THE CASE OF
HENRYK
ERLICH
AND
VICTOR
ALTER

FOREWORD BY CAMILLE HUYSMANS
PRESENTED TO
THE
STATE LIBRARY
OF VICTORIA
BY

Mr A. T. Brodney

1978

THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA
MELBOURNE
FOREWORD

The Representatives of the General Jewish Workers' Union "Bund" of Poland (affiliated to the Labour and Socialist International) publish this pamphlet for reasons of political, morality. They have to defend, before the world in war, the memory of two comrades who have been executed for a crime they have not committed.

They do so, with reluctance and regret, because of the fact that this cruel act has been committed by an allied power.

They do so, although they know that they shall be accused of trying to disturb the fight on a united battle front.

Nevertheless, they cannot hesitate one moment. They even should not hesitate if they had no direct proofs of the innocence of their comrades, because they and we have known them for many years as loyal fighters for Democracy. But they do possess the proofs of their innocence, and the reader will find them in this pamphlet. He will be able to form his own opinion—based on documents.

The reasons given for their execution are unworthy. They are more. They are stupid.

I shall not try to deduce the real reasons of this slander. They are obvious. Alter and Erlich are not the only victims. But in this case the intention was to strike at the head in order to decapitate a movement.

The reply will be that we shall continue our fight for Socialism and Democracy on lines which had been for a time also the lines of the executioners, and which they will have to follow, in a near future, even if executions of Socialists continue.

Camille Huysmans.

London, April 5th, 1943.
APPEAL...

M. MOLOTOV ASKED TO RELEASE ERLICH AND ALTER

On a day some time ago, there died in a prison in Kuibishev, two men, who had dedicated their lives to the welfare of their fellow men.

The following is the text of a cable, sent to the Soviet Foreign Minister, M. Molotov, on January 27th, 1943, by a group of leading citizens of the United States, requesting once more the release of H. Erlich and V. Alter:

IT IS NOW MORE THAN A YEAR THAT HENRYK ERLICH AND VICTOR ALTER TWO PROMINENT LEADERS OF JEWISH MASSES POLAND WERE RE-ARRESTED IN KOUIBYCHEV STOP MOST PROMINENT REPRESENTATIVES OF FREEDOM LOVING PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENTS REPEATEDLY REQUESTED THEIR RELEASE IN VAIN STOP TODAY WHEN UNIVERSAL PUBLIC OPINION UNITES IN CONDEMNATION OF NAZI CRIMINALS WHO ARE MURDERING IN COLD BLOOD ENTIRE JEWISH POPULATION POLAND WE RENEW IN NAME OF JUSTICE AND HUMANITY OUR REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF THESE OUTSTANDING COURAGEOUS FIGHTERS AGAINST FASCISM AND NAZISM HENRYK ERLICH AND VICTOR ALTER

WILLIAM GREEN, President, American Federation of Labor.
Professor ALBERT EINSTEIN.
Rev. HENRY SMITH LEIFER, Executive Secretary, Universal Christian Council.
DAVID DUBINSKY, President, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.
Dr. ALVIN JOHNSON, Director, New School for Social Research.
ADOLPH HELD, Chairman, Jewish Labour Committee.
LEO KRZYCKI, President, American Slav Congress.
JOSEPH WEINBERG, President, Workmen's Circle.
REINHOLD NIEBUHR, Chairman, Union for Democratic Action.
CLINTON S. GOLDEN, Assistant President, United Steelworkers of America.
Dr. B. HOFFMAN, President, Jewish Writers' Union.
RAYMOND GRAM SWING.
J. B. S. HARDMAN, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Editor Official Press.
PHILIP MURRAY, President, Congress of Industrial Organizations.

...AND ANSWER

M. LITVINOV ADMITS THE EXECUTION

Embassy of the Soviet Union, Washington, D.C.
February 23, 1943

Dear Mr. Green,

I am informed by Mr. Molotov, People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, of the receipt by him of a telegram signed by you concerning two Soviet citizens, Alter and Erlich.

I am instructed by Mr. Molotov to inform you of the following facts:

For active subversive work against the Soviet Union and assistance to Polish intelligence organs in armed activities, Erlich and Alter were sentenced to capital punishment in August, 1941.

At the request of the Polish Government, Erlich and Alter were released in September, 1941.

However, after they were set free, at the time of the most desperate battles of the Soviet troops against the advancing Hitler army, they resumed their hostile activities including appeals to the Soviet troops to stop bloodshed and immediately to conclude peace with Germany.

For this they were rearrested and, in December, 1941, sentenced once more to capital punishment by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court. This sentence has been carried out in regard to both of them.

Yours sincerely,
Ambassador MAXIM LITVINOV
HENRYK ERLICH was born in Lublin, Poland, in 1882. As a high-school youth in his teens he joined an underground Revolutionary Students' Organisation, one of those whose chief goal was the liberation of Poland from the rule of Czarism. In 1902 he was elected chairman of this underground student organization and, soon after, his oratorical and literary talents secured for him a place in the leadership of the entire Socialist Movement in the old Russia.

From 1902 until his arrest by the Russians in 1939, Erlich devoted his entire life and enormous energies to the cause of the oppressed. In 1905 he became the theoretical guide and editor of the Polish organ of the General Jewish Workers' Union "Bund," "Nasze Haslo" ("Our Watchword"). From "Nasze Haslo," after suffering arrest and exile, he went in 1912 to edit the large Russian daily newspaper "Dien" ("The Day"), while at the same time taking
charge of the theoretical organ of the General Jewish Workers' Union "Bund," "Di Cajt" ("Time"). The outbreak of the World War of 1914 found him the editor of the Socialist weekly "Yevreiskaia Vesti" (Jewish News).

He was arrested for the first time in 1902 and again in the winter of 1904. Arrested once more in 1909, he was exiled from Russia. Upon his return to the country in 1911 Erlich was placed by the Czarist regime on trial for his adherence to the revolutionary and "subversive" General Jewish Workers' Union "Bund."

Neither prison nor Czarist persecution, however, could break Erlich's spirit and courage. After the "Bund" became affiliated to the Russian Social Democratic Party, he was, in recognition of his services to the cause of Labour, elected to the Central Committee of that Party and appointed by the "Bund" as liaison member to the Social Democratic faction in the Czarist "Duma."

During the Russian Revolution of 1917 Erlich became a member of the editorial staff of the central organ of the Russian Social Democratic Party, "Rabochaya Gazeta" ("Workers' Gazette"), and in the month of March of the same year, after the Czar had abdicated and the Revolution was victorious, he was elected one of the leaders of the St. Petersburg Soviet and a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers' Soviets of Russia.

Appointed by the Council of Workers' Soviets as a member of a delegation that went to Europe to organise the famous International Socialist Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, Henryk Erlich visited Norway, Great Britain, France, Italy, and won the respect of the Democratic and Labour movements in those countries.

At the end of the last war—towards the end of 1918—Erlich returned to his native country, Poland. Very soon, in the first few months of 1919, he was chosen a member of the Warsaw City Council and he retained this title for the next 20 years—until the day of his tragic death. In Poland he was the recognised and respected leader of the Jewish working class, the most faithful fighter for the liberation and the solidarity of the working masses in Poland. For over 20 years he was Editor-in-Chief of the Jewish Workers' Daily "Naje Folkscajtung" ("New People's Daily"), the official organ of the "Bund." He was one of the best speakers and journalists Poland had. His name stood for honesty in politics and loyalty to Socialist ideals.

Since 1929, i.e., from the time the "Bund" joined the Labour and Socialist International, he was the representative of his party on the Executive Committee of the International. Often he represented views in this Committee which were not shared by the majority of the members. But even then he was held in great esteem by all the members of the International.
From the moment when the darkness of Fascism and Hitlerism first began to descend upon Europe, Erlich did not miss a single opportunity of giving warning against the growing danger, of attempting to destroy the smug, short-sighted optimism of many, of calling for the use of new methods in the struggle with this new and deadly enemy of freedom, human culture and progress. He did this not only in his own country, but internationally. In Poland he was one of the most ruthless and active opponents of the military and police régime of men like Beck and Rydz-Smigly. In the Socialist International he held the view that Fascism could only be destroyed by united action of the working class of the world, conscious of its aims and methods.

From the year 1937—from the time when all Fascist countries took a hand in the fight in Spain—Erlich belonged to the group of men who saw clearly the catastrophe which was bound to follow failure to intervene on the part of the united forces of freedom. He was an ardent adherent of the defence of the free nations against the aggression of the totalitarian Fascist forces.

In spite of his very critical attitude towards Russia’s internal policy, he defended, in the Press, on the speakers’ platform, at meetings of political institutions in the country and abroad, the view that the democratic countries must resolve on a line of action jointly with the U.S.S.R. against Fascist countries who were preparing for assault.
During the hard months immediately before the German attack on Poland was launched, Erlich led an intensified campaign to prepare the Jewish working masses for a full part in the approaching struggle, a struggle which would affect the Jewish masses even more than anyone else. On the first day of war Erlich worked all day on a manifesto to the Jewish workers, signed by the Central Committee of the Party and Youth Organisation, in which he called on everyone, and in particular the young people, to sacrifice everything, if need be their lives, to stop the Nazis from passing into their country.

