

Introduction

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Jews played highly visible roles, over an extended period, in the leadership of leftist movements – including socialist, communist, and anarchist organizations – around the world. In the first half of the twentieth century, significant numbers of Jews were also evident in the rank and file of specific left-wing political parties. In addition to participating in general leftist movements, Jews in Eastern Europe created and fostered a number of distinctive Jewish socialist parties with tens of thousands of members. Why were so many Jews sympathetic to left-wing causes? Explanations revolving around the purported characteristics of Jews, the impact of Jewish religious ideas, and the marginality of the Jewish population have been expounded by prominent scholars. However, there is reason to question both of the first two of these explanations. At the present time, left-wing ideas no longer hold the same degree of attraction for Jews as they did one hundred years ago. The relationship of Jews to the left was historically contingent, specific to political, historic, and economic conditions that prevailed between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries in Europe, and that impacted upon Jewish political opinion in the United States and other countries that received large numbers of Jewish immigrants from Europe.

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In a book that first appeared in 1911, the German sociologist Robert Michels noted “the abundance of Jews among the leaders of the socialist and revolutionary parties” and attempted to illuminate this phenomenon by reference to “specific racial qualities” that “make the Jew a born leader

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of the masses, a born organizer and propagandist.” Michels asserted that among these qualities were “sectarian fanaticism which, like an infection, can be communicated to the masses with astonishing frequency; next we have an invincible self-confidence (which in Jewish racial history is most characteristically displayed in the lives of the prophets) . . . remarkable ambition, an irresistible need to figure in the limelight, and last but not least an almost unlimited power of adaptation.”¹ He cites examples of “the quantitative and qualitative predominance of persons of Hebrew race” in leftist parties in Germany, Austria, the United States, Holland, Italy, Hungary, Poland, and other lands, and adds that Jewish involvement with socialist parties is also linked to the “spirit of rebellion against the wrongs from which” Jewry suffers, that is, the Jewish response to continuing antisemitism.²

Some scholars interested in the relationship between Jews and the left have emphasized not supposed Jewish qualities but rather purported similarities between Judaism or Jewish religious ideas, on the one hand, and ideas supported by leftist writers, on the other. Dennis Fischman, for one, has argued that Marx “approaches the standpoint of the Jewish tradition . . . In his stress on the indispensability of human action, Marx echoes the Jewish motifs of *partnership in Creation* and *dialogue*.”³ Michael Löwy, far more compellingly, has made creative use of Max Weber’s notion of *Wahlverwandschaften*, has written of an elective affinity illuminating links between Jewish messianism and a revolutionary, libertarian, worldview, and suggests that the views of such thinkers as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Gustav Landauer, Leo Lowenthal, and Georg Lukács can all be clarified, to varying degrees, through reference to the affinity he describes.⁴

Yet another, alternative, explanation for the attraction of some (very prominent) Jews to leftist ideas revolves around Jewish marginality. Isaac Deutscher – himself a leftist of Jewish origin – claimed that Marx, Luxemburg, and Trotsky (among others) “dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures” and “were born

¹ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 245.

² Michels, *Political Parties*, pp. 246–248.

³ Dennis Fischman, *Political Discourse in Exile: Karl Marx and the Jewish Question* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), pp. 110–111.

⁴ Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*, trans. Hope Heaney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs.”⁵ This, he proposed, “enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons.”

The notion that Jews are a race has long since been discredited by reputable social scientists (if not necessarily by all geneticists). There were, and are, Jewish leftists who have found elements of the Jewish religion to be compatible with their political proclivities. The idea that Judaism per se is intrinsically progressive, however, is not tenable. Jewish religious beliefs can lead and have led many to deeply conservative political positions. But Deutscher’s explanation for the onetime link between Jews and the left, the fact that it is colored by his political sympathies notwithstanding, has a great deal of merit. Jews were regularly marginal to the societies in which they lived when the left came into being and in the era during which it developed. Antisemitism made it impossible for Jews in many European lands to break into any number of powerful institutions. Jewish marginality, and the political, economic, and sociological conditions that existed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that fostered marginality, clarify the political inclinations of any number of prominent Jewish leftists of earlier generations. The rejection of Jews by mainstream society contributed to their sense that a dramatic change was both desirable and necessary.

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THE LEFT AND THE JEWS

The left arose out of the French Revolution, and was, initially, committed to that revolution’s ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Indeed: the term “leftist” originally referred to those French political leaders who supported the Revolution. Specific French leftists in the National Assembly, none of whom were Jews, endorsed the emancipation of French Jewry. The positions taken by these founders of the French left led some Jews in France to ally with the left. There are known to have been Jewish Jacobins, for example, in Saint-Esprit, near Bayonne.⁶

⁵ Isaac Deutscher, “The Non-Jewish Jew,” in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), p. 27.

⁶ Zosa Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848* (New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 822.

Left-wing movements ultimately came into being not only in France but also in many other lands. In general, these movements tended to favor equal treatment of citizens and opposed the legal disabilities that had been imposed upon Jews, in specific countries, in earlier times.

To be sure, individual, highly visible, leaders of the left were not immune to anti-Jewish prejudices. The Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, who was of aristocratic, non-Jewish, origin and who was a foremost leader of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International), for example, penned an essay in 1869 in which he proclaimed that "modern Jews ... considered as a nation ... are *par excellence* exploiters of others' labor, and have a natural horror and fear of the popular masses, whom, moreover, they despise, either openly or secretly. The habit of exploitation ... gives it an exclusive and baneful direction, entirely opposed to the interests as well as to the instincts of the proletariat."⁷ However, the views of figures such as Bakunin notwithstanding, the left was generally open to the participation of individual Jews within its ranks in ways that the European right was often not, and many late-nineteenth-century leftists (though not all) ultimately opposed the anti-semitic political movements that came into being in that era. It was by no means the case that outspoken opposition to political antisemitism and personal attitudes rooted in prejudice or stereotypes were mutually exclusive.⁸ Nevertheless, it is significant that German Social Democracy, the world's strongest Marxist-influenced movement in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, was less antisemitic than other major political parties in imperial Germany. It is worth noting that representatives of the Center Party advocated linking the number of Jewish judges in Bavaria to the proportion of Jews in the Bavarian population, that the National Liberals of Germany were not consistent defenders of equal rights for Jews, and that even the Progressives of Germany (to whom significant numbers of German Jews were attracted) were initially very cool to the notion of nominating Jewish candidates.⁹

Many Marxist-oriented parties operating at the end of the nineteenth century (or in the first decades of the twentieth) had positions on the

⁷ Edmund Silberner, "Two Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism," *Historia Judaica*, XIV, 2 (October, 1952), p. 96. Statements tinged with anti-Jewish sentiment can be found in the writings of any number of other socialists, anarchists, and communists.

