

From Kishinev to Chicago: The Forgotten Story of Lazar Averbuch

By A. JAMES RUDIN

TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE filed past the bier of Father Leo Heinrichs in Trenton, New Jersey on Sunday, March 1, 1908. The Trenton-born Roman Catholic priest was killed while kneeling at an altar rail during Mass the previous Sunday in a Denver church. His slayer, Giuseppe Alio, was alleged to be a member of the Gior-dano Bruno Club, an Italian-American anti-clerical group. Real fear swept the Catholic clergy throughout the nation, and the March 1 edition of the *Chicago Tribune* ran a front page headline "Priests in Dread." Police were called in to guard the priests, and Chancellor E. M. Dunne, the Vicar-General of the Chicago Archdiocese, declared all-out war upon "anti-clericals and anarchists." An editorial in *New World*, Chicago's Catholic newspaper, stated:

Cut down a weed and another will take its place. Suppress the anarchist who goes abroad with murder in his heart and you are simply making room for another . . . punishment of a lot of individual anarchists is utterly inadequate. . . . Religion and social order go hand in hand. Irreligion and social disorder go likewise hand in hand.

The Catholic clergy in many cities requested and got police protection. But it was Chicago that braced itself for the worst when the local press reported that Emma Goldman, the "Queen of the Reds," would begin an extended speaking campaign in Chicago on March 6. It was twenty-two years since the tragic Haymarket riot.

But Chicago, albeit a center of "Red Scares," was not alone. Alexander Berkman was denied a lecture hall in Worcester, Massachusetts; an Episcopal priest who intervened in his behalf was arrested and fined ten dollars. After the Philadelphia police had broken up a Zionist meeting, the law enforcement authorities admitted they had made a mistake because they thought "territorialism" meant "terrorism."

During the Pullman strike in 1894 William Howard Taft, who would be elected President in 1908, had written to his wife:

It will be necessary for the military to kill some of the mob before the trouble can be stayed. They have killed only six as yet. This is hardly enough to make an impression.

In 1900 another public figure, Theodore Roosevelt, the Republican candidate for the Vice-Presidency, had already said privately:

The sentiment now animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed . . . by taking ten or a dozen of their leaders out, standing them against the wall and shooting them dead.

Roosevelt was President of the United States in 1908.

During the week of Father Heinrichs' funeral, the "Burnett Restrictive Immigration Bill," a measure to curb the influx from Eastern and Southern Europe, was being debated in the

United States House of Representatives. Representative Adolph Sabath of Chicago, who wanted to keep the doors open, made an impassioned plea on the immigrants' behalf, and the bill was defeated; but it was a foretaste of things to come.

On Sunday, March 1, 1908, despite an economic recession and a thwarted "jobless march" five weeks earlier, no radical or anarchist meetings were scheduled in Chicago. George Shippy, the city's first native-born police chief, was relaxed enough to stay at a party until 2:00 A.M. Monday. Seven hours later young Lazar Averbuch knocked at the door of his house.

II

SHIPPY, THE SON of a policeman, was a political appointee of Mayor Fred Busse. At 54 he had reached the top of his profession and earned the title "The Iron Chief," both for his physical strength and for his refusal to allow Chicago's unemployed to stage a protest march; he was especially hard on alleged subversives and anarchists. The Shippys had two children: a daughter in her twenties who lived at home and attended the University of Chicago, and Harry, a cadet at Culver Military Academy in Indiana who had come home early in March to recover from an illness.

Teresa Tauber, the family maid, answered the door at 31 Lincoln Place just as the Shippys were finishing breakfast and the Chief was about to leave for his office. His driver, James Foley, was waiting outside as usual.

Averbuch, with a letter in his hand, asked to see Chief Shippy, and for a brief moment the two stood face to face. We shall never know what the young immigrant thought in that instant, but we know in detail what Chief Shippy later claimed that he saw in a "brief all comprehending glance,"

when the two men met for the first and last time in their lives. Shippy was to speak of Averbuch's "foreign cast of features," his "cruel lips" that could send a "shiver of distrust into any man's heart." He saw Averbuch's "defiant glare," and "like a flash of lightning" the thought came that "he was up to some wrong. The swarthy, undersized, but muscularly developed young man looked to me like an anarchist." The Chief "easily read the plot and struck at its heart."

