

Introduction

This is the most difficult test of national maturity: when a nation is deprived not only of its political independence, but also its territory; when the storm of history isolates it from its physical foundation, scattering it in foreign lands where it gradually loses its unifying language. If for all that, in this rupture of external national bonds a people continues over the course of many centuries to create a distinctive existence, manifested in the persistent striving for further autonomous development, then this people has attained the highest stage of cultural-historical individualization and may be considered indestructible if *under subsequent conditions it intensely maintains its national will*.

S. M. Dubnov

In a full-color poster for elections to the All-Russian Jewish Congress in 1917, the Yidishe Folkspartey, or Jewish People's Party, entreats the residents of a small Jewish town to vote for their list. The poster depicts a ramshackle shtetl with broken posts and crumbling wooden homes; the townspeople gathered around a Folkspartey banner include a mix of elderly men with beards and women with covered heads, along with clean-shaven men (one with a newspaper under his arm) (see Figure 7 in Chapter 6). This outwardly populist Jewish party sought to enlist the support of the broadest possible segment of Russia's Jewish population. It forsook neither traditional religious and economic life, like the Jewish socialist parties did, nor life in Europe, like the Zionists did. It embraced Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian as fulfilling different roles in Jewish life. It sought the democratization of Jewish communal self-government and the creation of new Russian Jewish national-cultural and governmental institutions. Most important, the self-named folklists believed that Jewish national aspirations could be fulfilled through Jewish autonomy in Russia and Eastern Europe more broadly.

Despite its pretensions to populism and its claims to represent all of Russian Jewry, the Folkspartey only superficially penetrated the kind of small Jewish town depicted in this poster. In fact, Jewish life in Eastern Europe had for some time been shifting away from this kind of small Jewish town as a result of massive internal migration, emigration,

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urbanization, and dislocation due to war. Yet, ideologically and organizationally, the Folkspartey leadership profoundly influenced the course of Russian Jewish politics. The principal tenet of the Folkspartey—non-territorial autonomy for the Jews of Russia, or autonomism—became the central thrust of Jewish political life in Russia before the party's founding during the revolutionary years of 1905–7. Thus well before the creation of a Russian republic in 1917, autonomism had taken hold of the Jewish political mainstream. The fact that Jewish autonomy had become the single positive political demand that spanned the Jewish ideological spectrum is reflected in how, following the tsar's abdication, all Jewish political groups and parties took part in organizing an all-Russian Jewish congress and in establishing local Jewish communal governments and, at the same time, called for guaranteed legal rights to an independent Jewish cultural and national life.

Jewish autonomism, the idea that Jews in the Russian Empire should demand not only civil equality but also national or collective rights, was first articulated by the historian, journalist, and political theorist Simon Dubnov (1860–1941) at the end of the nineteenth century. As Dubnov himself defined it (with scant modesty), “autonomism [was] the name given by Simon Dubnov in 1901 for the practical program for national-Jewish politics in the *galut* [exile, or Diaspora] which developed from his championing of a national ideology.”¹ Dubnov's “letters,” a series of essays published between 1897 and 1906, constructed a diaspora-nationalist political philosophy that was centered on the demand for Jewish local and national self-government and rooted in a historical claim to Jewish autonomy in Eastern Europe.² In essence, Dubnov sought to apply the territorial demands made by other national minorities in the Russian Empire to the nonterritorial situation of the Jews by calling for Jewish autonomy over education, culture, and communal welfare and the reconstitution of Jewish autonomy. In doing so, he called for the Jews of the empire to reject the “Western” model of Jewish emancipation, in which Jews gave up their collective rights in return for civil equality for Jews as individuals. In his influential essay “Autonomism,” published in 1901, Dubnov proclaimed: “The new epoch must combine Jewish civil-political equality with considerable sociocultural autonomy like that enjoyed by other nations in similar historical conditions. Jews

must demand *civil*, *political*, and *national* equality, without sacrificing one for the sake of the other, as was the case in the past.”³ In the years following this essay’s publication, Jewish political discourse shifted decisively toward discussion of national rights and self-government and became dominated by much of the agenda set out by Dubnov in his political treatises. Although Dubnov suggested that the term *autonomism* applied specifically to his own “practical program,” many Jewish political groups in the Russian Empire developed programs that could be characterized as autonomist (but within a socialist, Zionist, or even liberal-integrationist framework) and adhered to Dubnov’s position that the “fundamental principle [of autonomism] is the acknowledgment that the Jews exist as a nation in its dispersal among other nations.”⁴

