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Jewish Politics in the New Poland: The 1922 Elections, a Case Study

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The three million-strong Jewish community constituted almost ten per cent of the population of the Polish state that emerged from the Great War in 1918. In the turbulent years of Poland's reformation many of them suffered from anti-Semitic excesses and a number of pogroms. However, the threat of violence and an electoral system biased in favour of big parties proved insufficient in uniting the fragmented Jewish political organisations. The run-up to the first nationwide elections in 1922 saw the formation of six different Jewish parties and a myriad of local political organisations, rather than a broad electoral bloc.

This paper analyses the three explanations for this Jewish disunity that have been dominant in historiography: ideological conflicts, the different political realities Jews experienced in the Russian and Austrian partitions, and pragmatic considerations. The interaction between these motivations is investigated by focusing on parties representing the most powerful Jewish political movements in the post-war era: Zionism, Orthodoxy, and Socialism.

INTRODUCTION

In his 1907 story *Samoobrona* the writer Israel Zangwill describes a shtetl located in the Russian partition of Poland. The village is visited by a young man who tries to organise the local Jews in the face of sweeping anti-Semitic violence. He is, however, unable to complete his task due to the deep ideological divisions he encounters there. The Jews are split between integrationists, assimilationists, religious traditionalists, socialist Zionists, cultural Zionists, territorialists, Bundists, and countless other groups. The fractious and quarrelsome community brings the young idealist to despair.¹

The landscape of Jewish politics in the newly re-established Polish state was not unlike Zangwill's shtetl. A contemporary journalist, Alicja Belcikowska, wrote that 'probably no other country in the world has as many political parties and associations as Poland'.² The First Term Sejm, elected in 1922, consisted of thirty-two parties organised into eighteen parliamentary clubs.³ However, Jewish parties did not conform even to this extravagant standard. A population of less than three million gave birth to as many as six different nationwide parties, running in the 1922 elections, and a myriad of local political organisations.⁴

¹ Israel Zangwill, 'Samoobrona', *Read Book Online*:

<<http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/19191/>> [accessed 05 January 2011]

² Alicja Belcikowska, ed., *Stronnictwa i Związki Polityczne w Polsce* (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1925), p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

However, while this political plurality was comprehensible for the dominant seventy per cent of the Second Republic's population comprised by ethnic Poles, it appears less commonsensical for the Jewish minority. The Jews constituted circa ten per cent of the population and suffered from violent discrimination that intensified in the immediate aftermath of World War I, leading to a number of pogroms.⁵ And yet, unlike the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian, Belorussian and German political groups who sought to overcome the prejudice of the voting system against smaller parties⁶ by running in the elections as part of the consolidated Bloc of National Minorities (BNM),⁷ the Jewish community remained fragmented and torn by internal strife.⁸

This polarisation of Jewish electoral lists has been attributed by historians to several different causes. This paper discusses the three dominant explanations for the reluctance of some Jewish groups to join a common electoral platform.

The first stresses the importance of the core ideological differences between the Jewish parties, suggesting that the respective core beliefs of Zionist, Socialist, and Orthodox Jews were simply irreconcilable, preventing any potential political collaboration.⁹

The second suggests that any potential cohesiveness was hampered by the experiences of Jewish parties before the unification of Poland. The Jews living in the Russian partition were effectively barred from political life, while those in Austria-Hungary enjoyed years of active participation. As a result the two groups developed differing approaches to politics, with the latter being much more willing to cooperate with the government than the former.¹⁰

The third explanation proposes that rather than ideology and history, it was the influence of the broader occurrences on the political scene of 1920s Poland that affected most of the behaviour of Jewish political parties.¹¹ These events made running independently the pragmatic choice for some Jewish parties, just as they made running as part of an electoral bloc more beneficial for others. Those key events include the post-World War I anti-Semitic backlash and the Ukrainian election boycott in Eastern Galicia in 1922.

These three historiographic positions are illustrated by focusing on the participation of four Jewish parties in the 1922 Sejm elections. The first one is the Bloc of National Minorities itself. Congregating groups as diverse as rich German

⁵ Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews In Poland 1919-1939* (Berlin: [n.pub.], 1983), pp. 16-17.

⁶ Seventy-two out of the Sejm's 444 seats could be contested only by parties that had put candidates in more than six of the sixty-four constituencies.

⁷ Only one member of the Sejm from these three minorities was elected from outside the BNM in 1922: the representative of the Ukrainian pro-Polish 'Chliborobi' party.

⁸ Rafael F. Scharf, 'What Shall We Tell Miriam?', in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, volume VIII: Jews in Independent Poland 1918-1939*, ed. by Antony Polonsky et al. (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), p. 297.

⁹ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915-1926* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 16.

¹⁰ Ignacy Schiper et al., eds, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej, vol. II* (Warsaw: [n.pub.], 1936), p. 287.

¹¹ Andrzej Ajnenkiel, *Parlamentaryzm II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1975), pp. 275-276.

industrialists and poor Belorussian peasants in defence of minority rights, the Jewish wing of the Bloc was dominated by Zionists¹² from the former Russian partition.¹³ The second group are the Orthodox Jews, who in 1922 chose to run in the elections as part of the BNM, despite their strong ideological differences with the General Zionists.¹⁴ The third are the Galician Zionists, who decided to stay out of the BNM and in 1922 entered the Sejm from their own electoral list. The fourth group is the left-wing Bund, which, like the Galician Zionists, ran from their own list, but, unlike them, failed to obtain places in the Sejm.¹⁵

The timeframe of this paper encompasses the 1922 elections and the events preceding them. These were the first (and arguably last) elections in interwar Poland that can be described as representative.¹⁶ The 1919 elections to the Legislative Sejm took place during the turbulent re-emergence of Polish statehood and were not fully indicative of the future make-up of the Polish state. The elections could only take place in 44 out of the intended 70 electoral districts, leaving large portions of the future Polish territory unrepresented.¹⁷ Crucially, the areas of future south-eastern Poland, which were inhabited by large numbers of Jews that were to form the future electorate, were still in the hands of Ukrainians.¹⁸

IDEOLOGY

In order to understand the behaviour and coalition choices of the different Jewish political factions, it is crucial to understand the core ideology that motivated their actions. Jewish politics were underlined by a strong idealistic streak that often polarised the different factions to a point where no common ground could be found.¹⁹

ZIONISM

The Zionists first consolidated into a cohesive organisation during the 1897 World Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland.²⁰ It was then that they adopted the *Basel programme*, under which they committed 'to create a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine'.²¹ Zionists believed the Jews to be a stateless nation, whose

¹² This group will be referred to throughout the essay as General Zionists, or Grunbaum's Zionists, drawing from the name of the party leader.

¹³ Ajnenkiel, p. 184.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹⁵ Schiper, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, vol. II, pp. 293, 299.

