The tradition of Jewish anti-Zionism in the Galician socialist movement

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Abstract

One of Zionism's stock tactics has been to conflate Zionism and Judaism. Just as there are Jewish opponents of the racist Israeli state today, there have always been opponents of the Zionist strategy for dealing with anti-semitism.

Zionism, as a political movement was established during the late 1890s. It was fought, from the start, by another modern political movement which in the same period. Rather than examine this aspect of the politics of the largest organisation of Jewish workers, the Bund in the Russian empire, this paper considers the attitude of its sister organisation in the Austrian Empire, the Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia (JSDP).

Jewish social democrats in Galicia were, as members of the Polish Social Democratic Party (PPSD), in competition with Zionists for the allegiance of workers during the 1890s. The PPSD did not, however, take the organisations of Jewish workers seriously and Zionism made headway in the Jewish working class. In 1904, an Austrian Poale Zion (PZ, Labour Zionist) organisation in 1904. Dissatisfied with the assimilationist policies of the PPSD and, especially, its neglect of Jewish workers' organisations and agitation and literature in Yiddish, dissident Jewish socialists, led by Henryk Grossman, announced the formation of the JSDP on Mayday 1905.

From the its first public statements, the Party emphasised its fundamental commitment to the class organisation of the Jewish workers, solidarity with the international working class and a commitment to class struggle. On the basis of this position, the Party explicitly rejected Zionism.

The JSDP's campaign against Zion was an ongoing, if subordinate feature of its political activity. The Jewish Social Democrats competed with PZ for members of its constituent unions, particularly amongst shop assistants and clerks. The two organisations supported rival candidates in the first election to the Austrian Imperial Parliament under universal suffrage, in 1907, and in provincial (which years were there elections to the Sjem, municipal, workers' insurance fund ballots. When they eventually supported the same candidates, on some occasions, it was because PZ moved to the left and backed social democrats. In the campaign for universal suffrage, the JSDP's policies were in accord with those of the General Austrian Social Democratic Party, calling for equal, geographic constituencies, while PZ backed the Zionist demand for elections by national curia.

The JSDP also exposed the inadequacies of Zionist policies through material in its weekly newspaper, Der sotsial-demokrat. It carried articles not only on the doings and faults of Zionists and PZ members in Galicia and Austria, but also an expose of the conditions facing Jewish workers in Palestine, and a review of one of the first expressions of Arab nationalism published in the west.

Like the Bund, the JSDP after 1905 had considerable success in organising Jewish workers. It rapidly overtook the influence of PZ and built an organisation committed to the emancipation of the Jewish working class where it was, rather than flight in the face of anti-semitism and class collaboration in pursuit of the project of colonising Arab land.

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Political Zionists have consistently identified Zionism and Judaism or at least the interests of the entire Jewish people. Although this equation has been widely accepted since World War II and the Holocaust, it is very misleading. Today, there are Jews, even religious Jews, who are not Zionists, oppose the existence of the racist Israeli state and who argue that its actions do not promote the interests and security of most Jews, including those in Israel. Before the Holocaust, a clear majority of Jews were not Zionists.

It would be a further conflation to identify all ‘non-Zionist’ Jews with an ‘anti-Zionist’ position. But amongst Jewish socialists anti-Zionism is as old as political Zionism itself. Most Jewish Marxists looked to a proletarian solution to antisemitism and contested the existence of a common Jewish interest.

The Bund, which remained the largest Marxist organisation in the Russian Empire until 1906, was founded in 1897 and was consistently anti-Zionist. It saw the class struggle as the answer to both the exploitation of the working class as a whole and the oppression of Jewish workers in particular. The following discussion, however, looks at a related political current in Galicia. While the Jewish social democrats (Marxists) there engaged in a wide range of political and trade union activities, the focus here is on their anti-Zionism, in the period before World War I.

Galicia, the Polish province of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was one of its most economically backward regions. Despite their over-representation in urban areas, only ten percent of the small manual working class in Galicia was Jewish, roughly the proportion of Jews in the overall population of 7,136,000 in 1900. Although formally emancipated in 1867, Austrian Jews and especially those in the eastern provinces of the Empire, the overwhelming majority of whom spoke Yiddish as their first language, remained an oppressed group. They suffered from entrenched, if often unofficial, discriminatory practices and attitudes. They were still subject to official, legal discrimination. Under laws which dated back to the late 18th century, as well as more recent legislation and ordinances, Yiddish was not accorded the same status in the courts, with public authorities or in the education system as officially recognized languages.

There were Jewish workers amongst the earliest members of the social democratic (Marxist) movement in Galicia, in the early 1890s. By 1896 there were general workers’ associations in Kraków, Lemberg (now L’viv in the Ukraine), Kolomea (Kolomya in the Ukraine) and Przemyśl. A territorial social democratic organization, organising all workers in Galicia, was established as a component of the General Austrian Social Democratic Party, in 1890. The Galician Party’s first Congress, in 1892, adopted the name Social Democratic Party of Galicia (GPSD). In 1899, once its ‘Ruthenian’ (Ukrainian) members had formed the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, the Galician territorial organization became the national Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia (PPSD).