The *Chicago Evening Post* reported the Chief's story:

. . . I had ordered Foley, my driver, to hitch up the horse. About 9 o'clock the doorbell rang and I opened the door [this conflicted with Miss Tauber's account]. As I did so the man raised his hat, and I allowed him to step into the hallway. As the door was shut the man handed me an envelope. At a glance I saw that my name and address was written on it. I did not even wait to examine the envelope . . . I grabbed the man's arms and forcing them behind his back, called to mother [Mrs. Shippy] . . . When she ran into the hallway where I was holding the man, I said: "Mother, see if he has a revolver." She said that he had, after she had felt his back pockets. I tried to hold him with one hand and draw my revolver with the other, but he jerked away and fell against the door. I caught him again, fearing that he would get at his revolver before I could reach mine. He fought hard to free himself, but I clung to him. My son was upstairs and he must have heard the struggle. He started downstairs and was only a few steps from the bottom when the man freed one hand, drew a revolver and fired two shots at my son. Then Foley stepped into the hallway and the man shot him. By this time I was able to draw my own revolver . . . I fired four shots at the man, first two into his head and two into his body. He fell at the first shot, but I fired three more at him. I was cut on the arm by the man in the

struggle, but I did not learn this until after my son and Foley had been shot.

The man had a knife and a revolver and he tried to kill me. I believe he shot my son first because he believed Harry had a revolver and had come down to use it. My son saved my life. I might have been shot or stabbed and killed if the boy had not come to my assistance. . . . Something told me that he was going to try to kill me. . . . It looks to me as if the man had planned to distract my attention with the envelope and then shoot me down while I was reading the writing on it.

WHEN HE GAVE this account to the *Evening Post* Shippy did not know who his victim was, but on the next day, March 3, a positive identification was made. Lazar Averbuch (also referred to as "Lazarus," "Harry," "Jeremiah," "Jerry," and "Auerbach" by the Chicago papers), had been an employee of an egg commission house owned by W. H. Eichengreen. A fellow worker made the first identification which was shortly confirmed by Lazar's 22-year-old sister, Olga. Further investigation revealed that he was a native of Kishinev, Russia, who arrived in America only three months earlier by way of Vienna where, in 1906, he had studied accounting at a school of commerce. Finally, and most important of all to certain Chicago newspapers, Lazar Averbuch was a Jew.

The *Chicago Tribune* and the *Record-Herald* ran three-column pictures of Averbuch on March 3, along with huge drawings of Shippy's hallway. The *Record-Herald* printed a front-page cartoon showing a "snake of anarchism" attacking Uncle Sam's foot, and identified Averbuch as a "Russian Jew" in its banner headline.

The *Chicago Daily Journal*, saw an anarchist conspiracy, stating that the young man's "three companions" had

escaped with the police hard on their trail. All Chicago papers noted the "German writing" on the "decoy letter," but the *Tribune* was more precise: the writing was "cabalistic."

Harry Shippy and Foley were taken to Augustana Hospital after the shooting, but Averbuch died "en route to the German Hospital No. 754 Hamilton Court from gunshot wounds. . . ." His body was taken directly to Bently's Undertakers. Newspapers reported that "hundreds" came to see the "degenerate face" and "apelike ears" of the deceased. One police officer slapped the corpse and shouted, "Take that, you son of a bitch!" No Jewish undertaker or rabbi could be found to handle the funeral of Lazar Averbuch; he was buried in Cook County's "Potter's Field" on March 5, with layman Samuel Dorf reading the graveside service.

The newspapers differed as to whether Olga Averbuch actually went to the cemetery. The *Record-Herald* stated that at her brother's grave she shouted: "It has broken my heart that no rabbi would perform the service, but we have given Lazar a Jewish funeral anyway"; the *Tribune* left Olga, Rosie Stern, Averbuch's "fiancee," and Mr. Dorf at Bently's. All three were reported to have "knelt beside the body and offered up prayers to Jehovah [sic]," with Olga crying "All I can do is die!" On March 12, Lazar Averbuch was re-buried in a Jewish cemetery, Ridgelawn, with a "rabbi of a South Side Orthodox Jewish church [sic]," officiating.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SHOOTING Averbuch's personal effects had been turned over to the authorities and recorded: "pair keys, buttons, tie, and a lot of evidence in drawer #251." And in a different hand, the following items were listed: "3 revolvers Knife, also letter & pictures, 1 shirtt [sic] 1 pr glove." The "lot of evidence" was never

disclosed at the inquest on March 24, 1908, nor were any explanations for the differences in handwriting given, although the second entry contained incriminating evidence.

Chief Shippy's official report, submitted to Mayor Busse the day after the shooting, although basically similar to earlier newspaper accounts, was different in such details as the number of shots actually fired, whether Foley entered the house on his own initiative or had been called in by Chief Shippy, and whether Averbuch was shot before or after Foley entered. Shippy concluded with his description of Averbuch:

My assailant looked like an Armenian or Sicilian—was about 24 or 26 years old, 5 feet 7 inches, about 130 pounds, slim build; dark complexion, black hair, large blue eyes; wore a soft black hat, black square dark coat.