¹⁶ After the May Coup in 1926 Poland saw a rise of authoritarian measures that culminated in electoral fraud and physical violence against opposition candidates in the subsequent elections.

¹⁷ Julisz Bardach et al., eds, *Dzieje Sejmu Polskiego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1997), p. 155.

¹⁸ Michał Tymowski et al., *Historia Polski* (Paris: Editions Spotkania, 1986), p. 281.

¹⁹ Zvi Gitelman, 'A Century of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe', in *The emergence of modern Jewish politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²¹ Simon Segal, *The New Poland and the Jews* (New York: Lee Furman, 1938), p. 182.

ultimate goal must be to obtain a territorial homeland, preferably in Palestine, which they viewed as the cradle of the Jewish people.²²

GENERAL ZIONISTS

Zionism, however, was a very broad political front, and its constituents agreed on very little beyond the end goal of the movement and the importance of the Hebrew language in building national consciousness. The biggest bone of contention was how Jewish life was to be organised in the Diaspora before an actual Jewish state was established.²³ Polish Zionists in the 1920s were divided into two main factions, each further subdivided into smaller camps. The first faction was led by Isaac Grunbaum, a former secretary of the Russian Zionist Federation, and one of the creators of the Bloc of National Minorities.²⁴ Grunbaum's group, the General Zionists, originated in the Russian-occupied areas of the country and consisted of two main wings: the Mizrachi, or "religious Zionists", and the secular Hitachduth – the Zionist Labour Party.

These diverse groups were brought together in the BNM in 1922 to a large extent thanks to a common antagonistic attitude towards the Polish government. Grunbaum's faction called for 'Jewish control of Jewish schools, with state aid, and a Jewish electoral *curia* which would elect Members of the Polish Parliament [...] in proportion to their numbers'.²⁵ These requests were unacceptable to the Polish majority as they would mean shedding control over important state functions and ultimately transforming it from a nation-state into a state of nationalities.²⁶ Despite recognizing this drawback, the General Zionists relentlessly continued to push for their realization.²⁷

ZIONISTS OF THE AUSTRIAN PARTITION

The second dominant Zionist faction was led by Leon Reich, formerly a lawyer in the Austrian Army, and one of the main organizers of the National Council of East Galicia, or the Galician Zionist party.²⁸ He was playing a similar role to Grunbaum in the equally divisive milieu of Galician Zionist politics. However, what characterised his coalition, and what made it different from the groups that chose to run in elections from the BNM, was the fact that they chose to pursue their goals in strict cooperation with the Polish government.

While agreeing with Grunbaum on the Palestinian question and the importance of Hebrew, the Galician Zionists refused to enter the Bloc, seeing it as

²² Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, p. 26.

²³ Szymon Rudnicki, *Żydzi w Parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2004), p. 10.

²⁴ Ajnenkiel, p. 191.

²⁵ Eugene C. Black, 'Lucien Wolf and the Making of Poland: Paris 1919', in *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies, volume II*, ed. by Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 20.

²⁶ Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939: the crisis of constitutional government* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 92.

²⁷ D. Stachura, 'National Identity and the Ethnic Minorities in Early Inter-War Poland', in *Poland between the Wars, 1918-1939*, ed. by Peter D. Stachura (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 75.

²⁸ Antony Polonsky, 'Reich, Leon', *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Reich_Leon> [accessed 10 January 2011]

counterproductively antagonistic and expressing the worry that it might unite the entire spectrum of Polish politics, including the left-wing parties, against the Jews.²⁹ Reich sustained that Jews had no common interest with the other, territorial minorities.³⁰ While the Germans or Ukrainians sought autonomy, Reich believed that the Jews should expect no more from the Polish government than the fulfilment of the obligations resulting from the Minorities Treaty it signed at Versailles in 1919, as well as the granting of the full civil rights to the Jews that were guaranteed under the March 1921 Constitution.³¹ The Galician Zionists' ideology concerning political behaviour in the Diaspora was so different from Grunbaum's faction that they chose to run in the 1922 elections from the separate list seventeen.

ORTHODOXY

The Agudat Yisrael was formed largely as a reaction to secular Jewish political initiatives, specifically to the decision of the World Zionist Congress in 1911 to 'embark on educational-cultural activity in the diaspora', something that up until then the Orthodox schools had a monopoly on.³² The Orthodox Jews were appalled by the nationalist ideology that divorced the Jews from their religion and treated them as a nation like any other.³³ As Gitelman explains, the 'Orthodox authorities also condemned Zionism on the grounds that it sought to do what God and the Messiah would do – return the Jews to their ancestral homeland'.³⁴ They also opposed the revival of Hebrew as a language of daily use, seeing it as a desecration of the language of the Torah, the use of which should be restricted to religious purposes.³⁵ The Agudat was even more hostile towards Jewish anticlerical socialist radicals, placing an interdict on the Bund daily paper after it started being published on Saturdays.³⁶

On issues not related to religious practice, the Agudat followed the Talmudic principle "dina de malkhuta dina", or 'the law of the state is law'.³⁷ The Agudat believed that a direct and conciliatory approach could be more effective in alleviating the position of Jews.³⁸ The Polish authorities realised this when in 1919 they chose the Agudat to form the official representation of the Polish Jews at the

²⁹ Rudnicki, *Żydzi w Parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 132.

³⁰ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 92.

³¹ Mark Levene, 'Britain, a British Jew, and Jewish Relations with the New Poland: the Making of the Polish Minorities Treaty of 1919', in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, volume VIII: Jews in Independent Poland 1918-1939*, ed. by Antony Polonsky et al. (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), pp. 14-15.

³² Gershon Bacon, 'Imitation, Rejection, Cooperation', in *The emergence of modern Jewish politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), p. 85.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Gitelman, p. 7.

³⁵ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 93.

³⁶ Belcikowska, pp. 887-888.

³⁷ Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's threatening other: the image of the Jew from 1880 to the present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, c2006), p. 77.

³⁸ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 93.