⁸ For a recent discussion of this issue see Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹ Marjorie Lamberti, *Jewish Activism in Imperial Germany: The Struggle for Civil Equality* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 25, 33, 34, 42.

so-called Jewish question similar to that of German Social Democracy. The leading figures of the Marxist movement in France, Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, were opponents of political antisemitism, as were the leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. Edmund Silberner, among the first scholars to conduct sustained research on the attitudes of leftists toward Jews, once asserted that there is "an old anti-Semitic tradition within modern Socialism" and that this tradition sheds light on the views of quite a few socialist writers and parties.¹⁰ However, the attitudes of leftists toward Jews were far more differentiated than Silberner's conclusions might lead one to believe. There are important, deplorable examples of antisemitic leftists. Silberner to the contrary notwithstanding, on the other hand, there is not an undisputed "tradition" of antisemitism on the left per se.

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JEWS ON THE LEFT

The relative openness of the left made it possible not only for individuals of Jewish origin to become involved in leftist movements, but also, in some cases, to become leaders of such movements. Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle, who were of Jewish descent, are manifestly among the most important mid-nineteenth-century leftists and exemplify the highly visible roles played by individuals of Jewish origin in left-wing movements at a specific historic moment in time.

Marx knew little about Jews or Judaism. His father, Heinrich Marx, converted to the Lutheran faith in 1817, the year before Karl was born. Karl himself was converted to Lutheranism at the age of six. The school he attended as an adolescent, from 1830 to 1835, had been founded by Jesuits, and was attended primarily by Catholic students.

As a university student, however, Marx became friends with the Young Hegelian and Protestant theologian Bruno Bauer and took a course taught by Bauer on Isaiah. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marx paid close attention to Bauer's work on the Jewish question, and that he published responses to and critiques of Bauer's perspective.

Bauer had insisted that Jews, who did not have full civil rights in Prussia, would not be emancipated until such time as they had renounced

¹⁰ Edmund Silberner, "Anti-Semitism and Philo-Semitism in the Socialist International," *Judaism*, II (1953), p. 122.

Judaism. Marx replied to Bauer, most famously in “On the Jewish Question,” stressing that there was a distinction between political emancipation and human emancipation, and noting that Jews were entitled to the former even if they did not first abandon the Jewish religion. For Marx, the extent to which Jews had been granted equal political rights was a criterion by which to judge the modernity of a given state.

Marx never devoted sustained attention to the “Jewish question” after he wrote the discussions of Bauer’s work noted, though he referred to Jews in passing from time to time. In so doing, Marx sometimes made use of slurs and epithets (particularly in private letters to Friedrich Engels and other trusted confidants). These statements, and a review of Marx’s writings, led Edmund Silberner to proclaim, in an article first published in 1949, that “If the pronouncements of Marx are not chosen at random, but are examined as a whole, and if . . . by anti-Semitism aversion to the Jews is meant, Marx not only can but *must* be regarded as an outspoken anti-Semite.”¹¹

But, as was the case with Silberner’s general pronouncements, this assessment has been contested. Henry Pachter, for one, asserted in 1979 that “the term ‘anti-Semitic’ as we understand it today does not apply to the author of ‘On the Jewish Question’ and to his contemporary audience, which understood his meaning in the context of the Hegelian philosophy and its language . . . He is not preaching anti-Semitism but trying to defuse it.”¹² But it should be added: even if one rejects the label “anti-Semitic” as inappropriate when applied to Marx, and there is good reason to do so, it remains the case that Marx expressed personal antipathy toward individual Jews.¹³

Lassalle, the founder and the first president of the General German Workers’ Association, was, at the height of his career, one of the world’s most prominent socialists, and was widely popular among German workers. He was born and raised in a Jewish family. Lassalle’s mother was strictly orthodox in her observance of Jewish religious ritual during Lassalle’s youthful years. Lassalle never formally converted – though he became estranged from Judaism, particularly as he became acquainted with Hegelian and Young Hegelian thought.

¹¹ Edmund Silberner, “Was Marx an Anti-Semite?” *Historia Judaica*, XI, 1 (April, 1949), p. 50.

¹² Henry Pachter, “Marx and the Jews,” *Dissent* (Fall, 1979), pp. 452, 466.

¹³ The most thorough study of Marx’s attitude toward Jews is that of Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London, Henley, and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), which contains an annotated guide to relevant works.

However little Marx published on Jewish matters, Lassalle published even less. Indeed, there are no works by Lassalle meant for public consumption that focus directly on Jews, Judaism, or Jewry. Lassalle's private correspondence, however, is revealing. In one letter he notes:

I do not like Jews at all. I even detest them in general. I see in them nothing but the degenerate sons of a great, but long past epoch. As a result of centuries of servitude, these people have taken on the characteristics of slaves, and for this reason I am hostile to them.¹⁴

At another point, he proclaimed: "There are above all two classes of people that I cannot stand, writers and Jews – and I, unfortunately, belong to both."¹⁵ Thus: like Marx's, Lassalle's attitude toward Jews was characterized by general lack of interest in Jewish affairs, and by personal antipathy (a matter quite distinct from advocacy of political antisemitism).

How might we explain this personal antipathy? Robert Wistrich relied on a psychological diagnosis – "self-hatred" – in explaining both Marx's attitude toward Jews and that of Lassalle.¹⁶ As used by Wistrich, Jewish self-hatred refers to negative attitudes of a person of Jewish origin toward Jews linked to "feelings of rejection" that "arise in the individual who cannot achieve full acceptance by virtue of his origin."¹⁷ Though not out of the question in Lassalle's case, the diagnosis of Jewish self-hatred seems far-fetched in the case of Marx, who was not inclined to think of himself as Jewish.

Wistrich insinuates that Jewish self-hatred was evident not only in Marx and Lassalle but also in a number of other figures of Jewish origin active on the left, and writes in general terms about "the role which Jewish self-hatred played in activating latent prejudices in the socialist movement."¹⁸ However, Wistrich does not provide compelling evidence in support of his contention, does not provide a list of those socialists who he believes were afflicted with Jewish self-hatred, and thus paints with an overly wide brush. To be sure: internalization of antisemitic hatred has

¹⁴ As translated in Robert Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (London: Harrap, 1976), p. 56.

