

ZIONISM AND ZIONIST PARTIES. As a modern political movement, Zionism was created to achieve political independence for the Jewish people in the Holy Land. Although scholarly literature is divided about the exact origins of the movement, this summary begins with the history of Zionism from its roots in Hibat Tsiyon period (1881–1897). This section is followed by an account of five additional stages of Zionist development and activity in Eastern Europe: the period of political growth from the First Zionist Congress (1897) to World War I; the interwar years; the Holocaust; the Cold War era; and the fate of Zionism after the fall of communism in 1989 through the year 2000.



Poster urging Jews to vote for the Zionist slate (No. 6) in a Jewish communal election in the Soviet Union, ca. 1930s. (YIVO Archives)

Zionism in the Age of Empires, 1880–1897. While members of local Hibat Tsiyon (Love of Zion) organizations were not the first to advocate that Jews from Eastern Europe settle in Ottoman Palestine, the movement’s growth after the pogroms of 1881–1882 marked the advent of modern Zionist organization and action. Inspired, in part, by Lev Pinsker’s *Autoemancipation* (1882), several Zionist organizations were instrumental in establishing the towns of Rishon le-Tsiyon, Gedera, Rosh Pina, and Zikhron Ya’akov by the end of 1882. Among the most prominent were the student group BILU (which took its name from the Hebrew initials of the biblical verse “House of Jacob, let us go up”); several Hibat Tsiyon groups centered in Białystok, Vilna, and Warsaw; and the Eretz Israel movement in Romania. This latter group, led by Samuel Pineles (1843–1928) and based in Bucharest and Galați, convened for the first time in Focșani, Romania, on 11–12 January 1882.

Most of these colonies faltered and some of the settlements soon found themselves supported by Baron Edmond de Rothschild. In response to the difficulties of establishing new settlements in Palestine, Pinsker, Mosheh Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910), and others organized a meeting of various Hibat Tsiyon organizations and supporters in the Silesian city of Katowice from 6 to 11 November 1884. Representatives from approximately 20 Hibat Tsiyon organizations chose Pinsker to be the organization’s chair, Lilienblum as secretary in Odessa, and Shelomoh Pinhas Rabinowicz (Shefer; 1845–

1910) as head of the Warsaw branch. Hibat Tsiyon continued its organizational efforts with a second conference in Druskieniki, on 28 June–1 July 1887, and a third in Vilna, on 13–15 August 1889. The second conference witnessed the increased influence of religious supporters who were able to elect rabbis Shemu'el Mohilewer (1824–1898), Naftali Tsevi Yehudah Berlin (Ha-Netsiv; 1816–1893), and Mordekhai Eliasberg (1817–1889) to the six-member executive board.

The organization attained legal status in April 1890 and was officially known as Va'ad ha-Hevrah li-Temikhat Bene Yisra'el 'Ovde Adamah u-Va'ale Mela'khah be-Suryah uve-Erets ha-Kedoshah (Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Palestine). Representatives of 26 Hibat Tsiyon organizations met on 27 April 1890 to choose an executive committee. Known as the Odessa Committee, the body was led by Pinsker until his death in 1891; by Avraham Grünberg (1861–1906) until 1906; and finally by Menahem Ussishkin (1863–1941) until 1919 when the committee was abolished. Despite early hopes, the Odessa Committee failed to create a mass political movement. Handicapped by governmental restrictions and flustered by organizational difficulties and the opposition of more traditional Jewish leaders, its membership numbers never exceeded 5,000 in an empire that was home to more than 5 million Jews. Commenting on the organization's lackluster performance in a letter to Leo Motzkin (1867–1933), Shemaryahu Levin (1867–1935) wrote, "The disappointment from its activities grows from day to day."

From the First Zionist Congress to World War I. The First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 marked a new beginning for the Zionist movement under the leadership of Theodor Herzl. Forty-four delegates from the Russian Empire and some 20 students studying in the West represented different societies in the Russian Empire. The Congress led to a subsequent explosion of Zionist activity in Eastern Europe and to the establishment of more than 1,100 societies (as opposed to approximately 40 local organizations before 1897) and more than 60,000 shekel holders (dues-paying members of the World Zionist Organization) by 1900. Activities culminated in the first legal convention of Russian Zionists in Minsk from 22 to 27 August 1902. With some 500 delegates and 200 guests, the Minsk Conference represented a new high for the fledgling movement.

