

# SOLZHENITSYN ON THE JEWS AND TSARIST RUSSIA

*Deux siècles ensemble*

Volume 1: *Juifs et Russes avant la révolution*

Paris: Fayard, 2002

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It appears now that the English-speaking world will have to wait some time yet for a translation of *Two Hundred Years Together*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's two volume study of Russian-Jewish relations. Translations into both French and German have been available for five years, and Italian, Hungarian, Greek, Czech, and Latvian editions are in the works. But no publisher in America or Britain seems to want to bother with a book which has clearly generated an unusual degree of interest. Working from the French version, I will try to give readers of *The Occidental Quarterly* some idea what the book is and isn't, of what it attempts to do and what it accomplishes.

A number of reviewers have criticized Solzhenitsyn's over-reliance on just a few sources, some of them mere encyclopedias, and all in the Russian language. The late American historian John Klier went so far as to list nine historians besides himself whose work Solzhenitsyn might usefully have been consulted were he not largely limited to his native tongue: Hans Rogger, Michael Stanislawski, Michael Aronson, Steven Zipperstein, Jonathan Frankel, Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, Shaul Stampfer, Israel Bartal, and Eli Lederhendler. Klier concluded that "despite its good intentions, the book serves largely as a reminder that he received the Nobel Prize for literature, not for history."<sup>1</sup> Richard Pipes had similar criticisms, describing *Two Hundred Years Together* as "something more than a personal statement yet less than a work of scholarship."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the work is merely an over-

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<sup>1</sup> John Klier, "No Prize for History," *History Today*, November 2002, 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Pipes, "Solzhenitsyn and the Jews, Revisited," *The New Republic* 25 (November 2002).

view for a general audience of a vast historical panorama, and not the minutely researched life's work of a professional historian. Virtually all the information it contains has been available elsewhere to any reader of Russian determined to find it. It is thus inaccurate to speak, as some have done, of Solzhenitsyn's "revealing" the role of Jews in the Revolution.

*Two Hundred Years* originated, in fact, as a kind of by-product of *The Red Wheel*, the author's series of historical novels on late Imperial Russia and the Revolution. Solzhenitsyn's wife Natalia Dmitrievna, in an interview for National Public Radio, explained:

He didn't intend to write this book at all. He was writing *The Red Wheel*. But anyone who is studying the history of the Russian Revolution will inevitably get an enormous amount of material about the role of the Jews, because it was great. Aleksandr Isaevich realized that if he put this material into *The Red Wheel* he would create the impression that he was blaming the Jews for the Russian Revolution, which he does not.<sup>3</sup>

As I have written earlier ("Prophet of the Nation," TOQ, 6:3), Russian nationalists have often triumphantly pointed to the Jewish role in the Revolution as a way of avoiding the more painful course of national self-examination. In publishing his consideration of the Jewish role later and separately from his main work, Solzhenitsyn sought to discourage his Russian readers from indulging in this sort of scapegoating. Similar considerations may be warranted in the West, where certain persons far removed from Solzhenitsyn's Christian moral vision have suddenly become impatient to read this one particular work of his. The concern of Solzhenitsyn and his family that *Two Hundred Years* might be misunderstood by being taken outside the context of the rest of the author's works may be one factor working against the speedy appearance of an English translation.

When an interviewer for the German weekly *Der Spiegel* asked him last year "are we to conclude that the Jews carry more responsibility than others for the failed Soviet experiment?" he responded:

I avoid exactly that which your question implies: I do not call

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1128597>.

for any sort of scorekeeping or comparisons between the moral responsibility of one people or another; moreover, I completely exclude the notion of responsibility of one nation towards another. All I am calling for is self-reflection. Every people must answer morally for all of its past—including that past which is shameful. Answer by what means? By attempting to comprehend: How could such a thing have been allowed? Where in all this is our error? And could it happen again? It is in that spirit, specifically, that it would behoove the Jewish people to answer, both for the revolutionary cutthroats and the ranks willing to serve them. Not to answer before other peoples, but to oneself, to one's conscience, and before God. Just as we Russians must answer . . .<sup>4</sup>

Critics of Solzhenitsyn have even seized upon this unselfconscious use of the expression "we Russians." John Klier, e.g., writes: "Solzhenitsyn envisages a dualistic struggle, fought between us (Russians) and them (Jews)."<sup>5</sup> But all he is doing, really, is treating the bond of nationhood as natural and normal. It may be a clue to Solzhenitsyn's thought that he never claims for himself an objective observation post outside and above the fray of history, as "tolerant" Western historians such as Klier implicitly do.