¹⁵ Quoted in Edmund Silberner, *Sozialisten zur Judenfrage* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1962), p. 178.

¹⁶ Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*, pp. 36–37, 56. Cf. Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred. Antisemitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 188–208.

¹⁷ Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*, p. 7. ¹⁸ Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*, p. 6.

affected any number of individuals of Jewish origin. On the other hand, as Wistrich was well aware, there is no reason at all to presume that self-hatred is (or was) more common among leftists than among conservatives (or others).

Exceptionally prominent leftists of Jewish origin in the generations immediately following those of Lassalle and Marx include Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg, Victor Adler, Otto Bauer, and Max Adler, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov, Trotsky, and Leon Blum.¹⁹ Some may well have exhibited traces of self-hatred. Others did not. They had rather different attitudes toward Jews and issues of interest to the Jewish community.²⁰ For example: Eduard Bernstein and Max Adler ultimately developed a sympathetic attitude toward Zionism. Rosa Luxemburg and Otto Bauer did not.

The preceding list of world-renowned figures should not be taken as suggesting that most leftist leaders have been Jewish. August Bebel, Auguste Blanqui, Eugene V. Debs, Friedrich Engels, Charles Fourier, Antonio Gramsci, Jean Jaurès, Karl Kautsky, Peter Kropotkin, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Robert Owen, Georgii Plekhanov, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Karl Renner, and Henri de Saint-Simon were not Jewish; nor were many,

¹⁹ For additional examples, and consideration of relevant matters, see Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 84–86. Slezkine is off base on some subjects, including the Frankfurt School. His assertion that “members of the Frankfurt School did not wish to discuss their Jewish roots and did not consider their strikingly similar backgrounds relevant to the history of their doctrines” [Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, p. 87], for example (while true for Felix Weil), is undermined by Max Horkheimer’s explicit statements, late in his life, as to the relationship between Critical Theory and the Jewish prohibition against graven images.

²⁰ I have discussed the attitudes of Bernstein, Luxemburg, Victor Adler and Otto Bauer to Jewish matters in Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and “the Jewish Question” after Marx* (New York, London: New York University Press, 1992). Cf. Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate (1843–1943)*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), pp. 58–91. On Emma Goldman see Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 23–26. On Trotsky see Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972). Wistrich discusses all of these leftist figures (except Goldman) and considers relevant aspects of the life and ideas of Blum, in Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*. Cf. Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews: The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982), and Robert S. Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

many, other key figures of European, American, or other socialist, communist, or anarchist movements. Nevertheless, the presence of Jews and individuals of Jewish descent in the leadership of leftist movements was, at one point in time, considerable, and was regularly disproportionate to the percentage of Jews in the general populations of the countries in which these Jews were active.

Particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century, there were not only a remarkable number of Jews in the most prominent leadership positions of leftist parties, but also a disproportionately high number of Jews in (somewhat) lower-ranking positions within some of these parties, and in particular roles in party-related institutions. An analysis of the family backgrounds of those who participated in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party congress in 1907 reveals that 23 percent of the Menshevik delegates were Jewish, and that 11 percent of the Bolsheviks at this congress were Jews.²¹ Robert Michels noted in 1911 that "among the eighty-one socialist deputies sent to the [German] Reichstag in the penultimate general election, there were nine Jews, and this figure is an extremely high one when compared with the percentage of Jews among the population of Germany, and also with the total number of Jewish workers [in Germany] and with the number of Jewish members of the socialist party."²² Eighteen of the twenty-nine people's commissars in the government of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 were Jewish.²³ Eduard Bernstein suggested in 1921 that there were roughly five hundred journalists employed by social democratic newspapers in Germany, and that it would not be unreasonable to estimate that fifty of those journalists were of Jewish descent.²⁴ By the end of 1923, roughly 20 percent of the

²¹ Robert J. Brym, *The Jewish Intelligentsia and Russian Marxism: A Sociological Study of Intellectual Radicalism and Ideological Divergence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978). There was less of a Jewish presence among the Bolsheviks than among the Mensheviks throughout the period preceding the Revolution of 1917. Moreover: the total number of Bolsheviks who were Jewish in the prerevolutionary period was rather small. A Communist Party census conducted in 1922 demonstrates that there were at that time merely 958 Jewish members in the party who had joined before 1917. The total membership of the Bolshevik group in January 1917 was 23,600 [Zvi Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917–1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 105–106].

²² Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 246.

²³ Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, p. 33.

²⁴ Eduard Bernstein, "Di yidn un di dayshe sotsial-demokratie," *Tsukunft*, XXVI (March, 1921), p. 151.

membership of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) was Jewish.²⁵ Official Communist sources (not inclined to exaggerate on this subject) estimated that 35 percent of the KPP membership was Jewish in 1930.²⁶ In 1949, it has been alleged, approximately half of those in the American Communist Party were Jews.²⁷

But the presence of Jews on the left extended, in the twentieth century, well beyond membership in political parties, or association with party-related institutions. Jews were also highly visible in major periodicals and intellectual groupings that had left-wing orientations but were not party affiliated. The Institute of Social Research, for example, which was founded in Germany in 1923, and which became the crucible within which the Frankfurt School came into being, ultimately proved to be particularly attractive to intellectuals of Jewish origin. Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Friedrich Pollock were all Jews, and so was Herbert Marcuse, who first became closely associated with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s.²⁸

Though Jews were manifestly present in leftist movements in a number of different countries during the twentieth century, this fact does not by any means imply that most Jews in these countries were members of leftist parties. The total number of members of the KPP in 1930 was roughly 6,600.²⁹ To say that 35 percent of the members of the party in that year were Jews is to suggest that 2,310 Jews were members of the KPP. A census conducted by the Polish government found that there were 3,113,933 individuals of the “Mosaic faith” in Poland in December

²⁵ M. Mishkinsky, “The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews,” in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1989), p. 62.

²⁶ Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 254. There are no reliable statistics on the proportion of Jews active in Trotskyist movements. However, it appears to be the case that Jews played a disproportionate role in many of these movements. I have discussed Jews active in the Trotskyist movement in Poland in Jack Jacobs, “Communist Questions, Jewish Answers: Polish Jewish Dissident Communists of the Inter-War Era,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, XVIII (2005), pp. 369–379.

²⁷ Gennady Estraiikh, “Metamorphoses of Morgn-frayhayt,” in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov, *Studies in Yiddish*, III (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), p. 145.

