We are living in very challenging times. However, if our Jewish cultural and activist traditions have taught us nothing else, we know that where there are trials, there is also hope. And we at the Workmen’s Circle have hope and inspiration in abundance!

I am excited to share the many inspirational and exciting stories in our newsletter: the change-making activism that we have been a part of this past year, our flourishing Yiddish programs, our schools and the heartening outcomes we are seeing from our educational endeavors. With our community standing up and speaking out across the country in support of immigrant and labor rights, gender equality, civil liberties, and against fascism and bigotry (to name but a few of our campaigns), it is our children who are inspiring us every day with their creativity, insight, passion for what is right, and growing leadership skills.

At the Workmen’s Circle, we are fortunate to find our inspiration, and indeed our yeruše, in our founders’ values and actions — their activist traditions, their unwavering commitment to fight for economic justice for all, and their drive to create active coalitions of allies to stand together in building a shener un besere velt far ale. These values guide us as strongly today as they did over a century ago. And it is exciting to see the Workmen’s Circle’s renewal aligning with the activism upon which we were built.

In Solidarity,

Ann Toback
Activism at the Workmen’s Circle | Working for Justice!

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries our Eastern European ancestors perfected the art of resistance and activism through an enormous body of work: political writings, verse, literature, humor, song, and art. Virtually all areas of cultural expression intersected with Yiddishkayt activism, borne of the need to engage with many different oppressors.

He has called for mass deportations, cutbacks or total elimination of workers’ rights to collectively bargain, decreases of health and safety regulations, the elimination of the Affordable Care Act and its related protection for health insurance coverage, and downgraded Wage and Hour protections. In response, at the Workmen's Circle, we are following in the proud activist tradition of our founders and taking to the streets, to the phones, and internet, all in support of a better world for all! Here's our roster of protest activities, which last November 29 included the civil disobedience and arrest of our Executive Director, Ann Toback and our Director of Social Justice, Larry Moskowitz.

- Petition Against the Conference of Presidents Event Held at a Trump Hotel | 12/6/2016
- The March for Immigrant New York | 12/18/2016
- National Women’s March | 1/21/2017
- Vigil to Support Muslim and Immigrant Rights | 1/25/2017
- March to Support Immigrants | 1/29/2017
- Jewish Rally for Refugees | 2/12/2017
- Brooklyn March to Support Immigrant Rights | 3/5/2017
- Public Advocate Letitia James Press Conference Boycotting Builders of the Border Wall | 3/7/2017
- Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Commemoration and Action in Support of Immigrant and Worker Rights and Safety | 3/24/2017
- National May Day Mobilization | 5/1/2017
- Rally for Low Wage Airport Workers | 5/9/2017
- Rally in Support of Fair Scheduling Bill for Fast Food and Retail Workers | 5/24/2017
- Signing of Fair Scheduling Bill for Fast Food and Retail Workers | 5/30/2017
- Participant at the People’s Summit in Chicago | 6/9-11/2017
- Rally in Support of Mayor’s Control of Schools | 6/19/2017
- Demonstration for Refugee Rights on World Immigration Day | 6/20/2017
- NYC LGBT Pride March | 6/25/2017
- Rally in Support of Healthcare For All | 6/28/2017
- Organized Coalition of 50+ Jewish Organizations for Nationwide Petition/Resistance Campaign to Stop the Spread of Fascism | 8/17/2017
- Joined Picket Line in Charter Communications/Spectrum Striking Workers | 8/22/2017

The Workmen’s Circle Social Justice Action Center

Before Bernie, There Was The Workmen’s Circle

Today, there is a rising tide of activism, especially among young Jews, who are both progressive, and if not socialist, open to the ideas of Socialism. Ironically, this growing activism was catalyzed by a senior citizen Socialist Jew from Brooklyn: Bernie Sanders, whose campaign for President attracted millions.

Today in the United States we are facing oppression on a massive scale. In the past months we have witnessed government-driven legislative rollbacks and executive orders spearheaded by President Trump with the goal of preventing refugees from accessing the safety of our shores.

