At the end of the nineteenth century two political movements appeared that aimed to change the fate of the Jewish people in Europe. The first was the Zionist movement, which strove to solve the suffering of the Jews by severing their connection with Europe; the second was the Bund, which saw the solution to the Jewish problem in the participation of Jewish workers in the general revolutionary struggle. In the eyes of the Bund cooperation with the socialist parties of the majority nations in eastern Europe had a threefold significance: on a tactical level it facilitated the political and economic struggles of the Jewish proletariat; on a strategic level it complemented the political activity of the Bund; and on a doctrinal level it was the necessary condition for realizing the final goals of the movement. Therefore, the issue examined in this article—the cooperation between the Bund and the PPS (Polska Partia Socialistyczna—Polish Socialist Party) in independent Poland between the two world wars—is central to understanding the nature and path of this Jewish workers’ party in eastern Europe.

The accepted historiography on the Bund divides the years from 1897 to 1939 into two periods: ‘the Russian period’, which ended with the liquidation of the Bund in Soviet Russia in 1920; and the period of the sovereign Polish state, which ended with the Nazi occupation of Poland. During each of these periods the relationship between the Bund and its external partner differed. During the ‘Russian period’ the Bund saw itself as an integral part of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party, while during the ‘Polish period’ relations with the PPS were complex and unstable. This difference, coupled with the difficulties of the Bund in adapting to independent Poland, strengthened the view according to which the Bund regarded the Russian period as its Golden Age and the Russian Empire as its natural habitat. The Bund’s relations with the Russian Social Democrats were natural relations, since the two participants spoke the same ideological language and their leaders came from the same student circles. The Bund and the PPS, however, had very differing ideologies and past histories but found themselves compelled to cooperate by political circumstances. Indeed, the complex relationship between the Bund and the PPS goes back to the earliest contacts between the two groups.

The relationship between the Bund and the Russian Social Democrats was an institutional relationship that was expressed in the party press and party assemblies and was directed by an small group of political émigrés who lacked any real connection with the communities they were trying to influence. These communities also had few direct contacts. While the centres of the Russian proletariat were concentrated in the centre of the Empire, Jewish workers lived in the western provinces of the country. This geographical distance limited the contact between the field workers of the Bund and the professional revolutionaries of the Russian Social Democrats. In contrast, the Jewish masses lived in the very areas that were the fields of activity for the PPS: western
Ukraine; Belarus; Lithuania and Poland. In these areas all trade union and political activity involved contact (whether cooperative or hostile) between the Bund and the PPS. Thus the relationships between the Bund, the Social Democrats and the PPS should not be seen in chronological sequence, but rather as continuous but on different levels: contacts with the Social Democrats occurred on an ideological and leadership level, while contacts with the PPS took place in daily activities in the field. Although this article focuses primarily on independent Poland, the relationship between the Bund and the PPS in this period stemmed from ideological positions that had crystallized by 1906. Contact had occurred even before the different social democratic Jewish groups were united into one party—the Bund. Already in 1894, in the wave of immigration that was defined by the Poles as ‘the Litvak immigration’, a group from Vilna arrived in Warsaw, and a year later established the Union of Jewish Workers. This immigration, which deserves further research, brought to Poland new ideas such as Jewish nationalism and Russian culture. The appearance of this group is noted in a letter by Jewish members of the PPS in the city which reported that the group advocated a separate Jewish workers party in all areas of Russia to be founded on a national Jewish basis, and whose central demand was equal rights for Jews.

In the eyes of the PPS, the Bund was supported by the same class of Jews that was associated with the Russification of the western districts of the Russian Empire. From the beginning the PPS dedicated its attention to the Jewish question and in an article in 1993 in its London journal Przedswit took issue with the Jewish socialists: ‘It is difficult for us not to recognize the fact...[that] the Russian government is able to use socialist hands for its hard and difficult work [of Russification]. How much our fear is well-founded can be realized by the fatal influence that Russian Jews, who are acculturated into the Russian culture, have on the Jewish question in Poland.’ The PPS’s view of the Bund as an anti-Polish force and its members as proponents of Russification in Poland and Lithuania crystallized in a doctrinal resolution at the fourth congress of the PPS, held a month after the establishment of the Bund in November 1897. According to this: ‘Because...the activities of the Jewish groups that are now appearing under the name “General Union of Jewish workers in Poland and Russia” involve isolationism and organizational and programmatical separatism which are dangerous to the movement,...the congress resolves that the political direction of the Union is incorrect and essentially involves rejection of solidarity with the Polish and Lithuanian proletariat in its struggle for freedom from the occupying Russian government.’

On an organizational level the congress demanded acceptance of the hegemony of the PPS in Poland and Lithuania by all the socialist workers groups in the area. To the PPS the Bund was objectionable on three grounds: its support for Russification

---

1. This is also the view of Moshe Mishkinski. See his article on this website.
3. Przedswit, No. 5 (May, 1893).
which was its fundamental fault; its fragmentation of the workers movement in historic Poland; and its opposition to the desire of the Polish people for an independent country. Only those Jewish bodies that were integrated into Polish culture and language, accepted the hegemony of the PPS in all areas of activity and fought for Polish independence were worthy of support and recognition. The Bund was accused of spreading Russian culture and using Yiddish in its activities within the Jewish proletariat. This was unacceptable for the PPS for whom the test of loyalty was integration into Polish culture. What the PPS desired according to a Der yidisher arbeter, a Galician paper sympathetic to the Bundist position, was that ‘the Jewish intelligentsia of the PPS...deny its mother tongue, conduct itself only in Polish and conduct its socialist propaganda in Polish.’

The area of the Bund’s geographical growth and the Marxist orientation of its ideology put it on a collision course with the PPS. The origins of the Bund were in the area between ethnic Poland and greater Russia, an area in which the Ukrainian and Belorussian majorities had not yet begun the processes of urbanization. Since the cities in this area were populated by Jews, Poles and Russian officials, it was a mosaic of nations in which Jews were sometimes the largest element. The composition of the population dictated the call for ethnic autonomy within a general Russian federation as a solution to the national question. From a Jewish national standpoint, only within such a wide-ranging framework was there any meaning to a federative solution of this type. The division of the empire into national states would place the Jewish minority in all areas in direct conflict with the majority nation. The federative structure which characterized the Russian Social Democrats was desirable in the eyes of the Bund’s founders not only as an organic expression of its federative programme but also because of the opportunities for political action it afforded to the Jewish workers’ party. The tendency to favour the preservation of the Russian empire was supported by the cultural process of modernization which part of Russian Jewry had undergone. On the cultural level this process was expressed by the absorption of Russian culture and on the ideological plane by the acceptance of Marxist dogma. To the early Jewish socialists, Russian was both the language of culture and the language of progress. The transition to the use of Yiddish was the practical consequence of the growth of the Bund and its development as a mass party—because the language of the Jewish worker was Yiddish only by using this language would the party be able to achieve its goals. The ideology of the Bund thus made conflict with the PPS inevitable not only because of the point of view of the PPS, but also because of that of the Bund itself.

In its desire to compel the Bund to accept the organizational principles of the PPS, the PPS employed the policies of boycott and refusal to cooperate. Its hostility toward the Bund stemmed from a fundamental principle, that the Bund—an integral part of the Russian Social Democrat Party—belonged to a movement that would never succeed in carrying out a revolution. The Russian socialists were portrayed not only as ineffectual, but also as an element that preferred subjugation to Tsarist oppression over

5. Przedswit, No. 4 (April, 1893).
6. Der yiddisher arbeter, No. 1 (Lvov, 1898).
the right of self determination for peoples oppressed by Russia. Until 1904 this view seemed to coincide with reality. However, the Russo-Japanese War and the defeat of the Russian army in Manchuria split the PPS into the ‘elders’ who sought to use the war as a means to inspire armed rebellion and the ‘young’ who believed that the outbreak of revolution in the tsarist Empire obligated the PPS to take a new look at the Russian workers’ movement in Russia and its ally in Poland—the Bund.

At the end of January 1905 a general strike broke out which, although coordinated by the different socialist parties, was dominated by the Bund. The Bund proved not only to be the sole mass socialist party in the Russian empire but also as capable of mobilizing the masses into revolutionary action. This situation was the result of the difficult situation of the Jewish worker, who was exploited as a worker and discriminated against as a Jew and therefore was very militant. There is no doubt that this militancy was fully expressed in the events of June 1905 in the great industrial centre of Łódź, where most of the Łódź proletarian population fought in street battles and on the barricades and whose victims numbered hundreds of dead and wounded. In contrast to militancy of the Bund, the activity of the PPS were very limited in scope. The belief that the PPS had no choice but to change its tactics regarding the Russian revolutionary movement in general and its relations to the Bund in particular was expressed at its Seventh Congress in March 1905. Calls were made for an increasing closeness to the Bund: ‘In relation to the Bund, the congress resolves to recognize Workers’ Councils it has established in Warsaw and in Vilna and also authorizes the Central Committee and the local branches to coordinate their stands with it in certain cases.’

Although both the struggle between the PPS and the Bund and the rapprochement between the two parties were expressed in ideological terms, the sources suggest that the class between the two parties was less the result of ideology but than a consequence of the struggle for control of the Jewish worker. Almost two decades after the 1905 revolution, the editor of the PPS mouthpiece Robotnik, Feliks Perl, himself of Jewish origin, wrote: ‘There were moments when the PPS enjoyed only vacillating support among Jewish workers. After the fact it became clear that our support was superficial and not stable. We did not succeed in competing with the Bund.’ In the first years of the workers’ movement in the Russian empire the Bund was the sole mass movement among the various socialist parties. It enjoyed this status not only among the Russian Social Democrats, but also in the area of Poland in relation to the PPS, and this despite the gap between the actual number of registered members. In the summer of 1906 the Bund had 16,225 members throughout Poland. The number of members of the PPS and its allied organizations and trade unions reached approximately 55,000. The PPS certainly attempted to reach the Jewish proletariat. In the years between 1896 and 1905 it published 22 propaganda pamphlets addressed to the Jewish worker, including 19 that were published in the four years prior to the revolution of 1905. The number of

8. F. Perl, Szkic dziejow PPS, Księga pamiątkowa na 30-lecie PPS (Warsaw, 1923), 7.
publications in Yiddish is evidence of the importance that the PPS attached to gaining support among Jewish workers. After the suppression of the 1905 revolution and the decline in support for both the Bund and the PPS, articles discussing relations between the two parties ceased to appear and it was only in independent Poland that these relations again became significant.

**The Bund in independent Poland**

The Jewish public accepted the idea of the establishment of independent Poland with enthusiasm on the assumption that the new country would be founded on democratic principles and would recognize the rights of minorities as guaranteed by Minorities’ Treaty of June 1919. These hopes were quickly dashed by the wave of pogroms in which soldiers of the new Polish army took part, as well as the overt antisemitic activities of the Polish government. The years of the second Polish republic are recalled in the collective memory of Polish Jewry as a period of distress and discrimination.