²⁸ Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁹ Gabriele Simoncini, “Ethnic and Social Diversity in the Membership of the Communist Party of Poland: 1918–1938,” *Nationalities Papers*, XXII, Supplement 1 (1994), p. 59.

1931.³⁰ Thus: considerably less than 1 percent of the Polish Jewish population was enrolled in the KPP in the early 1930s.

On the other hand: there are all but certainly cases in which a plurality or even a majority of Jewish voters in a specific country has voted for a socialist or social democratic party in a particular election. Most Jewish voters in Germany in the first years of the Weimar Republic are likely to have cast their ballots for the German Democratic Party (DDP), which was not a socialist movement, but rather proudly bourgeois in orientation. However, there was, in all likelihood, an increase in support among German Jews for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) (which evolved over time from a Marxist into a reformist organization) during the course of the 1920s. One contemporary source suggests that in 1924, 42 percent of Jewish voters in Germany voted for the SPD, 40 percent for the DDP, and 8 percent of the Jewish vote went to the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).³¹ As the strength of the Nazi party increased, and liberal parties such as the DDP collapsed, it is quite probable that the proportion of German Jews voting for the SPD grew yet again. Arnold Paucker presents data suggesting that 62 percent of Jewish voters voted for the SPD after 1930, and that 8 percent voted for the KPD. Even if, as Paucker himself admits, the evidence that he provides may overstate German Jewish support for parties of the left, it is very likely that a majority of German Jewish voters did in fact support such parties in the Weimar Republic's last years.³² But I hasten to add that many German Jews who voted in German elections in the early 1930s are likely to have supported the SPD not because they endorsed the general platform of that party but because they believed that there were no viable alternatives open to them. In this

³⁰ Chone Shmeruk, "Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture," in *Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, p. 287.

³¹ Ernst Hamburger and Peter Pulzer, "Jews as Voters in the Weimar Republic," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, XXX (1985), p. 48, citing a work published in 1928. A second source indicates that the DDP received 64 percent of Jewish votes before 1930, the SPD 28 percent, the KPD 4 percent, and a fourth party, the German People's Party (DVP), which stood to the right of the DDP, received as many Jewish votes during that era as did the KPD [Arnold Paucker, "Jewish Defence against Nazism in the Weimar Republic," *Wiener Library Bulletin*, XXVI, 1-2, new series 26-7 (1972), p. 26].

³² Though the proportion of German Jewish voters casting ballots for the KPD may not have changed in the early 1930s, the proportion of Jews playing leading roles in that party dropped precipitously. There were no Jews in the Central Committee of the KPD at the end of the Weimar period, and no Jews among the eighty-nine KPD members elected to the Reichstag in November 1932 [Hamburger and Pulzer, "Jews as Voters in the Weimar Republic," p. 46].

and other cases: Jewish support for the left was linked to existing historical and political circumstances.

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THE JEWISH LEFT

A. The Jewish Left in Europe

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while some Jews created and became involved in non-Jewish leftist movements, explicitly Jewish leftist organizations were also established. Urbanization, modernization, pauperization, proletarianization, and the decline of rabbinic authority all contributed to the sparking of left-wing sentiment among East European Jews.³³ Unlike in Central and Western Europe, where many Jewish leftists were both acculturated and linguistically assimilated, and were therefore inclined to work within general leftist movements, East European Jewish leftists (and certain Jewish radicals who left Eastern Europe to settle in other parts of the world) regularly felt that the needs of the local Jewish populations – including the fact that many East European Jews were native-born Yiddish speakers and were not fluent in the languages of the non-Jews among whom they lived – made it necessary to create avowedly Jewish parties or organizations. Moreover: the socioeconomic structures of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe were sharply different from those of Jewish communities in Central or Western Europe. The proportion of East European Jews who were middle class or wealthy was considerably lower than was, for example, the proportion of German Jewry that could be so characterized. This made East European Jewry a more fertile recruitment ground for leftists than its counterparts in the German-speaking lands.³⁴

The first Jewish socialist organization, the Hebrew Socialist Union, was established in London in 1876. However, it was not created by English Jews, but by Jews who had emigrated from the European mainland to England. The group's members were by no means self-haters.

³³ Gerald Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880–1920*. The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 18–27.

³⁴ Emanuel Scherer, "The Bund," in *Struggle for Tomorrow: Modern Political Ideologies of the Jewish People*, ed. Basil J. Vlavianos and Feliks Gross (New York: Arts, Incorporated, 1954), p. 137.

They identified themselves as Jews (presumably in an ethnic or national sense), though they rejected religion. The Hebrew Socialist Union condemned private property, argued that a universal upheaval was necessary, and advocated workers' control. It held public meetings, helped to establish a trade union for tailors, and caused a stir within Anglo Jewry, but never had more than forty active members, and did not survive beyond the year in which it was created.³⁵ Though the Hebrew Socialist Union was inconsequential in size, it eventually provided inspiration to later Jewish socialists in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

In the period beginning with the 1870s and continuing through the 1880s and 1890s, there were sporadic attempts made by Jews living in the Russian Empire (some of whom were populists, and others of whom were Marxists) to organize radical circles among Russian Jewish artisans.³⁶ By the end of this period, participants in those efforts began to extend their activities in a variety of ways, including via the establishment of trade unions made up of Jewish workers and artisans, the organization of strikes conducted by these unions, and the creation of propaganda materials in Yiddish. This activity contributed to the creation of the General Jewish Workers' Bund, which was founded in Vilna in 1897.

Over time, the Bund became a relatively large party, operating in a broad swath of territory, despite the fact that it was an underground

³⁵ William J. Fishman, *Jewish Radicals: From Czarist Stetl to London Ghetto* (London: Harrap, 1976), pp. 103–124. Russian Jewish radicals involved in political life in the 1880s did not emulate the example of the Hebrew Socialist Union. A relatively large number of radicals of Jewish origin became active in political affairs in the Russian Empire in the 1880s. There were only 67 Jews among those arrested in the Russian Empire for political offenses in the period 1873–1877. These Jews made up 6.5 percent of all those arrested on such charges. There were 579 Jews among the 4,307 individuals arrested on political charges in the years 1884–1890. Thus: close to 14 percent of those in this latter group were Jewish [E(lihu) Tcherikower (Tsherikover), “Revolutionere un natsionale ideologies fun der rusish-yidisher inteligents,” in *Geshikhte fun der yidisher arbeter-bavegung in di fareynikte shtatn*, II, ed. E(lihu) Tcherikower (Tsherikover) (New York: Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut – yivo, 1945), p. 195]. Cf. Erich E. Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). However, these individuals were involved with the Russian populist movement and advocated that political activity be conducted primarily among Russian peasants. They made no attempt to found explicitly Jewish socialist groups. Indeed, most of the Russian radicals of Jewish origin of that era were ideological assimilationists and were estranged from Jewish life.

