The Great War against Eastern European Jewry, 1914-1920

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INTRODUCTION:
THE JEWS IN RUSSIA

In an attempt to describe the history of Jews in Russia in a simple though succinct manner, Pavel Milyukov has explained that it was not until 1563 that the Russian government had to deal with the Jews, when Ivan the Terrible conquered Polotsk. The Tsar was asked on that occasion what to do with them. Ivan had no hesitation: "Baptise or drown them in the river".[1] One century later, Tsar Alexis came up with a different response to the same problem and adopted a milder solution: deportations. Another century passed before Catherine II was to establish the notorious Pale of Settlement that would remain in vigour until the First World War.

In a more complex and reasonable manner, it could be said that the presence of Jewish communities in Tsarist Russia ran parallel to the territorial acquisitions of the country. As a matter of fact, Russia did not have to face a Jewish problem before Catherine II extended her dominions westwards, in the second half of the eighteenth century. Naturally, Jews were present in Kiev during the years of the medieval *'Rus*: anti-Jewish violence broke out in 1062 and in the following years a "crusade" against the "Judaizers", *Zhidovstvuyushchive*, was carried out. Though the contacts between Russians and the Khazar Kingdom – the Khazars converted to Judaism – were frequent, prior to the age of Catherine the Great the large masses of the future Russian Jewry were residing in the territories under Polish and Lithuanian rule.

The Jewish presence in this part of Europe was a consequence of the Jagiellonian policies to repopulate the eastern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian state – the Commonwealth after the Union of Lublin, in 1569 – and of the Jewish persecutions in the West (the crusades, the oppression after the Black Plague, the Medieval Inquisition, the Counter-Reformation...) that favoured the movement of Jewish groups eastwards. After Kiev was sacked and ravaged by the Mongols, the Polish and Lithuanian states expanded on the ruins of Kievan 'Rus, and in the year

1 P. Milyukov, "The Jewish Question in Russia", in M. Gorky, L. Andreyevgun, F. Sologub (edited by), *The Shield* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), pp. 58 ff.

1264 Boleslaw Nabozhny enacted the Statute of Kalisz, which granted some privileges to the Jewish communities of Poznan and Kalisz.

The Statute permitted the legal existence of the Jews during the entire period of Polish independence, and this tolerance was further granted by the *Magna Carta* of Jewish autonomy (the charter that Sigismund II Augustus promulgated on August 13, 1551) and the declaration of the Confederation of Warsaw of January 28, 1573. This was one of the first acts of tolerance in European history and legally assured the security of the Jews in Poland for two centuries.[2]

The "General Privileges" granted considerable autonomy to the Jewish communities, who formed their Kehilla (Kehillot) to govern questions of religion, jurisdiction, charity, organization, taxation and budget. The body of representatives of the Polish Jews was established in 1591 under the name of Council of the Four Lands. It had two central institutions: the Jewish Sejm and the Tribunal.

Though forming an integral part of the urban population, the Jews were not officially included in any of the general urban estates under the administration of magistracy and trade unions. The Jewish community thus formed an entirely independent class of citizens, a civil entity with separate forms of life, with its own religious, administrative, judicial and charitable institutions: a Jewish city within a Christian city.[3]

After the sixteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth underwent a slow but gradual decline. This is generally considered a consequence of the *liberum vetum* that paralysed the Sejm, the excessive power of noble families and confederations and the lack of a solid central authority.[4]

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2 N. Davies, *God's Playground. The Origins to 1795*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University, 2005), p. 126.

3 S. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, trans. Israel Friedlander, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916), Vol. 1, pp. 103-108. The members of the Kehilla were elected annually during the intermediate days of Passover. The sphere of a Kehilla's activity was very broad and included the collection of state taxes, the management of synagogues, Talmudic academies, cemeteries, and other communal institutions, the execution of title-deeds on real estate, the instruction of the young generations, the affairs concerning charity, commerce, handcrafts, and so forth.

4 D. H. Gershon, B. Gershon, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Bibliographical Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); C. Abramsky, M.

This decline was accelerated by social tensions among the different ethnic groups. Land ownership was in the hands of the state and the Polish-Lithuanian magnates, who were holders of vast estates (*latifundium*), cities, towns, villages and farming settlements. In these areas, a mass of industrious small landowners worked in conditions that resembled serfdom. This economic structure was managed by a veritable army of leaseholders who served as intermediaries between the owners and their workers: the Arendators (in Ukrainian *Орендар*, *Orendar*; in Russian *Откупщик*). The term, deriving from the Latin *Arenda*, was used to indicate the lease of fixed assets, such as land, mills, inns, taverns, breweries, factories, distilleries or special rights, such as the right to collect custom duties, to use bridges, to fish, and so forth. Usually, these intermediaries were Jews and consequently the Ukrainians viewed this mediation as a form of oppression. This perception of Jews was very much alive during the XVII century, when the friction between the Cossacks and Poland led to the great uprising of 1648. This revolt had many causes: social tensions deriving from the oppression of the magnates against serfs and rural people; religious rivalry, as the Polish rulers were Catholic and their attempt to create an Eastern Catholic (Uniate) church with the 1596 Union of Brest was not well received by Orthodox subjects; political expectations, as the Cossacks were seeking recognized status within the Polish hierarchy, struggling against the power of the Polish aristocracy, the *szlachta*.

The Khmelnytsky Uprising of 1648 - also known as the Ukrainian War of Liberation - is often cited because of the anti-Jewish massacres and pogroms. The word *pogrom* derives directly from the verb *pogromit* (*po-gromit'*) which means to break, to smash, suggesting a severe degree of destruction and violence. What was particularly relevant in the case of Russian pogroms is the collective dimension of these expressions of hatred, which always saw a considerable participation by voluntary perpetrators, assistants or "well-heeled bystanders".[5]

Jachimczyk, A. Polonsky (eds.), *The Jews in Poland* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); J. Goldberg (ed.), *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth. Charters of Rights Granted to Jewish Communities in Poland-Lithuania in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries: Critical Edition of Original Latin and Polish Documents with English Introductions and Notes* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy, 1985).

