

MEDEM JEWISH SOCIALIST GROUP:  
STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

PREAMBLE -- The Jewish people is a nation of many communities, dispersed over the world, united by history, languages and cultures that transcend political boundaries.

As a Jewish socialist group, we locate ourselves within a long progressive tradition of Jewish struggles for the rights and dignity of the Jews themselves, and of all oppressed people. In particular, we identify with the heritage of the Jewish Labor Bund, with which we are affiliated.

Founded in 1897, in Czarist Russia, the Bund exemplifies the traditions of militant and revolutionary democratic socialism and solidarity among peoples. The Bund has been uncompromising in its defense of Jewish national rights and secular Jewish culture. Vladimir Medem, for whom we are named, was an early leader and theoretician of the Bund.

Since the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States during the first decades of this century, many Jews have continued to fight for social justice, and have played important roles in the American labor movement and the left. The Jewish people also brought with them their culture and traditions, and have continued to develop them in America, which has become the scene of great Jewish cultural creativity.

This is the heritage on which we hope to build. This statement represents the common elements in our outlooks and goals. We see this statement of principles, not as a dogma, but as a starting point toward a vision of a vital Jewish culture and a new world.

SECULAR JEWISH CULTURE -- We support the continued development of secular Jewish culture. In particular, we look to our rich East European Jewish heritage and Yiddish culture for the inspiration and the tools with which to build a creative Jewish life in America. At the same time, we respect other Jewish languages and cultural traditions. We are for pluralism within the Jewish people, as we are in the society at large.

The development of the modern Jewish culture expressed in the Yiddish language was intimately bound up with the revolutionary and labor movements. An identification with Yiddish means identification with a period in Jewish history when the Jewish socialist subculture and institutions were strongest. It means identification with the poor and the oppressed.

Above all, an identification with Yiddish and Yiddish culture is an identification with the last 1,000 years of Jewish history and creativity. We look to them as a link to our world community in the present and as our hope for Jewish continuity in the future.

Yiddish culture has faced many obstacles to its survival. Some

within the Jewish community have sought to displace it and substitute for it either the local national culture or another aspect of Jewish culture. From without, Yiddish culture has faced heavy pressures. Still, it has survived.

Nevertheless, these pressures have had their effect. Many of us do not know the Yiddish language and culture. In our work we strive to strengthen our own knowledge of our history and culture, and to contribute to the vitality of American Jewish culture.

DOIKAYT AND ZIONISM -- The Jewish people are, and will continue to be, a world-wide people. Twenty-five centuries of Jewish life provide our case for the free development of every one of our cultural and communal centers. This is doikayt, the principle of "hereness". Efforts to subordinate the multitude of Jewish communities to any one community are harmful to the survival of the Jewish people.

Zionism has proved incapable of solving the political and existential problems of the Jewish people. Jews will have to continue to grapple with these questions wherever they live. The foundation of the Jewish state has not made Jews in other countries more secure, as Zionism promised it would. Neither has Israel made the Jews independent of the wills of non-Jews. Such independence is illusory for any nation in the modern world.

The Zionist movement denigrates cultures other than Hebrew culture, subordinates the interests of other Jewish communities to the interests of the State of Israel and undermines the viability of Jewish communities throughout the world.

We are deeply concerned with the well-being of the over three million Jews in Israel and strongly support their right to national self-determination, including the right to maintain an independent state. We support the full democratization of Israeli society, and stand behind those forces struggling to achieve that objective. At the same time, we support the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination.

Blind support of a state has tended to pull Jews in the United States to the right, against their actual interests. As socialists we reject any approach which glorifies state power, even if it is Jewish state power, and which tends to put the Jewish people in conflict with the rights of other peoples.

NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM -- We affirm the right of every national group to political and cultural self-determination. We do not counterpose the interests of the Jewish people to those of other peoples. Rather, we encourage comradeship and cooperation among different nationalities. Only in an atmosphere of cooperation and tolerance for diversity can each national group develop freely and fully.

Internationalism connotes support for socialist movements throughout the world. The struggle for socialism is furthered by the close cooperation of socialist movements conducted on an international scale.

ANTI-SEMITISM -- Anti-Semitism is a threat to Jews throughout the world. Anti-Semitism is prejudice against or persecution of the Jews as a people. It can take the form of religious and cultural

suppression, economic and educational discrimination, denial of political rights, expulsion and even genocide.

