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SOVIET RUSSIA Arrests
HENRYK EHRLICH
and VICTOR ALTER
Noted Polish Socialist Leaders

The story of the beloved leaders of Jewish labor in Poland. Statement by the Polish Embassy in the United States and by prominent American labor and political leaders.

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Published by the _____
**AMERICAN DELEGATION OF THE GENERAL
JEWISH WORKERS UNION OF POLAND**
175 East Broadway New York, N. Y.

2291/186

1941. In. 111.



VICTOR ALTER



HENRYK EHRLICH

FOREWORD

Word recently reached the United States that two of the foremost leaders of Polish-Jewish labor and of the world socialist movement, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, were arrested at Kouibyshev, temporary Soviet capital. News of the sudden and utterly inexplicable arrest of these internationally-known men who are Polish citizens was transmitted officially to the *American Delegation of the General Jewish Workers Union of Poland* by the Polish Embassy in Washington.

To American labor, particularly to the organized Jewish workers in the United States, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter need no introduction. Beloved and respected by millions of Jewish and Polish workers in their own country, their names are known wherever men and women struggle heroically for decency, democracy and freedom.

Ehrlich and Alter were among the first labor leaders in Poland to organize the widespread Polish resistance to the Nazis. When Germany attacked Poland in the month of September, 1939, they left Warsaw for the Eastern provinces of Poland in order to organize and continue there the struggle against Hitler's invading hordes. When these provinces were occupied by Soviet Russia, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter attempted to return to Warsaw in order to lead the underground movement of the Polish workers against

the Nazi invaders. On their way, however, they were arrested by the Russian G.P.U. and kept imprisoned by Soviet authorities for two years.

In September 1941, after the conclusion of the Russo-Polish pact, they were released at the request of the Polish Government-in-Exile functioning from London. Immediately upon their release Ehrlich and Alter issued an appeal to all Jewish citizens of Poland residing on Soviet territory to volunteer in the Polish army that was being organized in Russia, urging them to carry on a common fight with the Red Army against Nazi aggression. In the meantime the Polish Government invited these two indefatigable fighters against fascism to come to London and take part in the work of the temporary Polish Parliament as representatives of the Jewish citizens of Poland.

The news that Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter would soon resume their activities caused widespread satisfaction in liberal and labor circles in the United States and elated the Jewish and Polish masses of the Underground anti-Nazi movement of Poland. From all parts of the world they received many congratulatory messages and cables. On December 15, 1941, however, the Polish Ambassador in Washington received a cable informing him that Ehrlich and Alter were re-arrested in Kouibyshev on December 4, 1941. The arrest was carried out in a mysterious manner and thus far all attempts on the part of the Polish Ambassador in Russia, Professor Kot, to communicate with Ehrlich and Alter failed. Although the Polish Ambassador was permitted to supply the prisoners with food he was denied permission to speak to them.

The arrest by the Soviet Government of these two ardent and prominent fighters against Hitlerism at a time when Soviet Russia is carrying on a life-and-death struggle against the Nazi armies caused deep concern in labor circles in the United States. Many Jewish and labor leaders, upon learning the tragic and baffling news, immediately sent telegrams to Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Ambassador in Washington, asking him to intervene in behalf of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter.

We present here to the people of the United States the case of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter.

HENRYK EHRLICH and VICTOR ALTER

WHEREVER human beings suffer, wherever men and women struggle for freedom and equality the names of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter are revered and beloved. Leaders of the Jewish Workers' Union of Poland, they will loom large in the history of Poland's struggle for liberty and independence.

Ehrlich was born in 1882 in the city of Lublin, Poland, when that country was still groaning under the yoke of Czarist oppression. As a high school youth in his teens he joined the underground Revolutionary Student's Organization 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 great oratorical and writing talents placed him among the top leadership of the entire Russian Socialist movement.

From 1902 until his arrest by the Russians in 1939, forsaking his personal career—the comfortable life of a successful attorney—for the precarious and dangerous existence of a revolutionist Ehrlich 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*. From *Nasze Haslo*, after suffering arrest and exile, he went in 1912 to edit the large Russian daily newspaper *Dien* while at the same time taking charge of the theoretical organ of the General Jewish Workers Union, *Die Zeit*. The outbreak of the World War in 1914 finds him the editor of the socialist weekly, *Yevreiskia Vesti*.

