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The Split within the Poale Zion’s Left Wing: Two Versions of Jewish National Communism¹

Abstract

The organizations of the Jewish Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Poale Zion) in Ukraine and Belarus have experienced two major splits during the revolutionary events of the 1917–1920. The first of them was a classical form of the division into a left and a right wings. In 1917, the left one was formed although it did not become a separate party then. In 1919, the leaders of the Poale Zion’s right wing, who were sympathetic to the authority of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, had moved to Kamianets-Podilskyi and later to Tarnów in Poland together with the leaders of the Directorate of Ukraine. Unlike them, the representatives of the party’s left wing remained on the territory controlled by the Red Army. These groups received the status of a Soviet party. Thereby their activity in Soviet Ukraine and Belarus became legal.

In 1919, the second split took place. The left wing of the JSDWP(PZ) was divided into two groups both considering themselves as leftist. The first one was the Jewish Communist Party (Poale Zion). In 1922, it has merged with the Bolsheviks. The other group has changed its name to the Jewish Communist Workers’ Party (Poale Zion) in 1923 and operated until 1928.

These two parties had major ideological distinctions. We trace them in our paper basing on archival sources and the press published by these groups, as well as the documents of the Bolsheviks and some of Ukrainian national communist parties.

The first split within the Poale Zion organizations in Ukraine occurred in 1918. The rightist faction declared its support to the Ukrainian People’s Republic and took part in activity of the bodies of the Jewish national–personal autonomy. Its representatives became members of the UPR government. One of them, Avrom Revutsky, held office of the Minister of Jewish Affairs in December 1918 – April 1919. In turn, the leftist faction declared its loyalty to the Soviet regime.

The second split took place in 1919. It happened within the PZ left wing groups on the territory controlled by the Soviet forces and became formally legalized by the decisions of the so-called Gomel conference of Poale Zion communists in August 1919,

¹ This paper was presented at the 17th World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem (August 6–10, 2017).

during the advance of Denikin's forces in Ukraine. In these circumstances, the more radicalized pro-Soviet organizations of the JSDWP(PZ) in the north were separated from more moderate pro-Soviet PZ centers in the south.

Until now the historians almost totally disregarded the split within the Poale Zion's left wing. There were only several exceptions. The foremost is an article written by the prominent Bundist leader Moses Rafes in 1920 for the journal *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*. It was devoted to the Jewish communist movement in general. He argued:

[The Poale Zion] began to conduct less or more revolutionary propaganda activity. Obviously, their Zionist ideology protected them from being carried away by in the "defencism." Their nationalism was not about defense of "alien" nations' statehoods but about a desire for their own Zionist fatherland. This, if I may say so, Poale Zionists' ex-territoriality made it more open to the Bolshevik ideas. Poale Zionism's did not need to overcome the Second International's traditions because they were not its members either in their ideology or officially.²

At the same time, Rafes stated: "separate Poale Zionist groups in several regions have accepted the Soviet platform, but this action had not turned them into communists and had not affected their general nationalist ideology at all."³ This politician has written only a few words about the formal split within the Poale Zion in 1919:

A quiet struggle occurred within the Poale Zion. However, this group was politically disorganized and demoralized by its leaders' participation in the Dyrektoriiia's government.⁴ The common nationalist Zionist ideology inherent to different elements of this party united them. The left wing of this party preserved it as well as the right one. [...] Only in late August at the All-Russian conference in Gomel this party also split.⁵

Rafes' article was a political document and not an academic work. He wrote it as a newly converted Bolshevik who wanted to demonstrate his loyalty to the Bolshevik party. This text was published in the central press organ of the Third International. Naturally, these factors influenced its content.

The only strictly academic work on this topic was written in the late 1970s. Part of the 4th chapter of the book by Baruch Gurevitz on the phenomenon of the Jewish national communism in the USSR was devoted to the split within the PZ's left wing. However, this author did not present any deep analysis of the ideological differences between the JCP(PZ) and JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ). He considered them only insofar as he needed it for his analysis of the JCWP(PZ) ideology. He had no access to the press organs or archival documents of the JCP(PZ) and used the publications about it print-

² Moisei Rafes, "Evreiskoe kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie," *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* 9, 1920, 1300.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rafes means the participation of the Poale Zion's right wing in the Petliurist government.