Like other nationalists, Jewish and not, Dubnov used historical arguments to justify political demands and pointed to historical parallels with other nationalities. The urgency with which he argued his case, however, rested on his belief that for Jews, arriving at the moment of emancipation was akin to coming to a dangerous precipice overhanging a sea of assimilation, into which whole Jewish communities had previously thrown themselves, thereby erasing their Jewish national identity. In essence, autonomism’s adherents sought to fortify the Russian Jewish community—linguistically, culturally, and politically—for the moment when it eventually reached this precipice. As we will see, Jewish autonomists came to cast themselves as soldiers in a battle against assimilation, a foe with multiple and changing forms. We now know that the Western and Central European “assimilated” Jews of Dubnov’s imagination experienced a more complex assimilative process than he suggests.⁵ Nonetheless, what actually occurred is less important than how autonomists viewed the Jewish experience with emancipation in the West, how they perceived the threat of assimilation at home, and how they believed this danger should be countered. The autonomist movement included different interpretations of what autonomy had meant for Jews historically and what it should mean in the future. But all the interpretations included the idea that Jewish citizenship in the Russian Empire, when it came, should take a very different form from what already existed in the states of Western and Central Europe.

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A single characteristic shared by most of the Jews who built a national movement in Russia was a period (or lifetime) of immersion in the Russian linguistic and cultural milieu. Similar to the empire's other national minorities, the Jewish cultural and political elite's internal struggle with questions of integration and national self-consciousness occurred, if not in isolation, then separate from the larger population. Some members of the Jewish elite were drawn from the small number of Russified (or in the Kingdom of Poland, Polonized) Jewry, others had left small towns for educational opportunities in bigger cities, and still others had participated in Russian political movements. Yet the legalistic nature of Jewish religious life combined with the traditionalism of Russian society created a situation in which an individual's personal secularism often led to an especially sharp break with family and community. Secular Jewish intellectuals raised in traditional Jewish environments felt no desire to return to the rigors of religious life—its restrictions on diet, dress, and Sabbath rest—even while they mourned the attendant erosion of traditional Jewish life and culture. Furthermore, even the most emancipated and radically enlightened Jews feared the degenerative effect that emancipation might have on the Russian Jewish collective.⁶ As a result, many Jewish intellectuals turned to Jewish nationalism and autonomy to fill both psychological and practical needs. If Jews could find a means of achieving national self-determination while remaining in an Eastern European world, then a reconstructed Jewish communal life might serve as a bridge between the traditional and the modern.

Reestablishing Jewish autonomy became a matter of Jewish survival or disappearance in the minds of autonomist activists, and the greatest challenge was overcoming their own sense of disconnection from the people and culture they hoped to protect. To take one example, in 1912, Yisroel Efroikin pleaded with Jewish intellectuals in the Russian Empire to reconnect with the Jewish people—"the folk"—from whom he believed they had become hopelessly alienated. According to Efroikin, "There are no deep, inner, or intimate threads binding him to the folk: instead there is a different lifestyle, a different worldview, and a different language. Only the sword hanging over all of our heads today, only the heavy whip whistling over our backs, and a pallid sentimentality without skin and bones still hold him [the intellectual] to

the people.”⁷ Efroikin went on to suggest that the Jewish intellectual in Russia was moving down a path similar to the one taken by his Western brethren, “in yearning to break and tear this last thread that binds him” to his community.⁸ Efroikin’s own story suggests that he was writing for and about himself as much as his audience, the readers of a new and struggling Yiddish magazine published in St. Petersburg. The product of a small Lithuanian town, Efroikin received a *heder* and *yeshiva* education before moving to Switzerland, where he attended the University of Bern. Efroikin’s study of law and economics in Bern was second in importance to his radicalization there, and when he returned to the Russian Empire in 1910 as a socialist, he must have been a very different person from when he left in 1904.⁹

We can see in Efroikin’s words much of the tension and irony inherent in the political objectives of the Jewish intelligentsia in the late Russian Empire. No different from the non-Jewish intelligentsia there, Jewish intellectuals argued among themselves about who best understood the needs and desires of their “people.” Of course there was no single kind of “Jewish intellectual” in the Russian Empire at the time: Jews subscribed to the widest possible variety of political ideologies, including, perhaps most commonly, no ideology at all. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify a set of issues and institutions that preoccupied politically active Jewish intellectuals in the empire’s dying days, and foremost among those issues was the reform and reconstitution of Jewish communal autonomy. Efroikin understood the potency of the forces tempting Jews to break free from tradition, and he argued that if this desire to break free could not be fought, then it should be channeled into reshaping Jewish communal life.

