

In Kamf
(In Struggle)

translated by Hershl Hartman

We're hated and exiled and driven,
We're tortured, imprisoned, and more-
Because of the task we are given
To fight for the suffering poor.

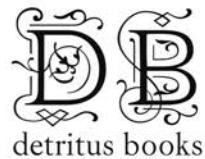
By guns and by ropes we are murdered
Our rights and our lives many gave,
Because we are fighting to further
The rights of the poorest wage slaves

You cast us in shackles of cold steel,
Restrain us like beasts of the wild.
You think you can kill our ideal
But its only our bodies defiled

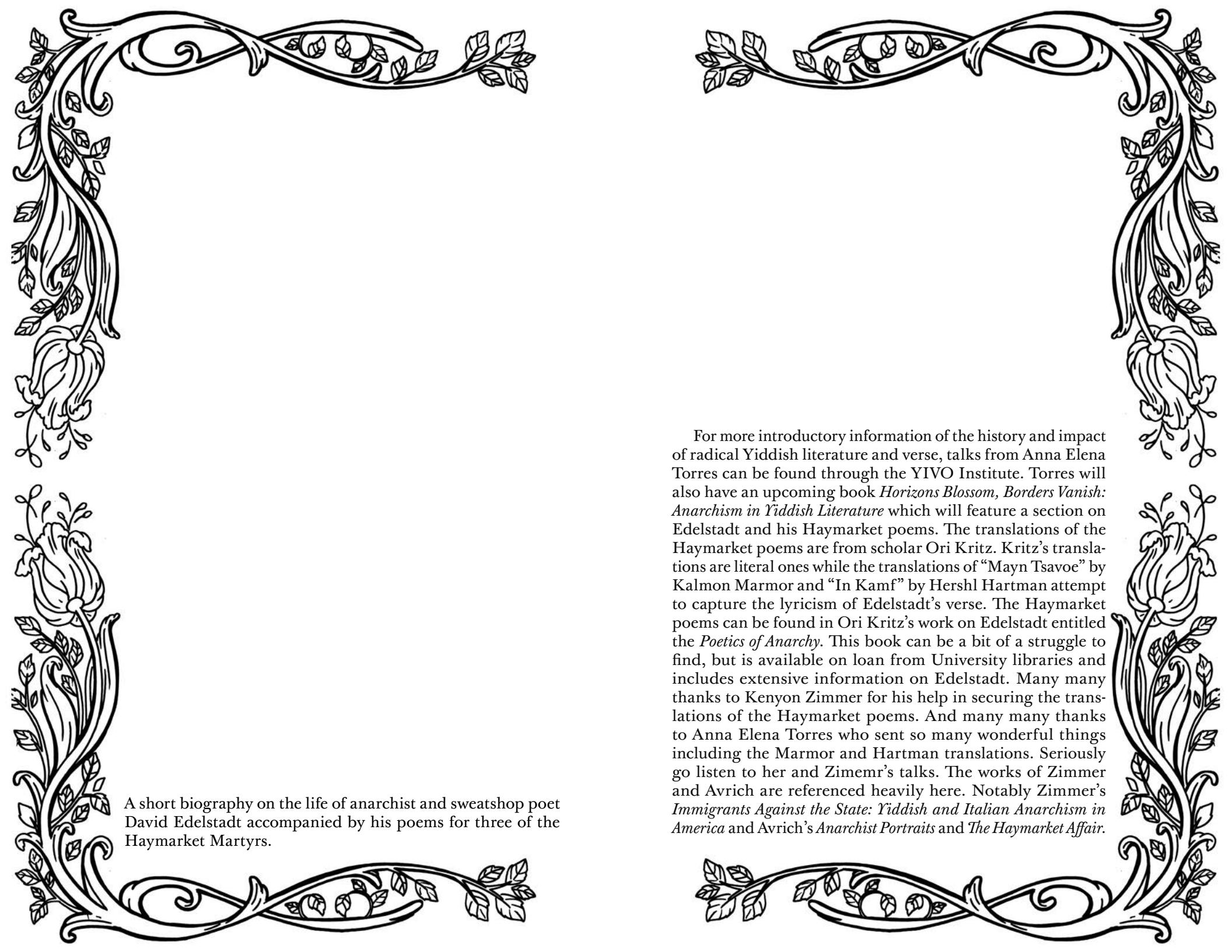
You tyrants can try to destroy us,
But new fighters will answer the call:
To battle, to battle till that day
When we have brought freedom to all.

DAVID EDELSTADT

with his poems for the Haymarket Martyrs

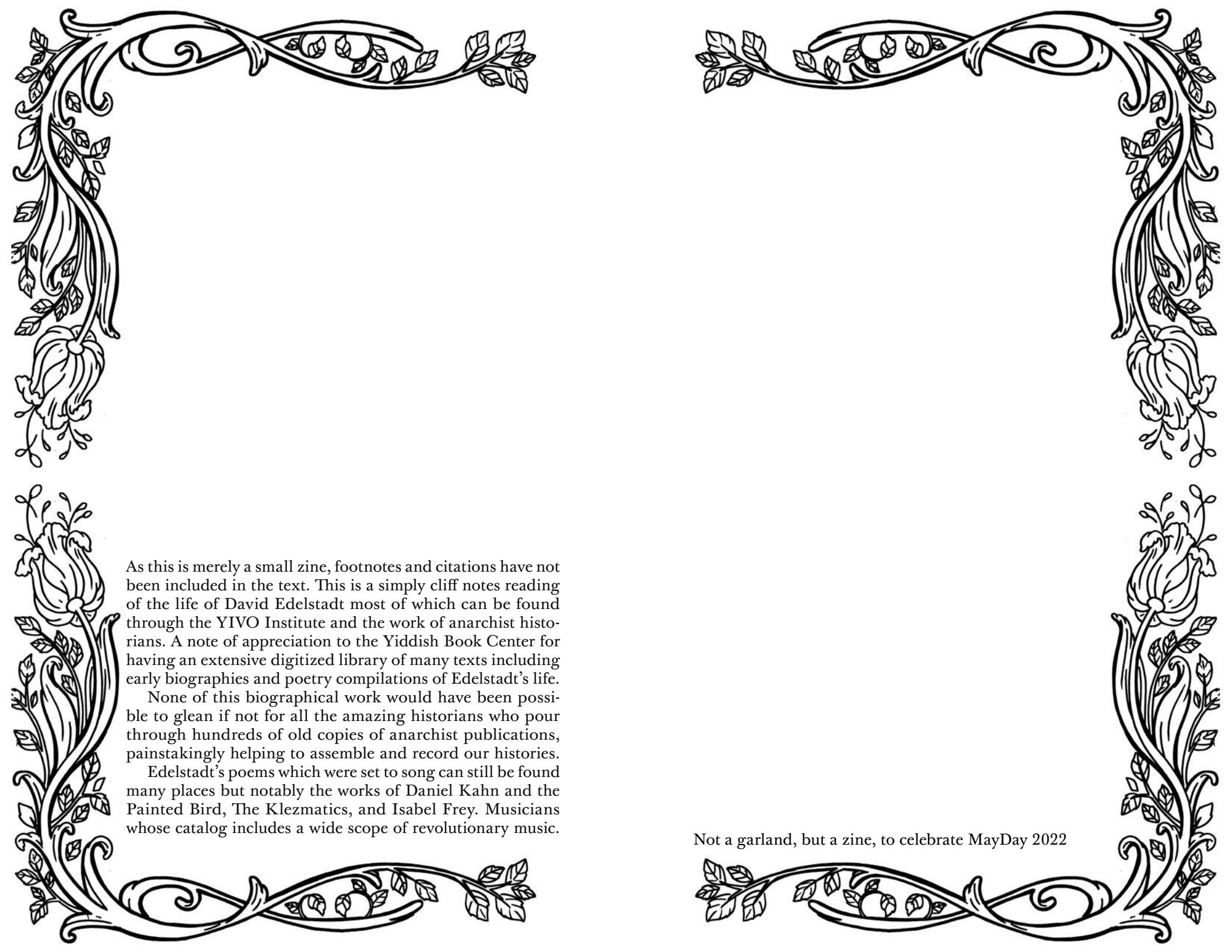


detritus books



A short biography on the life of anarchist and sweatshop poet David Edelstadt accompanied by his poems for three of the Haymarket Martyrs.

