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The Radical (Re-)Interpretation of Jewish Class and Nation

Poale Zion and the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917

“Our national consciousness is negative in that it is emancipatory. If we were the proletariat of a free nation, which neither oppresses nor is oppressed, we would not be interested in the problems of national life.”¹

“The social revolution is no dream any more, but an existing fact that needs to be reckoned with. But if the revolution has become a fact and socialism is not a utopia any more... what does one need Palestine for now?”²

Introduction

When the delegates of the World Union of Poale Zion (“Workers of Zion”) gathered for their fifth world congress in Vienna in July 1920, everybody was aware that this would be a decisive moment in the history of the socialist-Zionist movement and the Jewish labor movement in general. Already in May 1919, the international leadership had written to Shlomo Kaplansky (1884–1950), one of its key figures: “The conference is a vital necessity for us. Our Union is threatened by a severe split. Certain parties of the East have come under undesirable influences and demand a complete reconstruction of our Union or the formation of a new one in order to fight the current one.”³ The “undesirable influences” the letter

1 Ber Borochov, “Our Platform (1906),” in *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation: Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, ed. Mitchell Cohen (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1984), 89.

2 *Freie Tribüne*, November 22 1919, 3 (“Die soziale Revolution ist doch kein Traum mehr, sondern eine reale Tatsache, mit der gerechnet werden muß. Wenn aber die Revolution eine Tatsache geworden ist und der Sozialismus nicht mehr irgendwo in Utopia liegt, ... wozu braucht es jetzt Palästina?” Translation Jan Rybak).

3 Verbandsbureau des Allweltlichen Jüdischen Sozialistischen Arbeiterverbandes Poale Zion, *Letter to Shlomo Kaplansky, Stockholm*, May 24, 1919, Israel Labor Party Archive (Beit Berl), 1–10–1919–108 (“Die Konferenz ist eine Lebensnotwendigkeit für uns. In unserem Verbande droht eine schwere Spaltung einzutreten. Gewisse Parteien des Ostens sind unter ungewünschte Einflüsse geraten und wünschen völlige Umgestaltung unseres Verbandes oder die Gründung eines neuen zur Bekämpfung des gegenwärtigen.” Translation JR).

referred to were connected to the European revolutionary processes, in which many activists of Poale Zion participated, and which often entailed dynamics that brought many of them to reassess their understanding of key elements of socialist-Zionist theory. Several scholars have discussed the split within the socialist-Zionist movement in the context of the Russian Revolution, focusing on both local cases of radicalization and differentiation, as well as the discussions between the left Poale Zion and the Communist International.⁴

This chapter analyzes the evolution of socialist-Zionist ideology in the context of the two defining revolutionary experiences in 1905 and 1917 and the following years. It juxtaposes the traditional socialist-Zionist understandings of the Jewish nation, the Jewish working class, and its relations, both with the wider labor movement and the national project in Palestine, as they had developed in the context of the 1905 revolution, with those new approaches, emerging out of the experiences of the new European revolutionary processes. This contribution asks what meanings activists attributed to the concepts of nation and territory and how the two related to the Jewish working class and its supposed revolutionary and national tasks. In many regards, the two quotations above represent the transformation of many socialist-Zionists' approach to the questions of Jewish nationality and territory. Both statements had been made in the context of major revolutionary events that had dramatic consequences for the Jewish populations in the affected regions. However, the conclusions the two authors, who were both activists of the same political movement, drew, were radically opposed to one another, with one arguing for the national program, the other questioning it. This chapter contextualizes the emergence of Poale-Zionist ideology during the first Russian Revolution of 1905, and its radical re-interpretation during the major revolutionary wave in Europe from 1917 onwards.

⁴ Amongst others: John Bunzl, *Klassenkampf in der Diaspora: Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Arbeiterbewegung* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1975); Mario Keßler, *Zionismus und internationale Arbeiterbewegung 1897 bis 1933* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994); Mario Offenberger, *Kommunismus in Palästina: Nation und Klasse in der antikolonialen Revolution* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1975); Sondra Miller Rubenstein, *The Communist Movement in Palestine and Israel, 1919–1984* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1985), 53–69; Thomas Soxberger, *Revolution am Donaukanal: Jiddische Kultur und Politik in Wien (1904–1938)* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2013), 112–138.

The Jewish Labor Movement

The traumatic experiences during the revolution of 1905 and subsequent turmoil in the Russian Empire led several actors to search for new political responses. Some of them eventually formulated an ideological synthesis of Jewish nationalism and socialism. Traditionally, such ideas had remained rather fringe phenomena in both the wider labor movement and in Jewish politics.⁵ Whereas several activists, especially those organized in the *Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund* (“General Jewish Labor Bund”), founded in 1897, played a crucial role in the development of a distinctly Jewish labor movement, the references to Jewish national identity, and especially to the Yiddish language, remained largely instrumental for a long time. The nation and its claims were usually not perceived as ends in themselves. Only later, particular Jewish national concepts, especially Yiddishism, gained importance.⁶

The economic conditions of the Jewish population were decisive factors for the evolution of the Jewish labor movement and its political programs. The Jewish economy in the Russian Pale of Settlement, and to a lesser extent in Habsburg Galicia, was dominated by small-scale businesses, relegated to the lowest strata of the economic process.⁷ In Russia, those conditions worsened in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with the Jewish population and economy experiencing a decline and further marginalization.⁸ Modern capitalist production rapidly destroyed the economic basis of many Jews and forced significant parts of the working population into low-level production, mostly of consumer goods, which mainly required manpower and little investment in constant cap-

5 Several authors have discussed Moses Hess as a pioneer of socialist Zionism. For example: Shlomo Avineri, *Profile des Zionismus: Die geistigen Ursprünge des Staates Israel – 17 Portraits* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 53–64; Julius H. Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism: Hess, Pinkser, Rülf* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 11–33. Due to a lack of space and for the sake of a more coherent argument, I will refrain from discussing his influence, as well as that of Nachman Syrkin.

6 Amongst others: Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 207–208; Keßler, *Zionismus*, 51; Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate 1843–1943* (New York: Humanity Books, 1994), 97.

7 Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers’ Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 5–30.

8 Antony Polonsky, “The New Jewish Politics and its Discontents,” in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 39; Jerry Z. Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 203–205.

ital (i.e. machines) to be produced.⁹ The subsequent squeezing of Jewish industry by large-scale production led to a peculiar situation of small-scale industry with an excessive exploitation of the workforce. These circumstances were crucial for the fact that Jewish workers were amongst the first to organize against their employers.¹⁰ Henry Tobias refers to three elements that led to the formation of the Jewish labor movement in the Pale: the anti-Jewish and economically regressive state, the large-scale economic competition and anti-Semitic sentiments by the gentile population, as well as the tight-knit but socially fragmented and authoritarian-led Jewish communities.¹¹ He argues: “The necessary catalyst was provided when developments in Russia caused the old relationships to break down, forcing a search for new responses and opening new horizons in the process.”¹² However, the struggles of Jewish workers against their co-religionist employers often had the character of a “conflict of ‘pauper and pauper,’” as John Bunzl put it,¹³ often with no or little gains, not least due to the poverty of the employers themselves. While the emerging Jewish socialist movement played a crucial part in the formation of the wider labor movement in the Russian Empire, its limitations soon became clear.¹⁴

The revolutionary events of 1905 put the Jewish labor movement in Russia in the contradictory position of both leading regional struggles and simultaneously being largely excluded from the central course of events. With the revolution's fate being decided outside the Pale of Settlement, Jewish revolutionary activism, as radical and as self-sacrificing as it was, could not influence the outcome of the revolution in a decisive way.¹⁵ Even more important was the wave of anti-Semitic

9 Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 4–7.

10 Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinhartz, “Nationalism and Jewish Socialism: The Early Years,” *Modern Judaism* 8, no. 3 (1988): 220; Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 28–29; Inna Shtakser, *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement: Community and Identity during the Russian Revolution and its Immediate Aftermath, 1905–07* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 33–47; Scott Ury, “The Generation of 1905 and the Politics of Despair: Alienation, Friendship, Community,” in *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews*, ed. Stefani Hoffman and Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 104–105.