Amongst the GPSD’s most influential figures were a number of Jewish intellectuals, like Max Zetterbaum and Hermann Diamand. Seeking to involve Jewish workers in the organization, the Party’s most prominent leader, Ignacy Daszyński, a Pole, initially expressed hostility to assimilationism, the idea that Jews should give up all cultural distinctions except their religion and adopt ‘higher’ Polish culture, and defended the view that the Jews were a nation. During the late 1890s, however, the Party’s policies became more and more nationalist and its leaders expressed increasingly assimilationist attitudes towards Jewish workers. Organising Jewish workers was not a priority for the Party and it set up no co-ordinating structures to sustain their organisations. When recession followed political repression at the turn of the century, the Jewish general trade unions and workers’ education associations, which constituted the PPSD’s presence in the Jewish
proletariat, suffered sharp declines and collapsed entirely in Kraków, the second largest city in Galicia and the cultural capital of partitioned Poland.6

Meanwhile, Solomon Rubinstein, previously a key figure in setting up the first social democratic organisation of Jewish workers in Kraków, became active in organising Jewish white collar workers along labour Zionist lines in Vienna, in 1900-1901,7 precisely when Jewish social democratic organisation in Galicia was at its weakest. A Zionist union of commercial workers in Galicia was formed in 1903. Austrian unions with a Zionist orientation held a conference in Kraków in May the following year. This assembly which was regarded as the founding congress of the Austrian Poale Zion (Labour Zionist) Party.8

Zionism offered an escapist response to the oppression Jewish workers experienced. It promoted both the utopian idea of a Jewish state and the practical escape, though followed by a small minority of the movement’s supporters, of emigration to Palestine. While social democrats mobilised workers to struggle against despotism and for democracy and socialism, Zionism held out the prospect of Jewish emancipation by means of diplomatic and colonial collaboration with emperors. Poale Zionism (PZ) attempted to combine the two approaches.9

The PPSD’s Polish nationalism, assimilationism and dismissive attitude to Yiddish were major obstacles to counteracting the influence of PZ and recruiting Jewish workers to the social democratic movement.10

Despite the relative indifference of the PPSD, the Jewish social democratic movement in Galicia and particularly in Kraków soon began to revive. This was not the result of an official PPSD initiative. Three factors were involved. First, after the severe recession around the turn of the century, the Austrian economy began to recover. The recovery soon turned into a boom and increased workers’ self-confidence and preparedness to take strike action and join trade unions. This improvement was, however, from a very low initial level.11 Second, the higher levels of class struggle in the Russian empire and the successes of the socialist movement there, particularly the Bund, provided an inspiration for activists in Galicia. The efforts of a layer of Jewish university students, led Grossman and Jakob Bros in Kraków and by Karol Eyneygler in Lemberg was the third factor which helped build or revitalise Jewish socialist associations.12

The Poale Zionists, however, had a head start in their organising. The Yidisher Arbeyter, the PZ newspaper, earlier written in German, started appearing in Yiddish, in Autumn 1904. It focussed particularly on winning over Jewish workers in the PPSD.13 On 16 August 1904 Grossman reported on social democratic agitation amongst Jewish workers to a meeting of the Union of Workers’ Associations (the peak body of the union movement in Kraków). The rise of Zionism in the Jewish community was, he said, obvious, while socialist agitation was weak. It was essential to find agitators who could speak Yiddish and to build a Jewish socialist organisation which had greater autonomy from the Party.14

Before the PPSD’s 9th Congress in October-November 1904, Jewish activists established a secret organising committee to prepare the way for an independent Jewish social democratic party. At the Congress, Grossman, Max Rose and Bros (all Kraków university students involved in organising Jewish workers) supported a motion of no confidence in the Party’s moribund Jewish Agitation Committee. They condemned the Party’s lack of attention to publishing material in Yiddish and ineffectiveness in combating Zionist influence amongst Jewish workers.15 The motion was defeated and the Congress endorsed one from Diamand that regarded ‘a separate class organisation of the Jewish proletariat as harmful for the proletariat as a whole. A separate organisation of the Jewish proletariat is in the interest of the ruling class of exploiters, Zionist and antisemitic demagogues and all kinds of chauvinists.’16 At the conference the PPSD also entered into an exclusive alliance with the most right-wing and nationalist of the socialist organisations in the ‘Congress Kingdom of Poland’, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). This was another victory of the Party’s leadership over oppositionists who identified with more radical socialist organisations in Russian-occupied Poland, notably the Bund and the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (one of
whose leaders was Rosa Luxemburg).\(^17\)

Grossman continued to make the case for an independent Jewish socialist party in a pamphlet published in January 1905. He sustained an essentially a Bundist position, taking issue with both assimilationist Polish socialists and Zionists and drawing attention to the Bund’s successes.\(^1\) The PPSD’s stance on the Jewish question, he maintained, was an expression of opportunism, because ‘opportunism in our country is capitulation in the face of prejudice and patriotic traditions’.\(^2\) Like the PPSD theorist, Zetterbaum, he identified Zionism with the interests of the Jewish bourgeoisie.\(^3\)

Eventually, in March the PPSD leadership moved against the base of the dissident Jewish activists in the Party’s ranks. The Galician Trade Union Congress, which was under the influence of the Party, decided to dissolve the basic organisations of the Jewish working class, local educational associations and general unions, by the end of the year. Daszyński welcomed the prospect that these ‘Bundist daydreams’ or ‘nests of sedition’ would be eliminated.\(^4\) The activists accelerated their preparations for a split. Grossman wrote to the Bund reporting on developments and seeking material support, in the form of literature in Yiddish. One of the publications he requested, in particular, was a pamphlet on Zionism.\(^5\)

The Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia was proclaimed on May Day 1905. Supporters of the new Party came together in their own rallies in Kraków, the provincial capital Lemberg, Przemyśl and Tarnów.\(^6\) Jakob Bros, in Kraków, explained the nature of workers’ solidarity and proclaimed the formation of the new Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia (JSDP), ‘a party arising not against the Polish or Ruthenian parties, but alongside them.’ Then they joined the PPSD’s demonstrations in a show of proletarian internationalism.\(^7\)