The history of independent Poland can be divided into five chronological periods. The first period began with the declaration of Polish independence in November 1918 and continued, with much internal turbulence and an attempt to create a democratic framework, until the murder of President Narutowicz in November 1922. The second period, characterized by a series of right wing governments, ended in May 1926, with the coup which brought Piłsudski to power, while the third, the period of the establishment of his rule, ended in 1930. The fourth period, in which Piłsudski’s government, the Sanacja, was stabilized, began with the imprisonment of the centrist-left opposition leaders and ended with the death of Piłsudski in May 1935. The fifth period, the period of Piłsudski’s heirs, ended with the Nazi invasion of Poland. In each period the Jewish public and the Bund found themselves in a situation that necessitated different types of political activity, and, from the viewpoint of our article, also the building of a different relationship with the PPS. The historiography of the Bund divides the era of independent Poland into three periods: the period of ideological crystallization from the founding of the Polish state until the Bund joined the Second International in 1930; the period of the shaping of a new tactical orientation while preserving ideological purity between 1930 and 1936; and the transformation of the Bund into a mass Jewish party from 1936 on.

Already in the first days of the country’s existence, the Bund had come into conflict with much of Polish public opinion. During the First World War the Bund had supported the anti-war declaration agreed at Zimmerwald in September 1915 and regarded the Polish-Soviet war of 1920 as an expression of the unbridled nationalism of the new Poland. When the leader of the Bund, Henryk Alter, spoke in Warsaw against the war, he and his associates were forced to flee from the platform in order to avoid arrest. During this period relations with the PPS sank to a low level. The PPS, which had supported the First World War as a means of achieving Polish independence, also favoured the war against the Soviets and downplayed the antisemitic pogroms. The two

parties found themselves on opposite sides of the fence in all areas that had ideological meaning or were symbols of identity for them. One expression of this was the question of which international grouping to join: the Second International, located in Amsterdam, whose constituent parties had supported the First World War or the Third International (the Comintern), located in Moscow, which was the umbrella organization for world communism. The PPS belonged to the Second International, while the Bund, unable to decide on its ideological identification, compromised by joining the International Office for Information, whose centre was in Paris and which later became the Second and a Half International, independent of both the Second International and the Comintern. The compromise, although it reflected its self-image and neutralized the internal conflict in the Bund, did not answer the primary reason for joining an international organization—finding an ally. The Bund found itself alone both on the world stage and among the Jews in Poland.

The Bund’s isolation was expressed in all its activities in the first decade of Polish independence. In all elections until 1930 the Bund stood alone and without allies. It paid a price for its ideological stance not only in its electoral isolation but also in its lack of electoral success. This isolation was not overcome after the coup of May 1926, even though this was supported both by the PPS and the Bund. The coup was welcomed by all the parties of the left, who saw in it the elimination of a dangerously rightist government. The Bund activists, who hoped to participate in the leftist camp, viewed the coup as a chance to break out of their isolation. Bernard Goldstein, a Bund member, wrote: ‘All of us in the Bund were enthusiastic about the events, we were full…of hope for freedom.’ However, Piłsudski, who exploited the support of the left and the trade unions on his way to power, understood that in order to rule he had to move closer to the conservatives, above all those representing the landowners. Following his meeting with Janusz Radziwiłł, he distanced himself from his former supporters and moved closer to the conservative right (in contrast to the radical right which remained his sworn enemy). This change was exemplified by the list presented by the government for the 1928 elections to the Sejm, which included the landed aristocracy and the industrialists (among them also Jews). The immediate victim of the Piłsudski revolution was the party he had supported before 1914, the PPS, which was now split and relegated to the margin of political life.

The politics of Piłsudski’s regime created a reality in which the Bund found itself confronted with a major contradiction in determining its political path. As a party representing Jews, the Bund had reason to be satisfied with the steps taken by the government which in 1931 invalidated all still-existing legal restrictions against the Jews. Jewish public opinion supported these measures and regarded them as the righting of long-standing injustices. However some government measures that were seen as pro-Jewish were at odds with the democratic values of the Bund. In 1933 the Polish government amended the law on universities, an act that enabled the government to

intervene in the universities. While this law affected academic freedom, it also allowed for the defense of Jewish students, who were attacked by antisemites on the campus exposing the conflict between the Bund’s position as a socialist party and that of an advocate for the Jews.

From the end of 1929 Poland suffered particularly severely from the impact of the Great Depression. The Polish government took two main steps: it levied heavy taxes on the urban population in order to aid the rural economy, a step which favoured the landed aristocracy. In order to prevent unemployment in towns, the government took over bankrupt factories, although only those owned by Poles. These two steps hurt the Jewish worker, who, as a town dweller, was forced to pay higher taxes and was also exposed to unemployment because the factories owned by the government did not employ Jewish workers. In practice it became clear that these policies were good for some Jews, as they aided a number of the Jewish industrialists in the private industrial sector, although they did not improve the fate of the Jewish workers. The government actions led to conflict between the Bund, which saw these steps as expressions of discrimination, and the PPS, which supported the nationalization policies of the government as a way to prevent unemployment.

With the death of Piłsudski in 1935 the Bund’s dilemma effectively ceased. The government of Piłsudski’s successors adopted blatantly antisemitic measures, rejected democracy and looked toward the model of the increasing number of fascist states in Europe. This trend was reflected in a series of pogroms throughout the country in 1936 and early 1937 which the government did not strongly repress. As in 1905 the Bund took it upon itself to defend the interests not only of the Jewish proletariat but also of the general Jewish public. The public actions of the Bund transformed it into the party of the Jewish masses, a change that was also expressed its success at the ballot box. The policies of the PPS also underwent changes at this time. The party was pushed into opposition as a result of the government’s moves towards fascism and the increasing extremism of its measures. The PPS, therefore, grew closer to the Bund. In this period, the increasing closeness and cooperation between the two parties became routine at least on the level of the party leadership and its organs. This closeness reached its peak on the eve of World War Two.

The cooperation between the Bund and the PPS had significance in four areas: in the framework of the trade unions; in international organizations (first of all the Second International); in elections; and in public struggles. The contacts in the first three of these areas which had started in the 1920s were now given a permanent framework.

The position of the PPS regarding Jewish socialism
At the beginning of the century when the PPS and the Bund first confronted one another the PPS saw itself as the sole representative of authentic socialism and rejected all other proletarian movements in the area of Poland-Lithuania. When independent Poland was established and the PPS considered the Jewish question at its 17th Congress in 1920, it

---

regarded the Jews of Poland as a Yiddish-speaking religious group ruled by a clerical-bourgeois alliance. This approach assumed that through a secularization and adoption of Polish culture, coupled the establishment of the political hegemony of the socialist movement, the Jews would undergo a natural process of assimilation into the majority nation. It denied the Jews the right to self-determination and opposed the ideology of the Bund.\(^\text{15}\) The tension between the PPS and national Jewish elements grew during the war between Poland and the Soviet Union, which led to a wave of nationalism, along with a disregarding of the pogroms in which Polish soldiers took part. Even at its 19th Congress in January 1924, the PPS essentially denied the existence of the pogroms and tended to present them as mere street quarrels. The Congress did discuss question of national minorities in Poland and called for equal civil and legal rights, the abrogation of laws discriminating against minorities and the support of cultural and educational institutions in minority languages. The congress also demanded that socialists of the minority nationalities fight against nationalist and clerical trends among their own peoples.\(^\text{16}\) This was in line with earlier PPS policies, although against a background of growing repression by the rightist government against the minorities it must be seen as a step in favour of the national minorities, which also increased the distance between the PPS and the Polish right.

The split in the ranks of the PPS between supporters of Piłsudski (Jaworski’s group) and the centre and left of the party following the coup of May 1926 led to an increased understanding of the demands of the socialist parties of the minorities. In a discussion prior to the Twentieth Party Congress V. Kilewski wrote: ‘Our final goal is the establishment of a united party which includes the workers of all the peoples living in Poland. However the achievement of this goal is still far off and we must prepare for it. First we must make a formal agreement between the three major parties, the PPS, the German Social Democrats and the Bund...In the next stage the PPS must fight for realization of the justified claims of the minorities: education in their language and the right of the Jewish worker to work...only when we prove to our Jewish and German friends through our deeds that they have found in the PPS a loyal defender not just on the theoretical plane but also in actuality will the establishment of a united party with national emissaries not be met with resistance.’\(^\text{17}\) An even stronger position was taken by the editor of Robotnik, Mieczysław Niedziałkowski, who argued that the ‘Jewish question’ was not one of economics and religion but rather of national identity.\(^\text{18}\) This could be seen as a reversal of the position of the PPS, which now began to see the Jews as a nation, an approach that it had previously opposed. An article written in honour of the seventieth birthday of Herman Diamand, a PPS leader of Jewish origin, attempted, with some internal contradictions, to summarize the position of the party regarding the Jewish question. On the one side the author saw the Jews as a nation, but on the other

\(^{16}\) Robotnik, 5.1.1924.
\(^{17}\) Robotnik, 30.11.1928
\(^{18}\) Robotnik, 7.12.1928.
pointed out a cultural process following which two proletarian populations had emerged among the Jews: one Yiddish-speaking, organized by the Bund and the other Polish-speaking, which the PPS needed to lead. Because both groups were part of one people, he suggested the establishment of a single party that would unite both Polish and Jewish workers.  

In principle, the closer a publicist was to the left wing of the PPS, the more he took a position responding to the demands of the national minorities and thus closer to those of the Bund. In the 1930s all groups within the PPS were ready to meet the realistic expectations of the Bund in the areas of culture and education, but the gap between right and the left was still apparent in questions of principle. Recognition of the Jews of Poland as a nation was interpreted by the right as a basis for the belief that Poland was not able to solve the Jewish problem and therefore the Jews needed to emigrate. In contrast, the left accepted the Bund’s position, which regarded Polish Jews as a nation in all respects, but opposed their emigration. This point of departure rested on the assumption that the existence of a world-wide Jewish nation is a fiction shared by bourgeois Jewish nationalists and antisemites, despite the fact of the existence of a specific Polish-Jewish national group. The call of Zionists for Jews to emigrate was seen as a policy taken from Polish antisemites. The PPS left’s opposition to Jewish emigration became one of its markers in the 1930s. This approach was emphasized by Herman Diamand, who described Poland ‘as the sole homeland of Polish Jewry’ and opposed emigration in principle. In establishing this principle, the left tied it to the political tactical question of links to other parties. At the end of 1930, with the Passfield White Paper in the background, the editorial board of Robotnik held an interview with the leader of the Bund, Alexander Erlich. Erlich’s words were presented as those of the board, so much so that it led to a blurring of the positions of the interviewer and the interviewee:

The Sanacja (government) has formed an alliance with the most frightened and reactionary segment of the Jewish bourgeoisie. The Endeks in their proclamations ‘promise’ the Jewish masses ‘mass settlement in Erets Yisrael’, something which even the Zionists do not promise. In contrast to this we are organizing the labouring Jewish masses for the struggle for equal political and national rights here in Poland. This struggle is in our opinion part of the struggle for the general freedom of the working class in Poland.