11 Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 1–6.

12 *Ibid.*, 6.

13 Bunzl, *Klassenkampf*, 65 (“ein Konflikt zwischen ‘Pauper und Pauper’” Translation JR).

14 Abraham Brumberg, “Anniversaries in Conflict: On the Centenary of the Jewish Socialist Labor Bund,” *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series 5, no. 3 (1999): 197; Frankel, *Prophecy*, 207–208.

15 Bunzl, *Klassenkampf*, 97; Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and the Russian Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 61–63; Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford

pogroms that swept through the Pale in the aftermath of the revolution. Jewish self-defense became an important experience for many young revolutionaries who had to defend their communities, returning to their *shtetlekh* and neighborhoods, fighting on behalf of their community, defending Jews as Jews, rather than being engaged in a universal emancipatory struggle alongside gentile workers. Inna Shtakser showed how Jewish revolutionaries often remained the only ones defending the communities, with only occasional support from their gentile comrades, leading to disillusionment and a strengthening of their Jewish identities.¹⁶ Eventually, the collapse of the revolution, the ineffectiveness of Jewish revolutionary activities, the pogroms, and Jewish self-defense not only led to the subsequent collapse of many organizations but forced several activists to rethink their traditional approach towards Jewish revolutionary activism.¹⁷

The Jewish Worker and the “Strategic Base” in Palestine

According to Jonathan Frankel, it was this experience during the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary phase of 1905–1907 that led Ber Borochov (1881–1917) to develop his concept of socialist-Zionism.¹⁸ In contrast to romantic nationalists, Borochov formulated what he regarded as a materialist explanation and argument for proletarian Jewish nationalism.

Borochov saw the underlying problem of the Jewish workers’ movement that while it could play an important political role in the Jewish street, its economic impact, due to the structure of Jewish economy, was as weak as its overall political impact.¹⁹ Reflecting on this marginalization, he wrote in 1905: “The Jewish worker is not exploited by *gross Kapital*; his exploiter is the small capitalist whose role in the production is negligible. When the Jewish worker does go on

University Press, 2014), 85–87; Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, 299; Richard Wortman, “Nicholas II and the Revolution,” in *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia’s Jews*, ed. Stefani Hoffman and Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 41.

¹⁶ Shtakser, *Making*, 131–141.

¹⁷ Vladimir Levin, “The Jewish Socialist Parties in Russia in the Period of Reaction,” in *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia’s Jews*, ed. Stefani Hoffman and Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 112–117.

¹⁸ Frankel, *Prophecy*, 329–330.

¹⁹ Bunzl, *Klassenkampf*, 99; Keßler, *Zionismus*, 80–82.

strike against the industry which exploits him, he does not appreciably disturb the equilibrium of the country.”²⁰

Borochov and his comrades undertook the task of formulating an economic analysis of the Jewish people's conditions in order to demonstrate the necessity of concentrated emigration to Palestine. The key argument in his main 1906 work *Our Platform* was that due to the lack of a territory of its own, the Jewish economy was incapable of developing in a way that could provide a stable environment for the political and social life of the Jewish masses.²¹ This was interpreted as a national problem, which required a national response. He opened his argument by declaring that “The national problem arises when the development of the nation's forces of production conflicts with the state of conditions of production.”²² According to him, these abnormal conditions (not primarily the political system of the Russian Empire) were responsible for Jewish misery and could only be overcome on a national basis by radically transforming the living conditions of the people.²³ The peculiar economic conditions of the Jews allegedly made it impossible for the Jewish proletariat to struggle successfully. It would, according to Borochov, first need to acquire a national “strategic base,” by which he meant a national Jewish economy:

The worker who is bound by his economic insecurity to the work place so that he cannot use it as a strategic base, is not in a position to carry on independent political action and can play no historical role. He is not master of his own fate. But when we speak of the proletariat as a class, we must exclude workers' competition for employment and imply only unconditional class solidarity in the struggle against capital. The worker is concerned with the place of work only insofar as he has not succeeded in entirely severing his relations with the proletarianizing masses, to which he formerly belonged and into which he may be thrust again at some future time. The interests of the proletariat as a class are related

20 Ber Borochov, “Our Platform (1906),” in *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation: Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, ed. Mitchell Cohen (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1984), 90. Emphasis here and in all following quotations in the original.

21 According to Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (1884–1963; the second president of the State of Israel), “Our Platform” was more a product of collective discussion than of Borochov's personal efforts. He remembered that after Poale Zion's founding conference at Poltava in 1906, party members gathered to discuss the program. While Borochov delivered drafts, they collectively discussed and changed the text, which later came to be known as “Our Platform”. See: Izchak Ben-Zvi, “Labor Zionism in Russia,” in *Russian Jewry (1860–1917)*, ed. Jacob Frumkin, Gregor Aronson, and Alexis Goldenweiser (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1966), 215–216.

22 Borochov, *Our Platform*, 74.

23 *Ibid.*, 75–78. Enzo Traverso has pointed out that while Borochov had taken the concept of conditions of production from Karl Marx, this had been only a minor element in Marx's overall work but became the key factor for him. Traverso, *Marxists*, 115.

only to the strategic base – to those conditions under which it carries on its struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The development of the forces of production of the masses who are forced to proletarianization compels them to find a place to work; the development of the forces of production of the proletariat demands a normal strategic base for an effective class struggle.²⁴

Borochov argued that without a stable national economy, productive forces could not develop and successful class struggle was impossible, since the workers would be incapable of carrying out effective industrial actions.²⁵ The competition between the workers of various nationalities was perceived as a given, unchangeable fact, implicitly ruling out the potential of multi-ethnic workers' organizations. In this regard, Borochov saw the national development and the development of the working class and its struggle as a uniform process. The goal was the "normalization" of the national conditions (i.e. the acquirement of a "strategic base") as a precondition for the development of effective class struggle.²⁶ However, Borochov at no point fully explained what "normality" ought to be. It is worth noticing, however, that the aim to "normalize" the conditions was not only prevalent amongst the Zionists, who wanted to "normalize" the Jewish people,²⁷ but the quest for "normalization" was a common trope amongst many Eastern-European socialists at the time.²⁸ The more Western European states, France, the United Kingdom, and especially Germany, seemed to

²⁴ Borochov, *Our Platform*, 88.

²⁵ Ibid., 81. It is quite striking – and can possibly be traced back to negative experiences during the 1905 revolution and the pogroms – that Borochov at no point discussed the idea of cross-national class-based solidarity or joint action. While he problematized "the Jewish worker's inability to face the competition of the non-Jewish worker" (Ibid.) he only saw a national solution to this problem and never discussed the potentials and limitations of multinational workers' organizations

²⁶ Most explicitly: "Only with the proletariat is the national problem closely allied with the same strategic base, with the same imperatives of the class struggle upon which its class consciousness is built." Ibid., 89

²⁷ Formulated the earliest and clearest by Leon Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation! Mahnruf eines Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden* (Berlin: Kommissions-Verlag W. Issleib, 1882), 36.

²⁸ Originally, Marx and Engels had assumed that the revolution would prevail "in all civilized countries, i.e. at least in England, America, France and Germany" ("in allen zivilisierten Ländern, d.h. wenigstens in England, Amerika, Frankreich und Deutschland" Translation JR), Friedrich Engels, "Grundsätze des Kommunismus," in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Werke*, Vol. 4 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1959), 374. Following this assumption, Eastern-European followers of Marx and Engels put a lot of emphasis on the question of Russian backwardness and the necessity to overcome it; to "normalize" the situation, if you will. Most explicit in Vladimir I. Lenin, "Was sind die 'Volksfreunde' und wie kämpfen sie gegen die Sozialdemokraten," in W. I. Lenin, *Werke*, Vol. 1, 6th ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1971), 119–338.

have been the role models, probably also because the German labor movement was the most developed, politically leading force in the Socialist International.