After the initial burst of excitement, Herzl's demand for a sweeping political solution to the "Jewish Question," his leadership style, and the growing gap between Jews from Eastern Europe and those from the West led to a degree of discontent among supporters in Eastern Europe. The creation of the Democratic Faction in December 1901 by Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952) and others, as well as the subsequent founding of the religious Zionist Mizrahi movement in February 1902 in Vilna under the leadership of rabbis Yitshak Ya'akov Reines (1839–1915) and Avraham Ya'akov Slutsky (1861–1918) were early expressions of this protest. By calling for the creation of a

new, secular cultural center for Judaism in Palestine, Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Ginsberg) and his disciples from the Bene Mosheh movement were also constant sources of dissent within the Zionist movement. In a letter to Herzl (6 May 1903), Weizmann spoke openly of his own frustration regarding “our failure to secure the support of but an insignificant fraction of the youth. For years this mass of human material has yielded only a small number of really useful, dedicated workers and all because of Zionism’s superficial approach. . .”

Such protests gained momentum in 1903 when more than 170 out of a total of almost 600 delegates to the Sixth Zionist Congress (23–28 August), most of whom were representatives of the Russian Empire’s delegation, walked out of the Congress to protest Herzl’s proposition regarding the creation of a Jewish colony in East Africa. Inspired, in part, by what came to be called the Uganda Affair, three different organizations calling for the immediate establishment of a Jewish autonomous colony outside of Ottoman Palestine merged during a conference from 30 July through 1 August 1905; this amalgamated group formed the Jewish Territorial People’s Organization (later, the Jewish Territorial Organization; ITO). The numbers of territorialists grew quickly during the Revolution of 1905 as Zionism faced what very well may have been its political nadir. More radical Po‘ale Tsiyon organizations also began to flourish in both the Russian and Habsburg empires as the writings of the young Ber Borokhov (1881–1917), advocating a synthesis of Jewish nationalism, socialist values, and a commitment to settle in Ottoman Palestine, attracted hundreds of Jewish youths to various cells. One testament to Zionism’s fading popularity was the temporary closure in 1906 of the flagship daily, Nahum Sokolow’s Warsaw-based *Ha-Tsefirah*.

As one of the few legal Jewish movements at the time, Zionism reentered the political arena during the election campaign for the First Russian Duma in the spring of 1906. Together with Jewish liberals and, at times, in cooperation with other national minorities in the Pale of Settlement, the Saint Petersburg-based Soyuz dlya Dostizheniia Polnoporiviiia Evreiskogo Naroda v Rosii (Society for the Attainment of Equal Rights for Jews) helped elect 12 Jews (5 of whom were Zionists). This led many supporters to reevaluate Zionism’s long-standing opposition to political and cultural work in the Diaspora. From 4 to 10 December 1906 some 80 delegates from 56 centers convened in Helsingfors (the Swedish name for Helsinki) and approved the Helsingfors Program advocating *Gegenwartsarbeit*, the adoption of work in the present. Even die-hard Zionists realized that the eventual success of their precarious political plans demanded an end to this opposition to political and cultural work in the present. Despite these steps, and as a result of a split between Jewish liberals and Zionists, only one Zionist was among the 6 Jews elected to the Second Duma in early 1907. Prime Minister Petr Stolypin’s coup d’état of 3 June 1907 marked the end of the Russian Empire’s experiments with democratic reforms; at this time,

many of Zionism's early successes as a broad-based political party also came to an end.

Zionism and other Jewish parties in Austrian Galicia witnessed a simultaneous explosion of political activity. Taking advantage of expanded male suffrage, Zionists in Galicia founded the Jüdischen Politischen Nationalpartei (Jewish National Party) in July 1906. Of the 62,609 votes cast for various Jewish parties in Galicia, 24,274 went to Zionists, 17,581 to socialists, and 18,885 to the Polska Organizacja Żydowska (Polish Jewish Organization).

Disappointed with the lack of concrete political achievements in the Russian and Austrian Empires, many young Jews migrated from Eastern Europe to Palestine as part of the much-celebrated Second Aliyah (1903–1914). Despite the arrival of some 35,000 immigrants in pre-World War I Ottoman Palestine, however, the vast majority of Jews either remained in Eastern Europe or migrated to various locales in the New World from Chicago to Sydney.

The Interwar Years. The interwar period was the heyday of Jewish and Zionist politics in Eastern Europe. With radically redrawn borders and increasingly exclusive concepts of Polishness, interwar Poland provided ideal conditions for the growth of Zionist schools, youth groups, political parties, and cultural activities. Despite anti-Jewish violence and pogroms in Lwów, Pińsk, Vilna, and other cities and towns during the various wars of 1918–1919, much hope was inspired by the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920), and the Minorities Treaty of June 1919.