The socialist movement in Poland, which desired, at least on a doctrinal level, to establish a classless government in Poland, was aware of the distance between this goal and the reality in which it was to be realized. Poland was an agrarian country and the working class that was the basis for the socialist movement was small and still tied to the Polish village, which in turn was dominated by other political forces. This situation affected the political strategy of the PPS leadership, which in the past surmounted this obstacle by means of national slogans that appealed to the general Polish population

20. Ibid.
regardless of the class to which it belonged. After Piłsudski’s revolution the PPS could no longer use this traditional national identification that had been taken over by Piłsudski and his followers. Not for nothing the group that supported his government and split from the PPS took to itself the name: the former PPS revolutionary party, the name of Piłsudski’s old party. According to the party leadership the only way to achieve the party’s goals both in the short term, as in the overthrow of the government, and in the long term, was to ally the party to popular democratic factors outside the socialist movement. The desire to create a popular political bloc that would include parties from the centre and the left led to the creation of the centrist-left electoral alliance, Centrolew, established for the elections to the Sejm in 1930. The political failure of this alliance did not fundamentally alter the assumption that the only way the PPS could influence the direction of Poland was through an alliance of popular forces of this type. In addition, this alliance freed the PPS leadership from the embrace that it feared, that of the communists in a framework based on class and later the framework of a communist-led popular front. The alliance, at the centre of which the PPS stood, was limited by the internal political differences that split the party into left and right throughout all the 1930s.

The argument within the PPS was similar to that taking place within the Bund, which was influenced by what was taking place in the PPS. From the beginning of the 1920s the Bund was divided between the majority, which included the party leadership (supporters of thesis no. 1), and the leftist minority (supporters of thesis no. 2). Although the central issue was the question of the international affiliation of the party, the question of political alliances was also articulated through the prism of this factional quarrel. The left, whose positions were anchored in preservation of the purity of Marxist doctrine, rejected the PPS as a ‘reformist’ party, in other words as a party that sacrificed its revolutionary nature and socialist principles. Its relationship to the PPS was expressed in the periodical Kegn shstrom, which from its first issue stressed the negative side of the PPS. The rejection of the PPS by the left was also expressed in the pamphlet of S. Shotn, who claimed that the PPS, which represented a Polish national standpoint, was not ready to grant this right to the Jewish worker. Shotn attacked the party leadership for its willingness to surrender its positions in exchange for superficial signs of cooperation from the PPS. The politics of the PPS during the period of Centrolew, the electoral alliance of parties of the centre and the left that brought to the side of the PPS the parties of the peasants and other popular groups and that was established for the elections of 1930, seemed to confirm not only the view of the left, but also placed in doubt the tactics of the party leadership. The preference of the PPS for an electoral alliance with the parties of the centre pushed the Bund into isolation. Therefore leaders of the Bund who desired cooperation with the PPS opposed this trend, perhaps more determinedly than the members of the left. In internal discussions that were held in the beginning of 1933 the desire to break ties with the PPS dominated, a

24. ibid., 61.
demand that was not translated into action.\textsuperscript{25}

The leadership’s primary problem in its relationship with the PPS was the lack of formal connections with the Polish party and the inability directly to influence its rank and file. However, in the summer of 1929, when the PPS and other minority parties decided to establish the bureau for international coordination, a rapprochement between the two parties began. In February 1930 a joint congress of the PPS, the Bund, and the German Social Democrats was held, dedicated to the socialists’ approach to the national question in Poland.\textsuperscript{26} However the role of the PPS in the Centrolew undermined this initiative. The Bund, loyal to the line of trans-national socialist cooperation, tried to establish a ‘socialist leftist bloc’ that would include the minority workers’ parties; however, the majority of these parties preferred participation with the PPS in the Centrolew and the Jewish parties remained on their own. Isolated and aware of the direction the wind was blowing within the PPS, which fought against the collapse of its policies, the leader of the Bund, Victor Alter, directly addressed members of the PPS: ‘The Centrolew has pushed the PPS into a framework of the politics of “Poland for the Poles” and has forced the minority socialist parties to find their own solutions...the socialist camp, despite its commitment to the brotherhood of peoples, is split along national lines.’ Alter’s criticism was brought up in the decision of the central committee in April 1931 that supported his demand to return to the unification of the socialist camp in Poland on a class basis, while recognizing the right of self-determination of minorities and the establishment of an international front of workers parties against Fascism.\textsuperscript{27} The declaration was an attempt to influence the members of the PPS on the eve of its 22nd Congress.

A more meaningful attempt to influence members of the PPS was made by the party newspapers. From 1928 the Bund had published a monthly journal in Polish, \textit{Nasza Walka}, although it did not achieve all the goals that the leadership of the Bund entrusted to it. In its analysis of the 22nd PPS Congress, the Bund leadership assumed that members of the PPS were in a process of radicalization, and that this process would bring the two parties closer. In order to strengthen this process the Bund tried to publish a radical daily in Polish, however it was shut down by order of the police. After this failure it published a weekly, \textit{Nowe Pismo}, in cooperation with the leftist circles of the PPS, which appeared between fall of 1932 and summer of 1935. It spearheaded the Bundist efforts to steer the PPS into an alliance with the national minority socialists. PPS publicists responded by pointing out that while the Bund demanded that the PPS establish an alliance with the minority parties, it was not able to do that itself within the Jewish proletariat. One of the important actions of the weekly was the dissemination of a questionnaire concerning ways in which the leaders of the socialist camp in Poland could cooperate. The responses to this questionnaire emphasized the distance between the goals of the Bundist leadership, which strove towards full cooperation with the PPS while preserving its independence and identity and those of the PPS, in which even the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{25} Andrzej Pilch, \textit{Dzieje ruchu robotniczego w Krokowskim 1918-1939} (Warsaw, 1989), 45.
\bibitem{26} J. Tomicki, \textit{Lewica socjalistyczna w Polsce 1918-1939} (Warsaw, 1982), 300.
\bibitem{27} \textit{Naye folkstsaytung} (29.4.1931).
\end{thebibliography}
left wing that opposed the Centrolew, saw the sole path to cooperation in the acceptance of the PPS’s authority. This tension caused the Polish security service to claim: ‘The extent of the controversy between the PPS and the Jewish socialist parties is so great that the possibility of rapprochement between them is remote.’

Although the radicalization of the PPS increased as a result of the government’s policies, this did not lead to increasing closeness between the two parties. The imprisonment of PPS leaders and other Centrolew politicians gave the alliance much great prestige and as a result the party could not initially abandon it despite its failure in reality. However when the 23rd Congress of the PPS convened in February 1934, there was a significant move to the left. Not one member, including past supporters, voted for the renewal of Centrolew and the decisions focused instead on the establishment of a government of workers and peasants. The formulation of the resolution opened the way for the possibility of cooperation with other leftist parties, including the Polish Communist Party - KPP. In the eyes of the Bund this formula was defective for two reasons: 1. the stipulation for bringing the party closer to the national minority parties as well as the communists, which the Bund did not regard as reasonable, blocked cooperation with the Bund. 2. The leadership of the Bund, because of past experience, had an even more reserved opinion of the communists than the PPS. The resolutions of the congress were accompanied by the re-election of the old leadership, which did not change its positions. The congress called for changes in the party platform, but this was deferred to the next congress, which was not held until 1937. Until then the leadership succeeded in reinforcing its control, one of the results of which was, at least until 1936, a continued coolness in the relationship with the Bund.

This general trend was summarized from the point of view of the Bund in a document of the Bund’s central committee in 1935: ‘The reformist norms of the PPS and its opposition to the Bund prevent us from the possibility of uniting with the Polish proletarian party against nationalist and Zionist trends...’

The failure of the two parties to open a channel of communication and their inability to influence Polish reality was of fateful significance in the light of the processes taking place in central and eastern Europe. The background to the actions of the two parties was the spread of fascism, victorious in Germany and the collapse of the workers’ movement there and in Austria. In the eyes of the Polish left fascism was able take power in Germany because of the division of the Left and the support of conservatives. In its Polish version, fascism united the radical right with some sections of the government. The left’s fear of the danger of fascism moved all the leftist parties to action, but each responded to the threat in a different way and tried to exploit the fears of other parties for its own gain. The communists tried to draft the left into the international struggle to free communist prisoners in Germany, hoping that the joint struggle would achieve for them a legal status and bring into their ranks members of other leftist parties. The PPS focussed on the struggle for the rights of trade unions and

29. Ibid.
the preservation of democracy, while the Bund emphasized the antisemitic nature of the Nazi regime and the dangers that antisemitism posed to all workers. Beginning with the declaration of the Bundist leadership in July 1933, its activists organized mass assemblies with anti-Fascists, sometimes in cooperation with other parties.\(^{31}\)

The Bund’s central goal in fighting the new and dangerous phenomenon of fascism was to draft the masses into the struggle against it while preserving its own position in the struggle. Victor Alter, the party’s main ideologue, stressed the importance of this struggle. He believed that the fight against fascism in Poland would be possible under two conditions: the formation of a workers’ party uniting all the socialist parties in Poland and the willingness of this party to fight without compromise. This, he believed, was the lesson to be learned from the collapse of the Social Democrats in Germany. In Alter’s opinion, the reformist ideology, committed only to a parliamentary struggle, was what led to the failure of the SPD against Hitler. Moreover, the SPD gave up on the establishment of a class party in Germany, because its leaders ‘preferred a weak workers’ movement which it could control over a strong movement in which it would not be the most powerful.’\(^{32}\)

Alter’s attack on the SPD stemmed not just from academic interest in recent history and the international framework to which the two parties belonged. It also had political significance inside Poland, since the PPS was the equivalent of the SPD in Poland, with the additional drawbacks of its belief in the nationalist idea and its fear of political radicalism.\(^{33}\) In his opinion, the PPS’s reservations regarding the establishment of a class party in Poland stemmed from three reasons: 1. The PPS did not want socialist unity, because it wanted to preserve its Polish nature. 2. The PPS’s reformist leadership feared that unification would force it to move to the left. 3. The establishment of a united party would force the PPS to lose its dominant position in the Polish workers movement.\(^{34}\)

The class party proposed by Alter was not to be a monolithic body and would preserve the characteristics of the different workers’ movements in Poland. He claimed that there was no variety of socialist thought that did not have organizational expression in Poland.\(^{35}\) The united party would preserve all the existing expressions of Polish socialism while maintaining the positions of the socialists of the national minorities.\(^{36}\)

The structure proposed by Alter was a return to the beginnings of the Bund in Russia when it was the dominant party in the federation of parties called Russian Social Democracy. In the private mythos of the Bund this era was considered a lost garden of Eden. The establishment of a united party created conflict between the establishment of a class front (a class party) and a popular front, such as the Centrolew, toward which the PPS leadership strove. In Alter’s opinion a centre-left alliance, despite its electoral

\(^{31}\) Andrzej Pilch, *Dzieje ruchu robotniczego w Krakowskim 1918-1939*, 97.


\(^{33}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 85-6.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 85-6.

attractiveness, would lead to compromises in the struggle against fascism and thus facilitate its victory. In the periodical *Myśl Socjalistyczna*, which he edited, the desire of the PPS to preserve its alliance with the parties of the middle class was attacked: ‘The defenders of the politics of a popular front believe that its revolutionary significance comes from the defense of democracy as an expression of defense against fascism; however, a victorious struggle against fascism requires suppression of reactionary and fascist groups.’

The monthly argued that the support of the PPS for a popular front was an expression of reformism. An article in the newspaper claimed that the cooperation with the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) would block the way to a true alliance with the peasants: ‘The path to an alliance does not lead through an electoral arrangement with the present leadership of the Peasant Party but rather by means of continuous and constant preaching of socialist ideas among the peasants.’ In order to provide his arguments with a theoretical-Marxist dimension, Alter linked the idea of a class party to the idea of the dictatorship of the working class. Theoretical argument of this sort was the one of the ideological bases of the Bund’s Weltanschauung and transformed its argument with the PPS from a tactical to an ideological level. Alter was aided by conditions in Poland, especially after the passing of the new constitution in April 1935, which made much more difficult the parliamentary struggle as proposed by leadership of the PPS.