Like all great revolutionary leaders Henryk Ehrlich suffered torture and persecution in Czarist Russia. 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 Ehrlich was placed by the Czarist regime on trial for belonging to the revolutionary and "subversive" General Jewish Workers Union, the *Bund*.

Neither prison nor Czarist persecution, however, could break Ehrlich's spirit and courage. In recognition of his services to the cause of labor he was elected to the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Party and appointed by the *Bund* as its representative to the Social Democratic faction in the Czarist *Duma*.

During the Russian Revolution of 1917 Ehrlich became a member of the editorial staff of the central organ of the Russian Social Democratic Party, *Rabochaya Gazetta*, 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 Labor Council and also a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Council of Russia.

Appointed by the Council of Workers' Soviets as a member of a delegation that went to Europe to organize the famous International Socialist Peace Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, Henryk Ehrlich visited Norway, England, France, Italy and gained the respect and admiration of the democratic and labor movements in those countries.

* * *

The life of Victor Alter parallels in many respects that of Henryk Ehrlich. Born in 1890 in Mlawa, Poland, he, too, joined at an early age—in 1905—the underground youth movement. Constantly harassed by the Czarist police and unable to continue his studies in Russian-Poland, Alter went to Belgium where he studied engineering at the Polytechnic Institute. Upon his graduation, however, instead of pursuing the profession of engineer he joined the General Jewish Workers Union where he was soon elected as a member of the Central Executive Committee.

Victor Alter is perhaps one of the most talented Jewish labor journalists and writers. His numerous contributions in the Polish, French and Jewish languages include such well-known works as *Labor Co-operation*, *The Struggle for Socialism* and *The Man in Society*.

When the first World War came to an end in 1918 and Poland was granted independence by the Versailles Treaty both Ehrlich and Alter returned to their country from exile. Both men settled in Warsaw and soon became not only the most prominent leaders of the Jewish working masses in Poland but also the most colorful and beloved figures in the entire Polish Socialist movement. Both were elected to the City Council of Warsaw. They edited numerous Polish and Jewish newspapers and magazines published by the General Jewish Workers Union of Poland and devoted their time and energies to the re-building of the political, economic and cultural life of about four million Jews of Poland.

As a member of the Executive Committee of the Socialist International Henryk Ehrlich, together with such men as Leon Blum and Otto Bauer, struggled fiercely against the spread of Nazism and fascism in various parts of Europe. Together with Victor Alter he also protested and fought vigorously against the pro-fascist tendencies in Polish governing circles. The working people of Poland, Jews and non-Jews alike, gradually came to know the names of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter. The work of these two indefatigable workers for decency, democracy and justice was not in vain. In 1939, several months before the outbreak of the present war, the *Bund*, the party to which they belonged, received a majority of all Jewish votes in the municipal elections in Poland. In the month of August of the same year, just before Germany invaded Poland, they issued an appeal to the workers of Poland to struggle relentlessly against the scourge of Hitlerism—an appeal that is still being carried out by the underground Jewish heroes in the Polish ghettos and by the Polish workers outside the ghettos.

THE POLISH EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON ANNOUNCES THE ARREST OF EHRLICH AND ALTER IN RUSSIA

The following letter announcing the arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter in Kouibyshev, temporary Soviet capital, was received by the American Delegation of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland from the Polish Embassy in Washington.

December 16, 1941

POLISH EMBASSY
WASHINGTON
2640—16th Street, N. W.
738/SZ-1279

Dear Sir: *Mbl. Jag.*

In reference to your letter of December 8, 1941, concerning the case of Mssrs. Ehrlich and Alter I must inform you with sorrow of the news we received yesterday by cable.

Mssrs. Ehrlich and Alter were arrested by the Soviet authorities in Kouibyshev on December 4.

Our Embassy as well as our Ambassador, Professor Kot, intervened at once asking for the release of the prisoners as well as for the right to see them by a representative of the Embassy and to send them packages of food and clothing. After the elapse of a few days the local authorities granted the permission to send them food.

I am convinced that the Embassy will intervene further and I hope that its efforts will be successful and that in the near future the arrested men will be released.

Cordially yours,

For the Ambassador of the Polish Republic
M. KWAPISZEWSKI,
Minister Plenipotentiary Counsellor
of the Embassy.