Three weeks later a prison cell and a Soviet warden separated Erlich from the people he had served so well all his life.

The life of Victor Alter parallels in many respects that of Henryk Erlich. Born in Mlawa, Poland, in 1890, he too joined at an early age in 1905—the underground youth movement. Because of his part in a strike of Polish school youth against the policy of “Russianisation” by the Czar, on Polish soil, he was expelled from school in Warsaw.

Alter went to Belgium where he studied engineering at the Polytechnic Institute. Upon his graduation he joined the “Bund,” where he was soon elected a member of the Central Executive Committee.

Victor Alter was a gifted Socialist journalist and writer. His numerous contributions to Socialist thought in the Polish, French and Jewish languages include such well-known works as “Labour Co-operation,” “The Militant Socialism,” “The Man in the Community,” and others. He belonged to the most talented economists in the International Labour Movement and contributed greatly to the development of Socialist ideas on planned economy.

He was also elected in 1919 by the working masses to the Warsaw’s City Council. In 1927 he became one of Warsaw’s aldermen. He was an expert on local government in Poland’s capital. In December, 1938, during elections to the Warsaw City Council, he led the electoral campaign, in the working-class district, which won for the “Bund” all five seats which that district held.

As leader of the Jewish workers Alter approached nearest that ideal of “conquering the heart of the country for its people and the hearts of its people for the country.” Through his versatile activities he bridged many of the gulfs separating his people from the Polish
people and the peoples of the world. In his private life, just as in his public life, he did not stand for nationalistic limitations. Alter was a genuine citizen of the world. He believed deeply in the instinct of freedom inherent in every human being. All his life he educated the Jewish workers to be men and himself set an example to them. His favourite saying was: "It is better to die standing up, than to live on one's knees." And he did not flinch in spite of the strongest attacks from the reactionaries, which were directed against his movement or his own person, just as he did not bend in the cell of the Soviet prison.

He was a speaker and writer. He was a politician, an organiser of the trade unions and the co-operatives. He belonged to the most important institutions at home and abroad. He had views of his own on sociology and political economy, on physics and aesthetics.

Both Erlich and Alter were always the champions of truth and progress. And only their hangmen—the men who murdered them—dare to throw mud at their undefended graves.

MASS ARRESTS IN SOVIET-OCCUPIED EASTERN POLAND

Erlich and Alter were arrested by the Soviet authorities late September, 1939, a few days after the Red Army entered Eastern Poland—Erlich at the railway station of Brzesc (Brest Litovsk), Alter at Kowel.

Mr. Litvinov's letter to Mr. Green, quoted here, was meant to create the impression that both Alter and Erlich had been arrested on a definite charge. The truth is that they were detained along with thousands of other Polish citizens, especially Socialists and trade unionists.

Close upon the heels of the U.S.S.R. army which occupied Polish territory in September, 1939, followed many detachments of the N.K.W.D., the political police of Soviet Russia (formerly the "G.P.U."). And immediately mass arrests among all classes of the population of Poland began to take place. Especially great numbers of arrests were made among the Polish Labour leaders, belonging to the Polish Socialist Party and to the Jewish "Bund." The arrests began on September 20th, three days after the Soviet army had entered Poland. The town councillors, members of the committees of the local Socialist parties, members of the trade union executives, organisers of working-class and peasant youth were arrested.
Among these were Erlich and Alter. The fact that they were sent a few days later to the central prison of the N.K.W.D., “Butirki,” in Moscow, suggests that these arrests had been planned from the first upon the order of the central authorities, and that they belonged to the “operational plan” of the Soviets, prepared even before that part of Poland had been occupied.

The way in which these arrests were made was typical. In the houses, where the arrests took place, not only the men whom the police had come to fetch were arrested, but everybody who was in the house with them. In Wilno, for instance, the police entered the house of an old active “Bund” leader, Zeleznikov, who had been exiled to Siberia in the time of the Czar, in order to arrest him. Quite accidentally they found there also a man named Rosenstein employed in the sanatorium for working-class children named after Wladyslaw Medem. This man, who had fled from Warsaw and the Germans, they also arrested. He was sentenced to the labour camp where he met his death.

Also in Wilno, the Secret Soviet police came to arrest a well-known Socialist leader, a lawyer named Tajtell. But they found there a refugee from Warsaw, a well-known trade unionist and Socialist, who had spent years in Czarist prison—H. Himelfarb. They took him along and sentenced him to eight years in the camps.

It proved quite impossible to intervene with the examining magistrate or the public prosecutor. With very few exceptions, no parcels of food or clothing were allowed to reach them. The wife of one of the arrested men, Mrs. G., was told by the examining magistrate: “You have funny women here. In our country, in Russia, when the husband is arrested the wife sues for divorce and looks for another one. But here you come along pleading and begging, which can, after all, only result in your being sent away also.”

No information as to the fate of the arrested persons was available, much less was there any chance of seeing the prisoners or of sending letters to or from the prison.
FIVE WEEKS WITH ERLICH AND ALTER AT KUIBISHEV

Statement by Lucjan Blit, who shared a room with them at the Intourist Hotel in Kuibishev.

(Mr. Blit is a member of the Central Committee of the "Bund" in Poland, member of the Bureau of the Socialist Youth International, and member of the Warsaw City Council.)

In accordance with the Soviet-Polish Pact I was released from a Soviet "Labour Camp" near Archangel, in September, 1941.

In October I arrived at Buzuluk, a small town where lay the Headquarters of the Polish Army in the U.S.S.R. then in process of formation. On the 29th October there arrived here from Kuibishev, Mr. Wladyslaw Broniewski, who brought me a message from Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter asking me to go as soon as possible to Kuibishev, where they had both been staying since the middle of that month after being evacuated from Moscow together with the Polish Embassy.

The next day, October 30th, 1941, I arrived at the Grand Hotel, Kuibishevskaya St. 111, Kuibishev, where, in room No. 31 second floor, Erlich and Alter lived during the whole period of their stay in that town.

After tendering a certificate from the Polish Embassy stating that I had been requested by them to come to Kuibishev in order to undertake certain work among Polish nationals, I was given permission by the "Intourist"—to whom that hotel belongs—to take up residence there. I lived with Erlich and Alter in the same room until December 4th, the date of their rearrest, and stayed on in the same room until December 28th.

During the five weeks I shared their residence with them, I had the opportunity of hearing from these two comrades the full story of their last two years, i.e., from the moment of their arrest until my meeting with them. I also had the privilege of enjoying their fullest confidence during our short stay together and for this reason I believe I know everything they did from the moment of their release in Moscow to 12.30 a.m. on the 4th December, when they left never to return.

Erlich was arrested by the People's Commissariat of the Interior (N.K.W.D.) late in September, 1939, at the railway station
of Brzesc (Brest Litovsk). After several weeks in the local prison, he was transferred to the famous prison in Moscow known as "Butirki." There he was often questioned by various examining magistrates and once by the All-Russia Commissar for the Interior—Beria. He was questioned as to the attitude of the "Bund" towards all manner of social and political problems. Naturally there were not lacking those questions of a criminal-political character so typical in any of the U.S.S.R. political trials. For instance, he was asked to confess that, as leader of the Bund, assisted by the Polish political police, he had organised sabotage and terrorist acts on U.S.S.R. territory. Erlich purposely decided to give replies in writing to all questions and charges brought against him (he spoke Russian very well). As he told me, he did this so as to leave in the records of the N.K.W.D. a genuine account of the activities and views of the Bund in Poland.

When the Germans attacked Russia, Erlich was transferred from Moscow to the Saratov prison. In July of the same year he found himself in a room, not very big in size, where there were five or six military men. He was told this was the tribunal which was to try him. The members of the tribunal were at once judge and prosecutor. There were no counsel. Here Erlich delivered a long speech in which he defended himself against the charges preferred by the prosecution—acts of terror against the U.S.S.R., support for the preparations of an armed rising against the U.S.S.R., collaboration with the fascists, etc. After a very brief deliberation by the tribunal the death sentence was pronounced. Erlich did not avail himself of the right to plead for mercy to the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. He was moved to the condemned cell where he remained for two weeks, until the moment when he was asked to append his signature to the receipt of the Order by which his death sentence had been commuted to 10 years' hard labour in the "labour camps." In September, 1941, he was released from prison.

Alter was arrested by the N.K.W.D. in Kowel during the last few days of September, 1939. After a few weeks he was transferred to the same prison in Moscow in which Erlich lay—though neither knew of the presence of the other. His way of reacting to the charges preferred against him by the examining magistrates of the N.K.W.D. was different from that of Erlich. Alter, after hearing the charges relating to crimes of a mixed criminal and political character which he or his party were alleged to have committed, was wont to answer simply: "It is a lie." In prison he resorted several times to hunger strikes, fasting in defence of his own dignity or that of his fellow prisoners who were with him
in the same cell. Altogether he was on hunger strike for some thirty days. Amongst other things, he fought for and won for himself the right to write a scientific treatise on physics. In an effort to bring him to submission, in 1941 he was transferred for several weeks to a very severe prison in Moscow, the "Lafortowsky."