Because the transformation of the Russian Empire was still an open question (not only whether it should happen, but if so, when and into what), Jewish intellectuals considered how Jews might affect and be affected by that transformation. Those Jews who debated the “national idea” had already become part of the modern world and naturally presumed that with emancipation much of the rest of Russian Jewry would modernize as well. Modernity would confront Russian Jews, whether Russian Jews liked it or not, and Jewish intellectuals offered differing solutions to the problem. The most radical socialists sought to do away

with tradition completely; in inverse, the Orthodox movement *Agudat Yisrael* later sought to co-opt the political process to protect Jewish tradition. But for many Jews, nationalism was the bridge between the traditional world and the modern world. The autonomist movement (and different varieties of autonomism) thus resulted from an accommodation of traditional conceptions of Jewish community and peoplehood to the pressures of modernization. On a practical level, Jewish autonomism attempted to transform a premodern system of Jewish corporate autonomy into the secular and national institutions of Jewish self-government that would form the foundation of Jewish autonomy within the modern state. Finally, autonomy came to be viewed as the best defense against the threat of assimilation (real or imagined), the aspect of modernization that came to worry Russian Jewish intellectuals most.

Defining Nationalism in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia

How one explains nationalism historically depends primarily on how one defines it. Can nationalism be defined as a collective striving for sovereignty? Is it the attempt by groups to achieve a correlation between state boundaries and ethnicity? Or is it simply a sense of belonging to some cohesive political body? Each question will yield a different explanation for the emergence of nationalism and its relationship to modernization, and in my mind this is the fundamental problem with the most widely cited contemporary theorists of nationalism.¹⁰ Interestingly, one of the key theorists of Jewish socialism, Vladimir Medem, came to a similar conclusion during the early-twentieth-century debates over how to define nationalism and the Jewish nation: “It is obvious that the argument is futile, for each proceeds on the basis of what it needs to prove. Build the definition of a nation on the basis of its characteristics, and derive the sum of these characteristics from the definition of a nation.”¹¹ While readers may detect in my analysis the influence of certain recent theorists, I have avoided fitting the development of Jewish nationalism into a procrustean bed framed by one theory or another.

The approach taken in this book is to examine the moment when Jews began to call themselves nationalists and believed themselves to be participating in something called nationalism. Clearly, a sense of Jewish peoplehood existed before that point, as Jews had a legal framework regulating their lives and a national and religious narrative understood by all members of the group. Nonetheless, Jewish “nationalism” is a reflection of the ideological transformation of Am Yisrael—the People of Israel—into something that was new and that, although related to religious culture, was not defined solely by it.

Dubnov and other nationalists took active measures to promote and strengthen Jewish national self-consciousness and, in doing so, knowingly developed a distinctly modern form of Jewish nationalism that went beyond peoplehood while breaking with (or modifying) the biblical idea of Jewish chosenness. In fact, in tying together religion, language, peoplehood, and place (whether Eastern Europe or Palestine), all varieties of Jewish nationalism in Russia shared the same basic ingredients as Russian and Polish nationalism. In their application of history to the development of a “national idea,” Dubnov and his followers similarly seemed to exemplify the role of intellectuals in creating national movements. On the one hand, Jewish nationalism in Russia engendered a new secular understanding of the Jewish nation, one that allowed for national identification based on culture and history rather than on religious observance. On the other hand, the religion at the heart of Jewish culture and history was difficult to divorce from the new modern Jewish nationalism. Autonomists thus saw their primary task as solving the problem of how to provide secular Jews with a national culture and polity while constructing a communalist ethos that would bind traditional Jews (the folk) to people like themselves (the intelligentsia).