For more introductory information of the history and impact of radical Yiddish literature and verse, talks from Anna Elena Torres can be found through the YIVO Institute. Torres will also have an upcoming book *Horizons Blossom, Borders Vanish: Anarchism in Yiddish Literature* which will feature a section on Edelstadt and his Haymarket poems. The translations of the Haymarket poems are from scholar Ori Kritz. Kritz's translations are literal ones while the translations of "Mayn Tsavoe" by Kalmon Marmor and "In Kamf" by Hershl Hartman attempt to capture the lyricism of Edelstadt's verse. The Haymarket poems can be found in Ori Kritz's work on Edelstadt entitled the *Poetics of Anarchy*. This book can be a bit of a struggle to find, but is available on loan from University libraries and includes extensive information on Edelstadt. Many many thanks to Kenyon Zimmer for his help in securing the translations of the Haymarket poems. And many many thanks to Anna Elena Torres who sent so many wonderful things including the Marmor and Hartman translations. Seriously go listen to her and Zimemr's talks. The works of Zimmer and Avrich are referenced heavily here. Notably Zimmer's *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* and Avrich's *Anarchist Portraits* and *The Haymarket Affair*.



As this is merely a small zine, footnotes and citations have not been included in the text. This is a simply cliff notes reading of the life of David Edelstadt most of which can be found through the YIVO Institute and the work of anarchist historians. A note of appreciation to the Yiddish Book Center for having an extensive digitized library of many texts including early biographies and poetry compilations of Edelstadt's life.

None of this biographical work would have been possible to glean if not for all the amazing historians who pour through hundreds of old copies of anarchist publications, painstakingly helping to assemble and record our histories.

Edelstadt's poems which were set to song can still be found many places but notably the works of Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, The Klezmatics, and Isabel Frey. Musicians whose catalog includes a wide scope of revolutionary music.

Not a garland, but a zine, to celebrate MayDay 2022

In London, anarchists working in a sweatshop open a copy of a Yiddish language workers publication. They and their comrades in New York and Paris continually trade Yiddish language periodicals. A poem from one of the sweatshop poets is on the front page and a worker begins to read it aloud "Mir vern gehast un getribn, Mir vern geplogt un farfolgt...."

In the solitary wing of Blackwell, a woman is singing. After an intermittent hunger fast her strength is fading, but her voice still resounds throughout the wing. Some of the other inmates stomp in their cells and join her voice "Un alts nor defar vayl mir libn Dos oreme shmakhtnde folk..."

In Ukraine the anarchists are assembled in Kharkov. The Bolsheviks have been intensifying their repression, leading many to flee from Russia. Many of their social clubs and presses have been shut down and hundreds of their friends and comrades shot or imprisoned in the gulags. They are holding a meeting at one of their only remaining social centers and join in song together "Mir vern dershosn, gehangen, Men royb undz dos lebn un rekht; Derfar vayl mir emes farlangen Un frayhayt far oreme knecht!"

Between the 1880s and 1900s a school of Yiddish poetry and verse emerged within the radical Jewish immigrant population in America. Sweatshop conditions, packed tenement housing, and rampant exploitation inspired them to create verse detailing their conditions and encouraging revolutionary social change. These writers included Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923), Morris Winchevsky (1856-1932), David Edelstadt (1866-1892), and Joseph Bovshover (1873-1915). Their poems were frequently set to music and sung in shops, rallies, and in moments of resistance and struggle. Many weave in and out of revolutionary history persisting today.

Of the four, David Edelstadt was often the most uncompromising and militant in his dream of a liberated



"The 11th of November"

Again the blood-red banners are fluttering!
Freedom's holy voice is ringing!

Again the people are reminded
Of the fighters who lived and died for them!

In world history again we will
Turn over and find the page of the martyrs
Which is still fresh with the blood of our brothers,
Murdered by money-sacks, church, and state!

Five spirits stained with blood will hover
Over the people's-tribune among suffering slaves;
And they will give us invincible courage
To live and die for freedom and justice!

They will remind us of the will
Which they left for the workers:
"Fight for your freedom! No evil beast
Should drive you away from your holy post!"

"Don't be afraid of the hangmen and gallows!
Fight and ring the freedom bell!
And announce to the slaves of all the world,
That that very day would be the day of liberation!"

And on both shores of the great ocean
The slaves of all nations
Will give each other in friendship a brother-hand
And swear to annihilate chains and thrones

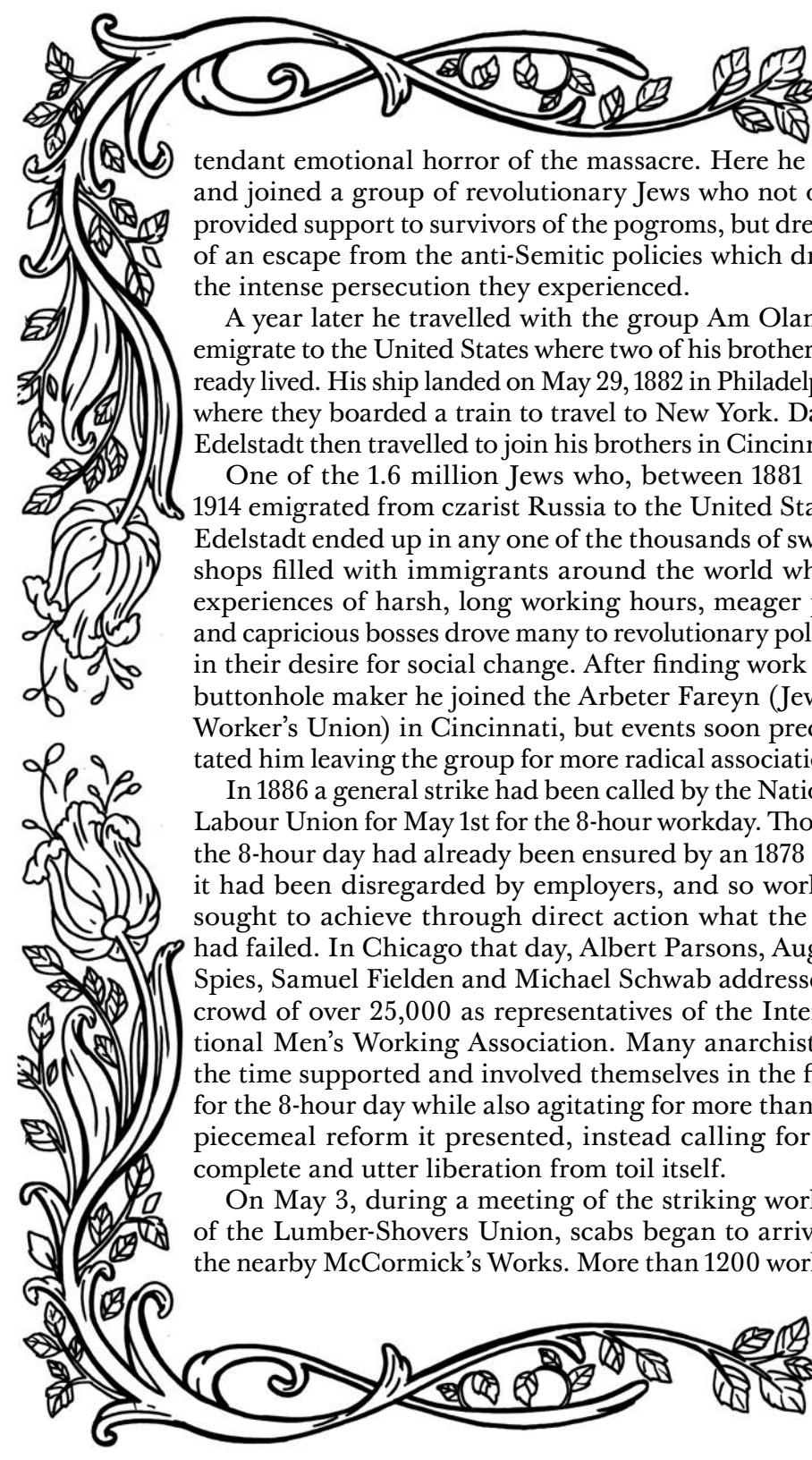
world and the most tragic in his early death at 26 from tuberculosis.