In 2016 and 2017 the Workmen’s Circle built exciting partnerships with many youth-focused organizations, with the goal of engaging these young adults in our progressive movement. Many joined our on-the-street activism in the past year at early morning Fight For $15 marches in Brooklyn, Midtown and Harlem, and strategized with us as we developed next steps in our campaigns. We have now launched the Workmen’s Circle Social Justice Action Center here within our offices, with the goal of providing youth-focused organizations with the facilities from which to work. Four innovative and youth-oriented activist groups are in residence with their staff, lay leaders and volunteers using our offices and resources free of charge (in addition to our large rooms for their many meetings and classes), and will become part of a Workmen’s Circle-organized progressive youth movement here in our space. We welcome them and look forward to their contributions to the world!

Habonim Dror is an autonomous Labor Zionist youth movement, the members of which strive for the concrete expression of its ideals in their own lives and society.

Hashomer Hatzair is a progressive Zionist youth movement specializing in youth-led experiential Jewish education, based on the values of equity, community and social responsibility.

If Not Now fights for a vibrant, liberated Jewish Community that supports freedom and dignity for all Israelis and Palestinians.

The Brooklyn Institute for Social Research is an alternative higher education organization offering a variety of courses in the humanities and sciences, and supporting socially relevant dialogue within the communities it serves.
The Workmen’s Circle 2018 Jewish Journey to Poland

The Workmen’s Circle is sponsoring a once-in-a-lifetime Jewish journey to Poland!

For ten days, we will travel throughout Poland and visit areas that were once centers of Jewish life, high culture and social activism. Led by expert guides, including academics, historians, authors, and special guests, we will immerse ourselves in Poland Jewish culture and connect to our enduring yiddishkayt traditions of literature, art, music and activism from centuries past to today.

Our trip is expressly scheduled to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising on April 19, and participants will partake in special commemorative events in honor of this important anniversary. Highlights of our tour will include:

• Exploring Warsaw, a city of contrasts, once a center of Jewish life. Starting with a walking tour from the Jewish Cemetery on Okopowa Street, to the Nozyk Synagogue (the only synagogue to survive the war), to Mila 18, headquarters headquarters for the Warsaw Ghetto’s Jewish Partisans, now an important memorial and final resting place for many of the martyrs of the Ghetto Uprising.

• Visiting the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews as special guests of Program Director of the Core Exhibit, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

• Traveling through Lodz, a 19th century industrial “promise land” of opportunities for European Jews, with a guest scholar, including visits to the former Lodz Ghetto and the Radegast Memorial.

• Visiting Lublin, once a center of Jewish printing, now an artist colony, and Zamosc, a 19th century center of the Haskalah (enlightenment movement) and the birthplace of I.L Peretz.

• Exploring Krakow, the historic center of European Jewry, and now one of the main centers of Jewish renewal in Poland. We will take a guided walking tour of Warsaw Old Town, Market Square, Collegium Maius, and Royal Castle grounds.

• And together, as a caring and supportive community, we will memorialize and reflect on the Shoah, with guided walks through Majdanek, Auschwitz and Birkenau. We will contemplate the tragedy of the Holocaust and together honor the memory of the millions who were murdered in this still unimaginable horror.

For more information on this once-in-a-lifetime trip, please contact Dave Dossick at 212-889-6800, ext. 813 or at ddossick@circle.org.

Warsaw Commemoration | A Solemn Remembrance

An extraordinary act of Jewish resistance during World War II, The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 19, 1943 – May 16, 1943 was commemorated at Warsaw Ghetto Memorial Plaza, Riverside Park in New York City on April 19. The Workmen’s Circle, the Congress for Jewish Culture and the Jewish Labor Committee held a moving tribute to the heroes of this historically significant event. As the first organization to commemorate the uprising in the early 1950s, we continue this tradition today in person and through social media, having reached over 600,000 people over two years, thousands of whom have responded and shared the message of heroism and sacrifice.
The Workmen’s Circle is pleased to present our fall event calendar showcasing our rich Jewish cultural and progressive heritage, and featuring an array of programs to appeal to all of our members and their many interests. From author lectures to historical commemorative events to Jewish food-focused evenings, there is something for everyone. These events are open to the public for a modest fee, but many are gratis to you or at a reduced fee as part of your Workmen’s Circle membership.

**Yiddish for Dogs**

October 15, 2017 | 10:00am – 12:00pm
Location: Central Park, NYC | $12 (Members free)
We love Yiddish! It’s a vibrant and wonderful part of our daily lexicon, and what better way to share our Yiddishkayt than to learn and teach it with our best four-legged friends? Register for our program along with your gut hunt, and with the help of a master dog trainer, teach your pup some basic obedience skills in our mamaloshn! Noshes provided for people and canines alike, as well as special gifts for dogs.