³⁶ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 30–31.

movement for almost all of the tsarist era.³⁷ It was not, initially, an advocate of national rights for the Jews of the Russian Empire. The Bund, however, ultimately came to be characterized not only by a continuing commitment to Marxism, and by its anti-Zionism, but also by its advocacy of national cultural autonomy for the Jews of the empire.³⁸ It played a key role in organizing the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, established armed self-defense groups to aid Jews threatened by pogromists, and was particularly visible in the period of the Revolution of 1905, during which it claimed to have thirty-three thousand members.

A series of other Jewish socialist parties – the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party (often known as the SS, its Russian initials), which asserted that it had twenty-seven thousand members, and which advocated the territorial concentration of Jewry while not insisting that this concentration take place in Palestine; the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Party Poalei Zion, which believed that Jewish territorial concentration could and ought to be realized only in Palestine, and which purportedly had sixteen thousand adherents, and the Jewish Socialist

³⁷ Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972).

³⁸ Scholars have offered a number of different explanations for how and why the Bund came to adopt a national program. The Bund leaders, Jonathan Frankel has argued, were navigating between Zionist critics on one flank, and Russian and Polish socialist critics on another, and charted a course between the two. From Frankel's perspective, in other words, the Bund's ideological evolution in the years of the tsarist empire can best be explained not by the need to respond to pressure from the rank and file (as Bundist historiography has sometimes suggested), or by sociological factors, but by a need to respond to the party's political opponents. "Bundist ideology turns out to have developed not inexorably as a superstructure reflecting the realities of the mass base but rather as a result of specific political contingencies." [Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 182]. Yoav Peled has replied to Frankel by arguing, compellingly, that political factors alone cannot explain the ideological evolution of the party, and that Frankel devoted insufficient attention to underlying sociohistorical processes. He notes that the experience of Russian Jewish workers in the labor market caused them to develop "ethno-class consciousness" and that the ideology that was adopted by the Bund was the political expression of this consciousness. "The evolution of Bundist ideology was neither a smooth process of adjustment to primordial reality [as Bundist historians have tended to argue] nor a search by a group of intellectuals for an ideological niche of their own [as Frankel suggests]. It was, rather, the continuous effort of a political party to strike the correct ideological balance between the various conflicting concerns of the constituency it was seeking to mobilize" [Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 131].

Workers' Party (a.k.a. SERP, its initials in Russian), which boasted a membership of thirteen thousand, many of whom were sympathetic to a social revolutionary rather than a Marxist understanding of socialism – came into being somewhat later than had the Bund, and competed with that party. These parties differed from one another, and from the Bund, in their conceptions of socialism, in their attitudes toward territorialism and Zionism, and, more generally, in their proposed solutions to the problems confronting the Jews of the Russian Empire.³⁹ They all thought of themselves, however, as leftist parties.

The Jewish socialist parties that had been active in the Russian Empire did not survive the Bolshevik consolidation of power (because the Bolsheviks were ultimately unwilling to tolerate such movements, and pressured them to dissolve).⁴⁰ But while the Bund was forced to stop operating in the USSR, it did quite well, in the 1930s, in Poland – the country in Europe with the largest Jewish population during that period and the cultural heart of the Jewish diaspora. An increase in the number of wage laborers in the Polish Jewish population (probably sparked by urbanization and economic modernization) led to the growth of trade unions linked to the Bund, which, in the 1930s, strengthened the Bund *per se*.⁴¹ In addition, the Bund in Poland benefited to some degree from the creation of a constellation of Bundist-oriented movements focused on children, youth, physical education, and women.⁴² Many of these Bundist-oriented movements acted as conveyor belts for the party, and thus help to explain how and why the Bund became the strongest Jewish

³⁹ Jews in Europe founded significant Jewish socialist parties not only in the Russian Empire but also in Austria-Hungary. The Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia, established in 1905, had a Bundist ideology and attracted forty-five hundred members in the period immediately preceding the beginning of the First World War [Rick Kuhn, “Organizing Yiddish-Speaking Workers in Pre-World War I Galicia: The Jewish Social Democratic Party,” in *Yiddish Language and Culture: Then and Now*, ed. Leonard Jay Greenspoon, Studies in Jewish Civilization, IX (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1998), pp. 37–65]. Labor Zionists in Austria-Hungary also organized a party of their own, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party Poalei Zion in Austria.

⁴⁰ Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 151–230. Relatively large numbers of Jews flocked to the Russian Communist Party – which was perceived as a bulwark against antisemitism, and a source of employment – in the era of the Russian Civil War and after the conclusion of that war.

⁴¹ Gertrud Pickhan, “*Gegen den Strom*”: *Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund “Bund” in Polen, 1918–1939*, Schriften des Simon-Dubnow Instituts Leipzig, I (Stuttgart, Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), p. 206.

⁴² Jack Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, in cooperation with YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2009).

political party in most major Polish cities with large Jewish populations in the period immediately preceding the beginning of the Second World War.

Labor Zionist parties never achieved political success in Poland comparable to that achieved by the Bund. The Left Poalei Zion, a Marxist-Zionist party, had strength in some provincial towns, including Brest and Chelm contributed to efforts to promote secular Yiddish culture in Poland in the interwar years, and had impressive intellectuals – such as Emanuel Ringelblum and Raphael Mahler – in its ranks.⁴³ But the Left Poalei Zion was squeezed, in interwar Poland, into a narrow political sliver between the general Zionist movement, on the one hand, and the Bund and Communist movements, on the other, and was unable to attract considerable numbers of Jewish workers or artisans in Poland's largest cities. The other left-Zionist parties in Poland – such as the Right Poalei Zion, Hitahdut, and the Zionist-Socialist Party Zeire Zion – were generally more Zionist and less leftist than was the Left Poalei Zion. As Ezra Mendelsohn has shown, they “had no parliamentary role and no real political responsibility.”⁴⁴

Most Jews active in or sympathetic to the Bund, the left-Zionists, or the non-Jewish leftist parties of Central Europe suffered the same fate as did the rest of the Jewish population during the Second World War. Almost all European Jewish leftists who remained in Nazi-occupied Europe during the war died or were murdered during the course of that conflict.⁴⁵ The base of support for the Jewish left in Europe was all but completely eliminated.