While Yitshak Grünbaum (1879–1970) is the leader most often associated with Zionism and Zionist politics, Osias (Yehoshua) Thon of Kraków (1870–1936) and others were also instrumental in Zionism's rise to communal influence and political power in interwar Poland. With impressive returns in the first Sejm elections of 1919, when 13 Jewish deputies, 6 of whom were Zionists, were chosen, Zionist parties were particularly popular in the regions of western Galicia and Congress Poland. Encouraged by this early popularity as well as by a growing sense of confrontation with Polish nationalists, Grünbaum led a coalition of Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, and other national minorities known as the Minorities Bloc in the Sejm elections of 1922. Although Zionist organizations in Galicia under the leadership of Ignacy (Yitshak) Schwarzbart (1888–1961) chose not to participate in the bloc, the coalition was successful as 32 Zionist representatives and another 15 Jewish deputies from other parties were elected. Ultimately, however, Grünbaum's strategy led to an increased sense of confrontation between Jewish parties and the larger Polish public. In the end, the bloc produced few real political achievements.

Unlike Grünbaum, Zionists in the former Austrian Galicia preferred the politics of compromise. This policy led to the signing of the Uгода

(agreement) between Leon Reich (1879–1929), the leader of Zionism in eastern Galicia, and the Polish prime minister, Władysław Grabski, in 1925. Although the agreement granted rights in the cultural and religious spheres in exchange for open Jewish support for Polish national interests, the government later refused to honor many parts of the agreement and Galician Zionists had little to show for their political maneuvering. In addition to the General Zionists, other smaller Zionist parties and movements competed for the support of Poland's 3.1 million Jews. These smaller parties included no less than six socialist Zionist or labor Zionist parties: the pro-Communist, Yiddishist Po'ale Tsiyon–left; Po'ale Tsiyon–right; the Zionist Socialists; Po'ale Tsiyon in eastern Galicia; Dror (Freedom); and the reformist, nonsocialist, pro-Hebrew party Hit'ahadut (Union).

The great expectations and bitter disappointments of Polish Zionism led to the sudden popularity of the Revisionist Zionist movement, known by its Hebrew name Ha-Tsohar, and its leader Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940) in the 1930s. In 1935, when the party broke with the World Zionist Movement and formed the New Zionist Organization, it boasted some 450,000 supporters in Poland as both the right and the left grew during the troubling times.

Throughout the interwar era, many political parties sponsored youth movements. One of the most important was the radical, later Marxist, Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir (The Young Guard). Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir was followed by the settlement-oriented He-Haluts (Pioneer), Gordonia (named after the labor Zionist hero Aharon David Gordon), Frayheyt (Freedom), and Betar (the Hebrew abbreviation for Berit Trumpeldor). Many scholars credit the popularity of youth movements to the growing sense of crisis among Jewish and non-Jewish youth, “a youth without a future.” Here too, however, Zionism proved ironically to be a dependent independence movement as government policies and economic factors often determined the course of Jewish politics, culture, and life. Less than 5 percent of Polish Jewry (139,756) emigrated to Palestine between 1918 and 1942.

Like many other Jewish political movements, Zionism turned to the realm of education to breed the next generation of activists and supporters. Backed by the General Zionists and moderate left-wing Zionist groups, the Tarbut school system proved to be one of Zionism's biggest successes in interwar Poland. Designed to turn Hebrew into a living language, the Tarbut schools, with 25,829 students in 1921 and 37,000 in 1934–1935, were particularly popular in the eastern borderlands. The religious Zionist school system Yavne, sponsored by Mizrahi, was also influential.

As was true of their neighbor Poland, the newly independent Baltic states of Lithuania and Latvia provided ideal environments for Zionist activity. Largely unfamiliar with Lithuanian culture and language, many Jews there gravitated toward specifically Jewish organizations. Zionists dominated the January 1920 all-Lithuanian Jewish conference and also led

the Jewish National Council until its abolition in 1924. Additionally, Zionist leaders Jakub Wygodzki (1855–1941), Samson Rosenbaum (1860–1934), and Max Soloveichik (1883–1957) served as ministers in early Lithuanian governments. Zionist educational activities also fared well as the Lithuanian government granted the local Jewish community a fair degree of national-cultural autonomy. Tarbut schools were extremely popular with more than 15,000 students and more than 500 teachers in 18 kindergartens, 81 elementary schools, and 11 high schools in 1930–1931. The Mizrahi school system, Yavne, attracted approximately one-third of the students in Jewish schools. Part of this success was due to the government's recognition and funding of Jewish elementary schools as state institutions. In addition to the thriving Tarbut school system, Zionist youth movements such as He-Haluts, Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir, Gordonia, and Dror were active in interwar Lithuania.