David Edelstadt was born in Kaluga, Russia on May 21, 1866, living outside of the Pale of Settlement. Edelstadt's father, a cantonist, had been forcibly conscripted into the czar's army as a young child and forced to serve 25 years. The "Cantonist" laws enacted by Nicolas the First had pulled multiple children away from their families through requirements to serve within the army as part of conscription requirements. Though his stated aim was to increase the "employability" of the Jewish conscripts, he wrote in a memo it was to effectively change their religion. As a result, Edelstadt grew up in a predominately Russian language environment.

Though not rich, his parents were able to provide a small education for their eight children. The children received education through a private tutor where Edelstadt was first introduced to Russian literature which consumed his young imagination and sensibilities. He wrote his first poem at the age of 11 already influenced by revolutionary ideals.

In 1881, he moved to Kiev and worked in his brother's shoe shop. Here at the age of 15 he heard of the assassination of Czar Alexander II by the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) when they successfully rolled a bomb under the czar's carriage. Those behind the assassination were tried and executed, elevating them to the position of martyrs to the young Edelstadt. Years later Edelstadt wrote a poem for Sofia Perovskaia (dedicated to his sister Sarah,) who had helped to assemble the bombs used against the czar.

The same year as the assassination, horrifying pogroms occurred in Kiev. Though Edelstadt was not physically injured, his deep compassion and shock led him to seek support in a center set up for the survivors for the at-



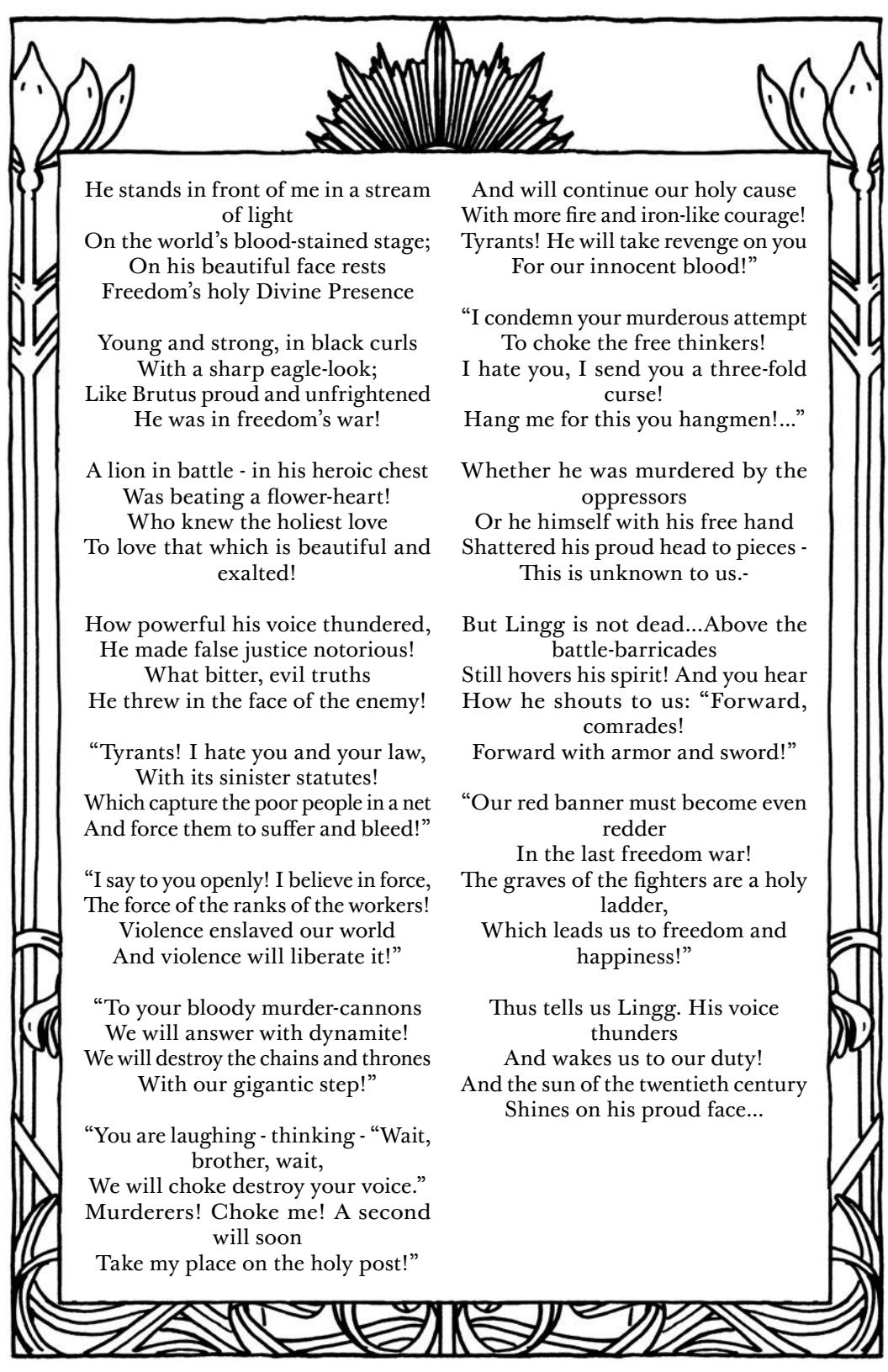
tendant emotional horror of the massacre. Here he met and joined a group of revolutionary Jews who not only provided support to survivors of the pogroms, but dreamt of an escape from the anti-Semitic policies which drove the intense persecution they experienced.