⁴³ Samuel Kassow, “The Left Poalei Zion in Inter-War Poland,” in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov. European Humanities Research Centre Studies in Yiddish, III (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), pp. 109–128. Cf. Bine Garntsarska-Kadari, *Di linke poyle-tzien in poyn biz der tsveyter velt-milkhome*, trans. Khonen Pozniak (Tel Aviv: Farlag i. l. peretz, 1995).

⁴⁴ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915–1926* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 172.

⁴⁵ A relatively small number of leaders of the Polish Bund escaped to the United States or to other lands with the aid of the New York-based Jewish Labor Committee, as did a small number of leaders of the German and of the Austrian social democratic movements. On the fate of Bundists during the Second World War, see Daniel Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours: The Jewish Labour Bund in Poland 1939–1949* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003). On the aid and support provided by the Jewish Labor Committee to German and Austrian social democrats, some of whom were of Jewish origin, see Jack Jacobs, *Ein Freund in Not. Das jüdische Arbeiterkomitee in New York und die Flüchtlinge aus den deutschsprachigen Ländern, 1933–1945* (Bonn: Forschungsinstitut der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1993).

There were attempts made to reorganize the Bund in Poland when the Second World War was over.⁴⁶ However, the Bund was no more able to exist in Communist-dominated Poland than it had been in the Communist-controlled USSR. The Bund in Poland was dismantled in 1948–1949.⁴⁷

In sum: the explicitly Jewish left arose among East European Jews at a specific point in the nineteenth century, in the context of urbanization, shifts in the class structure of the Jewish population, and a decrease in the strength of traditional Jewish religious authorities. The Bund – the most significant of the Jewish left parties – achieved successes both in tsarist Russia and in interwar Poland. Along with all other Jewish left parties in Europe, however, it was ultimately destroyed by world-historic forces far beyond its control. The Yiddish-speaking Jewish working class – which had been the Bund’s core constituency – was virtually extirpated in Eastern Europe by the Nazis and by those who worked on behalf of the Nazis. Communist victories, first in Russia and, much later, in Poland and elsewhere, eliminated the political space within which the Bund (and the East European Jewish left in general) had operated. In the wake of the Second World War, the East European Jewish left per se could not and did not survive.

B. The Jewish Left in the United States

The founders of the Jewish left in the United States were generally similar to their counterparts in Eastern Europe, and the constituency within which American Jewish leftists conducted their work paralleled that in countries such as Russia or Poland. The very different political conditions in which American Jews lived eventually made it possible for the American Jewish left to grow to an impressive size. Ultimately, however, the Jewish left in the United States also went into a sharp decline – though not for the same reasons as had the Jewish left movements of Eastern Europe. In the United States, economic and social mobility over the course of the

⁴⁶ David Engel, “The Bund after the Holocaust: Between Renewal and Self-Liquidation,” *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 213–226; Natalia Aleksium, “Where Was There a Future for Polish Jewry? Bundist and Zionist Polemics in Post-World War II Poland,” *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*, pp. 227–242.

⁴⁷ Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours*, pp. 210–218; David Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 56–74.

twentieth century diminished the proportional size of the Jewish working class. The relative openness of American society, which made assimilation possible, diminished the size of the Yiddish-speaking population. The American Jewish left, created in the nineteenth century, peaked in the twentieth century, and has dwindled in strength in the last few decades.

The pogroms of 1881, economic dislocation, and social changes within the world of East European Jewry, all contributed to sparking massive waves of immigration by Jews from the Russian Empire to the United States. Approximately 750,000 Jews born in the empire settled in the United States in the period from 1881 to 1905.⁴⁸ The Jews who left Europe were often younger, more impressionable, and somewhat less committed to the practice of Jewish religious traditions than were those who remained behind.

East European Jewish immigrants to the United States encountered extremely poor living and working conditions in neighborhoods such as New York's Lower East Side (to which a lion's share of the East European Jewish immigrants of that era moved upon arrival in America). This wave of immigrants, heavily concentrated in particular industries, began to develop class consciousness, was influenced by radical intellectuals, engaged in a variety of forms of collective action, and evinced sympathy for socialist and radical ideas.⁴⁹ Entities that later became pillars of the American Jewish left – including the Workmen's Circle and the Jewish Daily Forward (the *Forverts*) – were created by these immigrants during this period.

The Workmen's Circle (Arbeter Ring), first established on a local level in New York in 1892, snowballed in size after the beginning of the twentieth century. In an era when there was little in the way of government-provided social service in the United States, the Workmen's Circle offered concrete mutual aid benefits to its members. It also emphasized education and provided recreational opportunities. Considerable attention was given, as the organization matured, to sponsoring lectures, choruses, and orchestras; to publishing; and, ultimately, to establishing supplementary schools for children. The organization supported the work of trade unionists, including, in particular, trade union organizing efforts undertaken in the garment industry. It supported the American Socialist

⁴⁸ Hadassa Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881–1905* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 3–16.

Party, and sent material support to Jewish socialists abroad, for example, to Bundist institutions. Though the Workmen's Circle was broader in ideological range than was the Bund, and had a certain number of self-proclaimed anarchist members, and some members sympathetic to labor Zionism and other leftist currents, onetime Bundists tended to dominate the countrywide leadership of the Arbeter Ring for many decades after a wave of post-1905 immigration. The most prominent leaders of the Workmen's Circle, like those of the Bund, were sympathetic to socialism, and identified themselves as Jewish, but were not themselves religiously observant. Over time, the leaders also came to be strong advocates of secular, Yiddish language, culture. The organization was interested in defending the interests both of Jewish immigrants to America and of Jews who had remained in Eastern Europe. Though the order was open to them, it attracted few non-Jews into its ranks. It had eighty-seven thousand members at its peak in 1925 and had sizable material assets.