Paris Peace Treaty instead of the more politicized pro-Soviet Bundists and the autonomy-seeking Zionists.³⁹

However, the socially-backward Orthodox activists, unacquainted with modern organizational methods, struggled to establish a strong political presence on their own.⁴⁰ Despite rejecting Zionism, they quickly found themselves looking to Zionists for an organizational model they could imitate. Since some of the founders of Agudat Yisrael were former Zionists who broke with the movement, they shaped their new party in the likeness of the one they had left. The Agudat therefore developed youth movements, daily papers, organized international conferences, and even established training farms for immigrants to Palestine.⁴¹ Therefore, when on the eve of the 1922 elections the Agudat leaders realized that they did not stand much of a chance unless they found a political partner more knowledgeable in political strategies, the Zionists became their natural coalition partners.⁴² The Agudat's structural similarity with Grunbaum's party helped to generate an alliance of convenience between the two groups despite a wide ideological gap between the two. As a result, in 1922 a 'basic common commitment to Jewish solidarity overcame the groups' ideological differences',⁴³ and the Agudat ran in elections from the shared BNM list with the provision that they would not support its other constituents on religious matters.⁴⁴

BUNDISM

Among all the Jewish political groupings, the Bund is the one that most manifestly chose not to access the Bloc of National Minorities due to ideological reasons. Established in 1897 in Vilnius, and centred in the Russian partition, it cooperated closely with Russian and Polish socialist parties.⁴⁵ In its programme declaration during the elections to the 1919 Legislative Sejm, the Bund defined itself clearly as a fundamentally Marxist organization primarily preoccupied with class as opposed to nationalist struggle, and with the final goal of uniting the world proletariat.⁴⁶

The Bund fundamentally disagreed with the Zionist parties over the Jewish national question. It criticized the idea of striving for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine as manifestations of right-wing utopianism,⁴⁷ and it also disagreed with the Zionists' confrontational stance towards the Polish majority, which it viewed as an example of the bourgeois class inciting Jewish-Polish working-class conflict through nationalist agitation.⁴⁸ In its own programme, it presented international class solidarity as an alternative to the Zionist national ideology.⁴⁹

³⁹ Levene, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁰ Rudnicki, *Żydzi w Parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Bacon, p. 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Rudnicki, *Żydzi w Parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 130.

⁴⁵ Polonsky, 'The New Jewish Politics', p. 43.

⁴⁶ Bełcikowska, p. 888.

⁴⁷ Gitelman, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Bełcikowska, p. 889.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 891.

On the issue of education the Bund opposed the Hebrew-oriented Zionists call for Yiddish to become the first language taught to Jewish schoolchildren.⁵⁰ It also rejected Orthodox isolationism and insisted that a greater social cohesion could be reached only if Polish language was taught alongside other subjects in Jewish schools.⁵¹ The Bund went actively about implementing its ideas on education into practice by building a private network of Yiddish schools.⁵²

On economic issues the Bund presented a very radical trade-unionist programme.⁵³ Defending the eight-hour working day, extensive welfare programmes, freedom of strike, and the shifting of the tax burden towards the rich were all key parts of its 1922 election postulates.⁵⁴ They were largely unacceptable to the middle-class based Jewish parties in the BNM, providing no common ground for cooperation.

The ideological differences between the Bund and the Jewish parties in the Bloc were so significant that they precluded a shared electoral platform. The Bund rejected both the Zionists and the Agudat Yisrael, viewing the former's nationalism and the latter's conservative clerical ideology as barriers to the socialist progress it advocated.⁵⁵ The Bund's interests always lay in cooperating more closely with left-wing parties, regardless of their nationality, than with the Jewish groups in the BNM whose ideology they considered antithetical to its core principles of a world free of nation states.⁵⁶

PARTITIONS

The behaviour of Jewish parties in the Second Polish Republic was conditioned not only by ideological considerations, but also by the practical experience with politics which they had gained before the Polish state was re-formed. Through the 123 year-long period of partitions the great majority of Polish Jews inhabited lands belonging either to the Russian Empire, or to Austria-Hungary.⁵⁷ They developed their own distinct customs, dialects, and political organizations adapted to culturally distinct settings.⁵⁸ After World War I, when they were faced with the task of creating a common electoral block, this century-long gap proved very hard to bridge.⁵⁹

RUSSIAN PARTITION

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 892.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 891.

⁵² Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 95.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Bełcikowska, p. 892.

⁵⁵ Gitelman, p. 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Schiper, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, vol. II, p. 186.

⁵⁸ Vital Zajka, 'The Self-Perception of Lithuanian-Belarusian Jewry in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, volume XIV: Focusing on Jews in the Polish borderlands*, ed. by Antony Polonsky et al. (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), p. 23.

⁵⁹ Segal, p. 20.

The lands of the Russian partition, covering the Congress Kingdom and the Kresy,⁶⁰ offered its non-Russian inhabitants very limited political autonomy. Since the failure of the 1830 November Uprising, there were no representative institutions in the former Polish lands until the beginning of the 20th century.⁶¹ In the almost powerless Duma appearing after the 1905 Revolution, the representatives from the populous Congress Kingdom were gravely underrepresented.⁶² Marginalized and unable to achieve their goals, their sole function as legislators was to protest.⁶³ For instance, as a manifestation of their demands for autonomy, the Polish members refused to enter the Duma Presidium when the vote to be held solely concerned Russian issues.⁶⁴ The most active political organizations in the Russian-occupied lands were left-wing movements, especially in the industrial areas of the Congress Kingdom.⁶⁵ They militantly opposed the absolutist order and continued to do so after 1905, seeing the Duma as a parody of democracy.⁶⁶ They built their support in non-parliamentary ways, often boycotting elections, and thus handing over their potential seats to the nationalistic parties representing the petit bourgeois and upper classes.⁶⁷ These, in turn, were very susceptible to the anti-Semitic propaganda encouraged by the Russian authorities, and soon groups associated with the right-wing National Democratic (ND) movement led by Dmowski made it a centrepiece of their programme.⁶⁸

Jewish politicians in the region were thus facing an extremely hostile environment discouraging of political engagement. The Russian-dominated territory had a very weak tradition of social legislation and a strong tradition of breaking the law.⁶⁹ Jews were granted limited civil rights. The situation was at its worst in the Kresy, but even in the Congress Kingdom they did not have the right to own agricultural holdings or to be mayors of small towns.⁷⁰ Many Jews attempting to fit into this environment, while not losing the opportunity to participate in political life, became members of socialist, communist and Zionist

⁶⁰ The Congress Kingdom was the geographical area surrounding Warsaw, with large amounts of industry and an overwhelming Polish ethnic majority. The Kresy, or eastern borderlands, constituted the area east of the Congress Kingdom and were predominantly rural. Outside the major cities such as Vilnius, the Poles were frequently outnumbered by Lithuanians, Belarusians, or Ukrainians.

⁶¹ Ajnenkiel, p. 66.

⁶² In 1907, out of the Duma's 442 representatives, only 12 came from the Congress Kingdom.

⁶³ Segal, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Bardach, p. 135.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶⁶ Ajnenkiel, p. 66.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁸ Eugene C. Black, 'Squaring a Minorities Triangle: Lucien Wolf, Jewish Nationalists and Polish Nationalists', in *The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914-1923*, ed. by Paul Latawski (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992), p. 17.

⁶⁹ Jerzy Tomaszewski, 'Some Methodological Problems of the Study of Jewish History in Poland Between the Two World Wars', in *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies, volume I*, ed. by Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 164.