5 As Robert Weinberg noted in the analysis of Vasilii V. Vakhrenov's drawings of the 1871 pogrom in Odessa. R. Weinberg, "Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History", *Jewish History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Fall 1998), p. 76.

The events of 1648 are described by numerous witnesses – e.g. Nathan ben Moses Hannover - and analysed in many historiographical works, such as those by Orest Subtelny, Bernard Weinryb, Max Dimont, Edward Flannery and Martin Gilbert, with differing estimates of the casualties, which could reasonably be calculated at approximately 100,000. However, as the Russian historian Simon Dubnow emphasised, it was not only the number of victims that was appalling, but also the nature of these losses in the decade of 1648-58:

> "In the reports of the chroniclers, the number of Jewish victims varies between one hundred thousand and five hundred thousand. But even if we accept the lower figure, the number of victims still remains colossal, even exceeding the catastrophes of the Crusades and the Black Death in Western Europe. Some seven hundred Jewish communities in Poland had suffered massacre and pillage. In the Ukrainian cities situated on the left banks of the Dnieper, the region populated by Cossacks... the Jewish communities had disappeared almost completely. In the localities on the right shore of the Dnieper or in the Polish part of the Ukraine as well as those of Volhynia and Podolia, wherever Cossacks had made their appearance, only about one tenth of the Jewish population survived".6

The 1648 uprising inaugurated a period that is known as the "deluge" in Polish history, for it coincided with the Polish Commonwealth's crisis and the advance of Moscow, the heir of Kievan 'Rus claiming possession of the Ukrainian territories.

Between the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654, when the Cossacks pledged their allegiance to Tsar Alexis, and the Treaty of Andrusovo in 1667, the decline of the Polish state set the stage for the future agreement between Russia, Prussia and Austria and the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795, leading to the disappearance of the Polish state from the European map.The Polish territories hosting substantial communities of Jews were inserted in the so-called Pale of Settlement (*čerta postojannoj osedlosti,* ČOP). According to the *ukase* of December 23, 1791, this included:

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6 S. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, Vol. 1, pp. 156–57; B. Weinryb, "The Hebrew Chronicles on Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Cossack Polish War", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies,* 1 (1977): 153–77; *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, first published in 1965, also gives figures of 100,000 to 500,000, while Martin Gilbert in his 1976 *Jewish History Atlas* estimated over 100,000 Jewish casualties. M. Dimont, *Jews, God, and History* (Signet Classic, 2004), p. 247; Herbert Arthur Strauss (ed. by), *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Antisemitism 1870–1933/39* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), p. 1013.

Western Kraj, Mogilev, Polotsk, Malorossiya, Kiev, Chernihiv, Novhorod-Siversky (Poltava), Novorossiya, Ekaterinoslav and Taurida.

This zone was further expanded with the *ukase* of June 23, 1794 (Minsk, Volhynia, Podolia), after the Third Partition of Poland and in the years 1805-35 (Lithuania, Belarus) when rural areas that were 50 versts from the border were closed to new Jewish settlements.[7] The Pale of Settlement was divided into two parts: the north-western Severo-Zapadny Kraj, including Vitebsk, Mogilev and the four provinces of Vilnius, Grodno, Kaunas and Minsk; the south-western Jugo-Zapadny Kraj, including Podolia, Volhynia, Kiev, Bessarabia, Cherson, Chernihiv, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav and Taurida.[8]

But the life of Russian Jews did not depend solely upon the existence of the Pale of Settlement. Many other dispositions, beginning with the imperial decree of December 9, 1804 and the decree of April 13, 1835, contained further restrictions, obligations and prohibitions. When analysing the various "disabilities" the Russian Jews were subjected to, a 1916 publication of the American Jewish Committee listed several categories: occupational restrictions forbidding public service and certain activities such as farming; property restrictions prohibiting the possession of land or immovable property; fiscal burdens with special tributes such as the "candle tax" or the "meat tax"; educational restrictions that practically impeded admission to secondary or higher educational institutions and universities, except in proportions varying from 3 to 15 per cent of the entire number of non-Jewish pupils. In addition to these measures, many secondary schools (schools of military medical hygiene, railroad engineering, electricity, etc.) were entirely closed to Jews.

In 1827, severe restrictions were imposed on the residence of Jews in Kiev, the largest town in Southern Russia; by the law of May 3 (15), 1882, Jews were forbidden to settle in the villages of the Pale; following the law of December 29, 1887 (January 10, 1888), they were forbidden to move from one town to another. After being exempted for many years, the Jews were gradually recruited into the army but were confined to the lower

7 A *verst* is an old Russian measure of distance, nearly two-thirds of a mile.
8 A. Cifariello, "Ebrei e zona di residenza durante il regno di Alessandro II", *Studi Slavistici,* VII (2010): 85-109. See also John D. Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question, 1772-1825* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).

ranks and could not benefit from many exemptions that were reserved for non-Jews.[9]

Another important measure was issued on December 19, 1844, when a *ukase* suppressed the autonomy of the Kehilla and turned its administrative and fiscal functions over to the police departments and the municipalities. On the same day, another regulation transferred the taxes on kosher meat and the general basket tax, from the Kehilla into the hands of local administration.

A decree of 1851 classified the Jews into five categories. The majority, that is to say the proletariat mass, was classified as *neosedlye meščane*; the other categories were made up of the privileged classes, namely by those Jews who were allowed to enjoy certain rights. This privileged 5 per cent were granted the theoretical right of free travel and residence throughout the empire, but were equally subjected to the arbitrary measures of military and local authorities. Artisans were permitted free residence by the law of 1865, but persistent restrictions and new interpretations reduced the number of Jews enjoying this status to a bare fraction of the Jewish population. Merchants of the First Guild were allowed to leave the Pale after a five-year membership in their corporation, only on condition that they could pay an annual tax of 800 Roubles for ten years. Other exemptions were granted to a limited percentage of Jewish graduates in Russian institutions of higher education, and to the prostitutes, who were permitted to reside outside the Pale. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the involvement of Jews in the management of brothels and their subsequent "criminal dangerousness" would later become a leitmotif of antisemitic propaganda.