The inquest concluded that seven shots had been fired—two by Averbuch, two by Foley, and the remaining three by Shippy. Harold L. Ickes, 41 years after the shooting, recalled quite accurately that “. . . both [Shippy and Foley] were blazing away at this boy, seven or eight shots altogether. . . . In the melee, Shippey's [sic] son, Harry, was shot through the chest. He recovered.” An account written 25 years after Averbuch's death, simply said that Averbuch had been “punctured with bullets.” But even in 1908 some observers believed he had been unarmed, and that Shippy and his driver had set up a crossfire that wounded the Chief's son, Foley himself, and killed Averbuch. If the general public had had access to the coroner's report and considered the two differing entries of evidence, it seems likely that the theory of a police “frame up” would have gained more adherents than it did.

The “decoy letter,” it turned out,

had contained only the name and address of George Shippy, while the mysterious “cabalistic” figures were a daily quotation of the price of eggs. The piece of paper had first been used in Eichengreen's commission house which dealt in such products.

The shooting of 18-year-old Lazar Averbuch was to touch the lives not only of those who were directly involved, but of many important people, including Theodore Roosevelt, Oscar S. Straus, Harold L. Ickes, Jane Addams, Emma Goldman and Julius Rosenwald.

III

THE PUBLIC REACTION to the tragic events at 31 Lincoln Place was swift. Two days after Averbuch's death the President of the United States said, “I like that man Shippy. I'd like to meet him. He's the right man at the right place.” Police chiefs wired Shippy their congratulations. The *Chicago Tribune's* lead story on March 3 said in effect, “I-told-you-so”:

The fears of police officials . . . that their lives were in danger were realized yesterday when an avowed anarchist, Lazarus Averbuch, tried to assassinate Chief Shippy, and was himself slain.

The death of the “avowed anarchist” made the front pages throughout America. Washington's *Evening Star* took the occasion to remind its readers that the United States was “over run with hot tempered and evilly trained sons of Southern Europe.” While Averbuch's body was still at the undertaker's, President Roosevelt's Secretary of Commerce and Labor, Oscar S. Straus, issued a special directive to all federal immigration agents. He urged them to cooperate with local law enforcement officials in cases of possible deportation of anarchists. He further directed that deportation steps should be “taken at

once . . . to rid the country of alien anarchists."

Averbuch's death also evoked a speedy reaction from Chicago officials. On March 4 the United States District Attorney, the State's Attorney, the Chicago Corporation Counsel, Chief Shippy, his Assistant Chief, and the Mayor met to organize an "Anarchy Bureau" to banish "reds from the city." The Chicago police, fearful of a widespread anarchist attack, arrested nine people in the wake of Averbuch's death including Olga, his sister, Lazar's alleged "fiancee," Rosie Stern, and three of his friends—Harry Goldstein, Isadore Maron, and William Siegel. Joseph Freeman was arrested on a streetcar because he had publicly stated that he wished that Chief Shippy, not Averbuch, had been slain. A bartender was apprehended when it was reported to the police that Averbuch had frequented his place. Two others were picked up, Edward Berman and William Abramowitz; the latter, the Catholic *New World* did not fail to note, was a University of Chicago student:

Shall we give protection to the gentlemen anarchists who, from the dignified shelter of so-called social settlements or so-called education clubs, . . . propagate vice, irreligion, and social disorder . . . pour poison into minds too weak, and hearts too blackened with sin to spurn it. . . .

It was the first of many attempts to blame the Hull House of Jane Addams and the political societies at the University of Chicago.

A VERBUCHE'S SMALL APARTMENT was located in the "Jewish Ghetto" at 218 Washburne Avenue on Chicago's Near West Side. The police thoroughly searched the flat and confiscated Lazar's books, including *An Enemy of the People*, supposedly indicating "ferocious violent anarchy." All those ar-

rested were released after a few days of questioning.