Contemporary understandings of autonomism ranged from limited demands for cultural autonomy to maximalist visions of a Jewish national assembly and a minister for Jewish affairs in the government. Unsurprisingly, the extent of a given political group’s autonomist demands integrally related to how it viewed the Jewish “nation.” In the early years of the twentieth century a major transformation occurred among both Jewish socialists and liberals away from cosmopolitanism and toward more overt identification of the Jews as a nation in need

of particular rights as a group. Where one desired autonomy—in religion, language, land, or spirit—depended on one’s political views and how one viewed the essence of Jewishness. A number of scholars have recently reexamined the period between 1881 and 1917, an era generally associated with the Jewish move away from liberal integrationism and toward more radical identities, both socialist and nationalist, to suggest that in fact Jewish political identity remained multilayered.¹² The past few years alone have seen a burst of studies (e.g., those by Nathaniel Deutsch, James Loeffler, Kenneth Moss, Gabriella Safran, and Jeffrey Veidlinger) that take as their subject the relationship between Jewish cultural production and identity construction in late imperial and revolutionary Russia.¹³ Not unlike Jews in other parts of Europe and in the Americas, many Jews in late imperial Russia attempted to create a personal identity that would allow them to feel part of a group (the Jewish people) and yet benefit from the cultures and societies in which they lived. In the Russian Empire such identity construction was rather obviously and self-consciously manifested in the abrupt turn to Yiddish by Russian-speaking Jewish intellectuals between 1905 and 1917 or in the gradual embrace of Jewish nationalism by highly acculturated Jewish lawyers. Nevertheless, not every shift in mentality should be viewed as a crisis of identity. The Jewish intellectuals described in this book, though no doubt often aware of the many contradictions related to their personal identity, were primarily concerned with solving the “Jewish question” in Russia in a manner suitable to Russian Jewry.¹⁴ In other words, they did not invent the notion of a Jewish nation; they came to feel part of one, often after a prolonged absence from the fold.

Jewish Sovereignty and Autonomy

It is almost taken for granted today that a people’s national sovereignty is linked to territory and defined by borders. The world’s national liberation movements since the mid-nineteenth century overwhelmingly focused on wresting political sovereignty from imperial control in a given place. If we look back, however, at the national diversity of the Russian Empire’s western provinces and the Austro-Hungarian

Empire's eastern regions, we find that solutions to the burning national issues of the day did not always revolve around territory. In this part of Europe before the two world wars, different linguistic and religious groups frequently lived in cities and towns where no single group formed a majority. The possibility of guaranteed national minority rights in both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires was one of the most discussed issues of the day, as national minorities sought greater control over their affairs. Although Jews could not demand territorial autonomy in Russia like the Poles, Finns, Ukrainians, or Baltic peoples did, they could claim the right to use their own language, educate their own children, establish their own universities, and generally govern their own affairs.

Furthermore, Jewish autonomism presented a solution to the complex historical problem of Jewish sovereignty in the Diaspora. The issue of the Jews' power and sovereignty throughout their long history has been the topic of more than one comprehensive treatment.¹⁵ To appreciate the resonance of such questions, one need look no further than recent popular fiction. In 2007 a novel set in a counterfactual parallel world, in which millions of Jews found refuge and a form of self-government in Alaska, became a bestseller in the United States.¹⁶ In this novel, by Michael Chabon, Franklin Roosevelt's administration, reluctant to take in Jewish refugees but sympathetic to their plight, established a Jewish autonomous district in Sitka, Alaska (the premise for Chabon's story was a real proposal made by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes in 1938 to use Jewish refugees from Europe to help settle the Alaskan frontier). In the novel Sitka becomes home to several million Jews. Chabon's story, and its commercial success, reflects the hold that the potential courses of Jewish history and the possibilities of Jewish sovereignty continue to have on the popular imagination.¹⁷ The Jews in recent history are often seen as a people both with and without agency. They were able to establish their own national movement and sovereignty over their historical birthplace, far from their major population centers, yet at the same time they were unable to save millions of Jews trapped by war and genocide. At the core of the question of Jewish fate and agency one finds the question of sovereignty and autonomy. In the mind of Chabon, no less than those of the early

Zionists, territorialists, and much of the public, sovereignty is something that can be achieved through population concentration and territorial separation. In the 1930s even Stalin and the Soviet government briefly warmed to such an idea and established a Jewish autonomous region in the Soviet Far East (Birobidzhan), because in Soviet thinking the Jews could not be a real nationality without territory.¹⁸ Yet Jews did not always equate autonomy, self-government, and sovereignty with territory, even when they made up a plurality—in some cases, a majority—in many towns and cities in Eastern Europe.