But these few opportunities were an exception to the rule, and the great majority of Russian Jews continued to be subjected to special laws. The concessions and reforms, on the contrary, often contained the clause *krome evreev* (except for the Jews), as they were applied to all Russians except Jews.

9 In the cantonist schools, the Jews were forcibly enlisted together with Gypsies, Old Believers, vagabonds and members of other "difficult" minorities. L. Domnitch, *The Cantonists: The Jewish Children's Army of the Tsar* (Jerusalem: Devora Publishing, 2004); Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Drafted into Modernity: Jews in the Russian Army. 1827-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Following the 1827 Statute on Conscription Duty by Tsar Nicholas, the Jews were liable to military service and were subjected to the same conscription quota as all other tax-paying subjects.

In the period 1840–63, a special committee for the Jews in Russia was created in the context of Alexander II's reforms, and in these years the Jews consequently benefited from a new, more favourable, attitude of the government. In 1861–62, they were granted rights to buy land, and in the same context the abolition of "cantonism" and other reform proposals were issued by Alexander II. These measures extended the right to settle outside the Pale to the merchants able to pay the registration fees of the First Guild, to foreign Jews (the decree of March 16, 1859), to various craftsmen, to university graduates and to Jews with a higher level of education (e.g. doctors or even *kandidat* students who were ending their courses, according to the decree of November 27, 1861).

These reforms did not apply to the great majority of Jews who were labelled *bezpoleznye* (un-useful Jews), while the predominant voice in the newspapers commented on these attempts of modernization with the motto: *Žid idet!* (the Jew advances!). In this context, the articles of J. A. Brafman, a convert who wrote against Judaism in *Vilenskij Vestnik* attacking the Kehilla as a state within the state, had great resonance.[10]

The association between trade and Jews led to the consolidation of the anti-capitalist and xenophobic myth of Jews as lovers of gold, swindlers, dishonest, untrustworthy, and immoral subjects: "the more palpable was the fall of real wages in Russia in the 1860s to 1880s, the more vociferous became the Russian xenophobes eager to blame the entrepreneurial profit-oriented Jews".[11] The symbol of "Jewish immorality" was the tavern, which, like its Jewish owner, was an intrusion of the "other" into the countryside: "vodka prices were low, but the tensions they triggered were very high".[12] For the villagers of the pre-modern world, anything that was foreign was suspected of having special connections with the devil, and in the case of Jews, these suspicions were clearly fostered by the powerful influence of religious bias, which was widespread among Polish Catholic and Russian Orthodox peasants.[13]

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10 A major scandal, the *Tovariščestvo*, concerned the firm Greger, Gorvic, Kogan & co., which was accused of corruption and speculation during the 1877 Russo-Turkish War and was also described in Krestovskij's *Tamara Bendavid.*

11 Y. Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age of Shtetl. A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (Princeton & New York: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 118.

12 *Ibidem*, p. 136

13 W. T. Bartoszewski, A. Polonsky (ed. by), *The Jews in Warsaw: A History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); H. Levine, *Economic Origins of Antisemitism: Poland and its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University

Concerning the relationships between Poles and Jews, Theodore R. Weeks highlighted that the 1863 Polish rebellion represented the climax of a path that abandoned assimilation and turned into growing separatism. It is true that the 1831 and 1863 uprisings strengthened the idea of a common citizenship for Poles and Jews, but afterwards the new Jewish role in industrial development went hand in hand with the increasing rivalry between the two distinct economic groups. Russian Jewish immigrants had an important impact on trade and economy in Poland but, at the same time, their success fostered the hatred against Jews. Their language, traditions and customs were perceived by Poles as alien and after 1863, Polish society increasingly viewed the Jewish communities as a threat to the cultural, economic and political development of Poland. In addition to the general acceleration in the creation of national identities (both Polish and Jewish), several long-term factors contributed to distance Poles from Jews and to increase tensions between them: the economic changes and the growth of industrial cities, the subsequent birth and development of socialist movements that were interpreted as a purely Jewish creation and the arrival of new "*maskilim*" Russian Jews (especially after the 1891 expulsion from Moscow) who were perceived as a vector of Russification and were offensively called as "Litvaks" though they were not Lithuanian. All these factors served to inflame a troublesome relationship that further deteriorated after the 1905 Russian Revolution and the start of the political struggle inside the newly created Duma.[14]

Another momentous event was Alexander II's assassination in 1881, clearly aggravating the situation. The May Laws of 1881 prohibited any new Jewish settlement outside towns and villages in the Pale of Settlement (except for the Jews who had been living in villages before issuing the decree), while special authorities were given extraordinary powers to keep "public order" and punish any suspicious revolutionaries and, naturally, the Jews, who were perceived as the driving force behind the subversive

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Press, 1991).

14 This policy of Russification was a strange combination of Polonophobia, inherent conservatism and of the official hostility of Tsardom against the Catholic church and the Jews. In this context, the Lithuanians were perceived as victims of the negative Polish-Catholic influence and became "potential Russians" to be rapidly "Russified". T. R. Weeks, "Russification and the Lithuanians, 1863-1905", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 98 ff. Theodore R. Weeks, "Assimilation, Nationalism, Modernization, Antisemitism. Notes on Polish-Jewish Relations 1855-1905", in R. Blobaum (ed.), *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 32 ff.

organizations.[15]

The physical isolation and the discriminations were accompanied by a widespread sentiment of antisemitism, which fuelled the hostility that was frequently expressed through the pogroms. In this context, Aronson argues, an important role was played by local authorities' ambivalence, and by the rumours that almost invariably began in cities (where the pogromists could take advantage of their relative anonymity) and then moved to adjacent hamlets and villages.[16]

The Warsaw pogrom in 1881 opened a new phase in Polish-Jewish relations: a census of the Kehilla showed that many had declared themselves as Poles before 1881 and as Jews after 1881 ("Before 1881 a Pole, after 1881 a Jew!"). The following decades recorded the spread of antisemitism in the press, and in the nineties the radicals organized the national movement of Szlachta and the Polish League, which later became the Polish National Democracy. In his first book, *Thoughts of a Modern Pole,* Roman Dmowski drew on ideas that were spreading in Germany and suggested that the two peoples (Poles and Jews) were struggling in order to assimilate each other.