As various officials planned their strategy against anarchism, and as the shock of Averbuch's death subsided, the general public began to seek more information about the young Jewish immigrant. The day after the shooting, the *Record-Herald* had warned that Chicago was "festering with nihilism," and ". . . the greater proportion of anarchists are Russian Jews, and these are said to have had the doctrine of death to all officials by torch and knife and bullet ground into them ever since infancy," but by March 6 it had to admit that ". . . the police have almost abandoned the theory that Lazar Averbuch . . . was the agent of a conspiracy or a group of anarchists." A day earlier, the *Tribune* had acknowledged that the ". . . wild idea of an international nihilistic plot is without foundation." The *Chicago Daily News* editorially wondered: "Is there any justice in throwing upon this youth the full responsibility of the crime?" and it ominously asked, "Did not this crime have its inspiration in the words, in the plottings of those who welcomed young Averbuch into their counsels of darkness?" But it was the *Evening Post*, a politically conservative paper, that first began to see the real problem:

. . . the community must know whether it was the work of an individual criminal degenerate or a premeditated assault by organized assassins . . . the hysteria of the Hay Market times must not come over us again. Indiscriminate raids and confiscations do little good. . . . Anarchy can not be conquered by anarchy . . . the officers of justice must guard themselves from wild conjectures, nightmares of conspiracy, imaginary plots . . . and subversion of law and order.

On March 6 the *Record-Herald* printed a sympathetic interview with

Olga Averbuch. Lazar's sister had worked as Mrs. Eichengreen's seamstress. When her younger brother arrived in Chicago, he had been given a job in the Eichengreen firm. Olga described the sufferings of the Jewish people in Kishinev, particularly during the pogroms of 1905. Her parents, Olga, and her three brothers had survived that ordeal, and she was convinced that the pogroms had terrible effects upon Lazar. Olga concluded her long interview with a harsh indictment of the Chicago police. Even in the English translation one can sense the rhythm and cadence of her Yiddish outburst:

. . . his object in going was to ask the Chief for a record or certificate of good behavior as is customary in Russia. You know that in Russia every office demands a certificate . . . He thought . . . that such a certificate would help him procure a good position. . . . My brother had no revolver . . . he did not know how to shoot. . . . My brother was never an anarchist, Your Chief of Police . . . is a plain murderer. He shot my brother without cause or reason . . . he was . . . cold blooded . . . he wanted to win a name for himself as a hero . . . the papers state that they found in my rooming place a box with revolver bullets. That is an absolute lie. . . . He had no bullets because he did not need them . . . if a revolver was placed beside my brother's dead body, it was done in Shippy's house . . . how old was my brother? He would have been nineteen at the next Passover holidays. . . . My brother was neither a fool nor insane. He went to seek bread, and he met his death. . . .

The *Record-Herald* printed a translation of a letter written by Mrs. Averbuch to Olga and Lazar shortly before the shooting. The Averbuch parents along with their two other sons, were then living in Vienna:

We received your letter and can make

nothing out of it. . . . You are complaining that you sell your labor for pennies. . . . You ought to have known that before you left the old country . . . you are in a better country, and you ought to be satisfied where you are, because you can get a better living there than in Austria. . . .

Olga refused to tell her parents about the tragedy: "My father is old, and it would break his heart. I will not tell him." The *Daily Journal* in an editorial advised Olga Averbuch not to speak out about her brother, to ". . . trust to time to bury his crime in forgetfulness."

BUT THE INCIDENT was not "buried"; little by little, new facts emerged. Lazar, it turned out, had just obtained a new job. Mr. Henry Rhynsburger, an egg dealer of Pella, Iowa, who had met him a few weeks before in Chicago, had been so impressed by Averbuch's accounting ability that he offered him a better position and planned to start back with him for Iowa on March 2. The Iowa egg dealer was stunned by the news of the tragedy. Harold L. Ickes, the attorney who represented Averbuch's interests at the inquest, always believed that Lazar had gone to Shippy's house to obtain a police permit to move to Iowa:

. . . Now, at least, it is a credible theory, in the absence of any motive. When the police, with all of their ingenuity and will, all of their strength and power, couldn't find a motive, it is at least credible that Averbuch went over there with an innocent purpose. . . .

Two Chicago newspapers questioned certain aspects of the incident from the outset, consistently ridiculing anarchist charges and demanding a fair investigation of Averbuch's death. Predictably, both papers were socialist. *Die Arbeiter-Zeitung* published a scathing editorial the day after the shooting:

The capitalistic press made a great ado for a day. . . . Then when the crime has been used to sell papers the matter is dropped . . . the capitalistic press makes a great noise. That the man who attempted the deed was a mentally sick person is not mentioned . . . the capitalistic press unites in the cry "Death to anarchism."

The *Daily Socialist* ran the Averbuch story on its front page for nearly two weeks, always steering a careful course between the twin "evils" of anarchism and capitalism. But soon representatives of the "capitalist" press were echoing their critical tone.

For reasons far different from those of the Socialist papers, the *Daily News* also demanded an inquiry:

The law abiding public . . . wants the truth of the matter so fully disclosed that the weaving of red romances about the death of Averbuch shall cease.