For Borochof, the shared economic situation of the Jewish people must necessarily lead to a shared national identity of all the members of a nation.²⁹ For him, “the proletariat is immediately related to nationalism and national property – to the territory. Since the proletariat participates in the production process, it must have an interest in the conditions of production. Therefore, there needs to be a specific type of proletarian nationalism.”³⁰ Only once the question of territory and “strategic base” was solved would class-consciousness be able to develop and the nation’s working class be able to struggle successfully.³¹ According to Borochof, the non-proletarian classes also had a vested interest in establishing this “strategic base” to be able to compete with the capitalists of other nations. Eventually, the specific conditions of non-territorial and not independent nations would lead to a united form of nationalism, encompassing all classes. Even more: “Under such abnormal conditions, the interests of the classes of this nation become harmonious.”³² However, the standard-bearers of “real nationalism” could only be the proletariat and those classes closely connected to it. By struggling for national rights, they would fulfil a task on behalf of the entire nation:

*Real nationalism emerges amongst the progressive elements of an oppressed nation: real nationalism does not dream about maintaining traditions, does not make them bigger than they are, is not blinded by supposed national unity, understands the society’s class structure, and does not try to gloss over the real interests of the various groups. Its only goal is the real liberation of the nation, the normalization of its modes and conditions of production.*³³

29 Ber Borochof, “Das Klasseninteresse und die nationale Frage (1905),” in *Klasse und Nation: Zur Theorie und Praxis des Jüdischen Sozialismus*, ed. Weltverband Hechalutz (Berlin: Hechalutz, 1932), 18.

30 Ibid., 21 (“das Proletariat steht in einer unmittelbaren Beziehung zum Nationalismus und zum nationalen Besitz – zum Territorium. Weil das Proletariat an der Produktion teilnimmt, muß es sich für die Produktionsbedingungen interessieren. Es muß deshalb ein gewisser proletarischer Typ des Nationalismus existieren.” Translation JR).

31 Ibid., 37. In this context, Borochof also advocated for restrictions on labor migration.

32 Ibid., 43–44 (“Bei derartig anomalen Bedingungen werden die Interessen der Klassen dieser Nation harmonisch” Translation JR).

33 Ibid., 44–45) “Der reale Nationalismus entsteht bei den fortschrittlichen Elementen einer unterdrückten Nation: realer Nationalismus träumt nicht von der Erhaltung der Traditionen, macht sie nicht größer als sie sind, läßt sich von der scheinbaren nationalen Einigkeit nicht täuschen, versteht die Klassenstruktur der Gesellschaft und versucht nicht, die realen Interessen der verschiedenen Gruppen zu vertuschen. Sein Ziel ist allein die reale Befreiung der Nation, die Normalisierung der Produktionsbedingungen und -verhältnisse.” Translation JR).

For Poale-Zionists, the key to reaching the national goal of “normalization” was the transformation of Jewish economic conditions towards a “productive life” in a national territory. In a series of articles published in 1916, Borochof discussed the problem of Jewish economic conditions as being estranged from natural resources (i.e. land) from which, according to him, economic potency and independence originated.³⁴ He argued that “history was driving the Jews further and further away from soil and nature and higher and higher into the insubstantial ether of social stratification”³⁵ and concluded: “The landlessness of the Jewish people is the source of its malady and tragedy. We have no territory of our own, hence we are by necessity divorced from nature.”³⁶ From this analysis, Borochof derived the necessity to return to the soil in order to make Jewish labor productive. Although he put it in quasi-Marxist terminology and insisted on the materialist character of his analysis, the conclusion eventually resembled that of romantic nationalist Aaron David Gordon (1856–1922), who characterized the Jewish people as such in 1911:

A people, completely torn away from nature, for millennia imprisoned behind walls; a people used to all kinds of life but a natural life of work by and for itself – cannot become a living, natural, working people without all of its willpower. We are lacking the most important thing: labor – not forced [labor] but [labor] to which man is organically and naturally connected to, through which the people can connect to his soil and to its culture, which is rooted in soil and labor.³⁷

This emphasis on the soil, nature, and agricultural labor, which appears “natural” in the organic-nationalist, anti-modernist context of Gordon, seems somewhat misplaced in the strictly orthodox-Marxist self-perception of Borochof’s

³⁴ Ber Borochof, “The Economic Development of the Jewish People (1916),” in *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation: Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, ed. Mitchell Cohen (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1984), 169–171.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁷ Aaron David Gordon, “Arbeit,” in *A.D. Gordon Erlösung durch Arbeit: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1929), 65 (“Ein Volk, das ganz von der Natur losgerissen ist, das jahrtausendlang hinter Mauern eingesperrt war; ein Volk, das an alle Arten des Lebens gewöhnt war, nur nicht an eine natürliche, an ein Leben der Arbeit aus sich heraus und für sich, – kann nicht ohne Anspannung seiner ganzen Willenskraft, wieder ein lebendiges, natürliches, arbeitendes Volk werden. Uns fehlt das Wesentliche: die Arbeit, – nicht die aus Zwang, sondern die, mit der sich der Mensch organisch und natürlich verbunden fühlt durch die das Volk mit seinem Boden und seiner in Boden und Arbeit wurzelnden Kultur verwachsen kann.” Translation JR).

Poale Zion.³⁸ How far arguments suggesting that the future development of capitalism would increase the importance of agriculture were actually inspired by materialist considerations is secondary, insofar as they served to legitimize the argument for the national project: that only through the acquisition of a “strategic base” (i. e. land and a national economy) in Palestine could the Jewish workers gain agency as a class.³⁹ The eventual argument for Zionist agrarian labor, colonization, and national rebirth, brought forward here by Leon Chasanowich (1882–1925), a leading member of Poale Zion’s World Union, equaled that of Gordon:

The agriculture of no country ... fits the Jewish people’s character as well as the intensive agriculture of Palestine, which demands a lot of intellectual but little physical effort from the settlers (which is important for a people of the city that is gradually transforming), it additionally allows living together closely which is an important precondition for the flourishing of Jewish colonization.⁴⁰

In order to obtain the supposedly required ‘strategic base’, the Jews would need to acquire their own territory through concentrated emigration. Borochoy argued that emigration without a well-directed development of a Jewish national economy would not solve the problem since “the Jewish problem migrates with the Jews.”⁴¹ The only way to develop a strategic base for the Jewish working class would be the gathering of Jews in one territory. In regard to the migratory process, however, Borochoy remained rather vague. He argued that migration of labor would always follow the migration of capital⁴² and capital would currently be interested in investing in underdeveloped regions, since “international capital

38 Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25. Traditionally, Marxists had emphasized the general tendency that agriculture would lose its economic importance while modern industry would increasingly become the absolute dominant force in capitalism.

39 Leon Chasanowitsch, “Ziele und Mittel des sozialistischen Zionismus,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, July 1914, 962–973.

40 *Ibid.*, 970 (“Die Landwirtschaft keines der ... Länder so sehr dem jüdischen Volkscharakter angepaßt ist wie die intensive Agrikultur Palästinas, die wohl große Ansprüche an die Intelligenz der Ansiedler stellt, dagegen weniger physische Anstrengungen erfordert (was für das physisch sich nur allmählich umbildende Stadtvolk von Bedeutung ist), ferner ein enges soziales Zusammenleben erlaubt und damit eine wichtige Voraussetzung für das Gedeihen einer jüdischen Kolonisation erfüllt.” Translation JR).

