

Bundist Identity: Jewish Identity versus Marxist Identity

Faith Alex Perkins

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Bundist Identity: Jewish Identity versus Marxist Identity

The Bund, a Jewish-Marxist group, was created during a period when many other Marxist and socialist groups formed due to disappointment with the monarchies. Formally, it was known as “Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland” or the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, but it was called the Bund. The party had to create their own identity to separate themselves from the others and attract potential members to their party. Their dual-identity as Jews and Marxists allowed them to mobilize Jewish workers who had been left out of the larger socialist movement. The Bund advocated for a group that was largely forgotten by the Marxist movement due to the Marxist focus on a single-classless identity. They began as a party with a neutral stance on Jewish rights and later became the strongest advocate for Jewish rights in the Russian Empire. The Bundist ideology changed in the years leading up to the 1905 revolution in reaction to societal pressure and in reaction to the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party. Marxist ideology, Jewish culture and identity, and the RSDWP influenced the Bundist identity, and this dual-identity as Jews and Marxists allowed them to attract both groups to their party.

The Russian-Jews lived segregated, unassimilated lives in the 19th century. The “Jewish area” of the Russian Empire was called the Pale of Settlement situated in modern day Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania. They were prohibited from living outside of this area and were restricted from certain jobs and schools.¹ They had their own language, Yiddish, their own culture, and religion. All of this made them foreign to Russian society.² During the 19th century, Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment that persuaded Jews and Jewish culture to move into the secular, more European society, began in Europe. Many of the Jews living in Eastern Europe became interested in this new way of practicing Judaism and Jewish life. At the same time, the religious community created their own counter-movement called

¹ Henry Tobias. *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Origins to 1905* (California: Stanford University Press, 1972), 7.

² Nira Yuval Davis. “Marxism and Jewish Nationalism,” *History Workshop no.24* (1987): 98.

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Hasidism to curve Jews becoming secular.³ The last decade of the 19th century saw the beginning of active political participation among the Jewish workers due to the rapid industrialization in Russia and the growing policy of repression initiated by the Tsar.⁴ Anti-Semitism drove many Jews to Communist and Marxist parties. These parties created a utopian world in which all discrimination against Judaism and Jews would disappear, because religious and collective identities would evaporate.⁵

The founders of the Bund did not come from the ultra-religious faction of the Eastern European Jews. They were educated in secular Russian schools, not the religious *yeshivas*, and attended universities in Western Europe. The socialist organizations from the universities and the Haskalah influenced these young founders. All of the pioneers came from middle to lower-middle class families which made their relationship with the working class foreign.⁶ Although some of their founders were artisans and factory workers, they were not a part of the core, ideological group and participated in a smaller number than intellectuals.⁷ They struggled to maintain a following in the early years due to competing groups and their foreignness to the workers. They reached their peak in 1906 with 40,000 members.⁸ The Bundists are remembered because they advocated for national autonomy—an anti-Marxist ideology while rejecting Jewish internationalism and Zionism.

Karl Marx and the Bund

³ Henry Tobias, 9.

⁴ Koppel Pinson. “Arkady Kremer, Vladimir Medem, and the Ideology of the Jewish Bund,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 3 (1945): 5.

⁵ Jerry Muller. “Radical Anticapitalism.” In *Capitalism and the Jews* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2010), 42.

⁶ Koppel Pinson, 11

⁷ *Ibid*, 9.

⁸ Salo Baron. *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976.), 143.

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Karl Marx composed the central Marxist texts “Das Kapital” and “The Communist Manifesto.”⁸ In 1844, Karl Marx also wrote “On the Jewish Question,” which is largely considered to be an anti-Semitic text today. The Bund and the other Russian Marxist parties took ideology from his essays, despite his openly anti-Semitic text. His later works contain small anti-Semitic remarks or none at all. After this essay, he drops the “Jewish Question,” the question of Jewish emancipation, completely from his works.⁹ “On the Jewish Question” was forgotten until the end of the 19th century—around the time these socialist parties were forming their ideologies.¹⁰

“On the Jewish Question” is composed of three parts based around a response to Bruno Bauer’s *Die Judenfrage*. The first argument is that Marx wants to eliminate the need for religion. For example, he writes, “The political emancipation of the Jew, the Christian, and, in general, of religious man, is the emancipation of the state from Judaism, from Christianity, from religion in general.”¹¹ This part of the essay is not seen as anti-Semitic, because it argues for the emancipation of society from all religions, not just Judaism. Next, Marx argues for the need to get rid of all religions, as they fragment society into different identities. It is only in the third part of his essay that he becomes antagonistic towards Judaism and Jews; he begins to associate Judaism and Jews with the deficiencies in capitalism.¹²

In third argument in “On the Jewish Question,” Marx characterizes Jews as exclusive, greedy leeches on society who are synonymous with capitalism. He writes that they have “a bitter and caustic hostility and on the other, a subtle but unmistakable concern for their

⁹ Joel Kovel. "MARX ON THE JEWISH QUESTION." *Dialectical Anthropology* 8, no. 1/2 (1983): 36.