The Bund’s central problem in its relations with the PPS, its natural ally, lay in the different priorities of latter. This differences which derived not from the PPS’s relations with the Bund but rather from changes in its position within Polish politics, changes in the power relations within the party and the fear of rank and file members of a fascist takeover. Already at the beginning of 1934, Niedziałkowski, the principal PPS ideologue, described the party’s priorities: ‘We do not want to see on the table the counterfeit coin of antisemitism. The true and unchanging coins—are socialism and fascism...We do not accept the view that the Jewish question is “the centre of the universe” and we do not agree that the conflict between socialism and fascism should be pushed aside by the “Jewish question” which we see as one of the components of the general struggle.’

His stance was not only an answer to Alter’s articles but also reflected the position of rank and file members. The party leadership for the most part had abandoned the older view that close relations with a Jewish party would ultimately injure the workers’ camp in Poland and, in the first instance, the PPS. It thus decided to ignore the sentiment within the party rank and file. In contrast to the party leaders, many of whom were of Jewish origin and who always opposed antisemitism, rank-and-file members reflected the mood among Polish workers which was influenced by all aspects of antisemitism; religious, economic and political. Thus, at the Third Congress of the class trade unions which decided to fight for the right of the Jewish workers to educate their children in Yiddish a representative of the railway workers of

Vilna gave a speech marked by its antisemitic characterizations.\textsuperscript{40}

Manifestations of antisemitism were widespread among local party workers. At the first session of the PPS council in May 1936 during a period of anti-Jewish violence in Poland, Telrek, the representative of the Lwów branch, argued that ‘[f]or us at this moment the pogroms against the Jews do not constitute a danger.’ In a discussion focussed on the relationship with the KPP, the leader of the unions claimed that the communists were supported in the field only by the intelligentsia and ‘the Jews’.\textsuperscript{41} This discussion, which was similar to views expressed in the PPS press demonstrated that although the party had undergone a process of radicalization in the 1930s this was expressed in only in trade union activity and had no ideological or political dimension. Polish workers, including members of the party, were not more sensitive than the rest of the population to the troubles of the Jewish worker or less receptive to antisemitism. The PPS leadership had moved closer to the Bund through its awareness of the fact that antisemitism was one of the principal manifestations of the fascism that was threatening Poland. It feared, however, that focussing primarily on antisemitism would alienate the rank and file. Therefore, despite its declared support of the Bund’s struggle against the discrimination suffered by the Jewish worker, it did not seek to win mass support for this position.

This duality was evident in a pamphlet that expressed the heart of the public argument between the Bund and segments of the PPS over the question of the emigration of Jews from Poland which was a central demand of the antisemitic right. The publisher of the pamphlet, which appeared in 1937, stated in his introduction that he struggled with its publication, because the opening of the discussion would play into the hands of the Polish antissemites. In order to restrict criticism, the discussion was presented not as a general discussion of antisemitism but rather as a dispute between the Bund and the PPS, in other words as an internal socialist disagreement. The author of the pamphlet, Jan M. Borski, claimed that the question of emigration was legitimate because the demand for Jewish emigration had the support of the majority of Polish people and ‘the Bund could not disregard the fact that the majority of Poles...in the best circumstances only tolerate the Jews. If the majority of Jews want to remain in Poland, they should not unilaterally demand self-determination without listening to the voices of the majority’.\textsuperscript{42} Borski claimed that the only solution to the distress of the Jews was emigration, and because in Poland the distress was worse than in other countries, emigration from Poland should precede emigration from other countries. He described the Bund as a body whose viewpoint was limited ‘to the horizons of Kałuszyn and Kock.’\textsuperscript{43} In his opinion, the PPS leadership’s identification with the Bund distanced it from its supporters on the Polish street and this was a price that the PPS could not afford to pay. The popularity of the slogan of emigration obliged the left to adopt it in order to transform it into a political lever. On the concrete level of political alliances Borski

\begin{itemize}
\item[40.] A. Brumberg, \textit{The Bund and the PPS}, 82.
\item[41.] ‘Rada Naczelna PPS w maju 1936 r., in \textit{Z pola walki}, No. 1 (1966), 163.
\item[42.] J. M. Borski, \textit{Sprawa Zydowska a Socjalizm/ Polemika z Bundem} (Warsaw, 1937) 17.
\item[43.] Ibid., 17-20.
\end{itemize}
argued that the PPS exchange its alliance with the Bund for one with Poalei Zion.

Borski’s position was at odds with that of the PPS leadership. In a letter from Henryk Erlich to the leader of the left in the Second International, Friedrich Adler, Erlich pointed out with satisfaction to the fact that despite controversies in various areas, the two parties saw eye to eye regarding the question of emigration: ‘We do not always find ourselves of one opinion with members of the PPS in matters of principle and tactics. In this instance there is a unity of general opinion between the two parties.’

In 1936 it appeared that the Zionist solution of immigration to Erets Israel was gaining momentum in Poland. However a short time after the publication of the pamphlet immigration to Erets Israel had almost ceased, while the Bund had become the dominant Jewish party. While Borski’s position did not withstand the test of reality, it did hint at a fundamental dilemma of the PPS: as the party leadership increasingly adopted more radical positions and cooperation between it and the Bund increased, it was more and more distanced from its electorate, the public that Borski boasted he represented.

During the final days of independent Poland the closeness between the two parties reached its peak. One of the main theoreticians of the PPS, Zygmunt Szymanowski, wrote in an article which can be found in the Bund Archives in Warsaw: ‘Today our cooperation with the Bund, which sees itself as that part of the Jewish proletariat that wants to live in Poland and be citizens of Poland and share out path, is exceptional’

This cooperation and the Bund members sense of themselves as Polish citizens was expressed in a declaration of one of its representative on the city council of Warsaw in April 1939: ‘Together with the workers of all Poland and the masses of the Jewish people...we are ready to make all sacrifices demanded for defense of the freedom and independence of Poland.’

With the outbreak of the war the Bund established, in cooperation with the PPS, a workers’ committee for social aid and fought on the barricades of besieged Warsaw.

The increasing closeness at the leadership level did not bring with it the rank and file members of the PPS who were alienated from the Jews and the Bund. This led to the paradoxical situation that the links between the Bund and the PPS became closer but, as the PPS leadership lost control over its rank-and-file, the attitudes of Polish workers became more hostile to Jews. This was the situation following the defeat of Poland in September 1939 when the PPS leadership left for exile while the masses of the Polish proletariat remained in their homeland. On 15 December 1941, a week after the outbreak of the war between the United States and Nazi Germany, the PPS leadership and the Bund in New York published a trilingual declaration. The declaration, whose goal was to encourage the United States in the war against Germany, defined the areas of cooperation in occupied Poland and the nature of the relations between the Poles and the Jews in liberated Poland: ‘The masses of Poles and Jews, united in their shared suffering, acknowledge their shared fate and their goal of returning independence to Poland and reach out as brothers across the walls of the ghetto...The workers’ and

44. Henryk Erlich to Freidrich Adler, 24.9.1929, Zurich, SAI 2535/3,4.
45. AAN, Bund, 30/II-7/ pp. 90-1.
46. J. Tomicki, Lewica, p. 566.
peasants’ movements fight under the banners of the PPS and the Bund,...against all cooperation with Hitler’s Germany and every attempt to root Nazi ideology in Polish soil...We believe that there is only one solution to the “Jewish question”: to guarantee to the Jewish population in Poland full equality and cultural autonomy. All attempts to solve this question by means of forced emigration...by economic pressure or punishment are rejected as contrary to the principles of democracy."47

Cooperation in Trade Unions
The trade unions in independent Poland during the 1920s were divided on an ideological basis into three types: ‘class’ unions; ‘Polish’ unions; and ‘Christian’ unions. Each type of union included organizations built on party identification. The associations shared a national framework based on occupation. The ‘class’ organizations were under the control of the socialist parties, primarily the PPS. They included also the Jewish trade unions, which included the unions of the three Jewish workers’ parties, with clear Bundist hegemony. The ‘Polish’ unions were under the control of Narodowy Związek Robotników (NZR, the national union of workers), which were characterized both by militancy and blatant antisemitism. The ‘Christian’ unions, led by the priests, stood out for their conservative nature and their hostility to the ‘class’ unions. At the beginning of independent Poland the ‘class’ unions drew the masses into their ranks and in Warsaw, for example, had seven times more members than the other two.48 The liquidation of the Workers’ Council, which was established at the beginning of independence and the war between the Soviet Union and Poland, aroused national and anti-socialist tendencies and led to a palpable weakening of the ‘class’ unions. In this political situation, with the background of economic improvement in the lives of workers, the number of members in these unions declined during the years 1919-1924 from 560,000 to a third of its strength. The ‘Christian’ unions, which enjoyed the backing of the church, grew more than four-fold at this time.49 In 1924 the ‘vocational’ unions constituted some 32.5 percent of all the unionized workers, the ‘Polish’ unions—some 50 percent and the ‘Christian’ unions—more than 17 percent.50

Activity among Jewish workers was carried out in a fashion similar to that in the Polish sphere. Each of the trade unions on the Jewish street belonged to a ‘class’ union, and its party affiliation was with either the Bund, Poalei Zion or the Faraynigte Partay. At the second national congress of the Jewish unions (May 1922), which represented 50,000 members, 27 out of 37 delegates represented the Bund.51 Although in 1919 the Bund made every effort to unite all the unions through the abolition of national divisions, a trend that was expressed in Polish in the mouthpiece of the party, Głos Bundu, it retreated from this stance as a result of the opposition of both Polish and Jewish workers

47. Joint declaration by the PPS and the Bund, New York, 15.12.1941.
49. Ibid., 42-3.
50. Ibid, 42-3.
51. Ibid., 54.
and from fear of communist control. In the 1920s the Bund tried to set up an institutional arrangement between Polish and Jewish unions. The Bund called for integration into the general ‘class’ unions while maintaining an autonomous framework in the areas of education and culture in the Yiddish language. The heads of the general unions, members of the PPS, refused to accepted the Bund’s proposals. At the end of 1921 the Jewish unions were seen as a branch of the general ‘class’ unions and their leadership—the National Council—(landsrat) participated in the central committee of the trade unions – Centralny Komitet Związków Zawodowych (CKZZ—Central Committee of Trade Unions). Throughout the existence of the National Council, this was controlled without dispute by the Bund, although on a local level activity the communist opposition—‘the trade union left’—had considerable influence. During this period the Jewish workers were a significant part of the general workers’ unions in Poland, constituting almost 25 percent of all the ‘class’ unions in 1937. Belonging to the general trade unions dealt with three problems that plagued the Bundist leadership: it made possible broad activity among the Jewish masses under a legal umbrella that defended it against a hostile regime; it ensured party control of Jewish workers; and it created a regular framework of relationships with the PPS and, through this—with the general Polish proletariat.