A year later he travelled with the group Am Olam to emigrate to the United States where two of his brothers already lived. His ship landed on May 29, 1882 in Philadelphia where they boarded a train to travel to New York. David Edelstadt then travelled to join his brothers in Cincinnati.

One of the 1.6 million Jews who, between 1881 and 1914 emigrated from czarist Russia to the United States. Edelstadt ended up in any one of the thousands of sweatshops filled with immigrants around the world whose experiences of harsh, long working hours, meager pay, and capricious bosses drove many to revolutionary politics in their desire for social change. After finding work as a buttonhole maker he joined the Arbeter Fareyn (Jewish Worker's Union) in Cincinnati, but events soon precipitated him leaving the group for more radical associations.

In 1886 a general strike had been called by the National Labour Union for May 1st for the 8-hour workday. Though the 8-hour day had already been ensured by an 1878 law, it had been disregarded by employers, and so workers sought to achieve through direct action what the law had failed. In Chicago that day, Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden and Michael Schwab addressed a crowd of over 25,000 as representatives of the International Men's Working Association. Many anarchists at the time supported and involved themselves in the fight for the 8-hour day while also agitating for more than the piecemeal reform it presented, instead calling for the complete and utter liberation from toil itself.

On May 3, during a meeting of the striking workers of the Lumber-Shovers Union, scabs began to arrive at the nearby McCormick's Works. More than 1200 workers



He stands in front of me in a stream
of light

On the world's blood-stained stage;
On his beautiful face rests
Freedom's holy Divine Presence

Young and strong, in black curls
With a sharp eagle-look;
Like Brutus proud and unfrightened
He was in freedom's war!

A lion in battle - in his heroic chest
Was beating a flower-heart!
Who knew the holiest love
To love that which is beautiful and
exalted!

How powerful his voice thundered,
He made false justice notorious!
What bitter, evil truths
He threw in the face of the enemy!

"Tyrants! I hate you and your law,
With its sinister statutes!
Which capture the poor people in a net
And force them to suffer and bleed!"

"I say to you openly! I believe in force,
The force of the ranks of the workers!
Violence enslaved our world
And violence will liberate it!"

"To your bloody murder-cannons
We will answer with dynamite!
We will destroy the chains and thrones
With our gigantic step!"

"You are laughing - thinking - "Wait,
brother, wait,
We will choke destroy your voice."
Murderers! Choke me! A second
will soon
Take my place on the holy post!"

And will continue our holy cause
With more fire and iron-like courage!
Tyrants! He will take revenge on you
For our innocent blood!"

"I condemn your murderous attempt
To choke the free thinkers!
I hate you, I send you a three-fold
curse!
Hang me for this you hangmen!..."

Whether he was murdered by the
oppressors
Or he himself with his free hand
Shattered his proud head to pieces -
This is unknown to us.-

But Lingg is not dead...Above the
battle-barricades
Still hovers his spirit! And you hear
How he shouts to us: "Forward,
comrades!

Forward with armor and sword!"

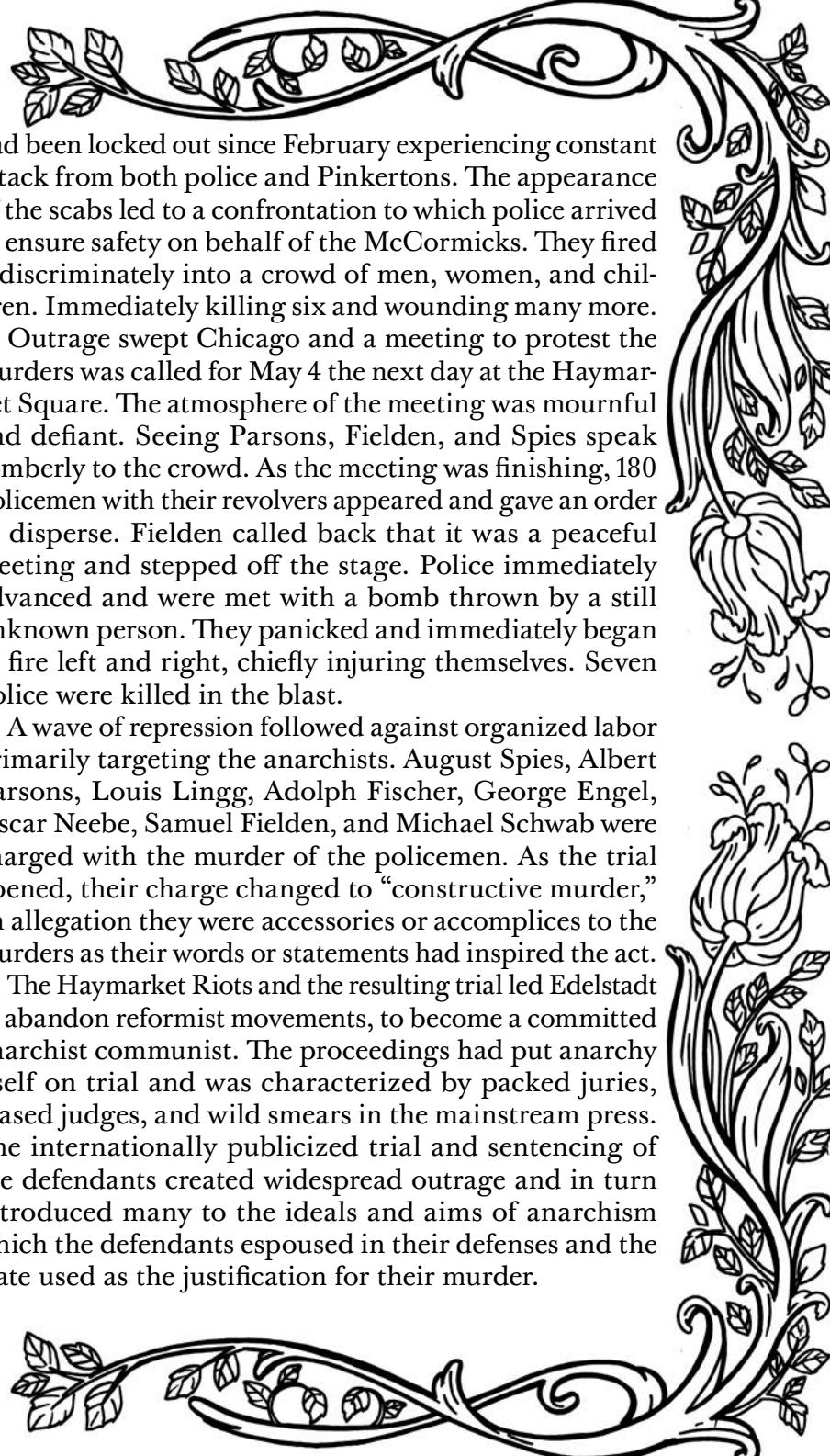
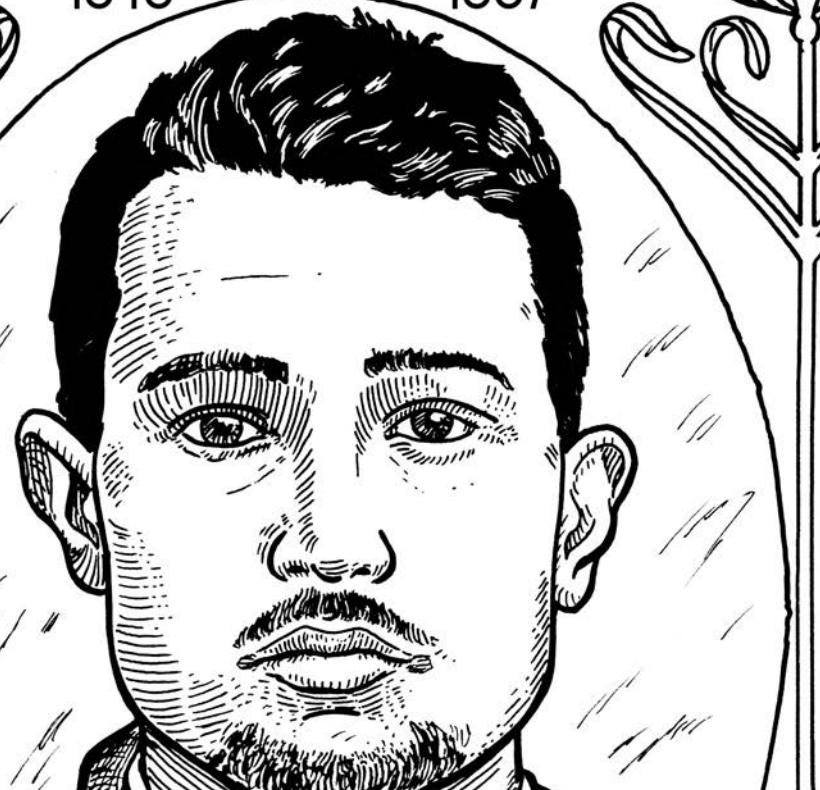
"Our red banner must become even
redder
In the last freedom war!
The graves of the fighters are a holy
ladder,
Which leads us to freedom and
happiness!"