⁵ Ibid., 1305.

ed in the mid-1920s, especially in the Berlin-based monthly journal *Der Kampf*.⁶ Analyzing the creation of the JCP(PZ) (he used the Russian form EKP), Gurevitz emphasized that “the new party accepted the Russian Communist Party’s platform” but “made some additions, especially on the national question.” He argued:

The EKP emphasized in its national platform the personal principle of self-determination.⁷ The “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” is the only way to achieve real national autonomy because only in that way could the national and social struggle be a united effort. The EKP recognized the need for two separate programs for the Jews during the time of transition, when the world would be divided into two different orders: a capitalist one and a Socialist one.⁸

Before and After the Gomel Conference

The split within the JSDWP(PZ)’s left wing in fact took place three months before the Gomel Conference. A series of extremely interesting party documents on this topic were published by the Central Committee of the JSDWP(PZ) (future JCWP(PZ)) as early as in August 1919. It is important to note that then the editors of the central party organ used the word “split” in quotes.⁹ The key document published was the decision on May 25th of the party’s Main Committee concerning the party’s relations with the “communist faction” within it. This document expressed the desire of the party’s leaders to maintain the unity of their political force as well as their consent to preserve an autonomous activity of factions and even their right to conduct an ideological struggle within the party.¹⁰ In addition to this document, the journal published the minutes of the joint meeting of the party’s main Committee and the Central Bureau of the Communist Faction (the name of the latter in this publication was written in quotes) from May 26th. This text clearly demonstrates the tensions within the JSDWP(PZ). Besides this text, the agreement between the Ukrainian and Russian Main Committees of the Poale Zion from June 29, 1919 was published in the same collection of the documents. It is interesting that it was signed by three sides: the Main Committee of the JSDWP(PZ) of the RSFSR, the Main Committee of the JSDWP(PZ) of Ukraine, and

⁶ Baruch Gurevitz, *National Communism in the Soviet Union, 1918–1928* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg, 1980), 52–54.

⁷ This principle was one of the central program theses of the majority of non-Zionist Jewish parties, i.e., the Folkspartey, Bund, the Socialist Jewish Workers’ Party (SERP). It had no central role in the PZ program until 1917, although the Poale Zionists accepted it. However, in late 1917 the Poale Zionists took active part in the work on the project of the proclamation of the national-personal autonomy in the Ukrainian People’s Republic. The law on this subject (“On the national-personal autonomy”) was passed by the Central Rada in January 1918 (the official date is January 9, but in fact it was approved several days later).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹ “Dokumenty k istorii ‘raskola,’” *Evreiskaia proletarskaia mysl’* 1, 1919, 19–25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

the Central Bureau of the Communist Faction.¹¹ On July 12–15th, the Communist Faction withdrew its signature under this agreement. This action caused the special statement of the Ukrainian Main Committee of the party, in which its leaders recognized that *de facto* the Communist Faction is a separate party.¹² On August 6th, the Moscow group of the Communist Faction published a statement in support of their Ukrainian counterparts. Its authors declared that they would take part in the Gomel Conference although it was convened on behalf of the Communist Poale Zionist groups of Russia and Lithuania, “the official representatives of which were not even informed about it.” It was also reprinted in the cited collection.¹³

The resolutions of the Gomel conference, on which the split has formally occurred, were published in the first issue of the central Committee of the newly created Jewish Communist Party (Poale Zion) in December 1919.

It is important to note that the press of the newly established party continued to use only the slogan “Proletarians of all nations, unite!” (“*Пролетарии всех наций, объединяйтесь!*”), used by the PZ organizations until 1917.¹⁴ At the same time, it rejected the slogan “Jewish proletarians of all countries, unite!” (“*Еврейские пролетарии всех стран, объединяйтесь!*”), which was taken as the second party motto by the so-called right current of the left wing of the PZ in 1919.¹⁵ So, they did not emphasize the exterritorial features of Jews in their party motto. The main Committee of the JSDWP(PZ) of Ukraine (the future JCWP(PZ)) began to publish its Magazine *Ievreiskaia proletarskaia mysl'* in August 1919, immediately after the split within the party.¹⁶ It also used only the old motto “Proletarians of all nations, unite!”

The above-mentioned resolution stated that the world was divided into “two hostile camps.” On the one side, its authors saw “the imperialistic states organized in the League of Nations,” on the other – “the countries in which the socialist revolution won.” Since the Hungarian Soviet Republic has fallen two weeks before this document was issued, we may say that the word “countries” (in plural form) was used to denote the officially independent Soviet republics created on the territory of the former Russian empire (first of all Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Russia). We can call to mind that exactly within these weeks (late August and early September 1919) the largest Ukrainian national communist group, the UCP (Borotbists)¹⁷, the future close partner of the

¹¹ Ibid., 21–23.

¹² Ibid., 23–24.

¹³ Ibid., 24–25.

¹⁴ See the logo of the *Nakanune* newspaper.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the logo of the mimeographed bulletin “*Biulleten' sekretariata Glavnogo komiteta Eyr. Sots.-dem. Rab. Partii na Ukraine*” 1, July 25, 1919, 1, before the final split.

¹⁶ This journal became the central organ of the JSDRP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) later. It was published in Russian during the first years of its existence and in Yiddish from the mid-1920s, first in Kyiv and then in Moscow.