**Activist Book Talks**

October 24, 2017 | 6:30 – 8:00pm at the WC
$10 (Members free)
As part of our Activist Book Series, we continue our regular labor and activist-focused discussions by welcoming Daniel Katz, author of the book, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism*.

**Inspiring Jewish Cooking: Spices, Herbs, and More!**

October 19, 2017 | 7:00 – 8:30pm
Location: Emma’s Torch, 293 Van Brunt St.
Brooklyn, New York | $50 ($35 for Members)
Spices and herbs have a significant place in Jewish foods dating back to Moses’ exodus from Egypt. Today, heritage spices are being used to create a new modern Jewish cuisine. As part of our Taste of Jewish Culture Series, join us at Emma’s Torch Café in Brooklyn where Chefs Lior Lev Sercarz and Alex Raij will take us on a tour of international Jewish cooking.

Growing up on a kibbutz in Israel, Chef Sercarz takes his cooking passion from his Middle Eastern background, while Chef Raij was inspired by *Aroma of Aleppo*, a cookbook written by a Syrian Jewish home cook. Emma’s Torch is an organization that trains refugees in food service jobs. Join us for great food, inspiring stories and Jewish connections.

To RSVP please visit emmastorch.org/events or email events@circle.org

**Yiddish Schmooze: Yiddish Songs of Struggle and Social Justice**

Sunday, November 5, 2017
4:00 – 5:30pm at the WC
Program presented in Yiddish | $10 (Members free)
Join fellow Yiddishists for an afternoon of music and singing in Yiddish! Led by Paula Teitelbaum, the evening’s songs will range from poetic musings on the state of the world to anthems of the labor movement. Each song will be introduced in its historical and literary context.

**Thanksgiving: A History of Jews and Immigrants Through Food**

November 15, 2017 | 7:00 – 8:30pm
Location: Emma’s Torch, 293 Van Brunt St.
Brooklyn, New York | $35 ($15 for Members)
The Thanksgiving holiday highlights the importance of family, food, and freedom — familiar icons in our Jewish cultural traditions. As part of our Taste of Jewish Culture Series, join us for a first of its kind Pre-Thanksgiving celebration at Emma’s Torch Café, featuring a Thanksgiving-style dinner prepared by their refugee student-chefs. We will share a delicious meal highlighting Jewish cuisine alongside the multicultural heritage foods of these budding chefs, all celebrating the diverse community that makes America truly stronger.

**Activist Book Talks**

November 21, 2017 | 6:30 – 8:00pm at the WC
$10 (Members free)
As part of our Activist Book Series, we are pleased to present journalist Juan Gonzalez, author of the new book: *Reclaiming Gotham: Bill de Blasio and the Movement to End America’s Tale of Two Cities* to speak about his book and lead a conversation around economic justice and class issues in the United States today.

**Founding of the Jewish Labor Bund 120th Anniversary**

October 22, 2017 | 1:00 – 3:00pm
Location: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 15 West 16th Street, NYC
$20 (YIVO and WC Members $10)
Celebrate the 120th Anniversary of the founding of the Jewish Labor Bund, a social movement that has been intertwined with the Workmen’s Circle from our beginnings to our progressive activism in 2017 and beyond. This is a co-sponsored program with YIVO that will examine the history and legacy of the Bund and its enduring influence on activism today.

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November 21, 2017 | 6:30 – 8:00pm at the WC
$10 (Members free)
As part of our Activist Book Series, we are pleased to present journalist Juan Gonzalez, author of the new book: *Reclaiming Gotham: Bill de Blasio and the Movement to End America’s Tale of Two Cities* to speak about his book and lead a conversation around economic justice and class issues in the United States today.
The Workmen's Circle Winter Benefit  
November 30, 2017 | 6:00 – 9:00pm  
Location: Helen Mills Event Space and Theater  
In appreciation of her many achievements on behalf of workers and the longstanding relationship between the Union and the Workmen's Circle, join us as we honor Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers.

For tickets contact:  
Jaime Gorelick at 212-889-6800 ext. 821

Activist Book Talks  
December 20, 2017 | 6:30 – 8:00pm at the WC  
$10 (Members free)  
As part of our Activist Book Series, we will welcome Linda Gordon, author of the book: The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition. Linda will lead a most timely and critical conversation around the historic and current rise of white supremacy and Fascism in the United States.