During the following years, thousands of Jewish families were expelled from Kiev (1886) and Moscow (1891), while the Pale underwent a rapid process of urbanization, as a consequence of the acceleration of the Russian industrial development.[17]

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15 S. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russian and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916), Vol. I, p. 408. See also, E. Petrovich Semenov, *The Russian Government and the Massacres: A Page of the Russian Counter-Revolution* (London: Murray, 1907); L. Wolf (ed. by), *Legal Sufferings of the Jews in Russia* (London, 1912); *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia* (London: Wertheimer 1920); E. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale. The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970); B. Vago-Mosse (ed.), *Jews and Non-Jews in East Central Europe* (New York, 1974); J. Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1864-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16 I. M. Aronson, *Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

17 The numbers are to be read in thousands: *Evreiskoe naselenie Rossii, 1917,* Vol. 7, col. 382, 1994. See also J. Leshchinsky, *Jewish People and Numbers* (Berlin, 1922).

City	1796-1803	1897	1910-14
Warsaw	9,2 (in 1800)	219,1	337,0
Odessa	0,2	138,9	219,4
Łódź	0,3 (in 1820)	98,7	166,6
Kiev	1,2	31,8	81,3
Vilnius	6,9	63,8	77,5
Ekaterinoslav	0,3	41,0	69,0
Białystok	4,0	41,9	61,5
Daugavpils (Dvinsk)	1,5 (in 1787)	32,4	56,0
Berdychiv	2,0	41,6	55,9
Kishinev	0,1 (in 1772)	50,2	52,0

The economic role of Russian Jews was considerable. In a 1903 book, Michael Davitt explained that in many parts of the empire – e.g. in Kiev - the expulsion of Jews was often invoked by their rivals, but also challenged by the authorities themselves, who underlined that such measures not only meant an increase in prices but, in some cases, the total shortage of some specific products.[18] This economic power represented a serious problem and a further cause of envy.

The Jews were increasingly viewed as potential traitors who organized the rebellion against the Tsar and the subversion of traditional Russian benchmarks (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, *Narod'nost*). This anti-Jewish hatred was manifest in the press and in articles such as A. S. Suvorin's "Žid idet!" (*Novoe Vremja,* March 23, 1880), or again in Skalkovskiy's analysis in *Sovremennaya Rossia* (1890), which mentioned the case of Sakhalin Island:

> "While the Jews succeeded in acquiring small fortunes, the convicts of other religious persuasions lost everything... Scarcely a single Jew performs the hard labour allotted to him, as he is always in possession of the means to hire other convicts to work for him, while he himself carries on his illicit trade, and gradually robs his fellows of the last of their possessions".[19]

18 M. Davitt, *Within the Pale: The True Story of Anti-Semitic Persecution in Russia* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1903), pp. 19-20 ff. It is worth noting that, for example with an 1823 decree, some attempts were made to establish Jewish agricultural settlements and colonies in the Pale. M. Wodzinksi, "Clerks, Jews, and Farmers: Projects of Jewish Agricultural Settlement in Poland", *Jewish History*, Vol. 21, No. 3/4 (2007), pp. 279-303.

19 "The Tsar and the Jews", *The Contemporary Review*, January 1, 1891, p. 316

The general belief of the Russian rightist reactionaries was that banks and finance represented the ruin of Russian political order and a real menace for the state, as trade was in the hands of "foreigners" such as Jews, Germans, Armenians...[20] The same considerations were shared by the Polish nationalists, who viewed the increase of the Jewish population in Warsaw (38% in 1914) as a "calamity". According to Robert Blobaum, this "Litvak invasion", combined with the consolidation of the industrial capitalist system and the crisis that affected small business aspirations, marked the passage to a new political phase in which socialist and nationalist radicalism was ready to emerge.[21]

But to describe the conditions of Jewish life in Russia, the focus should not solely be on the cities where the Jewish middle-class (traders, professionals, merchants) gradually moved during the last decades of the XIX century. Indeed, much scholarship (Hoffman, Zborowski, Herzog, Bauer, Petrovsky-Shtern, Miron) has focused on the role of the village, the *Shtetl* (from the German words *städtel/städtle*, namely "little town"), not as a simple physical space, but as a cultural dimension, a small world representing the special Yiddish nature of a good part of Eastern European Jewry. Marie Sukloff described in this way the place where she grew up:

> "The little village of Borovoi-Mlin, in which I was born, consisted of about thirty huts - low wooden structures with slanting thatched roofs. The walls, both inside and out, were plastered with mud and whitewashed. All the huts stood in a row, which formed the only street in the village. A wide dusty road passed in front - the meeting place of the cackling, quacking, and barking members of the community. Farther down, the communal pasture, a long and narrow strip of land, ran along the high bank of the rivulet Okena below. In the rear were small kitchen-gardens surrounded by low wattle fences, back of which rye fields stretched as far as the eye

20 M. Villchur, "Russian Reactionary Politics and the War"*, The Russian Review*, Volume 1, April 1916. Only a year before the war, a report drawn up by a group of noblemen of the government of Poltava pointed out the incalculable injury done to the interests of the Russian gentry by the introduction of banks and railroads, for these institutions "undermine the foundation of the existing political order", besides being "a menace to the State, as well as to the interests of the gentry". If we add to this bias a concept of nationalism, which would dispose, by extermination, of fifteen million "foreign" nationalities, such as Jews, Finns, Armenians, etc., one may get a more complete picture of the social and political beliefs of the Russian ultra-reactionaries.

21 R. Blobaum, "The Politics of Antisemitism in Fin-de Siècle Warsaw", *The Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 73, No. 2 (June 2001), pp. 280-284.

