A MAGAZINE WRITTEN, PRINTED AND ILLUSTRATED BY THE CHILDREN OF THE MODERN SCHOOL, STELTON, N. J.
The Jewish Labor and Political Archives houses a large collection of materials on anarchist movements across the world. Included in this collection are materials relating to the Ferrer Modern School in Stelton, New Jersey. Founded in 1915, the school was named after Francisco Ferrer, a Spanish anarchist and educationist who established a network of secular, private, libertarian schools in Barcelona. Ferrer was executed in 1909 after being convicted of orchestrating a series of insurrections. His death led to an international outcry and the founding of schools following his educational principles. In Ferrer’s words, “The whole value of education consists in respect for the physical, intellectual, and moral faculties of the child...education is not worthy of the name unless it be stripped of all dogmatism, and unless it leaves to the child the direction of its powers and is content to support them in their manifestations.”

THE FERRER MODERN SCHOOL IN STELTON, NJ

The tenets of the Ferrer Modern School in Stelton were geared toward the development of self-activity, creativeness, judgement, self-reliance, and strength of character. The school included an assembly room for singing, dancing, and dramatic activities; a craft, weaving, and art room; a library; a room for study; a print shop; and a shop for wood and metal craft. Students were encouraged to “do anything their inventive and creative minds may fancy.” One such activity was the publication of *Voice of the Children*, a book of poetry and accompanying linocuts entirely written, illustrated, and printed by the students with no assistance or suggestion by any teachers or members of the staff.
HOW I COPED WITH EXAMINING TRAGIC DOCUMENTS

Sarah Hudes writes about her experience as a Project Conservator working on physically preserving collections for the Jewish Labor and Political Archives digitization project.

by Sarah Hudes, Bard College Class of 2023

One of the first rules of conservation I was taught: remove any non-paper from the documents. Over time, I collected dozens of paper clips, yellowed pieces of tape, and ribbons. I found the debris beautiful; I found it wove an additional story that words couldn’t. Edges of letters reinforced with tape, or manuscripts with a dozen more staples than necessary—these were all extra steps to make sure messages were received intact. I hated to discard these little things that revealed parts of human nature, so they piled up on my desk. And sometimes, in between boxes, I would make paper clip chains to decorate my desk.

To me, conservation, especially Jewish conservation, is all about giving dignity to memory. In one of the letters I conserved during my time at YIVO, a woman quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Natural History of Intellect.” She includes the excerpt: “Without memory all life and thought were an unrelated succession. As gravity holds matter from flying off into space, so memory gives stability to knowledge; it is the cohesion which keeps things from falling into a lump, or flowing into waves.”

In my time working as a paper conservator on the Bund archive, I learned many technical skills, but most of all I gained a glimpse into the thousands of words, letters, receipts, and stories that made up history. Conservation is a symbiotic relationship between the conservator and the documents—it gifted me knowledge, memory of the past, and in return I was lucky enough to gift the documents new life.
YIVO WELCOMES YOUR SUPPORT OF THE JEWISH LABOR AND POLITICAL ARCHIVES PROJECT (JLPA)

As of December 31, 2023, the project has raised over $2.5 Million towards its $8.5 Million goal. This diverse collection includes items related to the Holocaust, labor unions, Jewish political activism, and much more. Together they offer invaluable insights into how Jews in Europe and the United States responded to the momentous events of the 20th century.

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

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

For more information and naming opportunities, please contact Melissa S. Cohen at 212.294.6156 or via email at mcohen@yivo.org.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

YIVO’s Jewish Labor and Political Archives (JLPA) encompasses more than 100 collections (3.5 million pages of documents). The materials cover geographic locations across the United States and Europe from 1870 to 1992. They are rich in correspondence between major political and labor leaders; materials about revolutionary cells; illegal press and pamphlets circulated during the Holocaust, manuscripts of speeches delivered by figures in the Jewish Labor Bund; leaflets and flyers calling for protests and boycotts; posters advertising rallies and marches; and sound recordings of members of the US labor movement.

The collections illustrate how the transnational activities of the Jewish working class were instrumental in the international labor movement. Jews who immigrated to the United States during the period of mass immigration brought their political ideologies, social consciousness, and demand for labor reform to the new and fertile ground of the American working class, joining other ethnic groups in the fight for fair wages and workers’ rights. The collections provide valuable insights on the impact of the Jewish immigrant community on American culture and serve as a bridge to understanding the evolution and diversity of the American Jewish experience.