¹⁰ Julius Carlebach. *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), 203.

¹¹ Karl Marx. “On the Jewish Question,” *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844), n.p.

¹² Joel Kovel, 32-33.

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welfare.” To Marx, Jews are isolationists who only care about their community and themselves. Marx believes that Jews could help end the Christian state.¹³ Nevertheless, he despised Jews who were rich and capitalistic. In his essay, he focuses on the stereotype of Jews being greedy capitalists.¹⁴ Therefore, he links Jewishness and capitalism as a dual threat to society. For example, Marx considers the “true” Jew:

Let us consider the real Jew: not the Sabbath Jew, who Bauer considers, but the everyday Jew. Let us seek the secret of the Jew in his religion in the real Jew. What is the profane basis of Judaism? Practical need and self-interest. What is the worldly cult of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly god? Money. Very well: then in emancipating itself from huckstering and money, and thus from real and practical Judaism, our age would emancipate itself.¹⁵

Clearly, here Marx is associating the Jew with capitalism. Therefore, in addition to abolishing capitalism, he would be able to rid the society of “Jewish” qualities. In later essays, Marx’s enemy is capitalism, because it is larger and more general.¹⁶ If Jews are always capitalist as Marx suggests, then these attacks are on Jewish identity. In order for the Bundists to reject capitalism, they would have to reject their Jewish identity. They chose not to reject Jewish identity, revealing that they did not associate Jewish identity with capitalism.

He asks whether the Jews were entitled to political emancipation as individuals. Marx claims Jews should be emancipated so long as they give up their “Jewish Spirit.”¹⁷ Marx

¹³ William H. Blanchard. “Karl Marx and the Jewish Question,” *Political Psychology* 5, no 3 (1984): 369.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 373.

¹⁵ Karl Marx. “On the Jewish Question,” *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844), n.p.

¹⁶ William H. Blanchard, 374

¹⁷ Nira Yuval Davis, 87.

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believes that Jews should continue to exist because of their particular social and economic roles, but society must struggle against the “Jewish Spirit” which he views as money and commerce.¹⁸ Marx decided that “Jewish Spirit” (money and capitalism) dominated the social order, and only when capitalism is destroyed will Judaism and Jewish identity be destroyed. Marx’s essay concludes that the social emancipation of the Jew is equal to the emancipation of society from Judaism, which he wrongly equated to capitalism.¹⁹ The Bundists must have had another idea as to what the “Jewish Spirit” meant to them because they refused to reject their Jewish identity in the face of Marx’s condemnation.

Historians struggle with assessing whether Marx was an anti-Semite in his life because he wrote this essay. Scholar Jerry Muller writes that Marx was not anti-Semitic at all. Muller believes that Marx combined a moral critique of capitalism with traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes to besmirch the moral standing of capitalist society. He asserts that Marx did not do this out of anti-Semitic thoughts, but used stereotypes as a way to further his point. During the Middle Ages, Christians were condescending and discriminatory to Jews because of the Jewish presence in mercantilism, which they saw as evil and impure. Marx uses this traditional negative characterization of Jews as merchants and usurers to make the point that these qualities had now come to characterize the society as a whole.²⁰

Notable historian Iain Hampsher-Monk agrees, writing that only a superficial reading of “On the Jewish Question” will cause an anti-Semitic interpretation. Hampsher-Monk says that Marx is concerned with the fact that Christians need to attribute these anti-Semitic stereotypes to Jews. He writes that Marx’s argument does rely on the idea that, for Germans, Jews has become synonymous with commerce. Marx believes that religious identity, like Jewish identity, was created in reaction to the stratification of commerce and occupations

¹⁸ Ibid, 88.

¹⁹ Nira Yuval-Davis, 90.

²⁰ Jerry Muller, 39.

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within society and not before and therefore, Hampsher-Monk contends that his association of Jews and capitalism is correct.²¹

In the book, *Karl Marx's Radical Critique of Judaism*, Julius Carlebach writes that Marx lacked an understanding of the real situation of Jews in his time period and history. Therefore, Marx made his remarks based on ignorance, which then explains the mischaracterization of Jews and capitalism in "On the Jewish Question."²² Karl Marx descended from a long-line of rabbis and Jews, with his parents being the ones who converted, so if his anti-Semitism was truly based on ignorance, then this ignorance would be quite ironic.²³ It seems unlikely that he would know nothing about the situation of Jews, unless he fully rejected his family and their background.