41 Borochoy, *Our Platform*, 82.

42 Aside from Borochoy’s (incorrect) reference to Marx (on page 93), Amos Perlmutter has pointed out that concepts which were developed in the so-called Mikhailovsky school of sociology and economics in Russia had great influence on him. See Amos Perlmutter, “Dov Ber-Borochoy: A Marxist-Zionist Ideologist,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 1 (1969): 40.

began to look for new investment channels and turned to financing agricultural projects.”⁴³ He was convinced that all the necessary conditions for such an investment could be found in Palestine:

The country in which Jews immigrate will not be highly industrial nor predominantly agricultural but rather semi-agricultural. Jews alone will migrate there, separated from the general stream of immigration. This country will have no attraction for immigrants from other nations, and will be the only one available to the Jews ... It will be a land of low cultural and political development. Big capital will hardly find use for itself there, while Jewish small and middle capital will find a market for its products in both this country and its environs. The land of spontaneously concentrated Jewish immigration will be Palestine.⁴⁴

The main task of the national movement was therefore to direct Jewish migration to Palestine,⁴⁵ although he insisted that he had not chosen the region because of national emotions: “Our Palestinianism is not a matter of principle, because it has nothing to do with old traditions.”⁴⁶ Borochoy, at least at this point, argued for Palestine as the most practical territory with a low population density and no strong economy that would pose a threat to Jewish businesses – and therefore to the “strategic base”.⁴⁷ With the development of the Zionist labor movement, some aspects of Borochoy’s theory, especially those related to Palestine and the definition of the Jewish nation, were abandoned rather quickly. Whereas Borochoy had applied a very rigid economic concept, Shlomo Kaplansky, the leader of Poale Zion in the Habsburg Empire at the time and key figure of the party’s World Union, developed the economic aspect towards a general-national one, as he stated: “The Jewish nation is situated in many countries... yet nevertheless is united nationally by the common conditions of development of its productive life, as well as by its history, traditions and culture.”⁴⁸ This argument shows that for many activists the nation and its territory were often more than just an instrumental aspect on the way to socialism, but increasingly a value in itself.

One of the key dilemmas socialist-Zionism faced throughout its existence was balancing between its nation- and its class-based aims. Although Borochoy

⁴³ Borochoy, *Our Platform*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 93–98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

⁴⁸ Shlomo Kaplansky, “HaTazkir haRishon leMisrad haInternatzional haSotzialisti (1907) (The First Memorandum to the International Socialist Bureau),” in *Hazon veHagashma (Vision and Fulfillment)*, ed. Shlomo Kaplansky (Merhavia: Sifriyat HaPoalim, 1950), 135, quoted in Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 191.

in a 1905 essay had portrayed the various classes' approaches to nationalism and had stated that it was only the proletariat which could – through class struggle – fulfil Zionism and socialism,⁴⁹ problems occurred on a practical level; however, this was the essence of socialist-Zionism. Borochoch wrote:

“We are Social Democrats and we are Jews.” Our national consciousness is negative in that it is emancipatory. If we were the proletariat of a free nation, which neither oppresses nor is oppressed, we would not be interested in the problems of national life. Even now, when under the pressure of national conflicts, we have acquired national consciousness, spiritual culture concerns us less than social and economic problems. Ours is a realistic nationalism, free from any “spiritual” admixture.⁵⁰

He therefore regarded Zionism as a “minimal program,” a necessary precondition for the final goal, socialism.⁵¹ While Poale Zion regarded the class-based struggles in the Diaspora to be important, at least in theory, they had to remain somewhat subjugated to the national aims, which were of course not defined by spiritual or emotional desires, but their fulfilment was necessary for achieving meaningful goals. This theory implicitly excluded the possibility of successful class struggles by Jewish workers before the “minimal program” had been fulfilled.

Over the years, the materialist-economic argument put forward by proletarian-Zionism Borochoch had evolved. While the traditional theory was upheld, practical considerations turned the national “strategic base” in Palestine increasingly into an end in itself. In a 1917 essay, probably with the original title “Palestine in Our Program and Tactics,”⁵² Borochoch argued for more ideological

⁴⁹ Borochoch, *Klasseninteresse*, 27–39.

⁵⁰ Borochoch, *Our Platform*, 89.

⁵¹ Ber Borochoch, “Die Grundlagen des Poale-Zionismus,” in *Die Grundlagen des Poale-Zionismus*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt: Borochoch-Press, 1969), 72–73. This part is not included in the English-language edition of the text by Cohen.

⁵² Ber Borochoch, “Palästina in unserem Programm und unserer Taktik,” in *Sozialismus und Zionismus: Eine Synthese*, ed. Mendel Singer (Vienna: Verlag Zukunft, 1932), 255–259. Mendel Singer, who edited the text in 1932 on behalf of the Austrian Poale Zion, used the term “Palästina.” The collection of texts published by the *Hechaluz* (“pioneer”) group in Berlin in the same year also uses the term “Palästina”. See Ber Borochoch, “Palästina in unserem Programm und in unserer Taktik (1917),” in *Klasse und Nation: Zur Theorie und Praxis des jüdischen Sozialismus*, ed. Weltverband Hechaluz (Berlin: Hechaluz, 1932), 99–103. Other editors used the phrase “Eretz Israel in Our Program, and Tactics” as a title, replacing “Palästina” with “Eretz Israel” throughout the text, thereby suggesting a more romantic-Zionist tone. For example: Mitchell Cohen and Ber Borochoch, “Eretz Israel in Our Program and Tactics (1917),” in *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation: Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, ed. Mitchell Cohen (New Brunswick

flexibility and an increased openness to nationalist feelings, since the materialist-economic concept had allegedly already been introduced to a wider public: “Henceforth, it is required to use a new, richer terminology. We are allowed to and must speak in an emotional terminology. Now we can and must employ an emotional language, now we can and shall say: ‘Palestine. A Jewish home!’”⁵³

The harmonious unity between nationalism and socialism, Palestine and the Diaspora, which had always been proclaimed by Poale Zion, turned out to be a rather tense relation, when clear decisions for either one side were required. In practice, the problem of the relation between socialism and nationalism could not simply be dismissed, as Borochoy did, by saying “We are 100 percent socialist and 100 percent Zionist.”⁵⁴ The problem became most obvious at election times in the Habsburg Empire. While it was easy when notorious anti-Semites, such as the Ernst Schneider (1850–1913) in Vienna or Karel Baxa (1863–1938) in Prague were standing against Social Democrats in the elections to the *Reichsrat* (“Imperial Council”) in 1907, when all Jewish organizations unanimously endorsed the latter,⁵⁵ other cases turned out to be a lot more difficult and sparked internal debates. When a non-Jewish or non-Zionist Social Democrat was standing against a bourgeois Zionist, Poale Zion’s activists had to make a clear decision between their class-based and their national affiliations. In 1907, the party mostly opted to endorse the Zionist candidates. In Galicia, they explicitly called to vote for the Jewish National Party against the candidates of the Social Democrats, accusing their candidate Herman Diamand (1860–1931) of “assimilationism” which was perceived as treacherous.⁵⁶ This decision for a bourgeois Zionist

and London: Transaction Books, 1984), 201–203. Cohen’s translation is based on a collection of Borochoy’s writings, which was published in Yiddish by Berl Locker in New York in 1928. The essay’s title therein is “Erets Israel in undzer program un taktik.” It can be found in: Berl Locker, ed., *Ber Borochoy: Geklibene Shriftn (Selected Writings)* (New York: Astoria Press, 1928), 271–274.

53 Borochoy, *Palästina*, 256 (“Nunmehr gibt sich das Bedürfnis kund, in einer neuen, reicheren Terminologie zu sprechen. Wir dürfen und müssen uns jetzt auch der Gefühlssprache bedienen, jetzt können und dürfen wir sagen: Palästina. Eine jüdische Heimstätte!” Translation JR). Cohen’s translation differs slightly, especially the final words: “Eretz Israel – a Jewish home!” Borochoy, *Eretz Israel*, 201–202.

54 Ber Borochoy, “The Socialism of Poale Zion Here (1915),” in *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation: Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, ed. Mitchell Cohen (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1984), 155–162. Prior to that, Borochoy had criticized those of his comrades who described themselves as 85 percent Zionists and 15 percent Socialists. *Ibid.*, 158.

55 Adolf Gaisbauer, *Davidstern und Doppeladler: Zionismus und jüdischer Nationalismus in Österreich 1882–1918* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1988), 371. Ernst Schneider lost the elections by a margin of 0.3 percent; Karel Baxa was elected.