In spite of all this, neither Alter nor Erlich did sign any of the "confessions" demanded of them. In July, 1941, Alter was tried and sentenced to death by a court martial. He spent twelve days in the condemned cell. He made no plea for mercy but was later informed that the sentence had been commuted to one of 10 years' hard labour in the "labour camps." In September, 1941, he was released from prison.

His release took place in the same manner as that of Erlich. High officials of the N.K.W.D., on behalf of the Soviet Government, expressed their regret for the "mistake which had been committed by those sections of the N.K.W.D. which had detained them in prison, tried them, etc." A colonel of the N.K.W.D.—one of the most influential men in that organisation (later on he became an official liaison officer between the Soviet General Staff and the Supreme Command of the Polish Army in the U.S.S.R.)—Aron Volkovisky, called on them immediately after their release, as the Representative of the Soviet Government, and expressed the wish that they should both forget the wrongs done to them. They were offered residence in one of the best hotels in Moscow and a sum of money (I think it was about 3,000 roubles each) was paid to them as compensation. Some of my acquaintances employed at the Polish Embassy in Moscow told me they met Erlich and Alter within a few hours of their release, and both were so changed that it was hard to recognise them, so aged and weakened were they.

Shortly after the order for release was communicated to Erlich and Alter, the Colonel A. Volkovisky of the N.K.W.D., previously mentioned, approached them on behalf of his Government with the suggestion that they should form an all-world Jewish anti-Hitlerite committee on the lines of the Slavonic Committee created in Moscow. After consultation with the Polish Ambassador in the U.S.S.R., Professor Kot, Erlich and Alter consented to form such a committee. A number of conferences took place between them and the representatives of the Soviet authorities. One such conference was held at the invitation of Beria, the Commissar for the Interior, who was present. The principles of the work of the committee were agreed upon, its provisional membership and præsidium: Chairman—Erlich, Vice-Chairman—Michoels (a Jewish artist in
the U.S.S.R.), and General Secretary—Alter. The question of sending a delegate to America was discussed (Erlich was to be the delegate). The N.K.W.D. brought to Moscow those comrades who were to be used for the work of the committee, such as Dr. Henryk Schreiber, who later died in Russia. For the same purpose the N.K.W.D. was also trying to find the writer, although in vain, because I was imprisoned under an assumed name. I was to be sent as a delegate to the other side of the front—to German-occupied Poland. In the end the Soviet delegates themselves had no objections to raise either against the political and social principles or the mode of procedure of the committee, but they made it a point that they must first seek the approval of the Soviet Authorities. As a result of the conversation with Beria, Alter and Erlich sent a letter to Stalin containing the draft of the programme and the mode of procedure of the Committee. At that time Moscow found herself menaced by the Hitlerite hordes which were closing in. On October 15th Moscow was evacuated by the Government. Amongst others all diplomatic offices were transferred. The Soviet authorities also evacuated Alter and Erlich and told them that the N.K.W.D. in Kuibishev would receive instructions to take good care of them and that the decision would be communicated to them there. In addition Colonel Volkovisky asked them to prepare certain things, as for instance a proclamation to the Jewish masses in Poland and America. It could be seen from the discussions that the Soviet authorities were anxious first of all to make use of the influence which the Bund held among the working classes in the U.S.A.

Whilst I shared the room in Kuibishev with Erlich and Alter, I was several times witness of visits to them by a man who worked in the N.K.W.D. If I am not mistaken his name was Chasanovich. Every time he came he said that the decision had not yet arrived. He explained this as due to the particularly difficult military position in which Russia found herself at that time (November, 1941), when very intense fighting for Moscow was in progress.

On December 3rd, in the absence of Erlich and Alter, I answered a telephone call from Chasanovich who asked me when they would be at home as he had very important news for them, brought by someone who had come specially from Moscow. At 12.30 on the night of the 3rd-4th December, there were seated at table in the hotel restaurant—Erlich, Alter, Cadet Natanson, a former Cambridge Reader in Mathematics, and the writer. One of the women clerks of the hotel called Alter to the telephone. After a while he returned and said: “Henryk, let us get our coats, we have to go.”
Shortly afterwards they returned ready to go out. They almost forgot to say good-bye as they had promised to return very soon. I HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM SINCE.

The following day, at noon, worried by their absence and lack of news of them, I went with Leon Oler, another prominent member of the Bund released some time ago from a labour camp, to the Polish Embassy, where a formal affidavit was sworn as to their disappearance.

The Polish Embassy started enquiries and were finally informed that Erlich and Alter were in prison. The reasons for their detention varied from time to time but had one thing in common—they none of them made sense.

A few days after the arrest, December 12th, 1941, the N.K.W.D. agreed to accept small parcels of underwear for the prisoners. We took the parcels in company with one of the clerks of the Embassy. In front of the N.K.W.D. building Chasanovich was waiting. There, in the street, lolling against a fence, he made a perfunctory examination of the contents of the parcels and signed in pencil the receipt forms which had been prepared by us in advance. He would accept no food parcels, declaring cynically, “They are better fed in there than you are.”

On December 28th, 1941, I was summoned to the N.K.W.D. where a decision of the N.K.W.D. was read to me according to which I had to leave Kuibishev within 24 hours under penalty of immediate arrest.

Between the 4th and 29th December, i.e., from the time of the rearrest of Erlich and Alter, until the moment of my leaving our room in the Grand Hotel, the Soviet authorities never made any search for the documents and articles left there by Alter and Erlich. After several days everything that had belonged to them was deposited with the Polish Embassy.

LUCJAN BLIT.

London, March, 1943.
FACTS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Blit, on receiving orders to leave Kuibishev, joined the Polish Army in the U.S.S.R. and together with them left Russia. He arrived in this country recently.

His story is substantiated by documents which reached the Representation of the Bund in London.

Let us now come to the documents.

Erlich and Alter were first arrested by the Soviet authorities late in September, 1939. Arrested at the same time were hundreds of Jewish and Polish Socialists. Erlich and Alter were sentenced to death on a charge which was afterwards dismissed with apologies by the Soviet authorities, who assured them that the action taken had been a mistake.

M. Litvinov states in his letter that after Erlich and Alter were set free, they resumed their hostile activities against the U.S.S.R. which included appeals to the Soviet troops to stop fighting and for the immediate conclusion of peace with Hitler. This statement is ridiculous and astonishing.

It is quite sure that the Soviet authorities could adduce no evidence to support their charge. We, on the contrary, possess documentary evidence that Erlich and Alter were acting quite differently.

To show the real attitude of Erlich and Alter towards Hitler Germany we quote some of the documents in our possession. This is their letter to the Polish Ambassador revealing their ideas and plans immediately after regaining their freedom in September, 1941.

Moscow, 24th September, 1941.

Your Excellency,

Two years ago when the prison gates closed behind us, we represented the largest political party among the Jews in Poland. We enjoyed the fullest confidence of the Jewish masses. To-day, when we are able to return to our active political and social life, we hope that we still have the right to speak on behalf of these masses.

In this unprecedented moment in history, we regard it as our duty to submit to your Excellency, and, through you, to the entire Polish community, our point of view on the two most important problems of the day—war and peace.
The fight against the Nazis and Nazism, employing every means at our disposal—and, first and foremost, an armed fight—is the duty of every man and woman who loathes barbarism and villainy, it is the duty of every nation which loves freedom. As Socialists and citizens of Poland—suffering so cruelly at the hands of Hitler, we join the ranks of those who are fighting against this swastika monster. As sons of the Jewish people who, more than any have been ill-treated and tortured by Hitler, we feel it to be especially our duty to take part in this struggle in defence of our dignity, through the utmost exertion of our efforts.

To-day when a new Polish army is being created on the soil of the U.S.S.R. to continue Poland's struggle against Hitler, we appeal to all Jewish citizens of Poland who are strong enough to bear arms and who are at present on U.S.S.R. territory—"To arms! Join the ranks of the soldiers who will once again offer their lives in defence of Poland's right to freedom of existence, who at one with the Allied Armies, desire to free Poland and the entire world from the nightmare of Hitler slavery. And you, who are unable to bear arms, do not spare yourselves in assisting the army in its task of speeding up victory over the Axis Powers."

To play a part in this war for freedom is both a duty and an honourable privilege. In the name of the Jewish masses and the Jewish intelligentsia, who reposes their confidence in us, we declare our readiness to fulfil this duty and to demand the opportunity of availing ourselves of this right.

An inseparable part of the problem of war is peace and the problem of a new Poland. We have no desire to dwell now upon the errors of Polish policy before the war and upon the wrongs done to the Jewish people in Poland. We desire only to set out the following conclusions which must be drawn from the experiences of the past few years:

1. The existence of Poland without a constant threat to her freedom is possible only in a free democratic Europe.

2. A free democratic Europe can arise, survive and develop only in conditions of peace, only when, after the final military victory, the countries of Europe will embark upon a determined and bold programme of social reform eradicating nationalism, imperialism and that threat of new wars which is rooted in the capitalist system.