⁷⁰ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 42.

movements, all of whom were antagonistic to the regime.⁷¹ Moderate Jewish political parties were virtually non-existent in the Russian-occupied area.⁷²

In addition, after the 1882 wave of pogroms in Russia, many Jews from ethnically Russian areas moved to the Congress Kingdom and Kresy. They were a group extremely embittered by the experiences they went through in Russia and often politically militant.⁷³ To complicate the situation further, those educated among them were Russian-speaking, were brought up in a Russian cultural framework, and felt no identification with the cause of Polish autonomy.⁷⁴

GENERAL ZIONISTS

Within this antagonistic framework, the first Jewish political parties on Polish lands were officially formed. The Zionists and the Bund, both formed in 1897, quickly became the most influential groups. The former took up the tactics of the Polish representatives in the Duma and became part of the protesting opposition. Despite their obvious differences, as Davies points out, 'the aims and demands of the Zionist movement for an exclusive national homeland, not to mention their strident tone, closely matched those of the Polish National Democrats'.⁷⁵ Also, like the National Democrats, their influence on Russian politics was minuscule. In total, there were twelve Jewish deputies in the First Duma, a number that fell to three in the Second Duma, two in the Third, and again three in the last Duma, elected in 1912.⁷⁶ With numbers too low to push through any of their agenda in the parliament, they resorted to direct action and conspiracy, often in cooperation with other national minorities.⁷⁷

After World War I, these Jewish nationalist groups picked up the thread where they left it before the war broke out. The electoral alliance formed with the Ukrainian and Belorussian minorities, which grew into the BNM, had very little common ideological ground, and in fact the interests of the groups were often contrasting.⁷⁸ However, the specificity of the Polish electoral system, designed in order to favour the large Polish parties over the minority groups, made them natural allies.⁷⁹ The memory of opposing the Tsarist authorities helped forge this alliance against a new enemy: the Polish-dominated parliamentary establishment of the Second Republic.

The antagonism of the Zionists towards most Polish political parties precluded any framework of cooperation outside the BNM, and fuelled the right-wing parties related to the National Democrats, who themselves continued to practice the very

⁷¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: a history of Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 252.

⁷² Czesław Brzoza, ed., *Żydowska mozaika polityczna w Polsce 1917-1927 : wybór dokumentów* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2003), p. 97.

⁷³ Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 251.

⁷⁴ Władysław Bartoszewski, 'Some Thoughts on Polish-Jewish Relations', in *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies, volume I*, ed. by Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 280.

⁷⁵ Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 255.

⁷⁶ Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: a short history of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Keterpress Enterprises, 2000), p. 76.

⁷⁷ Segal, p. 38.

⁷⁸ Schiper, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej, vol. II*, pp. 295-296.

⁷⁹ Rudnicki, *Żydzi w Parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 128-129.

attitudes they displayed in the Russian partition.⁸⁰ The common mentality and philosophy of resentment shared by Jewish and Polish nationalists that stemmed from their involvement in the futile Duma, led the historian Neal Ascherson to the bitter conclusion that perhaps ‘the lasting legacy of pre-war Jewish politics in Europe is not democracy, but the blind “national egoism” which some Zionists in Poland learned from the Nationalism preached by Roman Dmowski’.⁸¹

BUND

The second group originating from the Russian partition, the Bund, followed the path of other socialist movements and formed a non-parliamentary opposition. After its formation in Vilnius, it entered into an alliance with the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ (RSDW) organization, which was a multi-ethnic umbrella party assembling many left-wing groups.⁸² However, the alliance soon broke up, as the RSDW refused to agree with the Bund’s view on the Jewish minority as culturally distinct, and advocated full assimilation.⁸³ The Bund was forced to become a stand-alone group, looked at suspiciously by other socialists.

The Bund refused any cooperation with the undemocratic Tsarist regime. It quickly became a clandestine organization and, like the Zionists, preferred the use of direct action.⁸⁴ However, despite the fallout with RSDW, the Bund acknowledged that on its own it would succumb to political irrelevance, and thus never ceased to seek allies within the left-wing movement. The Bund’s leaders – Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter – both participated in the 1917 Russian revolution.⁸⁵ The party sympathized with the communist movement until it left the Comintern in 1921.⁸⁶

The Bund erroneously believed that its vision of a multinational and federative socialist organization could be integrated into the post-war order.⁸⁷ However, it proved more flexible in its approach than the Zionists in the sense that it attempted to adapt its methods to the post-partition reality, while maintaining the same pre-partition goals. After Poland regained independence, the Bund continued to pursue its political and ideological concepts in an almost unaltered form, but without ostracizing the Polish socialists, and thus adjusting its behaviour to the

⁸⁰ Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the two World Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 83-86.

⁸¹ Norman Davies, ‘Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Poland’, in *Studies from Polin: From Shtetl to Socialism*, ed. by Antony Polonsky (London, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), p. 244.

⁸² Feliks Tych, ‘Foreword’, in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. by Jack Jacobs (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. xvii.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Bełcikowska, *Stronnictwa i Związki Polityczne*, p. 883.

⁸⁵ Gertrud Pickhan, ‘Kossovsky, Portnoy and Others: the Role of Members of the Bund’s Founding Generation in the Interwar Polish Bund’, in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. by Jack Jacobs (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 69.

⁸⁶ Stachura, p. 74.

⁸⁷ Gitelman, p. 3.

new reality by participating in the democratic elections, and not attaching itself to subversive Ukrainian or Belorussian far-left organisations within the BNM.⁸⁸

AUSTRIAN PARTITION

The Polish lands under Austrian partition included West and East Galicia, the former inhabited predominantly by Poles, and the latter by Ukrainians (with the exception of large cities, where Poles dominated).⁸⁹ The Habsburgs chose to manage the ethnic minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in a very different way to the Russian Tsars. Galicians enjoyed considerable political autonomy. From the 1840s they could form parties and send their representatives to the Austrian parliament, the Reichsrat.⁹⁰ From the 1860s onwards, ten per cent of all inhabitants of the region voted every year to elect a Galician Sejm that held some power over local legislation and the division of taxes.⁹¹ In 1873, the Galician Sejm obtained extensive competences in areas such as the organization of gminas,⁹² local development, agriculture, forestry, and education.⁹³ In 1907, the elections to the Reichsrat became general.⁹⁴ From then on, the Galician MPs constituted the third largest group in the parliament, after the Austrians and Hungarians.⁹⁵ All of this helped Galician politicians to acquire the parliamentary experience their equivalents in the Russian partition were denied.⁹⁶

By the end of the 19th century, Galician Jews numbered above 800,000, constituted about eleven per cent of the region's population, and between fifty per cent and seventy-five per cent of the residents in 63 Galician towns.⁹⁷ This meant that they often proved decisive in settling election outcomes. Their significance was acknowledged by both the Austrian rulers and the local Poles, as well as the Ukrainians who sought political allies. The Jews were well-represented on municipal councils, served as mayors in some Galician towns, and held seats in the Reichsrat.⁹⁸ They enjoyed educational opportunities and constituted a large proportion of the learned professions.⁹⁹

Galician Jews frequently cooperated with majority groups. Already during the first direct elections for seats in the Austrian parliament in 1873, as well as in the

⁸⁸ Daniel Blatman, 'Minority Policy, Bundism, and Jewish Women In Interwar Poland', in *The emergence of modern Jewish politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), p. 60.