The JSDP’s founding manifesto examined the precedents for the establishment of new social-democratic parties in the Austrian empire. It proclaimed the Party’s adherence to social democratic orthodoxy and right to be recognised as a part of the federal, General Austrian Social Democratic Party:

> We are not nationalists, we are not chauvinists, and no-one has enforced the class character of our struggle more strongly than we have. Nobody has fought Zionism as a class movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie more ruthlessly than we have. We do not want nationalist programs, we are just demanding a national organisation. It is, finally, necessary to distinguish between these. We want the same sort of national organisation as the Germans, Poles and Czechs, the southern-Slavs, and even the Ukrainians already have in Austria, and which only the Jews do not have!\(^8\)

The JSDP never deviated from its Marxist critique of Zionism.

Along with the PPSD, which retained a rump of supporters amongst Jewish workers, PZ was the JSDP’s main competitor inside the Jewish working class. The Poale Zion newspaper had begun to appear fortnightly instead of monthly in February 1905 and the second Congress of Poale Zion in Austria was to take place in Kraków, just over a week after the JSDP’s founding Congress in June
1905. Bros’s motion at the JSDP Congress, that the Party condemn Zionism, ‘the movement of the Jewish bourgeois class’ in all its forms, including PZ, was therefore an important one.

David Balakan, who attended as a guest from Czernowitz (now Chernivtsi in the Ukraine), the capital of the even more underdeveloped eastern province of Bukovina, was impressed by the JSDP’s founding Congress: the policies of the new organisation coincided with his own views. He soon contributed a critique of the 7th Zionist Congress to the *Yidisher sotsial-demokrat*.

In Theodor Herzl’s death less than a year before, Balakan saw a metaphor for the crisis of Zionism. At the 1905 Zionist Congress, the movement split between supporters of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and the possibility of obtaining one, in Uganda, from the British government. Having been rebuffed by the Ottoman Sultan, Herzl had favoured the British proposal.

A short book Balakan soon wrote in German was particularly significant for the JSDP. Published by the university bookshop in Czernowitz, it was the first systematic defence of the JSDP and its policies accessible to most German-Austrian (and German) social democrats. Its specific case for the establishment of the JSDP drew on Grossman’s *The proletariat in the face of the Jewish question* and other arguments rehearsed in the Party’s publications. But Balakan also offered a penetrating Marxist discussion of the Jewish question and critique of Zionism. This drew on a systematic understanding of theory and practice of the Bund, German and Austrian social democracy, mainstream and Labour Zionism. Balakan endorsed Bund’s identification of Zionism as the movement within the Jewish petty and middle bourgeoisie, which finds itself under the double pressure of competition from big capital on the one hand and the exceptional laws and incitement of the regime and bourgeois elements in the Christian population on the other. Starting from the assumption of that antisemitism is eternal, Zionism’s goal is the establishment of a class state in Palestine and it seeks to cover up class contradictions in the name of the general national interest …

Given that most of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Austria-Hungary, in particular, identified with the Habsburg monarchy, this was analysis was superior to Zetterbaum and Grossman’s argument that Zionism was simply a bourgeois movement. Zionists and antisemites, Balakan also observed, shared the basic assumption that Jews and gentiles could not live together.

Balakan took his critique of Zionism a step further. His argument is a decisive refutation of later historical accounts from a Zionist perspective. Robert Wistrich, for example, has argued that there was a procolonial current in Marxism, going back to Marx.

In this context Zionism, which aimed at colonizing a backward, undeveloped country by modern methods of agricultural co-operation, appeared as a “civilizing” movement to a growing number of socialists. Significantly not even its strongest opponents, such as Karl Kautsky or the Austro-Marxists, ever challenged it before 1914 in terms of its possible effects in Palestine itself. It simply did not occur to anti-Zionist Marxists, any more than to sympathizers with Zionism, that there could be an “Arab problem” in Palestine. It would have bee inconceivable in the pre-1914 climate of socialist thought to condemn Zionism as a “colonialist” movement aiming at the establishment of a “settler-State”. If anything, it was pro-Zionist socialists who underlined this aspect of Zionism in positive terms, whereas anti-Zionists emphasized its role in diverting the Jewish masses from the class struggle in the countries where they already lived.

This claim rests on a wilful neglect arguments in primary and secondary sources which Wistrich himself cited. It had certainly occurred to some anti-Zionist Marxists that there was an ‘Arab problem’ in Palestine. Balakan’s comments could not be clearer. The Zionists would have to obtain land in Palestine, Balakan also understood, by purchase or force. There were problems with both methods. The Zionists simply did not have the resources to buy much land. Thus, until 1948, only about eight per cent of land in Palestine was owned by Jews. In the circumstances that preceded World War I, Balakan was also correct in arguing that
A forcible dispossession of the current landlords, assuming that the Sultan concedes autonomy [to the Jews in Palestine], cannot be in question. The Turkish regime would never allow it and those to be dispossessed would not rest with their hands in their laps waiting for what is to come.34

Nevertheless, Max Nordau’s opening address to the 7th Zionist Congress, in July 1905, included a hopeful account of how a deal might be done with the Sultan. In return for being given the right to run Palestine, the Zionists, could protect the Sultan’s authority if ‘the Turkish regime, perhaps, saw itself faced with the necessity of defending its rule in Palestine and Syria, weapons in hand, against its own subjects.’ Balakan was taken aback.