(Translation from the Polish)

APPEALS on Behalf of HENRYK EHRlich and VICTOR ALTER to MAXIM LITVINOFF, Soviet Ambassador in Washington, to CORDELL HULL, U. S. Secretary of State, and to the Soviet Government.

*From the Editor-in-Chief of
The Jewish Daily Forward*

December 17, 1941

Sent to:

American Embassy
Kouibyshev, U. S. S. R.

and:

Maxim Litvinoff
Russian Embassy
Washington, D. C.

I have just learned of the arrest of two correspondents of the *Jewish Daily Forward* in Kouibyshev, Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Will highly appreciate your intercession in their behalf. Please reply.

AB. CAHAN
Editor-in-Chief
Jewish Daily Forward

From the Workmen's Circle

December 19, 1941

Secretary of State Cordell Hull
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

We are sending you a copy of a cablegram sent to the Soviet government through its Ambassador at Washington, Maxim Litvinoff, regarding Victor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, who during their visits to the United States were active in behalf of our organization. The contents of the cablegram are as follows:

The Workmen's Circle, which is a fraternal organization representing 250,000 Jewish working people in the United States, was elated several months ago to hear the news that a number of arrested Socialists from Poland were liberated in Soviet Russia, among them the well known to us and beloved in the United States, Victor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich.

To our great sorrow we learned from the American press today that Victor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich were again arrested. Our organization and membership are vitally interested in the valiant fight that Soviet Russia is conducting against Hitler and the Nazi regime. Victor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich are known to everyone as courageous and steadfast fighters against fascism. We appeal through you to the Soviet Government to set them free. We hope to be gladdened by the receipt of such news.

WORKMEN'S CIRCLE
175 East Broadway, N. Y. C.
J. WEINBERG, *President*
J. BASKIN, *General Secretary*

*From the Co-Operative Commonwealth
Federation of Canada*

December 22, 1941

Mr. Maxim Litvinoff
Ambassador for the U. S. S. R.

Washington, U. S. A.

Have been informed of recent second arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, two leaders of the Jewish socialist movement in Poland. Very disturbed at this arrest of two well known labor leaders who in recent manifesto to Jewish people called for every possible sacrifice in war against Hitler and who have been appointed respectively members of the Polish Government and National Council in Exile. We have unshaken confidence in their loyalty to our common cause in this war and therefore plead on behalf of the National Executive of the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation for their immediate release.

DAVID LEWIS
National Secretary, C. C. F.

*From the Union for the Protection
Of the Human Person*

December 23, 1941

Honorable Cordell Hull
Secretary of State
Washington, D. C.

The Union for the Protection of the Human Person by International Social and Economic Cooperation herewith kindly asks you to consider the case of two prominent Polish socialist leaders, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, recently arrested by Soviet authorities probably in Kouibyshev. In the autumn of 1939 they were arrested during the Russian occupation of eastern Poland but were released later on. We therefore beg you to use all your influence in order to obtain the release of the two prominent democratic leaders whose arrest we are convinced must be due to regrettable misunderstanding.

FOR THE UNION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

HENRY SMITH LEIPERT
Chairman

From the Jewish Writers' Union

December 24, 1941

Maxim Litvinoff
Russian Embassy
Washington, D. C.

and

Russian Government
Kouibyshev, U. S. S. R.

The Union of Jewish Writers of America was shocked by news of second arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, famous leaders of Jewish masses of Poland. Both well known in United States as steadfast, courageous fighters against fascism and Hitlerism. American public opinion would be pleased by news of their release. Please do utmost for our two colleagues from Poland.

DR. B. HOFFMAN, *President*
JEWISH WRITERS' UNION

*From the Amalgamated Clothing
Workers of America*

December 26, 1941

His Excellency, Maxim Litvinoff
Embassy, Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
Washington, D. C.

I take the liberty to plead for your intervention in the case of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter at present under arrest by Soviet authorities. A great many people in our organization know these men personally and are thoroughly convinced of their absolute loyalty to the democratic cause which animates the present war against Hitler and Hitlerism. News of the release of these two men would help us all in carrying on our work in the present war effort.

JACOB S. POTOFSKY
General Secretary-Treasurer

AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS OF AMERICA
15 Union Square, N. Y. C.