Latkepalooza!  
December 10, 2017 | 11:00am – 1:00pm  
Location: Museum of Jewish Heritage  
36 Battery Place, NYC  
Tickets: $10 (Children and grandchildren of WC/MJH/NYTF members free)  
Get ready for the festival of lights! Music, food and hands-on activities for families with children ages 3-10 await. Play dreidels, decorate menorahs, nosh on latkes and jelly donuts, and so much more. Come for a snapshot of our upbeat, experiential learning program that takes place year round in our Workmen’s Circle cultural schools.

Unless otherwise noted all events take place at the Workmen’s Circle (“WC”) 247 West 37th Street with wine and light bites.  
To RSVP for an event, please go to “Events” at circle.org, email events@circle.org, or call Marisa Dolkart at 212-889-6800, ext. 820.
It's Better in Yiddish!

WHY

Yiddish is everywhere in our daily lexicon! The Workmen’s Circle offers a friendly and engaging learning environment for every level, from beginners to life-long speakers.

WHAT

Classes take place at our headquarters in Midtown Manhattan at 247 West 37th Street and online the world over! To register visit www.circle.org, email info@circle.org or call us at 212.889.6800 x820.

WHERE

For complete Yiddish class descriptions please visit our website: www.circle.org/what-we-do/yiddish-language

A TASTE OF YIDDISH

The Workmen’s Circle is proud to co-sponsor these beginner-level courses on the art of Yiddish conversation with the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene. Prior knowledge or the ability to read Yiddish not required. Come learn our mamaloshn in two different (8 week) course offerings:

- **Beginners I:**
  Conversation + reading + writing + grammar. Alphabet knowledge not required.

- **Beginners II:**
  For students who have completed an elementary course.

- **Beginners III + IV:**
  Focus on conversation + grammar.

- **Intermediate I + II:**
  For students with 1-2 years of Yiddish language study.

- **Intermediate III + IV:**
  Taught almost entirely in Yiddish with focus on conversation + comprehension.

- **Advanced:**
  Taught entirely in Yiddish with focus on literature + culture.

Unless otherwise noted, rates are as follows:

- **Online classes:** $250 for WC members/$295 for non-members
- **In-person classes:** $200 for WC members/$275 for non-members

A Taste of Yiddish | Lunch and Learn

Schmooze in Yiddish with Motl Didner, NYTF Associate Artistic Director | Thursdays 12:00–1:00pm
A beginner-level course on the art of Yiddish conversation. Prior knowledge of Yiddish not required; all material in both transliteration and Yiddish alphabet. $150 tuition (includes lunch)

Explore Yiddish Songs with Zalmen Mlotek, NYTF Artistic Director | Thursdays 1:30–2:30pm
Learn popular Yiddish songs and hidden gems from Chana and Yosl Mlotek’s songbooks. Prior knowledge of Yiddish and the ability to read music not required. $150 tuition (includes lunch)

SPECIAL OFFER! Enroll in both courses for the discounted price of $250 total tuition for two great learning opportunities.
For more information and for registration, please visit www.nytf.org.
A Message From Our President

When last year I expressed how proud I was of our organization and our strong social justice activism, I truly must admit, I was not aware of how important this initiative would be.

As I have often said, when my family joined the Workmen’s Circle, we found a wonderful and special organization, with a long rich history of caring for those who most needed care. Ours was an organization founded on principles of truly helping members from cradle to grave, with strong progressive values, roots in the labor movement, encouraging the study of Yiddish language and learning through its schools and Camp Kinder Ring.

We always understood that our Workmen’s Circle was special, and quite honestly, this has never been more important than now. As many of us realize, immigrant rights, affordable health care, protection of the environment for our children, and support to our most vulnerable are now under attack.

It is my view, that at this time, our commitment to learning through our schools and Camp Kinder Ring is very important. Teaching fairness through action instills empowerment. This is what we owe to our community.

Thanks to our Executive Director Ann Toback, her staff and our Board, we have been actively addressing these difficult challenges, and we promise to continue to do so.

As symbolic of our mission, our organization uses the wonderful Yiddish phrase, a shenere un besere velt far ale...a more beautiful and better world for all. I think we all realize during difficult times, it is imperative we hold to this vision.

As always thank you for your support.

