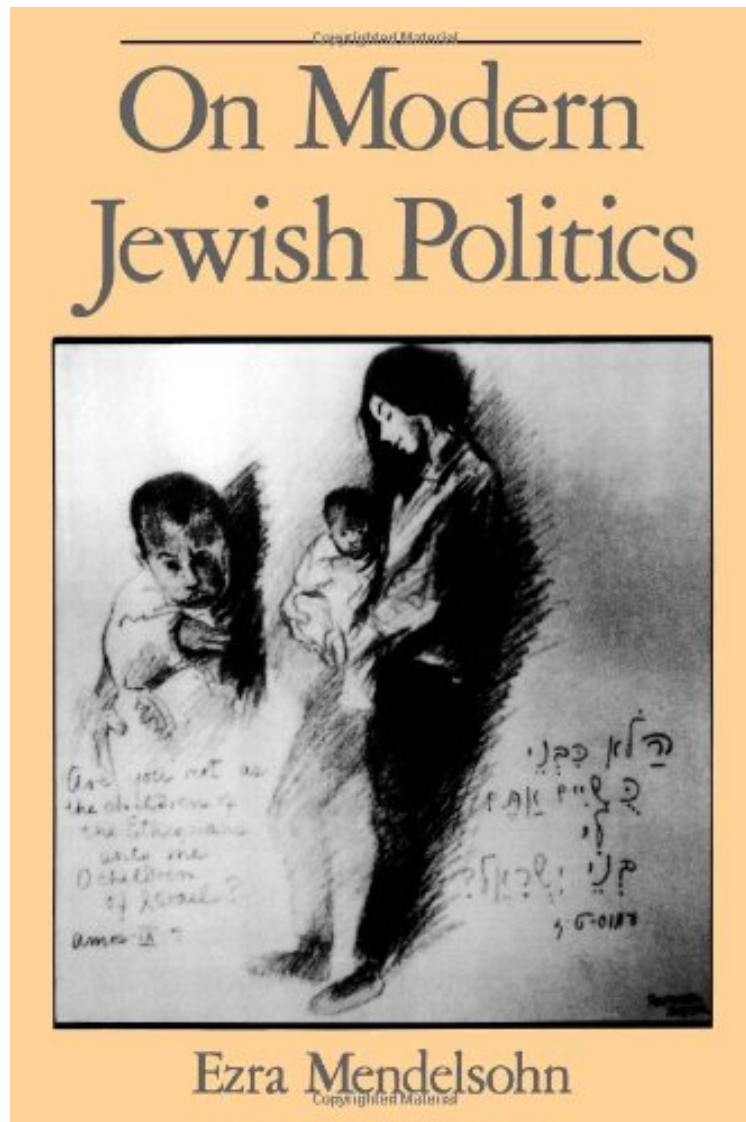


[FREE] On Modern Jewish Politics (Studies in Jewish History)

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Ezra Mendelsohn

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Ezra Mendelsohn : On Modern Jewish Politics (Studies in Jewish History) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On Modern Jewish Politics (Studies in Jewish History):

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. On Modern Jewish Politics By Nathan Fuchs The book arrived promptly, on time for a class, and was in good shape as advertised. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Reflective View of the Pre-WWII Politics of Poland's Jews. Why Jews and Communism By Jan Peczkis The Litwaks (Litwaks, LITVAKES in Yiddish) were long the objects of not only Endek but also Jewish preoccupation: "...in the