And even the *Record-Herald*, in a restrained editorial, asked for a ". . . thorough investigation of conditions which might lead to intelligent action." But there was to be no board of inquiry and no public investigation, only a coroner's inquest on March 24, 1908. No other source of hard evidence seemed to remain to be examined. Shortly after the shooting the Chicago police had announced that Lazar Averbuch had purchased a revolver and a knife on February 29 for \$5.15 from J. F. Corbly's pawn shop on North Clark Street. Because the deceased earned only \$6.00 a week and because Corbly was "under heavy obligation to the police," the *Daily Socialist* was skeptical. Corbly posted a strange sign in his shop window on March 11:

We positively decline to be interviewed by Jews or Socialists regarding the attempt to shoot Chief Shippy. . . . We are tired.

WHEN LAZAR AVERBUCH WAS SHOT, the Chicago Jewish community numbered about 130,000. There were many synagogues in the city along with communal organizations such as orphanages, hospitals, burial societies, vocational guidance bureaus, family service units, as well as a clothing center and a lodging area.

The Jews of Chicago annually donated over \$250,000 to support local, national, and overseas charities. On the Sunday after Averbuch's death, the *Tribune* featured a society story, illustrated with photographs of Jewish "Grand Dames," about an upcoming "Jewish Ball" to raise monies for these charities and a picture story attacking Russian Jews as "anarchist agents."

The "Grand Dames," of course, were members of the German Jewish community; the subjects of the other story: East Europeans. The two groups rarely met, except at business as employer and employee. German Jewish proprietors would sometimes hire East European Jews to work for them in textile factories, tailor shops, grocery markets, and egg and produce houses. Thus, it was not strange for Lazar Averbuch and his sister to have been employed by the German Jewish Eichengreens.

The Jewish Ghetto, on Chicago's Near West Side, centered around Twelfth Street (now Roosevelt Road) and Independence Avenue. It was in this drab housing area that Lazar lived during his three months in America. Although Jews had become accustomed to living as a "nation within a nation" in Eastern Europe, they soon discovered that America was different from the "Old Country." Young Jews in particular ventured far out of the Chicago Ghetto in search of work and pleasure.

Miss Jane Addams, the founder of the Hull House, Chicago's best known social settlement, was well aware of Jewish life in the Ghetto, and soon

after Averbuch's death, she sensed possible trouble for the Jewish community. Miss Addams called a private meeting that included S. S. Gregory, a past president of the American Bar Association, Julius Rosenwald, the President of Sears, Roebuck, & Company, and Harold L. Ickes, then a young attorney barely a year out of law school. As Ickes made his way to the Hull House, he saw young Jews "surging up and down . . . getting terribly excited . . . working each other up." Ickes clearly remembered the meeting:

She . . . Jane Addams . . . said, "I am afraid of trouble. I am afraid of clashes with the police, and that would be a terrible thing for the Jews themselves. Now what can we do about it?" We were all sympathetic . . . she said, "Mr. Gregory, will you take the case?" Mr. Gregory said, no, he could not . . . I understood that because Mr. Gregory had been a junior lawyer in the anarchist trial [Hay Market riots of 1886], and it took him a good many years, fighting years, to overcome the handicap that that meant to his practice.

She turned to one or two other lawyers. They couldn't do it . . . I could see that she wasn't quite happy about it. . . . She said, "Well, Mr. Ickes, I guess we will have to ask you to take it." And I took it. Julius Rosenwald said, "I will contribute \$2,000, on the condition that my name shall not be known in the case. . . ." That's all the money we had, and they expected to fight the City administration . . . with \$2,000 to spend.

An editorial appeared on March 9 in the *Jewish Daily Courier*, a politically conservative Yiddish newspaper:

It is absolutely necessary and desirable that the Jewish citizens of Chicago, who are now stirred by doubts regarding the killing of . . . Averbuch, should keep their peace and should not indulge in unnecessary protests . . . this is not alone a Jewish affair. It becomes a great importance to the American public . . .

who must do justice in the matter. . . . We are only a small part of Chicago's population. . . . We can depend upon the public conscience to establish justice in this case.

This cautious and restrained approach was a response to the agitation and fear that was evident within the Jewish Ghetto. On the day that the *Courier* urged Jews to "keep their peace," the *Daily Socialist's* headline was: "Jews Will Raise \$40,000" for an Averbuch defense fund. Two days later the paper noted that a quarter of the total had been raised, but no names of donors were listed. In point of fact, Julius Rosenwald, with his secret gift of \$2,000, appears to have been the only contributor.