In Friendship,

Peter Pepper

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Annual Winter Benefit | Generational Activism to Union Solidarity

On November 30, 2017 please join us as we honor Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers. Randi is a lifelong union activist and a fierce advocate for educators everywhere. She has dedicated her career to fighting for workers’ rights, community engagement, and economic justice. These tenets echo the doctrines on which the Workmen’s Circle was built. We are proud to honor Randi Weingarten in appreciation of her many achievements on behalf of workers and the longstanding relationship between the Union and the Workmen’s Circle.

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At our last Annual Winter Benefit the Workmen’s Circle honored Ethel Grodzins Romm, gender equality proponent, along with her son, Dr. Joseph Romm, world-renowned climate activist. Nearly 200 guests enjoyed an evening focused on the Workmen’s Circle tradition of fun dor tsu dor, or “generation-to-generation” activism. After introductions from our own Peter Pepper and David Gelber (Executive Producer of the Emmy Award-winning series Years of Living Dangerously), whose own father was a member of the Workmen’s Circle, guests were treated to surprise congratulatory videos from two global climate activists: Vice President Al Gore and film director and conservationist James Cameron.
From Here to Halvah  |  Jewish Desserts Reimagined

For an eternity desserts have been the traditional sweet finish to any meal. The Workmen’s Circle hosted a crowd of multi-generational food lovers at Shelsky’s of Brooklyn to experience modern-day takes on some Jewish favorites. Among rainbow cookies and chocolate babka, were stout macaroons, salted caramel halvah and peach-mint rugelach. This “eat-and-think” event brought together culinary experts for a panel discussion and food purveyors to deconstruct the intimate connection Jews have with sweets, and to talk about today’s innovative Jewish dessert scene. Panelists included cookbook author Leah Koenig, food writer and reality TV judge Gabriella Gershenson, and Adina Steiman, Editor at Epicurious. Desserts were presented by Shelsky’s, Danny Macaroons, Seed + Mill, and Breads Bakery. The scene was vibrant and all left feeling “enlightened” despite the calories. Look for another dessert-focused installment of our Taste of Jewish Culture Series in the fall.

Life Member Celebration  |  An Evening with Paula Vogel

Our Life Members are the heart of the Workmen’s Circle, and their faith in our work has sustained us over these many years. In June we honored them at a special evening featuring Pulitzer prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel. Her Tony Award-winning play, Indecent, revolves around many of the same issues and interests that the Workmen’s Circle has championed since our beginnings: human rights, immigration and of course, Yiddish. Food, wine and the intriguing story of how a Yiddish play took the world by storm and made it to the Broadway stage made for a memorable event for all.
Summer Revisited

Camp Kinder Ring

This year's summer theme, Making the World a Better Place, launched the Camp Kinder Ring season with campers on the road to a wonderful 91st season. Activities and guest speaker presentations focusing on kindness, respect, anti-bullying and more were abundant as were sports, swimming in the lake, Jewish cultural activities, and making friendships and memories to last a lifetime. Next year's sign-up starts now!

Save the date: June 24, 2018

Trip to Yiddishland

Over 120 Yiddishists participated in another spectacular Trip to Yiddishland. With a growing children's program and more young people than ever, it was truly a wonderful week! From yoga in the morning to immersive Yiddish classes, and thought-provoking discussions to Klezmer, singing and dancing in the evening, everyone left exhilarated and looking forward to next year.

Save the date: August 13-19, 2018

Taste of Jewish Culture

Our Taste of Jewish Culture Street Festival on 6th Avenue had a timely new message: Diversity is Delicious. We showcased the amazing contributions immigrant communities make to our everyday lives, as over 15,000 eager eaters visited the festival's multicultural food vendors, selling unique takes on Jewish dishes. Some of our favorites were: brisket quesadillas, pastrami and sauerkraut dumplings, potato latkes with Thai chili applesauce, and babka ice cream sandwiches. The Workmen's Circle was proud to introduce its own semi-pro egg cream team: “The Shpritzers” who mixed egg creams for all (free for Dads in honor of Father's Day!). And food wasn't the only thing on the menu, musical performances by Frank London & Greg Wall and the Klezmer-rock band, Golem, accompanied Yiddish dancing in the streets.

Save the date: Sunday, June 17, 2018

Yiddish for Dogs

This summer we debuted a new program to a group of hunts and their people in Central Park, NYC: Yiddish for Dogs! Our best furry friends learned some good citizenship skills (zitz, shrai, and kum) in our mamaloshn. All noshed on rugelach, schmoozed, sniffed, and left with a new appreciation for bringing a bisl more Jewish culture into their daily lives!