⁸⁹ Jerzy Holzer, *Mozaika polityczna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1974), p. 21.

⁹⁰ Ajnenkiel, p. 52.

⁹¹ Bardach, p. 123.

⁹² The gmina is the lowest uniform level of territorial division in Poland. It can be translated as 'commune' or 'municipality'.

⁹³ Ajnenkiel, p. 55.

⁹⁴ Bardach, p. 132.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Segal, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Rachel Manekin, 'Galicia', *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*

<<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Galicia>> [accessed 22 January 2011].

⁹⁸ Spector, Shmuel and Wigoder, Geoffrey, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust: vol. III* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 1515.

⁹⁹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 41.

1907 elections, some Jewish politicians formed electoral alliances with the Ukrainians.¹⁰⁰ Others co-operated with the Poles. In the 1873 elections, the Jewish candidate from Cracow chose to join the Polish bloc in the conservative wing of the chamber, while four others joined the Liberals.¹⁰¹ The alliance between Poles and Jewish elites lasted until the outbreak of World War I, and was at its strongest between 1879 and 1885, when almost all Jewish representatives supported the Poles.¹⁰²

Jews could participate in the affairs of the state and build a civil society in their midst, because, as Davies eloquently explains, 'they were free from the social and political pressures which dominated life in other partitions. They were free from the cultural imperialism of Russia and Germany; they were free from the atmosphere of deprivation and harassment induced by Tsardom'.¹⁰³ Even the Galician branch of the National Democratic movement represented a much milder degree of anti-Semitism than its Russian branch.¹⁰⁴ This lower level of hostility, combined with the more democratic nature of the regime, encouraged Galician Jews to lead active political lives under Austrian rule.

GALICIAN ZIONISTS

Similar to the Russian partition, the Zionists were the dominant Jewish political movement in the region.¹⁰⁵ However, unlike the Zionists from the Kresy, dominated by the ethnically Russian Jews, the leaders of the Galician branch of the movement were deeply rooted in the Polish language and culture.¹⁰⁶ Having gathered experience with political liberalism for many decades, they were moderate in their politics. Parliamentary deliberation was preferred to direct action and more radical and subversive branches of the movement enjoyed little success.¹⁰⁷

The Galician Zionists cooperated with any party that could help them obtain electoral success, not allowing personal or ideological animosity to stand in the way of politics. Zionists also ran as independents, and the more left-wing oriented of them were members of the Polish Socialist Party.¹⁰⁸ In 1907, a Jewish bloc within the Reichsrat was formed, becoming the first Jewish parliamentary structure in Europe.¹⁰⁹ Although some criticized the flexible approach of the Galician Zionists as a weakness, their method was met with some success under Austrian rule. As Levene notes: 'Polish Jewish political parties with national programmes [...] made

¹⁰⁰ Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. II* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), p. 119.

¹⁰¹ Manekin, 'Galicia', *YIVO*.

¹⁰² Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. II*, p. 127.

¹⁰³ Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁴ Segal, p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ Although a discussion of the Jewish assimilationist movement is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth pointing out that the movement was particularly strong in the region and until 1918 and frequently successfully challenged the ascendancy of Zionism.

¹⁰⁶ Manekin, 'Galicia', *YIVO*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Polonsky, 'The New Jewish Politics', p. 46.

major strides forward'.¹¹⁰ They became politically relevant, on both the national and local level, and were actively engaged in the life of the entire multi-ethnic community.

These extremely different experiences of Zionist groupings in the Russian and Austrian partitions manifested themselves after World War I. The leaders of the Galician Zionists, Leon Reich and Ozjasz Thon, frequently clashed with Grunbaum within the Jewish Club in the Sejm.¹¹¹ While the latter, together with his Ukrainian and Belorussian allies in the BNM, favoured a policy of constant opposition towards the Polish authorities, the Galician leaders took a more nuanced stance, criticizing the government when it did not fulfil the promises made in the Minorities Treaty, but backing it whenever its policies helped guarantee Jewish rights.¹¹² The opinion that Jews could only successfully fight for equal rights if they remained vocally loyal citizens of the Republic was shared by the Orthodox wing of the Jewish Club, as well as the Jewish Merchants' Association.¹¹³

The difference in political strategy of the uncompromising Grunbaum, and the much more pragmatic and flexible Galicians, proved insurmountable. The former's origins in the Russian partition made him sceptical of any cooperation with the dominant majority, and led him to believe that the only solution would be to obtain a level of autonomy for the Jews that would free them from their reliance on any Polish government. This in turn brought him closer to the other autonomy-seeking minorities and helped consolidate the BNM.¹¹⁴ The more successful experiences of the Galicians in political dialogue and compromise made them reject this maximalist stance as unconstructive. They preferred to take a direct approach to the dominant Polish majority, and to achieve equal rights through demonstrating a positive and loyal attitude towards the Polish state, seeing it as a lesser evil and as a protector from the Ukrainian or National Democrat nationalist movements.¹¹⁵

OTHER JEWISH MOVEMENTS

Another interesting feature of the Austrian partition, that distinguished it from the Congress Kingdom and Kresy, were the specificities of the local Orthodox and Socialist movements. The Orthodox Jews, who were non-existent in Russian political life, participated in the Austrian parliament from the very outset. The first Jew who was elected from Galicia was in fact a representative of the Orthodox Jewry – Berish Meisels, the rabbi of Cracow, elected as early as 1848.¹¹⁶ Although never a large political movement, the Galician Orthodox Jews quickly realized that, unlike their equivalents in Russia, they were able to obtain greater religious freedom in parliamentary ways. And despite their small numbers, they proved

¹¹⁰ Levene, p. 19.

¹¹¹ Manekin, 'Galicia', *YIVO*.

¹¹² Segal, p. 38.

¹¹³ Ajnenkiel, p. 275.

¹¹⁴ Polonsky, 'The New Jewish Politics', p. 50.

¹¹⁵ Polonsky, 'The New Jewish Politics', p. 51.

¹¹⁶ 'Entries Index- D', *The History of the Jewish People*

<<http://www.jewishhistory.org.il/history.php?letter=d>> [accessed 24 January 2011]

surprisingly effective in doing this. When the Austrian constitution was issued in December 1867, it contained provisions that abolished 'all restrictions connected with religious observance, granted universal equality before the law, and allowed freedom of religion and conscience'.¹¹⁷ The Orthodox Jews were also willing to cooperate with Polish parties, even those who were ideologically very distant. In 1911, during the Austrian parliamentary elections, Orthodox representatives signed an agreement with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) to support it in return for the PPS's rejection of the requirements that Jewish rabbis would have to pass an examination in Polish language and general knowledge in order to fulfil their duties.¹¹⁸ This flexibility, acquired during the partition period, later helped the Agudat Yisrael in running as a part of the mixed electoral block with other minorities in the 1922 elections.

