

The Social Zionist movement in Poland. From the Late 19th Century to the Beginning of the Communist Era

■ The emergence and development of the social Zionist movement in the Polish environment should be understood as a certain idealistic and political process of unspecified time scale. In Poland, it was to a large extent pioneer in character in comparison with analogical phenomena developing intensely in the remaining parts of Central-Eastern Europe, mainly within today's southern-eastern Ukraine, as well as other European countries and North America. It was definitely an important phenomenon in the life of Polish society, influencing strongly the development of the Zionist movement itself and the emergence and development of the state of Israel. It is an interesting case in the history of the idea's spreading and in the process of Europeanisation of Polish relations. Nevertheless, its political role in the modern history of Poland and in the proclamation of the State of Israel is by no means reflected in contemporary Polish historiography. This is mainly due to political reasons. Before 1989, especially after the Six-Day War between Israelis and Arabs in 1969, when Zionism was viewed as a bourgeois movement and ideology constituting a serious danger for the world's system of real socialism and the existence of Poland, it was simply impossible to conduct research regarding the subject matter. It was used only for propaganda reasons to

stimulate anti-Semitism in the Polish society and explain the anti-Israeli course of foreign politics. On the other hand, after 1989, the interest in the social idea vanished; its place was now only in “the trash of history” and the development of research on the history of socialist movements ceased due to ideological reasons. Lack of knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish in the Polish society was another difficulty. Nevertheless, in the last several years, the interest in the history of the Zionist movement in Poland, mainly of the second post-war period, emerged, especially among the young generation of historians, such as Natalia Aleksium and August Grabski.

The emergence and development of the socialist Zionist movement in the political, organisational and idealistic dimensions was conditioned by social and national (national revival) transformations of Jews at the end of the 19th century, political development of the Zionist movement, the situation in the Polish socialist movement, etc. (Śliwa, 1997).

Moses Hess, a German writer and philosopher, Karl Marx’ and Friedrich Engels’ friend, is recognised as the pioneer of the social Zionist idea. He did not follow Marx and Engels’ theory of philosophical materialism and the theory of social class struggle, as he sought for idealistic inspirations for socialism in Spinoza’s philosophy. What is more, he did not share their view on the Jewish question, seeing Jews not only as a religious community, but as a separate nation as well. In 1862 he published a work entitled *Rome and Jerusalem. The Last National Question*, in which he was opposed to the assimilation policy of Jews, postulating recreation of the Jewish state in Palestine, which would be socialist in character and would be the starting point for the whole humanity’s salvation. Due to the growing anti-Semitism in Europe, especially in Germany, he wanted to increase the pace of the national revival of Jews, seeing Judaism as the primary element of the process. It has to be noted that in 1963 his *Philosophical works from 1841–1850* were published in Warsaw.

With the process of shaping the modern Polish nation in the last twenty-five years of the 19th century, national awareness of the Jewish people developed and the assimilation movement, which had been very weak so far, started to collapse. The political indications of Jewish national revival were the Zionist groups emerging at the beginning of the 1880s: Chibbat Cijon (*Lovers of Zion*) in the Kingdom of Poland (Warszawa, Łódź, Piotrków Trybunalski, Kalisz, Białystok), whose main headquarters were located in Odessa. The Zionist movement developed in Galicia as well. In 1882, the first Zionist soiree took place in Lviv.

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The process of national revival in Jews was on the increase. In 1887 Herman Diamand, the future key politician of Galician social democracy, established the „Syjon” Association, which published a pamphlet entitled *Jakim powinien być program młodzieży żydowskiej* (“What the Jewish youth programme should be like”), popularising slogans connected with Jewish settlement in Palestine. At the same time, the Association proclaimed a programme of granting citizenship to Jews, restructuring Jewish relations and modernisation of Jewish life according to universal western-European models, with all due respect for the Judaic tradition. In 1892, the Association started to publish a journal entitled „Przyszłość” (“Future”), in which it justified the main aim of Zionism – the emigration of Jews to Palestine. Followers were mobilised with the following slogan: “All layers of the developing Zionist movement and Jews of all countries – unite! Down with convenient assimilation masquerade! Down with the obsequious Jankiel, the musician, and his fans!” (Feldman, 1893, p. 56).