Joel Kovel, in "Marx and the Jewish Question," writes that Marx preoccupied himself with Jews because they were societally stereotyped as exclusive and selfish. Kovel argues that Marx believed that the real plague of society was the bourgeois order that created class tensions. He believes that we should excuse Marx's anti-Semitism because anti-Semitism was accepted and part of popular thought at the time, which is not necessarily a good excuse. Kovel sees Marx's anti-Semitism as medieval, because its belief that Jews were the usurers and moneylenders: Usurer was seen as a sin and inherently Jewish in medieval times. However, Kovel perceives Marx as an anti-Semite because he denied the right for Jews to be Jews.²⁴

It is uncertain how many Bundists actually read this text by Marx and what their reactions were to it. Although this is not the text that created Marxism, it would still be influential in the Bundist identity, because if Marx said one must reject Judaism and "Jewish

²¹ Iain Hampsher-Monk. *A History of Modern Political Thought: Major Political Thinkers from Hobbes to Marx* (Oxford [England]: Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 496.

²² Julius Carlebach, 202.

²³ Blanchard, 369.

²⁴ Kovel, 32, 36, 39

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Spirit,” it opened up questions for a party founded by Jews, for Jews. The Bundists obviously saw past Marx’s vehement critique of Jews as a demand to reject capitalism but not their Jewish identity. Even the role of this essay in the larger Russian Marxist movement is uncertain.

Bundist Ideology and Identity

From the declaration of the party in 1897 until 1906 the Bundist ideology was a fluid mix of competing Marxist and Jewish ideologies. Until the 1880s, the founders of the party thought that they wanted to mobilize all Russian workers, because Russian culture had influenced them so much.²⁵ From the late 1880s to 1897, they were known as the Jewish Social Democratic Group. They only added “Jewish” to the name because they wanted to differentiate from other competing political groups. This shows that they did not actively identify as Jews as they added “Jewish” as a way to attract members. It was more of an ethnic identifier of the founders than a cultural or religious one. They continued to focus on the rights of all workers more than those of Jews.²⁶

In the 1890s, the Bund began to attract more members to their group. They supported the international workers’ movement, instead of the specific Jewish workers’ movement.²⁷ The party began to move from educating the individual to expanding the movement to a wider scale. They had to compete with the Russian Marxists, the European Marxists, local Polish socialist groups, and the Zionists for Jewish support.²⁸ The desire for a larger movement caused them to finally incorporate Yiddish into their speeches. Previously, the

²⁵ Koppel Pinson, 17.

²⁶ Koppel Pinson, 28.

²⁷ Henry Tobias. *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Origins to 1905* (California: Stanford University Press, 1972), 26.

²⁸ Calvin Goldscheider and Alan S Zuckerman. „The Formation of Jewish Political Movements in Europe,” *Modern Judaism* 8, no.3 (1998): 97.

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Bund had been using Russian, but most of the Jewish population understood little to no Russian.²⁹ Bundist member, Victor Ehrlich writes in his memoir that Yiddish had an adverse effect among part of the Jewish population though because “A Yiddish orientated and primarily working-class party, the Bund held scant appeal to the linguistically assimilated Jewish middle-class professionals.”³⁰ The founders and leaders of this party recognized now that they were never going to gain support if they did not reach out to their own communities. This turn to Yiddish signifies a change in the group. They had previously wanted to appeal to all Russians, but changed because they began to see the special needs of the population they represented. Yiddish became the language of the working class and their culture contrasted with Hebrew and Russian: Both were seen as reactionary and bourgeois, and Hebrew even a remnant of the religious past.³¹ This change also signifies a small recognition of a different culture and nationalism than the Russians because, by choosing the Jewish language, they are deciding that they are different culturally and historically than the other Russian workers.

In 1893, Bundist leader Arkady Kremer published his essay, “On Agitation,” which spoke about the need to mobilize the workers instead of theoretically creating ideas about a socialist future.³² His essay did not address any specifically Jewish issues because at this time Kremer was more interested in the general Russian workers’ movement instead of a Jewish one. This essay influenced many Bundists and became one of the main party works.³³ If one of the leaders of the party preached for general movement as late as 1893 it can be assumed that their move to appeal to Jewish workers was only motivated by the desire for a large party

²⁹ Ibid,28.

³⁰ Victor Ehrlich. *Child of a Turbulent Century* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 34.

³¹ Joshua Shanes. “Yiddish and Jewish Diaspora Nationalism,” *University of Wisconsin Press, Vol.90, no, 2* (1999): 180.

³² Henry Tobias. *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 11.

³³ Henry Tobias. *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 14.

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membership, instead of wanting to help the specific problems of Jewish workers, making their Jewish identity was superficial at best.