With the benefit of hindsight, Jewish autonomism may seem ill-fated or unrealistic. Yet autonomism merely reflected the nearly universal belief at the time that Jews would continue to live as Jews in the territories of the Russian Empire for many years to come. It is important to remember that in the early years of the twentieth century, many political possibilities still remained open for Russian Jews. Most of them did not feel compelled to choose between Zionism and socialism, or some combination of the two. Jewish intellectuals, whether liberal or radical, expected the empire's imminent or eventual transformation and sought to prepare the way for Jews to participate politically as equal members of a new society in a reconstituted state. Such political preparation took place noisily and in an atmosphere of intense competition between parties and ideologies and emerging rivalries between nationalities. Autonomism's seeming attainability was the very quality that drew Jews to the idea. Jewish autonomy required neither the complete overthrow of the tsar's regime nor the mass emigration of Jews. Jewish autonomy required only one thing: that when the empire became unsustainable in its existing form, Jews would be treated equally with other nationalities.

A New History of Jewish National Politics

The turn to autonomism by Russian Jewish intellectuals played a central role in both the politicization of Russian Jewry and the development of Jewish national self-consciousness. Although scholars have concentrated on the influences of Austrian socialism, Russian populism, English utilitarianism, or German Romanticism on the

intellectual development of Dubnov and other Russian Jewish nationalist theorists, Jewish autonomism was predominantly a product of its times. The movement for Jewish autonomy developed in the context of changing notions of political sovereignty, decentralization, and federalism among the many national groups of Eastern Europe and should be seen as a key element of both the political campaign for Jewish individual and collective rights and the cultural mission to create an alternative to religious traditionalism. Various parties and individuals incorporated autonomism into their ideologies for different purposes: to aid the class struggle, as a waystation on the road to Jewish statehood in Palestine, or as a means of finding an answer to the Jewish national question in the places where most of world Jewry then lived. The widespread dissemination of the autonomist idea, and with it the conviction that through autonomy the Jews might attain their national aspirations under a future constitutional or revolutionary regime, thus helps to explain the general Jewish turn to nationalism in Russia. By claiming that Russia's Jewish question could be solved as part of a general solution to its nationalities question, Russian Jewish nationalists fostered the belief that Jewish national claims, whether in Palestine or Russia, deserved to be redressed alongside their demands for civil emancipation.

I originally intended this book to be about the influence of an idea—autonomism—on Jewish political life in late imperial and revolutionary Russia. Although Dubnov's fame ensured that "Dubnov literature" has flowed like a steady stream since his death and in fact has only increased in recent years, most contributors to that literature have focused on his life, on a historiographic approach, or on relationships with other well-known public figures.¹⁹ What remained to be completed was what one historian called a systematic assessment of the "sociopolitical impact on Russian and Polish Jewry of Dubnow's ideology."²⁰ This is the task, still relevant twenty-five years after this observation was made, that I set out to complete. Indeed, Dubnov's ideas influenced not just the political discourse of the period but also the national self-consciousness of an expanding number of educated and self-taught Jews—and, on a practical level, the objectives and demands of every Russian Jewish political party and communal organization in the early twentieth century. In

attempting to define Dubnov's sociopolitical footprint, however, I also discovered several interesting stories that help to explain the relationship between Jewish autonomy and the genesis of Jewish nationalism more generally, and these became the primary themes of this book. The first theme is that a small number of intellectuals made a sizable impact on Jewish national self-consciousness in the Russian Empire and on ideas about what the Jewish community, people, or nation needed to do to reconfigure itself for survival in the modern world. The second theme is that practical efforts toward Jewish autonomism closely followed attempts within Russian imperial society more generally to create more local self-government, a more decentralized state, and what we today call civil society. And the third theme is that Jewish nationalism developed in a changing legal environment, where the idea that nations had legal rights was beginning to take hold. Much of the debate about Jewish nationalism in the Russian Empire was therefore about what legal rights Jews were entitled to, as individuals, as a group, and as a nation.