Theodore Zolotkoff, an assistant State's attorney of the time, wrote a Yiddish article for the *Courier*, "From Kishinev to Chicago." Zolotkoff lamented the tragedy of Lazar Averbuch and voiced serious doubts about the affair:

I do not believe that Shippy was stabbed. . . . Who has seen Shippy's wound? Who, but a dealer in firearms, who is under heavy obligation to the police, has shown that Averbuch ever had a revolver or dagger? I do not believe that he had either when he entered Chief Shippy's house . . . his mission to the house of George Shippy is a mystery today . . . something is hidden.

The *Courier's* editor, Peter Boyarsky, published an editorial, "Wanted: An Emil Zola," whose title summed up the newly emerging view of the Averbuch affair.

Jane Addams expressed her own doubts about the shooting of Averbuch:

There are many hundreds of adherents in the colony [of Russian Jews] to the theory that the boy was . . . induced to go to the Chief's house by a man in

the employ of the Russian government. . . . Certainly nothing could happen which would so well serve the Russian government . . . if the most autocratic government yet remaining in civilization, should succeed in pulling back into its own autocratic methods the youngest and most daring experiment in democratic government which the world has ever seen.

THE GERMAN JEWISH COMMUNITY of the city was deeply concerned about the Averbuch case and its possible anti-Semitic aftermath. The general press repeated usage of the words "Jew" and "Jewish anarchists" especially upset Chicago's older and more settled Jews. Their leading spokesman, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch of Sinai Temple, disassociated himself and his people from Lazar Averbuch, a "deluded and demented Jewish Russian lad." Hirsch, born in Luxembourg, had come to America as a young man and had become one of the nation's leading Reform rabbis. Hirsch led a large and distinguished Congregation (that included Julius Rosenwald among its members), and he also edited the Jewish weekly, *The Reform Advocate*.

In an *Advocate* editorial Hirsch wrote that Averbuch was no anarchist agent, but rather a "hapless, mentally unbalanced boy who fell under the spell of nihilistic and socialistic literature." The rabbi reminded his readers that "America is not Russia," and that the real responsibility for Lazar's actions ". . . is with the Tsar and his police bureau." Without the Kishinev pogroms, ". . . there would have been no Chicago tragedy." Rabbi Hirsch had a novel explanation for Averbuch's alleged gun and knife: "Many a boy bent on going west has carried a gun and yet was neither a murderer nor an anarchist." This was an obvious reference to Averbuch's plans to move to Iowa.

The March 14th *Advocate* featured

a letter that raised the same questions as Zolotkoff had done in the *Courier*:

1. Why couldn't Shippy . . . have held Averbuch . . . until help came?
2. Why must we take Shippy's word that the young man was armed?
3. If Shippy had been stabbed in the right arm, why was he able to recover so quickly; quickly enough to write a report?
4. Was Lazar Averbuch really an anarchist?
5. . . . Is it possible that he sought a "permit of character" which a Jew in Russia needs to move to another city?

By March 21, just three days prior to the inquest, Hirsch took a calmer, more patronizing approach to Lazar's death. His editorial speaks volumes in describing the vast social and emotional distance that existed between the German and the East European Jew:

The tragedy . . . could not but focus the eyes of the community on the doings . . . of all the Jews in this country . . . the Russian Jew is the mainstay of the Russian revolution, and the daily press has not overlooked this fact . . . a small minority of Russian Jews are anarchists . . . they have a love of debating and passion for theorizing . . . they love to discuss what is beyond their reach . . . the Russian has no historical consciousness . . . reality is not among his factors . . . the Jewish soul is aflame with zeal for social justice . . . and his clubs are debating societies. . . . We know the Russian Jew better than the police or newspaper editors . . . we understand their idiosyncrasy . . . their mental gymnastics . . . if the state has to fear only the Jewish anarchist, it will be safe from attack.

Other Chicago Reform rabbis echoed Hirsch's feelings.

It was left to *The Israelite*, an English language weekly widely read by

Reform Jews in Chicago, to sound the shrillest note:

No excuse should be sought for him [Averbuch]. . . . No man, especially in the land of freedom, has the right to take law into his hands . . . Averbuch has received his just retribution. . . . Chief Shippy has been doing his utmost to put a check to the violent anarchist meetings . . . he has been trying to suppress the outbreak of anarchy. . . . The attack on his life is attributed to this cause. . . . The most drastic measures on the part of the authorities should be encouraged.

The *Tribune* and the *Record-Herald* could not have done better.