A broader attempt to establish control of the unions and cooperation with the Polish worker took place in April 1926, when the Bund convened a general conference supporting equal rights to work for the Jewish worker. Discrimination against the Jewish worker in employment was one of the principal expressions of Jewish discrimination in independent Poland and stemmed from the government’s policy of preventing the employment of Jewish workers in nationalized factories and public companies. In addition to the representatives of the Jewish unions, most of whom were from the Bund, representatives of the general trade unions and socialist parties also participated.52

Although the conference did not lead to concrete results, the fact of its being held was evidence of the Bund’s strength among the Jewish workers and its connections with the Polish workers’ movement, connections that members of the Bund hoped would lead to an improvement in the situation of the Jewish worker in the future. The conference was held in a period in which the numbers of members in the Jewish trade unions were declining and the leaders of the unions hoped to use the conference to reverse this trend. However only in 1938, on the eve of the Second World War, did the number of members in the Jewish unions come close to the number of members in 1919 - 43,466: as opposed to 48,500.53 The lowest level in membership in the Jewish trade unions was in 1933, when they had only 5,300 members. This decline reflected to a certain extent the decline within the general class unions, which lost many members following the split in their ranks with the establishment of the pro-government trade unions and which

52. Stefan Bergman, ‘Przyczynki do historii Bundu’ in Biuletin ZIH, No. 2-3 (4-9, 1992), 121-23.
reflected the split in the PPS and the departure of government supporters from its ranks. The move to belong to a joint union framework brought the Bund and the PPS closer, as a result of the struggle between the union leadership and its enemies within the unions themselves. Paradoxically, as the number of rank and file members in the unions declined, the strength of the workers from the centre, identified with the PPS and the Bund, increased. In the Garment Workers’ Union in Warsaw, which shrank to one-third of its members between 1922 and 1926, no changes took place in the number of members controlled by the Bund and thus in actuality the Bund’s influence grew. The decline in the members of the unions was a reflection their sense of weakness and lack of faith of the workers in the union leaders. The tendency of the union leaders to use strikes as weapons was viewed by many workers as an adventurism divorced from daily reality and led to an abandonment of the unions especially at the beginning of the 1930s.

At a later period, with the growth of militancy among the workers, the excessive caution of the leadership, a fruit of the failures of the past, was regarded as defeatist, particularly in the eyes of the young generation.

During the 1930s the unions were divided along political lines as well as according to divisions between the centre and the field workers because the emphases of the two sides were not the same. Although Bina Garncarska-Kadari describes in her book tension of this sort between the Bundist leadership of the unions and the workers, members of Left Poalei Zion, there is no doubt that the primary tension was between this leadership and the members of the KPP. The tension within the trade union erupted into violence when, at its peak in 1931, the communists murdered a Bundist activist of the bakers union that was controlled by the communists. Similarly, the central communist Jewish bureau reported to the central committee of the KPP on the activities of armed brigades of the Bund against the communist trade organizations. According to this report an armed division attacked members of the union of striking shoemakers, and their leader, Bernard (Bernard Goldstein) shot and wounded one of the strikers. This was just one of the episodes in the struggle of the Bundist leadership against the strikes, defined by Goldstein in his book as ‘wildcat [strikes]’ led by the communists. The report of the Jewish bureau also claims that in the struggle against the Shoemakers’ Union the Bund compromised its traditional policies of cooperation with the PPS only at the leadership level and established a branch of the trade union shared by the two parties in the offices of the PPS. This case was evidence of the joint struggle against the communists that was one of the bases of cooperation between the Bund and the PPS, a struggle whose importance was anchored in the fact that for the illegal KPP the trade union was the only sphere of legal activity. The expulsion of the communists from trade union activity would block their limited possibilities to influence the public. This danger explains to a large extent the bitter nature of the struggle by the Bund and the

56. ‘Degeneratsia fun a partei,’ in Unser tseit (3-4, 1932).
58. CZB - sprawozdanie 1-5, 1930, AZIH Ruch. Rob. 152.
PPS on one side and the KPP on the other. The necessities of the anti-communist struggle constituted the background for a rapprochement between the two socialist parties, especially during the 1930s.

Relations between the trade unions and the communists were further complicated as a result of external factors. The rise of the Nazis in Germany created the desire to form a joint front made up of all the trade unions, including the communists. An additional factor influencing this trend was the proposal by the head of the Polish government, Leon Kozłowski, of a law of ‘unifying’ all trade unions. In light of this twofold danger the class, general, and Jewish unions accepted members of the PPS into their ranks on a personal basis. This led to a government response against the united unions, particularly the Jewish segment. In 1936 the authorities shut down 100 branches of the Jewish unions. Along with the official protests of the Central Committee of Trade Unions and the Jewish National Council, within the unions there was a sense that the ‘class’ trade unions were facing a serious threat to their existence.\(^{59}\)

In periods in which the two parties were separated in all other areas, the link through the trade unions was preserved, as is evident from the discussions of the union congresses. In the summer of 1929 the Bund used the fourth union congress as an arena in which to criticize the path of the PPS, which had chosen cooperation with the centre in the electoral bloc Centrolew.\(^{60}\) The sixth congress, held in May 1936, reflected cooperation with all the socialist parties in Poland: the PPS, the Bund and the German Social Democrats, against the nationalist government trends, the German Nazis, the fascism of the Polish right and antisemitism. At the end of the 1930s the congress platform became the sole stage enjoying appropriate publicity and freedom from censorship able to serve the political desires of the Bund and the PPS.\(^{61}\) Parallel to the congress a special conference was held in which representatives of the socialist parties and the leadership of the general and Jewish class unions participated. The conference was held following the decision of the central committee to end its cooperation with the communists and the unions in their control that had begun only a year earlier. The combination of the two events was at one with the goal of the Bund to establish a socialist party bloc without the communists. The conference discussed the problem of realizing shared goals in the social and economic sphere for all components of the socialist movement in Poland and signaled a new stage in the process of rapprochement between the Bund and the PPS. Following the conference the Executive Council of the PPS resolved: ‘Only the PPS and the class trade movement together with the socialist parties of the minorities on the one hand and the peasant party (SL) on the other hand constitute the organizational basis....necessary for victory of the joint front of workers and peasants.’\(^{62}\)

For the rank and file member the primary meeting place between the two parties was in joint demonstrations that served as strong educational and propaganda tools. It is

\(^{59}\) ‘Ruch zawodowy w Polsce,’ t. 2, cz. 2, -90.
\(^{60}\) \textit{Di geshikhte fun Bund}, Ferter Band (New York, 1972), 276.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 282.
\(^{62}\) J. Tomicki, \textit{Lewica}, 530-32.
possible to distinguish two types of demonstrations: the annual demonstrations on May First and protests on the occasion of important events. Despite the fact that the demonstrations on the First of May were held under the slogan of working class solidarity and the overcoming of national divisions, the joint organization by the PPS and the Bund encountered many difficulties. In contrast to the readiness of Bund leaders to participate, a readiness that stemmed from the need to break out of the isolation of the Jewish workers, the leaders of the PPS feared joint demonstrations. Beginning in the early 1920s, with the background of the weakening of the class unions and the strength of the ‘Polish’ and ‘Christian’ unions, the leaders of the PPS tended to underplay cooperation with the minorities and particularly the Jews. In his memoirs Bernard Goldstein described the contacts prior to the joint demonstration on 1 May 1926 in Warsaw. Bund representatives Emanuel Sherer and Artur Ziegelboym were satisfied with holding either two concurrent demonstrations or one after the other. The leaders of the PPS, however, were afraid of being labeled philosemitic and resisted all suggestions. The demonstration did not take place.\(^\text{63}\) The PPS at this time saw itself as fighting a right wing government and feared that alignment with a Jewish party would serve the government’s purposes and strengthen the Endecja within it. The demonstration was to be held on the eve of Piłsudski’s coup and in the tense atmosphere of the period, the leaders of the PPS tried to refrain from alienating any force that could be an ally in the struggle against the government.

While the discussions in the capital Warsaw were influenced by national political considerations, the situation was different in Łódź. Here the Bund was more militant and the PPS took more hostile positions against the government and was closer to the demands of the minority workers. Therefore in both 1927 and 1928 there were joint demonstrations on the First of May in which more than 40,000 demonstrators marched in blocs according to party affiliation.\(^\text{64}\) The uniqueness of the city also stood out in a joint mass assembly held at the end of 1928 to identify with striking textile workers. Representatives of the Bund, the German Socialist Workers’ Party (Deutsch Sozialistische Arbeiter Partei—DSAP), and the PPS spoke to a crowd of thousands.\(^\text{65}\)

In 1931, with the argument within the PPS about the future of Centrolew in the background, there was a parallel dispute between its activists in the trade union regarding cooperation in the First of May demonstration. Following the agreement between the two parties, the demonstration for the First of May in Warsaw was conducted with a joint procession in two blocs, one of the PPS and one of the Bund. The strength of the demonstration was impressive and it even provoked an unsuccessful effort by antisemitic students to disrupt it.\(^\text{66}\) 1936 was characterized by widespread agitation among the workers with the police opening fire on unemployed demonstrators in Lwów and on striking workers in Kraków resulting in many deaths. As a result First of May demonstrations were bigger than in previous years and the mass assemblies

---


\(^\text{64}\) Y. S. Hertz, Di geshikhte fun Bund in Lodz (New York, 1958), 338.

\(^\text{65}\) Ibid., 339.

\(^\text{66}\) Ibid., 219-20.
included many members of all the workers parties, including Jewish parties. The demonstration held in 1937 is evidence of the trend of rapprochement in the May First demonstrations. For the demonstration the Bund issued a directive for its branches that placed three slogans at the centre of the demonstrations: against fascism, against repression of the working class and against antisemitism. The directive called for the opening of negotiations with representatives of the local socialist parties and rejected contacts with the communists. It also vetoed the participation of the Zionist parties and in the places where they did take part called for the banning of Zionist slogans and banners. The directive listed the priorities of the Bund leadership and named the PPS as its preferred ally. In the demonstration the parties marched together and were protected jointly by militias of both parties. On the eve of the demonstration the two parties put out a joint publication, Dziennik Ludowy. The driving force in this process of rapprochement was usually the trade union activists. On the Polish side they revealed readiness for these moves which marked a break with their basic emotional approach that was usually hostile to Jews.