The Jewish Socialists in the predominantly rural Austrian partition played a much smaller and less militant role than the Bund in the more urbanized Russian partition. The Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia had a membership of less than 3000.¹¹⁹ The Bundists merged with the Jewish Social Democratic Party in 1912.¹²⁰ Many Jewish socialists also continued to be drawn into the ranks of the Polish Social Democratic Party, led by the charismatic Ignacy Daszyński. Many of them opposed militant Jewish Socialist movements, and preferred parliamentary to direct action characteristic of the Russian Bundists.¹²¹ However, with limited organisational capacity and little support from Polish socialists, the Bund enjoyed limited success and never formed lasting relationships with other parties which could have helped it find coalition partners in post-World War I Poland.

PRAGMATISM

Having analyzed the core doctrines of different Jewish movements, and the influence of pre-war politics on shaping their stance towards the dominant ethnic majority, it is useful to look at how they responded to the challenges and opportunities posed to them by the key historical and political events that marked the first years of existence of the Second Polish Republic. This will allow us to factor in a third element, which, together with ideology and experience, determined their political choices: pragmatism.

WORLD WAR I

World War I was accompanied by the worst anti-Semitic massacres since the Khmel'nitsky uprising in 1648.¹²² The first months of the war brought a successful

¹¹⁷ Manekin, 'Galicia', *YIVO*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Rick Kuhn, 'The Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia and the Bund', in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. by Jack Jacobs (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 142-143.

¹²⁰ Joseph Kissman, 'The History of the Jewish Worker Movement Bund in Bukovina', in *History of the Jews in the Bukowina, vol. I*, ed. by Hugo Gold (Tel Aviv: [n.pub.], 1958), pp. 129-144.

¹²¹ Kuhn, pp. 136-137.

¹²² Blatman, pp. 57-58.

Russian advance into Galicia. The Tsarist administration that followed the troops did not waste any time imposing order on the previously liberal region. The Jews, enjoying many personal, political, and religious freedoms, were one of the first targets. The new rulers made it a point of honour to 'equate the Galician Jews with the Russian Jewry'.¹²³ Jews were also accused of spying for Austria-Hungary. The Tsarist propaganda was so pervasive that even many foreign correspondents writing about World War I accepted it without question. Charles Phillips, a member of the American Red Cross Commission to Poland between 1919 and 1923, wrote in his memoir, 'that there were Jewish spies employed in Poland was nothing new. Espionage was such an old practice among the Jews that distrust of them became an every-day tradition'.¹²⁴ As a result it became almost common practice for the Russian troops to organize a pogrom in every town, first when entering it, and then once again when leaving it.¹²⁵

POLISH-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Although the Russians pulled out of the war after the Bolshevik Revolution, the situation of Jews did not get any easier, especially in Galicia. Russian troops were quickly replaced by the semi-professional army organized by the Polish independence movement and the Ukrainian nationalists attempting to push the Poles westwards.¹²⁶ Among both groups anti-Semitism proved widespread, with the Poles demonstrating particular hostility towards the local Jews. There were two principal reasons.

First of all, Jews were seen as enemies of Polish independence. Indeed, before World War I and during its initial stages, the most vocal section of the Jewish population opposed the idea of independence for Poland.¹²⁷ German and Austrian Zionists organized a Committee for the East and attempted to persuade the Central powers to reorganize Central Europe in a way that would omit the creation of a new Polish state.¹²⁸ The only Jewish organization that outwardly supported Polish independence was the Bund, whose young leaders often considered themselves culturally Polish.¹²⁹ In Galicia, however, the Zionists were seen as much more influential than the Bund, and thus the local Jews attracted a large measure of resentment from the Polish troops heading eastwards.¹³⁰

Secondly, the Jews antagonized the Poles by insisting on keeping a neutral stance in the dispute as to whether Eastern Galicia should become part of a future Polish or Ukrainian state. Jews found themselves truly between a rock and a hard place in this situation, as they did wanted to antagonize the nationally-minded Ukrainians, who outnumbered the Poles in the region. However, in the words of

¹²³ Ignacy Schiper et al., eds, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, vol. I (Warsaw: [n.pub.], 1936), p. 413.

¹²⁴ Charles Phillips, *The New Poland* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923), p. 293.

¹²⁵ Schiper, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, vol. I, p. 414.

¹²⁶ Krystyna M. Olszer, ed, *For your freedom and ours : Polish progressive spirit from the 14th century to the present* (New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1981), p. 189.

¹²⁷ Brzoza, p. 25.

¹²⁸ Stachura, p. 67.

¹²⁹ Blatman, pp. 57-58.

¹³⁰ Kuhn, pp. 142-143.

Polonsky, 'the Poles showed little understanding for the desire of Jews in ethnically mixed areas to maintain a neutral posture in the national conflicts there'.¹³¹ Many of them treated Jewish neutrality as an act of treason, or at least disloyalty, and saw anti-Jewish excesses as just retribution.¹³²

The 1918 pogrom in Lviv exemplified the spiral of violence into which Jews in the eastern lands could so easily fall.¹³³ When the city was first taken by the Ukrainians, the Jews were threatened with severe punishment for any acts of cooperation with Poland.¹³⁴ As a result, they chose to remain neutral and accept the Ukrainian administration. When the Polish soldiers retook the city in November, they decided to punish the local population. They went out on the streets, burnt synagogues, destroyed Jewish property, and massacred 340 people, seventy of whom were Jewish.¹³⁵

The Lviv pogrom had broader implications for the behaviour of Galician Jewish politicians in Polish political life after the war was over. The Galician Zionists became determined to convince the Poles that they were loyal citizens of the state in order to avoid a repeat of similar atrocities in the future. In 1922, when they were encouraged to join the Ukrainian nationalists in boycotting the elections in protest over the lack of autonomy granted by the Polish administration, the Galician Zionists chose to manifest their civic loyalty by declining the offer.¹³⁶

POLISH-SOVIET WAR

Another wave of pogroms came during the Polish-Soviet war that broke out just months after the World War I armistice. Polish nationalists exploited the theme of Judeo-Bolshevism in order to associate the Jews with the Soviets and to present them as foreign agents threatening the success of the campaign against the Soviets.¹³⁷ In the minds of many Poles, this representation of Jews as harmful to the war effort legitimized the necessity of fighting back against them.¹³⁸ The Versailles Minorities Treaty served as a symbol of Jewish international influence, curbing Polish autonomy, and, in an ironic twist of fate, led to even greater anti-Semitic violence.¹³⁹

In the same way that Lviv served as the symbol of anti-Jewish excesses during World War I and the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, the April 1919 massacre of Pinsk, where a local Polish garrison executed thirty-five Jews accused of supporting the Communists, including women and children, became the symbol of pogroms

¹³¹ Zajka, p. 23.