In the same year when the “Syjon” Association was established, a well-known writer, publicist and social activist from Lviv, Alfred Nossig, published the first treatise on political Zionism in Poland entitled: *Próba rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej* (“An attempt to solve the Jewish question”). In his work, which was published ten years before Theodor Herzl’s “bible of Zionism” – *Der Judenstaat*, he explained the idea of recreating the Jewish state in Palestine, referring to national and religious arguments, and convincing that national aspirations of Jews settled within Poland can be satisfied neither by the assimilation programme, nor the postulate to emigrate to other countries, nor granting them a separate national-administrative status, but only by creating a Jewish state, as only by such means can the “final regeneration of the Jewish nation” occur. After his conflict with Theodor Herzl, Nossig resigned from the idea of political Zionism ten years later. Nevertheless, the postulates of Jewish emigration to Palestine and recreation of the Jewish state were well received among Jewish people who lived in the Austrian and Russian annexed territories of Poland, as well as those from the western part of the tsarist empire. A new Jewish Zionist movement started to emerge, both organisationally and ideologically, which in 1884 led to the first conference of the *Lovers of Zion* in Katowice. In the last decade of the 19th century the movement revived significantly in the Polish territory due to the 1896 journey of Theodor Herzl to the Kingdom of Poland. A year later the First Zionist Congress in Basel took place. The day after its inauguration, the initiator noted in his diary: “Today I created the Jewish state. In five years’ time, and in 50 for

sure, everyone will know about that” (Herzl, 1922). Fifty-five years passed until his idea came true and the Jewish state became a fact. The creator of Zionism was mistaken by one year only – the state of Israel was established in 1948.

The development of the Zionist movement within Poland was complicated by the social changes among Polish and Jewish workers’ in the last decade of the 19th century and a visible polarisation of opinions in these communities, which led to the creation of a massive Polish socialist movement and a similar one among Jews. As a matter of fact, from the beginning of the Polish socialist movement there were also numerous Jewish intelligentsia representatives, who were practically co-creators of the movement, such as Szymon Dickstein, Stanisław Mendelson, Feliks Kon, Feliks Perl, Róża Luksemburg, Henryk Walecki, Adolf Warski, Józef Kwiatek, Stanisław Posner, Herman Diamand, Emil Haecker and Herman Lieberman, to name just a few. As they derived from Jewish intelligentsia and bourgeoisie communities adapted to the Polish culture, which did not understand national aspiration of Jewish masses, they proclaimed the idea of their social liberation as part of the general liberation process of workers. That is why Polish workers’ parties co-created by these socialists wanted to recruit followers in Jewish communities of workers’ from their very beginning. The Polish Socialist Party established a Jewish Organisation of the party in the Kingdom of Poland in 1893, while the Galician Social-Democratic Party suggested recruitment among Jewish workers and creating a special Jewish organisation as early as in January 1892. According to Ignacy Daszyński, the leader of the Galician Party, “the interests of the Jewish proletariat are identical with those of workers of other countries”. Both socialist parties initiated publication of special agitation materials, including journals written in Yiddish, such as “Der Arbeiter”, for recruitment reasons (Piasecki, 1978, 1982). That way they were able to draw the attention of lower Jewish classes away from Jewish national aspirations and to weaken the growing Zionist movement.

Regardless of the impact of Polish socialist parties on the Jewish community, independent Jewish social movement started to consolidate at the time, leading to the establishment of the General Jewish Labour Bund of Poland and Russia in Vilnius in 1897. It fought both the assimilation of Jews and their emigration to Palestine. At the same time, it postulated the national-cultural autonomy in the settlement country and building world-wide socialism. The aim of its direct activity was the realisation of socialism in Poland and improvement of the situation of Jewish labourers as, following the words of its main leader and

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theoretician, Wiktor Alter, “creating a state in Palestine is impossible; therefore, we should provide living for Jewish workers in Poland, not in Palestine” (Śliwa, 1986). Fierce rivalry for the rule over Jewish workers’ hearts and minds between these two political institutions occurred. The Bund dominated absolutely. Nevertheless, socialist leaders could not stay indifferent to the growing influences of Zionist groupings and ignore national aspirations of the Jewish working class. At the same time, Zionists had to value their social aspirations and the emerging Jewish emancipation movement.

In such ideological and political atmosphere the growing Zionist movement differentiated and, apart from the dominating liberal-political current, other currents developed: the conservative-religious and the socialist one. The latter first developed in Galicia. Its origins were connected to the establishment of the Trade Union of Jewish Workers, Trades and Clerks in Vienna, which was a Zionist and social organisation. Its branches were soon created in most Galician cities; therefore, a convention of all trade unions of Jewish traders and workers associating 10 trade unions and 4 sections, with 1535 members in total, was organised in Krakow in May 1904. The convention was recognised as the First Convention of Poale Zion. There were mainly white-collars and Jewish intelligentsia, to a minor extent workers, who remained under the influence of the Polish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia and Silesia and the Jewish Social-Democratic Party in Galicia. The second convention took place in Krakow in June 1905. Among participants, there were representatives of 20 organisations and 15 sections of Poale Zion, 2000 members in total from most Galician towns and cities. The organisational-political status of the Zionist-socialist movement in Galicia remained unchanged until the First World War. It was a minority movement, as, for instance, the Jewish Social-Democratic Party in Galicia and Bukovina had 6800 members at the time.