¹⁷ The Borotbists' party initially emerged as a left wing within the Ukrainian Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries [UPSR] in early 1918. This wing was called “the Borotbists” in the party slang after the name of its newspaper *Borot'ba* (“*The Struggle*”). In May 1918 this leftist group has become a separate

JCP(PZ), insisted on the same positions and proposed to the Comintern the project of the Constitution of the future World Federation of Soviet Republics.¹⁸ Simultaneously, the Resolution on the Political Situation of the Gomel Conference condemned the creation of “so called ‘independent’ small national states” used as “a weapon for the struggle against the revolutionary countries.”¹⁹ Of course, neither the Poale Zionists and the Ukrainian national communists, nor the Bolsheviks used the term “state” to denote the Soviet republics. In their ideological documents as well as in the press this word had a clear negative connotation. The demand to adapt “the policy of the working class” to the “economical features, special way of life, and the ethnic structure of every country” is identical to the demands of the Ukrainian Borotbists repeated in their press and such documents as the above-mentioned project of the Constitution of the World Federation of Soviet Republics. The positions of the JCP(PZ) ideologists toward Soviet power as well as the role of proletarians as the “revolutionary vanguard” were similar to the positions of all “Soviet parties” (the term “Soviet parties” was used to define all parties which were legal on the territory controlled by the red forces).

Naturally, unlike the Ukrainian national communists (and, especially, the Borotbists, who insisted on the idea of creation of a separate red army in every Soviet republic), the authors of this resolution did not proclaim their desire to create separate Jewish Red Army in Ukraine or Russia because of the exterritoriality of Jews in the diaspora. Instead, they called for a strengthening of the existing Red Army: “To strengthen the Red Army by all means until the victory over internal counterrevolution will be achieved and the direct help to the struggle of proletarians in other countries will become possible.”²⁰ They emphasized the importance of practical realization of the laws on the national question issued by Soviet power. We also can see the intimation of plans for the agrarization of the Jews from shtetls in the demand: “To involve artisans who are supplanted [from the economic life] into the production activity and to incorporate them into agriculture and the branches of industry related to agriculture.”²¹ This idea was also expressed in the Benzion Rubstein’s article “On the problem of the agrarization of Jewish masses,” the first part of which was published in the first issue of the

party (with the old name of the UPSR). In March 1919, it was renamed into Ukrainian Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries (Communists) [UPSR(C)]. On August 6, 1919, after the Borotbists had absorbed the small Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (Independentists-Leftists), the UPSR(C) was renamed into Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbists). The UCP(B) was liquidated and partly absorbed by the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine in April–May 1920. See: Ivan Maistrenko, *Borot’bism. A Chapter in the History of Ukrainian Revolution* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2007); Serhii Hirik, “Dzherela doslidzhennia ideinykh zasad Ukrain’skoi komunistychnoi partii (borot’bystiv)” (Candidate of Science diss., Hrushevsky Institute of Ukrainian Archeography and Source Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2015).

¹⁸ See the text of this document in: Serhii Hirik, “Tsentralizatsiia bez tsentru? Borot’bysts’kyi proekt ‘Federatsii Radians’kykh Respublik.’” *Kyivs’ka starovyna* 4 (2012): 144–146.

¹⁹ “Rezoliutsiia o politicheskom momente (t. t. M. Barngoltsa i M. Gerra),” *Nakanune* 1, 1919, 10.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Nakanune newspaper. This author emphasized the practical aspects of agrarization of Jews' in small shtetls. He argued that "the shtetls where the majority of the local Jews is engaged in agriculture" exist in the districts of the Chernihiv and Gomel provinces that were not seized by the German forces.²²

The Resolution on the Nationalities Policy was prepared by comrade Sholom (his real name was not mentioned in documents). This document was the main ideological text on this topic published by the JCP(PZ) until its dissolution in 1922–1923. Its key statements were:

- The creation of the so called "workers' nation" from the proletarians of each ethnic group.
- The determination of the auxiliary nature of the "personal" principle of "the nationality question's" solution compared to the territorial as a basic one in the capitalist society on the one hand, and
- The determination of the auxiliary nature of the "territorial" principle of "the nationality question's" solution compared to the personal as a basic one in the socialist society on the other hand.²³
- The next point of this document was the idea of centralization of the economic life and decentralization of "the cultural creativity" and "national individual" life. It was close to the future official doctrine of "national in form, socialist in content" national cultures, declared by Stalin in 1925. Unlike the JCP(PZ) ideologists, the Ukrainian national communists of these times (especially the above mentioned Borotbists) declared the necessity of the creation of separate National Economy Councils (Sovnarkhozes) in each republic.
- Struggle for Soviet power was proclaimed necessary for a real national liberation (Sholom specially referred to the Ukrainian case when declaring this thesis).
- During the early stages of socialist reconstruction, the national autonomy (territorial as well as personal) was understood as a necessary weapon against "the national ignoring" (the author had stated that the national discrimination is impossible after the socialist revolution but it may be replaced by national ignoring).
- The national autonomy of Jews on the early stages of socialist reconstruction was considered as possible through the Jewish sections within the executive bodies of power; later they would have to be reorganized into the Jewish Workers' Councils (Soviets).
- The frame of reference of such Jewish autonomous bodies of power covers the problems of culture and education, health care, social assistance, *agrarization* and *productivization* of Jews, and their emigration.²⁴

²² Bentsion Rubshtein, "K voprosu ob agrarizatsii evreiskikh mass," *Nakanune* 1, 1919, 5–6.