> could see".[22]

Another meaningful testimony was given by Mary Antin, one of the thousands of Russian Jews who looked for a new "promised land" in the United States, and portrayed her old home as a sort of microcosm:

> "Nobody went to Russia for pleasure. Why, in Russia lived the Czar, and a great many cruel people; and in Russia were the dreadful prisons from which people never came back... It was strange that the Czar and the police should want all Russia for themselves. It was a very big country... Then there came a time when I knew that Polotzk and Vitebsk and Vilna and some other places were grouped together as the Pale of Settlement, and within this area the Czar commanded me to stay, with my father and mother and friends, and all other people like us. We must not be found outside the Pale, because we were Jews".[23]

Apart from emigration, the Jewish political responses to this adverse context were multifold. On one side, some Jewish activists championed the cause of reform and rejected both revolution and emigration, for example with the League for the Attainment of Full Rights for the Jews of Russia; on the other, radical Jews became one of the most fierce enemies of the Tsar.[24] Their wide-ranging participation in the birth and development of the first socialist movements, the Bund and the Social-Democratic Party, however, proved very counterproductive as it strengthened the aversion of the authorities and public opinion. Mendelsohn described the spread of the Russian Jewish labour movement at the turn of the twentieth century, when Marxist slogans of class solidarity spread among the Jewish urban

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22 M. Sukloff, *The Life-Story of a Russian Exile* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), p. 3. On the reality of the Shtetl, M. Zborowski, E. Herzog, *Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York, 1962); E. Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1997); Y. Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); D. Miron, *'The Image of the Shtetl' and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse-New York, 2000), pp. 1-48; Ben Cion Pinchuk, "Jewish Discourse and the Shtetl", *Jewish History*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2001), pp. 169-179; B. Nathans, *Beyond the Pale* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: Berkeley University Press, 2004).

23 M. Antin, *The Promised Land* (Boston-New York: Riverside Press, 1912), pp. 1 ff.

24 The League was created in Vilnius in 1905 as an alliance of Jewish liberals, cultural autonomists and even some moderate Zionists. These groups later established a political "convergence" with the Kadets. A. Orbach, "The Jewish People's Group and Jewish Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1906-1914", *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February 1990), pp. 1-15.

proletariat and intellectuals. The Jews understood the importance of spreading socialist movements among the Christians, but this option was abandoned owing to the weakness of Christian socialist movements and to the increasing separatism that was dividing Jewish and Russian communities.[25] Only in a few cases did these movements succeed in extending their organization to non-Jewish workers, while generally the relations between the two communities were strained by the competition for jobs and the anti-Jewish feelings. In places such as Łódź (the "Manchester of Poland") and Białystok, the cooperation of Jewish and non-Jewish workers could influence the success or failure of a given strike. Consequently, the authorities exploited the frictions between the two, using the strategy of *divide et impera*: with this tactic, the police frequently contributed to the conversion of mass-scale strikes into serious anti-Jewish excesses.[26]

As pointed out by Dubnow, the fundamental article of faith of the Jewish socialists was idealistic cosmopolitanism: the fight was directed towards general freedom and the reform of the Russian Empire, and only indirectly concerned the particular situation of Jews.[27] Naturally, the reform of society and institutions was conditioned by the nationality question, and an interesting way of dealing with this issue was the so-called "autonomism" – Dubnow himself was a supporter of this model – according to which the destabilization effects of nationalism were to be mitigated thanks to the principle of "national autonomy". The latter was particularly appreciated also by Marxists, as proved in Austria by the case of Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, and in Russia by Vladimir Medem.[28]

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25 Mendelsohn, for example, described the cases of Sholem Levin and Vladimir Medem. E. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Worker's Movement in Tsarist Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 33. See also the important work of Leopold H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

26 E. Mendelsohn, "Jews and Christian Workers in the Russian Pale of Settlement"*, Jewish Social Studies,* Oct. 1, 1968, 30, 4, p. 245

27 S. Dubnow, Vol. II, p. 223.

28 J. D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); S. Dubnow, *Nationalism and History*. *Essays on Old and New Judaism*, ed. Koppel S. Pinson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958); E. Bauer, "A Polish Jew and a Project for Jewish Emancipation in the Russian Empire: Nahum Sokolow and Count S. I. Witte, 1905-1906", in E.

This atmosphere of intense debates and heated discussions set the stage for an incredible *coup de theatre,* which was directed against the Jews and had far-reaching consequences for their future in Europe: the Tsarist secret police fabricated a fraudulent pamphlet, the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,* which was published in 1903. This forgery was proposed as the proof of a Jewish conspiracy to conquer world power through finance, economy, politics, masonry, disorder and destruction of religion. It was published by *Znamya,* a journal that was close to the movement of the Black Hundreds (*Chornaya Sotnya)*, a rightist antisemitic movement that was terrorizing Russian Jews, inciting violence as happened in the 1903 pogrom of Kishinev.[29]

On this occasion, the agitations were propagated by the antisemitic local newspaper *Bessarabets* and led to brutal murder (45 casualties and hundreds of wounded), looting and mutilations. Alarming reports appeared in the press and generated many agitations among the Jews, for instance, in Warsaw, where special self-defence squads were organized. The *Jewish Herald* published a letter from Buhush (Bessarabia) portraying the Christian mob as "hyenas" who "smelled blood from afar".[30]

Violence continued after the 1905 Revolution, when, according to authors such as Weeks and Jedlicki, the Jews became a powerful personification of a mysterious "enemy from within", a complex combination of religious hatred, economic factors and political bias.[31] Many other cities were

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Melzer, D. Engel (eds.), *Gal-Ed on the History of Jews in Poland* (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, 1997).

29 The movement was loyal to Tsarism and opposed every form of national self-determination, for example the Ukrainian one. H. Rogger, *Russia in the Age of Modernisation and Revolution, 1881-1917* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 204 ff. W. Laquer, *Black Hundred: The Rise of The Russian Extreme Right* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); D. C. Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905*, Cambridge, 1995. H. Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 1986).

30 "Jews in Romania and Poland Alarmed"*, The New York Times*, May 21, 1903. "Information showing that the outrages at Kishineff had an effect of inflaming anti-Jew passions elsewhere than in Bessarabia was received yesterday in this city. Alarming conditions in Warsaw, Russian Poland, and Romania, were described in letters. Further details of the distress at Kishineff were were also received". For more press articles and comments, Cyrus Adler, *The voice of America on Kishinev* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1904).