At the same time, i.e. between 1901 and 1903, the first circles of socialists-Zionists were established within the Kingdom of Poland and in the so-called removed lands, including Warsaw, Łódź, Białystok, Vilnius, Minsk and Vitebsk. Warsaw, alongside with Odessa, became the main centre of the new socio-national movement. It soon led to its consolidation, as in 1905 an illegal convention was organised in Ciechocinek with representatives from the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Poland, where the Russian Association of Jewish Socialists was established. A clear revival of the association occurred after the beginning of the Japanese-Russian war and the first Russian revolution.

Dov Ber Borochof (1881–1918), a Russian politician, is recognised as the creator of the Zionist movement and its ideology (Merchov, 1972, p. 29). Initially, he was connected with the Russian social democracy; however, under the influence of the growing wave of anti-Semitism and nationalism, he realised that the only solution of the Jewish question can be found by joining the liberation idea of the oppressed Jewish nation with a workers' revolution. In 1901 he established the Russian Association of Jewish Socialists in Poltava, which changed its name for the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party Poale Zion five years later (Wróbel, 1991). The following year, he established the World Federation of Poale Zion in Hague, which cooperated with the World Zionist Organisation. Nevertheless, it remained a minority movement in comparison with the organisation initiated by Theodor Herzl. While at the beginning of the century there were 100,000 members of the Zionist movement within the Russian empire, social Zionism had only 16,000. There is no data related to the Polish territory, except for Galicia mentioned above. It can be assumed that during the greatest increase of political activity, i.e. during the 1905 revolution, it did not exceed 5,000 members. To put that into context, Jewish socialist parties in the Russian and Austrian annexed territory had over twice as many members. In his idealistic conceptions of social Zionism, Borochof joined the ideas of Marxist socialism with the principles of Zionist Judaism. He believed that the Jewish nation, including mainly its working class, could develop properly, i.e. achieve progress through modernisation, only in the circumstances of a national state, such as the Jewish state of Palestine, based on socialist principles and constituting one of the centres of worldwide emancipation movement of the working class. Those particular national-state aspirations of Jewish workers were conditioned by the fierce rivalry of workers coming from different nations, which dominated international solidarity. In the fight in question, Jews were in a no-win situation due to historical, economic, social, and psychological reasons. Their inability of political organisation, which was a consequence of no national state, resulted in the fact that they were the weakest factor in the worldwide rivalry between nations in the sphere of labour, being offloaded the worst labours in selected branches of industry and the lowest category of the working world. It closed their access to progress and social promotion. Initiating the first Jewish congress in the USA one year after the outbreak of the Great War, he claimed that in such a situation, the emancipation of the Jewish nation could be achieved only by Jews themselves, as "the only solution to the Jewish problem is creating such balance of power, in which other

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nations could not persecute us with impunity and with so much ease. The specificity of the Jewish tragedy is a consequence of the fact that Jews do not have their own state and that is why no one cares about Jewish needs and interests [...]. Remember about that, Jewish workers, and you will understand that Palestine as a country of Jewish masses is by no means a pipe dream, but a great historical opportunity. Examine it, comrades, and you will understand why we demand a Jewish congress, standing on the political-autonomous platform of the Jewish seat in Palestine” (Borochov, B. 1938, p. 64, 108).

The creator of the workers’ Zionist movement had some connection to the Polish community. After the fall of the first Russian revolution, he came to Krakow, but after a short stay, he settled in Vienna in 1907. He is a completely unknown figure in Poland. His works were neither translated nor published. The only exception is a selection of his works entitled *Oblicze antyzyjonizmu* (“The nature of anti-Zionism”) with the preface by Dr. Morus Sobel, published in 1938 by the Academic Zionist-Socialist Organisation.

