

Mario Keßler, Antisemitismus, Zionismus und Sozialismus, Decaton Verlag, Mainz 1993, 156 S., brosch., 24 DM.

In this anthology Mario Keßler has assembled a dozen of his articles, lectures, and reviews, almost all of which date from the period between 1988 and 1992. These pieces are written in an engaging, accessible, and jargon-free style. They are moreover, based on extensive reading of German, Russian, English and French published sources, and on original research conducted in German, Polish, and American archives.

Keßler's work sketches out the attitudes of the Second International, the Komintern, the SPD and the KPD towards matters related to the »Jewish question«, and also discusses relevant aspects of the thought of Lenin, Trotsky and other figures and institutions. While manifestly writing from a leftist perspective, Keßler repeatedly and pointedly condemns Stalinist positions, stressing, for example, anti-Semitic aspects of Stalin's treatment of Jewish communists in the 1930s, and the anti-Jewish repressions which occurred in the 1950s in what Keßler describes as the »(pseudo)-socialist lands«.

Keßler displays admiration for the (anti-Zionist) Jewish Workers Bund, and criticizes Communist historians for distorting the significant role played by that movement in the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. His work is sensitive to Jewish concerns, and perceptive in detecting manifestations of anti-Jewish prejudice.

Keßler, however, is a historian of the labor movement, not a historian of Jewry. His work is solid and dependable when it discusses German political parties and international institutions. Despite his admirable and extensive research, however, this work is not quite as uniformly dependable when discussing Russian Jewish politics or figures. Keßler identifies Markus Ratner, for example, who was a leader of the SERP (the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party), as a »Poale-Zionist« (S. 108) – that is, as a member of the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Party Poalei-Zion, which was actually a rival party to the SERP. In another piece, Keßler describes the SERP (which was generally sympathetic to the non-Marxist Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, and often hostile to the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party) as seeking to link Zionism »mit marxistischem Gedankengut« (S. 31).

Keßler seems to suggest (S. 117, S. 135) that a majority of Russian Jewry supported the Mensheviks or those linked to the Mensheviks in the period leading up to the October Revolution. Election results from cities with substantial Jewish populations, however, do not corroborate this suggestion. In Minsk, for example, where Jewish parties were elected to 28 of the 102 seats in the city council during the relevant period, 16 of the Jewish seats were occupied by representatives of the Jewish National Bloc, 10 were occupied by Bundists, and one each by the Poalei-Zion and by the Socialist Zionists. The Zionists won the Jewish communal elections in Kiev. 35 of the 101 deputies elected to the Jewish community organization of Odessa were Zionists. The Bundists won 26 seats in Odessa, Orthodox groups and the Poalei-Zion each won 11, the Folkspartay 9, and a variety of other groups occupied the remaining 19 seats.

These lapses to the contrary notwithstanding, Keßler has written a very good, highly readable book, which nicely complements his erudite volume »Zionismus und internationale Arbeiterbewegung 1897 bis 1933« (1994). I predict that Keßler's anthology will find a relatively large and well-deserved audience, and that it will play a salutary political role.

*Jack Jacobs, New York*