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Bearing in mind Solzhenitsyn's fundamental purposes and assumptions, let us see what he has to tell us of the Jews' and Russians' two hundred years together.

The ancestors of Russia's Jews were the Ashkenazim, or German Jews, who began migrating eastward into Poland in the Eleventh Century AD. During the centuries of their Polish sojourn, the Jews developed an institution called the *kahal* (plural *kehalim*). Although the word originally signified "community," it came to be applied to an exclusive administrative council which served as intermediary between the Jewish world and the public authorities.

In Poland, the *kehalim* collected the Crown's taxes (receiving the Crown's patronage in return); collected funds for the social needs of

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,496003,00.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Klier, "No Prize for History," 60.

the Jews; established the rules which governed commerce and industry; exercised judicial authority over the Jewish population; and paid the salaries of Rabbis. The *kehalim* were jealous of their authority, which they frequently abused for personal ends. Accordingly, they were unpopular with ordinary Jews and relied mainly on the support of the Polish Crown to maintain their position. Both the rabbinate and the *kehalim* worked to keep ordinary Jews isolated from the surrounding society, in part by minutely regulating their activity and keeping their minds focused on ritual obligations.

After quoting Jewish writers on the subject, Solzhenitsyn adds:

The two thousand year endurance of the Jewish people in the Diaspora calls for admiration and respect. Yet, looking more closely, at certain times such as the Russo-Polish period from the sixteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries, this solidarity came about through the authoritarian methods of the *kehalim*, and one is uncertain whether respect must be shown for these methods simply because they come from a religious tradition. However that may be, even a small measure of this type of separatism on the part of Russians gets imputed to us as a grave fault. (p. 40)

At the time of their incorporation into the Russian Empire, the Jew's economic condition in Poland was undergoing a long period of decline. Much of the *kahal's* energy was devoted to combating the rise of both the new Hassidic movement and the German-Jewish Enlightenment (the *Haskalah*).

Before the partitions of Poland, Jews were officially prohibited from settling in Russia, although a small number of Jewish merchants were in fact already trading in Ukraine and the Baltic ports. Solzhenitsyn emphasizes throughout his history that the apparent harshness of Russian law must usually be understood within a context of extremely lax enforcement. But the first partition, in 1772, rendered any prohibition a dead letter by suddenly bringing some one hundred thousand Polish Jews into the Russian Empire.

Catherine the Great was personally well-disposed toward the Jews, but Russian doubts about the sincerity of her own conversion from Protestantism made her cautious about displaying liberality toward her non-Orthodox subjects.

The imposition of Russian law threatened the traditional authority of the *kahal*, e.g., by allowing Jews to pay their taxes directly to the government. In 1785, however, a *kahal* delegation successfully petitioned the Crown for a restoration of most of its old prerogatives, tax-collecting included. The Russian government apparently saw the *kahal* as a useful tool of administration and did not dissolve it until 1844.

In 1786, public offices were opened to Jews: there came to be Jewish city-councilmen, mayors, and judges. Catherine eventually sent an order to the Governor General of White Russia (Belarus), signed in her own hand, demanding that "equality of rights for Jews be introduced on the spot without the smallest delay," on pain of penal sanctions against those who infringed upon them. Solzhenitsyn comments:

Let us note that by this act the Jews obtained equal civil rights contrary not only to the situation in Poland, but even before they obtained them in France or Germany. Moreover, the Jews in Russia received straightway the individual freedom which would be denied the Russian peasants for another eighty years. (p. 43)

In 1790, Catherine received a petition from the merchant's guild of Moscow alleging fraudulent business practices on the part of newly arrived Jewish merchants from White Russia and abroad, and requesting their formal expulsion. In December 1791, the Tsarina granted this petition, forbidding Jewish traders from permanent settlement in the central provinces of Russia. At the same time, by way of mitigation, she accorded Jews unlimited rights of residence and trade in "New Russia," a large, thinly populated territory recently won from the Turks (today constituting Moldova and a large part of Ukraine). Solzhenitsyn emphasizes that this decree was not intended to favor Christians in general at the expense of Jews. There was a reciprocal prohibition, e.g., against Christian merchants from Central Russia settling in "New Russia."