Thus tells us Lingg. His voice
thunders
And wakes us to our duty!
And the sun of the twentieth century
Shines on his proud face...

LOUIS LINGG

1848

1887

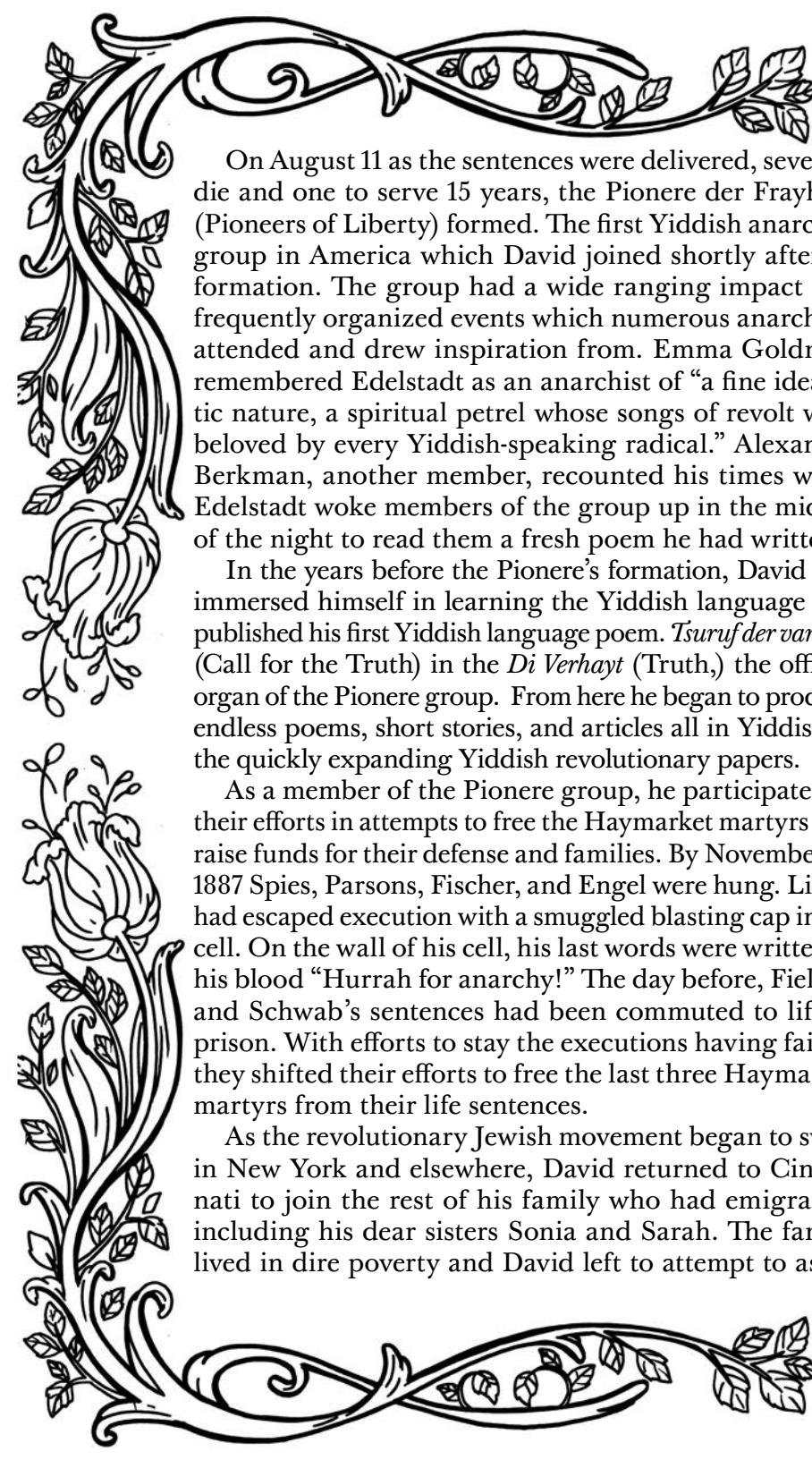


had been locked out since February experiencing constant attack from both police and Pinkertons. The appearance of the scabs led to a confrontation to which police arrived to ensure safety on behalf of the McCormicks. They fired indiscriminately into a crowd of men, women, and children. Immediately killing six and wounding many more.

Outrage swept Chicago and a meeting to protest the murders was called for May 4 the next day at the Haymarket Square. The atmosphere of the meeting was mournful and defiant. Seeing Parsons, Fielden, and Spies speak somberly to the crowd. As the meeting was finishing, 180 policemen with their revolvers appeared and gave an order to disperse. Fielden called back that it was a peaceful meeting and stepped off the stage. Police immediately advanced and were met with a bomb thrown by a still unknown person. They panicked and immediately began to fire left and right, chiefly injuring themselves. Seven police were killed in the blast.

A wave of repression followed against organized labor primarily targeting the anarchists. August Spies, Albert Parsons, Louis Lingg, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, Oscar Neebe, Samuel Fielden, and Michael Schwab were charged with the murder of the policemen. As the trial opened, their charge changed to "constructive murder," an allegation they were accessories or accomplices to the murders as their words or statements had inspired the act.

The Haymarket Riots and the resulting trial led Edelstadt to abandon reformist movements, to become a committed anarchist communist. The proceedings had put anarchy itself on trial and was characterized by packed juries, biased judges, and wild smears in the mainstream press. The internationally publicized trial and sentencing of the defendants created widespread outrage and in turn introduced many to the ideals and aims of anarchism which the defendants espoused in their defenses and the state used as the justification for their murder.

