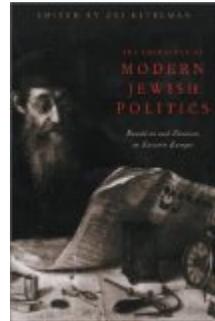


Zvi Gitelman, ed. *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003. vii + 275 pp. \$44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-4188-0.

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Modern Jewish Politics: Beyond the Bundist/Zionist Dichotomy

Jews have historically engaged in politics both internally and externally, and likewise Jewish politics have been shaped by Jewish concerns on the one hand and influences from developments in non-Jewish politics on the other. While various Jewish ideologies struggled for supremacy in the modern world, Jews were often forced to put their ideological differences aside in order to protect their vulnerable communities and populations from rising animosities, or to negotiate with the gentile leadership in order to strengthen their communities. This tension makes Jewish politics a rich topic for research and study. This topic becomes more politically charged when located in eastern Europe in the period immediately preceding the Holocaust. With the benefit of hindsight we know that these Jewish communities were on the verge of destruction, so their internal and external political behaviors are difficult to separate from questions of their appropriateness and the efficacy of their responses given the rise of anti-Jewish sentiments. Nevertheless it is important to avoid the pitfall of evaluating the political strategies of eastern European Jewry in light of the Holocaust, but rather to attempt to understand them in their context as responses to a complex and uncertain world.

Many of the articles in the present collection contribute to our understanding of these tensions by presenting new research and perspectives. The subtitle of the book, "Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe," and the introduction that emphasizes these specific movements are too narrow and somewhat misleading as to the con-

tent of the volume. Still, the book succeeds in shedding light on the nature of modern Jewish politics by exploring the topic from a variety of perspectives.

This volume originated from a conference that took place in 1998 at the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, "A Century of Modern Jewish Politics: The Bund and Zionism in Poland and Eastern Europe." Given that 1997 was the centenary of both the First Zionist Congress at Basle and the founding of the Bund at Vilna, the focus of the conference makes sense; however, in the published form this collection is not so much an exploration and comparison of two movements as it is an analysis of modern Jewish politics more broadly defined. Ronald Grigor Suny, a scholar of Soviet nationalities, alludes to this in the postscript by focusing on two articles that concentrate on alternatives to the Bund and mainstream Zionists, Ben Nathans's article on Russian Jewish liberals and Samuel Kassow's on the leftist Poalei Tsiyon party. I am in agreement with Suny that these articles challenge the premise that east European Jewish politics consisted of a struggle between the competing ideologies of the Bund and Zionism. However, I see this more complex understanding of Jewish politics as shaping many of the articles in this volume.

The articles are arranged in three sections. The first and most substantial, on east European Jewish politics, consists of a variety of essays mostly focused on inter-war Poland, yet ranging in subject from Bundist social

organizations to the Agudat Yisrael. This initial section is followed by one on politics and culture, exploring the relationship between Jewish politics and Yiddish culture, Hebrew literature, and the plastic arts. The volume concludes with a short section on east European Jewish politics in emigration.

Zvi Gitelman's introduction raises the question of why the Zionist movement seems to have succeeded in its aim while the Bund has practically disappeared. He argues that, despite its virtual disappearance, it is the Bund that has had the more lasting influence on Jewish politics and society. He states the purpose of the volume as follows: "This volume analyzes the changes in Jewish political life wrought by Zionism and Bundism, examines political, social, and cultural dimensions of the two movements, and explores the relationship between politics, culture, and society among the Jews of Eastern Europe in the first half of this century" (p. 3). According to Gitelman, the essays raise "the issue of whether ethnic minorities are best served by highly ideological or pragmatic movements in trying to defend their interests in nondemocratic, multiethnic states" (pp. 3-4). He also suggests that the authors hold different opinions on the relative success and failure of political parties and the appropriateness of their tactics and that most address these questions through the prism of the Holocaust.

The dichotomy presented here between two parties, one ideological and one pragmatic, risks simplifying the complex political forces and influences on the Jews of eastern Europe. After all, is it clear which one, the Bund or Zionism, is ideological and which is pragmatic? Rather than proclaiming a verdict on political visions, historians must focus on understanding the dynamics and influences that led to these visions and their transformation and development over time and place. Gitelman incorporates the general introduction to the volume into his own contribution, in which he suggests "that the Bund contributed to the democratization and modernization of Jewish political life, perhaps to a greater extent than the Zionist movement" (p. 6). He demonstrates that, by including women and establishing more democratic forms of decision-making, the Bund left its mark on Jewish politics.

