BOOK REVIEWS

Eglė Bendikaitė. *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2006. Pp. 300. ISBN 9986-780-85-3

When in 1820 one of the original propagandists of Zionist ideas, the journalist Mordecai Manuel Noah, proposed to create a Jewish state on Grand Island to the north of Buffalo (USA), he could not even have imagined what this suggestion could lead to. Even in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century the originators of Zionism seemed to be advocating a utopian scheme. Nevertheless, the political programme of 1897, known as the Basel Programme, contained all the elements necessary for a practical political plan:

- (1) promoting the settlement of Jewish farmers, artisans and producers in Eretz Yisrael;
- (2) uniting the Jews into Zionist organizations locally and internationally within the law of each country;
- (3) strengthening of Jewish national sentiment and self-consciousness;
- (4) preliminary measures in obtaining the governments' permission, wherever necessary, for the implementation of Zionist aims.

Monographs and articles devoted to issues of ethnic minorities have been appearing in Lithuanian historical scholarship for over a decade. Some are linked to narrow topics; others deal with political movements, institutions or phenomena considered in a wider international framework. The Zionist movement and its ideology definitely were an important part of the political life of both the Jews and non-Jews in Lithuania prior to 1940.

However, so far Zionism has not received proper attention and is relatively unknown in present-day Lithuania. Other Jewish socialist, religious and 'territorial' ('the solution of the Jewish question') issues have been investigated more extensively. In view of the lack of corresponding research, 'Lithuanian' specifics of this international movement were neglected. Not much was known about the history and ideology of this political movement in Lithuania, and the views and evaluations that circulated in Lithuanian scholarship were either presented by opponents or taken over as Polish, German, or American historiographic stereotypes.

Bendikaitė's book is an attempt to fill in the gap in this field of Lithuanian historiography. The book discusses Zionism in the context of national movements and the history of Lithuanian Zionists during World War One. The study deals with the history of the political Zionist trend, its organizational structure and programme as well as the social and political activities

of Zionists in the structures of Jewish ethnic autonomy and government. Some independent tendencies of Zionism are also analysed, for instance Zionist revisionism. The study deals with some practical aspects of Party activity, such as Jewish education, physical culture, etc. The policy of organizing Jewish emigration from Lithuania and the settlement in Palestine are also dealt with.

Ideological interpretation is alien to the author. She bases her research on the tradition of empirical study and recounts events 'as they happened'. In the book there are no clichés, stereotypes or generalizations which often mislead the reader about the nature and aims of the Zionist movement. The movement, which is identified exceptionally with the objective to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, is presented without any revamp, with all its successes and failures, including local projects in Lithuania, all of which contributed to the creation of the state of Israel after the Second World War.

The book, containing much interesting previously unpublished material, is based on the sources kept in the archives of Lithuania and the YIVO in New York. There are many interesting details about events and people associated with the movement. The conclusions of the study are logical, and the empirical material is various and relevant.

Discussing the book one would like to draw attention to the theoretical scheme and areas under discussion on which the author could focus in her future work.

Noteworthy is the section of the book describing the followers of the religious Zionist wing as 'successors of the Hebrew linguistic movement'. An attempt is made to look at the problem of the relationship between Zionism and Judaism and even at the very discourse of religion as a prolongation of the linguistic tradition among Orthodox Jews. Meanwhile dialogue and possibilities of communication between the adherents of secular Zionism and traditional religious ideology were conditioned as likely as not by practical trivial causes, which are not disclosed in this work. It is important to give an answer to the question: whence was the problem of this interaction in Lithuania and what was its dynamics in the inter-war period? Some future study could also show how deep mistrust between the devotees of secular Zionist policy and tradition-cherishing Orthodox Jews was overcome. Consequently, a qualification of the interaction between the Zionists and the opposing religious activists would be desirable. It would not be adequate to confine oneself to practical disputes between religious parties and adherents of secular autonomy in Lithuania in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The majority of religious Jewish organizations and individuals criticized Zionism as a secular movement and treated attempts to establish a Jewish state in Israel as a sacrilege, since only the Messiah could perform that task. The Jews must return to Israel at God's request to live according to

the commandments of the Torah and Halakhah and to implement Lord's behests. Even possibly the most universal and liberal reformed Judaism (due to its orientation to the integration into surrounding cultures) was inconsistent with Zionism. In her book the author overlooks the religious and polemic works explaining the motives for the rise of Mizrachi, the dialogue and cooperation with the Zionist movement both in Lithuania and other countries. Why was this party weak in respect of organization and activity in Lithuania? Was that not due to the sharp divide between secular and religious policies? Lastly, the reaction of the religious communities and Agudat itself to such Mizrachi cooperation is not clear.

The leaders of the Mizrachi party and secular Zionists were unanimous in the questions of tactics, but in the long-term strategy they took upon themselves different tasks. They wanted a theocratic Israel given by God's will.

The relations with non-Jewish political parties cooperating with the Zionist movement were similar. There was compromise and common activity in tactical matters; however, agreement on the strategic vision was possible only because for the pre-war politicians it seemed too abstract, distant, and unrealistic.

In order to understand and appreciate the victories and losses of the Zionist organizations in Lithuania it is necessary to examine in greater detail the interaction between the Zionist movement and the political situation of the country. The experience and historiography of other countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania) show that cooperation with non-Jewish political organizations was integral tactics of the Zionist parties. In Lithuania the situation was the same. However, only further research can show if there is enough material on this issue in the archives.

In her book Bendikaitė deals with a topic the Lithuanian investigation of which is several decades behind in terms of world historiography. Therefore, her book widens historiographical information not only about the Zionist movement but also about the nature of Jewish policy and offers guidelines for further research, leading to a better understanding of Jewish policy in Lithuania. Bendikaitė is highly qualified for this kind of work and will continue her research. It is also worth paying attention to the exceptional typographical quality of the book.

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