Save the date: October 15, 2017

Have you considered Life Membership in the Workmen’s Circle?

Support our work to promote yiddishkayt, social justice and a better world for all while securing your membership and benefits for life. One less bill, one less worry.

Call Kathy or Maberliz at 646-291-8365 to discuss this option.
Payment plans are available.
As Jews, we have a culture and tradition rooted in ethics and activism, however, much of the work in the Jewish communal world has been focused on charity rather than change. Today teens are bombarded by serious societal issues, and they wish to be participants in addressing them, not just bystanders. We just completed a two-year pilot program, *Youth Stand Up For Justice*, which connects and teaches teens using our activist traditions and then follows up by providing an activist community for them to engage around today’s issues and together participate and lead social justice campaigns to change the world around them.

**Youth Stand Up For Justice**

starts with an experiential learning program, consisting of 3 modules: personal narrative, understanding our Jewish history, and effecting future change. Facilitated by Workmen’s Circle-trained peer educators ages 20-26, it is run year-round in partnership with existing youth programs in Jewish institutional sites such as JCCs, synagogues and summer camps. Over 600 kids, ages 12-17, have participated in the last 2 years, seeding a community for teens to collectively engage in social justice activism and helping kids claim and build on their desire to be change-makers in our world.

**Charity vs. Change**

The difference between volunteering in a soup kitchen to feed the hungry for a day versus being a part of the Fight for $15 campaign, demanding that our elected officials pass living wage legislation, and by doing so, decrease the number of people who need to use soup kitchens.

**Ready to change THE WORLD?**

Are you a college student or recent grad with a passion for social justice and Jewish progressivism who has a knack for connecting with teens?

**Join our activism program and become a peer educator.**

We’ll give you the skills you need to make our world the one you want it to be.

Two 1/2 days of training with front-line activist change-makers.

Then at least 5 visits to teen groups in the tri-state area to share what you’ve learned.

Get paid $300 to train and $150 for every outreach visit.

The more you do, the more you make!

Spark the spirit of activism in teens to make a better world!

Do you know a local college senior or recent grad who would be interested in becoming a peer educator? Clip the article and send it along to them. All training and program time is compensated and can be done while in school. Contact Larry Moskowitz at 212-889-6800 ext. 808 or lmoskowitz@circle.org for more information.

**Leave a LASTING LEGACY**

Your estate plan represents your beliefs, your activism, and your legacy. Including the Workmen’s Circle in your estate plan is a simple, yet powerful, way to invest in the next generation. If you are remembering the Workmen’s Circle in your will, trust, life insurance policy, and/or other planned gift, please let us know and thank you!

Leave a legacy gift. Be a beacon for future generations.

For more information, contact Ilana Kats, Development Officer: ikats@circle.org, 646-291-8369.
Back to School | Joyful Learning

The end of summer heralds the start of school, and the Workmen’s Circle network of 8 supplementary schools brings together hands-on Jewish cultural learning, social justice activism, music and art, Bar and Bat Mitzvah prep, holiday celebrations and a bisl Yiddish through fun and authentic experiential learning. Our program is for kids ages 5-13 and their parents. We were delighted to receive this wonderful write-up in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) after a visit at our Midtown Manhattan school.

If you know a family who should be part of our Sunday school community, please call Abbe Marcus, Education Manager, at 212-889-6800, ext. 807.

This Sunday school teaches Jewish kids Yiddish — and socialism by Ben Sales for the JTA (reprinted with permission)

NEW YORK ( JTA) — The Jewish Sunday school teacher, a black accordion strapped to her shoulders, stands before a photo of a 1927 Jewish protest in Warsaw and introduces her students to an important holiday observed by their ancestors. It isn't Passover, which has just ended, but another that is approaching in a couple weeks: May Day, the unofficial May 1 holiday celebrating workers' rights.

“Socialism is the idea that everyone should have what they need,” says the teacher, Hannah Temple, as a projector flashes images of a protest sign and Jewish immigrants marching in a labor demonstration. On the walls, multicolored signs declare “Jewish communities fight for $15” — a minimum wage campaign — “We are all workers” and “Remember the Triangle Fire,” a reference to the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire that killed 146 garment workers at a factory and galvanized the labor movement.