Really, that the Zionists with Nordau at their head recommend themselves to the Sultan as domestic slaves against the Young Turks, who are trying to establish modern state relations, that they can reconcile their Jewish culture with service as Cossacks and hangmen for the Turkish autocracy, that we opponents would never have dared state. We would not have regarded the entire Zionist Congress, the ‘representation of an entire enslaved people’ as so corrupt that not a single voice, not even of a Zionist socialist, was raised against this shameful thought. In a genuinely bourgeois way, purchasing their ‘national liberation’ with the enslavement of other peoples doesn’t matter to them all in the slightest, if it only helps. Their culture and world view can bear such a burden very well.35

Very early, Balakan drew attention to the expansionist logic of Zionist colonisation

The Zionist leaders want to extend colonisation to the areas around Palestine, as Palestine will soon not offer sufficient room for the Jewish masses who crave entry. On the other hand, a greater Palestine is necessary, with a view to the future ‘national market-again the bourgeois, capitalist signature. The Zionist ‘statesmen’ don’t even have a corner of Palestine yet, but already have the land hunger of ‘genuine’ diplomats.36

Jewish social democrats in Galicia and their allies therefore opposed Zionism not only because it was a diversion from Jewish workers’ struggles against exploitation and oppression in Europe, but also because of its implications for Palestine’s Arab inhabitants. Balakan’s pamphlet was published in German, not a language accessible to most Galician Jews. To provide Party members and supporters with a consistent social democratic perspective in Yiddish, the JSDP began to publish the weekly Sotsial-demokrat in October 1905. In May 1906, it carried a systematic, if brief account of the national movement in the Arab world. The article was a translation of a review, from the left-wing Polish journal Krytyka, of Neguib Azoury’s Le réveil de la nation arabe dans l’Asie turque (The awakening of the Arab nation in Turkish Asia). Azoury, himself an important figure in the rise of Arab consciousness, described the emergence of an Arab national movement against Turkish domination. Zionist colonisation was accelerating the development of this movement. The review was sarcastically titled ‘Good prospects for the Zionists in Palestine’. But, written in the period before Zionism gained the support of its first powerful imperialist backer, Britain, its conclusions proved to be overoptimistic. ‘The Zionist daydreams, which have never been more than daydreams, will soon come to nothing compared to this movement.’37

The following year, the Sotsial-demokrat published ‘A letter from Jerusalem’, to arm its readers with further, very practical arguments against Zionism. The letter described the prevalence of disease in the city, the extent of class differences which drove a huge proportion of Jewish worker immigrants back to Russia, the prevalence of religious fanaticism, and confused class relations.38

Outside the main cities, the JSDP’s main political competitor in organising Jewish workers was Zionism. Combating Zionism was therefore an element in the JSDP’s practical organising work as well as its propaganda. One of the new Jewish Social Democratic Party’s efforts to expand beyond its initial strong-holds took place in Podgórze.
With the support of the Kraków JSDP, members in Podgórze, just across the bridge over the Vistula, held a meeting attended by 100 people on Saturday 8 July 1905. A university student, Leon Feyner chaired, while Pesakh Dembitser, a Kraków worker, was one of the main speakers. The formal presentations focussed was the importance organisation, particularly the central social democratic commercial workers’ union, and the way the activities of Poale Zion amongst commercial workers weakened it. In the course of the upturn in workers’ struggles, the union had recently won shorter hours for many of its members. Unfortunately for the Zionists present, the first of their speakers to be recognised in the discussion was a student, with little grasp of how workers’ organised.

Then comrade Grossman spoke. He showed how false the Zionist “love” of the Jewish people was. With sharp words and quotations from the Zionist press, he demonstrated what a swindle these people’s position on the revolution in Russia was. Further, the speaker gave a popular explanation of the meaning of socialism, how enormously significant and vital it was for the working class. Finally, he proved the necessity a workers’ organisation in general and the JSDP in particular.

Two more Zionists intervened to retrieve their position, before the young JSDP heavy weights from across the river in Kraków, Grossman, again, Papier and Dembitser resumed their hammering of Zionism. Towards the end of the meeting, a majority of those present elected a local agitation committee to build a JSDP presence in the town. A week later, at the next JSDP gathering, 65 mainly older, married workers, joined the organisation. In early November, a meeting of over 100 women, also organised by the JSDP, established an association of women workers in Podgórze.

The issues between PZ and the JSDP were not just abstract questions. Shop assistants in Podgórze were working up to 17 hours a day. The Zionists got up a petition for shorter hours which the employers simply rejected. JSDP was prepared to lead strikes and boycotts in pursuit of better wages and shorter hours. The Jewish social democrats were in the vanguard of the upsurge of class struggle, triggered by the revolution in Russia, amongst Jews in Galicia in 1905 and 1906.

JSDP organising in Brody on the Russian border, on the other side of Galicia also began in mid 1905. Yehusha Neker came out from Lemberg to give a talk on organisation and events in Russia on 8 July. The following Saturday, it was Karol Eyneygler on the political situation in Europe. In a case of political harassment typical of eastern Galicia, the police did not permit him to speak in Yiddish, because he hadn’t obtained permission first. So he spoke Polish but, using the disruptive activities of Poale Zionists in the audience as an excuse, the police soon dissolved the meeting altogether. The Tarnopol Party Committee sent comrade Temperberg to the shtetl (Jewish village) of Skalat to combat Zionist influence there. His speech had the desired effect. The 60, mainly older workers, present disowned the Zionists and decided to organise a memorial meeting for the Bundist hero Hersh Lekert.

