

Jewish Politics in 1917

1. The Bund

The largest and best-organised Jewish socialist party, the Bund had been founded in 1897, at the same time as the RSDWP. It retained very close ties to the RSDWP, especially the Mensheviks, with some radical members of the Bund becoming close to Menshevik-Internationalists. The Bund believed that Jewish workers should ally themselves with non-Jewish workers, whilst at the same time protecting aspects of Jewish culture and defending themselves against antisemitism. It was a strongly anti-Zionist organisation. As most working-class Jews spoke Yiddish, the Bund argued this should be the language of the Jewish people in Russia.

2. Poale-Tsion

Poale-Tsion, meaning "workers of Zion", combined socialism and Zionism, arguing that a Jewish socialist state should be established in Palestine. Its members were most closely aligned with left-wing Menshevik-Internationalists, and demanded Yiddish be adopted as the main Jewish language.

3. United Jewish Socialist Workers Party (OESRP)

Formed from two separate Jewish socialist groups, the OESRP was a Marxist-influenced populist organisation. It advocated extra-territorial autonomy for Jews, meaning Jews would control their own affairs but without having their own homeland, making it anti-Zionist but not entirely integrationist. Like other Jewish socialist parties, it endorsed Yiddish as the Jewish language.

4. General Zionists

Russia's "General Zionists" were non-socialists and made up the largest Jewish party in 1917, with about four times the membership of the Bund. It was much more influenced by Jewish religion than the Jewish socialist parties and advocated Hebrew, the language of Jewish religious scripture, as the Jewish language. It called for a Jewish homeland to be established in Palestine and, before that, Jews to have autonomy to control their own affairs in Russia.

5. Jewish National Group

A non-socialist party allied to the Kadets, the Jewish National Group had moderate liberal ideas. It was anti-Zionist, arguing that Jews demanding a separate homeland would weaken Russia, and secular, meaning it sought to separate politics and religion. However, the Jewish National Group did call for cultural autonomy and separate religious education for Jews, which it argued should be in *both Hebrew and Yiddish*.

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