56 Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 220–221, 245–246.

against a socialist candidate in return led to massive criticism within the party and forced it to change its tactics. The elections to the *Reichsrat* in 1911 saw the party's endorsement of the prominent Social Democrat Friedrich Austerlitz (1862–1931)⁵⁷ against the leading bourgeois Zionist Robert Stricker (1879–1944) in the Vienna-Leopoldstadt constituency.⁵⁸

Similar problems, although with less political ramifications, often arose when Jewish workers went on strike against Jewish entrepreneurs who often belonged to the Zionist movement. This was the case, for instance, when in October 1904 Jewish shop workers went on strike to reduce working hours. In the East Galician city of Stanislau/Stanisławów/Stanyslawiw, a number of shop owners were members of Zionist organizations. Still, the striking workers were supported by Poale Zion.⁵⁹ When in early 1914 printers, many of them Jewish, some even members of Poale Zion, went on strike in East Galicia, they found themselves in direct opposition to the general-Zionists, whose paper, the *Togblat* (“Daily Paper”) in Lemberg/Lwów/L'viv continued to be published. Poale Zion attacked the paper's editor-in-chief Moshe Frostig (1887–1928), as a leading strike-breaker, and accused the entire bourgeois-Zionist leadership as being anti-working-class agitators.⁶⁰ This delicate balance between national- and class-oriented identities and political practices was profoundly shaken by the revolutionary upheavals of 1917 and the following years, leading many activists to rethink and reinterpret their programmatic concepts.

The Second Revolution: Class and Nation Reconsidered

Although Poale Zion's program regarded the establishment of a “strategic base” to be a precondition for the development of a potent Jewish revolutionary movement, Poale Zionists in the Diaspora constantly participated in strikes and pro-

57 Austerlitz had a Jewish background but had officially renounced his religious affiliation in 1898. He was chief editor of the Social Democratic Labor Party's central daily *Arbeiterzeitung* (“Workers' Paper”).

58 Gaisbauer, *Davidstern*, 404–405.

59 Ibid., 400. The same happened again in 1911. See the Ministry of Interior's report: Präsidium des k. k. Ministeriums des Inneren, *Bericht Strafsache: Ausschreitungen bei Streik/Demonstration der Handelsangestellten in Stanislau*, November 5, 1911, Austrian State Archive (Vienna), Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Inneres MdI Präsidium A2114.

60 Anonymous, “Das Lemberger Tagblatt und der Druckerstreik,” *Neuer Weg: Jüdische sozialistische Zeitschrift*, February 1914, 7.

tests in their respective home countries. This activism reached its climax during the revolutionary upheavals in Russia and then throughout Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 onwards.⁶¹ In Russia, Poale Zion was the only Jewish party whose majority came out in full support of the Bolsheviks, as early as late spring 1917.⁶² The party later even founded a Jewish-only battalion, the “Borochov-Unit”, mainly made up of members of Poale Zion, which was part of the Red Army.⁶³ The Russian party eventually split into a Social-democratic and a communist organization.⁶⁴ In some regions of the Habsburg Empire, local activists of Poale Zion played a certain role in the organization of the major strike wave that shook the country in January 1918.⁶⁵ From late October onwards, the movement came to be an integral part of the Austrian workers’ councils’ movement and developed close links with other – non-Jewish, and non-Zionist – revolutionary actors on the ground.⁶⁶ Similar radicalization processes could be observed in Latvia⁶⁷ and Poland,⁶⁸ as well as slightly later in Czechoslovakia⁶⁹ and Bukovina.⁷⁰ In the Viennese party’s paper, which came to be the mouthpiece of the radical left within Poale Zion, an activist appealed to the city’s Jewish workers:

61 See the special issue: *Arbeit – Bewegung – Geschichte: Zeitschrift für Historische Studien* 2 (2017): *Judentum und Revolution: Der Weltverband der Poale Zion zwischen Zionismus und Kommunismus*.

62 Poale Zion, *Dray Rezolutsiyim* (Three Resolutions) (Warsaw: Farlag Arbeiterheim, 1918).

63 Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 369–371; Baruch Gurevitz and Dominique Négrel, “Un cas de communisme national en Union Soviétique Le Poale Zion: 1918–1928,” *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 15, no. 3/4 (1974): 342.

64 Zvi Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Section of the CPSU, 1917–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 215–217.

65 Bunzl, *Klassenkampf*, 125–128; David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 58–59.

66 Hans Hautmann, *Geschichte der Rätebewegung in Österreich 1918–1924* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1987), 369, 370, 519; Soxberger, *Revolution*, 112–171.

67 Ebreju sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija “Polei-Zion” Riga, *Letter to Ignatz Kornfeld*, November 27 1918, Israel Labor Party Archive (Beit Berl), 1–1–1917–3.

68 Ignatz Kornfeld, *Letter to Berl Locker*, May 20 1919, Israel Labor Party Archive (Beit Berl), 1–10–1918–117.

69 Josef Reiss, *Letter to Verbandsbureau der der Jüdisch-sozialistischen Arbeiterpartei Poale Zion*, September 11 1920, Israel Labor Party Archive (Beit Berl), 1–3–1919–22.

70 Jüdische Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei “Poale-Zion” Czernowitz, *Letter to Verbandsbureau der Jüdisch-sozialistischen Arbeiterpartei Poale Zion in Berlin*, March 14 1920, Israel Labor Party Archive (Beit Berl), 1–10–1917–120.

The old [order] is dead. We want to dig a deep grave for it. But together with the old [order] its accomplices must perish from the stage of history. The new generation must create a new world in its own image, and this is why the German-Austrian Social Democracy's second revolutionary act should not have been a bourgeois-reactionary National Assembly but a socialist-revolutionary workers' council. Those men who were elected before the war and who are responsible for it will not lead the people into the Promised Land! No! Freely elected representatives of the working class must take the people's destiny in their own hands in this historic moment. Never again shall a capitalist system which has brought such a catastrophe for the people come to power! No! Only the proletariat, which had warned of the war, fought and bled, it alone has the right to build a society where there is no master and no slave and where there will never be war again. And the proletariat not only has the right but the power to do that. That is why: All power to the freely elected workers' councils!⁷¹

Not only would the old Social-democratic leadership not be able to lead the masses into the "promised land", but the "promised land" itself was now discussed as something completely different; not Palestine, but a – geographically not defined – socialist society. This radicalization process, reflected in the Viennese party's paper, generally entailed the shift of attention towards the European revolution, and away from Palestine.⁷² Contrary to the years 1905 to 1907, activists found themselves at the heart of the revolution, often struggling alongside the workers of other nationalities, and – most importantly – they seemed to succeed in their revolutionary efforts.⁷³ In Soviet Russia, the revolution had abolish-

71 Alexander Serpow, "Der Weg der Revolution," *Freie Tribüne*, February 7 1919, 2 ("Das Alte ist tot. Wir wollen ihm ein tiefes Grab schaufeln. Mit dem Alten müssen aber auch alle seine Helfershelfer von der historischen Bühne verschwinden. Das neue Geschlecht muß sich selbst seine neue Welt in eigener Gestalt schaffen und deshalb hätte der zweite Revolutionsakt der deutschösterreichischen Sozialdemokratie nicht eine bürgerlich reaktionäre Nationalversammlung sein dürfen sondern ein sozialistisch-revolutionärer Arbeiterrat. Nicht jene Männer, die vor dem Kriege gewählt wurden und für diesen mitverantwortlich sind, werden das Volk jetzt in das gelobte Land führen können. Nein! Freigewählte Vertreter der Arbeiterklasse haben in diesem großen historischen Moment das Schicksal des Volkes in ihre Hand zu nehmen. Es soll nie wieder das kapitalistische System, das das Volk in eine solche Katastrophe verwickelt hat, zur Macht kommen. Nein. Das Proletariat, das vor dem Kriege gewarnt hat, kämpfte und blutete, nur dieses allein hat das Recht, eine Gesellschaftsordnung aufzubauen, in der es weder arm noch reich, weder Herr noch Knecht, und daher auch keine Kriege geben wird. Und das Proletariat hat nicht nur das Recht, sondern auch die Macht, es zu vollziehen. Deshalb: die ganze Macht dem freigewählten Arbeiterrate!" Translation JR). The article had already been written in November 1918.