²³ The author of this document explained this by emphasizing the decline of the meaning of such concepts as "the national minority" and "the national majority" in socialist society.

²⁴ "Rezoliutsiia o natsionalnoi politike (tovarishcha Sholoma)," *Nakanune* 1, 1919, 11. See Appendix 1.

In 1919, the ideologists of the JCP(PZ) did not fully reject the Zionist ideas but notably reinterpreted them. The Gomel conference adopted a special resolution “On our Palestinian activities” in which its delegates stated that the Jews’ economic situation in the territory where the power was taken by “the working class” did not change radically.²⁵ At the same time, the development of the revolutionary events and the civil war impoverished the Jews and made their previous occupations impossible. It predetermined the necessity of a policy of productivization and agrarization of Jews. However, in the diaspora the largescale policy in this area was impossible, so the autonomous Jewish bodies that had power were obliged to “concentrate the masses of Jewish emigres in the only country where the Jewish immigration was successful on the large scale and where the creation of the Jewish population with full (*normal*) social structure was possible. It is Palestine.” The authors of this document stated that this process had to be controlled by the Third International (the Comintern). They proposed to agrarize the Jews in the diaspora in order to prepare them for work on the land in Palestine as well as it was embodied by the *khalutsim* before. In Palestine, unlike in the diaspora, they considered the creation of the Jewish red army (Jewish red legions) as possible and desirable: they called “to create the red legions for struggle against imperialist invaders.”²⁶ This thesis brings the ideology of the JCP(PZ) closer to the ideology of the Ukrainian Borotbists – the JCP(PZ) leaders thought that a separate red army would be possible when the Jews had their own territory, but the Jews as an “exterritorial nation” did not need such armed forces.

It is important to mention, that the authors of this resolution argued that the socialist colonization of Palestine “will become possible only in the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”²⁷ They stated: “In respect that the dictatorship of the proletariat is already embodied in Russia, the Conference entrusts the Central Committee to prepare a detailed plan of the preliminary work until the moment when the socialist colonization of Palestine will become possible.”²⁸ As for the authors of this document, “the socialist colonization of Palestine [...] has to be embodied upon conditions of the regular work of the Jewish workers, with help of the governments of the socialist countries²⁹ and their center, i.e., the Third International.”³⁰

In the end of August 1919, the Moscow conference of the newly established party has occurred. It adopted the resolution *On the All-World Jewish Communist Party*. This document stated that during the revolution the Jewish proletarians in all countries (capitalist as well as socialist) were in similar economic and political situation. To be sure, this idea was

²⁵ “Rezoliutsiia o nashei palestinskoj deiatelnosti (t. M. Gerra),” *Nakanune* 1, 1919, 11–12. See Appendix 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The form “социалистические страны” (“the socialist countries”) is used in the document to avoid the word “states.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*

extremely different from the position of the ruling Bolshevik party on the same question. Similarly, this resolution emphasized that the main task of all Jewish communist groups in the world was to create a socialist society in Palestine (the word “state” or even “republic” was not used), so they had to create the All-World Jewish Communist Party which would coordinate their efforts. In 1920 such organization was created, but it firstly cooperated with both currents in the Poale Zion’s left wing in the former Russian empire and then continued to do it only with the more moderate group, i.e., the JCWP(PZ).

All these theses were repeated in the declaration of the JCP(PZ), issued in September 1919.

The Rise and Fall of Communist Poale Zionism

The JCP(PZ) created a decentralized party organizational structure and was open to cooperation with other political forces. Alongside with the Central Committee based in Moscow, it formed the Ukrainian Central Bureau of the Central Committee based in Kyiv. The latter one published its own press organs and was to a significant degree autonomous from the Central Committee. We need to note that most of the party members lived and worked exactly in Ukraine and Belarus, not in Russia. It is important that in its first circular letter “To All the Party Organizations,” the Ukrainian bureau of this party declared its desire to cooperate with the UCP(B), the CPU(B), and the UPLSR(B) in Ukraine, so the first mentioned political force among partners was not the ruling Bolsheviks party but the national communist group of the Borotbists.³¹ This thesis was developed in the resolution of the party’s Central Committee in Moscow from January 1920 (Bolsheviks and Borbists³² were not even mentioned as partners, this role was reserved only for the Borotbists):

in the process of the political work we have recently noticed a certain convergence with the UCP(B) caused by the close ideological positions of both fraternal communist parties.