¹³² Sarunas Liekis et al., 'Three Documents on Anti-Jewish Violence in the Eastern Kresy during the Polish-Soviet Conflict', in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, volume XIV: Focusing on Jews in the Polish borderlands*, ed. by Antony Polonsky et al. (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), p. 117.

¹³³ Stachura, p. 69.

¹³⁴ Ajnenkiel, p. 179.

¹³⁵ Davies, 'Ethnic Diversity', p. 241.

¹³⁶ Stachura, p. 73.

¹³⁷ Michlic, p.89.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹³⁹ Heller, pp. 3-4.

during the Polish-Soviet conflict.¹⁴⁰ However, the new wave of violence, centred mainly around the Kresy, brought very different reactions from the local Jews than the prior events in Galicia. Rather than making them actively seek out ways of proving their loyalty, as the Galician Jews did, the pogroms of 1919 and 1920 served to further harden the anti-regime stance of the Grunbaum Zionists and the Bund, relegating those Jewish groups with assimilationist ideas to political insignificance.¹⁴¹ They effectively pushed the Grunbaum faction into the arms of the other disgruntled minorities, and precluded any cooperation of the Jewish socialists with Polish parties in the future elections.

RUN UP TO ELECTIONS

The territorial consolidation of Poland was completed with the signing of the Treaty of Riga and the Polish Constitution, both in March 1921.¹⁴² The new Poland was far from being the state 'inhabited by indisputably Polish populations'¹⁴³ that Wilson envisaged in his fourteen points. According to the September 1921 census, Poles constituted only about 70 per cent of the twenty-seven million population, with fourteen per cent Ukrainians (circa four million), over ten per cent Jews (almost three million), and four per cent Germans and Belorussians.¹⁴⁴ The progressive March Constitution guaranteed to the minorities a 'full protection of life, freedom, possession of every citizen disregarding their provenience, nationality, language, race, or religion'.¹⁴⁵ However, as time would show, many of these promises were to remain unfulfilled.

Nonetheless, the Constitution turned Poland into a parliamentary republic with its first full elections scheduled for November 1922.¹⁴⁶ The provisional elections held three years earlier indicated the growing strength of right-wing nationalists associated with Dmowski, who obtained over thirty per cent of the vote, becoming the most powerful political group in the country.¹⁴⁷ With most of the eastern provinces containing high numbers of Jews not yet included in the voting process, only ten Jewish MPs entered the Sejm, a mixture of Zionists and Orthodox politicians.¹⁴⁸

In the three years preceding November 1922, Polish politics were dominated by the struggle between Dmowski's faction and the moderates and socialists backing Pilsudski. Pilsudski opposed Dmowski's ethnic nationalism, and dreamt of establishing a federal empire sprawling from Poznan to Kiev, continuing the

¹⁴⁰ Blatman, p. 58.

¹⁴¹ Michael C. Steinlauf, 'The Polish-Jewish Daily Press', in *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, volume II, ed. by Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 221.

¹⁴² Tymowski, p. 281.

¹⁴³ Paul Latawski, ed., *The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914-1923* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992), p. 199.

¹⁴⁴ Stachura, p. 62.

¹⁴⁵ Szymon Rudnicki, ed., *Druga Rzeczypospolita: wybór tekstów źródłowych* (Warszawa, 1990), p. 91.

¹⁴⁶ Ajnenkiel, p. 153.

¹⁴⁷ Tymowski, p. 284.

¹⁴⁸ Ajnenkiel, p. 132.

tradition of the multinational Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹⁴⁹ Treated as an anachronistic romantic by some, he nonetheless became one of Poland's foremost political figures after becoming the leader of the independence movement during World War I.¹⁵⁰

Dmowski, an "integral nationalist", wanted the Polish state to only consist of territories essential for Polish security, whose populations could be easily polonized.¹⁵¹ An astute politician, he quickly realized that he could build political capital on his anti-Semitism, and during the Paris Peace Conference, he insisted that citizenship be given only to those who could prove they had had no Jewish ancestors for three generations.¹⁵² He justified his views with reference to the perceived alienness of Jewish culture and faith and fostered the anti-Semitic resentment among Polish peasants and workers by highlighting Jewish successes in trade and industry and by playing the card of Judeo-Bolshevism.¹⁵³ As his success in the 1919 elections demonstrated, the Poles, with the Polish-Soviet war still fresh in their mind, were extremely susceptible to such propaganda. By 1922, it seemed that Dmowski's camp had the upper hand over Piłsudski's supporters.

BLOC OF NATIONAL MINORITIES (GENERAL ZIONISTS AND AGUDAT YISRAEL)

The rise of the anti-Semitic right on the eve of the First Term Sejm elections understandably alarmed the Jewish parties. They responded to the threat in a variety of ways. General Zionists sought to create a broad electoral bloc encompassing all of Poland's minorities. This way Grunbaum wanted to offset the disadvantage of the electoral system towards small parties by attracting almost one third of all potential voters.¹⁵⁴ However, not all Jewish parties wanted to be associated with the controversial Grunbaum and his militant opposition to the new state.¹⁵⁵ In the end, the only other significant Jewish force that joined the BNM was the Orthodox Agudat Yisrael, which saw in the bloc a marriage of convenience with a political partner more knowledgeable about political strategies.¹⁵⁶ As a result the BNM obtained sixteen per cent of the vote and sixty-six seats in the new Sejm, seventeen of which were obtained by Jewish candidates (six of these seats went to the Agudat).¹⁵⁷ Although the achievement was not as great as it would have been in case of greater consolidation of the minorities, it did not go unnoticed and the nationalists promptly used it for their scaremongering tactics, highlighting the success of the bloc in voivodships such as Volhynia, where it got as much as eighty per cent of the entire vote.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁹ Antony Polonsky, 'Introduction', in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, volume XIV: Focusing on Jews in the Polish borderlands*, ed. by Antony Polonsky et al. (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), pp. 13-14.

¹⁵⁰ Davies, 'Ethnic Diversity', p. 239.

¹⁵¹ Polonsky, 'Introduction', pp. 13-14.

¹⁵² Black, 'Lucien Wolf and the Making of Poland', p. 15.

¹⁵³ Tymowski, p. 260.

¹⁵⁴ Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 406.

¹⁵⁵ Stachura, p. 75.

¹⁵⁶ Bacon, p. 93.

