with the Bundist movement and its actors, the Bundists themselves, rather than with the Bund alone.

The goal of my contribution is twofold. I first aim to outline the main actions undertaken by the French Bundist movement in the immediate post-Holocaust years (late 1944 to early 1949), a period of transition during which it was laying the groundwork for its reconstruction. The adaptation of its social services to face the needs of the postwar years, its response to the massive movement of Jewish refugees out of Poland and the Displaced Persons (DPs) camps, and its cultural and political efforts to ensure the preservation of its particular sense of Jewishness, all constituted the foundations of this reconstruction. Secondly, I will question the extent to which French Bundists, who represented a minority voice in Jewish and Socialist postwar circles, isolated themselves or collaborated with other like-minded groups. Was reconstruction of the movement a wholly Bundist and France-centered process, or a joint enterprise with fellow Bundists abroad, with the French and American Jewish communities, Socialist circles and labor groups in France? Did partnerships occur, and were they openly sought or imposed by necessity? Finally, what impact did these interactions have on the content of the Bundist reconstruction?

This sort of research is necessarily based on archival material coming from various organizations. Aside from certain documents from the recently rediscovered papers of the French Bundist movement, this article is mostly based on non-Bundist archival material. Although I partly rely on files and publications from Jewish or political organizations in France and the United States, I have examined most closely the daily correspondence between French Bundists and the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC). An anti-Nazi organization

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6 I refer here to the French Bundist movement and French Bundists themselves independent of their nationality, defining the labels instead based on geographical situation. I thus consider here Bundist refugees from Poland to be part of the French Bundist movement.