31 J. Jedlicki, "Intellectuals against Antisemitism in the Last Years of the 'Polish Kingdom'", in R. Blobaum, cit., p. 61; R. Weinberg, "Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa", *Russian Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Jan., 1987), pp. 53-

affected by a new wave of pogroms (Odessa, Białystok, Melitopol, Feodosia for a total number of about 254 episodes in all), which had the primary effect of increasing the emigration from Russia, especially to the United States. Here, an important group of Jewish communities established active organizations of charity and assistance such as the Board of Delegates in Civil and Religious Rights of the Hebrew, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (HIAS).[32] The dramatic Jewish reality generated a great flow of emigrants, who left Russia in search of better conditions, like Mendel Singer in Joseph Roths' *Job:* his belief in God was weakened by the adversities, the despair and the tragic conditions of life under Tsarism.

Another clear example of the disastrous and paradoxical effect of these migrations is the fact that while Russia lost the potential benefits of "undesired" Jewish people, the emigrants treasured other countries such as the United States or France, where a young generation of Jewish artists contributed to create the legend of expressionist painters such as Marc Chagall, Chaim Soutine, Moise Kisling and many others.[33]

The emergency of the Jewish question was clear to foreign public opinion but also to Russian liberals. In 1910, the Jewish members of the Duma, headed by Naphtali Friedman and supported by the Constitutional-Democratic Party, proposed a bill for the abolition of the Pale of Settlement, but the response was naturally negative. Many other projects were similarly turned down in the following years, when the increase of emigration proved to the international observers how the Jewish presence was perceived in twentieth century Russia.

Another occasion causing outrage that reverberated throughout the world was the "Beilis affair", in 1911-13. On March 11, 1911, Andrei Yushchinsky, a twelve-year-old pupil of the Kievo-Sofievsky Theological

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75; G. Surh, "Ekaterinoslav City in 1905: Workers, Jews, and Violence", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 64, Workers, Suburbs, and Labor Geography (Fall, 2003), pp. 139-166.

32 "From Kishineff to Białystok: A Table of Pogroms from 1903 to 1906", *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 8 (September 20, 1906, to September 8, 1907), pp. 34-89; see also, S. Lambroza, **"**The Tsarist Government and the Pogroms of 1903-06", *Modern Judaism* Vol. 7, No. 3 (October 1987), pp. 287-296.

33 For instance, Aron Haber Beron, Henri Hayden, Alexandre Altmann, Isaac Antcher, Zygmunt Landau, Ossip Lubitch, Zygmund Schreter and Marcel Slodk. See Nadine Nieszawer, Marie Boyé, Paul Fogel, *Peintres Juifs à Paris 1905-1939 Ecole de Paris* (Paris: Editons Denoel, 2000).

Seminary, disappeared and his corpse was discovered only some days later. Mendel Beilis was arrested on July 21, 1911 and his fate was conditioned by a campaign that very much resembled the *Dreyfus Affair* in France. Beilis spent more than two years in prison awaiting trial, while the authorities tried to build a case against him by falsifying papers, pressurizing witnesses and launching an antisemitic campaign in the press. But the case backfired and in October 1913, the jury unanimously acquitted Beilis who rapidly became a celebrity.[34]

The new wave of antisemitism after the 1905 Revolution reached its peak in the 1912 Polish campaign for the Duma. The electoral law was changed and Warsaw was able to send two delegates to the Russian assembly: one for the Russian population and one for the others. The Jews had the majority and wanted a Polish candidate who advocated Jewish rights. However, the Polish National Democratic candidate refused to guarantee his intentions to fight for Jewish equality, and the Jewish parties decided to vote for a socialist, Eugeniusz Jagiełło.

The reaction was harsh: Polish members of the Duma agitated the peasants against Jewish "wandering mice", who were paradoxically accused of Russianizing Poland and, at the same time, of Germanizing the country. The National Democrats also launched the economic boycott, overhauling an idea that had been spread in Poland by Father Jelensky in the last decades of the XIX century.[35]

The war was approaching and Russian Tsardom would soon come to an end. The decline was ratified by the conflict and the revolutions, which showed how the country was still conditioned by an anachronistic resistance to modernization, a context in which it was normal to concentrate a particular group of people in the notorious Pale of

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34 "Anyone wanting to see the major stars of New York's Yiddish stage on Thanksgiving weekend in 1913 had three choices: *Mendel Beilis* at Jacob Adler's Dewey Theater, *Mendel Beilis* at Boris Thomashefsky's National Theater, or *Mendel Beilis* at David Kessler's Second Avenue Theater". J. Berkowitz, "The 'Mendel Beilis' Epidemic on the Yiddish Stage", *Jewish Social Studies*, 8, No. 1, Fall, 2001, p. 199. See also, Bernard Malamud's novel, *The Fixer*, which was published in 1966, and M. Samuel, *Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beilis Case* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

35 S. Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910* (New York, 1914), p. 172; B. D. Weinryb, "East European Immigration to the United States", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 45, No. 4, Tercentenary Issue (Apr., 1955), p. 519.

Settlement, a sort of open-air prison for Jews. At that time, the Pale still comprised the western part of the Russian Empire: almost all of the Ukraine including Bessarabia, Russian Poland and the Lithuanian and White-Russian provinces (Vilnius, Vitebsk, Grodno, Kaunas, Minsk, Mogilev), and hosted roughly 6/7 of the entire Jewish population; 2,600,000 inhabitants of Ukraine were Jews, 1,400,000 lived in the six provinces of Lithuania and White Russia.[36]

36 Memorandum "The Pale of Settlement in the Former Russian Empire", Archives of the Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). USSR: Agro-Joint, Publicity, 1925-1927, 1921-1932, item 359421.