One of the leaders of the Bund and later the leader of the Mensheviks, Julius Martov, gave a speech on May 2, 1895, in which he spoke about the need to recognize the specific Jewish problems: “The Jewish proletariat cannot rely solely on the Russian and Polish proletariat. It is always conceivable that in order to gain their ends, non-Jewish proletariat leaders may be willing or obliged to make concessions at the expense of Jews.”³⁴ This marks the true change in the identity of the Bund, who had previously been a party for everyone but composed of only Jews, to a party working for the advancement of Jews primarily and then other workers.

The Jewish Workers’ Labor Bund was formally created in 1897. Unlike the larger Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP), they had rejected “Social Democratic” in their name because many felt that the term only applied to small groups that led workers instead of a group of individual workers coming together.³⁵ Arkady Kremer, who had been previously skeptical about Jewish identity in the party, said during his key-note speech that the aims of the new organization were:

a general union of all Jewish socialist organizations will have as its goal not only the struggle for the general Russian political demands; it will also have the special task of defending the special interests of the Jewish workers, carry on the struggle for civil rights of the Jewish workers and above all to carry the struggle against discriminatory anti-Jewish laws. That is because the Jewish workers suffer not only as workers but also

³⁴ Koppel Pinson, 7.

³⁵ Henry Tobias. “The Bund and the First Congress of the RSDWP: An Addendum,” *The Russian Review* 24 no. 4 (1965): 394.

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as Jews, and we dare not and cannot remain indifferent at such a time.³⁶

Kremer's speech shows that he changed his attitude from his 1893 essay and that he recognized the need for a specifically Jewish party. Kremer is rejecting the Marxist principle of internationalism over nationalism and classlessness over identity by choosing to focus on Jews, instead of all workers. In this speech there is no discussion of national-autonomy for the Jews, only their rights.

The Bund began as a purely Marxist group, but it soon had to deal with the relationship between Marxism and nationalism. The Bundists struggled with how to harmonize the Marxist concept of class struggle with Jewish nationalism. In the early years of the Bund, prominent founder Vladimir Medem took a stance of neutralism. This meant recognizing the Jewish language, culture, and problems and opposing assimilation, but not wanting to create a national consciousness or national aspiration as the goal of the party.³⁷ The Bundist stance of national neutralism can be summed up in a quote by a Bundist member: "We are not against assimilation; we are against the aspiration of assimilation as a goal! We are not against the national character of culture, but against the nationalist policy."³⁸ At this point, the goal of the Bund was contradictory because they wanted a both separate Jewish identity and general class identity.

The national question was not discussed at the Third Bund Convention in 1899, although the party members wanted it debated.³⁹ The next convention in 1901, adopted a resolution which stated that Russia should be:

³⁶ Koppel Pinson, 14.

³⁷ Koppel Pinson, 254.

³⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, 13.

³⁹ Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz. "Nationalism and Jewish Socialism: The Early Years," *Modern Judaism* 8, no 3 (1988): 229.

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reconstructed as a federation of nationalities with complete national autonomy for each nationality, independent of the territory in which it is located. The conference holds that the term 'nation' is also to be applied to the Jewish people. In the light of existing circumstances, however, it is still too soon to put forth the demand for national autonomy for the Jews...⁴⁰

At the same time, this declaration was limited to abolition of discriminatory laws and protesting oppression while avoiding national feeling.⁴⁰ This was meant to appease the members who wanted an answer to the national question, but the convention refused to outright support a Jewish national aspiration. They were still following the national-neutralism that Medem preached.

At the fifth convention in 1903, the party split between those promoting national aspirations and those opposing them.⁴¹ Finally, at the sixth convention in 1905, the party passed a resolution advocating for Jewish cultural autonomy.⁵¹ By passing this resolution, they recognized that Jews have a different history and culture than those of the Russian people. They finally recognized a Jewish identity. As stated before, this was antagonistic to the Marxist principle of internationalism and an international working class.

The biography of Bundist leader, Vladimir Medem, who was formally a supporter of national-neutralism, still maintains the principles of one class over multiple identities:

A national culture as an independent entity, as a closed circle with its pericular content, does not exist at all. The national is the pericular form into which the universally human content is poured." The contents of cultural life, which is generally the

⁴⁰ Koppel, 17.

⁴¹ Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, 229.

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same all over, takes various colors and various national forms, as soon as it enters into different groups with different social relationships.⁴²

This passage means that members of the Bund continued to disagree on the role of national-cultural autonomy as their ideology. Jewish nationalism was a part of the Zionist ideology, which is why Medem might have shied away from this. Also, it could have been because he recognized that the Marxist principle of internationalism should be higher than Jewish identity. Either way, it shows that the Bund had a difficult time uniting their own members around this ideology and an even harder time convincing the larger socialist party of their ideology.