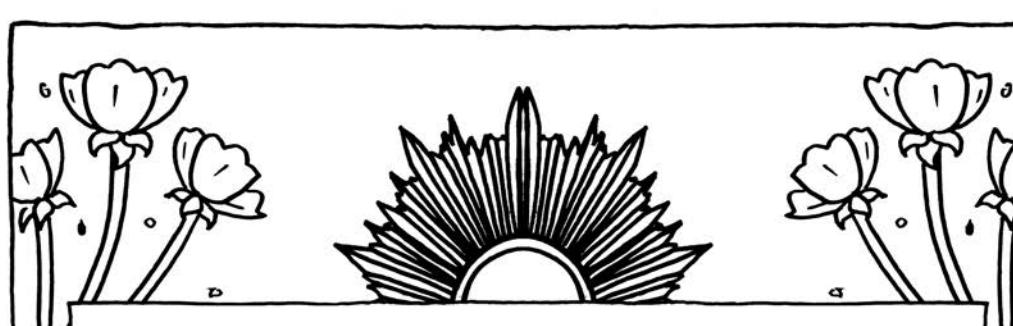


On August 11 as the sentences were delivered, seven to die and one to serve 15 years, the Pionere der Frayhayt (Pioneers of Liberty) formed. The first Yiddish anarchist group in America which David joined shortly after its formation. The group had a wide ranging impact and frequently organized events which numerous anarchists attended and drew inspiration from. Emma Goldman remembered Edelstadt as an anarchist of "a fine idealistic nature, a spiritual petrel whose songs of revolt were beloved by every Yiddish-speaking radical." Alexander Berkman, another member, recounted his times when Edelstadt woke members of the group up in the middle of the night to read them a fresh poem he had written.

In the years before the Pionere's formation, David had immersed himself in learning the Yiddish language and published his first Yiddish language poem. *Tsuruf der varhayt* (Call for the Truth) in the *Di Verhayt* (Truth,) the official organ of the Pionere group. From here he began to produce endless poems, short stories, and articles all in Yiddish to the quickly expanding Yiddish revolutionary papers.

As a member of the Pionere group, he participated in their efforts in attempts to free the Haymarket martyrs and raise funds for their defense and families. By November 11, 1887 Spies, Parsons, Fischer, and Engel were hung. Lingg had escaped execution with a smuggled blasting cap in his cell. On the wall of his cell, his last words were written in his blood "Hurrah for anarchy!" The day before, Fielden and Schwab's sentences had been commuted to life in prison. With efforts to stay the executions having failed, they shifted their efforts to free the last three Haymarket martyrs from their life sentences.

As the revolutionary Jewish movement began to swell in New York and elsewhere, David returned to Cincinnati to join the rest of his family who had emigrated, including his dear sisters Sonia and Sarah. The family lived in dire poverty and David left to attempt to assist



He, like a powerful oak tree
Stood in the stormy wind!
The people's tribune was his home,
The people — his loved one, his child!

No one had, like him, understood
So well the spirit of the people,
And no one was by wild tyrants
So mercilessly persecuted.

He spoke to the people in their
language,
Used for them, intelligent weapons.
He was a fighter, a freedom prophet
Of the white and black slaves!

He travelled much in the slave-world
And with tears moistened their chains!
Everywhere his free spirit used
To spread its proud wings! -

Among stone-breakers, smiths and
weavers
In every slave-tent -
He, in the mines of the coal diggers
Placed his free tribune!

Under the open skies, in rain and frost
He preached freedom!
And with his thundering protest
The suffering slaves he defended!

He was a *Marat* in his blazing speeches,
A Spartacus in resistance!
A man of the people, a permanent
testimony
Of workers' tears and shame!

In front of his spiritual eye always
hovered
The great revolution.
He breathed, lived with her
With his blood colored her banner!

He heard in the sound of chains
The groan of the wounded freedom, -
Which was oppressed
by bloody sword,
Disgraced by human stupidity!

His heart was an open holy book
Of a serious fighter and thinker -
How bitter, how cruel must be our
curse
To his persecutors and hangmen!

People! He loved you endlessly,
More than himself, his wife and child!
He lived and died for you -
Finish his work now!

ALBERT PARSONS

1848

1887



them, however knowledge of his union agitation made it difficult for him to find sufficient employment. The loss of the vibrant New York scene coupled with the misery and poverty his family lived in took him back to New York.

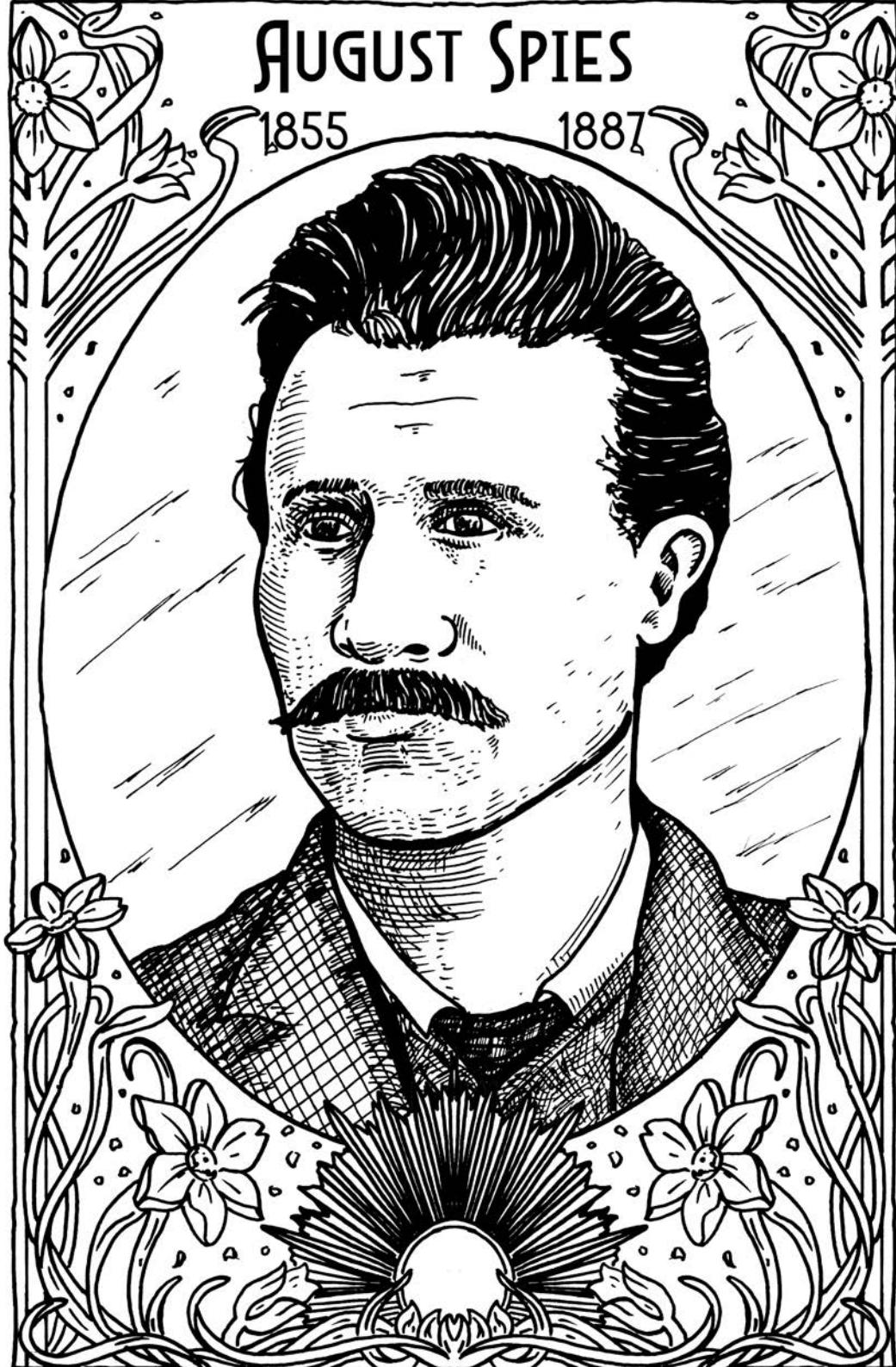
On Feb 15, 1889 he returned to New York where he became an interim editor of the *Varhayt* along with Hillel Solotaroff. Its first issue was to include his first poem in the Yiddish language, "Tsuruf der Varhayt" (A call for the Truth), a poem dedicated to the excitement and joy of bringing the paper to life. The paper lasted for a little under five months and Edelstadt contributed poems in every issue. After its folding he found a job which finally afforded him enough of a wage for a stable life. Long hours and exhausting work, but a wage with which he could support himself and pursue his writing. Though the paper was short lived, it proliferated through cities. Edelstadt found himself invited to lecture and recite in many towns where anarchists gathered. After this burst of energy, David's family in Cincinnati implored him to return. He consented and spent six months engaged in deep study and expanded his language studies, though also found time to found an anarchist union *Der Umparneyisher* (The Unaffiliated).