THE GREAT WAR AND THE JEWISH QUESTION IN RUSSIA

C'est la guerre c'est l'été
Déjà l'été encore la guerre
(Jacques Prevert)

The Expulsions

When the Great War broke out, the Pale became the theatre of battles and conflicts between Russian and German troops. At the same time, the conflict provided an opportunity for those Jews who hoped to reform and cancel Tsarist misrule, "to make Russia a modern state built upon righteousness and justice", to "have a voice in the framing of the laws of that medieval country". It was not surprising, therefore, that in August 1914 a Jewish journal in the United States openly criticized Russia and invoked the success of the German army:

> "The two evils that support the Russian throne and sustain the haughty and arrogant aristocracy, are the ignorance of the Russian peasants and its puissance through their soldiers. To dispel the one and break the other is the only and sole salvation of the oppressed of Russia... The nature of the persecution of the Jews by the Russian government is actually designed along the lines of suppressing and expelling them. In the first place, they fear that the Jews will influence the peasants and spread some enlightenment among them. They therefore seek to separate the Jews from the Russians and have crowded the former into what has been styled the Pale of Settlement. They have compelled over four million persons to live within these quarters, refusing to allow any, with some exceptions, to leave or to settle in the interior of Russia... From this cesspool of ignorance and superstition, there emanates the epidemic of nation-wide persecution and popular anti-Jewish hatred".[1]

The enemies of Russia, and Germany in particular, were fully aware of this state of things and tried to exploit the situation and address the hostility of Jewish people against Russian troops. In 1914, the German

1 I. I., "Russia and the Jew", *The Sentinel,* August 14, 1914, p. 2; "War Items of Special Jewish Interests", *The Sentinel*, August 14, 1914, p. 4.

command inaugurated this strategy with the help of the zionist leaders Max Isidor Bodenheimer and Nahum Sokolow, and of associations such as the Komitee für den Osten and the Mannesmann-Comité.[2] The German Committee for the Freeing of Russian Jews (Deutsches Komitee zur Befreiung der Russischen Juden) was created in August 1914 and supported the distribution of propaganda leaflets in the occupied zones of Poland, including a bulletin in Yiddish and Hebrew, reminding the Jews (*An die Juden in Polen!*) of the constant anti-Jewish persecution in Russia.

Naturally, the Tsar tried to neutralize this potential menace. During the first months of war, he issued a proclamation to his "dear Jews" and even decorated some of them, such as Rabbi Bruk of Kovel (Volhynia). It was also true that former Russian Jews residing in France volunteered in the French army where they had gained liberty, while the Jewish deputy of the province of Kaunas, Naphtali Friedman, in the historic "war session" of the Russian Duma (August 8, 1914) reaffirmed Jewish loyalty to the Tsar:

> "In the great spiritual uplift which has come to the nation, the Jews fully participate, and they will go to the field of battle shoulder to shoulder with the other nationalities of the Empire. Although we Jews have long suffered, and are still suffering, from grievous civil disabilities, we feel, nevertheless, that we are Russian citizens and faithful sons of our Fatherland. Nothing will ever alienate us from our country, nor separate us from the land to which for so many centuries we have been attached".[3]

But Friedman's assurances did not sound so convincing to the Russian commanders: as underlined by Petrovsky-Shtern, while the energy and devotion of Jewish soldiers might be greatly appreciated within the rank and file of the army, the regime supported the antisemitic idea of treating Jews as enemy aliens, and refused to allow modernity rule the structure of a state that was not yet ready to fight a modern war.[4]

The conflict was fought in many Jewish centres. A straight north and south line from Riga to Thessaloniki, "the spinal cord of European Jewry", touched every important battle of the Eastern Front. The material damage was gigantic: the Jews were concentrated in a restricted area and shut off from the sea and neutral countries. They had no avenues of escape and

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2 Z. Szajkowski, "The German appeal to the Jews of Poland, August 1914", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Ser., Vol. 59, No. 4 (Apr., 1969), pp. 311-320.
3 G. Kennan, "The War and the Russian Jews", *The Outlook*, January 20, 1915, p. 132. See also, H. Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).
4 Y. Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army,* cit.

were overwhelmed in that strip of Europe; they were evacuated, suffered devastation and pillage, as well as the paralysis of economic life.

The Russian Jews' precarious situation has been analysed by many historians (Altshuler, Ansky, Bianchi, Gatrell, Goldin, Levene, Lohr, Prusin), whose works must be interpreted in the general context of the Eastern Front – for example Norman Stone's *The Eastern Front* (London, 1998) – in order to complete the detailed and compelling description of Russia's unsuccessful military strategy and tactics. Eric Lohr, in particular, has reviewed the different dispositions that the Russian army adopted during the war, underlining how they were inspired by the vision of Jews (and of Germans too) as an unreliable element: spies or deserters who were to be removed from the zones of major strategic importance. As a consequence, the military commands used the War Statute of 1914, and the unlimited powers that this act bestowed upon them, to expel Jews, Germans and foreigners from certain areas.

Semion Goldin has analysed the legal framework that permitted these deportations, beginning with the order of August 11, 1914, the first deportation that affected about 1,500 Jews in the district of Khotin.[5] According to these regulations, the members of the military command who were at least on the level of army commander, like the governors in time of peace, were entitled to expel from their zone of operation all persons whose presence they considered undesirable. Nowhere in these regulations was it stated that Jews or other large groups were to be viewed as undesirable, but the *Stavka* (the headquarters of the High Command) considered the Jews in particular as spies and potential traitors, the perfect scapegoats to justify the failures on the front. According to Ansky's testimony, the procedure for expulsion began with an order by the military authorities. He quoted the order of evacuation for Przemyśl: “By orders of the commander of the fortress of Przemyśl, I hereby notify that the Jews residing in Przemyśl and its environs must leave this area as quickly as possible”. Then a Jewish implementation committee was set up, and in the case the Jews resisted evacuation, the threat of a company of Cossacks was sufficient to accelerate the expulsions.[6]

5 S. Goldin, “Deportation of Jews by the Russian Military Command, 1914-1915”, *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1 (41), Spring 2000, pp. 40 ff.
6 Semyon Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), p. 124.