3. The new social organisation of Europe should be backed by a new political structure in Europe founded no longer on antagonisms and struggles between the different Nations, but upon a common interest and a readiness to defend themselves jointly against common danger.

4. The new Poland must become an active member of a community of nations which will decide the fate of the future Europe in the spirit of political freedom, social justice and national equality. It must follow that these principles would apply to the internal policy of Poland as well as to her relations with other States and Peoples.

5. Whether these aims can be achieved or not depends upon the solidity and the creative energy of the working masses in the towns and villages of Poland and on their ability to realise their ideal of a Poland which would be a genuine mother of all her people.

That portion of the Jewish population of Poland which we represent, and which is an organic part of her working masses, will spare no effort in order to work jointly with them in the building of a new Poland based on the prosperity of her people and the freedom of spiritual development of her citizens.

H. ERLICH.
W. ALTER.
This attitude of Erlich and Alter is obvious also from the fact that the Soviet authorities, after releasing them, assured them that their collaboration with the Soviet in the struggle against Germany was necessary in the joint interests of the U.S.S.R., the Jewish people and Poland. In the name of the People’s Commissariat for Interior Affairs, Colonel A. Volkovisky, and later the People’s Commissar for the Interior, Beria, at a special conference, proposed to Erlich and Alter the organisation of a world-wide Jewish Committee to aid the U.S.S.R. in the fight against Hitler and to call upon the Jews to devote their energies and their connections to the common cause. To this Erlich and Alter agreed. They set about their task immediately. Almost daily Soviet officials visited them in Moscow and after they were evacuated, in Kuibishev, to discuss these problems. As a result of these discussions the programme and principles of the committee were drawn up and sent to Stalin for his approval following the advice of the Commissar Beria.

The day on which they sent their letter to Stalin they wrote to Beria as follows:

Esteemed Lavrenty Pavlovich,

Following our conversation with you, we held a number of conferences in order to work out in detail the plans agreed upon during that conversation. As a result of these conferences the Jewish Anti-Hitler Committee addressed a letter to the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the U.S.S.R. requesting permission to organise such a Committee in the U.S.S.R. We enclose copy of this letter.

At the same time we would like to ask you, esteemed Lavrenty Pavlovich, to help us to speed up the matter towards a satisfactory solution.

With Socialist greetings,

H. Erlich. V. Alter,

Moscow, October, 1941.

This letter leaves no doubt as to the attitude of Erlich and Alter and the activities towards which they were determined to direct their energies. It must be emphasised that the programme of activities was drawn up on the initiative of the Soviet authorities and with their full agreement.

October, 1941.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF PEOPLE’S COMMISSARS OF THE U.S.S.R. J. V. STALIN.

Esteemed Josef Vissarionovitch,

Civilised mankind was never before faced with dangers like the present: Hitler and Hitlerism are a deadly menace to all achievements of culture, to the independence of all nations, and the freedom of all peoples.

The outcome of the gigantic battles now fought on the vast plains of the
U.S.S.R. will decide for years to come the fate of working-class movements, the fate of all mankind.

The fight against these dangers demands supreme efforts of all those who are resolved to save themselves, their culture, their country and the whole world from the horrors of Fascist barbarism led by Hitler.

Hitler aims at the subjection of all countries and peoples without exception, but his persecution of the Jews is particularly cruel. He drags through the mud the human and national dignity of the Jewish people, he places it outside all law, even his own Fascist law. He aims at the complete extermination of the Jews. That the Jewish masses must fight Hitlerism with particular energy and the greatest self-sacrifice. This is true of the Jewish citizens of those countries in which the threat of Hitler's barbarian rule has already become cruel reality. This is equally true of the Jewish citizens of all other countries.

Under such circumstances, the undersigned, as representatives of Jewish populations of countries violated by Hitlerism, consider it essential to form a special Jewish Anti-Hitler Committee, being the Initiative-Group of this Committee we approach you, esteemed Joseph Vissarionovitch, in your capacity as the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R., with the request that you should grant permission to form such a Committee on Soviet territory. The work of this Committee would be based on the following principles:

A. GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

All work of the J.A.C., and above all its propaganda, is to be founded on the conviction that:

(a) the liberation of the Jewish masses from enslavement, particularly Hitlerite enslavement, is, in any country, inextricably bound up with the liberation of all national groups of that country;

(b) real emancipation of Jewish masses is possible only where the whole life of the country is based on principles of social justice;

(c) Jewish masses of all countries must, therefore, together with the rest of the people, fight for social and national emancipation.

B. AIMS.

1. To stimulate, organise, and direct the energies of the Jewish masses and, if possible, entire Jewish communities of all countries in the supreme fight against Hitlerism.

2. To organise relief for the Jews in countries under Hitlerite (or generally Fascist) rule. In particular, J.A.C. would extend help to Jewish refugees from these countries, now in the U.S.S.R.

The J.A.C. would endeavour to achieve these aims in constant collaboration with the Governments and Consulates of countries fighting against Hitlerism and possessing more or less considerable Jewish populations.

C. MEANS.

1. The J.A.C. in the U.S.S.R. will try to maintain constant communication with Jews in countries under Hitler's rule, with the purpose of obtaining correct information on the position of the Jewish masses there, of strengthening the spirit of these masses, and of helping them with all means available in their fight against Hitlerism.
2. The J.A.C. will establish permanent connection with the main settle­ments of Jewish refugees from such countries in the U.S.S.R. with a view to:

(a) sponsoring the enlistment of all able-bodied persons in their respective national armies;

(b) organising auxiliary working parties serving the needs of these armies and the war industries;

(c) helping to provide work for all other refugees in their settlements.

3. Contact will be established with personalities and organisations in the U.S.A., in support of their anti-Hitler propaganda and campaigns for:

(a) maximum help to the U.S.S.R. from the U.S.A. in form of war materials and supplies;

(b) maximum credit facilities for the U.S.S.R.

4. The Jewish population of the U.S.A. will be asked to shoulder some part of the expenses (both in money and supplies) necessary for the relief of Jewish refugees from Hitler-occupied countries, now resident in the U.S.S.R.

5. The J.A.C., together with American comrades, will work out further plans to ensure a more active participation of American Jews in the fight against Hitlerism, the main brunt of which has so far been borne by the U.S.S.R.

6. Similar activities to those outlined above for the U.S.A. to be initiated in Great Britain, taking account of the conditions prevailing in that country.

7. The J.A.C. will use propaganda by word of mouth as well as the printed word in all possible ways.

D. The Organisational Structure of the J.A.C.

1. The projected composition of the J.A.C. in the U.S.S.R.: seven representatives of Jewish populations in countries under Hitler's rule, and one representative each of the Jewish populations in the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., and Great Britain, respectively.

2. The activities of the J.A.C. to be directed by a Präsidium of three: Erlich, Chairman; Alter, Secretary.

3. The J.A.C. in the U.S.S.R. proposes to elect as honorary members (obtaining, of course, previously their agreement) representatives of the Soviet Government, the Ambassadors of the U.S.A., Great Britain and Poland, as well as a number of outstanding personalities from various branches of public life (science, art, industry, etc.) in the U.S.S.R. and other countries.

4. The J.A.C. may appoint its representatives to the main centres of Jewish refugee settlements in the U.S.S.R., and also in other countries.

Such are the principles and the aims of the proposed Committee.

We hope that the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. will have no objection to its formation.

With Socialist greetings,

H. Erlich
V. Alter.

Another proof is the letter written by Erlich to Lucjan Blit, which letter is in our possession together with the three drafts of the appeals to the Jewish population in German-occupied Poland as reproduced below.
... Do not give up hope! The day of justice and reckoning will arrive. Hitler and his satellites have been outlawed by the great majority of the people of the world. Against them stand to-day three powerful fighting nations—Great Britain, the United States, and the U.S.S.R. The German beast will receive a knock-out. ... We call upon you to fight. Be brave in battle. May your fight to-day be your pride to-morrow.

On the third anniversary of the day on which Hitler began his World War, he is boasting of the conquests he has made, of the victories he has achieved over the defenceless. But he does not mention German towns which have suffered from British and American bombs, nor does he speak of the great continent of the U.S.S.R. which makes the Red Army invincible. He does not say that his “blitz” in the East has miscarried, nor that American and British industry and the inexhaustible resources in men of the U.S.S.R., will together crush Hitler Germany.

... And in Poland, where millions are suffering intolerably, the Jewish population must unite in one thought, all our efforts for the struggle with Hitlerism. We shall spare neither strength nor sacrifice until our mortal enemy has been destroyed.

The Jewish anti-Hitler Committee has the task of rallying the Jewish masses throughout the world to take part in the struggle, to help with all their might those who are engaged in the battle with the enemy of mankind and the mortal enemy of the Jewish people—the battle with Hitlerism.

In accordance with the agreement between Erlich and Alter and the Soviet authorities, the latter were making all the preparations for the work of the Committee right up to the moment Erlich and Alter were arrested. For this purpose they brought to Kuibishev a number of persons proposed by Erlich and Alter to take up special functions as members of the Committee. Lucjan Blit, who is now in London, was, for instance, to be dropped by parachute in Poland as the representative of the Committee to join the anti-German struggle there.

