

## NATHAN MALYN'S REPLY TO TRIBUTES PAID HIM AT THE TESTIMONIAL DINNER

Given in his honor by

Branch 45 of the Workmen's Circle - January 4, 1959

Dear Friends and Honored Guests:

I thank you all for the kind words you have said about me tonight. I know that many have come from far distances to be with me tonight and in this severe weather at that. Such expressions of friendship will never be forgotten.

In the course of 50 years I very seldom spoke about myself. I will do so tonight with discretion. Fifty years in the labor movement portends a life rich in experiences. I cannot boast these things about myself. The truth of the matter is that I was a drudge all my life, working hard for everything I wanted to know. I plugged along and took things in their stride.

My life reached out into the misty reaches of feudalism as a background. In the forefront is the atomic age, with all its glory and all its promises and apprehensions. In between those two currents flows my life. I can remember the stories told of my grandfather, a village tailor, who used to go to the lord's manor to sew for his serfs. I remember the stories told by my father of his soldiering for Czar Nicholas the First for 25 years of his lifetime on the Caucasus. How it took him a whole year to reach his destination on foot. He told stories of the Cantonists, Jewish children of the poor, who were captured by the "Machers" in the Jewish communities and delivered to serve in the Russian army, so that the sons of the Balebatim could be absolved from the service. These children, 10 and 12 years old, were cajoled with all kinds of promises to turn to Christianity and finally forced with the knout to conversion. Some of them died for Kidish Hashem, but many grew up to become generals and other important Government officials. I hear my grandmother telling stories of the Polish uprisings against the Czar. I see the faces, attire and mimicries of the people on their way to the Beth Hamedrosh or Chasidim Shtibel. I see myself and other children at play in the courts and streets of my town. I see my mother parting with the last piece of bread and sending her children to Cheder.

Childhood and boyhood was full of poverty, but nevertheless full of content. I found out early that things were not altogether Kosher in this world. Why must the poor always live either in garret rooms under the eaves of many storied houses, or in the basements of such houses? Why must the workers labor until midnight in the busy season and not earn a penny in the slack season? Why are the poor so helpless? Why is my father called to read the Torah only when they read the "Hatochechu or Koyrach"? These things bothered me throughout my boyhood until I discovered the Socialist movement and the Bund.

New horizons were revealed. Everything became so clear and simple. The pamphlets I read at that time illustrated the whole matter very simply. The worker creates wealth worth \$4 a day, but the boss takes \$2 for himself. The \$2 represent surplus value, which is appropriated by the boss or capitalist. These things, after 50 years of thought and reasoning and study are not so simple to me now as they were in those days, but in my youth such things were indisputable. This was the Alpha and Omega of all economic problems.

About that time a book came into my hands, written by Slonimsky, at that time the editor of the "Hatzphirah". It dealt with the Universe. A new cosmology was revealed to me. I never dreamed before that the earth was round and that it revolves around the Sun. That the earth was not the only planet that turns around the sun, and that most of the stars we see in the heavens represent solar systems of their own. The question now arose - How did it all come about? I never solved this riddle to my entire satisfaction, but I came to the conclusion that if there is a superhuman power that controls the universe, with all its intricate mechanism, He cannot at the same time be bothered with every insect, or animal, including man, on earth or on any other habitable planet. That Man is the master of his own destiny, and that if anything is wrong in our social system, we ourselves must rectify the situation or suffer and even perish.

With this mental baggage I came to America 54 years ago. I joined the movement practically the first month after I set foot on these shores and I am harnessed to it ever since.

The period between 1905 and 1918 distinguished itself with its Messianic fervor that permeated the movement and every individual connected with it. We had youth and youthful recklessness. We often did not think before we jumped. We did not calculate or measure the pros and cons of every question. We were on the upsurge. A million votes. One-hundred thousand members in the Socialist Party. We were riding the crest. Meshiach is coming and nothing will stop him. Such level headed men like Morris Hilquit prophesied in 1908 that by 1912 the Socialists will be in the majority in the United States.

The first World War and its aftermath ended the period of Messianic inspiration. A reshuffling of values took place. A transition into the middle class by many former workers. The period of costly Bar Mitzvahs and Pidion Habens and multi-thousand dollar weddings. The period of Persian lamb and mink coats. The period of climbing into the sphere of the Joneses and country clubs.

When I view in retrospect at that period, I come to the conclusion that all that change was a manifestation of the coming of age of the immigrant generation. The immigrant, due to favorable circumstances created by two wars, has emerged from the sweat shop into middle class living and middle class standards. Although thousands of second and third generation descendants of the first immigrants are engaged in the various trades as workers, they are no longer to be found in the trades their fathers and grandfathers were engaged in. This can especially be noted in New York, Chicago and other great centers, where the sweat shop used to thrive. The Jewish worker in the needle trades is gradually disappearing and so is the leadership in the unions, known as Jewish unions. What does this all mean? It means that the generation that came to this country since the '80's has been integrated into American life and follows the pattern established by America. We worship success like all America does. We are fully Americanized.

Were our youthful efforts only a dream? There were many factors, as I have already indicated, that brought about the change, but even so, we are all enjoying now the things we, in our youth, have worked for. We were the first to make popular the ideas of Social Security, Unemployment Compensation, the right of workers to organize and many other rights and privileges. Every Socialist platform of those early days embodied these demands. They were not introduced by Socialists, but what difference does it make? The New Deal had to scan the Socialist platforms to work out the plan for the amelioration of the lot of the people in the period between 1933 and 1940.

But the social forces of America were not the only ones that affected our movement. Communism played havoc with our party. Socialism in the popular mind became synonymous with communism. As time went on a new generation grew up, who knew nothing of the struggle of the Socialists against the tyranny of early capitalism. The great movements of the workers in Germany, Britain, Austria and France were swallowed up in the holocaust of war. The world forgot their achievements. Only communism, the perverted form of Socialism, was known to the world.

Under those circumstances the logical thing to do was to preserve our ranks intact. This we did successfully in the Workmen's Circle. On the political scene we were not so successful.

Thus we come to an end of 50 years in the labor movement. I want to believe that I have contributed my humble share to the leadership and guidance of the movement in the days of growth and success and that in the days of struggle I helped to strengthen our ramparts and to preserve our ranks.

Those with whom I marched shoulder to shoulder in our early days are gone beyond return. I hope to stay with you for a long time to come. I cannot repeat the reckless feats of youth that was responsible for the most part for our achievements in Pittsburgh, but I shall give you instead the little wisdom and experience acquired in the course of 54 years.

Any thinking man must stop every once in a while to draw up a balance sheet and to ask oneself: "Was it worthwhile?" In these days of cynicism, inertia and frustration this question is very poignant. My answer to this question must be in the affirmative. The Labor Movement gave meaning to my life. The movement urged me to become educated so that I could be of more service to it. I cannot conceive a better way of life, a life full of content and meaning. Only those who gave every ounce of mind and spirit to the solution of world problems and bringing about a better world, have actually lived. This is the meaning of life to me, and as long as there is a spark of life in me, I will live the same way.