Because activists were also influenced by local conditions, it is hard to find an overall policy. On the First of May 1938 in western Galicia activists of the unions in Kraków prevented any contact between Polish and Jewish workers, while in nearby Tarnów a joint demonstration was held. Antisemitism increased during the second half of the 1930s as a result of Hitler’s victory in neighboring Germany and internal developments in Poland. Antisemitic manifestations were many and varied: economic boycott of Jews, demonstrating against and persecuting Jews in institutions of higher education and the streets of Polish cities, and, worst of all—violent riots against whole Jewish communities. Opposed to this wave stood the Bund which responded in various ways to the disturbances, forming self-defense units, publishing newspapers in Yiddish and Polish and mobilizing of public opinion. The party leaders believed that it was possible to stop anti-Jewish violence riots if it became clear to the instigators and participants that they would pay a heavy personal price for their actions and if it could be shown that the Polish people did not support them. In their opinion, the primary tool was the integration of self-defense (preferably with the support of Polish fighters), general strikes and demonstrations. These were the traditional tools of the socialist movement from its beginning. It was Rosa Luxemburg who had developed the theory of the general strike as the principal revolutionary tool. When the pogroms against the Jews reached their peak in the violence in Przytyk in March 1936, the Bund leadership decided to use this weapon. The central committee of the Bund called a general strike of half a day on 17 March, a decision that received backing from the National Council of Jewish unions. The a general strike was intended as a protest against the rising wave of antisemitism but it was also combined with general socialist demands. In this way the strike was supposed to be transformed from a practical Jewish matter to one of relevance

68. AAN, Bund, 30/II-1, 14-15.
70. Andrzej Pilch, Dzieje ruchu robotniczego w Krakowskim 1918-1939, 304.
to the entire working class in Poland. Only a few Jewish groups joined the Bundist initiative and the other Jewish parties preferred to ignore it. Despite this the strike shut down the whole Jewish street and its extent surprised the non-Bundist Jewish organizations and their leaders.\footnote{Johnpoll, \textit{The Politics}, 212-13.}

The PPS mouthpiece \textit{Robotnik} supported the Bund and its call for a general strike. The day after the Bund’s decision, the strike call was published next to an appeal of the National Council of Jewish unions to the Central Committee of the general unions. The committee decided to express solidarity with the steps of the Jewish workers.\footnote{\textit{Robotnik}, 15.3.1936.} The day after the strike it was described in detail in the newspaper, and in a description of the events in Warsaw and the provinces, its range and character as a protest of the masses of the Jewish people was emphasized. In the article the goals of the strike were set out and the leading line of the Bund accepted: ‘The protest strike of yesterday against fascism and antisemitism that was called for by the Jewish socialists encompassed the masses of downtrodden Jews in Warsaw and the provinces...The strike was intended...to be a protest above all against antisemitism which is the demagogic weapon of the fascists.’ This claim repeated the words of the official editor and leader of the PPS, Mieczysław Niedziałkowski. The article sheds light on the roots of PPS support of the strike: alongside identification in principle with the distress of the Jews. Niedziałkowski underlined the unity in the struggle of the Bund and the PPS against international and local fascism. As the Jews were forced to defend themselves against antisemitism, so would the Polish worker defend himself against the other face of the same fascism – the repression of the proletariat. In order to show support for the unity of the struggle, despite differing points of departure, Niedziałkowski pointed out that in him ‘there did not flow one drop of blood that was not Aryan.’\footnote{\textit{Robotnik}, 19.3.1936.} Despite the support of the party organ, the PPS leadership made in clear that the strike was an internal Jewish matter and that Polish workers did not need to participate. This position, accepted by the leaders of the Bund, was criticized indirectly by the weekly \textit{Ziben tog}. This publication was close to the left of the Bund and stated that despite the decision of the PPS ‘on the initiative of the enlightened segments of the Polish working class, thousands of Polish workers...not only expressed enthusiasm for the strike, but took an active part in it as an individual action against fascism and national repression.’\footnote{\textit{Ziben Tog} (Vilna), 20.3.1936.} It is difficult to estimate the extent of this participation, which was, at least in part, a protest of the PPS left against its leadership.

This strike, like the demonstrations on the First of May illustrated the main dilemma in relations between the Bund and the PPS which resulted from a differing view of reality in the various strata of the PPS. Although the PPS underwent a process of radicalization in the 1930s, this was expressed in trade union activity with no ideological or political character. The majority of Polish workers, including party members, did not become more sensitive to the suffering of the Jewish worker, less
accessible to antisemitism and more resistant from the Polish right.

**The Relations between the Bund and the PPS in the electoral framework**

Between the two world wars a democratic framework for local and regional elections existed in Poland even after parliamentary democracy had ceased to function. After Piłsudski’s rise to power, the Polish government developed increasingly authoritarian tendencies which undermined the democratic process while preserving its external form. This development led to a questioning of the importance of democratic values and the use of elections as a tool for social change with the ability to influence the shape of public life in Poland. Throughout the period the Bund took part in the electoral framework on three levels: national elections to the Polish Sejm; municipal elections; and elections to Jewish communal organizations. In addition members of the Bund participated in elections to the Medical Insurance system—an indication of its strength in the trade unions. However, because the last two types of elections were internal Jewish matters which do not touch the subject under discussion, I will focus only on elections to the Sejm and the municipalities.

On the national level the Bund suffered from two weaknesses—its lack of votes which prevented it from having even one deputy in the Sejm and the ideological argument over whether to stand in such elections. In the first days of independent Poland the Bund supported the Councils of Workers Representatives and the Federation composed of individual councils and saw them as ‘institutions to strengthen democracy,’ not as a mechanism for ruling. The Bund saw in the Council a legislative body which would send representatives to other democratic bodies. The Federation, which at its height included some 100 councils, was liquidated in 1920 with the departure of the PPS representatives. In contrast to this support the Bund had reservations about the Sejm, which was portrayed as similar to the Russian Duma, just as the councils were understood as a version of the Soviets of 1918. From this time on the Bund took part in the elections to the Sejm but its participation reflected a gap between political praxis and ideology. With Hitler’s rise to power the Bund decided to re-examine its ideological arsenal and again espoused the Marxist idea of ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat.’ However, it gave a unique interpretation to this idea. Alter defined it as ‘proletarian and socialist democracy...that in building a new regime will accept the control of the revolutionary classes and will be responsible to them.’

Devotion to the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat was important in the eyes of the party as one of the factors uniting the Bund with the socialist left in western Europe, the importance of which increased with the Bund’s affiliation with the Socialist International. In the declaration of the left at the Second International in 1934 it was declared that parliamentary activity ‘is one method and not the most important in the struggle of the workers against the regime.’ A year later, in the ideological declaration of the Bund at its Sixth Congress, it was held that this dictatorship would be a

---

75. *Lebens progen*, Nos. 42, 43, October 1918.
‘government of the workers and peasants which would arise following the victory in direct struggle of the masses against fascism and capitalism.’ As a result the Bund regarded parliamentary struggle primarily as a propaganda tool to unite the working class. The parliamentary struggles in which the Bund engaged were thus claimed to be only a tool to mobilize the masses, the actual results of which were not significant. How strongly this view was held may be doubted, since it is difficult to believe that the cadre that had the responsibility of organizing electoral campaigns could have seen their efforts in this light. It is more reasonable to assume that the leaders of the Bund behaved like the fox in the fables of Aesop that described the grapes it could not reach as sour.

The PPS—the Bund’s natural collaborator—viewed the parliamentary system in a completely different light. Beginning with its Fifteenth Congress at the end of 1918, the PPS chose the parliamentary path as the sole means by which to change the regime in Poland. Throughout the interwar period it maintained its devotion to the parliamentary method as the way to take power, although it changed its definition of the government that would arise following parliamentary victory. On the eve of the 24th PPS Congress, Niedziałkowski called for a government of workers and peasants, a government that thanks to the support of the masses would not shrink from acts of violence against fascism but his view did arouse some opposition. The Bund also utilized this definition. For the Bund this was another term for the dictatorship of the proletariat, while the PPS saw it as the highest stage of parliamentary democracy. This viewpoint placed winning elections at the centre of PPS strategy and the need to obtain parliamentary alliances was a necessity to which other ideological positions were subordinated. The difference in approach between the Bund and the PPS was expressed in their view of election results: while the Bund was not seriously discouraged by its recurring defeats in elections to the Sejm, in the eyes of the PPS leadership an electoral defeat led to severe internal crisis.

In the 1928 elections, the first following Piłsudski’s coup, the PPS succeeded beyond their expectations. The electoral achievements of the PPS in the 1928 elections strengthened the central ideological line of the party leadership which claimed that the democratic regime in Poland was an effective and relatively painless tool with which to change the regime. On the eve of the 1930 elections to the Sejm one of the outstanding publicists of the PPS, Jan Borski, wrote: ‘Today we find in our hands a powerful weapon in the war with the regime - the ballot.’ Loyal to this path the PPS initiated the establishment of Centrolew. On the eve of the elections the government took steps that clearly violated all democratic process and imprisoned the leaders of the alliance. The persecution by the ruling powers, the atmosphere of repression in the street and the propaganda that portrayed the opposition as traitors led to failure of the electoral alliance, the main victim of which was the PPS. The Centrolew episode raised doubts about the accepted assumptions about social democracy in Poland, the stability of the democratic

79. Projekty programu PPS (Łódź, 1936), 45-6, 56-7.
80. Robotnik, 1.10.1930.
system and the willingness of all its parts of the political spectrum to honour the rules of the game. The electoral failure and doubt about the merit of the party’s tactics were expressed in the next two party Congresses, on 22 May 1931 and on 23 February, 1934. In 1931 factions of the party came into conflict: the old leadership, that continued to uphold the traditional line of seeking only parliamentary struggle, the centre and the left. Two central questions were posed at the congress: what is the way to change the regime and what alliances needed to achieve this goal? The old leadership proposed to continue with the Centrolew as the sole means by which to change the regime, since because of the predominantly rural character of Poland, the proletariat was too weak to take power on its own and needed the support of the peasants and the middle class. It feared separation from the other parties in the centrist camp and hoped to preserve an open bridge to those segments of the party that had moved into the government camp. Although the centrist opposition, led by Zygmunt Zaremba, did not reject the electoral alliance in principle, it claimed that the party must first of all draw closer to the parties of the minority workers. The left called for action by the proletariat on its own and for a doctrinal alliance with the communists. The congress accepted a compromise proposal that the party should ‘fight for government of the workers’, but this did not end the disagreement in the party which continued until the outbreak of the Second World War.  

The electoral weakness of the Bund necessitated alliances—however because of its ideological inflexibility it was difficult for the Bund to conclude such alliances and they did not survive elections. In its search for allies the Bund looked in two arenas: the Jewish workers’ parties and the socialist parties—the PPS and the socialist parties of the minorities. The permanent tension on the Jewish street between the Zionist workers’ movements, the Bund and the communists made it difficult to establish alliances on the Jewish street and in any case the Bund would have gained little electoral benefit because of the small size of its partners. The tension between the non-socialist Jewish parties and the Bund made any cooperation between them impossible. This situation led the leaders of the Bund to the inescapable conclusion that only cooperation with the PPS and the minority socialist parties would make possible the strengthening of the Bund’s voice.

However this cooperation, regarded as natural by the Bund and desired by the centre and left of the PPS, was made difficult by antisemitic beliefs that were widespread among the Polish workers. In cases when the two parties cooperated, the enemies of the PPS used the weapon of antisemitism against it, accusing the PPS of abandoning the national and class interests of the Polish worker. According to a leaflet of the left wing of the National Workers Party which had split off from the Endecja, published on the eve of the municipal elections in Łódź in 1927: ‘How is it possible to call this party a Polish party since it has sold itself to the Germans and the insolent nationalists from the Jewish Bund. It marches together with these who declare that they will expel workers and Polish officers from the city in order to replace them with Jews...The PPS has betrayed Polish interests and has sold itself to the Jewish

industrialists. PPS activists themselves did not refrain from using antisemitism as a weapon in places in which they believed this would bring them profit. Thus in a leaflet distributed in Kutno it accused the city council as being an ally of the Polish and Jewish right that had turned against the workers. The use of antisemitism was not limited to municipal elections. The PPS was also exploited it in the 1930 elections to the Sejm, when it issued a leaflet which proclaimed: ‘Don’t vote for list number 1; who are its representatives? They are Eliyahu Kirshbaum, Moshe Wiślicki, Noah Przylucki—a Jew from Lithuania, Loewenhertz—a Jew from Galicia and others.’ Expressions of antisemitism by the PPS, even if provoked by the heat of an electoral struggle, were at odds with the internationalist views of the Bund and outraged Jewish feelings. Despite the cooperation between them in some voting areas, in the 1930s it increased the distance between the two parties.