The Central Committee proposes the Ukrainian Central Bureau to begin negotiations with the leaders of the UCP(B) on the further development of such convergence in the center as well as in the regions.³³

The leaders of the Ukrainian Central Bureau of the JCP(PZ) also published several complimentary articles on Borotbists in their press. The Borotbists did the same. One of the leaders of the JCP(PZ) Kyiv organization Yakov Yashin³⁴ read several lectures on

³¹ *Kommunisticheskoe slovo* 2, 1919, 1.

³² The Ukrainian Party of Left Socialists-Revolutionaries (Borbists) [UPLSR(B)] was created as a result of the split within the Ukrainian Party of Left Socialists-Revolutionaries (i.e., the Russian Left Social-Revolutionaries in Ukraine) in March–June 1919. The UPLSR(B) was liquidated and partly absorbed by the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine in July 1920.

³³ F. 41, op. 1, spr. 173, ark. 2, TsDAHOU.

³⁴ It is interesting that he used the Ukrainized form of his surname “Yashko” instead of the Russified one “Yashin” in the Ukrainian language documents.

the ideology and activity of their party in Borotbists workers clubs, and the Borotbists leaders Mykhaylo Poloz and Olexander Shumsky gave lectures on the Borotbists for Jewish workers in the Borokhov clubs created by the JCP(PZ). This cooperation was interrupted in spring 1920 when the negotiations between the Borotbists and Bolsheviks on the unification of these parties were activated. The Borotbists party was ultimately absorbed by the Bolsheviks in April 1920. After the absorption of the Borotbists by the Bolsheviks, the JCP(PZ) in Ukraine lost its natural ally. Several months had passed before they (as well as the JSDRP(PZ), future JCRP(PZ)) made an effort to join the Third International or at least to take part in its Second Congress.³⁵ The applications of both parties were not approved by the ECCI.

As we have mentioned above, the all-world organization of the communist Poale Zion (the World Communist Ferband Poale Zion – *Veltferband*) cooperated with both factions of the former left wing of the PZ in former Russian Empire. Simultaneously this all-world organization made its own efforts to join the Comintern.³⁶ Moreover, its representatives were allowed to take part in the Third Congress of the Third International, while the members of the *Veltferband* from the Soviet republics, i.e., the members of the JCP(PZ) and JSDFP(PZ) were not. However, the delegates of the *Veltferband* at the congress represented interests of local Poale Zionists.

In 1922, the JCP(PZ) fell into a crisis. It was too open to cooperation with non-Jewish parties to preserve itself as an isolated party. Its leaders were too much involved into the everyday life of local Russified Jewish workers and small craftsmen to continue to demand the realization of the Zionist principles. It has to be noted that most of the ideological documents of the JCP(PZ) were written or published in Russian language unlike the documents and press of the JCWP(PZ), which were frequently published in Yiddish.

One of the leaders of the Minsk organization of the JCP(PZ) Zvi Fridliand described the process of the JCP(PZ)'s decline in his informative pamphlet "The Communist International and the Communist Poale Zionism" immediately after his conversion to Bolshevism before the JCP(PZ) was dissolved. Describing the debate on the Poale Zion at the Executive Committee of the Communist International at the Third Congress of the Comintern, he argued:

The Poale Zionists-communists were isolated from the labor movement in Russia as well as in other countries. [...] The PZ minority³⁷ had proposed to the Comintern a platform, which was not acceptable for the latter. The rejection of the Palestinism could matter in 1919 or 1920. In 1921, it was not enough. The JCP(PZ) needed to adapt their program to the program of the RCP's Jewish sections (*Evspektias*) which already

³⁵ See: Grant Adibekov et al., eds., *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) i Komintern: 1919–1943 gg. Dokumenty* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 51–52.

³⁶ See my article: Serhiy Hirik, "Jewish National Communist Parties and the Comintern: A Non-Mutual Association," *Judaica Ukrainica* 2 (2013): 113–125.

³⁷ Fridliand meant the pro-Bolshevik current within the JCP(PZ) and the World Communist Ferband (Poale Zion).

existed. [...] The majority of the JCP(PZ) has betrayed communism, hiding this activity behind revolutionary words. The minority was unable to lead the whole revolutionary part of the [PZ] movement to the Communist International.³⁸

In December 1922, the JCP(PZ)'s Third Congress adopted the decision to dissolve the party and to accept the policy of the RCP(B) on the nationality question. In 1923, many of its organizations were absorbed by the Jewish sections of the Bolsheviks party. So one may argue that the main distinction between the JCWP(PZ) and the JCP(PZ), that caused the earlier dissolution of the latter, was a closer contact between the JCP(PZ) with the Russified part of the Jewish population. They preferred the perspectives of the practical activity within the ruling party to the Zionist principles. Unlike them, the JCWP(PZ) did not have many organizations in various regions and, as we can see from preserved lists of members of its local organizations, it consisted largely of intellectuals. Its leaders were more isolated from the population and, therefore, had more opportunities to preserve their ideological purity.