*From the Knitgoods Workers'
Union, Local 155, I. L. G. W. U.*

December 30, 1941

Honorable Maxim Litvinoff
Russian Embassy
Washington, D. C.

The Knitgoods Workers' Union, Local 155, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, is at present engaged in a drive to help the victims of Nazi aggression in the Soviet Union. We have already succeeded in raising thousands of dollars for this purpose.

Together with hundreds of thousands of organized American workers, we are shocked and surprised to hear that Alter and Ehrlich have been rearrested and thrown in jail. We call on you to transmit our views to the government of the U. S. S. R.

The action of the Russian Government at the time of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in liberating Alter and Ehrlich encouraged and inspires thousands of American workers to mobilize in support of the Soviet Union.

But the tempo of united action and solidarity will be slowed down by such tactics of bad faith and duplicity. You cannot on the one hand continue to call for support in the struggle against fascism and on the other hand proceed with the jailing of devoted and tried anti-fascist fighters.

In this common struggle against the forces of fascism and nazism, Alter and Ehrlich can contribute more effectively outside of jail than inside.

Please accept this message as the sentiment of an organization devoted to the cause of labor and against injustice and oppression everywhere.

We look forward to immediate action so that all forces will be encouraged to intensify their actions for a better world.

LOUIS LEVINSON, *President*
LOUIS NELSON, *Manager*

KNITGOODS WORKERS' UNION, LOCAL 155
I. L. G. W. U., 1023 Broadway, Brooklyn, N. Y.

*From the Jewish Socialist
Verband of America*

December 31, 1941

His Excellency, Maxim Litvinoff
U. S. S. R. Embassy
Washington, D. C.

The National Executive of the Jewish Socialist Verband joins all parts of the labor and fraternal movements in calling upon Your Excellency to convey to the government of U. S. S. R. to set free the valiant fighters against fascism and reaction, the leaders of the Jewish labor movement in Poland, Ehrlich and Alter.

JEWISH SOCIALIST VERBAND OF AMERICA
175 East Broadway, N. Y. C.
S. RIFKIN, *President*
I. LEVIN-SHATZKES, *National Secretary*

*From the Polish Political
Refugees in the U. S. A.*

January 3, 1942

His Excellency, Maxim Litvinoff
Russian Embassy
Washington, D. C.

Anti-fascist political refugees from Poland expelled from their country by Hitler's invasion are shocked by arrest of Ehrlich and Alter, well known in Poland and abroad anti-fascist leaders. We beg for their liberation in the interest of the common struggle against fascism.

FEDERATION OF POLISH POLITICAL REFUGEES IN U. S. A.
PROFESSOR ALEXANDER HERTZ

*From the American Delegation of the
General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland*

Honorable Maxim Litvinoff
Russian Embassy
Washington, D. C.

Deeply shocked by second arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, prominent members of Central Committee of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland. Our two comrades are most beloved leaders of Jewish socialist movement of Poland. They gained the confidence and respect of vast majority of working population of Poland because of many years stubborn fight against reaction and fascism and deep devotion to working masses. Largely due to lifework of now arrested Ehrlich, Alter the Jewish working masses of Poland are now engaged together with Polish comrades in underground movement against the Nazi invader despite terror of Gestapo. That is why underground movement of Poland selected them as their representatives in Polish Parliament-in-Exile in London. In behalf of underground movement of Jewish large masses of Poland we request Russian government through you to release our comrades immediately and give them means to fulfill their mission in London which is part of our common struggle against Hitlerism and fascism.

AMERICAN DELEGATION OF GENERAL JEWISH
WORKERS' UNION OF POLAND
EMANUEL NOWOGRODSKY, *Secretary*
175 East Broadway, Room 401, N. Y. C.

What Happened to

EHRLICH and ALTER

TO DEEPEN the mystery surrounding the arrest of the two labor leaders there appeared in the American press the following dispatch from Moscow dated December 26, 1941.

"The Moscow Radio denies that Soviet authorities arrested the two Polish Jews, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter. These men were released together with other Polish prisoners of war. Although their whereabouts are unknown, we emphasize that they were not re-arrested".

Commenting editorially on this dispatch, "Nowy Swiat", the largest Polish newspaper in the United States stated on December 27:

"This bit of news from Moscow seems odd indeed. On December 16 the American Delegation of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland received an official letter from the Polish Embassy in Washington stating that Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter were re-arrested in Kouibyshev on December 4. The Embassy also stated that it received an official cable about their arrest from the Polish Government in London.