Nira-Yuval Davis, a notable historian of gender, remarks that the Bundists wanted to change their socio-economic reality into a reality where Jews were free from isolation and discrimination, but then would have no specific economic or social function.⁴³ They were working to end the economic and social conditions in which national cultural autonomy was possible. Therefore, their ideology was contradictory and would have ultimately eliminated the need for their party had they met their goals.

The tenth Congress of the Bund in April 1917 declared their independence from the Russian party completely. Their resolution stated that

anyone who himself a Jew by nationality is considered a member of this legal public institution. The national cultural organizations include within the sphere of their competency the entire field of the nation's cultural life: the school work, the development of literature, art, also scientific and technical

⁴² Vladimir Medem. *The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem: The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, (New York: KTVA Publishing House, 1979), 188.

⁴³ Nira Yuval-Davis, 16.

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knowledge. All institutions of the national-cultural organization and the schools they create must have a purely secular character. The language of the national-cultural organization is Hebrew.⁴⁴

The Bund took advantage of the instability of the Tsarist regime and the new socialist government to claim their autonomy over the education of the Jewish population. They wanted control over the school system, as it would allow them to shape how the future Jewish population would think and act. That is why they rejected any sort of religious influence in their schools because of their reliance on the Marxist anti-religion ideology. Notably, they changed the language in which they were to teach and speak to Hebrew instead of Yiddish. They had previously used Yiddish to mobilize the Jewish population. The switch to Hebrew could come from the growing influence of Zionism in the community and the Zionist promotion of Hebrew as the language of Jews. However, Hebrew is also intrinsically tied to religion, something the Bundists rejected, because the Bible, Tanach, and other important religious texts are written in Hebrew.

The Bundist identity was a fluid mix of Jewish and Marxist identities that influenced their oath, leaflets, and their membership in the party. An examination of their oath “Di Shuve” shows an absence of any reference to Jewishness or Jewish identity. The party wrote this oath in 1902 before they had fully come to Jewish identity and national aspiration as it did in 1905. It says:

Brothers and sisters in toil and struggle
All who are dispersed far and wide
Come together, the flag is ready

⁴⁴ Robert Brower, “The Resolution of the Tenth Conference of the Bund, April 1917.” In *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: Documents.*, Vol. 1. Stanford University Press, 1961: 428-429.

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It waves in anger, it is red with blood!

Swear an oath of life and death!

Heaven and earth will hear us,

The light stars will bear witness.

An oath of blood, an oath of tears,

We swear, we swear, we swear!

We swear an endless loyalty to the Bund.

Only it can free the slaves now.

The red flag is high and wide.

It waves in anger, it is red with blood!

Swear an oath of life and death!⁴⁵

It speaks about a “red flag” which is in reference to the colors established by the French flag that made the proletariat the color red. Later, red is associated with the Soviet Union, but here, it means the working class. It references the “slaves,” which could be the slavery of the working class. Marx saw the working class as enslaved by the bourgeoisie. It could also be in reference to the more Jewish identity as slaves under the Tsar, who restricted them and treated them as second-class citizens. A final explanation could be identification with the slaves of the story of Exodus from the Bible, although this is unlikely because they espoused secular values. Either way, this oath lacks a specific Jewish identity.

Another way to understand their identity is through the leaflets they published. Figure 1 shows a man holding a hammer and a torch with the tag line “Join the Future” in Polish and

⁴⁵ Shlomo Rappoport. *Di Shuve (The Oath)* (California: Stanford University, 1902), n.p.

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Yiddish. This was posted in Warsaw, Poland. This man is seen to be strong, the opposite of how Jews were portrayed by Christian sources. Perhaps this is how the Bundists viewed themselves because they were finally fighting for themselves politically and physically with their party and self-defense leagues. They are no longer the weak, docile population. Also the man does not feature the stereotypical large Jewish nose, which means they did not feel like they needed the man to be stereotypical or overtly Jewish. The man is carrying a hammer, which is the recognized symbol of the worker that the Bolsheviks also used. Uniquely, the man is carrying fire, which could be representative of how the Bundists perceived movement of the Jewish community into the modern world.⁴⁶ The Bundists perceived the typical Jew of the shtetl, the ultra-religious, superstitious uneducated Jew as backwards and primitive.⁴⁷ They used both Polish and Yiddish on this leaflet because it was posted in Poland. Although they originated in Russia proper, they still had a large following in Poland, and this leaflet is showing that they recognized their Polish audience, but were still true to Yiddish identity.

⁴⁶ “Join the Future.” Digital Image. *Labor History*. n.d., n.p.

⁴⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, 17.