We know the position of the right current of the Poale Zion's left wing from its documents, particularly from the polemical texts written in the months when the split occurred. One of the main distinctions between two groups was their attitude toward the Palestine issue. This topic took a noticeably larger place in the JSDWP(PZ) materials than in the documents of the JCP(PZ). In 1920, the JSDWP(PZ) published the polemical document "On the Palestinian work," in which the above-described principles of the JCP(PZ)'s version of Zionism, especially the idea of dependence of Palestinism on the need of the Jewish masses for "productivization" and "agrarization," was criticized. As for this current in Jewish national communism, Palestinism was important as such. The ideologists of the JSDWP(PZ) saw the emphasis of JCP(PZ) on linkage between the situation in the diaspora and the need of the Palestinism as almost equal to rejection of Zionism.³⁹ It appears that they were correct — during 1921–1922 most ideologists of the JCP(PZ) rejected Palestinism entirely. Moreover, in 1920, this topic almost completely disappeared from the pages of the JCP(PZ) party press and documents. At the same time, it took a very important place in the JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) publications until the party dissolution in 1928. Every issue of the central organ of the JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) included a special chapter "The Palestine Division" consisting of articles and short notes on the current situation in Palestine, the problem of the Jewish emigration, etc. The JCP(PZ) preferred to work "here and now," while the JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) preferred to contribute to the future emigration.

The JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) considered the topic of its cooperation with the Third International as a much more important than the JCP(PZ) did. The materials of the plenums of JSDWP(PZ)'s Central Committee indicate this. For instance, during the meeting of its Bureau on September 1, 1919, the central issue was the possibil-

³⁸ Tsvi Fridlyand, *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional i kommunisticheskii poalei-tzionizm* (Minsk: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Belorussii, 1921), 127.

³⁹ "O palestinskoi rabote. Tezisy tov. Abramovicha," *Evreiskaya proletarskaia mys'* 6–7, 1919, 10–18.

ity for the party to become a member of the Comintern. The CC ordered its member Berlinraut to prepare the text of the memorandum to the ECCI for such case and approved his project of the memorandum on September 18, 1919. The Fifth Congress of the JSDWP(PZ) (September 7–14, 1920) issued the special resolution “On the Comintern”:

Taking into account that the Jewish proletariat has a peculiar economic structure and culture [...], the 5th party congress considers the creation of a special Jewish section within the Comintern necessary. [...] at the same, the Party Congress time expresses its satisfaction with the recognition of the Palestine Section by the Third International and gives it the right to represent it [the JSDWP(PZ)] to the Poale Zion.⁴⁰

The topic of contacts with the Comintern was discussed at all JSDWP(PZ) party congresses until its dissolution, but generally the possibility of its joining the Third International was not even mentioned. Nevertheless, the Twelfth All-Russian Conference of the JCWP(PZ) (March 11–16, 1926) sent a greeting message to the Executive Committee of the Comintern where it expressed the hope that

during the days of the coming battles for communism in all world, the Jewish revolutionary proletarians' vanguard, the Communist Party of the Jewish Workers (Poale Zion) and its World Ferband⁴¹ will take a responsible and honorable place among the Communist sections of the Communist International.⁴²

The statement “On the World Communist Movement” called to struggle for the creation of possibility (only possibility!) “of the Veltfarband joining the Comintern, and a sectioning of our parties in several countries.”⁴³ However, this optimism was groundless. In less than one year and a half, the Jewish Communist Workers Party (Poale Zion) was dissolved according to decisions of the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The phenomenon of the Communist Poale Zionism in the USSR has ceased to exist.

Conclusions

It is possible to argue that one of the main reasons for the split within the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party (Poale Zion) left wing was the so-called “exterritoriality” of the ideas proclaimed by the leaders of several local party organizations. Exterritoriality in this case means that the Jews could not only strive for territorialization in Palestine, but could also claim self-rule in the diaspora. It is important, that such “exterritoriality” was much more widespread among the Poale Zionist groups in the Eastern provinces of Ukraine and in Belarus, where the organizations of this party had to

⁴⁰ “Mezhdunarodnoe polozhenie i III Internatsional,” f. 272, op. 1, d. 7, l. 17, RGASPI.

⁴¹ I.e., Veltfarband – the WUPZ.

⁴² “Ispolkomu Kominterna,” f. 272, op. 1, d. 20, l. 146, RGASPI.