Although not as popular as in Lithuania, Zionist organizations were still influential in interwar Latvia. Zionist socialists were able to elect at least one delegate to most of the Latvian parliaments before 1934, and Rabbi Max (Mordechai) Nurok (1879–1962), of Courland, became known as the leader of Latvia's Mizrahi movement. Latvia was also the birthplace, in 1923, of the Revisionist movement and its youth organization Betar. In addition to Betar, Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir, locally known as Netsah, was also very popular. Although Jewish-run schools flourished in Latvia, Yiddish schools proved more popular than the Tarbut schools.

Romania, as well, served as a fertile ground for Zionist activity and organization between the wars. Like Poland, the radically redrawn borders of independent Romania and the growth of Romanian nationalism created ideal conditions for Zionist organizations. Here, too, Zionism was strongest in new territories such as the former Russian area of Bessarabia and the ex-Austrian region of Bukovina; it was somewhat weaker in the Regat (Old Kingdom) that consisted of Moldavia, Walachia, and part of Dobrogea. Centered in the Jewish communities of the Regat, the non-Zionist Uniunea Evreilor Români (Union of Romanian Jews; UER) dominated Jewish politics with a policy of moderation. After a series of political compromises and few successes, Jews in the new territories set off on their own. In 1928, four Zionist deputies--Theodor Fischer and Iosif Fischer of Transylvania, Mayer Ebner of Bukovina, and Michael Landau of Bessarabia--formed the Jewish National Club in the Romanian parliament. The newly formed Jewish Party of Romania ran independently in the parliamentary elections of 1931 and received 64,175 votes and four mandates. A year later, the party received 67,582 votes and sent five representatives to parliament. However, this success was short-lived; by 1933 support for the party had dropped to 38,565 votes. Despite its spotty political record, the Zionist movement remained popular in Romania's new territories. By 1922, there were 75 Tarbut institutions in Bessarabia alone, including 20 kindergartens, 40 elementary schools, and 15 high schools. While Tarbut schools were less popular in Bukovina, youth

movements such as He-Haluts, Gordonia, and Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir thrived in both areas.

Although Czechoslovakia in the interwar years was not as hospitable or conducive to Zionism as Poland or Romania, Zionism there was the strongest of any Jewish political movement. In January 1919, the Židovská Národní Rada (Jewish National Council) in Prague voted to establish Židovská Strana, the Jewish Party of Czechoslovakia. Designed as an umbrella organization, the party remained under Zionist leadership and exhibited a pro-Zionist orientation throughout the period. The Jewish Party was able to secure impressive election returns with 79,714 votes in 1920; 98,845 in 1925; and 104,539 in 1929. As a result, the party was able to elect two representatives to the Czechoslovakian parliament in both 1929 and 1935. Despite these electoral successes, the Jewish Party and Zionism met fierce opposition on the part of Orthodox groups in both Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. However, this opposition did not impede the establishment of four Tarbut primary schools and one gymnasium (high school) in the latter region. The director of its Hebrew high school, Hayim Kugel (1897–1966), was a leader of the Jewish Party and a parliamentary representative. While popular in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, the Tarbut system failed to take off in either the Czech lands or Slovakia.

In interwar Hungary, unlike its neighbors, Zionism remained rather marginal as Jews in Budapest and other areas enthusiastically embraced Magyar culture and society. Shekel purchases before 1939 represented only 1 percent of Hungary's Jewish population, and just 1,100 Jews emigrated from Hungary to Palestine between 1933 and 1939. The truncated Hungarian state had relatively few national minorities other than Jews; consequently, Jews faced fewer dilemmas along the lines of those faced by Jews in Galicia, Bessarabia, or other borderlands where Jewish and other nationalisms often flourished.

In the Soviet Union, the study and publication of Hebrew material was prohibited soon after the Bolsheviks' consolidation of power. Organized political activity was at risk and Zionist parties such as the Tse'ire Tsiyon (Labor Zionist party), He-Haluts, the Zionist Socialists, and youth movements including Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir and Kadima all operated in gray zones between legal and illegal realms. As a result, membership totals in most of these organizations rarely exceeded 10,000. Most were shut down by the early 1930s.