This is the first book to examine in totality the movement for Jewish autonomy in late imperial and revolutionary Russia. I aim to explore the role of autonomism in the process of Jewish politicization, to identify the various streams of Jewish autonomism as they developed, and to determine how and why different Jewish political parties and figures took up autonomism. I also take into account the wide range of ideological and circumstantial factors that contributed to the ascendance of Jewish national rights. The actions of the Russian state and Russian intellectuals, the struggles of other national movements in the western provinces of the Russian Empire, questions of national minority rights in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the mixing of new Jewish socialist and nationalist ideologies, urbanization in the Russian Empire, and the development of a Jewish intelligentsia that was actively engaged in the political questions of the day—these are just some of the elements necessary for a full view of Jewish politics in late imperial and revolutionary Russia.

The book moves approximately chronologically from the turn of the twentieth century until the early 1920s. In the first chapter I provide an explanation of the intellectual and historical origins of autonomism.

In Chapter 2 I explain how ideas about federalism and state decentralization that were popular among Russian intellectuals influenced their Jewish counterparts, and I consider the development of parallel conceptions of nonterritorial autonomy among Jewish and non-Jewish socialists. Here I make a key argument, one that runs through the rest of the book: that Jewish autonomism followed the Russian movement to create a self-governing public sphere and national life independent from the state. In the third chapter I examine the role of the Russian Revolution of 1905–7 in politicizing Russian Jewry and bringing the issue of national rights to the fore. During these revolutionary years and thereafter, politically active Jews in Russia became convinced that if the Jews did not create a program for nonterritorial Jewish autonomy, they would be left without the autonomous rights of the other national minorities. The decade leading up to World War I saw the creation of new autonomist initiatives and growing nationalism across the Jewish political spectrum. Jewish intellectuals, lawyers, and communal activists debated the nature of the national idea and the ideal form of Jewish self-government. In Chapter 4 I analyze the Jewish conferences, organizations, and publications established during the interrevolutionary period where the “national idea” and the possible means of implementing Jewish autonomy in Russia were debated.

Both the war and the February Revolution of 1917 opened new opportunities to advance Jewish autonomy. As discussed in Chapter 5, Jewish political activists worked during World War I to centralize Jewish communal organizations and establish local and Russia-wide self-government. In the midst of war, widespread anti-Jewish violence, and a refugee crisis, Jewish activists (like those of other nationalities) seized the opportunity to build institutions that could actualize their national autonomy. Finally, in Chapters 6 and 7 I evaluate not only the lively Jewish experiment with legal autonomy in Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe made possible by the February Revolution and the tsar’s abdication but also how the historical processes that led to autonomism’s eventual failure between the world wars reflected the broader conflicts that arose from the dissolution of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and their transformation into new states. In Chapter 6 I pay particular attention to Jewish voting in the wide array of Jewish and

general elections that took place over the course of 1917 because it provides a rare opportunity to assess how political ideas about nationalism, national rights, autonomy, liberalism, and socialism made their way (or didn't) into Jewish public opinion. As discussed in the book's final chapter, Jewish claims to national minority rights made their way to the deliberations and eventual treaties of the Versailles Conference, and the issue of collective Jewish rights—and in particular whether the Jews should be recognized as a nationality—was a question with considerable ramifications in the early Soviet Union, a state that came into being by promising national self-determination for all. Even though full-fledged Jewish autonomism was suppressed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the concept of Jewish collective rights persisted and was in fact imported in different forms to the Western liberal democracies and the Jewish community in Palestine, known as the Yishuv. In sum, with many bumps and much disagreement, between the turn of the twentieth century and the early 1920s, Russia's Jewish political, intellectual, and financial elite managed to develop the institutional and ideological framework for an autonomous community (or nation, depending on whom one asked). That process was alternately enabled by circumstances and then curtailed by them, because ultimately the Jews in the new states that emerged following World War I lacked the power to enforce Jewish claims to national rights and autonomy.

The tragic fate of European Jewry has for many compounded the difficulty in understanding that in the early twentieth century many Jews believed that their national expectations could be fully realized in Eastern Europe, and others, such as Zionists and socialists, adopted demands for Jewish national rights in Russia (and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) alongside their platforms for a Jewish state or proletarian revolution. Yet at the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian government faced intense pressure from both its emerging civil society and national groups in the western provinces to reform itself and decentralize its powers. Jewish autonomism emerged in this context and became not merely an ideology but a principle around which Jewish political and social life in the Russian Empire could be organized.