The Zionist socialist movement developed organisationally and politically only after Poland regained independence. With the process of revival and strengthening of Polish statehood, Jewish socialist movement, including that Zionist in nature, was quickly rebuilt. Polish insurrection and romantic independence experience had a major impact on that. Poale Zion developed as well, recreating its organisational structures in old centres of the country and consolidating its position among Jewish workers. It was not for long, however, as in 1920 the attitude towards the Comintern caused a split into a Left and a Right faction (Holzer, 1974, p. 272). The latter remained in the structures of the old Second International, being rather passive. Its opponent – Poale Zion Left, which had a more socially radical programme, declared accession to the Communist International, but refused to demand the self-dissolution of the World Union of Poale Zion Left. For that reason, in the end, it was not accepted. It still postulated solving the Jewish question by creating the Jewish state in Palestine, which would be based on socialist principles, at the same time trying to improve the living conditions of Jews living temporarily in Poland by granting them the status of national-cultural autonomy after the victory of the socialist revolution. Under the influence of the growing fascist danger and radicalisation of the Polish society, it tried to become as popular as possible among Jewish workers, displacing other Zionist groupings, which can be proved by the fact that together with other Zionist-socialist groupings it sent 49 delegates to the World Zionist Congress in

1937, which was more than all other Zionist groupings. It had much influence on Jewish trade and youth unions. It published a weekly entitled "Arbeter Welt" in Warsaw. Among its leaders, the most active and politically important were Lejb Holenderski, Józef Kenner, Józef Rosen, Szachno Sagan, Icchok Lew, Nuchim Jakow Rafałkes and Adolf Berman. It did not manage, however, to equal its sister organisation – The Jewish Socialist Union Poale Zion Right, which joined the Socialist Workers' International after the collapse of the Second International and intensively developed its influences in the Jewish workers community. It had numerous sections in many countries, with the largest one in Poland, gathering five thousand members at the beginning of the 1930s (Tomicki, 1982, p. 313). It propagated the emigration of Jewish workers to Palestine, projecting there a social Jewish state in the future. Aiming at improvement of the situation of Jewish workers in Poland, it fought Piłsudski's politics cooperating with the Polish Socialist Party and the socialists from Ukrainian and German minorities.

Initially, the cooperation of all socialist forces in the country against Piłsudski's government was impossible. The anti-Sanation bloc of the socialist left initiated before the parliament election in 1930 did not succeed, mainly because of Poale Zion Left's opposition, which wanted to fight the Polish Socialist Party for its participation in the political agreement with the Centrolew. Jewish socialist parties fought a lot themselves and vied for workers' community support. They found it difficult to agree with each other due to programme differences. The Bund did not accept Zionist solutions, as, according to the party's ideologist, Emanuel Szerer, "it is not Zionism (either general or socialist) in Palestine, but socialism in Poland and other countries, which means liberation of Jewish working masses" (Szerer, 1929, p. 51). Cooperation of all socialist groups in Poland was possible only before the outbreak of the new world war. The increasing danger of war, fascist successes, prolonged negative social effects of the great economic crisis, and attempts to consolidate democratic and left forces in many European countries led to a political agreement of all class socialist and workers' organisations, including three Jewish socialist parties, with the Polish Socialist Party as the leader. A common anti-capitalist and anti-Sanation programme platform was established, to be later developed as the so-called welfare programme, containing a vision of socialism after seizing the power in Poland (Śliwa, 1988, p. 171).

Partial cooperation between Jewish socialist parties occurred in the face of the Extermination, especially in Warsaw. In the situation of increasing extermination politics of Germany, the Bund initiated a meeting of Jewish socialist groups'

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representatives in the Warsaw ghetto in March 1942, including Lejzor Lewin and Czesław Grajek from Poale Zion Right, Mejloch Fajnkind and Hersz Berliński from Poale Zion Left, and Abram Blum and Maurycy Orzech from the Bund. The meeting was aimed at establishing a political agreement, which would be anti-fascist in character, and creating a mutual military organisation, coordinating military actions, buying weapons, helping victims of Nazism, etc. A similar initiative was started by Adolf Berman, the leader of Poale Zion Left. Representatives of the Polish Workers' Party and other Jewish groupings joined it. This way, the Anti-Fascist Bloc was established in the Warsaw ghetto, however, ultimately without Bund's participation due to its negative attitude towards the question of Zionism (Mulak, 1990, p. 298). Consolidation of the political-military action of all Jewish organisations in the Warsaw ghetto within the Jewish National Committee led by Adolf Berman in cooperation with governmental institutions of the Polish underground in organising aid for Jews and insurgents in the Warsaw ghetto failed as well, as Bund's representatives refused to cooperate due to the fact that Zionists outnumbered them in the Committee. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, military groups of several dozens of people representing both socialist Zionist parties submitted to the leaders of the Jewish Combat Organisation. The president of the Jewish National Committee, Adolf Berman, was the secretary of the Polish Council to Aid Jews "Żegota" at the time, and managed the Jewish department of the State National Council in the last year of the war.

