Jewish politics and Jewish political culture (1897-1950)

Instructor:
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Jewish Studies Program
Central European University
2017/2018, Winter Term
2 credits
Office hours: by appointment

Course Description
This course aims to broaden its students’ knowledge and understanding of modern Jewish political behaviour. The starting point is the premise that Jewish politics, both in Europe and the United States, during the first half of the twentieth century, encompassed more than only a one-directional path leading to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Zionism’s eventual “victory” enabled the ascription of a normative label of “failure”, or marginality, to other (rival) political paths and mindsets. By exploring different Jewish political identities and actions, the course’s participants will gain an increased sense of the fluidity and variety of Jewish political reality during the period under consideration. Not only will we investigate the histories of Jewish political movements such as the Jewish Labour Bund, various forms of Diaspora Nationalism, Folkism, Zionism, and Territorialism, as well as Jewish socialist, communist, and anarchist groups and individuals, but we will also focus on less clearly organised forms of Jewish politics by looking at the connection between religion and politics, culture and politics (and culture as politics), Yiddishism, American-Jewish politics and Jewish assimilationist tendencies. We will read samples from some of the “classics” of Jewish political history (Frankel, Mendelsohn, Gitelman, a.o.), while leaving also ample space for an exploration of the more recent burgeoning field of post-post-Zionist scholarly work (Rabinovitch, Karlip, Loeffler a.o.). Finally, numerous primary sources will be central to our seminar discussions.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, students will be able to:

• understand and reflect on the diversity of Jewish political behaviour during the period studied, and to situate this picture within a broader non-Jewish geopolitical context.
• critically assess the political and scholarly aims of existing historiography of twentieth century Jewish politics.
• analyse primary sources on a textual basis (discourse analysis) and connect such findings to the relevant secondary literature provided.
• put forward, orally and in writing, a clearly formulated claim, supported by well-defined arguments.

Course Requirements

• Active class participation (20%)
• Weekly formulation of three questions based on the readings, due by 18:00, the day before class (20%)
• Class presentation of one of the assigned readings (depending on the number of students: 20% or 2 x 10%)
• Research paper (5000 words) on a class-related topic of choice. Topic (to be discussed and approved with and by the teacher): week 3; outline due in week 7.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: A Lost Atlantis: An Introduction to Jewish Politics and its Scholarship

Suggested additional reading:

Week 2: Diaspora Nationalism

Primary sources:
• Simon Dubnow, “Autonomism, The Basis of the National Program,” in Simon Dubnow, Nationalism and History. Essays on Old and New Judaism (Koppel S.
Suggested additional reading:


**Week 3: Yiddish(ism): Culture as Politics**


**Primary sources:**


Suggested additional reading:


Week 4: Socialism, Communism, and Anarchism


Primary sources:


Suggested additional reading:


Week 5: The Jewish Labour Bund


Primary sources:


Suggested additional reading:


**Week 6: Zionism**


**Primary sources:**


**Suggested additional reading:**


**Week 7: Zionism Revisited**


**Primary sources:**


Suggested additional reading:
• Simon Rawidowicz, “Two that are One”, in State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Continuity: Essays on the ‘Ever-Dying People’ (Brandeis UP, 1998), 147-161.

Week 8: The Jewish Territorialist Movement
• Adam Rovner, In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands before Israel (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 219-228.

Primary sources:

Suggested additional reading:

**Week 9: American-Jewish Politics**


**Primary sources:**


**Suggested additional reading:**

Week 10: Religion and Jewish Politics


Primary sources:

Suggested additional reading:

Week 11: Assimilation(ism) / Integration


Primary sources:


**Week 12: Synthesis and Conclusion**