72 Christian Dietrich, "Zwischen Sowjetrußland und Eretz Israel: Die Radikalisierung des österreichischen Arbeiterzionismus 1918 bis 1920," *Arbeit – Bewegung – Geschichte: Zeitschrift für Historische Studien* 2 (2017): 49–64.

73 See for example the memoirs of Hersch Mendel, then a member of the Bund, recalling the joint struggle of Jewish (including Poale Zionist) and non-Jewish revolutionaries, both in Russia

ed all anti-Semitic laws, the Bolsheviks regarded anti-Semitism as a criminal counterrevolutionary act, and – at least formally – granted autonomous rights to Jewish (Yiddishist) groups. During the civil war, the Red Army often came to be the only force not systematically engaging in pogroms, often the only force that could protect Jews.⁷⁴

Eventually, an increasing number of Poale Zionists asked themselves whether the triumphant revolution in Europe did not in fact disprove the Borochovist paradigm. Could nationalism or the acquisition of a strategic base still be considered a precondition for socialism? Already in November 1919 an anonymous author raised doubts in the *Freie Tribüne* (“Free Tribune”, the paper of the Viennese Poale Zion):

The social revolution is no dream any more, but an existing fact that needs to be reckoned with. But if the revolution has become a fact and socialism is not a utopia any more... what does one need Palestine for? We never wanted it because of our love and admiration for Grandmother Rachel's grave as a precondition for socialism, which proclaims the right to work. Now, are the motives of “non-industrialization” and “national competition” [the problems that required the “strategic base”; JR] not losing their importance, especially now since the Jewish bourgeoisie will not be able to build the national home since it has lost its function as the bearers of capitalism?⁷⁵

In March 1920, M. S., probably Malke Schorr (1885–1961), one of the few leading female activists in the Austrian Poale Zion, asked whether now, in the situation of the unfolding socialist revolution, the old idea of building Palestine could still be seen as precondition for the participation of the Jewish working class in the

and in Poland. Hersch Mendel, *Erinnerungen eines jüdischen Revolutionärs* (Cologne: Neuer ISP Verlag, 2004).

⁷⁴ Budnitskii, *Russian Jews*, 95; Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality*, 105–139; Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 262–263; Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 300–301; David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41–43.

⁷⁵ “Der proletarische Palästinizismus im Lichte der sozialen Revolution,” *Freie Tribüne*, November 22 1919, 3 (“Die soziale Revolution ist doch kein Traum mehr, sondern eine reale Tatsache, mit der gerechnet werden muß. Wenn aber die Revolution eine Tatsache geworden ist und der Sozialismus nicht mehr irgendwo in Utopia liegt, [...] wozu braucht es jetzt Palästina? Wir wollen es ja nicht aus Liebe und Verehrung für Urmutter Rachels Grab sondern als Vorbedingung für den Sozialismus, der das Recht auf Arbeit dekretiert. Es müssen doch also auch die Motive der ‘Nichtindustrialisierung’, der ‘nationalen Konkurrenz’ u.s.w. fortfallen und vor allem kann doch nicht jetzt die jüdische Bourgeoisie das Zentrum schaffen, da sie ja als Trägerin des Kapitalismus ihre Funktion verloren hat?” Translation JR).

struggle for socialism: “If additionally, one takes into account the fact that once the social revolution has begun, the Palestinian settlement as a precondition for future class struggle completely loses its relevance, [then] the problem of the colonization of Palestine remains only current insofar as it can serve as one assembly point for potential migratory movement.”⁷⁶ At the fifth congress of the World Union of Poale Zion, which was held in Vienna in July 1920, the contradicting understandings of Jewish nationalism and its role in the revolutionary process clashed in its most open form. Alexander Chaschin (Zvi Auerbach; 1888–1938), a delegate of the Russian Jewish Communist Party (Poale Zion), stated: “First, I want to make it clear that as far as the Jewish question is a political [one] and not an economic question or of a certain cultural development, it had been liquidated completely in Soviet Russia. In a political sense, there is no Jewish Question within the borders of Soviet Russia.”⁷⁷ He insisted that it was very likely that the remaining economic and cultural questions could be solved within Soviet Russia, for example through the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies in the country.⁷⁸ One of his comrades insisted on the need of transforming Jewish economic life, making it “productive”, especially after the destructions of the civil war, but suggested this could also be done in the Soviet state: “The massive destruction is just a transitional phase. We are sure that as soon as... everyone has returned from the front, the Jewish masses and parties will recognize the importance [or concept; JR] of Jewish economic work. It is our task to make those masses productive.”⁷⁹

For many, the idea of the transformation of the Jewish masses, to make them “productive”, remained a central feature of their ideology. However, the context

76 M(alk) S(chorr), “Revisionismus? Palästina in unserem Programm,” *Freie Tribüne*, March 6 1920, 3 (“Wenn man aber außerdem die Tatsache in Betracht zieht, daß im Moment, als die soziale Revolution ihr Werk begonnen hat, die palästinensische Siedlung als Voraussetzung für den künftigen Klassenkampf vollständig gegenstandslos würde, verbleibt das Problem der Kolonisation Palästinas nur insofern aktuell, als dieses Land als einer der Sammelpunkte für die eventuelle Wanderung in Betracht kommt.” Translation JR).

77 *Minutes of the Fifth World Congress of the World Union of Poale Zion in Vienna*, July 1920, Pinhas Lavon Institute Archive (Tel Aviv), III 11–1–36, 283 (“Zuerst möchte ich feststellen, dass die jüdische Frage in Räterussland, soweit sie eine politische ist und keine Frage der Ökonomik oder einer gewissen kulturellen Entwicklung vollständig liquidiert worden ist. Politisch existiert innerhalb der Grenzen Räte-Russlands keine Judenfrage.” Translation JR).

78 *Ibid.*, 284–285.

79 *Ibid.*, 252 (“Der gewaltige Zerstörungsmoment ist nur eine Übergangszeit. Wir sind sicher, dass [...] wenn alles von der Front heimkehren wird, werden die juedischen Massen und Parteien das Moment der juedischen ökonomischen Arbeit anerkennen müssen. Unsere Aufgabe ist es jetzt jene Massen zu produktivieren.” Translation JR).

in which this was imagined, and the political conclusions drawn from it were radically different. No longer could this transformation only take place in the context of an acquired “strategic base” in Palestine, and more importantly, it was no longer a precondition for participation in the revolution, but rather an anticipated outcome of it. The same was true for Palestine itself. Hardly any of the Central and Eastern European parties had been engaged in Palestine-oriented work during the revolutionary period, a fact for which they received heavy criticism from their comrades in other countries.⁸⁰ A delegate complained that the Austrian party had told him that as long as British imperialism had not been thrown out of Palestine, they would not want to have anything to do with it.⁸¹ The Palestinian delegates of Achdut haAvodah (“Unity of Labor”) suspected those Eastern European parties of boycotting the work in Palestine for the sake of the struggle against imperialism and for the communist revolution. Yitzhak Tabenkin (1888–1971) denounced “this Eastern Jewish politics as what it is; treason to our cause.”⁸² Nahum Rafalkes (Nir; 1884–1968) from Poland replied: “Com[rade] Tabenkin does not care about anything that is happening throughout the world, he only sees Palestine. The entire world needs to be transformed in the way the comrades in Palestine would like it.”⁸³

While Borochof had traditionally assumed that a Jewish homeland was a precondition for successful struggle, now the successful revolution was regarded by many as the precondition for an independent Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, as *Freie Tribüne* suggested: “The active struggle of the Jewish proletariat for the proletarian world revolution, a self-conscious global Jewish workers’ organization, and our World Union as its vanguard, are the means and the way that lead us to the realization of proletarian Zionism.”⁸⁴ This did not only relegate the idea of Palestine to a lesser important part of the program, but funda-

80 Ibid., 46–48. According to a delegate, the Austrian activists were actively discouraging members from leaving for Palestine, telling them about high unemployment and malaria in the country.