Jewish world of Eastern Europe these Litvaks were celebrated--or damned--for their well-known tendencies toward modernization, secularization, radicalism, and the logical extension of all this, namely, modern nationalism." (p. 42). Although Mendelsohn devotes much of his work to condemning Polish anti-Semitism, he comes to a point where he cuts the Poles some slack: "How could a Polish state successfully cope with a huge non-Polish population comprising something in the nature of 40 percent of all its citizens?" (p. 131). Before touching on the state of Israel, Mendelsohn senses a bit of hypocrisy in Jews attacking Poland when they never were in a position of having to deal with recalcitrant minorities: "It is easy to accuse certain Poles--and even the interwar Polish state--of chauvinism...But Jews of the national persuasion--Bundists...or Zionists...can hardly be accused of such crimes and misdemeanors as they ruled over no one." (p. 112). Interestingly, the author sees the use of Yiddish, by religious as well as secular Jews, not so much an end in itself as a means by which Jews enforced their aggressive separatism (or what I call self-imposed apartheid): "The famous Chinese wall separating Jew from gentile...at least in Eastern Europe, a devotion to Yiddish, not because this language was regarded as a basis of modern secular Jewish nationalism but because its preservation reduced the likelihood of close contacts with the non-Jewish world." (pp. 23-24). The author prefers the term integrationism to assimilation. Mendelsohn believes that Jews failed to integrate more into Polish society not only because of Polish hostility and Jewish separatism, but also because of Poland's situation: "A backward social structure dominated by remnants of the old aristocracy, the established church, and the peasantry is not one that will facilitate Jewish integration." (p. 39). However, Mendelsohn tacitly agrees with the Endek premise that integration into Polish society does not necessarily make a Pole out of a Jew: "But this was usually a case of acculturation without integration--the worst of all worlds, and no victory for the Poles and Romanians of the Mosaic faith." (p. 117). Interestingly, Mendelsohn contends that Jewish nationalists generally agreed with Dmowski and the Endeks that Jews were not, and could never, become Poles. (p. 19). As in many of his other works, Mendelsohn shows that Jewish support for Communism went far beyond membership in the tiny, outlawed Communist party. Isaac Bashevis Singer is quoted as calling Poale Zion Communist. (p. 53). In 1920, the Poale Zion split into pro-Communist and anti-Communist factions (p. 69), and the Bund, which Mendelsohn identifies as a Marxist organization (p. 72), lost some of its members to Communism. (p. 69). Antisemitism by itself cannot be the main reason that Jews found Communism appealing. After all, the political left had been anti-Semitic in its hostility to Jews as a capitalist class. (p. 96). Karl Marx was one of the left-wing heroes and martyrs of Jewish origin, "...whose blatant and inconvenient anti-Semitism was ignored or explained away." (p. 32). As for combatting bigotry, Jewish Communists found bigotry by Jews as objectionable as bigotry against Jews. The author quotes Sydney Hook, who saw Jewish Communists as, "...a vanguard, liberated from the exclusionist and chauvinistic principles of their forefathers..." (p. 97). Mendelsohn (pp. 98-99) elaborates on this theme, and adds, "Hatred in this context means, among other things, hatred of the gentile, the drunken and violent GOY of the Jewish imagination. Judaism, at least the Judaism as shaped by the rabbis, meant despising the non-Jew..." (p. 99). Was it, in the end, all about the Jewish acquisition of power and influence? Mendelsohn thinks so, albeit in a positive sense: "The alliance with the gentiles signified not only comradeship but also power...For Jews on the left the longed-for alliance with the international working class signified their transformation from a despised and powerless minority into an integral part of a mighty force, potentially the majority of mankind." (p. 100). Now consider the impending German-made Holocaust. The author assesses Zionism. He believes that the main reason significantly more Polish (and German) Jews did not emigrate to Palestine before WWII owed less to British resistance than to the Jews' lack of desire to do so--even those professedly sympathetic to Zionism. (p. 116).

This book is a concise guide to and analysis of the complexities of modern Jewish politics in the interwar European and American diaspora. "Jewish politics" refers to the different and opposing visions of the Jewish future as formulated by various Jewish political parties and organizations and their efforts to implement their programs and thereby solve the "Jewish question." Mendelsohn begins by attempting a typology of these Jewish political parties and organizations, dividing them into a number of schools or "camps." He then suggests a "geography" of Jewish politics by locating the core areas of the various camps. There follows an analysis of the competition among the various Jewish political camps for hegemony in the Jewish world--an analysis that pays particular attention to the situation in the United States and Poland, the two largest diasporas, in the 1920s and 1930s. The final chapters ask the following questions: what were the sources of appeal of the various Jewish political camps (such as the Jewish left and Jewish nationalism), to what extent did the various factions succeed in their efforts to implement their plans for the Jewish future, and how were Jewish politics similar to, or different from, the politics of other minority groups in Europe and America? Mendelsohn concludes with a discussion of the great changes that have occurred in the world of Jewish politics since World War II.

"Mendelsohn's fine overview of Jewish politics...fills a conspicuous vacuum, often brilliantly....All in all, this is an impartial, highly competent, and instructive book."--American Historical "Very spirited and controversial...A first-rate book."--Jewish Chronicle"An invaluable history of the reaction of Europe's Jews to the vast changes brought about by

20th-century political upheavals."--Choice"Ezra Mendelsohn's dissection of modern Jewish politics is immensely informative and clear, and it is enriched with abundant supportive examples from the spheres of literature, art, and music. Although political history is one of the most developed areas in the study of other European peoples, only lately has Jewish political behavior begun to be analyzed in analogous terms, and in this field Mendelsohn is one of a small number of pioneering scholars."--Commentary

From the Back Cover
In this book Ezra Mendelsohn presents a concise guide to the complexities of modern diaspora Jewish politics. He divides the various Jewish political parties and organizations into a number of schools or 'camps, ' provides a geography of Jewish politics, and analyzes the results of the competition among the different camps for hegemony in the Jewish world.

About the Author
Ezra Mendelsohn is at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.