

the Red Army fighting the common enemy. Ilya Ehrenburg, who discovered his Jewishness during the war—or, rather, someone in authority told him of it—was on the committee.

In June 1943, the committee sent over a delegation of two, the well-known director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater, Solomon Michoels (Wofsi) and Itzik Feffer.<sup>+100</sup> Their task was to counteract the indignation aroused here by the executions of the two eminent leaders of the Polish Bund, Henryk Ehrlich and Viktor Alter. Their tour was highly beneficial for Moscow. They issued statements and gave interviews assuring public opinion here of the Soviet's genuine cooperation in the war and, later, in the making of peace. To the Jews they spoke of the unbroken bond with Soviet Jewry and of the common aim of reconstructing shattered Jewish life in Europe after the victory over Hitler. This was also the theme of the *Einigkeit*.

Shachno Epstein died a natural death in the summer of 1945. He was given a state funeral. Had he lived a few years longer, he would certainly have followed Itzik Feffer and dozens of other Jewish men of letters to their degrading death.

### KALMEN MARMOR, HIS COMMUNISM WAS A PUZZLE

Kalmen Marmor had neither Olgin's craving for leadership nor Shachno Epstein's all-consuming aspiration for literary criticism. Marmor would have shrunk in fear had he been offered a seat among policy-makers, and would have politely declined any suggestion of writing essays on contemporary literature. His corner was bibliography; it was his avocation.

Marmor was well acquainted with the classical Hebrew literature and had a deep regard for the Jewish heritage. At heart a non-Marxist, he was an admirer of Henri Bergson, a serious "deviation" which he kept to himself. This small, quiet, and timid man had a rather checkered ideological career, shifting with notable speed from one political position to another. He was a Socialist, a religious Orthodox, a Labor Zionist, and again a Socialist, ending as a Communist.

Marmor was born in 1879 in a little town near Vilno. His father was a *Maskil* (Enlightener), and Kalmen was given a Jewish and

secular education. In Vilno, he studied in the famous Strashune Library. He joined a Socialist circle, and, thinking it was his duty to become a proletarian, learned the metal turning trade. However, at the age of 20 he suddenly turned extremely religious, putting on phylacteries every day. But his religious impulse did not last more than a year. In 1898, Marmor went abroad, studied literature and political economy in the University of Berlin, and, afterward, took three years of natural sciences in the University of Freiburg. He also studied Judaica, and became a Zionist. Marmor was a delegate to several of the early Zionist congresses in Basel, Switzerland. He migrated to London, joined the Labor Zionists there. For a short time he lived in Palestine.

In 1906, Marmor came to the United States, and was the first editor of the *Poale Zion* weekly in Chicago. He was also one of the founders of the *Poale Zion* World Alliance, in 1907. But in 1914 he broke with Labor Zionism and joined the Socialist Federation and the staff of the *Forward* in Chicago. At the Jewish Labor Congress, January 1919, Marmor voted against the resolution endorsing the Balfour Zion Declaration. In 1920, he left the Socialists and became a member of the underground Communist Party.\*<sup>422</sup>

In the first years of the *Freiheit*, Marmor conducted a daily column of biographies of outstanding men and women. His was an assorted choice: Spartacus, Karl Marx, Abraham Lincoln, Bakunin, Prudhon, Rosa Luxemburg, Uriel De Acosta, Spinoza, Moses Hess, Leo Tolstoi, John Stuart Mills, and—David Belasco. (The actor-impresario sent him a letter of appreciation, saying that he regretted that his old mother was not alive to read the kind words about her son. He added that he would keep the article among his treasured mementos. Marmor passed this letter around with a shy smile.)

The author does not presume to account for the inner motives that drew this modern *Maskil* to the theory of proletarian dictatorship. He cannot accept as a full explanation the reason advanced by some Right-Wingers that Marmor became a Communist out of resentment at what he thought was his unfair treatment by the *Forward*—he was not made editor of the Chicago paper. Perhaps his very timidity was the clue. Timid souls are often captivated by the audacity of a dynamic idea.

In the early days of the Communist movement, Marmor's service

to the party was almost nil. Only after the CP came out of the underground was his prestige an asset. And in the dark days in the fall of 1929, 1939, the late 40's and 50's, his name served as a sort of *mezuzele*, a sign of Jewishness and respectability on the door of Communism.

Political writing was not his genre. Moreover, he gave the appearance of a man too pure to soil his hands in muddy political waters. Nevertheless, the party was able to "mobilize" him when he was needed, though not without some resistance on his part. During the battle with the community over the events in Palestine, Marmor contributed his share by comparing Zionism with fascism. "What fascism is for other people Zionism is for the Jews," he wrote. And in the months of the Stalin-Hitler pact, he celebrated the "liberation" of his city by the Red Army.\*<sup>423</sup>

#### A BIBLIOGRAPHER OF MERIT, HE LACKED COURAGE

Marmor did pioneering work on the field of the early Jewish literature in this country, particularly labor poetry. Highly methodical and painstaking in his research, his biographies of the early poets—David Edelstadt (two books), Joseph Bovshover, Morris Rosenfeld and Morris Winchefskey—are valuable sources for students of Yiddish literature. He also published a book on the playwright Jacob Gordin and a monograph on the origin of the Jewish press in America. His scholarly book on Aaron Lieberman is the only work in Yiddish on this veteran Enlightener-Socialist of Europe.