In reporting to the Bund on the progress of the new Party, Grossman noted that ‘an important part of our battle is the battle with Zionism and Poale Zionism.’ He made the same point in an appeal to the General Austrian Social Democratic Party Congress against its Executive’s decision not to recognise the JSDP as a component of the General Party. He stressed that his Party was politically orthodox. The key decisions of the Party’s founding Congress on its relationship to the General Austrian and Polish Social Democratic Parties and to Zionism, placed the Jewish organisation on the same political basis as the rest of the Austrian social democratic movement. The report which accompanied this appeal drew parallels between the contending political forces in the Jewish and Polish communities in Galicia, comparing the clique of career Jews in politics with the Polish Conservative Party; the Zionists with the antisemitic all-Polish Party (the National Democrats); the Polish Democrats with the new Party of Independent Jews. ‘The organisation of the Jewish proletariat, finally,’ the report affirmed ‘is in the sharpest contradiction with all these parties.'
Conflicts with Zionists and Poale Zionists were also apparent in the campaign over universal suffrage which flared up in Austria in the course of the Congress of the General Social Democratic Party, when the Tsar conceded a constitution in Russia at the end of October. Grossman and Jonas Blum reported on the Congress and the movement for electoral reform to a Party meeting in Kraków on Saturday 4 November, helping to build a rally on Sunday. Around 20,000 people turned out for the protest. The following weeks saw hundreds of meetings and demonstrations in favour of universal suffrage in Galicia and across the Austrian empire. Police attacked rallies in Lemberg and Tarnopol.

On Sunday the 5th, there was a public meeting on electoral reform and the elections to the Kehile (local Jewish administrations with authority, under Austrian law, over Jews in religious and related matters) in Kraków, organised by the party of the ‘Independent Jews’, also known as the Jewish Democrats. In the course of his speech Grossman, attacked the Zionists who had demanded that the meeting not take place because Jewish blood was being shed in Russia, condemning them for calling on people ‘not to struggle, but to weep.’ While supporters of the JSDP were in the majority at the meeting, the Zionists created such a racket that it was dissolved. The Jewish social democrats then unfurled their banner and sang revolutionary songs. The Sotsial-demokrat pointed out that the Zionists had acted like the police in disrupting the meeting. In Chrzanów, about 45 kilometres to the west of Kraków, local Zionists behaved in a similar way in May-June 1906. The Mayor expelled two JSDP members from the town, after Zionists had denounced them.

The Zionists, who up until recently had rejected any involvement in the politics of particular countries as a diversion from their goal of a state in Palestine, now argued, rather inconsistently, that representatives in the Reichsrat (Austrian parliament) should be elected by ‘national curia’ (nationally homogenous, non-territorial electorates). The main argument for proportional representation and nation curia was that these electoral systems would resolve the national question. The same was true of the government’s proposal that electorates be drawn up so they were nationally homogenous. Grossman’s conclusion on this point was convincing: ‘electoral systems, even the best of them, won’t end national struggles’.

The JSDP’s priority was that socialist rather than Zionist or bourgeois Jewish candidates should win in the urban electorates where many of the voters were Jewish. When the first Reichsrat election under universal suffrage was finally held, in May 1907, the Jewish social democrats campaigned against Zionist candidates and in favour of those belonging to the PPSD.

Although they were not standing for the seat which encompassed the Jewish area of Kraków, the Kazimierz, Grossman attacked the Zionists, who were contesting the elections elsewhere in Galicia, in a speech at a large public meeting. Their election campaign did not raise the issue of Palestine, their preoccupation for fifteen years. Instead the Zionists’ election program consisted of the demand for more Jews in the Reichsrat. The Jews in the right wing Polish National Council made the same demand. In practice, therefore, the Zionists were promoting clericalism amongst the Jews and therefore amongst the Poles. For socialists, on the other hand, religion is a private matter: religious edicts should not be issued in parliament. To what extent were the Zionists to be believed when they declared themselves to be both democrats and loyal to the existing Austrian regime?

Grossman wrote a substantial pamphlet on the emergence of the JSDP in 1907, the most sustained and sophisticated justification for the Party’s existence. It’s twin targets were Zionism and the Polish nationalism of the PPSD. Jewish bourgeois nationalism, in the form of Zionism, like Polish nationalism, demanded an independent territorial state. Zionism had, Grossman argued, no practical program and refused to fight for democracy here and now, let alone for the immediate interests of the working class.

It is absolutely clear, that even the greatest reactionary can demand a people’s or even a ‘socialist’ republic in Palestine, and as a result fail to take advantage of the existing constitution or to struggle for the democratisation of a given country. This indirectly
bolsters the absolutism of the clerical and warmongering Austrian bureaucracy. This reactionary standpoint found its best expression in the formula that Zionism, as a **general-nationalist** movement, cannot limit itself to any particular class or group; on the contrary it must include people from all social strata and from the most diverse political camps, uniting East, West, North and South.\(^{55}\)

Jewish workers in Lemberg, however, had developed a practical political program, before the emergence of political Zionist organisation.\(^{56}\) Seeing through the nationalist phraseology of Zionism to its failure to oppose the policies of the imperial bureaucracy, they set up their own independent party in Galicia, in 1892. This party, although it soon collapsed, sought a federal relationship with other national social democratic currents in Galicia, anticipating the federal organisational form adopted by the General Austrian Social Democratic Party in 1897.\(^{57}\)