⁴³ “Vsemirnoe kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie i nashi zadachi,” *ibid.*, l. 19.

operate jointly (or simply, cooperate) with the anti-Zionist parties, especially the Bund and the Bolshevik organizations. Exactly these “more radical” Poale Zionist activists were the core of the Jewish Communist Party (Poale Zion) created at the Gomel Conference.

I also suggest that the fact of an almost entire absence of such radical groups in Podolia and Volhynia during the Ukrainian revolution was not primarily caused by the social structure of the Jewish population in these regions or the course of revolutionary events. Certainly, the Jewish proletariat was not as numerous in the non-industrialized cities of Right-Bank Ukraine as it was in Kyiv, Katerynoslav, or Kharkiv. The evacuation of the Ukrainian People’s Republic’s bodies of power and army detachments to Podolia in 1919 was also not favorable to the formation of such radical leftist groups in this region. At the same time, the organizations of JCP(PZ) and JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) – created in East Volhynia and Podolia in the early 1920s, when Soviet power was finally established – were much less active than the relatively small organizations of these parties in Belarus. One also cannot observe any traces of cooperation between leftist Poale Zionists and Borotbists in early 1920 in this region although it was close to Kyiv and Kharkiv. Since there were no close contacts between the leftist Poale Zion groups and the Ukrainian national communists in Right-Bank Ukraine, the former did not experience any significant influence of the latter in this area.

The so called “exterritoriality” problem was manifested, for example, in key ideological texts of the JCP(PZ) where the idea of emigration to Palestine had no significant place. I claim that it was caused by close contacts of its leaders with the Russified part of the Jewish proletariat. It is important to emphasize that the press organs of the JCP(PZ) were more frequently published in Russian than in Yiddish. At the same time, the partial repudiation of “exterritoriality” in some of their documents concerning “the Palestine problem”, and even their support for the idea to create “Jewish Red Legions” in Palestine to a large followed the slogans and argumentations of the Borotbists. It is possible to argue that this was partly caused by the Borotbists’ influence through the press and the lectures in the Poale Zionists’ clubs in Kyiv and Kharkiv.

The difference between the social bases of the JCP(PZ) on the one hand and of the JSDWP(PZ)/JCWP(PZ) on the other hand was a fact. It led to the situation where the leaders of the former decided to liquidate their own political force and to work within the ruling Bolshevik party. The leaders of the latter preferred to save their party as a practically isolated framework for almost a decade after the split, until 1928.

Appendix I
Resolution on the Nationalities Policy
(By comrade Sholom)⁴⁴

I

In a capitalist society, every nation is the oppressor or the oppressed. The population is divided into *ethnic majorities*⁴⁵ on the one hand and *ethnic minorities* on the other. *The territorial principle is the main principle of the national self-determination.* The personal one is the only tool for ethnic minorities.

A free nation emerges only during the socialist revolution, when the proletariat becomes a *working nation* that adapts economic relations to its cultural needs.

Socialism abolishes concepts of an ethnic majority and ethnic minority. *The personal principle becomes the main principle of the national self-determination.* The territorial one becomes only a secondary tool for rational distribution of the nationalities' energy.

The socialist society is a free union of nationalities. *Its economy is centralized* and systematically regulated at the global scale; its cultural life is divided into national-individual elements.

II

The events in Ukraine demonstrate that *in a capitalist society the struggle for national autonomy has nothing but a demonstrative significance.* Under the regime that is the cause of oppression, national autonomy is impossible.

The only opportunity to realize the national self-determination properly is to establish a dictatorship of proletariat. That is why the struggle for national autonomy is related to the struggle for Soviet power.

III

In the current transition period, when significant remnants of a capitalist society exist, the proletariat has to make concessions to the petite bourgeoisie. In such circumstances, the national autonomy needs to be adapted to all features of the transition epoch. To a certain degree, it has to play the role that the national autonomy plays under the capitalist regime. It is a way to avoid national ignoring if not national oppression (as the latter is impossible under Soviet power).

When Soviet power will be strengthened and the proletarians will get rid of the influence of the petite bourgeoisie, the national autonomy will become a tool to organize the masses' activities for solving the general problems of society⁴⁶ as well as for us-

⁴⁴ Published in Russian in: *Nakanune* 1, 1919, II. The Yiddish-language version was not found yet. Translated by me.

⁴⁵ The form "national" (*"национальные"*) is used in the document. The authors of the document considered a nation as a stage of development of the ethnic group. Italic was used in the original text.

⁴⁶ The author of the document used a form *"общегосударственный."* At the same time, in other documents the Poale Zionists consistently avoided the word "state" and used the words "society," "re-

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ing of the proletariat's new constructive potential, and addressing the particular needs of its national environs.