Temple teaches the children words to a Yiddish May Day anthem and offers a short primer on early 20th century labor activism. “We need to sleep some, we need to work some, but we need some time that's for us,” she says, describing the campaign for an eight-hour workday. She invites the few dozen students and parents in the room to a May Day protest in downtown Manhattan. A few hands go up. “Maybe?” she asks. “Maybe is great.”

The Yiddish sing-along-cum-socialist teach-in is the morning meeting of the Midtown Workmen’s Circle School, a secular Jewish Sunday school that combines Yiddish language and culture education with progressive social justice organizing. It’s one of eight such schools, called “shules,” in four states serving a total of 300 students aged 5 to 13 — teaching them everything from an Eastern European melody for the Four Questions to how to protest on behalf of underpaid fast-food workers. The curriculum ends with a joint Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony for the seventh-graders.

Though it's more than a century old, the Workmen’s Circle, a left-wing Eastern European Jewish culture and social justice group, has seen its fundraising and school enrollment grow in recent years. Part of the boost, leaders say, was due to the diametrically opposed presidential campaigns of Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-VT., and Donald Trump. Sanders, says executive director Ann Toback, awakened American Jews to secular, progressive Jewish culture conveyed with a heavy Brooklyn accent. Trump, she adds, sparked Jews on the left to organize in protest.

Workmen’s Circle isn’t shy about its political leanings. Following the presidential election, it made a lapel pin bearing the faces of Sanders and Trump accompanied by the words “mensch” and “putz,” respectively. “Before there was Bernie, there was the Workmen's Circle,” Toback says. “Is there a way we can connect to so many of his followers? The values that he based his campaign on are really the inherent values of the Workmen's Circle and our movement.”

In the five-month period after the election, the group saw its donations double over the same stretch the previous year. It has opened five of its eight Sunday schools in the past three years. The biggest, in Boston, has more than 100 students. In May, the Manhattan school will be hosting a spring open house for the first time. “More people are coming to us looking for — ‘I want to engage in social justice activism,’” says Beth Zasloff, director of the Midtown school. “I know that for me, after the election, having a community, having a place to go where I know we can address these issues with our children, felt extremely important.”

The Midtown school, like its counterparts, eschews traditional Jewish Sunday school mainstays like learning Hebrew or studying ritual and prayer. Israel isn’t a focus. Workmen’s Circle has partnered in the past both with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, a left-wing group that...
focuses on domestic issues, and Habonim Dror, the left-wing Labor Zionist movement. Instead, kids take three types of classes: arts and crafts, Yiddish language and history, and culture and social justice.

Last Sunday, the three students in the Yiddish class were reading a play, in transliteration, about a robot. The teacher would read a line in Yiddish and translate, which a student repeated. The arts and crafts class was making banners for an immigrant rights protest. In the history and culture class, four students prepared for their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs next year. For the ceremony, they’ll do a research project on their family history and interview an elderly relative. Later that Sunday, this year’s Bar Mitzvah class made presentations on children who were killed in the Holocaust.

One student said knowing Yiddish made her feel like her friends at school who hail each other in the hallways in Bengali. Another said her favorite Workmen’s Circle experience was participating in the Jan. 21 Women’s March in New York City. And for some, the appeal lies in attending a Sunday school that avoids the standard memorization of Hebrew prayers. “This is secular, and I’m not super religious in terms of my beliefs about God,” says Moxie Strom. “So it’s nice to have something that doesn’t focus so much on ‘God said this and God said that.’”

“There’s so much culture they’re missing,” says Kolya Borodulin, the group’s Director of Yiddish Programming, who grew up in Birobidzhan, the Soviet Union’s Jewish Autonomous Region. “Jewish holidays, traditions described by famous Yiddish authors — any contemporary issues you name — are reflected in the Yiddish language. So you can see this parallel universe in Yiddish.” Even if they go to eight years of Sunday school, Borodulin says, the students are unlikely to come out speaking proficient Yiddish, or even reading a page in the language’s Hebrew script. The school’s aim, rather, is to reinforce a cultural and ideological Jewish identity in its students. The aspiration is that years after they leave, they will be able to connect to their Judaism on holidays, in song and on the picket line.

“What resonates most with them is the social justice and having a sense of what we believe in,” says Debbie Feiner, whose two sons, ages 9 and 12, attend the Midtown school. The older one, she says, understands that “when you see some injustice, you need to take action. He can’t be a passive bystander, and he’ll connect that with his Judaism.”