IF THERE WAS TO BE justice for Averbuch it would have to emerge at the inquest scheduled for March 24. After March 10, only the *Daily Socialist* continued to give the Averbuch case front page coverage. As talk of an anarchist ring or conspiracy died down, Harold Ickes began his inquest preparations. "I am interested," he declared, "in showing that Lazar Averbuch was not an anarchist, and I want to point out the illegal arrests of Olga Averbuch and Rosie Stern." Ickes hired a Russian language expert, and the young attorney called for another autopsy, even though the police had performed their own. The body was removed from its Ridgelawn grave without publicity, and Ickes' recollection of the autopsy was still vivid in 1949:

We performed a second autopsy . . . we found that this boy had been shot twice in front and twice from behind . . . at one stage I noticed a pause and a hurried conversation between the doctors and some of the other attendants. . . . Then two or three left hurriedly. . . . We waited . . . finally I said, "What is the delay?"

Then I got the story: The police had allowed . . . the brain to be taken out and sent to Rush Medical . . . for fu-

ture study . . . they were afraid that I would discover the brain was missing. . . . I never would have. . . . But their guilty consciences drove them over to Rush Medical to get the brain and restore it before I discovered it. . . .

The Chicago police had removed Averbuch's brain for study, and they had also requested of the Kishinev police authorities further information on Averbuch and his "anarchist background." The *Daily Socialist* sarcastically noted that ". . . the police of Kishinev, who stood by while Averbuch's relatives were murdered [in 1905] by the mob; while Rosie Stern's mother was stoned to death; . . . will furnish the Chicago police 'evidence' in their effort to prove that Chief Shippy killed Lazar Averbuch in self defense. . . ."

As both sides prepared for the inquest, Ickes had an important meeting with Peter Hoffman, Chicago's "perennial coroner":

. . . they were trying to make it appear that this man [Averbuch] was an anarchist . . . and I said, "Pete, you aren't going to let them introduce any evidence about anarchism, are you? . . . There is no such evidence. If it is brought in, it is a plant . . . and you know it as well as I." He said, "I am going to let them introduce anything they want to introduce." I said, "If that is your attitude . . . I suppose you will admit evidence about Averbuch's brain." He turned perfectly white. He said, "You are trying to beat me for re-election. . . ." I said, "No." He said, "Well, you know that nothing is worse to a Jew than the loss of a drop of blood."

Ickes and Hoffman worked out an arrangement whereby no "evidence" about Averbuch's alleged anarchist connections would be introduced at the inquest, and in return, Ickes promised to mention nothing about the missing brain. Assistant Chief Schuettler had

admitted to Ickes before the inquest that the police had no evidence about anarchist plots and Averbuch. According to Ickes, it was the "flattest inquest that ever was held." Chief Shippy told his version of the incident, and the arms dealer swore that Averbuch had purchased a gun, a knife of eighteen inches, and bullets in his store, at a cost of \$5.15—a huge investment for a man who earned only \$6.00 a week, three of which went to paying room and board, and the rest of which was usually sent to his parents in Austria.

Shippy admitted that he had acted "like a father, rather than as a police officer." Little new was added by Shippy except that Averbuch actually spoke these words to the Chief: "I got nothing." A fellow worker of Averbuch's stated that Lazar had asked him for Shippy's address, and that another worker had written the Chief's name and address on a piece of paper. Eichengreen testified that Averbuch was "well bred," and that he could speak six languages.

The actual weapons alleged to have been used by Averbuch were not produced at the inquest. Rather, they were held by the police for 13 months and then were released to Chief Shippy, two months before his retirement. The "three revolvers and knife" have never been found.

Olga Averbuch, accompanied by a nurse, denied that Lazar had sought to take his own life. The police made no attempt to link Averbuch with any anarchist group, a fact that was welcomed by the *Daily Socialist*, though it could not have known the reason for the crucial omission: ". . . The inquest brought out very little information of any kind. . . . Averbuch had no connection with anarchism in any form. . . . That is one thing that has been accomplished . . . the exposure of the lying . . . capitalist press of Chicago."

THE SIX MEMBERS of the jury deliberated the case for just over an hour, and then returned with their verdict: ". . . we the jury believe the said shooting was justified and exonerate said George M. Shippy and James Foley from blame." The *Tribune* reported that only one juror "desired to discuss the evidence." After the verdict, two men who were deeply involved in the case issued press statements. Assistant Chief Schuettler said, "We had a lot more evidence," while attorney Ickes laconically remarked, "It is just what I expected." Years later, long after the inquest, and, indeed, after Ickes had completed a distinguished legal and public service career, he wondered:

Was it a good trade? I think it was, because it removed the element [anarchism] which might have implicated a great many of the younger Jewish men and women.