An attempt was made by the Bund and the PPS to cooperate in the 1928 elections to the Sejm. In four electoral constituencies in which there was a sizeable group of Jewish workers the Bund supported the PPS candidates, while in the city and district of Białystok an electoral arrangement was reached by which the PPS supported the Bund candidate. This policy was not accidental, because the tradition of cooperation between the two parties was long and well-founded. In a leaflet of the ‘socialist bloc’ in Białystok the body presented itself as an alliance of the largest workers’ organizations of Poles, Germans, and Jews: the PPS, the German Socialist Working Party, and the Bund. ‘In the district of Białystok the joint electoral struggle of these parties was realized.’ This alliance was, in the opinion of the authors of the leaflet, an answer to list number 18, the Bloc of National Minorities a ‘creation of the Jewish, German, Belorussian and Ukrainian bourgeoisie…a wolf in sheep’s clothing’. Despite high expectations, the results were disappointing and the bloc received fewer votes than the combined vote of these three parties in the previous elections (17.5 per cent compared to 18.3 per cent) and lost votes in every district.

The importance of the electoral links was emphasized not only by the Bund, but also by the PPS. The electoral alliance in Białystok was described in Robotnik not only as ‘an expression of working class solidarity but as proof that the socialist program in the national question is a shared product of the entire working class in Poland...therefore there is greater and deeper importance in the creation of the socialist bloc in Białystok than simply winning in these elections.’ The sense of the achievement stemming from the cooperation in the 1928 elections increased the sense of injustice, betrayal and disappointment felt by the Bund when the PPS joined Centrolew on the eve of the 1930 elections. The achievements of the socialist bloc in Białystok spurred the Bund’s efforts to fight Centrolew. The 1930 elections were the last elections in which the left and

82. Narodowy Robotniczy Komitet Wyborczy, No. 7, NPR-lewica, PZZ, SAI.
83. PPS, Komitet Wyborczy w Kutnie, 6.6.1926, SAI.
84. Antoni Czubinskim, Centrolew (Poznań, 1963) 87.
85. Komitet Wyborczy Bloku Socialistycznego w Okręgu Białystok, 2. 1928.
86. Ruch robotniczy na Białostocczyznie, ed. Michal Gnatowski (Warsaw, 1987) 100.
87. 2.3.1928.
centre parties took part. Although elections were held in 1935 and 1938, the conditions for participation were formulated by the government in such a way that the opposition decided to boycott them. Both the policies of the government preventing fair elections and their boycott raised doubts about the PPS’s the main strategy, which argued that parliamentary elections were the sole way to change the regime. The PPS found itself in a situation similar to that of the Social Democrats in Imperial Germany, who fought only through the ballot box, despite knowing that the German parliament had no real power.

The policies of the government which deprived the elections of 1935 and 1938 of democratic content forced the PPS to focus on municipal elections which were less influenced by government manipulations and were therefore interpreted as a true test of relations between the political powers. With the establishment of independent Poland, the municipal elections were a sphere of continual activity by the Bund and PPS. These two parties relied on an urban electorate in a country where the majority of residents lived in villages and saw these elections as both a test of their strength and a sphere that would directly influence the lives of their supporters. Municipal elections were especially important to the Bund which did not win representation in the Sejm in the entire history of independent Poland. The cities remained the only electoral stage in which Bund representatives were able to act and make their party message heard. Despite the importance the two parties gave to the municipal elections, only in the 1927 elections in Lublin did they present a joint list of the Bund and the PPS. This cooperation was noted in the PPS report to the Executive Committee of the Second International. At the time of the municipal elections in 1934 joint Polish-Jewish socialist lists were put forward in Krakow, Tarnow and Kalisz, a phenomenon that was covered by the Bundist newspapers but not those of the PPS.

It is interesting that the periodical refrained from pointing out Białystok, in which a joint electoral bloc was also active. The reason stems perhaps from the history of the local PPS, which claimed discrimination by the Bund (of the seven chosen in the bloc, only one was a PPS member). Of all the municipal elections, those for the municipality of Łódź had special significance for the socialist public. Łódź was nicknamed ‘the capital city of the workers’ and Robotnik took pains to explain to its readers the importance and the problems of the second largest city in Poland:

Forty per cent of the population of Łódź is made up of national minorities; however eighty percent of the industrial capital is found in the hands of the Jews and the Germans. Beside the Jewish and German workers in Łódź lives a ‘royal family’ of rich Jews and Germans. In this situation it is easy and advantageous to divert the flow of class opposition to a stinking chauvinistic swamp, to engage in antisemitic witch hunts...the difficulty in the struggle of the PPS stems not from the difficulties of winning seats or gaining control of the municipality, but from the need to instill in the Łódź proletariat spiritual strength, class

88. Congres de 1928, Partie Socialiste Polonaise, SAI 135/2.
89. Nasze Pismo, Nasze Pretensje, (25.3.1934).
consciousness and the desire to unite under the red flag of the PPS.  

The social and national makeup of Łódź turned the dilemma of the relationship of the PPS with the socialist parties of the minorities into a question of existence for the two sides. Łódź was especially important to the Bund not only as the centre of its members, but also as a holy symbol, because of the war fought on the barricades in the 1905 revolution. At the funeral the Bundist leader Izrael Lichtensztejn, the Bund flag pierced by bullets from the days of the revolution was paraded in front of the representatives of all the workers’ parties. 

Six elections were held in Łódź from 1919-1939; in five of them the Bund stood on its own. In the first elections it received a quarter of all Jewish votes; on the eve of the war two-thirds of this public supported it. As early as 1927 all the socialist parties conducted discussions aimed at establishing an alliance in the elections but as a result of the tension between the KPP and the PPS-left on the one hand and all the other parties these were unsuccessful. The attempt to establish a bloc of the PPS, the Bund and the German Socialists failed because they were late in presenting the list and the partners made do with calls for conducting the election campaign honestly and in a friendly spirit. The elections resulted in the victory of the left and the new municipal government was ruled by a socialist coalition headed by the PPS. This coalition was attacked by Polish nationalists, who created an atmosphere of antisemitism in the city which intensified on the eve of the municipal elections of 1934.

The elections resulted in the victory of the left and the new municipal government was ruled by a socialist coalition headed by the PPS. This coalition was attacked by Polish nationalists, who created an atmosphere of antisemitism in the city which intensified on the eve of the municipal elections of 1934.

The PPS, the Bund and the German Socialists in Poland appeared in these elections on joint electoral list that of ‘Socialist and working class solidarity and of the class trade unions.’ The establishment of this list reflected the atmosphere of siege felt by the workers movement following Hitler’s rise to power and the defeat of the Social Democrats in Austria. As a result of the economic crisis in the city the Endecja accused the PPS, which controlled the city council leadership, of defending Jewish capital at the workers’ expense. The socialist alliance, which was forced to contend with widespread and effective antisemitic incitement and with a violent attacks in the street, was routed in the elections in which many Polish workers voted for the Endecja.

The lessons of the defeat of 1934 influenced the tactics of the PPS in the elections to the city council in 1936. The local PPS leadership concluded that it was necessary to avoid an open electoral alliance with the Bund because of the susceptibility

93. Results of the vote for the Bund in the Łódź municipal elections
Year: 1919 1923 1927 1936 1938
Number of votes for the Bund 8925 8081 13922 23685 27545 (with Poalei Zion)
%age of all Jewish votes 25% 21% 24% 48% 64%
95. Y.S. Hertz, Di geshikhte fun Bund in Lodz, 378.
of the Polish workers in the city to antisemitic incitement. The PPS accordingly rejected the Bund’s suggestion that it renew the bloc. In place of the watchword of solidarity it advocated the formula, ‘we will march separately, we will win together.’ The leaders of the Bund regarded this as a retreat from the principle of the brotherhood of peoples. They were supported by Alexander Erlich, described the PPS decision as a ‘serious mistake,’ one that would weaken the struggle against fascism. At the beginning of the electoral campaign there was an understanding between the two parties that while the PPS would seek support among German and Polish workers, the Bund would do so among Jews. However, the PPS changed its tactics and, with the hope of winning support, turned to the Jewish street as well. The fundamental assumption of the PPS was that the Jews had no choice but to vote for the PPS, because of its opposition to the antisemitic Endecja. From that moment on the Bund and the PPS operated not only alongside one another, but also against one another. The struggle between the two parties inflamed passions on the street, and in order to prevent a further deterioration in their relationship, the PPS suggested coordinating their positions and cooperation in the elections. Nevertheless Niedziałałkowski, in his analysis of the elections expressed pride that the PPS had been able to garner Jewish support which went beyond the Bund’s traditional working-class constituency: ‘We also received votes of the Jewish workers, the Jewish middle class and intelligentsia in those quarters where there is a Jewish majority. Of course we are not ashamed of this support.’

In Łódź, the relationships between the two parties were influenced by another factor which did not penetrate public consciousness because of its informal nature. The PPS in Łódź was controlled by the left wing led by Henryk Wachowicz. When the National Council of the PPS decided to end negotiations over cooperation with the communists in 1936, the branch leadership opposed this decision. As a consequence, the local leadership strove for a united front including the KPP in opposition to the national leadership which favoured the re-establishment of the bloc of 1934. This was reflected in the 1936 electoral campaign The Bund in 1936 was more anti-communist than the local PPS and was also ruled out as an ally because it was an obstacle to an alliance with the KPP. PPS activists on the Jewish street attempted to persuade supporters of the communists to vote for the PPS. Despite its political reservations, in public the national leadership supported the Łódź branch and supported its campaign in Robotnik. Here, the elections were fought under the slogan ‘Łódź will be red’ and were presented as a conflict of two ideologies: the fascist and antisemitic ideology against the that of the socialist movement which defended the freedom and rights of man.

In the elections, held on 27 September, the PPS received 100,000 votes and 34 seats on the council, which came under its control. The Bund received 23,762 votes and 6 seats. The results of the elections were described as ‘a red flag over Łódź, the choice

96. Ibid., 378-80.
97. M. Niedziałałkowski, Lodzanin, 1.10.1036.
of socialism and democracy.’

The PPS captured the city, while the Bund was the majority party among the Jews. All the PPS members, including the national leadership headed by Niedziałkowski, saw the results of the elections as a historic victory and presented them as such. The victory in Łódź was also interpreted outside of Poland as a victory of the socialist left and was welcomed by leaders of the left in France. However it was soon clear that this was a Pyrrhic victory. When the new city council proposed as Mayor Norbert Barlicki, the leader of the PPS left in the city, his nomination was blocked by the Ministry of the Interior. When the council refused to reconsider, it was dissolved and its place taken by a council composed of government nominees.

The Łódź branch was also attacked from within the party because of its cooperation with the communists. At the 24th congress of the PPS (February 1937) Wachowicz was attacked under the slogan, ‘Better 10,000 votes for the PPS alone than 80,000 together with the communists.’ For the Bund, the elections were a major success. In earlier elections the Bund in Łódź had felt compelled to establish an electoral bloc with the small Poalei Zion party; Now it was transformed into the reigning party on the Jewish street in Łódź, supported by two-thirds of the voters.