¹⁵⁷ Ajnenkiel, p. 191.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

GALICIAN ZIONISTS

The Galician Zionists were one of the Jewish parties that chose not to join the BNM. Apart from rejecting the militant approach of the bloc towards the Polish administration, they had strong reasons to believe that they did not need the help of an electoral bloc in order to achieve a good result. This was because the nationalist Ukrainian parties, controlling by far the majority of the minority vote in East Galicia, chose to boycott the elections as a sign of defiance against what they saw as an illegal Polish occupation.¹⁵⁹ The Galician Zionists, who refused to join the boycott, found themselves, as a result, in an unexpectedly comfortable position. With only sixty-eight per cent of those eligible taking part in the elections (with the figure as low as forty per cent in the most heavily Ukrainian areas), the proportion of the vote achieved by the Zionists greatly exceeded their real demographic strength. Despite achieving only a little less than 200,000 votes, the East Galician Zionists obtained fifteen seats in the Sejm (with their sister party from West Galicia adding another two).¹⁶⁰ This pragmatic decision allowed the Galician Zionists to become the largest faction within the Jewish Club in the Sejm.

BUND

The Jewish left did poorly in the 1922 vote. Unable to find common ideological ground with other Jewish parties, and drawing criticism from Polish socialists for its militancy and unwillingness to support the PPS hero Pilsudski, the Bund stood alone in the elections.¹⁶¹ With the defeat of the Bolsheviks in the Polish-Soviet war in 1920 still fresh in people's minds, the views of a party that until recently identified itself with the communists held little sway. However, the Bund refused to compromise following the pragmatic example set by the Zionists and Orthodox parties, and instead chose not to enter any electoral bloc.¹⁶² With little prospect of obtaining a good result in the elections, it concentrated on building a strong base among the Jewish workers around its social and educational organizations.¹⁶³ As a result, it achieved an electoral result of only circa 80,000 votes, which prevented it from gaining any seats in the Sejm.¹⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

The dispersion of the Jewish parties in 1922 meant that the resulting Jewish Club in the new Sejm was a fractious affair. It was divided into three wings – the General Zionist, the Galician Zionist, and the Orthodox – each with different agenda priorities and different views on government policies.¹⁶⁵ As a result, the Jews were

¹⁵⁹ Stachura, p. 73.

¹⁶⁰ Schiper, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, vol. II, p. 293.

¹⁶¹ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 94.

¹⁶² Gitelman, p. 4.

¹⁶³ Schiper, *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, vol. II, p. 279-280.

¹⁶⁴ Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁵ Becikowska, pp. 480-481.

highly unsuccessful in pushing through their agenda on workplace discrimination of the Jews, educational autonomy, and anti-Semitic violence. In certain instances the different factions of the Club even opposed each other in parliamentary votes.¹⁶⁶ The three elements identified by historians – ideology, experiences from partition-era politics, and political pragmatism – continued to prevent Jewish solidarity within the Sejm, just as they had prevented the Jews from forming a strong electoral bloc that could help maximize their gains in the elections.

However, what becomes apparent when we look at the three proposed explanations is that none of them can on its own explain the patterns of Jewish politics. It is true, for instance, that the differences between the General and Galician Zionists in their approach towards the government did stem from their experiences in pre-World War I Russian and Austrian politics. However, both parties were still ideologically very close and the Galicians might well have joined the BNM in 1922 if the Ukrainian electoral boycott in East Galicia had not taken place. It was pragmatism and opportunism that outweighed ideological affinity and pushed the Galicians into creating their own list for the 1922 election. It is clear that in this case the legacy of the partitions and pragmatism both played crucial and complementary roles in explaining the final decisions made by the Galician Zionists.

The factors affecting the Orthodox Jewish movement were similarly complex. Entering the world of Polish politics with very little experience, due to the virtual non-existence of a political wing of the Agudat Yisrael during the partition period, the movement needed to look for more knowledgeable coalition partners. In 1922, it was forced to sacrifice its ideology and run in an electoral bloc headed by Zionist activists. In this case, again, experience (or rather the lack thereof) during the partition period, combined with political pragmatism outweighed ideology in conditioning the decision of the Orthodox movement to enter the BNM.

However, neither can we wholly discount the importance of ideology. This is most clear in the case of the Bund, which, out of the movements analysed in this paper, was the one that remained most dedicated to not compromising its core ideas. Unwilling to cooperate with its Zionist and Orthodox ideological opponents in the BNM in 1922, the Bundists chose to take their own path, even if it meant limited electoral success.

Interwar Poland had been a crucible for the major Jewish political and cultural positions developed in the early twentieth century. As Ezra Mendelsohn writes, ‘it was on Polish soil that Orthodoxy and secularism, socialism, Zionism and diaspora nationalism, sought to impose their way of life and their “solutions” on the Jewish population’.¹⁶⁷ Poland had thus been a true political battleground for the Jews, and a robust historiographic framework is essential in order to understand how these battles were fought.

Analysis of the Zionist, Orthodox, and Bundist political movements can help draw conclusions on the role of the existing historiography in creating such a framework. First, all three existing historiographic approaches are helpful in

¹⁶⁶ Polonsky, ‘Reich’, *YIVO*.

¹⁶⁷ Mendelsohn, ‘Jewish Historiography’, pp. 3-4.

understanding the reality of Jewish politics in interwar Poland. By looking at the actions and especially electoral choices of Jewish parties through these frameworks one can better comprehend their motivations and the guiding principles that shaped their behaviour on the political scene.

More importantly, however, in order to get the best insight into this topic, one should not limit oneself to just one of these three approaches. Ideology, partition politics, and pragmatism describe three different facets of the same phenomenon, and are best used in conjunction. Each Jewish political movement in Poland prioritized a different one of these three guiding principles, but no party discarded any of them completely. It is only by understanding how important a role each of them played for a given Jewish political movement that we can understand more fully the choices it made.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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1922 ELECTIONS

	Votes in 1000s	Percentage
<i>Right</i>	2637	30.1
Christian Alliance of National Unity (National Democrats, Christian Democrats, Christian National Party)	2551	29.1
National- State Union	38	0.4
State Alliance of the Kresy	48	0.6
<i>Centre</i>	1914	21.9
Piast	1153	13.2
Polish Centre	259	3.0
Bourgeois Centre	29	0.3
NPR	473	5.4
<i>Left</i>	2221	25.2
Liberation	963	11.0
PPS	906	10.3
Peoples' Councils	46	0.5
Peasant Party- Left Wing	59	0.7
Radical Peasant Party	115	1.3
Communists lists	132	1.4
<i>National Minorities</i>	1889	21.6
National Minority Bloc	1398	16.0
East Galician Zionists	175	2.0
West Galician Zionists	81	0.9
Jewish Populists (Folkists)	53	0.6
Chliborobi	87	1.0
Bund	81	0.9
Zionist Workers' Party	14	0.2

Table 1: Elections to the Sejm, November 1922. Source: Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939: the crisis of constitutional government* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 60.