Calling into question the assumption that to be modern Jews had to achieve independence and self-reliance, Benjamin Nathans asserts that Russian Jewish integrationists constituted another form of modern Jewish politics. He suggests that "no Jewish politics committed to life in the diaspora could afford to disengage itself

from gentile power structures" (p. 23). In doing so, he rightly interprets Jewish politics within its historical context: "In order to be truly inclusive, therefore, the yardstick of Jewish political modernity ought to measure not simply the extent to which Jews freed themselves from dependence on gentile institutions, but the ways in which their collective engagement with those institutions changed over time" (p. 23). By demonstrating that Russian-Jewish integrationists took part in the struggle for national rights and certain forms of autonomy, Nathans's contribution calls into question the definition of Jewish politics based on a dichotomy between the Bund and Zionism.

Antony Polonsky traces the transformation in Jewish political consciousness that spread from tsarist Russia to the Kingdom of Poland, from the assimilationist solution to autonomist movements, such as Zionism, Bundism, and folkism. After the First World War, conditions seemed ripe for Jewish autonomy in eastern Europe, particularly in Lithuania, but although the autonomous experiment there had a promising beginning, it ultimately failed. The rise of anti-Semitism in the 1930s undermined autonomous politics, strengthening the Bund which through its connections with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) seemed most promising, and increasing support for what Polonsky calls the politics of desperation, radical Zionism and communism.

Daniel Blatman addresses the struggle between two approaches within the Bund in interwar Poland, integration with the PPS and Jewish autonomy. He demonstrates that, unlike the Polish Socialist organizations, autonomous social organizations such as the Artisan's Union and the Women's Association (YAF) provided for the cultural needs of Jewish workers, thereby justifying the existence of these separate organizations for Jews. Faced with differences with the PPS over the issue of Jewish cultural autonomy and internal disputes about its place in the socialist camp, the Bund defined its goal and mission in 1919 as "fulfilling the [Jewish proletariat's] entitlements to national and cultural autonomy" (p. 59). In this way the Bund leadership adjusted its vision to fit the circumstances of the Polish state by addressing the specific needs of Jewish workers.

In his article on the leftist Poalei Tsiyon in interwar Poland, Samuel Kassow challenges many of our assumptions, concentrating on this fascinating and understudied group that called for a binational, Yiddish-speaking Soviet Palestine. He asserts: "the Communists had countered Zionism with the pledge of a new promised land:

the Soviet Union. The Bund constantly hammered home its compelling message of 'doigkayt' ('here-ness'): commitment to the Jewish masses, to their struggle in the diaspora and to their language, Yiddish. Of all the Zionist parties, it was the LPZ that most recognized the force of these alternate visions and strove to adapt them to Zionism." (p. 71). The ideology of the LPZ stressed a Marxist determinist view of Zionism over a "constructivist" view, putting it at odds with mainstream Zionism. With the growth of the Yishuv, the Jewish settlement in Palestine, they risked losing members to other Zionist groups, while if they adopted a more pro-Yishuv stance they risked alienating their more leftist members. "The ideological balance came at a price, but was central to the identity of the movement" (p. 76).

If Kassow succeeds in demonstrating the importance of the LPZ as an alternative form of new Jewish politics, Gershon Bacon similarly expands our understanding of new Jewish politics beyond Zionism and the Bund to include the Agudat Yisrael, a worldwide organization of Orthodox Jews. He suggests that the Aguda on the one hand was the polar opposite and critical opponent of Zionism while, on the other hand, it imitated many Zionist political techniques. This imitation is seen as evidence that Orthodox Jews felt a threat from the Zionist movement. Nevertheless, the two movements cooperated in order to protect Jewish interests. "In the end, Agudat Yisrael and the Zionists in Poland would be ideological rivals, but no less were they reluctant partners" (p. 94). Thus the Aguda adopted modern Jewish political methods to compete with its Jewish rivals and ultimately to cooperate with them in the face of growing anti-Semitism.

Michael Steinlauf draws on a rich collection of autobiographies of Jewish youth in interwar Poland to explore their political and cultural lives. While ideologies from communism to Agudat Yisrael attracted the youth, the common ground was a passion for reading, writing, education, and physical activity. Steinlauf asserts that "attentive reading of the autobiographies tends to contradict the notion of a generation of true believers living under the sign of ideological struggle and political activism" (p. 103). The typical writer moved between different ideologies and in and out of politics. They shared a culture of aspiration and a desire to move forward from the restrictions and isolation of the present.