The *Forverts*, a Yiddish language newspaper founded in New York in 1897, was, at one time, another major bastion of Jewish leftists in the United States. The newspaper was not a party organ. However, it was closely associated with the American Socialist Party in the newspaper's early years. The *Forverts*, which was edited by Abraham Cahan during the period of its greatest strength, ultimately became not only the most powerful social democratic daily in the United States, but also the largest daily newspaper published in Yiddish anywhere in the world. Around 1917, the *Forverts* reportedly had a circulation exceeding 200,000.⁵⁰

The Workmen's Circle and the *Forverts* – which operated legally – were, in a number of respects, not directly comparable to European Jewish socialist parties such as the Bund, or to the earliest Yiddish radical

⁵⁰ Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.* (New York: KTAV, 1969), I, p. 323. The history and orientation of the *Forverts* are described by Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.*, pp. 318–334; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left*. Contemporary Religious Movements (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), pp. 326–346; and by Michels, *Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 104ff.

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe are known to have been involved with leftist causes not only in the United States, but also in Argentina, Canada, South Africa, and other countries [Philip Mendes, "The Rise and Fall of the Jewish/Left Alliance: An Historical and Political Analysis," *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, XLV, 4 (December, 1999), pp. 492–493; Nancy L. Green, ed., *Jewish Workers in the Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 119–185]. Regional variation notwithstanding, the trajectories of Jewish involvement with the left seem to have been rather similar in virtually all of the lands that attracted significant numbers of Jews from Eastern Europe.

periodicals issued in Eastern Europe (which were often produced and distributed surreptitiously). Nevertheless, it ought to be noted that the Workmen's Circle was, at its moment of greatest strength, much larger than any European Jewish socialist organization, and that the *Forverts*, similarly, had a far greater reach than did its counterparts in other lands.

Jewish immigrants to the United States from Eastern Europe played instrumental roles in the twentieth century not only in the Workmen's Circle and in the *Forverts* but also in America's trade union movement. The most important trade unions with Jewish leadership were the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), founded in 1900, which organized workers who made women's clothing, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (the Amalgamated), which organized those who made men's clothing and came into being in 1914. The cap makers union and the fur and leather workers union were also significant. None of these unions was explicitly or exclusively Jewish. But the early leaders of all four – including, most famously, David Dubinsky of the ILGWU and Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated – were Jews, and so were significant portions of the memberships of these unions. In 1918, the ILGWU had 129,311 members. The Amalgamated is known to have had 177,000 members in 1920.

As was the case among leftists around the world, the Bolshevik Revolution led to deep divisions within the American Jewish left. Individuals sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause and living in the United States ultimately helped to create (and/or controlled) a set of organizations and periodicals reflecting their perspective. The *Freiheit* (*Frayhayt*) (founded in 1922, and later renamed the *Morgn-frayhayt*), a Yiddish daily newspaper published in New York, attracted readers who were further to the left than were those who read the *Forverts*.⁵¹ Initially including among its leading figures individuals who were revolutionaries but not necessarily Communists, the newspaper was eventually dominated by Communists and drew many of its earliest readers away from the *Forverts*. In the 1920s, the paid circulation of the *Frayhayt* reached fourteen thousand.⁵²

⁵¹ The founding and earliest years of the *Frayhayt* are described in Melech Epstein, *The Jews and Communism 1919–1941: The Story of Early Communist Victories and Ultimate Defeats in the Jewish Community, U.S.A.* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1959), pp. 102–104, and Michels, *Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 238–250.

⁵² Epstein, *Jews and Communism*, p. 138. Estraikh reports that the *Morgn-frayhayt* had a circulation of twenty-one thousand in 1947 [Estraikh, “Metamorphoses of *Morgn-frayhayt*,” p. 145].

The International Workers Order, which was established in 1930, similarly, attracted Jews (and non-Jews) who were further to the left than were those in the Workmen's Circle. Jewish membership in the International Workers Order, which provided substantial material support to the *Morgn-frayhayt*, reached sixty thousand in 1947, at which time these Jews made up roughly one-third of the total number of members of the order.⁵³

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CONTEMPORARY JEWISH POLITICAL ATTITUDES

All of the components of the American Jewish left described previously have declined precipitously in size and strength in recent generations. Linguistic acculturation contributed substantially to a marked drop in the circulation of the *Forverts*. The Yiddish-language newspaper, which is now a biweekly, has a paid circulation for its print edition of considerably less than three thousand (though it also has a presence on-line).⁵⁴ The newspaper's editorial line is neither radical nor leftist.

The Workmen's Circle, which had done well when Jewish immigrants were densely concentrated in urban neighborhoods, was negatively affected by the geographic dispersion of the descendants of these immigrants (as well as by assimilation and other social changes).⁵⁵ Formal membership is now less than twelve thousand and continues to decline steadily.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the proportion of Jews in the garment industry unions decreased very sharply as a result of Jewish social mobility. By the 1930s, it was already true that 11 percent of employed Jewish males in the United States were in professional rather than working-class positions. This figure rose to 15 percent shortly after the Second World War, to 20 percent in 1957, and to 30 percent in the 1970s.⁵⁶ Local 22 of the ILGWU, which at one time "was perhaps the largest single Jewish labor organization" in the United States, had, at its height (in 1938), "nearly 28,000 members, of whom seventy-five percent

⁵³ Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, pp. 311–315.

⁵⁴ The Forward Association, owner of the *Forverts*, has also published an English-language weekly, *Forward*, in recent years. This weekly does not have a leftist editorial perspective.

⁵⁵ Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 379. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

were Jewish” and of whom a high proportion were female.⁵⁷ By 1950, Local 22 had only 12,500 members, of whom 30 percent were Jews. Similar trends were also evident by the middle of the twentieth century in other trade unions in which Jews had earlier been present in significant numbers and have continued since. Only a negligible number of Jewish rank and file workers are currently employed in unionized positions in the American garment industry. More generally: a far smaller proportion of American Jews work in blue-collar positions today than was true a century ago.

Many of the organizations and periodicals created (and/or maintained) by those American Jews who were sympathetic to the Bolshevik Revolution – hurt not only by the factors mentioned, but also by measures taken by American government agencies against suspected Communists during the Cold War, and by a sharp drop in sympathy for Communism within the American Jewish population in the wake of revelations about actions taken by the Stalinist regime in the USSR – are no longer extant.⁵⁸ The International Workers Order, which lost a series of court battles and which ultimately had its charter revoked at the request of an agency of the state of New York, was formally dissolved in 1954.⁵⁹ The *Morgn-frayhayt* ceased publishing in 1988.⁶⁰

Arthur Liebman wrote, in a work published in 1979, that

the income, occupational, and geographical mobilities that Jews experienced in America in one or two generations were body blows to the maintenance of a sizeable, concentrated, and economically homogenous Jewish working class. Although limitations on where Jews might work or live continued (and continue), the opportunities were such that Jews as a people rather quickly moved from the working class to the middle class in America. This socioeconomic metamorphosis could not but be damaging to the Jews’ commitment to socialism.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.*, p. xii.

