



Jews and the Left: The Rise and Fall of a Political Alliance

Philip Mendes

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The disproportionate historical contribution of Jews to the political Left has been well documented. It can in fact be argued that from approximately 1848 till 1970, an informal political alliance existed between Jews and the political Left. This was never an alliance of all Jews and all Left groups. But it was an alliance between key sections of the Left and key sections of politically active Jews at various times and in various places. Both partners to this alliance were motivated by a combination of pragmatic self-interest and idealism or altruism.

Philip Mendes' work is the first publication to provide a systematic historical and political overview of the relationship between Jews and the Left. It argues that Jews were drawn to the Left by a range of structural and cultural influences including poverty and class oppression, anti-Semitic violence and discrimination, Jewish ethical teachings, and Left support for Jewish rights. Nevertheless, most Jews were never sympathetic to left-wing politics, and a significant number of Jews became victims of Communist regimes. Equally, the subsequent decline of Jewish involvement in the Left can be attributed to relatively objective factors such as the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel which transformed Jewish dependence from international to national forces.

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