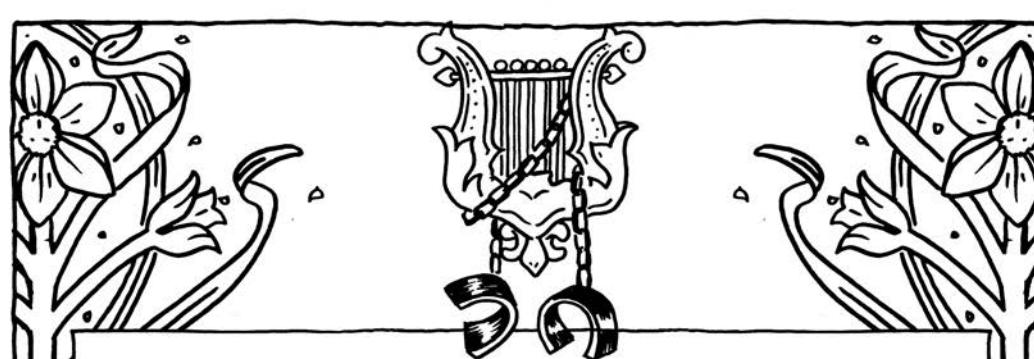
Back in New York, the anarchists of the Pionere were seeking a collaboration with the socialists to publish a joint paper to be the voice of all workers. A conference was called which lasted for six days exhausting its participants and deepening the divides between the anarchists and socialists. The anarchists fought for nothing less than total freedom and the socialists chided their utopianism, calling for them to be reasonable and aim for reform. The conference ended in a hail of insult and acrimony between the competing groups, and a joint paper was seen as an impossibility. The social democrats retreated to publish their *Arbiter Tsaytung* which immediately engaged in vitriol against the anarchists.

On July 4, 1890 the *Fraye Arbayer Shtime* (Free Voice of Labour) appeared. The Yiddish anarchist publication that spanned multiple generations giving voice to the beautiful ideal. Running from January 2, 1890 and only officially closing from rising printing and paper costs in 1977. In its first year Edelstadt contributed memorial poems for Albert Parsons, August Spies, and Louis Lingg. Men who, for Edelstadt, were not truly dead as long as their words and acts still inspired us from the grave. The same year he wrote many of his poems which were set to song. "In Kamf", "Mayn Tsavoe", "Tsu di Arbayer Froyen", "Vakht oyf!", and "Der Arbeter". He wrote a wide range of poems which included remembrances for Louise Michel, the Paris Commune, John Brown, along with directly addressing race and gender as important struggles against oppression. Many revolutionary publications of the time included poetry and verse on their front pages, and Edelstadt was often on the front page of the *Shtime*.

The paper had been created with the plan to be the voice of *all* workers, a policy to be ensured through its two editors, an anarchist and a social democrat. Edelstadt became a continuing contributor and much as he had written a poem to celebrate the start of the *Varhayt* he penned a piece entitled "Tsuruf an di Fraye Arbayer Shtime" (A Call to the *Fraye Arbeiter Shtime*). While in Cincinnati providing support to his family, he felt intensely connected to the well being and content of the paper. Along with his poems he submitted opinion pieces and often sent letters back to be read at the paper's meetings.

The divides between the social democrats and anarchists deepened with the publication of the *Shtime* as now the *Arbayer Tsaytung* had an easy target to attack. From its inception the *Tsaytung* had published polemics against the anarchists and now their fights played across the pages of both publications. Anarchists were uninterested in





Calm and proud like the great
Socrates
He on the gallows stood
Each of his words was a holy deed,
A death-blow to wild tyrants!

Seldom a human spirit rises
More heroically, higher!
The hangmen became pallid, the
criminals-pale:
He - unfrightened and bold!

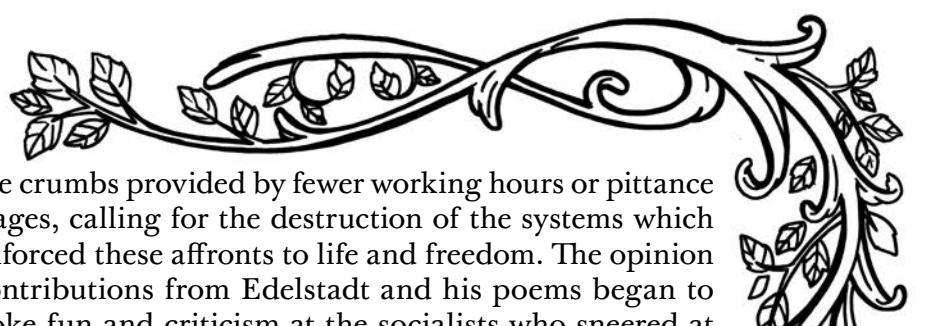
From the dreadful gallows, as from
a tribune,
Like an inspiring prophet,
With the fire of the proud Com-
mune
To his murderers he said:

"A time will come, when from our
coffins
"Will rise a powerful voice,
Stronger than that which you
want now to choke,
"A thousand times
stronger, more striking!"

These were the last words of
Spies...
Hangmen, what do you gain from
this?
Did you annihilate the spiritual
giant-
Did you extinguish the sun?
Oh, no! Martyrs live on - and
thesinger
Feels now his free mood:
He touches now his harp with holy
finger,
He is singing to me the holy song!

And I see the sun breaking
through the mists,
The darkness is sinking to the
ground,-
The slave wakes up! Shiver tyrants,
Your last hour is striking!

The free bright morning is coming,
When a powerfull voice will rise-
Stronger than that which you have
now stifled
A thousand times stronger,
delivering heavier blows!