⁵⁸ Exceptions to this generalization include Camp Kinderland, a summer camp for children currently based in Massachusetts, which, in an earlier era, had been close in spirit to the International Workers Order, and *Jewish Currents*, a periodical issued in New York and originally known as *Jewish Life*. On Camp Kinderland see Paul C. Mishler, *Raising Reds. The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 89–94. Both Camp Kinderland and *Jewish Currents* have morphed into institutions committed to progressive political positions but far from following a party line, and rather different in tone than they were when they came into being.

⁵⁹ Epstein, *Jews and Communism*, p. 155; Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 311.

⁶⁰ Estraiikh, “Metamorphoses of *Morgn-frayhayt*,” p. 144.

⁶¹ Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 592. Liebman also describes ways in which the “inadvertent strengthening of a sense of Jewish solidarity” by Jewish leftists in America ultimately

The trends described by Liebman have continued over the course of the years since the publication of his work, and help to explain the continuing decline in ties between American Jews and the left. In the twenty-first century, leftist anti-Zionism and other factors have also contributed to further reductions of support for leftist causes within American Jewry. The number of contemporary American Jews who support explicitly socialist, communist, or anarchist movements is now rather small.

Though the United States is manifestly a vastly different country than was imperial Germany, contemporary American Jewry is more like early-twentieth-century German Jewry in its socioeconomic structure and in its political affiliations than like Russian Jewry of the tsarist era. Like the Jews of imperial Germany, a notable proportion of American Jewry is made up of individuals in high socioeconomic status groups. Like the Jews of early-twentieth-century Germany, contemporary American Jews are often sympathetic to liberal (as distinguished from radical) ideas. Indeed: American Jewry is more liberal than many other American ethnic groups on a broad range of issues. American Jewry is, however, not identified with the American political left, at this point in its history, but rather with powerful, mainstream American political institutions. As I write these lines, Bernie Sanders (who is Jewish and an avowed democratic socialist) and Hillary Clinton (who is neither Jewish nor a socialist) are both running presidential campaigns. Most American Jews, I suspect, support the latter of these two candidates.

Jews in other countries have likewise edged away from earlier sympathies for leftist ideas. The State of Israel had a string of Labor-dominated governments in its founding decades. It has, however, elected right-wing governments with nationalistic platforms in more recent elections. The decline of leftist ideas in Israel seems to be related to three different phenomena: (1) immigration patterns, (2) matters related to the conflict with the Palestinians and with other portions of the Arab world, and (3) changes in the class composition of Israeli society. Early waves of Jewish immigrants to Palestine (and, later, to the State of Israel) were made up, in part, of East European Jews who had themselves been influenced by leftist ideas, of varying kinds. Self-proclaimed socialist thinkers such as Nachman Syrkin and Berl Katznelson were widely admired by Israelis of an earlier generation. Many *kibbutzim* (collective settlements), the *Histadrut* (the General Federation of Labor), and other institutions in

undermined class consciousness and allegiance to the left [Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 597].

Palestine were controlled, in an earlier era, by labor Zionists. The social democratic political parties within which these institutions were influential regularly won major electoral victories. However, neither the large wave of Jews from North Africa (the Mizrahim), which arrived in Israel beginning with the 1950s, nor the large wave of Jews from the USSR (and from the successor states of the USSR), which began to arrive roughly a generation later, were sympathetic either to socialism in general or to the Labor Party of Israel. Moreover: the descendants of East European Jews who have immigrated to Israel in recent years from English-speaking lands have often been from religiously orthodox backgrounds and have regularly advocated both conservative social values and conservative political views. Certain other segments of the Jewish population of Israel, including descendants of the East European Jewish immigrants who had arrived in Palestine as idealistic leftists in earlier eras, became less sympathetic to leftist ideas than their ancestors had been as their class position altered. The descendants of East European Jewish immigrants to Palestine currently living in Israel are regularly in very high socioeconomic status groups, and often sympathetic to business interests rather than to the interests of the working class. More generally: the Jewish population of Israel as presently constituted does not evince particular sympathy for the left.

Jews in France, home to the world's third largest Jewish community, were, even in the recent past, sympathetic to Socialist Party candidates. François Mitterand, the first Socialist elected to serve as President of the French Fifth Republic, apparently received a plurality of the votes of French Jews both in 1981 and in 1988. However, the Jewish population of France seems not to have given comparable support to Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate in France's presidential election in 2007. Fears within the French Jewish population of rising antisemitism seem to have increased support for the "law-and-order" policies advocated by Nicolas Sarkozy (who is partially of Jewish origin). A large proportion of the Jews of France, it would appear, voted for Sarkozy (candidate of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement) in 2007 rather than for Royal. Sarkozy also apparently received a plurality of Jewish votes in the presidential election held in France in 2012.

Current Jewish political opinion in the three largest Jewish communities (United States, Israel, and France), which, collectively, constitute the overwhelming majority of world Jewry, corroborates the idea that the onetime ties between Jews and the left can best be explained by political, economic, and sociological conditions that came into existence in the

nineteenth century and went out of existence in the twentieth, rather than by reference to Jewish religious ideas or other factors. The marginality of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, the lack of opportunity for Jews in major institutions in tsarist Russia, poor living and working conditions not only in Eastern Europe but also in the United States, the explicit antisemitism of right-wing movements, and the relative openness of left-wing movements, all led some Jews in areas such as the Russian Empire and the United States to affiliate with the political left at a particular juncture in history. However, the dramatically altered conditions in which most Jews live in the twenty-first century have resulted in a very different Jewish political profile. The relationship of Jews to the left was a historically important phenomenon. This relationship, however, was of limited duration.

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Many questions remain unanswered. How has the left evolved within Israel? What is the relationship of contemporary leftist anti-Zionism to antisemitism? How should Jews on the left assess Judaism? What is the significance for Jews alive today of the historic connections among certain individuals of Jewish origin and leftist parties? In what ways does a gendered perspective shed light on the relationship between the left and Jews? Do our historic understandings of canonical figures and institutions continue to ring true? These and other such questions will be addressed in the following pages. No attempt has been made to present a unified perspective. This book is intended, rather, to suggest the range of views and interests among the leading, contemporary academics concerned with relevant subjects – and the extent to which the subject of Jews and the left remains a contentious one even in the twenty-first century.