Zionists-socialists were most active at the beginning of the second period after the war, in which slogans related to the recreation of the Jewish state in Palestine became very popular among those who survived the Holocaust. Nevertheless, most Zionist leaders were against immediate emigration of Jews from Poland, preferring to stay in the country and develop the tutelary activity among survivors, including the expected newcomers from the USSR. That is why communist authorities supported them and their aid actions. Poale Zion Left quickly extended its organisation offices within the country and developed its activity in two ways: on the one hand, through participation in the political representation of Jews in Poland – the Central Committee of Polish Jews, by means of charity, tutelary, culture, education and productiveness actions; on the other, organising various mutual aid institutions and actions, such as 45 day-care rooms for children and youth, 25 kitchens for poor Jews, 12 sports clubs, 20 labour cooperatives and kibbutzim, in which they helped people going to Palestine. It had its party organisations in 60 cities of the country, the greatest Jewish centres,

and gathered almost 20,000 members, being the strongest Jewish party in Poland (Aleksiun, 2002, p. 131). When Adolf Berman became the president of the Central Committee of Polish Jews in 1946 and Poale Zion Left unified with Poale Zion Right in October 1947 to become the Unified Jewish Workers' Party Poale Zion, the party's activity increased and it strengthened its political position. However, it did not last for long, as due to cold war tendencies at the end of 1947, changes in the international communist movement and Soviet politics towards the newly-created Jewish state, as well as the speeding Sovietisation of Poland, growing emigration of Jews from the country, and decreasing aid from the West, the pluralistic and autonomous model of Jewish community life was to be liquidated. Jewish education and cultural institutions were nationalised, separate cooperative movement, healthcare and other mutual aid institutions were abolished. Zionists and representatives of other groupings were dismissed from so-far mutual Jewish organisations and associations. In April 1949, Adolf Berman was dismissed from the function of the president of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, and substituted by Grzegorz Smolar, a communist activist. Under his rule, the committee was transformed into a Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, the only organisation of Polish Jews active until 1989 in accordance with the politics of real socialism. (Grabski, 2004, p. 304; 2008, p. 21–58). This way, the Jewish community was deprived of political representation and its activity was standardised. Communists remained their only representatives, and as they were close to the government, they could fulfil their projects of solving the Jewish question in Poland by means of granting them equal rights in the Polish society and in the communist understanding of the development of Jewish culture. During that short post-war period of time, Zionist aspirations were fiercely fought by Bund activists, who were against the emigration action of Jews and wanted to recreate the Jewish community in Poland together with repatriates from the USSR. They were also against all Zionist activity and participation of Zionist representatives in Jewish committees and organisations. Among all Jewish organisations, they were first to stop political activity. From only about 1,500 members, a part of Bund members left it to become part of the Polish Workers' Party in 1948. The remaining part joined the Polish United Workers' Party. At the same time, communist authorities speeded up the liquidation of Zionist organisations, allowing Jews to legally leave for Israel in autumn 1949, and set dates for ceasing all political and organisation activity in Zionist organisations. The United Jewish Workers' Party Poale Zion was the last one, liquidated

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on 1st February 1950. On that day, the half-century-long history of the social Zionist movement in Poland, which enriched social and political life of the Polish society and promoted social and national aspirations of the Jewish working class, contributing to the rebirth of the Israeli state, was finished.

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Abstract

The article analyses the socialist current of the Zionist movement. It emphasises the pioneers of the current and the sources of inspiration, including those from outside the Jewish community, but related to the socialist bloc. According to the studies conducted, the development of Zionism in Poland was complicated by social transformations among Polish and Jewish workers in the last decade of the 19th century and by a strong ideological polarization of these communities, which led to the emergence of a mass Polish socialist movement based on the Jewish socialist movement. In the atmosphere of ideological and political ferment, the awakened Zionist movement was diversified. In consequence, apart from the dominant liberal-political current, new currents emerged: the conservative-religious and the socialist one. The latter started to develop within Galicia to become strongly present in the Kingdom of Poland with time. When it comes to the organizational and political aspects, the Zionist socialist movement developed only after independence was regained. As a result of the Second World War, a rapid break of the Jewish life in Poland took place. The after-war period brought new challenges that had to be faced also by socialist Zionists.

Key words: Zionism, Socialist Zionist movement, Socialism, Bund

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