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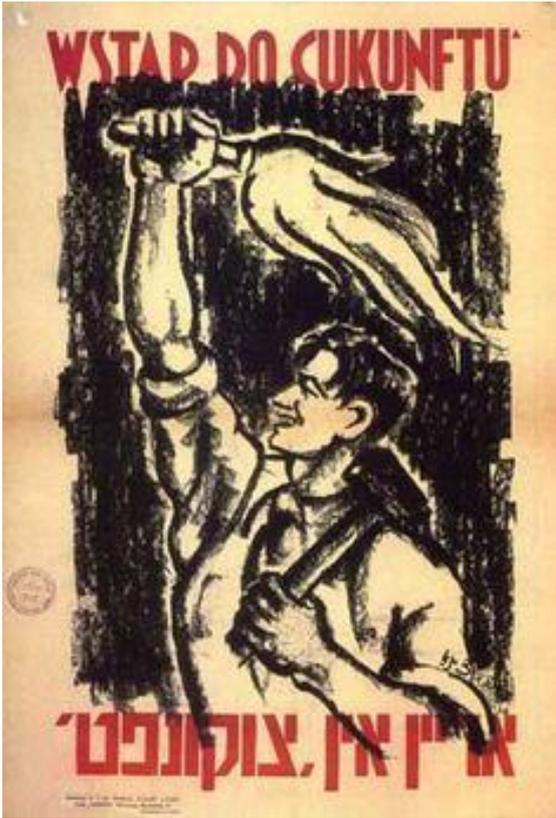


Figure 1

The members of the Bund clearly had a large influence on its ideology. As mentioned previously, many of the founders were intellectuals—although the number of intellectuals in the founding of the Bundist party was far less than the number of founders of the Bolshevik party.⁴⁸ Figure 2 shows a gathering of the local Bundist members in Broisov, Russia (now Belarus) in 1904.⁴⁹ The figures are well dressed in clothing worn by intellectuals, not laborers. The Bund failed to attract members because they created a group of intellectuals, who had never had experience with the working class, to advocate for the working class.⁵⁰ In Figure 3, we see a rally of the Bund in 1917 that was attended by a substantial population.⁵¹ Mostly, well-dressed men and boys, who could have been a part of the Bundist youth



Figure 2

⁴⁸ Koppel Pinson, 9.

⁴⁹ “Bundist Meeting.” Digital Image. *YIVO Encyclopedia*. n.p., 1905.

⁵⁰ S.M Dubnow. *History of Jews in Russia and Poland*. Vol. 3. 3 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920), 67.

⁵¹ “Bundist Demonstration.” Digital Image. *Wikipedia*. n.p, 1917.

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organization called “Tsukunft” or future, attended it.⁵² It is difficult to tell whether they are intellectuals or workers because of the coats over their clothes, but some of the men have to be either intellectuals or bosses because they are wearing fur collars.



Figure 3

Women are featured alongside men in the members’ gathering (Figure 2).⁵³ Marxism preaches equality between the sexes, which would have been a relief to the restricted lives of Jewish women. Women were a smaller part of the intelligentsia and the work force. The education of Jewish women living in Russia depended on the wealth and devoutness of the family. Women of wealthier, more secular families attended schools in Russia and Western Europe. On the other hand, women of lower class, religious families were only educated for prayer. Religious families often disowned women who went to the revolutionary movement. Some women in the movement began to regard their physical appearance as frivolous and never married. The Bund and other socialist groups were able to appeal to Jewish women in

⁵² Bernard Goldstein. *Twenty Years with the Jewish Labor Bund: Memoirs of Interwar Poland* (Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2016), 23.

⁵³ “Bundist Meeting.” Digital Image. *YIVO Encyclopedia*. n.p., 1905.

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the same way they appealed to men, yet women participated in a smaller proportion than men.⁵⁴ In Figure 3, women are also seen at the rally, but there are very few.⁵⁵

The Bund did not just have to compete with the Russian Social Democratic Working Party, but with other groups like the Zionists and the Polish socialists. Zionism was one of competing ideologies taking over Jews in the early 20th century. Theodor Herzl expanded Zionism into a mass movement in 1897. This group had the goal of a re-establishment of a Jewish state in Israel (then Palestine).⁵⁶ The Bund despised Zionism so much that at the Fourth Bundist Congress in 1901, they created a resolution that said,

The conference sees the ultimate goal of political Zionism, i.e. achieving a territory for the Jewish people—if it means that only a fraction of the Jewish people would be settled there—as something which is not very important and which would not solve the Jewish problem.⁵⁷

Although the Bund wanted cultural autonomy for the Jews of Russia, they did not want a specifically Jewish area. The Bundists saw the Zionists as running away from the Jewish problem of emancipation. Instead of facing the anti-Semitism and inequalities, the Bund saw Zionism as something that would separate the Jews into different classes—those wanting a state and those who did not, ruining their goal of a society free from discrimination and separation.

Bund in Larger Russian Marxist Movement:

⁵⁴ Henry Tobias. *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 137.