Zionism during the Holocaust. As is true of many aspects of the history of the Holocaust, accounts of Zionism and Zionist movements in Eastern Europe during World War II are often tainted by the wisdom of hindsight. Revolts and acts of armed resistance by Zionist activists and organizations played an important role during the war years. Most prominent among such actions was the April 1943 revolt in the Warsaw ghetto, led by the young Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir leader Mordechai Anielewicz (1919/20–1943) and the

Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (Jewish Fighting Organization; ŻOB). Additional uprisings and other forms of armed resistance in the Białystok and Vilna ghettos as well as partisan actions were led by such Zionist figures as Haika Grosman (1919–1993) and Mordechai Tenenbaum (1916–1943) in Białystok and Abba Kovner (1918–1988) in Vilna. Less is known about the role of non-Zionist organizations such as the Bund and Jewish Communists as well as other nonviolent forms of resistance such as the Oneg Shabbat Archives in Warsaw led by the Po‘ale Tsiyon–left activist and historian Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944). The exact roles and actions of Zionist leaders and others who cooperated with either Nazi forces or puppet regimes remains extremely controversial. Indeed, the role of Zionists, former Zionists, and others in the administration of different Judenräte--including Jacob Edelstein (1903–1944) of Theresienstadt, Reszō Kasztner (1906–1957) of Va‘adat ‘Ezrah va-Hatsalah (Relief and Rescue Committee) of Budapest, and Khayim Mordekhe Rumkowski (1877–1944) in Łódź--has yet to be addressed adequately by scholars.

Zionism in the Cold War Era, 1944–1989. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, Zionist activists and organizations concentrated their efforts on the mass emigration of Jewish survivors to British Palestine. Under the name of Berihah (flight), Zionist activists in Poland, including the indefatigable Adolph (Avraham) Berman (1906–1978) and the charismatic Yitshak (Antek) Zuckerman (1915–1981), helped organize the emigration of some 120,000 Jewish survivors and repatriates who had returned to Poland after the war. [See Berihah.]

Organized emigration to Palestine and later to the new State of Israel came to a halt with the Communist parties’ consolidation of power throughout the newly reconstructed Soviet bloc. By 1950, Zionist organizations had been shut down in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the reannexed Baltic regions. In Prague and Moscow, prominent Jews were accused of crimes against the Czechoslovak and Soviet regimes. The Slánský Trial of November 1952 in Prague and the announcement of the Doctors’ Plot in January 1953 in the Soviet Union marked new lows for Jewish leaders and organizations in Eastern Europe. Although antisemitic show trials did not take place in Poland in the 1950s, Israel’s victory in the War of 1967 and Polish student protests of March 1968 helped pave the way for an antisemitic witch-hunt for Zionist agents and activists. As a result, some 20,000–30,000 Jews and non-Jewish family members fled Poland for Israel, Sweden, and other countries. In all three cases, Zionism in postwar Eastern Europe proved to be more powerful as a political and cultural construct than as an actual movement.

The fallout of the War of 1967, the ensuing anti-Israel and antisemitic campaigns in both Poland and the Soviet Union, the emerging memory of the Holocaust, and the influence of the dissident movement throughout the Soviet bloc helped give birth to the Refusenik movement in the Soviet Union.

Rooted in a desire to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel, the movement was decidedly pro-Zionist as activists and their families risked imprisonment, economic sanctions, and social ostracism for participating in illegal cultural and political activity. On the diplomatic level, the Refuseniks soon became bargaining chips as the Soviet Union and the United States waged a Cold War in which human rights, sports, and space programs often served as surrogates for larger issues. As a result of diplomatic pressure, more than 350,000 Jews and family members were allowed to leave the Soviet Union for Israel and other lands from 1968 to 1989. Although an important factor in the Soviet Union, the Jewish Refusenik movement did not gain much momentum in Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia as Jewish activists often shied away from specifically Jewish causes and opted, instead, to join forces with local dissidents in national struggles against Soviet domination.

Zionism after 1989. With the fall of the Soviet Union and its indirect control over Eastern Europe, new centers of Jewish and Zionist activity began to emerge both spontaneously and as a result of the activities of organizations such as the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In addition to efforts on the part of these and other organizations, economic disintegration, political chaos, and uncertainty lead to the emigration of nearly 1 million Jews and family members to Israel between 1990 and 2000. Although the degree of Jewishness and level of Zionist fervor among many of these new immigrants (*olim hadahsim*) is periodically questioned by pundits, politicians and other provocateurs, the vast majority of these new arrivals have integrated--to one degree or another--into the economic, educational and political spheres of Israeli society of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and with this integration have created a new phase in the ongoing relationship between Zionism and Eastern Europe.

[*The principal parties, organizations, and individuals mentioned are the subject of independent entries.*]

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