Marmor spent a few years in the early part of the 30's in Kiev, working at the Jewish Section of the Ukrainian Academy of Science. When the time was nearing for his return, his wife, a simple housewife, deeply saddened by what she saw around her, warned her husband, "Kalmen, if you will praise the Soviet Union on a lecture tour at home—as I expect you to—I will follow you from city to city, and from every platform call you a liar." \*<sup>424</sup> Marmor was saved from having to make a crucial decision. His wife took ill and died in Kiev. He returned in July 1936. As she had foreseen, he was lavish in his praise of the Soviet Union in his lectures and articles, though among friends he told his true observations with tears in his eyes.

Marmor's timidity was both pathetic and disgusting. In his book

on Morris Rosenfeld, published by the Kiev Academy, the editors injected the prevailing Proletcult theory, turning the poet who lamented the misery of the sweatshop into a revolutionary artist. This theory was totally alien to the spirit and letter of the manuscript. But Marmor did not object. When questioned in private, he replied helplessly, "They did it."

Friday, December 1, 1939, the day the news arrived of the unprovoked Russian attack on Finland, the author called Marmor and made an appointment to meet him at the entrance to Central Park on 59th Street and Broadway.

"How can you tolerate all this!" he asked Marmor feelingly. "Give me your statement of resignation from the party for the *Hoffnung*."

Marmor began pleading, "Melech, I admire your courage. I look up to you. You are my ideal. But I must confess, when I picture myself as the target of so much abuse and mud-slinging as you are, I shrink in fear." "Please give me three days time," he begged. "I will give you a statement then."

Marmor was pitiable. The author felt that firm insistence would probably have produced his resignation. But Marmor's cowardice, though candidly admitted, was becoming repulsive. He said goodbye and went away. Marmor never resigned.

In the last years of his life, Marmor published his memoirs in the *Freiheit*. There was quite a kaleidoscope of personalities in review. But Marmor, a lifelong member of the CP, had no bad word for any of them. He was not the man to hurt anyone of his own free will.

Marmor had an engaging manner that attracted people to him. Despite his unflinching obedience to the party, he had hardly any personal enemies. Even anti-Communists were disarmed by his humaneness and valuable pioneering work.

Marmor was paralyzed for quite some time. He died in Los Angeles in 1956, at the age of 75. The Communists were then in urgent need of an imposing funeral of a man of Marmor's reputation. Stalin's downgrading and the news of the destruction of Jewish writers and scientists was lowering the spirit of even the most faithful. And the *Freiheit* did its utmost to hold up Marmor's life as a shining example of a devoted Communist. But while the local Communists

were hastily making their preparations for a mass funeral, Marmor's son, an anti-Communist, spirited the body away and gave his father a quiet Jewish burial.

It was the only time Marmor ever failed his party comrades.

### **A. BITTELMAN, MORE POLITICIAN THAN THEORETICIAN**

The story of Alexander Bittelman, however brief, cannot be told outside the Communist Party. Unlike Olgin, Shachno Epstein and Marmor, his rise began only with the Left Wing. He was young and unknown before that.

Osher (Alexander) Bittelman was born in 1890 in Odessa, on the shores of the Black Sea. His parents later moved to Berditchev, the classical Jewish city in the Ukraine. He was sent to the *heder* and later to the government school. Bittelman joined the Bund while quite young, and was exiled for two years to the Province of Archangel. He came to this country in 1912. Unwilling to remain a shop worker, he, similar to other semi-educated immigrants, studied civil engineering in the evening classes of Cooper Union. But he never worked in that capacity. He left the shop to work in the Harlem section of the People's Relief Committee during World War I. He was then active in the large Harlem branch of the Jewish Socialist Federation. Harlem was considered a center of the advanced immigrant youth.

The federation top was studded with more than a dozen luminous figures—Vladek, Hardman, Olgin, Zivyon, to mention but a few—and a dry unimaginative man like Bittelman had to remain obscure. Neither a forceful speaker nor a lucid writer, his influence was confined to a group of branch comrades. He would have had to wait many years, meanwhile performing routine tasks, before he could hope to climb to leadership. However, the ferment in the Socialist ranks evoked by the Bolshevik Revolution moved to the front a number of younger people who were agitating for a sharp turn to the left. These people formed the Left Wing. Bittelman was one of them, though not among the very first.

Shrewd and calculating, with cold eyes and an impassive face, Bittelman had a hard doctrinaire approach to life and a limited emotional range. He was the right man for the shabby maneuvers