Grossman argued that the PPSD was progressive because it opposed Zionism and identified the common fate of the Jewish proletariat the proletarians of other nations in Austria. This amounted to a positive, if abstract invocation of Marxist principles. But the version of socialism the PPSD presented to Jewish workers was too abstract. It did not address their immediate problems as both an oppressed and an exploited group; it offered no guidelines for contemporary political practice or struggles against oppression. PPSD leaders maintained that the Jewish question would be resolved under socialism. In this way, Grossman explained, they promoted passivity amongst the Jewish masses.\(^{58}\)

So there was a basic similarity between the PPSD and Zionist positions. By pointing to a solution in the distant future, under socialism or in Palestine, they ‘cut themselves off from the real context in which a solution to this question is necessary’. ‘Both make a mockery of historical circumstances of time and place’.\(^{59}\)

By removing themselves from the real circumstances, which form the **basis** of the Jewish question, both tendencies have unequivocally shown that the **organic connection between the Jewish question** (like any other social issue) and the **given socio-political system of a state,** is a mystery to them. So too is the corollary that the Jewish question which has arisen on a particular socio-political basis cannot be solved separately from that basis and its circumstances. This can occur only occur **through a struggle on the basis of these social circumstances and against them.**\(^{60}\)

No wonder that, over the period between 1897 and 1899, the Jewish workers’ movement led by the Polish Social Democratic Party declined and ‘through its material neglect of the Jewish workers’ movement, the PPSD helped to deliver the Jewish working class to the swindle of Zionist ideology.’\(^{61}\) The Polish Party had ‘turned the class struggle of the Jewish proletariat into a chauvinist fight between two nationalisms’. The dynamic and the damaging consequences of the nationalism of the dominant groups in Austrian social democracy were very clear in Grossman’s critique of the PPSD’s capitulation to the ideology of the Polish bourgeoisie.

Jewish workers, Grossman pointed out, could not wait for the ultimate victory of socialism or Palestine before taking up the struggle against social and national oppression. Hence the appeal of the model provided by the Bund.\(^{62}\) It applied the insight that ‘[s]ocialism acquires strength in a given country or people only **when it applies its theory to the specific development and problems of that country or people.**’\(^{63}\) The ‘analysis of all the practical interests of the Jewish workers’ movement and all the important phenomena of Jewish social life’ was a precondition for making socialism relevant to Jewish workers and winning them from rival ideologies.\(^{64}\) Only a Jewish working class party, Grossman argued, as he had for several years, could do these things.

In *Bundism in Galicia*, he also offered a distinctive account of the relationship between class interest and political organisation. His brief analysis paralleled Lenin’s polemics on the issue and anticipated Lukács’s and Gramsci’s post-war discussions of the role of the party in the development of class consciousness.\(^{65}\)
Recognition, based on scientific socialism that all forms of social consciousness are to be explained in terms of class and group interests is of great practical significance in the assessment of a proletarian party, i.e. social democracy. It is also significant to the extent that it remains true in reverse. The class interests of the proletariat should find their expression in party consciousness (in the form of a program) and when this party consciousness is the multi-faceted expression of the proletariat’s class interests, and the most far-reaching interpretation of the conclusions drawn from the objective trends of actual social development. Workers’ parties do not always fulfill this requirement (as evidenced by the PPSD). Both the character and the content of collective party thought remain directly dependent on the particular party’s adjustment to the very working class whose expression it should be.

The question, therefore, of establishing the Jewish workers’ movement on the basis of Marxism (i.e. of fulfilling the above-mentioned tasks, of making abstract socialist theory into the blood and flesh of the workers’ movement; in other words of adjusting it to the development of Jewish society and its particular problems), could only, we repeat, be a result of the closest possible adaptation of the party organisation to the historical forms of the Jewish proletariat’s condition. It could only result from the mutual organic growth of the party organisation with the workers’ movement itself, just as the latter has grown out of capitalist society.66

Given the constraints faced by Jewish social democrats in Galicia—the nationalist hostility of the PPSD and its opportunist alliance with the equally nationalist German-Austrian Party inside the General Party—the construction of such a Jewish workers’ movement could only be undertaken by a Jewish social democratic party. Grossman, however, transformed the immediate circumstances which had pushed him and his comrades to establish such a national organisation into a principle.67 He projected backward the organisational form imposed on the Jewish working class to say that this was the only possible form of organisation for all workers parties in Austria from the late 1890s. If, however, the Polish and German social democrats had opposed national oppression in Austria as seriously as the Russia Social Democratic Labour Party did from its refoundation in 1903, there would have been other organisational choices available to the Jewish working class in Galicia.

When the PPSD approved the repackaging of its rump ‘Jewish section’ as the ‘Jewish Social Democracy of Galicia’ in 1908, the JSDP immediately started to campaign to ensure that no-one would be taken in by the change of label. Grossman addressed meetings on the issue in Kraków and Lemberg. A Poale Zionist and another Jewish national socialist spoke during the discussion in Lemberg, accusing the JSDP of demanding too little and lacking national spirit. In his reply, Grossman conceded some of their case

That you are nationalists, we don’t want to dispute with you. That is, actually, the difference between you and us. We are Jewish social democrats and you Jewish nationalists. We lead the class struggles of the Jewish proletariat. We fight for equality. We want the Jewish nation to be equal to all other nations. Cultivating nationalism with its accompanying chauvinism, you want to capture the Jewish proletariat in the net of chauvinism, under the mask of your peculiar socialism.68

