

October 20, 1963

Mr. Julius Bell, Secretary
Atran Foundation, Inc.
205 West 54 Street
New York 19, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Bell:

In submitting this request for continued support of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research by the Atran Foundation, we should like first to renew our thanks for the assistance extended so far. It has given us the opportunity to establish and equip the Atran Exhibition Hall on the second floor of our building, which over the years was the place of a number of widely acclaimed annual exhibits. Their topics were enumerated in the reports which we submitted to you earlier this year, on May 15th and September 3rd, in response to your inquiry. From among them, we should like to single out the exhibits on the Jewish small town ("shtetl") in Eastern Europe and the one on Morris Rosenfeld and the early period of East European immigration to this country. It is worth stressing that for all exhibits detailed catalogues were compiled and published, which constitute permanent contributions to the subjects to which the exhibits themselves were devoted.

The 1963 exhibition, arranged by our Documentary Projects division under the heading Life, Struggle and Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, demonstrated one of the most dramatic events in Jewish history on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary. The disbursements for this undertaking by far exceeded those of our previous exhibits, and the direct costs were covered by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Yet we should like gratefully to acknowledge that last year's grant of \$3,300 by the Atran Foundation has made it possible for us widely to publicize the exhibition in print, on radio and television, to lay the groundwork for its showing in other cities, etc. The enclosed excerpt from the Congressional Record in part reflects the lasting impression which the YIVO exhibition on the Warsaw ghetto has left.

We are therefore asking the Atran Foundation for an allocation in the same amount as last year for our efforts to disseminate knowledge on the basis of the incomparable treasures of the YIVO collections and thereby to spread the message of Jewish awareness and Jewish continuity.

Simultaneously, we are turning to the Atran Foundation with the request for a special one-time grant for a specific project. This project stems not only from remembrance of things past, but addresses itself to the task of community education in a constructive and long-range way. On the initiative of a group of professional scholars connected with outstanding academic institutions in this country and abroad, YIVO has resolved that the time has come to convoke a research conference on Jewish participation in movements dedicated to the cause of social progress. The participants in these movements -- be it in Eastern Europe, in pioneering Palestine or in the early phases of Jewish labor in America -- could expect for themselves just hardships and deprivation, in some countries even imprisonment, deportation and death. What moved hundreds of thousands of men and women was not the expectation of personal benefits but a readiness for self-sacrifice for the sake of the suffering Jewish people and of humanity as a whole.

Thus, the emphasis at the conference will be not so much on political struggles (though they, too, are essential because of the peculiar pattern of Czarist oppression which affected six million Jews), but rather on the philosophies of the movements and on the ethical and humanistic values embodied in them.

The YIVO Division of History since its inception has been engaged in studying this phase of modern Jewish history and has published monographs and whole volumes devoted to it. Small wonder, however, that these studies chiefly belong to an earlier period of YIVO's activities. With the destruction of Jewish life and culture in Europe during and after World War II and the profound social changes in this country, the number of competent scholars in the field has been dwindling and the danger became imminent that in time there would be nobody left to tell the great story to the Jews who have grown up in the free countries of the world under completely different conditions. It gives us a good deal of pleasure to report that in the course of the last years a number of young historians and sociologists in the United States, Israel and Great Britain, both academic teachers with established reputations and graduate students, have developed a substantial interest in the problems referred to above. Through them, research into Jewish social history and ideologies has been becoming an academic subject in general institutions of higher learning.

Obviously, these scholars are not driven by nostalgia for a bygone life which they themselves have never known. What motivates them is insight into the intrinsic values of the movements concerned. Jewish ideologies to these young scholars are test cases in Jewish social history and in the history of ideas in general. They have turned to YIVO because of its detachment from any partisan approach and, on the other hand, because of YIVO's basic principle of evaluating any single Jewish phenomenon within the framework of Jewish and general historical development.

Unquestionably, one can also detect in this growing interest of young Jewish scholars in Jewish social history -- just as in the growing concern in academic circles with Yiddish language and literature - an underlying search for Jewish identity. The promise of this fact for the development of a mature Jewish community the world over cannot be overestimated. Such a community, it is now commonly recognized, is impossible before a Jewish leadership emerges that combines vision for the future with an intimate knowledge of the Jewish past.