IV

The Jewish sections have to be organized at various commissariats to meet the needs of the Jewish workers as citizens and to involve them into the general life of the society.

When Soviet power will develop, and the Soviet institutions will get closer to the Jewish life, the Jewish proletarians will seek to control all processes of the Jewish life and to solve all its problems systematically and on a national scale.⁴⁷ I.e., the Jewish sections will transform into the *Jewish workers' [soviets]* because of the course of events.

V

Considering the spontaneous autonomization of the Jewish life, the Conference supports the active participation [of the communist Poale Zionists] in the Jewish commissariats and Jewish sections of various commissariats and departments of soviets for their reorganization according to the way of life of the Jewish population.

Seeking to create the Jewish Workers' Soviets, we wish:

- 1) to involve wide Jewish masses in the activities of the sections;
- 2) to pass on the right to appoint the ruling bodies and the control over them to the Jewish communist groups and the Jewish sections within the labor unions;
- 3) to concentrate the sections' activities in the *commissariats* which will elect their central governing bodies at their congresses;
- 4) to require from the directors of sections and commissariats to make regular activity reports to the mass meetings.

The direct goal of the Jewish autonomous bodies is to realize the dictatorship of proletariat among the Jews.

Their areas of competence cover:

- 1) cultural and educational work;
- 2) healthcare for the Jewish population;
- 3) social assistance for the Jewish poor;
- 4) involvement of the Jewish masses in the productive work and especially in the agriculture;
- 5) emigration and colonization.

VI

Since in the circumstances of the Socialist revolution, the process of emigration loses its spontaneous nature, and the bodies of the [Jewish] national autonomy will have

public," or "organization" instead of it. The concept of a state was considered as a bourgeois one. That is why I use the term "society" in the translation.

⁴⁷ "...в общегосударственном масштабе."

no need to take this spontaneous process under control. Instead of this they will have to prepare and control the process of concentration of the Jewish masses in Palestine.

VII

Since the normalization of the Jewish economy is possible only on the global scale, the Conference supports the idea to convene *the World Congress of the Jewish Workers' Soviets*.

Appendix 2 **Resolution on Our Palestinian Activities**

(By comrade M. Gerr)⁴⁸

I

The seizure of political power by the working class does not radically change the economic condition of the Jewish nation.

The development of the socialist revolution and the lasting civil war ruin the Jewish masses. They were in a difficult situation before, but these events made their situation completely intolerable.

Even the necessary steps of Soviet power in economy *at times inevitably* cause displacement of a large part of the Jewish artisanal, trade, and industrial proletarians⁴⁹ as well as the Jewish poor from their economic positions.

The catastrophic economic situation of the Jewish population forces it to search for new sources of food.

Transition of the Jewish masses to agriculture becomes necessary.

On this way, the Jewish tailors encounter with several obstacles caused by the past of the Jewish people. These obstacles are insurmountable even if the Jewish population and the workers' power make great efforts.

The Jewish masses are forced to emigrate.

The spontaneous direction of the Jewish emigration and the conscious intervention of the Jewish workers' institutions in this process have to concentrate the Jewish emigrants in the only country where the Jewish immigration has been successful on a relatively large scale. The local conditions make it possible to create the normal Jewish population⁵⁰ exactly in Palestine.

The socialist colonization of Palestine *is possible only under a dictatorship of proletariat*. It has to be embodied upon conditions of regular work of the Jewish workers, with help of the governments of the socialist countries and their center, i.e., the Third International.

⁴⁸ Published in Russian in: *Nakanune* 1, 1919, 11–12. Translated by me.

⁴⁹ “...ремесленный и торгово-промышленный пролетариат.”

⁵⁰ The author of this document considers the society with a “full” structure (with the Jewish peasantry, Jewish workers, etc.) as a “normal” one.

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Since the normal Jewish population in Palestine cannot be created right now because of the English occupation and the [activity of] treacherous Jewish bourgeoisie and its Zionist leaders, the work for the creation of the Jewish socialist society is closely related to the struggle against the imperialist states of the Entente.

II

The Conference considers necessary:

- 1) to provide a wide range of educational activities among the Jewish masses in order to agitate for the creation of the Jewish socialist society in Palestine;
- 2) to inform the fraternal communist parties about our purposes;
- 3) to support the transition of the Jewish population to agriculture and especially to arable farming;
- 4) to actively fulfill the liquidation of the Jewish bourgeois and especially Zionist institutions;
- 5) to create the red legions for the fight against the imperialist invaders;
- 6) to raise a rebellion in all countries captured by the Entente and *its minions, especially in the East, and first of all in Palestine.*

III

Since the socialist colonization will be possible only under the dictatorship of proletariat and in respect that the dictatorship of the proletariat is already embodied in Russia, the Conference entrusts the Central Committee to prepare the detailed plan of the preliminary work until the moment when the socialist colonization of Palestine will become possible.