The Jewish author, researcher and activist - famous for his 1914 play, *The Dybbuk* - reported on the numerous falsehoods that he heard in various localities, where the same "tales" were reworked and embellished time and again. One version ran that the Russian Jews were installing telephones in their synagogues and dispatching secret reports in bottles across the Vistula. Another tale told of how, at a checkpoint of Russian troops, an elderly Jew succeeded in transporting a sack containing a German man and 2,500 silver Thalers on his shoulders.[7]

The information about the deportations reached Western Europe thanks to a number of articles, like those by Georg Brandes in the Copenhagen newspaper, *Politiken*. Another article by a special correspondent of the London *Evening Standard*, reprinted in both the *World* and the *Jewish Chronicle*, reported in detail about the terrible sufferings of the Jews in Poland and Lithuania, where thousands of people were reduced to a condition of wretched beggary. In October 1914, Warsaw was hosting 22-25,000 refugees, and on January 25, 1915, the military authorities ordered the expulsion from more than 40 localities in the region of Warsaw, where the mass of refugees had reached the number of 80,000.[8] In April-May 1915, the third phase commenced with larger scale mass evacuations: in this case the deportees were assigned destinations in advance and the journeys were better organized with the use of trains and the help of civilian officials. In May, the expulsions took on extreme proportions and were extended by General Nikolai Radkevich to the whole of Courland, to the province of Kaunas and part of Grodno and Suwałki: 200,000 Jews (40,000 from Riga) were expelled and treated as deportees.

Nonetheless, these measures were not always fully implemented owing to some technical problems, to the resistance of some generals such as Alekseev, and to the lack of space in which to hold the expatriated Jews: the great majority of the Pale of Settlement was in fact under military control and only few zones remained available to concentrate the Jewish deportees. Some criticism was also voiced by civilian and political authorities, for example by a number of governors who pointed out that in

7 S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure,* pp. 16-19, 103.

8 "The securing of our military interests from the harmful existence of hostile foreigners in the Vistula Region, in the very theater of war, is very much complicated by the excessive number of German colonists living there; as current experience is showing that, although they have taken Russian subject-hood, they are only hiding their often criminal attraction toward their German fatherland". Outline of the history of EKOPO from August 1914 until the end of 1919. AJDC, JDC, Relations with Associations, item 233137.

many cases the removal of local Jews meant the paralysis of certain economic sectors. Indeed, the war went hand in hand with an almost immediate economic crisis that affected Jewish commercial activities in particular. In Poland, Lithuania, Volhynia and Podolia, where Jews made up from 40% to 80% of the total population, the war completely interrupted export trade. Quantities of goods remained in the warehouses and it was calculated that 25-30% of Jews were deprived of all means of existence and compelled to fall back on public charity.

The last expulsion of Jews from an entire region was decreed in the province of Pskov in late August 1915. But the deportations of Jews decreased significantly only in October and November 1915, partly due to the stabilization of the front, partly due to the replacement of Yanushkevich as chief of staff of the High Command by Alekseev, who was more pragmatic than his predecessor.[9]

After the initial disorganized chaos, in this second phase the evacuation and settlement of refugees was effected in a relatively orderly way. The journeys were better organized: the trains were provided with food supplies and were accompanied by escorting crews, which consisted in most instances of one physician, one nurse and other attending personnel. Special cars were reserved for the sick, while the refugees were registered according to sex, age and occupation. Nonetheless, in the largest transit railway stations the escorting crews frequently found cars crowded with refugees and to which no definite destination had been assigned.

When the minister of defence Prince Nikolai Shcherbatov realized it was impossible to settle all the refugees within the Pale, a directive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of August 4 (17), 1915 permitted the Jews, who were finally recognized as war sufferers, “to live in urban settlements” outside the Pale of Settlement, “with the exception of the capitals Moscow and Petrograd and locations under the authorities of the Ministries of the Court and Defence”. This decree generated much discussion and wide-ranging interpretations. On one hand, it was presented by the Russian government as the virtual abolition of the Pale; on the other, many signs clearly indicated that, far from being a generous act of a liberal government, this measure was only a temporary expedient, dictated by

9 Though Alekseev opposed large-scale deportations of Jews, which he viewed as harmful to the interests of the Russian army, many other factors contributed to mitigate these measures and reduce their impact: first of all technical difficulties and chaotic decision-making of the command at the front. S. Goldin, cit., p. 51.

military necessity and by the need for a foreign loan. The American Jewish Committee's "black book" mentioned many reasons in support of this interpretation: the act did not remove any of the hardships to which the Jews in Russia were legally subjected. As an Octobrist deputy, Rostovtzev, declared in the Duma: "What Pale is this you are speaking of? There is no Pale; Kaiser Wilhelm has abolished it!" The minutes of the Council of Ministers (August 4-17, 1915) prove clearly that the necessity for such a measure was also justified by the need to obtain the financial support of Jewish finance and to exert influence on the press in terms of changing its revolutionary tone: "But what can we do when the knife is at our throat? If the evil influence of the Jews is undebatable... the necessity for money is equally undebatable".[10]

The measure was granted grudgingly, with several limitations that emphasized the humiliating position of the Jews, who under the provisions of the new decree were still debarred from all villages, from the two capitals Petrograd and Moscow, from the vicinities of royal residences and from the districts of Don and Turkestan under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War. In practice, the act was often ignored or evaded by local officials, as happened in Smolensk, where the governor continued to expel Jews entering his province.

In conclusion, the promulgation of the abolition act was designed exclusively to mislead public opinion and to conform to military requisites, as denounced by the press: the *Russkoe Slovo*, on August 13 (26), 1915, and the *Evreyskaya Zhizn*, on August 23 (September 5), 1915, both condemned this "half-way measure" as a simple substitution of one Pale for another. In an impassioned article, the eminent Jewish historian Simeon Dubnow denounced the hypocrisy of the government and called for the immediate abolition of all Jewish restrictions.[11] The various documents sent to the JDC headquarters directly from Russia confirmed

10 *The Jews of the Eastern Front,* p. 23. Michael Cherniavsky (ed.), *Prologue to Revolution: Notes of A. N. Iakhontov on the Secret Meetings of the Council of Ministers, 1915* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 57-61.

11 "It is fully a year since the terrified faces of the 'prisoners' appeared through the bars of that gigantic prison known as 'the Jewish Pale.' Part of the prison was already enveloped in the flames of war, and the entire structure was threatened. The prisoners, in deathly terror, clamoured that the doors be thrown open. They were driven from one part of the prison to another part that seemed in less danger, but the prison doors remained shut. The warden's answer to their prayer was that it was impossible to 'release them, even in war time, because later it would be difficult to recapture them!". *Evreyskaya Nedelya* (September, 1915)