Prolonged exchange of opinions in personal meetings and through correspondence have led us to the conclusion that at this juncture a scholarly conference is the best way to give further impetus to the work started by individuals. Here are the terms of reference.

Scope. The conference will encompass Jewish movements dedicated to the cause of social progress; in addition, it will examine the part of individual Jews in comparable non-Jewish parties and groupings. Only movements and organizations committed to the ideals of social democracy and personal freedom will be included.

Time and Place. The conference will convene in New York in the fall of 1964. It will last three days and hold morning and afternoon sessions devoted to the reading of papers and discussion.

Auspices. The conference will be held under the auspices of YIVO. This will guarantee its scholarly level in consonance with accepted academic standards.

Tentative List of Speakers and Topics. Each scholar mentioned below has expressed his willingness to participate; in parenthesis, the topics envisaged are added. However, the list is given only by way of illustration and is far from representing the ultimate program of the conference.

- Abraham Ascher, Brooklyn College (Paul Akselrod and the Pogroms in Russia During the Early 1880's);
- Michael Astour, Brandeis University (Aspects of History of the "Territorialist" Movement);
- Samuel Ettinger, University of Jerusalem (not yet determined);
- Jonathan Frankel, University of Cambridge, England (Aspects of the Labor Zionist Movement, 1890-1920);
- Ezra Mendelson, Columbia University (The Jewish Trade Union Movement in Russia Before 1914);
- Moses Rischin, University of California, Los Angeles, author of "The Promised City" (paper based on his forthcoming biography of Abraham Cahan);
- Leonard Schapiro, London School of Economics and Political Science (The Role of Jews in the Russian Liberal Movement);
- Harold Shukman, St. Antony's College, Oxford, England (The Bund's Relations with Iskra to 1903);
- Henry Tobias, University of New Mexico (The Problem of Leadership in Jewish Social Movements).

As for scholars without academic affiliation who have done notable work on various aspects of Jewish social history, invitations will be extended, among others, to Rudolf Glanz, Jacob S. Hertz, Abraham Menes and Zosa Szajkowski.

Committee in Charge. The Research Planning Committee of YIVO, which has laid out the plans and conducted the work so far, will also be in charge of the scholarly aspects of the conference. The Committee consists of Dr. Alexander Erlich, Columbia University; Dr. Joshua A. Fishman, Graduate School of Education, Yeshiva University; Dr. Uriel Weinreich, Atran Professor of Linguistics and Yiddish, Columbia University. Specialists in several fields of Jewish and general history have served and will continue to serve as consultants.

Financing. Office facilities and meeting rooms will be provided by YIVO and therefore involve no special expenses. The main expenditure is transportation for the participants from outside of New York. While, in accordance with customary procedure, they would defray the expenses of their stay in New York out of their own pockets, it is the problem of traveling expenses which assumes paramount importance. We count on two trips from Israel (\$2,000), three from England (\$1,800), and three from several points in the United States (\$600). Another \$600 will be needed for small disbursements in New York on behalf of the participants, for printing expenses (working papers and summaries to be distributed in advance, programs and the like), etc. This brings the costs of the conference to \$5,000. Some shifts from one budget item to another may be required as the conference takes final shape, but the expenditures as a whole will definitely be kept within the indicated total.

We respectfully ask the Atran Foundation to grant YIVO, in addition to the general annual grant, the amount of \$5,000 for the purposes of this conference. Needless to say, both in the preparatory correspondence and in the programs of the conference itself, as well as in the accompanying publicity, it will be stressed that the support of the Atran Foundation made the conference possible. If, as we confidently hope, the work of the conference will culminate in the publication of a volume of proceedings, the role of the Atran Foundation in convening the conference will again be gratefully acknowledged.

May we be permitted, by way of conclusion, to express our belief that the support of the Atran Foundation for this specific project would be particularly fitting in view of the life history of its founder. The late Frank Z. Atran, indeed, may be considered an exponent of those countless and nameless members of the rank and file who took part in the struggles for justice and dignity. We feel that the conference proposed bridging, as it intends to, the gap between the present and the days of old, will be a genuine tribute to Frank Z. Atran and his generation.

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Julius Borenstein
Chairman, Executive Board

Enc.: Excerpt from
Congressional Record