The second section of the volume explores the complexities of Jewish political parties and ideologies in relation to culture. For example, David Fishman challenges the notion that the Bund created modern Yiddish culture.

He points out that Yiddish culture flourished equally in radical and nonradical milieus, and that "most of the landmark events in the history of modern Yiddish culture were not sponsored by the Bund nor led by Bundists" (p. 109). Fishman uncovers the ongoing tensions between Labor activists and Yiddish writing. While the Bund appreciated Yiddish culture as a tool to attract workers to their cause, its members disapproved of the notion of Yiddish for its own sake (p. 113). He concludes that "while the Bund tugged Yiddish culture to the political left, its positions did not dominate the Yiddish literary and cultural scene between 1890 and the First World War" (p. 119). Ruth Wisse explores the relationship between politics and culture in the work of I. L. Peretz. Peretz's politics was a politics of exile, but in a secular world where there is no hope of redemption exile becomes an end in itself. Peretz warned against this very culture of exile in his writings in which he prophesized doom and destruction.

The renaissance of the Hebrew language and literature in tsarist Russia and its relation to Jewish nationalism is examined by David Aberbach. He understands Hebrew literature on many levels, as "a rejection of tsarist authority, an assertion of Jewish national feeling, and a declaration of independence from the empire" (p. 133). Aberbach's study of Hebrew language and literature contributes yet another nuanced perspective on modern Jewish politics, demonstrating the complex factors driving the transformation of Hebrew literature in tsarist Russia.

The final article in this section is by Seth Wolitz. He contrasts the political and ideological perspective of Zionist art, exemplified by the work of Ephraim Moses Lilien, which used traditional elements to support Zionist goals, with the work of the Vitebsk art school of Yehuda Pen, which focused on portraying the present; namely, the culture of the eastern European Jew. In contrast to the Zionist portrayal of the biblical past and the future homeland, the Vitebsk artists "grappled with the present and took the present as the given upon which to expand, not flee" (p. 164). According to Wolitz, the showdown between the two schools took place in an artists' colony in Paris in 1912. While the Zionist artists published an art journal filled with biblical scenes, Marc Chagall appropriated the Zionist subject matter in his modernist version of "Adam and Eve." In so doing he created a Jewish point of view that distinguished Jewish work from non-Jewish work. Modern Jewish art has much in common with modern Jewish literature and politics. It developed under the dual influence of internal political struggle and non-Jewish culture, and in essence became defined by

this dynamic of “internal cultural combat” (p. 177).

The final two articles pose the question of how the new Jewish politics of eastern Europe translated to America and western Europe. Jonathan Frankel traces the development of the Jewish Socialist Federation, established in the United States in 1912 by veterans of the Bundist movement. “It was an attempt to apply a model close to that represented by the Bund in tsarist Russia to American conditions. But although no longer newcomers, the graduates of the Bund had failed to take into account the fact that they were challenging a structure that had become deeply entrenched before they had even begun arriving in the United States” (p. 188).

The ramifications of the encounter between east European and native Jews for post-World War II French Jewry are explored by Maud Mandel. She demonstrates that while French Jewry did become more inclined toward Zionism, neither the Holocaust nor the birth of Israel caused them to question their French citizenship. “The Vichy legacy did not mean that Jews had to reject their French patriotism; rather, they had to supplement their loyalty to France with a stronger commitment to Jewish nationalism” (p. 206). According to Mandel, the

Holocaust and the birth of the State of Israel led to a greater integration of immigrant Jews into the population. Yet one wonders how much the shifting of political views within French Jewry resulted from the influence of immigrants and how much was simply a reaction to historical events. The fact that French Jewry became more inclined toward Zionism, not Bundism, supports the latter view.

The Agudat Yisrael, the leftist Poalei Tsiyon, Russian integrationists, diaspora nationalism, Bundism, and Zionism formed some of the varied political responses of east European Jews to modernity. If anything, this volume challenges the assumption that a struggle between two clearly defined ideologies, Zionism and Bundism, constituted modern Jewish politics. Different elements of these ideologies were adopted and combined by Jews in various times and places. Modern Jewish politics was constantly being refined and modified as it faced new challenges posed by external events and circumstances, internal disputes, and the need for cooperation. This volume contributes to our understanding of eastern European Jewry by suggesting a more inclusive and nuanced view of what constitutes modern Jewish politics.

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