⁵⁵ “Bundist Demonstration.” Digital Image. *Wikipedia*. n.p, 1917.

⁵⁶ Nira Yuval-Davis, 12.

⁵⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, 12.

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Many Jews joined the Bolshevik and Menshevik parties instead of the Bund. Jews were over-represented in the Bolshevik party and its elite in the years prior to the 1917 revolutions. They made up many of its leaders and high-ranking party officials.⁵⁸ Most of the socialist Jews identified politically with the ideology of the Jewish Bund, then Zionism, then a smaller number with the Mensheviks, and the smallest number with the Bolsheviks. Most Jews did not support Bolshevism because of the atheism of the party and its economic policy that would have hurt many Jewish merchants, business owners, and traders.⁵⁹ Therefore, the Bund had to appeal to the Jewish workers in a way that did not use atheism as the main tenant. Although the Bundists were against religion, they never were as critical as the Russian Marxists, because they knew that Judaism itself was tied with Jewish identity.

The Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party was founded in 1898, a year after the Bund formed. The Bund supplied this movement with many of the foremost leaders like Leon Trotsky, one of the organizers of the first coup in 1917 and Yakov Sverlov, the first president of the Supreme Soviet.⁶⁰ The Bund played a large role during the early years of the RSDWP, but as the party grew, the Bund was pushed out of the party. In the beginning, the Bund was given autonomy over organizing the Jewish workers. The Bundists wanted the exclusive right to organize Jewish workers because they claimed that the Jews were a nation and therefore required a separate Jewish socialist organization.⁶¹ Their previous difficulty in deciding on the issue of Jewish national autonomy vanished here. During the First Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) in 1898, the Bund attended with the

⁵⁸ Liliana Riga. "Ethnonationalism, Assimilation, and the Social Worlds of the Jewish Bolsheviks in Fin de Siècle Tsarist Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no.4 (2006): 765.

⁵⁹ Jerry Muller. "Radical Anticapitalism." In *Capitalism and the Jews* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2010), 140.

⁶⁰ Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, 230.

⁶¹ Nira Yuval Davis, 93.

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demand that in the future they be allowed to decide national and cultural ideals for the Jewish proletariat. The RSDWP agreed to their demands without argument.⁶²

The leading Russian Social Democrats all adopted a negative attitude toward the national question, excluding the Bundists. The Bund followed the Austrian-Marxists' decision on the national question.⁶³ They borrowed ideology from the leading European and Czech socialist, Karl Kautsky, who supported the creation of autonomous national states within Austria-Hungary. The Bundists supported this ideology because they saw the value in the representation of minority groups. While Karl Kautsky was trying to bring harmony between the communities in Austria, the Bundists wanted to bring harmony between the religious and secular Jewish communities and between the Russian and Jewish communities.⁶⁴ Therefore, the Bundists formed around an ideology that was different from that of the Russian Marxists because the Russian Marxists stuck more to a literal interpretation of Marx's theories on the role of nationalism and workers' movements.

Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin said about the Jewish national question in 1903 that: "The idea of a Jewish nationality is contradictory to the interests of the Jewish proletariat, in that it encourages directly and indirectly a 'ghetto mentality,' hostile to assimilation."⁶⁵ Lenin was hostile towards the Bund because of their nationalist aspirations because he thought it encouraged the Jews to stay isolated and separated from society. Their nationalist aspirations did not fit with the Marxist ideal of internationalism, and this later caused a split with the RSDWP.

⁶² Henry Tobias. "The Bund and the First Congress of the RSDWP: An Addendum," *The Russian Review* 24 no. 4 (1965): 395.

⁶³ Koppel Pinson, 250.

⁶⁴ Calvin Goldscheider and Alan S Zuckerman. „The Formation of Jewish Political Movements in Europe,” *Modern Judaism* 8, no.3 (1998): 97.

⁶⁵ Koppel Pinson, 257.

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The Bund and the Russian party split in 1903 after increasing tensions between the two parties. This break came after the Second Congress in which the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were formed. The Bund and Lenin fought over the future program of the party, and the Bund was outvoted in the vote for autonomy. The Bund wanted to maintain a level of autonomy from the Russian party and demanded to be able to organize the Jewish masses in their own way. They wanted to be able to mobilize the mass of Jewish workers around common Jewish problems such as discrimination and pogroms (anti-Jewish attacks).⁶⁶ In response to these problems, they organized Jewish defense leagues and strikes of Jewish companies.⁶⁷

The general socialist movement supported the Bundists and other Jews' struggle against laws that discriminated against Jews; however, the demand for cultural autonomy went beyond asking for civil and political rights. Marxist ideology was against the demand of cultural autonomy, because it separated one group by history and culture. Although the Bundists agreed to follow the party's program, the Bolsheviks still called their demands nationalistic and rejected them. Lenin wanted to create a single party that included Jewish Marxists, therefore, eliminating the need for the Bund.⁶⁸ The Bundist identity was completely separated from the RSDWP identity after this break.