These arguments found an audience in the Jewish working class. At their respective Party Congresses in 1908, both the JSDP and PZ claimed about 3,500 members.69 But the overwhelming majority of the Party’s members lived in Galicia. This was not true of the labour Zionists. There were substantial labour Zionist organisations in Vienna and groups in the Czech lands.70 In Galicia, the JSDP was therefore a significantly larger Party. Within a short period of its formation, the JSDP under Grossman’s leadership had become the dominant organisation amongst Jewish workers in the province.
In its coverage of the JSDP Congress, the Sotsial-demokrat made a side-swipe at both the PPSD and PZ, pointing out that the Congress itself demonstrated that the Jewish proletariat was capable of both making its own decisions and conducting class struggles in the diaspora. Grossman’s presentation, however, focussed on the mainstream Jewish parties, more formidable opponents than the PZ. The Zionists’ political perspectives had undergone a rapid evolution around the time universal suffrage was introduced for the elections to the Reichsrat. Agitation for the Hebrew language showed ‘how dear the education of the [Yiddish speaking] Jewish masses is to the hearts of the Zionists’. Their stock in trade, bewailing the injustices which befall the Jews, formerly the speciality of liberal Jewish politicians, was ‘no positive program which can constitute the basis for the revitalisation of Jewish society and the reconstitution of the structure of Jewish social life.’ The reactionary party of the ‘Poles of Mosaic faith’, who participated in the right wing Polish caucus in the Reichsrat only showed any interest in the Jewish masses immediately before elections. ‘Their sole program is the hunt for seats in parliament, it doesn’t go further than that.’ The ‘Independent Jews’ in Kraków, although they called themselves the Jewish Democratic Party had done deals with the reactionaries. Grossman wrote that they ‘pursue a policy which politically corrupts the Jewish masses by means of democratic philanthropy: cheaper homes, coal etc. Their political activity is never more than a struggle for pitiful steps forward and not a struggle for the principle of real equality for the Jews.’

The resolution which summed up Grossman’s and his Party’s political perspectives in relation to Galicia emphasised the need for self-reliance. The General Party’s representation in the Reichsrat had disintegrated into separate national caucuses shortly after the first elections under universal suffrage in 1907; a parliamentary symptom of the concessions made by the constituent organisations of Austrian social democracy to nationalism. In a tacit acknowledgement of this nationalist degeneration, the resolution failed to mention the wider Austrian social democratic movement.

The Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia regards itself as isolated in the struggle for the political and social struggle for the emancipation of the Jewish working class. Both the Polish and the so-called Jewish parties are hostile to this struggle.

The complete lack of real democracy means that the pseudo democratic Polish parties regard the Jewish proletariat’s struggle as separatist agitation and harmful to the country.

Jewish proletariat cannot in the least rely for support in its liberation struggle on Zionism, after the series of shifts the Zionists have engaged in over the past two years. Rather, Zionism is one of the greatest opponents of the cultural revitalisation of the Jewish masses.

The so-called “Independent Jews”, cut off from the centres of the Jewish masses, quite apart from their minimal local significance, have proved themselves to be opportunists. They have moved from the path of struggle to that of “democratic philanthropy” and demoralising compromises.

We assert that the unheard of means the Polish Social Democratic Party employs in its fight against us damage both the Jewish and Polish proletariats. The PPSD alone bears and will bear responsibility for this.

For these reasons, the Jewish proletariat has to conquer its political rights and build its political influence with its own forces in the struggle against all Polish and Jewish parties.

The JSDP, however, was still prepared to work with the PPSD in the interests of the whole working class. In the lead-up to the 1911 Reichsrat elections, the PPSD’s ‘Jewish social democracy’ and the JSDP agreed to fuse. Part of the deal was that the JSDP would withdraw its candidates for the election and throw its support behind those of the PPSD. In Lemberg, the PPSD’s Herman Diamand won a large majority over the prominent Zionist, Adolf Stand. PZ also contributed to this success.
The Labour Zionist organisation had moved to the left and supported social democratic candidates in 1911, rather than Zionists as it had in 1907. PZ had begun to move to the left in 1905, under the influence of revolutionary events in Russia. The Labour Zionists also seem to have responded to the disinterest of the General Zionists in the problems faced by workers, accommodated to the more militant and successful JSDP and been concerned that supporting bourgeois Zionist candidates would undermine their goal of affiliating to the Socialist International.75

After the elections, the PPSD reneged on the recognition of the JSDP, though the Parties supported each other’s candidates in the elections to the Galician Sejm (Parliament) in 1913.76 Later in the year, however, the former leaders of the ‘Jewish Social Democracy’, though not its rank and file, returned to the Polish Party. In the years before the First World War, the PPSD’s political priorities were increasingly nationalist. From 1912, Party leaders made clear that, should war break out, it would side with Austria, in the interests of the reestablishment of an independent Poland. From the outbreak of the war, the PPSD participated in the Principal National Committee of Polish parties in Austria and even joined the conservative dominated Polish Club in the Reichsrat in 1916.77

The outbreak of war in 1914 severely disrupted the JSDP. The regime imposed martial law in Galicia. Many Party members were conscripted and many others became refugees as the Russian front swept back and forth, devastating the east of the province. For a couple of years the JSDP did not function at all. Before the war, however, and in contrast to the PPSD, the JSDP never made concessions to the (Zionist) nationalism of ‘its own’ petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. After the JSDP began to operate again, in 1917, it resumed its criticism of Zionism as an oppressive colonial enterprise and its commitment to working class struggle.78

Endnotes
6 Bross dated the start of the problem period to 1899-1901 ‘The beginning of the Jewish Labor Movement’ op. cit. p. 82 also see Jakob Bross ‘Tsu der geshikhte fun der y. s. d. p. in galitsiishe’ Royter Pinkes 2 Verlag Kultur Lige, Warsaw, 1924, pp. 32, 43-44. According to Grossman, the decline occurred ‘after 1897’, Bundizm op. cit. p. 25. For the collapse of the Jewish organisations in Kraków by 1901, see Yidishe sotsial-demokrat 2 May 1905 p. 39.
Anshel Reiss *Bereshit tenuot ha Poalim ha Yehudim be Galitsyah* World Federation of Polish Jews, Tel Aviv 1973, pp. 25.