The strangeness of this broadcast is further emphasized by the fact that the Polish Ambassador in Russia, Professor Kot, informed the Polish Embassy in Washington that upon learning of the arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter he at once attempted to see them and supply them with food. After several days of delay he was denied permission to meet the prisoners *but was given the right to send them food.*

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE to receive permission to send food to two men—while being refused an opportunity to speak to them—who, the Moscow radio now declares, were never arrested and whose whereabouts are unknown?"

* * *

WHAT HAPPENED TO VICTOR ALTER AND HENRYK EHRLICH IN RUSSIA?



STATEMENT BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE ON THE EHRLICH-ALTER CASE

The Jewish Labor Committee, representing hundreds of American trade unions and other labor organizations, made several attempts to see the Soviet Ambassador in Washington in connection with the arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter.

Under date of December 29, 1941, the Committee, in its desire to be heard by the Ambassador, wrote to the Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, Mr. Anthony N. Fedotov. Mr. Fedotov wished to be informed of the subject that the delegation of the Jewish Labor Committee expected to take up with Mr. Litvinoff. The Jewish Labor Committee informed him as follows:

The arrest of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, which took place on December 4th, 1941, made a painful impression on American labor. The 500,000 organized Jewish workers in America, affiliated with the Jewish Labor Committee were shocked and grieved by this news. The Jewish Labor Committee is now in the midst of a very successful nation-wide campaign to raise funds and to mobilize the sympathies of the millions of American workers in behalf of Soviet Russia, which is now engaged in a heroic struggle against the Nazi armies.

Only a short time ago we received with enthusiasm the report that the two labor leaders mentioned above were released from their long detention. Their first statement upon their release was a fiery call to Polish Jews residing in Soviet Russia to enter the Polish armies being organized on Soviet territory to fight Nazism, alongside the heroic Red Army.

Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter are outstanding leaders in the Polish labor movement. They are also very prominent in the United States. They visited this country several times in the interests of the Polish labor movement and of the struggle against Nazism and Fascism. They gained our confidence and enjoyed our respect, which explains why their detention came as such a shocking blow to the leaders and masses of American labor.

ADOLPH HELD, *Chairman*

In reply to this request the Jewish Labor Committee received the following letter from Mr. Fedotov:

The Ambassador read your letter of December 29th and instructed me to inform you that the matter concerning the two persons mentioned in your letter was taken up with appropriate authorities in the U. S. S. R. and the Ambassador is awaiting word from Moscow.

ANTHONY N. FEDOTOV,
Secretary to the Ambassador

STATEMENT BY THE AMERICAN LABOR COMMITTEE
IN THE CASE OF

The American Labor Committee was organized in 1914 to represent the interests of American workers in their own country and abroad. It has since that time been active in the promotion of labor legislation and in the support of labor organizations in every part of the world.

On December 22, 1914, the Committee in its desire to be heard by the American people on the subject of the Jewish Labor Committee, which is now engaged in a large scale propaganda campaign in this country, requested the Secretary of the United States Department of Labor to be permitted to be heard at the hearing of the Jewish Labor Committee on December 22, 1914.

The Secretary of Labor declined the request of the American Labor Committee and advised that the hearing of the Jewish Labor Committee would be held on December 22, 1914, at the Department of Labor. The American Labor Committee is now in the midst of a large scale propaganda campaign in this country, which is now engaged in a large scale propaganda campaign in this country.

Only a short time ago the Secretary of Labor advised the American Labor Committee that the two labor leaders mentioned above were refused from their hearing. The American Labor Committee is now in the midst of a large scale propaganda campaign in this country, which is now engaged in a large scale propaganda campaign in this country.

It is also very interesting to note that the American Labor Committee is now in the midst of a large scale propaganda campaign in this country, which is now engaged in a large scale propaganda campaign in this country.

AMERICAN LABOR COMMITTEE

In reply to this request the Jewish Labor Committee received the following letter from Mr. F. Johnson:

The American Labor Committee is now in the midst of a large scale propaganda campaign in this country, which is now engaged in a large scale propaganda campaign in this country.

AMERICAN LABOR COMMITTEE