Scapegoating and stereotyping are basic to anti-Semitism. Jews have been branded as foreign- as rootless cosmopolitans- as all powerful, as controlling and as subversive.

Periods of economic crisis and insecurity have proven to be fertile for the growth of anti-Semitic actions and attitudes. It is often fostered and manipulated by powerful groups to maintain their positions in society. However, anti-Semitism remains a problem even in periods of relative security.

Though anti-Semitism has traditionally been rooted in the right, the left has not been free of the anti-Semitism which exists in society as a whole. Its traditional denial of cultural and national rights to minorities has been particularly true as applied to Jewish peoplehood. The decision of much of the left to single out Zionism for vilification from among all nationalist movements often serves as the cover for a basic anti-Semitic attitude.

The struggle against anti-Semitism is part of the struggle against all forms of racism and national oppression. It is important that Jews continue to fight against anti-Semitism by reaching out for allies in other oppressed nationalities and in the left.

We must be vigilant and confront anti-Semitism in any guise in which it may appear.

RACISM -- Racism is central to the history of this country. The institutionalization of economic, political and cultural discrimination continues to produce sharp inequalities between whites and national and racial minorities, and divides the working class.

As members of a people which has continually been the victim of racism, we actively support the struggle of Blacks and other oppressed nationalities for full equality and for cultural self-determination. We oppose racism wherever it arises, but we are particularly outraged by racism within the Jewish community. Racism, no matter who is the target, endangers the security and well-being of the Jewish community.

Throughout our history we have been the targets of racist immigration and emigration policies. One need look no further than the closed-door policies of the 'friendly powers' during the Holocaust. We vehemently oppose the current U.S. policy, which is permeated by racism. We protest the Immigration and Naturalization Service's policy of terror and intimidation that only serves to create a docile work force for U.S. employers. The "flood of immigration" is a logical result of this country's domination of the Third World.

SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY -- We are for democratic socialism. Democratic socialism is a society based on self-government, a society in which the realm of democracy is extended to all spheres and all levels of social life. At its heart, people control their own communities, workplaces and institutions. Socialism is based on self-determination and human cooperation, rather than on relations of domination, subordination and exploitation. It is a society organized to facilitate the fullest realization of human potential

and the expression of human creativity.

We reject any claims by dictatorial or authoritarian regimes to be socialist. Socialism has not succeeded, and cannot succeed, in one country. Systems designed to maintain the domination of the many by the few- whether they be capitalist or bureaucratic dictatorships of the left or right- are antithetical to our goal of humanistic democratic socialism.

The creation of socialism is not an event, but a long process. As part of that process we strive to contribute to groups and movements working toward social justice, peace, equality and democracy.

FEMINISM -- The oppression of women is basic to the society in which we live. This oppression is based on a system of institutions and beliefs which rigidly define sex roles for women and men.

Women have been assigned primary responsibility for raising children and caring for the home, work which is usually not recognized and is undervalued. At the same time, this homemaking role serves to remove women from sources of power in society. Women who do work outside the home are channeled into lower paying, lower status jobs. Even when women work side by side with men, they are not paid equally.

Culturally, 'femaleness' is portrayed as passivity, dependency and submissiveness in order to justify women's place in society. This definition is oppressive to men as well. Women's control of their own bodies is threatened by sexual violence and harassment, denial of abortion rights, forced sterilization and limitations on contraception.

The oppression of homosexuals is another aspect of the socially enforced sex role system. Lesbians and gay men suffer from laws against homosexuality and are often denied their rights to employment, housing, public accomodation and child custody. The sexist attitudes and laws which pervade our society foster anti-gay violence and harassment. Lesbian and gay male partners are denied the legal rights and social sanctions which married couples enjoy.

We support the struggle for full equality for women and gay people in society and in the Jewish community, including the struggle for legal equality, reproductive freedom, freedom from discrimination and violence. The women's and gay movements, far from being of narrow interest, have far-reaching implications. These movements have uncovered the political content of areas of our lives which we thought to be "merely" personal. They have shown that our personal relations are strongly conditioned by ideas and institutions which reinforce male domination. They have shown us the need to struggle against imposed sex roles both inside and outside the family. Feminism thus means not simply the right of women to expand their lives into traditionally male spheres, but contains a new conception of human possibility.