Until the moment of their re-arrest the atmosphere surrounding Erlich and Alter was charged with confidence in their sincerity of attitude and intentions and no one could have suspected that their efforts could have ended so tragically. When they were re-arrested it came as a complete surprise.

It must also be stressed that until January 26th, 1942, the Soviet Government expressed no doubts whatever as to the Polish citizenship of Erlich and Alter. It was only on that date that the Narkomindiel surprised the Polish Embassy by sending the Polish passport of Erlich with a covering note to say that he was a Soviet citizen. On March 16th, 1942, the Narkomindiel again sent a note to the Polish Embassy in which they claimed that Erlich and also Alter were Soviet citizens. All protests of the Polish Embassy were in vain.

When the news of the execution of Erlich and Alter reached London, the Polish Government in London handed to the Soviet Ambassador on March 8th, 1943, a note of protest against the execution.
CONCLUSIONS

We Serve the Cause of Truth

What are the unshakable facts established by the documents and evidence adduced above:

1. Erlich and Alter were undoubtedly Polish citizens; born, in fact, in the very heart of Poland. During the whole period of the independent existence of Poland they lived in Warsaw, the capital of Poland, where they devoted their energies and activities to the fight for a democratic Poland, to the cause of the Labour Movement and of the Jewish working masses, whose direct representatives and leaders they were.

2. They were on Polish soil when war broke out. They were arrested by the Soviet authorities in Eastern Poland (Erlich in Brzese and Alter in Kowel) in September, 1939, soon after the occupation of those areas by the Soviets. They were arrested in the very days when the Jewish working masses, true to the teaching and instruction of Erlich and Alter, were carrying out, shoulder to shoulder with the Polish masses, the famous heroic defence of Warsaw against the overwhelming power of Hitler’s motorised armies.

They were kept in Soviet prisons until the middle of September, 1941. They were then released at the request of the Polish Government, which proves that the Soviet Government did not then question their Polish citizenship. Until the 4th of December, 1941, when they were re-arrested, they were lodged by the Soviet authorities in Intourist hotels for foreigners, first in Moscow, then, after the evacuation of the capital, in Kuibishev. It is well known that persons lodged in those Intourist hotels are closely watched by agents of the Soviet Secret Police.

From the foregoing it is evident that they were never really free on the territory of Soviet Russia and consequently could not have carried on any subversive activities against the Soviet Government, even, if it could be assumed—a suggestion which is merely absurd—that these men suddenly changed their ideas and turned pro-Hitler at the very moment when their country was under Hitler’s yoke and their people were in process of extermination by Hitler’s gangs. Neither, for the same reason, could they have had any opportunity of making appeals to the Soviet troops, as alleged by the Soviet authorities.
3. The Soviet police never made any attempt to search their hotel room either before their rearrest or after. Is it feasible that these men could have been arrested and confronted with such grave charges without a search having been first made in an effort to discover compromising documents?

4. It has been conclusively proved that Erlich and Alter had devoted the whole of their energies and activities during the short period between release and rearrest to a task whose object was the very opposite of that with which they were charged.

5. From the facts and documents produced it is beyond doubt that Erlich and Alter were outspoken revolutionary Socialists and devoted fighters against reactionary movements such as Fascism and Hitlerism. They were the recognised and respected representatives of the Jewish people whose lot they shared and whose life and future they had close to their hearts.

They actually fought at all times for collaboration between the Republic of Poland and Soviet Russia. What could have been the motive for the alleged crime of Erlich and Alter? What possible motive could there be for these two prominent anti-Hitlerites and internationally known Jewish Labour leaders to commit the crime of advocating a separate peace with Hitler. The idea is ridiculous.

No one can be sure as yet of the real reasons for this execution. Perhaps they were the victims of Communist hatred against Socialists, in which case the accusation against Alter and Erlich is directed against the whole international Socialist Movement. But this is only hypothesis, because no one can possess tangible proof of the real but mysterious motives fabricated in the unfathomable darkness of Soviet justice. In any case it must be emphasised that no proof whatsoever has been put forward by the Soviet authorities to substantiate their absurd accusations and justify the shameful execution of Erlich and Alter.

On the other hand, there is ample evidence to lead us to the conviction that the Soviet authorities never had any intention of releasing Erlich and Alter entirely, or of allowing them to leave Russia. In pursuance of the Soviet-Polish Pact thousands of Polish citizens were at that period being released from Soviet prisons and camps. Each one of them received from the Soviet authorities an official document concerning their release. The only two Polish citizens who were not given such documents after their release were
Erlich and Alter. There must have been some reason for such a pointed omission.

Even before all the documents about Erlich and Alter had been published, everyone who had known them and their activities had been deeply shaken and indignant over their first arrest, although it took place at the beginning of the war; at a time when Soviet Russia was not one of the United Nations fighting Hitler. How much more indignant did everyone feel after their re-arrest, which took place at a time when the Soviet Union had joined forces with the United Nations and every fighter against Hitler was needed for the common cause.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the entire Labour Movement of the United States except the Communists, the Labour Movement of Great Britain and innumerable prominent men of science and letters, and in the democratic movement, raised their voices time and again demanding their release. Innumerable appeals were sent to the Soviet Government by Labour organisations and outstanding individuals both in the United States and in this country, but no reply was vouchsafed by the Soviet Government to any of them.

The "New York Post," of March 4th, 1943, reported:

"Wendell Willkie personally asked Joseph Stalin in Moscow to release from a Soviet prison Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich, Jewish Socialist leaders of Poland, who at that time had already been secretly executed by the Reds . . . Willkie interceded for the two Polish anti-Nazi union leaders at the request of American Labor leaders, including Philip Murray, C.I.O. President, William Green, A.F.L. head, and David Dubinsky, President of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, it was reported."

The fact that Erlich and Alter were already dead was revealed only in reply to a telegraphic appeal made by the American Federation of Labour, the American Congress of Industrial Organisations, and a number of other great workers' organisations and prominent persons. It is apparent now that many of those appeals were made on behalf of men who were already dead. The Soviet Government decided to reveal the truth about their execution at the moment chosen by them as the most convenient. They probably thought that a time when the Soviet Armies were victoriously advancing no one would dare protest. Similarly their arrest for the second time coincided with a period in which the Soviet armies
were advancing. Their release, be it noted, was ordered at a time when Russia was in deadly danger.

Despite the great admiration which every true Democrat has for the gallant Soviet Armies, and because all true democrats are anxious to see the establishment of good relations between all the United Nations, the news of the execution of Erlich and Alter has caused a great wave of protest to sweep over the democratic world. Public opinion, after its first stupefaction, was then overcome by indignation which arose throughout the whole American democratic Press. The first to protest were the American Socialists and Trade Unionists. A Committee of 250 representatives of the American Labour Movement, headed by David Dubinsky, President of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, and supported by the American Federation of Labour and the C.I.O. issued a statement which read:

“We reject categorically the absurd and nonsensical accusation that Alter and Erlich were supposed to advocate a separate peace with Germany. The attempt to slander these two martyrs, which aims at throwing a shadow on their faithfulness to the ideals of progress and humanity is shameless and vile.”

The Committee organised, on March 30th, 1943, at the Mecca Temple in New York, a great memorial meeting to pay tribute to Alter and Erlich, and to protest against their execution. The meeting was attended by 3,500 Trade Union delegates. Such outspoken anti-Hitlerites as La Guardia, the Mayor of New York, William Green, President of the American Federation of Labour, and other representatives of the Labour Movement and of liberal thought were the speakers at this meeting.

This is what the London Times, of April 1st, 1943, reported about this meeting:

“Among the speakers were the Mayor, Mr. La Guardia, who compared the executions of Erlich and Alter with those of Sacco and Vanzetti, and Mr. William Green, President of the American Federation of Labour. Some of the speakers characterised the charges against the men as cynical fabrications. However, several speakers reaffirmed the determination of American Labour and the American people to aid Soviet Russia to the utmost in the war.”

The meeting of 3,500 delegates of Trade Unions at Mecca Temple, New York, adopted the following resolution:
"We, 3,500 delegates and members of labour unions and fraternal organisations, express our indignation and protest against the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, internationally known labour union leaders of Poland, ordered by a military court in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (Russia).

"We scornfully reject the charges, presented to the court and accepted by it as justification of the verdict, that Erlich and Alter were actively or otherwise engaged in Nazi service; or that they sympathised in any way or manner with Nazi aims or anything that Nazism stands for; or that Erlich and Alter were less than wholeheartedly devoted to the war effort of the United Nations, including the U.S.S.R., in the present war to the finish on the Axis powers.

"Thousands of us knew these two leaders of labour in Poland personally and well, and all of us have watched their record, over many years, as determined fighters against Hiterism, Fascism, and every form of tyranny, oppression and brutalitarianism. Out of this, our knowledge and firm conviction of the innocence of the two men, indeed, of their proven loyalty to all aims which we hold dear, we reject the validity of the reason for the murder verdict. We entertain no shadow of suspicion or doubt about the innocence of the executed men of labour.