In 1903, it should be noted, the Bund was still technically neutral on the question of Jewish nationalism. The main problem the Bundists saw was that the Bolsheviks would not be able to reach the largely Yiddish speaking Jewish proletariat because they wanted all of the literature to be in Russian.⁶⁹ Ironically, many of the Bundist leaders were unable to speak Yiddish themselves, but they still felt they had a closer connection to the Jewish population

⁶⁶ Leonard Schapiro. "The Role of Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 40, no. 94 (1961): 158.

⁶⁷ Nira Yuval Davis, 11.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁹ Leonard Schapiro, 157.

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than the Bolsheviks.⁷⁰ The Bundists believed Jewish workers would be left out of Lenin's movement because he could not appeal to them, causing them to split because they understood that specific help to Jewish workers was more important than a general workers' movement.

By 1906, the Bund had re-joined the RSDWP. At the convention, the Bund no longer wanted to be recognized as the only socialist party for Jews, but wanted the right to organize in all Russian territories. At this point in time, the Bund had adopted a program of national-cultural autonomy. The Bund were allowed to organize Jewish workers, but the issue of cultural autonomy was pushed to the side and forgotten by the RSDWP.⁷¹ When the Bundists returned to the party in 1906, the previous support of cultural autonomy was ended. The Bund lost their nationalist voice when they returned back to the Russian party—they understood that their earlier passionate support of nationalism would continue to exclude them from the larger Russian Marxist movement.⁷²

It is not fair to say that the Russian Marxists and other Russian socialists were anti-Semitic, but this ideology was an underlying theme in society at the time, which in turn alienated the Bundists. Some Marxists did come and support the Jewish population against pogroms that were committed against the Jews.⁷³ The majority of the Left chose to ignore anti-Semitism because they did not want to become the object of anti-Semitic attacks.⁷⁴ The Left chose to ignore anti-Semitism, showing they were not as committed to the Marxist principle of a classless society. They chose to ignore a problem that would potentially cause disunity in this society if not addressed by the party.

⁷⁰ Zvi Y. Gitelman. *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, (Pittsburgh, The University of Pittsburgh, 2003), 110.

⁷¹ Ben Halpern, 231.

⁷² Calvin Goldscheider, 97.

⁷³ Leonard Schapiro, 155.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 232.

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Unlike the Bund, the RSDWP prioritized identities by putting Marxism before Jewish identity. This means that they accepted Jews as revolutionaries first and their ethnic identity second. Therefore, Jews from an entire spectrum of assimilation and identity found a role in the party. The early party allowed for “Jewish-Jews” and “non-Jewish Jews” to be accepted.⁷⁵ Early Bolshevism allowed Jews of all backgrounds to join, causing competition with the Bundists. Although the Bundist ideology indirectly required some sort of Jewish identity, this party did not.

During the Russian Civil War, which lasted from 1917-1922, the Bund tried to assert their identity and right to rule in a country that experienced a large power vacuum after the death of the Tsar. During the war, the Bund formed Jewish battalions that fought on the side of the Bolshevik revolution. Many of these regiments were multinational.⁷⁶ Only during the civil war did Jews begin to join the Bolsheviks, as they were not attracted to the pro-monarchist Whites who committed pogroms against them. In 1920, the Bund formally joined the new Jewish section of the Communist party. Jews were overrepresented in the Bolshevik party along with other minority groups, but they were gradually phased out of leadership in this party due to anti-Semitism disguised accusations of capitalistic activity.⁷⁷ In Poland, the Bund continued to be active until World War II. It organized Jewish defense against the Nazis and the Poles during the war. After 1947, the Bund ceased to exist due to loss of numbers from the Holocaust and immigration to Israel.⁷⁸

The Bund’s complex identity allowed them to construct a party that coupled Marxist ideology with Jewish cultural and national aspirations. The Bund was a party that fought for Jewish workers’ rights that were largely ignored due to rampant anti-Semitism in the Russian

⁷⁵ Liliana Riga, 796.

⁷⁶ Nira Yuval Davis, 11.

⁷⁷ Jerry Muller, 141-142.

⁷⁸ Nira Yuval Davis, 11.

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empire. The party managed to mobilize a previously passive group and move them into the larger Russian society. This irreversible change in Jewish thought led to more prominence in society and better opportunities for the Eastern European Jews. Ultimately, this assimilation and acceptance into society led to the degradation and destruction of the Jewish shtetls, their culture, and their communities. The antisemitism of the Russian population under the Tsar did not vanish but continued on in the new “classless” society. However, the Bundist legacy of socialism and Jewish identity lives on today in Israel and its welfare system.

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