The trend away from electoral blocs between the Bund and the PPS became a general national phenomenon in Poland. The fear of the antisemitic tendencies of the Polish workers, even on the eve of the German invasion, led to an avoidance of this strategy even in places where cooperation between the two parties was traditional. In Białystok the two parties refrained from establishing an electoral bloc; however, according to government informants, ‘in the areas in which there were no Bundist lists, Jews-members of the Bund supported the PPS and vice versa.’ Here, as elsewhere he struggle of the Bund was not only for the soul of the voter but also against the politics of the government which sought to annul the results of elections which it disliked. Despite the fact that during the course of the elections members of the PPS denied the existence of this informal agreement, the antisemitic parties gave it wide publicity in their propaganda. This did not have the desired effect— the two parties gained control of the municipality in the elections of May 1939, barely four months before Poland lost its independence.

The elections to the Jewish communal bodies, which can be regarded as a test of political strength on the Jewish street, afford another example of government interference in elections. The elections to these bodies were strongly influenced by politics of the Polish government which wanted to keep control of them in the hands of Agudat Israel. The best example of this policy was in Łódź. In the elections to the community council in February 1928 Agudat Israel won the endorsement of the government and with its support control of the council. The government support of
Agudat Israel was the first stage in an agreement between the two parties according to which Agudat Israel would support the government bloc in the elections to the Sejm in March 1928. Although the court disqualified the elections because of fraud, a government order kept the Aguda representative, Leib Mincberg, in his position as temporary chairman, a role which he held until 1939. In 1930 a reform of the system of community elections was established. Article 20 deprived from men who expressed themselves in public against the Jewish religion of the vote. Based on this order ten of the leaders of the Bund and Poalei Zion were denied participation in the 1931 elections to the council, and as a result, these parties called for a boycott. In addition the Aguda was aided in these elections by fraud. In 1936, with the Bund victories in the municipal elections in the background, there was fear that the Bund would also gain control of the community council in Łódź. Therefore, the Ministry of Religion postponed elections to the council, due to be held in November 1936, to an unspecified future date. Only the war ended the control of the Łódź council by the Aguda.105

Cooperation in International Organizations

One of the central questions that divided the Bund in Poland following its separation from the Russian Bund and its transformation into an independent body was the question of its place on the world socialist map. After its failure to join the Comintern, the Bund joined the Paris bureau, (the Second and a half International), a body made up of parties that did not join either the Second or the Third International. This position—an expression of the compromise between the two wings of the party, the men of thesis no. 1 (the firsts), who desired to join the Second International and the men of thesis number 2 (the seconds), who opposed this goal was abandoned at the Fifth Congress of the Bund in summer 1930 in Łódź. Although choosing which International it would belong to was the only subject before the 102 delegates at the Congress, the participation of representatives of other socialist parties in Poland illuminated the connection of this question to that of their relationships with the Bund. Bronisław Ziemiecki, the leader of the Łódź City Council and a member of the PPS, clarified the connection well: ‘Despite the lack of right to interfere in the subject under discussion, I want to express the hope that by the decision taken connections will be strengthened between all workers of Poland and as cooperation increase.’ Zygmunt Zaremba, the representative of the PPS leadership and a man of the left wing seconded this opinion: ‘Over the abyss that separates the Jewish and Polish workers, despite all the obstacles, the Bund and the PPS are building bridges of understanding between the workers of the two peoples...I belong one of the few who represent Jewish workers in the Sejm. Their thousands of votes are especially dear to me because they are a promise of better days, days in which the wall separating the Polish and Jewish workers will be torn down and a united socialist movement will arise.’ The responses of the congress representatives show that they expected a more tangible commitment than that heard in Zaremba’s words, such as that given by the representative of the German Socialist Party in Poland, Kroenig. Kroenig

committed his party to supporting the demand of the Bund for the establishment of an educational network in Yiddish. He also linked the subject of belonging to the Socialist International with the relations between the parties in Poland: ‘Standing before you is the question of the international. Similarly it is our task to create a minor international in Poland of Polish, German, Jewish and Ukrainian workers.’

The leadership of the Bund—the men of thesis no. 1—did not need external support although they were happy to have it in order to tip the scale. After rejecting the Comintern as damaging to working class solidarity and expressing reservations about the Paris bureau, the congress decided to join the Socialist International, as it was ‘the sole arena uniting all the socialist movements that can realize the general working class consciousness.’ This was the result of the ‘party’s obligation to bring the masses of Jewish workers into the great family of the Socialist International.’ The congress also declared that the party would situate itself on the left wing, the revolutionary wing, of this International.106 A week later the committee of the Bund allowed Henryk Erlich to give an interview to Robotnik. In it Erlich tied the decision of the congress to the relations between the two parties: ‘We believe that our joining the International will have significance for uniting the workers’ parties in Poland. We always stood out for our cooperation with the Polish socialists and with the members of the national minorities...We hope that our part in the international will contribute to increasing mutual understanding and to the possibilities of cooperation so essential to the entire socialist camp in Poland, especially today when the struggle against dictatorship necessitates the consolidation of all proletarian powers.’107

The Bund’s joining of the International gave the party, at least in the opinion of its leaders, a lever with which to influence the PPS in that it could draw on the external support and authority of the International. In the period of crisis over Centrolew, when the contacts between the Bund and the PPS were severed, the leaders of the Bund used the stage of the International in order publicly to criticize the electoral strategy of the PPS, knowing that this would prevent the PPS from ignoring this criticism. In the meeting of the International executive in February 1931 the Bund criticized the PPS’s participation in Centrolew and demanded that the next congress discuss the question of socialist participation in bourgeois governments and regimes. A discussion of this type affected the PPS’s ability to manoeuvre in forming coalitions. In his speech, the Bund spokesman argued that the way to bring down the Sanacja regime in Poland was ‘through the unity of the workers of all nations in Poland’,108 as opposed to pragmatic electoral alliances as accepted by the PPS. The raising of specifically Polish issues in a discussion in the International compelled the leadership of the PPS to consider the positions of the Bund, because of the prestige of the Bundist leaders in the International and their relations with the leaders of the world socialist movement. In the executive committee of the International, the Bund and the PPS had similar representation, despite the great difference in their size. In addition, the leaders of the Bund were well

106. AAN, Bund, 30/I/II-7.
107. Robotnik, 8.6.1930.
108. Internationale Information, No. 6, 28.2.1931.
connected to the independent socialist parties and the left wing of the Socialist International. On the day following the Nazi victory in Germany and the fall of the Schutzbund in Austria the leaders of this wing, among them Erlich and Alter, published ‘a declaration of the Socialist International left.’ Despite its programmatic and general nature the declaration put forward positions identified with those of the Bund in its disagreements with the leadership of the PPS. In its second paragraph dealing with ‘the defense of democracy’, it rejected the view that the ballot box should be the sole means of changing a regime and in its third paragraph it stressed the need to unify all the components of the working class in the country.109

Belonging to the Socialist International gave the Bund a status which they sought in vain in their political activities in Poland: the status of a sought-after and respected partner, prestige for their past history, a lever with which to influence their Polish partner—the PPS—and an arena to in which to make their claims heard and in which they did not suffer from isolation as in the political arena in Poland.

**Were the Bund’s connections with the PPS an exercise in irrelevance?**

In his book on the Polish Bund, Bernard Johnpoll claims that out of all the options of connections with the PPS, from an electoral alliance to full unification between the two parties, the policies of the Bund did not bear any significant results.110 Johnpoll accused the leaders of the Bund of falling victim to the myth of the Bund’s splendid and heroic past. It seems to me that Johnpoll ignores the Polish reality especially the processes undergone by PPS that influenced its relationship with the Bund. Relations with the PPS were central to the Bund throughout the 1930s. The decade opened with a crisis in the parties’ relations, the crisis of **Centrolew** and ended with them fighting together in besieged Warsaw in September 1939. The politics of **Centrolew** were understood by all segments of the Bund as a betrayal by the PPS, although with various interpretations. While the Bundist right regarded the policies of the PPS as an expression of its opportunism, the left viewed them as proof of its reformist nature. The two sides agreed on the national essence of the PPS. The Bund publicist, Isser Goldberg, expressed the majority opinion when he claimed that ‘it is impossible to go together with the PPS in questions of tactics because of its approach to the national question.’111

The Bund was aware of this face of the PPS from the first interaction between the two parties at the end of the nineteenth century. The Bund believed that the adoption of the name ‘Polish Socialist Party’ involved a clear ideological choice. In the political arena in the tsarist empire (of which much of Poland was a part) parties that took the adjective Russkii, which had national meaning, belonged to the national wing of the political map, while other parties were defined with the adjective Rossiiskii, whose meaning was territorial-state related. Thus the parties in tsarist Poland that called themselves Polish (Polska), emphasized their national nature in contrast to parties that were content with a geographical indication ‘in Poland (Partia...Polski). The national

character of the PPS was stressed in an article that appeared in September 1934 in the Bundist periodical Nowe Pismo aimed at the Polish public. The author claimed that ‘the Jewish workers’ movement, while autonomous in its sphere of activity (the Jewish street), must be part of the general workers movement.’ This autonomy derived not from an ideological line but rather from the cultural and linguistic reality of the Jewish street. Unification with the PPS was not possible ‘because it has refused to move from being a Polish socialist party to being the socialist party of Poland’. The PPS of the 1930s was prepared to suggest only two options to the Bund: the right of existence as a party of a national minority or absorption into the PPS. The first aim was anchored in the emphasis of the Polish character of the country, while recognizing the existence of national minorities and their cultural needs. This orientation was of long-standing and enjoyed the support of the leadership and the majority of the party’s members. It opposed the incorporation of the Bund in the PPS because of cultural and national differences and was ready to be satisfied with close cooperation between the two parties. The left of the PPS was rather more accommodating. The ideologue of the left, Adam Próchnik, in his response to a survey of the relations between the parties in the socialist movement wrote ‘it is necessary to start taking steps toward unification of the socialist movement in Poland. I do not see significant obstacles to the liquidation of fragmentation along national lines as exists today in Poland.’ However, the left also stipulated the liquidation of the Bund and ending of the autonomy of the Jewish worker, conditions to which the Bund could not agree. Thus the Bund found itself between those who refused to accept it and those who wanted to incorporate it, two options at odds with its own approach to unification—Jewish autonomous existence in a federative socialist framework.

In the 1930s, especially after Hitler’s rise to power, the Bund’s relations to the external world in general and the PPS in particular were dictated by its fears. The fear of a wave of nationalism, antisemitism and fascism pushed the Bund to establish a broad anti-fascist front in Poland and Europe and influenced its daily politics. More than any other group in the world socialist movement, the Bund was aware of the dangers and tried to forestall them; however, its weakness and isolation frustrated its efforts. The gap between the consciousness of danger and recognition of its own weakness created a tragic dilemma which the Bund in the 1930s could never overcome. The other tragedy of the Bund was its late flowering: when it became a dominant factor in the Jewish arena and was able to work closely with the PPS, the Nazi enemy cast its shadow over the weak Poland. A similar sense of loss of control over fate was shared by the leadership of the PPS, which sensed that the international danger but failed to mobilize the mass of Polish society to confront it. The tragedy foreseen by both the Bundist leadership and their counterparts in the PPS took an even darker form than they could have anticipated. Poland lost its independence, suffered millions of victims. Millions of the Jews in Poland, for whom the Bund fought and spoke, were murdered. With them died the

113. Nowe Pismo, No. 11, 1.4.1935.
Polish Bund.