"We mourn the loss of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter as a grave loss to the cause of labour, democracy and humanity.

"Lest our protest be misunderstood or be wilfully misrepresented, either by enemies of American democracy or by Nazi agents seeking to confuse the public mind and to divide the Allied nations, we solemnly declare here that despite the grievous injustice perpetrated by the Soviet court on the two servants and leaders of labour we are, as ever, loyal and devoted to the declared and clear aims of our country’s alliance with the Soviet Union, and all the United Nations, as expressed in the Atlantic Charter and given living meaning by President Roosevelt.

"Nothing can or will swerve us from doing our utmost to secure, by common effort, total victory in this war and lasting international peace in the wake of the war.

"Our keen reaction to this tragic occurrence does not deter us from placing all our—honour, labour, life itself—at the service of the United Nations against the Axis powers. Neither can or will the terrible judgment and execution of our two friends and comrades-in-arms at the hands of the Soviet courts diminish our
admiration for the heroic, indeed superhuman, achievements of the Russian people and their armed forces in this titanic struggle against Nazism and aggression and for freedom.

"Free citizens of a great democratic nation, we consider it not only our privilege but duty as well to voice our protest against a great wrong committed by an ally, even as we together, and at one with our allies, fight to the crowning end for a common and decisive victory."

The entire American democratic Press expressed its deepest indignation and protest. Thus, for instance, the great liberal magazine "The New Republic," of March 15th, 1943, wrote:

"If Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter had been born Frenchmen their names might have been Leon Blum and Leon Jouhaux . . . Both Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were vigorously anti-Fascist and more particularly anti-Nazi. Both warned the Polish Government again and again of the danger of underestimating Hitler . . . Those who could believe Leon Blum and Leon Jouhaux guilty of similar charges might feel that Erlich and Alter were guilty of the charges levelled against them. Those who would brand any such accusation a monstrous falsehood if brought against Blum and Jouhaux must also reject the suggestion that Erlich and Alter could have been guilty."

And the pro-Soviet "P.M. Daily Picture Magazine" wrote on March 18th in an editorial comment to the news given in the same issue in four columns:

"If there are facts that American Labour does not know, and that prove the Soviet charges in the tribunal of the international conscience, let us have them. But until they are revealed, it would be fearfully difficult to believe that two men who were at once labor leaders and Socialists, and Poles and Jews, and whose careers showed their integrity, could have had traffic with the Nazi enemy . . . On the known facts a tragic injustice has been done . . ."

The democratic weekly, "The Nation," March 13th, 1943, wrote:

"The record of these men provides the strongest possible refutation of the charges of anti-war activity on which they were condemned by a Soviet court-martial. They were not Socialists of a pacifist stripe. On the contrary, they helped organise the valiant resistance to the Nazis of the workers of Warsaw . . . The act of the Russian military authorities has outraged opinion in other
countries, especially among Socialist and Jewish workers, who were slowly coming to realise the need of closer ties with their fellow-workers in Russia. And in reactionary circles, where the fate of two labor men would ordinarily be a matter of vast unconcern, the executions are being used as another instrument against the unity of Russia and the West. For this the chief responsibility lies with the Soviet Government. The execution of Erlich and Alter was not only bad justice, it was also bad propaganda... Such behaviour plays directly into the hands of Goebbels...

* * *

Is it true that we should ignore this monstrous act because of the war? Is it not true that just because of the war and the ideals for which we are fighting it is our duty to protest against the injustice done to Erlich and Alter? Some people now say that the wave of protest which this case called forth in the United States and in this country is doing harm to the common cause. In fact, all true Democrats feel in it a moral issue and that it is a moral duty to protest and to shed light upon this unfortunate case in order to prevent the enemies of Democracy from making capital out of it.

The Labour Movement and all the genuine democratic elements never ceased to demand the release of Erlich and Alter because they realised that the fact of their being kept in prison was doing harm to the efforts of the democratic forces against Hitlerism and serving reactionary propaganda. There is no doubt that the whole case of Erlich and Alter is harmful to the cause of democracy. But the harm has been done, not by those who protest against the murder of two innocent people, but by those who murdered them.

We cannot afford to remain silent and allow the names of two men who devoted the whole of their lives to the fight for freedom, justice and Socialism, to be defiled and besmirched after their execution. The war against Hitler did not start in June, 1941; it began on the 1st of September, 1939, and the part which Erlich and Alter played in it was clearly revealed in the appeals they issued in Warsaw on September 1st, 1939, and in the deeds of their followers in Poland. Erlich and Alter never declared that the attitude towards Fascism and Hitlerism should be “only a matter of taste.”

Soviet Russia is one of the United Nations, and our protest against the execution of Erlich and Alter does not affect our atti-
tude towards the efforts we have to make to help Russia win this war alongside of us.

The attitude of the General Jewish Workers' Union "Bund" (the Jewish Labour Party in Poland, the main leaders of which Erlich and Alter were) was expressed in an official statement of the American Representation of the Bund published in the American Press on March 7th. It was repeated by one of the London representatives of the Bund, Mr. Zygielbojm, in his address to a memorial meeting held in London on March 28th in Caxton Hall, when he said:

"As those who share the struggle for a new world, as sons of a people who make such great sacrifices in this struggle and as representatives of the Jewish battalion of the great underground army in Nazi-occupied Poland and Europe, we shall follow the path of our unforgettable leaders, Erlich and Alter, we shall continue to contribute towards the speeding up of the victory of the United Nations over the Axis powers. We still consider that help for the Soviet Armies who are to-day partners in the struggle against Nazism and Fascism should be as great and as effective as possible. However, we shall not forego our right and our duty to express our sorrow and protest against the execution of Erlich and Alter. This execution is a blasphemy upon the ideals for which millions are dying to-day."

We can well imagine how the news about the execution of their leaders affected the tortured Jewish people in Poland, and especially those of them who, brought up and taught by Erlich and Alter, are carrying on the anti-Hitler struggle as a part of the workers' underground movement in Poland. But so strong are the hatred of Hitlerism and the belief in Democracy and Socialism among the followers of Erlich and Alter, that we have not the slightest doubt that their convictions and views are identical with those we have expressed.

By keeping silent we should be accessories to a crime.

To allow the morality of a great movement for a just and free world to be slandered, might affect the future world, the purity of the Labour Movement and hopes for its unity.

By revealing the truth and by recording our protest we are serving the cause of the United Nations fighting in this war and the cause of the International Labor Movement.

We are convinced that Erlich and Alter will live in the memories of the working masses as pure and true symbols of the struggle for justice, freedom and Socialism. That is to say, for the truth.

We are serving the cause of Truth.
APPENDIX I

THE JEWISH BUND OF POLAND EXPRESSES ITS HORROR

At a moment when the tormented Jewish population of Nazi-ruled Europe is being led to death, when thousands of our brothers and sisters, among them the noblest and bravest sons of our people, are being butchered daily—at this moment of Hitler’s most horrible atrocities against the Jews, officials of the General Jewish Workers’ Union of Poland and the intellectual leaders of the Jewish underground struggle against the Nazis, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, have been executed in a Soviet prison.

The part played by these two men in the Jewish, the Polish, and the international labour movement; the horrible deed perpetrated upon them; the shameful lie fabricated against them; their honour and the honour of the Jewish masses, to whom Erlich and Alter have been and will remain paragons—all this moves us, the closest friends and comrades-in-arms of these murdered men, to make the following declaration to the public:

Henryk Erlich was executed in his 61st year, Victor Alter in his 52nd. Both stood from their earliest youth in the front ranks of the Jewish and international labour movement, first in the days of the Czar and later, after the First World War, in independent Poland.

Ever since 1918 they were the recognised political and intellectual leaders of the Jewish labour movement and, through it, of the broad Jewish masses of Poland. By word of mouth and pen; in thousands of articles in the daily and periodical labour press; in books and pamphlets in the Yiddish, Polish, French, and English tongues; to countless Jewish and Polish meetings, conferences and congresses; from the platform of the Warsaw Municipal Council; at International Socialist and Labour congresses, conferences, and executive sessions—indefatigably and unflinching they roused and fostered the belief in a new world, a world of Freedom, Democracy, and Socialism.

Unforgettable is their part in the battle waged in Poland against Fascism, Nazism, anti-Semitism. Indescribable is the love and respect, the esteem and confidence in which they were held by the Jewish masses and intelligentsia, not only in Poland, but far beyond her borders, here in America, too.

They always stood in the very thick of the fight against Polish reaction and were intimately associated with everything in Polish and international life which was animated by the struggle for freedom, by the struggle against every form of violence, brutality, and oppression.

From their pen came, at the outbreak of the present war, September 1st, 1939, the flaming call of the Central Committee of the Central Jewish Workers’ Union of Poland to the Jewish masses to spare no energies or sacrifices but to throw themselves heart and soul into the holy war for the destruction and annihilation of Hitlerism and Fascism. The important part played by the Jewish working people of Warsaw in the immortal defence of that beleaguered city was in large measure the fruit of their militant spirit, the seed they had planted in the hearts of the Jewish masses.