The *Daily Courier*, not privy to Ickes' "trade," was relieved by the inquest's lack of anarchist "evidence":

No other verdict could have been expected. . . . We felt all the injustice which the false alarm of an "anarchist plot" was bound to cause thousands of our people . . . we have lost . . . a respectable, intelligent, and hardworking boy . . . under circumstances which are as tragic as they are mysterious. But we were much more deeply affected by the suffering . . . which was likely to be caused by the unwarranted imputation of anarchist plots. The inquest has established that Averbuch was no anarchist. This was the point which concerned us above all. . . . We are ready to accept it [the verdict], if the rest of the community is willing to abide by it.

I believe that Ickes did, indeed, make a fair trade. In the hysteria of 1908, Ickes' revelation about the missing brain might have been denied by

the police, or perhaps even cited as a "necessary step" in the "war on anarchy." (In 1908, many people believed that the shape of a skull or forehead, the configurations of a brain, and other physiological attributes actually determined the behavior of a person, especially criminal or politically radical types.) The already savage press might have published more rumors, half truths, and lies about Averbuch, Jews, Judaism, and immigrants, resulting in the accelerated polarization between groups in Chicago. Harold L. Ickes, who 25 years after the Averbuch incident became Secretary of the Interior in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, may not have been an "Emil Zola," but Julius Rosenwald received full value for his \$2,000 investment in Averbuch's (and perhaps his own?) defense.

VI

IN THE COURSE of my research on the subject, I was surprised by the vast amount of published material on the Averbuch affair. The young immigrant's death made the front page of almost every American newspaper, and there were countless editorials and letters to the editor. In reading and assembling this material, I became aware of the nature of the impact that Averbuch's death had upon America: it brought to light the religious, ethnic, and economic cracks and fissures that were present in the America of 1908. The hysterical outbursts of the press, the willingness to accept Averbuch's guilt without a proper investigation or trial (a willingness shared by many men of good will), the impassioned attacks on and defenses of the Settlements, the nervous response of the Federal Government, the search for a single cause, all show an America that had not begun the humane absorption of its many new citizens.

The social settlements, especially Hull House, were honest attempts to meet the needs of America's newcomers. Yet, even here one encounters a subtle, even condescending approach to the foreign-born. The Averbuch case was saved from perhaps becoming a long lasting and vicious anti-Semitic affair only through the sensitivity and maturity of Jane Addams, and the tenacity of Harold L. Ickes. Julius Rosenwald's need to remain anonymous perhaps reflected his own fear and anxiety of anti-Semitism. If Rosenwald, Miss Addams, S. S. Gregory, and other leading citizens had publicly demanded a "blue ribbon" investigating commission that would have sought the actual weapons and all other real evidence, it is possible that the hostile atmosphere could have been changed for the better. Sadly, no such demand was ever made, and it was left to a resourceful, albeit inexperienced attorney to salvage what he could in the face of police and press hysteria.

The Christian clergy did not bring credit upon themselves, for only a few brave men spoke out for the principle of innocence before the law. Many ministers and priests, perhaps afraid for their own lives and livelihoods, followed rather than led their flocks.

The Chicago rabbis had a special, indeed, a personal interest in the case, but even they seemed a bit strident in their anti-radical stands, and Rabbi Hirsch went to great lengths to separate himself and his Congregation from the young Jews who had recently arrived from Eastern Europe.

The case is an excellent example of press irresponsibility in a large city. Much of my data was gleaned from the newspapers of the period, some of which created and sustained a bitter anti-Semitic campaign. The *Tribune* and the *Record-Herald* became shrill voices generating public anxiety and

hatred. The Chicago socialist papers were lonely in their criticism of the police and the alleged "Red terror," while the Yiddish paper, the *Daily Courier*, though critical of Shippy's actions, seemed too frightened and sedate in its approach to Averbuch's death. Louis Post's weekly, *The Public*, was one of the treasures of the period. Not only did this remarkable journal have a reconciling and balanced editorial policy, but it reprinted many valuable articles from other publications providing a broad cross-section of opinion.

All governmental agencies from the local to the Federal level reacted to Averbuch's death with a jitteriness that sometimes led to repressive measures. Surely, a government has the right to protect itself from those who would destroy it, but it does not have the right to jump to false conclusions and to contribute to the frenzy of the general public. President Roosevelt's con-

gratulatory words for Chief Shippy were ill-timed and undignified, and they helped to legitimize the growing anti-immigrant feeling that was already prevalent.

Over sixty years have passed since Lazar Averbuch was shot, and the question remains: What really happened at 31 Lincoln Place at 9:00 A.M. on March 2, 1908? No one knew then, though some observers have suggested that Shippy, his family and Foley all lied about Averbuch's being armed, and that, in fact, the young Jewish immigrant was simply murdered. The *Daily Courier* noted:

. . . The eye witnesses to the tragedy are all members of Chief Shippy's household and only they and God know the truth, and God has not appeared as a witness at the inquest.

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