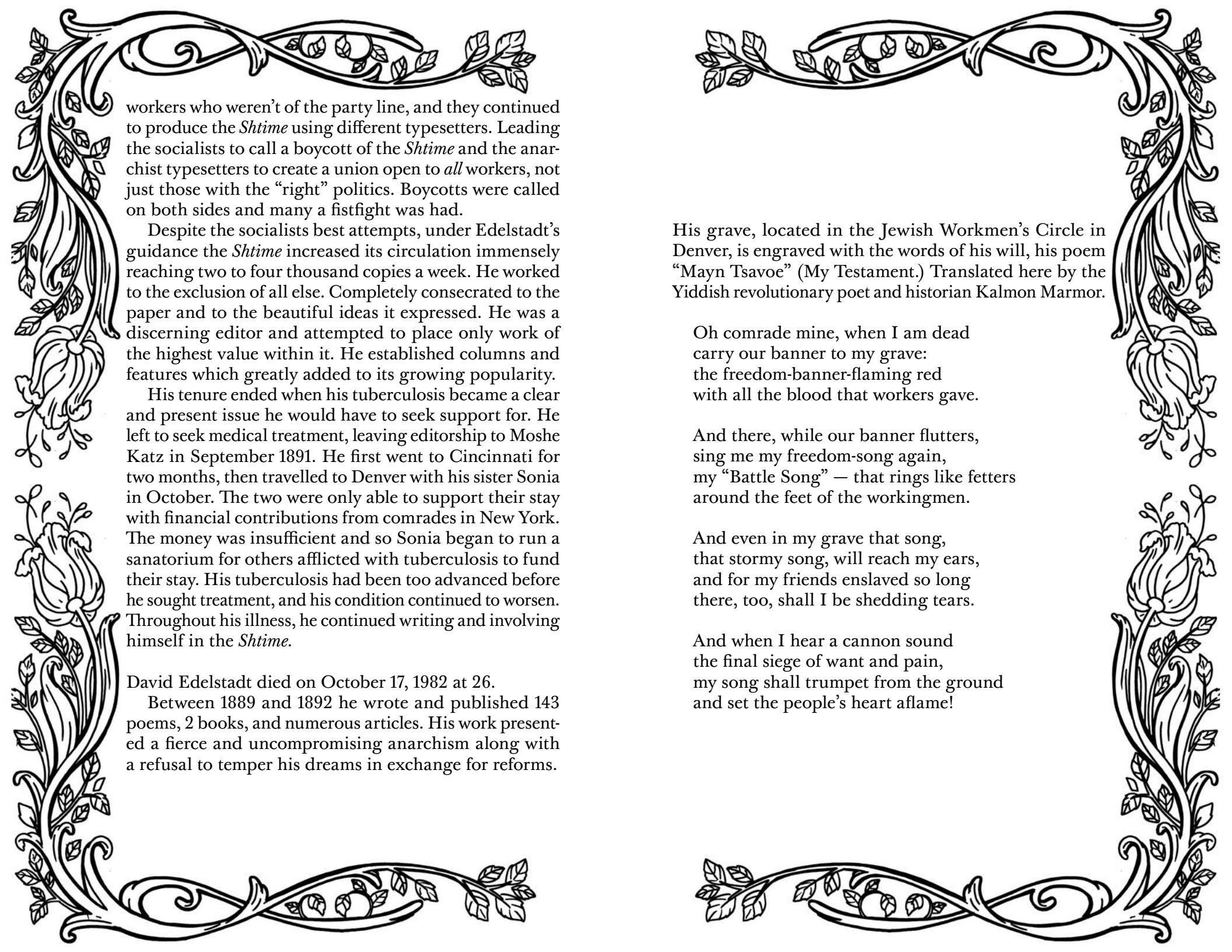
the crumbs provided by fewer working hours or pittance wages, calling for the destruction of the systems which enforced these affronts to life and freedom. The opinion contributions from Edelstadt and his poems began to poke fun and criticism at the socialists who sneered at the anarchist demand for everything. For Edelstadt "Half freedoms is no freedom!"

In December of 1890, the current editor of the *Shtime* asked Edelstadt to replace him at the paper to which he accepted and moved back to New York. His first issue as editor was the January 9 issue, the last words of Albert Parsons adorned its masthead "Let the voice of the people be heard!"

The work of editing the *Shtime* consumed his life. Spending long hours in a cellar basement, he wrote and wrote. Abandoning friendships and beginning to show signs of a developing tuberculosis. It was believed he contracted it in 1891 while catching a ferry to visit Johann Most on Blackwell Island. It was this time he began writing short stories on the lives and conditions the workers struggled in. It was soon after he took over the paper that his co-editor left and he remained the only editor.

At the same time, the Tsaytung increased in its attacks of the anarchists including personal ones against Edelstadt himself. They wrote of him as a liar and idler. They also included criticisms from a number of Edelstadt's fellow sweatshop poets. Edelstadt would respond in the form of poems mocking his socialist counterparts titled "The Artist and the Ass" and "The Ass and the Ray of Sunshine".

The enmity from the social democrats spilled off the page and into the physical production of the paper itself. When the socialist controlled typesetter union announced the *Shtime* needed to up payment to the union, the anarchists refused to recognize the demand, claiming it was an attempt to shut down the paper. There were additional criticisms of the union as exclusionary and not open to



workers who weren't of the party line, and they continued to produce the *Shtime* using different typesetters. Leading the socialists to call a boycott of the *Shtime* and the anarchist typesetters to create a union open to *all* workers, not just those with the "right" politics. Boycotts were called on both sides and many a fistfight was had.

Despite the socialists best attempts, under Edelstadt's guidance the *Shtime* increased its circulation immensely reaching two to four thousand copies a week. He worked to the exclusion of all else. Completely consecrated to the paper and to the beautiful ideas it expressed. He was a discerning editor and attempted to place only work of the highest value within it. He established columns and features which greatly added to its growing popularity.

His tenure ended when his tuberculosis became a clear and present issue he would have to seek support for. He left to seek medical treatment, leaving editorship to Moshe Katz in September 1891. He first went to Cincinnati for two months, then travelled to Denver with his sister Sonia in October. The two were only able to support their stay with financial contributions from comrades in New York. The money was insufficient and so Sonia began to run a sanatorium for others afflicted with tuberculosis to fund their stay. His tuberculosis had been too advanced before he sought treatment, and his condition continued to worsen. Throughout his illness, he continued writing and involving himself in the *Shtime*.

David Edelstadt died on October 17, 1982 at 26.

Between 1889 and 1892 he wrote and published 143 poems, 2 books, and numerous articles. His work presented a fierce and uncompromising anarchism along with a refusal to temper his dreams in exchange for reforms.

His grave, located in the Jewish Workmen's Circle in Denver, is engraved with the words of his will, his poem "Mayn Tsavoe" (My Testament.) Translated here by the Yiddish revolutionary poet and historian Kalmon Marmor.

Oh comrade mine, when I am dead
carry our banner to my grave:
the freedom-banner-flaming red
with all the blood that workers gave.

And there, while our banner flutters,
sing me my freedom-song again,
my "Battle Song" — that rings like fetters
around the feet of the workingmen.

And even in my grave that song,
that stormy song, will reach my ears,
and for my friends enslaved so long
there, too, shall I be shedding tears.

And when I hear a cannon sound
the final siege of want and pain,
my song shall trumpet from the ground
and set the people's heart aflame!