At the beginning of October, 1939, they were arrested in the eastern part of Poland immediately after the occupation of those regions by the Soviets. For two years the Soviet Government kept them in jail. And without the slightest public control, they were both at first condemned to death and then (when Russia and Germany were already at war) their sentence was “graciously” commuted to 10 years’ imprisonment, on the absurd charge that they had, forsooth, “taken part in the Polish Intelligence Service.” It was only thanks to the Polish-Russian pact that they were released in September, 1941, from the Soviet prison.

Released, but not really freed!
The large number of refugees, Polish citizens, who at that time, as a result of the Polish-Russian agreement, were released from Russian prisons and concentration camps would receive special documents concerning their release; Erlich and Alter did not get such documents! Apparently the Soviet authorities, who released them in September, 1941, were determined even then to release Erlich and Alter only temporarily, merely as a respite before their next arrest!

Immediately after leaving the Soviet gaol, Erlich and Alter sent a cable from Moscow to New York in which they declared: "We are continuing the common struggle against Fascism and for Socialism!"

In line with this, they—as Polish nationals, through the instrumentality of the Polish embassy in Moscow—issued a call to the Jewish refugees of Polish citizenship located in Soviet Russia, to join the Polish army then being formed on Soviet soil with the consent of the Soviet Government. They called them "to arms"—to armed participation in the struggle of the United Nations for freedom—"for the deliverance of Poland and of the entire world from the spectre of Brown slavery."

They were free for a few weeks only. As midnight between December 3rd and 4th, 1941, they were summoned "just for a while" to a Soviet office and never came back again.

Now we learn from official Soviet sources in America that they were sentenced to death and executed in December, 1942. Secretly, under mysterious circumstances, without the slightest public control, or even semblance of such control, and on the absurd and shameful charge that they had, forsooth, "urged Soviet soldiers to stop the bloodshed and make immediate peace with Germany."

We note:

The foremost labour leaders of the United States and England, men who represent millions of organised workers, continually urged the freeing of Erlich and Alter. Representatives of the European underground, as well as famous intellectual and well-known political leaders, to whom millions listen, joined in these pleas. The Polish Government interceded constantly. Other officials in the camp of the United Nations also laboured for the release of Erlich and Alter. All, not even excluding the sworn defenders of everything Soviet Russia does (the latter in their hearts), well knew and know Erlich and Alter's attitude to the struggle against Nazism, Fascism, and the whole camp of Axis countries. The crime committed by way of answer to all these pleas for the freeing of Erlich and Alter is a challenge to public opinion in the democratic world.

We declare:

The attempt to represent Erlich and Alter as Nazi agents is a shameful and contemptible libel. Those who knew them are incapable of casting any aspersions upon the spotless characters of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, upon their absolute devotion to their ideals of liberty, progress, and humanity, upon their brilliant and sacred memory. Not upon the two martyrs, but upon those who murdered them will the stain of the perpetrated crime rest forever.

According to the Soviet communication, Erlich and Alter were tried and executed as "Soviet citizens." To this we reply (and we have incontestable proofs in our support).

The supposed "Soviet citizenship" of Erlich and Alter is not merely in glaring conflict with the fact that both were born in those parts of Poland which have never belonged to the Soviets. To regard Erlich and Alter as "Soviet nationals" is unjustified even in the light of certain facts and documents of Soviet practice itself. Thus, for example, the Soviet Government expressly recognised the Polish citizenship of Erlich and Alter when it released them from gaol in September, 1941. And for a time even after their second arrest it did not question their Polish citizenship vis-a-vis the Polish Government. To the oral and written representations of the latter, the Soviet
Government at first replied with various excuses, but not with the pretext that they were, forsooth, “Soviet nationals.” This argument made its appearance only later, almost two months after their apprehension, although no circumstances had arisen since September, 1941 (when the Soviet Government acknowledged Erlich and Alter’s Polish citizenship) to justify the sudden classification of Erlich and Alter as “Soviet citizens.” There is only one real reason for this: the desire to get rid of the necessity to excuse to the outside world the arbitrary arrest of December, 1941, the desire to be able “freely” to condemn and besmirch the prisoners.

The Soviet Government executed Erlich and Alter during the great victories of the Red Army, figuring, apparently, that the Soviet triumphs on the battlefields of Stalingrad, the Caucasus, the Ukraine, and the feelings of joy aroused in us by them, would drown out the protests against the crime perpetrated. But however great the heroism of the Red Army it must not be misused to cover up or justify crimes. The blood of the Red Army men, shed in the battle with Nazism, does not wash away the stain of the judicial murder committed against Erlich and Alter to the detriment of the war against Nazism.

We affirm:

Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter were not Communists. They fought for a social order that would combine Socialism with freedom, with democracy, with respect for the human person. Without blinking at the negative sides of Soviet reality, they nevertheless recognized the positive elements of the Soviet’s constructive work and oriented themselves to the cooperation of the Soviet Union with the universal forces of democracy, progress, and Socialism. In their attitude to the Soviet Union they accordingly took a stand which coincides with the views of tens of millions—democrats, liberals, Socialists—in America and in England, a stand which also has the full approval of the fighting underground workers of Poland and throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.

Erlich and Alter, both members of the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International, are the first non-Russian and non-Communist labour leaders the Soviet Government has permitted itself to arrest, try, and put to death merely, as a matter of fact, because they were freedom-loving Socialists, Socialists with a name and influence in the international labour movement. The old Communist hatred of the free, independent and above all, Socialist movement, descended in all its fury upon their heads. Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter perished in a Soviet prison as martyrs to the sacred, libertarian, Socialist ideals in which millions believe and which the Soviet regime cannot tolerate.

The murder of Erlich and Alter is the first case of its kind since the outbreak of the war. This proves anew the terrible consequences resulting from a reign of terror and despotism and reveals plainly the great perils it holds for the new order that will have to be reared on the ruins of Fascism and Nazism.

As participants in the struggle for a new and free world, as children of a people that is making the greatest sacrifices of blood and treasure in this struggle, and as representatives of the Jewish elements in the vast underground army of Nazi-held Poland and Europe, we will follow in the footsteps of our illustrious leaders and continue, as heretofore, to make our contribution toward a speedy victory of all the United Nations over the Axis countries. As hitherto, we believe that the aid given to the Soviet Army, to our ally in the common war against Nazism and Fascism, should be as great and as effective as possible. We are firmly convinced that the common triumph of the United Nations will pave the way for a new order of true freedom and true Socialism throughout Europe, including also Russia itself.

We declare:
The murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter is a desecration of the high aims and ideals for which tens of millions of people—members of the United Nations family—are shedding their blood.

For this we hold responsible and condemn not the Soviet people, but those who rule in its name. They are to blame for widening the tragic gulf between the world of Socialism and Communism.

We will never forget their bloody deed!

The anniversary of their crime will remain a day sacred to the memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter as long as there shall exist a Jewish working-class and a Socialist labour movement.

American Representation of the
General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland.
Foreign Delegation of the
Youth Organisation of the
General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland.

New York, March, 1943.

APPENDIX II

POLISH SOCIALISTS JOIN THEIR JEWISH COMRADES
IN THEIR SORROW

The members of the Polish Socialist Party, now in Britain owing to wartime conditions, render homage to the memory of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich. The news of their execution has moved us deeply. It was more than personal friendship that formed a strong link between us and them.

They were comrades in arms in our daily struggle for Freedom, Democracy, Workers' Rights and Socialism in the Polish Republic. As leaders of the Jewish Labour Movement, they regarded it as their first duty to fight for a better life of the Jewish masses in the Polish Republic, yet they did not forget their duty of real and sincere solidarity with the Polish worker and peasant masses and their Movement.

Thanks to their work and under their leadership, the solidarity of all the working people of Poland grew and developed into a living body without distinction of origin, religion or nationality. That solidarity was the best and supreme expression of Polish national patriotism. It was embodied in the persons of Alter and Erlich.

They gave new proofs of that patriotism in the course of this war. Fully aware of the overwhelming superiority of the enemy, Alter and Erlich appealed to the people to fight and to resist the German invasion. Even a long imprisonment in the U.S.S.R. could not break their spirit. Having regained their freedom in September, 1941, they appealed to the Jews, Polish citizens on the territory of the U.S.S.R., to take part in the armed struggle against the German invader. They magnanimously forgot their recent sufferings and wrongs; they concentrated all their efforts towards one end: Victory over Germany and her satellites.

We condemn the abuse heaped by the murderers upon the victims. We repudiate all calumnies no matter whence they come. We have known these
two comrades. They have been in the same ranks with us for years, they shared with us for decades our sufferings and our sorrows. No one dare desecrate the graves of these two fighters for Freedom, Socialism, and the Independence of Poland. The mud that is being thrown at them by some people will never reach them.

The Polish working masses will for ever retain in grateful memory the names of Comrades Alter and Erlich, along with other innumerable victims of the struggle against the invader.