Poale Zion specifically sought to represent workers at Zionist Congresses and (with no success) to represent the international Jewish working class at Congresses of the Socialist International, Kener *Kvershnit* op. cit. p. 83. For critical accounts of Zionism and Poale Zionism in this period see Nathan Weinstock *Zionism: false messiah* In *Links*, London 1979, especially pp. 46-50; John Bunzl *Klassenkampf in der Diaspora: Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Arbeiterbewegung in Österreich* Wien 1975, pp. 113-115. Note that most systematic attempt to synthesise Marxism and Zionism was made by Ber Borokhov. His approach found more support within PZ organisations in Russia than Austria.

For the PPSD’s analysis of Zionism and the ‘Jewish question’ see Max Zetterbaum *Probleme der jüdisch-proletarischen Bewegung* *Die Neue Zeit* 19 (1) numbers 11 and 12, 1900, pp. 324-330, 367-373.


Bros *‘Tsu der geshikhhte’* op. cit. p. 43. According to Christina Stead, in 1901 Grossman learnt Yiddish in order to organise Jewish workers in Kraków, *Stead Collection, National Library of Australia, Box 6 Folder 45*.

Bunzl *Klassenkampf*, op. cit. p. 124.


**Naprzdó**, 1 November 1904.


Henryk Grossman *Proletariat wobec kwestii żydowskiej z powodu niedyskutowanej dyskusyi w ‘Krytyce’* Kraków, Drukani Władysława Teodorczuka, January 1905, p. 31.

Grossman *Proletariat wobec kwestii żydowskiej* op. cit. pp. 36, 41. The first part of the pamphlet appeared in Yiddish as ‘Dem proletariat benegeye tsu der yidenfrage’, in *Der yidisher sotsial-demokrat*, 1, April 1905, 6-13; and 3, June 1905 pp. 7-11.


Letter from Henryk Grossman to the Foreign Committee of the Bund, Kraków, 8 April 1905, MG2 F107, Bund Archive, YIVO, New York (Bund Archive). Grossman refers to Bronislav Grosser, one of whose pseudonyms was ‘Sławek’, as ‘Sławka Gr’.

‘Tsi di lezer!’ *Yidisher sotsial-demokrat* 1, April 1905, p. 3.

Najdus *Polska Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna* op. cit. p. 437.

JSDP ‘Święto majowe’ in JSDP *Przed Kongresem* Krakow, 2 June 1905, pp. 6-7, emphasis in the original.

ibid. p. 7, emphasis in the original.


ibid. p. 20. ‘Balaban’ appears in the text, but this seems to be a typographical error. These were common in the *Yidisher sotsial-demokrat*. 

14 Rick Kuhn
34 Balakan Die Sozialdemokratie und das jüdische Proletariat op. cit. p. 40
36 ibid. p. 47.
38 ‘A brief fun Yerusholaim’ Sotsial-demokrat 2 August 1907, p. 2.
40 Sotsial-demokrat 3 November 1905, p. 3.
41 Sotsial-demokrat 6 October 1905, 27 October 1905.
42 Yidisher sotsial-demokrat 4-5, July-August 1905, pp. 45-46.
43 Yidisher sotsial-demokrat 4-5, July-August 1905, pp. 43-44
50 Sotsial-demokrat 10 November 1905, p. 3.
51 Sotsial-demokrat 8 June 1906 p. 4.
53 For an example of the JSDP’s critique of Zionism see ‘Der bankrot fun’m tsionizm’ Sotsial-demokrat 13-7-1906, p. 1; ‘H. G.’ (presumably Henryk Grossman) ‘Polenklub, Yidenklub un der Tsionistisher sharlotanizmus’ Sotsial-demokrat 28 September 1906.
54 Sotsial-demokrat 1 April 1907, p. 4.


ibid. p. 43.

*Sotsial-demokrat* 26 June 1908 p. 4. The attempts at disruption by Poale Zionists during the meeting continued after it was over. But when Jewish national socialists, including a gangster who had organised an attack and drawn a gun on the JSDP secretary Henryk Shveber and Leyb Landau in Przemyśl in 1907, tried to unfurl a Poale Zionist banner, ‘our Lwów comrades taught him better’.

Jakob Grobler and Henryk Shrayber ‘Berikht fun der Eksekutiv-komitet tsum III Partey-tag in Lemberg 1908’ *Sotsial-demokrat* 9 October 1908, p. 2; The ironic report in the JSDP’s newspaper was very sceptical about the PZ’s claimed membership, ‘Der kongres fun di “alveltlikhe Poale-Tsion” fin Esterreykh’ *Sotsial-demokrat* 19 June 1908 p. 3.

Kener *Kvershnit* op. cit. p. 106.


‘Der III. kongres 2’, op. cit., p. 3.

‘Der III. kongres 2’, op. cit., p. 3.


Piasecki *Sekcja Zydowska* op. cit., pp. 82, 92.


See, for example ‘Di Juden-pogromen in Palestina un der Tsionizm’ *Sotsial-demokrat* 1 May 1920, p. 7.