81 Ibid., 68.

82 Ibid., 367 (“Die juedische Politik im Osten muss klargestellt werden. Sie ist ein vollständiger Verrat unserer Sache.” Translation JR).

83 Ibid., 369 (“Den Gen. Tabenkin kuummert wieder ueberhaupt nicht, was in der Welt vorgeht, er sieht nur Palästina. Alles in der Welt muss umgebaut werden, wie die Genossen in Palästina es wollen.” Translation JR).

84 Anonymous, “Probleme der jüdischen Arbeiterbewegung: VII Die Realisierung des Zionismus,” *Freie Tribüne*, April 3 1920, 2. (“Aktiver Kampf des jüdischen Proletariats für die proletarische Weltrevolution, eine auf sich selbst vertrauende jüdische Arbeiter-Weltorganisation und unser Weltverband als zielbewußte Vorhut derselben, das sind in großen Umrissen Mittel und Weg, die uns zur Realisierung des proletarischen Zionismus führen.” Translation JR).

mentally changed the construction of socialist-Zionist self-definition in relation to territory and the ability to struggle. At the congress, the members of the movement's more right-wing faction, such as Aharon Reuveni (1886–1971), a delegate from Palestine, strongly refuted this revision of concepts: "He [Chaschin] thinks that later if there will be a Soviet government, it will use its assets to build a Jewish home in Palestine. This is a belief which reminds us of the pious Jews who are waiting for the messiah."⁸⁵ Similarly, Ignacy Schiper (1884–1943) criticized his fellow Polish comrades for what he saw as revolutionary overenthusiasm: "The Polish comrades are currently at the heart of a struggle where every perception of reality gets lost, a struggle fought with blindfolded eyes, which confuses the psyche and in which everyone is throwing around phrases about the social revolution."⁸⁶ Perceiving the world revolution as a precondition for the creation of a Jewish home in Palestine and not vice versa, as a delegate from the Social-Democratic Russian Poale Zion party argued, would mean to "lose the Poale-Zionist ground and add putschism to it."⁸⁷

As it has been mentioned above, the experience of successful joint struggles of Jewish and gentile revolutionaries alongside each other essentially questioned the necessity of a distinct national solution for the specific conditions of the Jewish working class. A Russian delegate argued: "The Jewish proletariat is not the leader of the Russian Revolution. But it marches alongside the Russian proletariat in one front, in all its revolutionary tasks and appearances."⁸⁸ For him, this entailed a reformulation of the relations between the concepts of class and nation, overturning the classical understanding of this relation, arguing, that the (proletarian) nation would be constituted after the victory of the revolution:

Whereas the working class is liberated, it also needs to be liberated as a national class. The working class [then] constitutes itself as the nation ... The Jewish working class must be part of the III. International. Because it will [then] have more influence, because there is

85 *Minutes of the Fifth World Congress of the World Union of Poale Zion in Vienna*, 291 ("Er denkt später, wenn die Sowjetregierung sein wird, wird mit ihren Mitteln und ihrer Kraft eine juedische Heimat in Palästina aufgebaut werden. Das ist eine Vorstellung, welche uns erinnert an den Gedanken der frommen Juden, die auf den Messias warten." Translation JR).

86 *Ibid.*, 196 ("Die polnischen Genossen stehen im Brennpunkt des Kampfes wo jeder Blick fuer die Wirklichkeit verloren geht, ein Kampf in dem man mit verbundenen Augen geht, wo die Psyche verwirrt wird, wo alles nur mit Phrasen der sozialen Revolution herumwirbelt." Translation JR).

87 *Ibid.*, 60 ("Sie... verlieren dabei aber ihren poalezionistischen Boden und fuegen noch Putschismus dazu." Translation JR).

88 *Ibid.*, 204 ("Das juedische Proletariat ist nicht der Fuehrer der russischen Revolution. Es geht aber mit dem russischen Proletariat in einer Front in allen seinen revolutionären Arbeiten und Auftritten." Translation JR).

no other way, because there is no way back. The grandeur of the victory of the working class is also the grandeur of our victory.⁸⁹

Some, such as Yitzhak Ben-Zvi from Palestine, saw this new approach, which had developed in many of the member parties, as subjugation to foreign interests, since “we are not a section of the Russian, German-Austrian, English or American proletariat, but we are an independent body with an independent cause, such as the Russian or German working class.”⁹⁰ This is why he argued one should adopt a policy of neutrality towards the British rulers in Palestine and the Third International alike.⁹¹ Evidently, it were mainly the delegates from Palestine who insisted on upholding the classical Borochovist approach during this debate. David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973) argued:

In these times, when we are marching towards the dictatorship of the proletariat ... we Jewish socialists find ourselves in the tragic situation that in contrast to all other peoples, we have far less healthy elements, the real power, the working masses, which due to their own force in their own economy could become a real power within their people and create the basis to revolutionize and rebuild Jewish life.⁹²

Following this classical Borochovist paradigm about the lack of a “strategic base,” he also rejected the idea of “subordination” to the working classes of other nations: “If we take the social revolution seriously, it cannot be a perspective for us to play a role as a small group on the backs of the German, English or Russian proletariat. The Jewish working class must play its own role according to

89 Ibid., 259 (“Und soweit die Arbeiterklasse als Klasse befreit wird, muss sie auch als nationale Klasse befreit werden. Die Arbeiterklasse konstituiert sich als Nation. ... Die juedische Arbeiterklasse muss in der 3. Internationale stehen. Weil sie mehr Einfluss haben wird, weil ein anderer Weg nicht da ist, weil es ein zurueck nicht mehr gibt. Die Grösse des Sieges der Arbeiterklasse ist auch die Grösse unseres Sieges.” Translation JR).

90 Ibid., 51 (“Wir sind keine Sektion des russischen, deutschösterreichischen, englischen oder amerikanischen Proletariats sondern sind ein selbständiger Körper mit selbständigem Zweck, wie die russische und deutsche Arbeiterklasse.” Translation JR).

91 Ibid., 52.

92 Ibid., 274–275 (“In der Zeit, wenn wir der Diktatur des Proletariats entgegenschreiten... finden wir juedische Sozialisten uns vor einer so tragischen Situation, dass weit weniger als in allen Ländern und Völkern, bei uns das gesunde Element, die reale Kraft, die arbeitenden Massen, vorhanden sind die Dank ihrer eigenen Kraft in ihrer eigenen Wirtschaft eine wirkliche Macht im Volke werden könnten und die Grundlagen und im juedischen Volksleben revolutionieren und auf eine neue Basis stellen sollen können.” Translation JR).

its constructive force.”⁹³ In accordance with the party’s classical theory, he made his main point:

Our part in the social revolution must first and foremost be to create possibilities in Palestine for the creation of a great, Jewish, working Yishuv which shall be the bearer of the social revolution. We as Jewish socialists under no circumstances can make peace with the idea that we are simply the object of the revolution. We must its subject as well (big tumult). I do not think one can disrupt me with scandals. [apparently referring to the delegates’ protests; JR] We think that through the constructive socialist work in Palestine, by strengthening the position of the Jewish worker, by creating a workers’ economy, by strengthening the political forces of the working class, and especially by bringing new workers and work-seeking masses to Palestine, into the socialist or semi-socialist economy, that this is our most important preparatory work for the coming social revolution.⁹⁴

For many activists who had been engaged in revolutionary activism throughout Central and Eastern Europe since 1917, this argument seemed unacceptable. Could they wait for their comrades’ “preparatory work” in Palestine? They had often been part of joint struggles alongside non-Jewish workers, often regarded them as successful, and could not accept giving up this newly won agency for the sake of first building a strong working Yishuv, fulfilling a task on behalf of the entire nation. In this revolutionary situation, even an implicit cooperation with the bourgeoisie for the sake of the nation seemed unthinkable, or as a Russian delegate put it: “The Jewish bourgeoisie is no better than any other. Jewish counterrevolution is the same as any other. Therefore, there can be no coopera-