We shall never forget the crimes committed against the working masses of Poland, against their Movement, against their leaders. Not a single drop of blood will be shed in vain.

We are aware that the news of this murder will stir the masses taking part in the underground fight and resisting the inhuman terror of Hitlerism. Great indeed must be the spirit to withstand the blows which fall on the heroes of the underground struggle from so many sides. We trust, we know, that the fight will not cease for a moment, that they will never falter, that their hearts will not weaken, until the invaders are driven out of Poland, until the Republic—one and indivisible will regain her true and complete independence.

*Foreign Committee, Polish Socialist Party.*

London, March 5th, 1943.

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**APPENDIX III**

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS PAY TRIBUTE TO ERLICH AND ALTER**

The undersigned representative Socialists from Allied countries warmly associate themselves with the tribute to the life and work of Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich expressed in the above resolution of their Polish comrades:

Louis de Brouckére; Camille Huysmans: *(Belgian Labour Party)*.

A. J. Dobbs; Lincoln Evans; William Gillies; J. S. Middleton; Eleanor Stewart; Mary E. Sutherland; James Walker, m.p.: *(British Labour Party)*.

Josef Belina: *(Czechoslovak Social Democratic Labour Party)*.

Louis Lévy: *(French Social Party)*.

Alf Severin: *(Norwegian Labour Party)*.

Berl Locker: *(Palestine: Jewish Labour Party)*.

London, March 12th, 1943.
MEMORIAL MEETING IN LONDON FOR THE EXECUTED
HENRYK ERLICH AND VICTOR ALTER.

A memorial meeting, dedicated to the memory of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, internationally prominent Socialists and leaders of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland, who were executed by the Soviet Government, took place on March 28th, 1943, in London.

Camille Huysmans, president of the Socialist International, former President of the Belgian Parliament and Mayor of Brussels, expressed his sorrow and indignation in the following statement:

Comrades,

It is with a real sadness that we learnt through an official advice from Mr. Litvinoff in America that our friends Erlich and Alter had been executed.

I should not say that I was astonished. Their sudden arrest in Kuibeshev was a sinister omen. We knew for a long time that Moscow had a greater respect for the life of a prominent capitalist of the United States than for the life of a prominent social-democrat, who refused to accept dictatorship as a normal system of government.

If between Social-democrats as we are, and Communists, there is a difference of political conception and of method, there is also a difference of humanity. And, once, speaking to one of my friends at the moment when he was in disgrace, Litvinoff said:

"The great difference in handling matters, between Communists and Social-democrats, is, that a Social-democrat would not have the courage to execute a Communist, whereas a Communist would not hesitate a moment."

This analysis of both our characters is very true, for we have a great tradition of tolerance. We do admit that a Communist has the right to believe in dictatorship, and we are not ready to punish him because his opinion differs from ours.

We do not believe that we are the depositors of eternal truth. Even when we claim to be Marxists, we do not admit that Marx has never committed an error and we are sure that Marx has never uttered such a pretense.

But the Communists are quite of another opinion.
In their eyes, democrats are traitors of the working class, and for this reason, they are dangerous and have to be removed.

I am obliged to remember that the men who rule at this moment in Moscow have not always been of this opinion. And, when I remember their former attitude, at the moment when they were sitting with us at the same table, before 1914, they claimed to be real democrats. We were, in their own eyes, very poor democrats, not sufficiently strong-minded in adaptation of democratic principles.

Let me give two examples.

The question of Poland has been a problem, that has been discussed at nearly all international congresses, even during the period of the First International. The liberty of Poland was a slogan for all Socialists of all countries. The comrade, who later was most insistent on this matter when he was alive, was Lenin. He accepted on this question no compromise, neither with Germans, nor with Austrians, and above all, with Russians. The complete liberty of Poland was a refrain that came back in all his Socialist songs. I am not quite sure that Marshall Stalin would sing the same songs to-day, with the same conviction and with the same refrain.

My second example is the result of my personal experience at the International Congress of Stuttgart in 1907.

One of our parties was asked to put on the agenda the question of death penalty, and I am not sure that the initiative did not come from one of the Russian groups. The delegate, who had the most clear ideas on this much discussed subject, was Lenin, and in the Commission he was appointed as referent. He was charged to write the report. He wrote a strong and indignant report against political executions. He thought probably of his brother, who had been hanged by the Czar. Lenin’s report and draft of resolution were accepted by the whole Congress, and I remember I congratulated him on this occasion. We were not always of the same opinion. He was of the opinion that I was too moderate. But he pardoned me my political sins, because I had helped him in 1905 and 1906, when de Bronckere and I were in charge of a Belgian factory, sending weapons to our fighting comrades in Russia.

I am not sure that Stalin and his friends would be very pleased to-day, if we published the Lenin resolution of 1907 on political executions.

The two examples I gave you are really symbolic. They indicate a complete change in the mind of Lenin’s political party. I have
the impression that, to-day, the Communists are more Russian than Socialist, and that the spirit of Czarist autocracy and Czarist ruling methods has survived in their minds. But, what is still more disturbing is the fact that they have not the courage of their act. They find it necessary to justify brutal crimes. Not by reason of difference of opinion, which would be the reality. NO! They invent slander and calumny.

Let us take the case of our friends Alter and Erlich!

Who in this room, will believe one moment that these men—democrats of high standing—men, who have been with personal courage in the first ranks of our fight for long years, would have committed basely, and let me say, stupidly, a disgusting act of vulgar treachery?

Would Erlich and Alter have been the agents of Hitler, who has been the sadistic persecutor of their own nation and of their political friends, the oppressor of a country of which they were devoted citizens?

Nobody will believe so—even in Russia.

Nobody! Our assassinated friends had nothing in common with the Nazis, even not an idea of dictatorship of any kind and we are sure, also, that they never made any agreement with Hitler.

I shall not take your time by insisting on this aspect of the event.

The minor reasons given are still more childish, among others, that Erlich and Alter were transformed from Polish into Russian citizens, in order to give proof that they were executed by the law of their own nation.

Stalin is a better Marshall, than a political leader. In the latter, he lacks imagination. His change of civic dress reminds one of the French comedies of the last century where you see on the stage the same gentleman who is a middle-aged barber in the first scene, an old general in the following one, and a young nurse in the third.

When in the beginning of the twenty years, Stalin ordered the attack of Georgia, his native country—in opposition to the opinion of Lenin—he already employed the same system. He accused the social-democracy of Georgia with identical inventions, even with false documents, instead of saying bluntly and simply, like Bethman-Holweg did when he ordered the invasion of Belgium in 1914:

—Not kennt kein Gebot.

What I find really comical in this tragedy, is, that we also, we were accused in the same manner. We were the tools of American capitalism and British greediness. We were the traitors of the international proletariat!
But twenty and twenty-five years later, the same treachery was committed by Stalin himself and his devoted friends, and today we may state with a certain irony, that he does what we did, with the difference that if he had understood his position better in 1932, we probably would not have had a second war.

I do not argue that Russia alone is responsible for these events, but I’m sure that a more democratic minded Russia would probably have played a better part in the history of mankind since 1918 than what we have seen till now.

I want now, in the light of the last events, to say more.

The execution of Erlich and Alter is not an accident. It is not a political error, committed in a time of special disturbance and passion. This execution is part of a system.

A number of Social-democrats have been executed, systematically since the 17th of September, 1939. They all belonged either to the P.P.S. of Poland or to the Jewish “Bund,” and they have all played a remarkable part in our labor movement for democracy against Fascism and Hitlerism.

Over two hundred members of the local “Bund” Committees and Jewish trade unionists of the towns of Eastern Poland were arrested by the Soviet authorities immediately after the Red Army occupied these towns. The fate of all those comrades is still unknown. The majority of them are probably no longer alive.

Such are the facts, and I ask you:

—Have we the right to state here our indignation and our protest?

I know, we are placed in a difficult position.

If we protest, we shall be accused in certain quarters of public opinion that we are trying to disrupt the allied front—that we do not consider with sufficient reticence the big part played by the Russian Army in our common fight for liberation.

If we do not protest, we must consider ourselves cowards—and traitors to our friends’ sacred memory.

We accept for ourselves, this dreadful dilemma, and shall not hesitate one moment.

We are not cowards, and have no intention to play here a part of resignation which is not ours. We refuse to remain mute, when allies commit such errors and such crimes.
The Communists of Moscow may know also that our friends here are not ready in the future to bow their heads before violence, slander or execution.

The Labor Class of the Western countries will not abandon its principles, neither under pressure of Hitlerism, nor under pressure of men who claim to be better Socialists than we are.

Political experience has shown, for twenty years, that the future of mankind will be and must be a development of democracy, and not of tyranny. Nations in the whole-world expect security and all citizens of our modern world: liberty.

I have still another hope to express.

I hope, for the honor of the Second International and the "Bund," that the documents concerning this political tragedy will soon be published, and I am sure that, after the war, the occasion will be offered to repeat to Stalin the old words which are now new ones and which, every civilized man knows by tradition:

—What hast Thou done? What hast Thou done? The voice of Thy brother's blood crieth unto me, from the ground.

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