⁹³ Ibid., 275 (“Wenn wir es aber ernst meinen, mit der sozialen Revolution, so ist es fuer uns keine Perspektive, dass eine kleine Gruppe sie auf dem Ruecken des deutschen, englischen oder russischen Proletariats mitmacht und dort eine Rolle spielt. Die juedische Arbeiterschaft muss dort mit ihrer eigenen Kraft und schöpferischen Möglichkeit ihre eigene Rolle spielen.” Translation JR).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 276–277 (“Dass unser Anteil an der sozialen Revolution sich zuerst darin ausdruecken muss, dass wir in Palästina Möglichkeiten schaffen, fuer die Verwirklichung eines grossen, juedischen, arbeitenden Jischubs, welcher der Träger der sozialen Revolution werden soll. Wir als juedische Sozialisten koennen auf keinen Fall mit dem Gedanken Frieden schliessen, dass wir bloss das Objekt der Revolution sein sollen. Wir muessen auch ihr Subjekt sein (grosser Lärm) Ich denke durch Skandale wird man mich nicht stören. Wir denken, dass durch die schöpferische, sozialistische Arbeit in Palästina dass durch das verstärken der Positionen der juedischen Arbeiter, durch unseren Aufbau der Arbeiterwirtschaft, durch die Verstärkung der politischen Kräfte der Arbeiterschaft und besonders durch das Hereinbringen neuer Arbeiter und arbeitssuchender Massen nach Palästina, in die sozialistische und halbsozialistische Wirtschaft, dass das unsere wichtigste Vorbereitungsarbeit ist fuer die kommende soziale Revolution.” Translation JR).

tion with the Jewish bourgeoisie.”⁹⁵ The most radical break with this concept was formulated by Alexander Chaschin, who rejected the paradigm of the working class fulfilling a task on behalf of the nation:

The time has come to liquidate the old on all fronts. We have to liquidate all the semi-, quarterly, and three quarterly fighters, Klal Yisroel. Now the moment has come for a working Klal Yisroel. There is no other for us. The time has come, that we cannot rely on any other classes in the name of Klal Yisroel anymore ... We have come with the hope that we liquidate, and such as capitalism destroys the fatherlands and unites them in great capitalist bodies, now the time has come for us to build a universal homeland, to build the fatherland of the social revolution.⁹⁶

He clearly rejected any concept of a national homeland of the Jews as a precondition for the revolution but saw the revolution as the solution for the “Jewish question”: “The Jewish interests, the interests of the entire world are now bound to the social revolution and this is why we need to support it.”⁹⁷ In his perspective, the role of Palestine in this revolutionary process was not to make the Jews productive and capable of fighting but it would be at best a later outcome of the world revolution. In the meantime, the “fatherland” seemed to have been located somewhere else, while any cooperation with general-Zionism or the national bourgeoisie for the sake of the nation was ruled out.

The Jewish Revolutionary and Palestine

Analyzing the development of Poale Zion’s understanding of the relation between the Jewish working class, the nation, and Palestine requires a look at the circumstances in which these ideologies emerged. Ber Borochov’s concept

⁹⁵ Ibid., 205 (“Die juedische Bourgeoisie ist nicht besser, wie eine andere, die juedische Konterrevolution ist ebenso wie die andere. Deshalb gibt es kein Zusammenarbeiten mit der juedischen Bourgeoisie.” Translation JR).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 208 (“dass der Augenblick gekommen ist, wo wir, das Alte an allen Fronten liquidieren muessen. Wo wir liquidieren muessen mit den ganzen halben, viertel, und dreiviertel-Kämpfern, mit Klall-Jisroel, das jetzt das Moment gekommen ist, wo geschaffen worden ist ein arbeitendes Klall-Jisroel. Ein anderes gibt es fuer uns nicht. Dass jetzt die Zeit gekommen ist, wo wir nicht im Namen von Klall Jisroel diese oder jene Klasse stuetzen duerfen, ... Wir sind mit der Hoffnung gekommen, dass liquidiert wird und dass, ebenso wie der Kapitalismus Vaterländer vernichtet und neue in grosskapitalistischen Organen vereinigt, jetzt fuer uns die Zeit gekommen ist eine allgemeine Heimat, ein Vaterland aufzubauen, das der sozialen Revolution.” Translation JR).

⁹⁷ Ibid., 209 (“Die juedischen Interessen, die Interessen der ganzen Welt liegen in der sozialen Revolution und wie muessen sie daher stuetzen.” Translation JR).

of the Jewish proletariat's common interests, shared harmoniously with the nation as well as his demand for a "strategic base", were direct results of the experiences he had made during the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary events in Russia in the years 1905 to 1907. As the Jewish labor movement seemed incapable of determining the course of events and enduring the worst of the reaction's violence, he saw the core problem in the general economic conditions in which the Jewish working class lived in the Empire. His argument, that the acquisition of a "strategic base" was necessary to give the Jewish working class revolutionary agency, was therefore both an explanation of the recent defeat and a programmatic claim for future activities. He created a causal chain for revolutionary activism: without a territory, the workers would not be able to struggle; through the acquisition of such a territory, successful participation in the revolution would be enabled. According to this line of argument, the nation was the defining factor for the evolution of a potent working class; the working class could not struggle without prior national emancipation. The Jewish worker as a revolutionary subject was therefore inherently defined through their relation to the territory, Palestine, that was eventually not only the cause of the working class but its acquisition of a national cause for the sake of the Jews as a nation.

While all members of Poale Zion formally accepted this paradigm, this revolutionary causal chain was practically undermined by many daily struggles in the Diaspora. As long as Poale Zion would not be the dominant party, it had to take almost daily decisions, navigating between its socialist-revolutionary and its national-Zionist program.

However, the biggest challenge to the socialist-national synthesis came with the revolutionary wave in Europe, unfolding after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The different assessments of the situation, the different interpretations of the party's program, were determined by local and regional conditions under which the various activists lived. It was not only polemics when at the World Congress Leon Chasanowich of Poale Zion's international leadership attacked the revolutionary enthusiasts as "high-tide socialists, communists as long as the Bolsheviks are standing 100 kilometers before Warsaw."⁹⁸ Many of his (soon to be former) comrades in Central and Eastern Europe had gone through a revolutionary experience that contradicted the party's traditional class-nation-paradigm. Some were fighting in the very same Bolshevik army that was approaching Warsaw, others were leading mass strikes of Jewish and non-Jewish

⁹⁸ Ibid., 385 ("Das sind Konjunktursozialisten, Kommunisten wenn die Bolschewiken 100 km von Warschau entfernt sind." Translation JR). He referred to the recent advance of the Red Army in its war against Poland.

workers or had been elected to workers' councils. In the eyes of many activists, all these achievements had been reached despite the lack of a "strategic base." The Jewish workers' agency, which many of Poale Zion's activists had hitherto seen as dependent on the national project in Palestine, was visible on a daily basis in the Diaspora and many of the activists were unwilling to give it up for the sake of programmatic principles. This reinterpretation of the class-nation-territory paradigm in their view did not necessarily make them less Zionist. However, they not only re-shifted their priorities from Palestine to the struggles in Europe, but also reversed the connection between Jewish revolutionary activity and the establishment of a national home in Palestine. After the revolution, the Jews would be granted the right to the land: "Over the heart of worldwide reaction, there will fly the red flag of the social revolution, while on Mount Moriah, the red flag of the Jewish Communist Party will be raised."⁹⁹ While this suggests that an ideological, or maybe emotional, connection with Palestine persisted even amongst the most radical activists, the prospective rejection of Zionism as a concept itself is already visible in this line of argument. The land was not perceived as a "necessity" derived from materialist analysis any more, rather a distant wish that would be fulfilled by the world revolution in the future; however, there was no longer any causal connection to the Jewish proletariat's development. It is unsurprising that a number of the activists that made this argument later abandoned Zionism entirely and often joined the communist parties of their respective countries.

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⁹⁹ Ibid., 209 ("Auf dem Herzblatt der Weltreaktion die rote Fahne der sozialen Revolution wehen wird, während auf dem Berg Moria die Fahne der juedisch kommunistischen Partei aufgezogen sein wird." Translation JR).

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