But this decision, made on practical grounds and without any long views, became the basis for the Pale of Settlement, the area in Western Russia set aside for unrestricted Jewish residence. Over time, more and more exceptions would be made, allowing Jewish students, professionals, and certain types of businessmen to settle in central Russia. But until its abolition by the Provisional Government in 1917, the vast

majority of Russia's Jews would continue to live within the Pale (e.g., 94 percent in 1897, according to the Imperial Census).

The second and third partitions of Poland took place in 1793 and 1795, and were much more consequential for our story than the first: nearly one million Jews were now incorporated into Russia. Their numbers would increase fivefold over the next century.

In 1800, a serious famine occurred in White Russia, an area of heavy Jewish settlement. Gavril Derzhavin, an Imperial Senator (and, incidentally, the greatest Russian poet before Pushkin), was sent to take emergency measures and submit a report. He found that Polish landowners commonly ignored their estates, preferring to hire the services of Jewish overseers for terms of just one to three years. These overseers had every incentive to squeeze profit out of the estates during their brief tenure, even at the expense of future productivity. They provided the peasants seed and tools for farming at three times the market rate and bought the resulting produce at below market prices, both extortions made possible by a monopoly granted and enforced by the Polish gentry. Many Jews also worked as distillers or tavern keepers on the estates or in rural villages. The drunkenness of the peasants and the rapacity of the Jewish distillers combined to divert grain to vodka production which otherwise would have gone to make bread.

The fundamental problem, as Derzhavin saw it, was that the Jews had outgrown their traditional economic niche. There were too many tradesmen and not enough primary producers in heavily Jewish areas. The Senator also lamented that "[the Jews] have only contempt for those who do not share their faith." He recommended that they be encouraged to colonize less densely populated areas and that the Government sponsor schools to instruct them in Russian and useful trades. And, in what Solzhenitsyn calls "the rather harsh frankness of his time," Derzhavin declared that "if Divine Providence has kept this nation of dangerous *mores* on the earth and not exterminated them, it is proper for governments under whose scepter He has placed them to put up with them as well."

Such observations have made Derzhavin unpopular with Jewish historians. But Solzhenitsyn rejects the accusation that he was a "fanatical Judeophobe," pointing out that he did not blame the Jews for the famine (as some Jewish sources assert). This is a recurring pattern in *Two Hundred Years Together*—Solzhenitsyn seems less concerned to

recount the Jewish share in the tragic fate of Russia than to vindicate the honor of Russians (especially Tsarist officials) who have wrongly gone down in the history books as persecutors.

The government's eventual response to Derzhavin's proposals was the "Jewish Regulation of 1804." Freedom of conscience was guaranteed to all Jews, including the Hassidim (previously persecuted by the *kehalim*). Jews were accorded equal protection of the law, including the right to own land and employ Christian workers. The project of government sponsored Jewish schools was dropped at the insistence of the *kehalim*, but Russian schools and universities were opened to them on a basis of equality.

The most important measure, however, was a total prohibition upon Jewish distilling and tavern keeping. Jews were even ordered to leave the White Russian countryside within a period of three years. As usual, the Tsarist government's powers of enforcement were quite unequal to its ambitions; similar orders continued to be issued with limited effect every few years until 1881.

The government tried to mitigate the new prohibitions with subsidies to set up the affected Jews in new professions, and temporary tax exemptions to let them become established. The Regulation claimed to be, and was in certain ways, the most liberal Jewish policy in Europe. But the Jews felt cruelly the necessity of abandoning a mode of life they had been habituated to for generations under the Polish Crown.

The government devoted strenuous and repeated efforts to encourage Jews to take up agriculture in the virgin lands of New Russia. The result was an epic fiasco of more than fifty years duration. Many of the Jewish colonists "had no idea they would have to perform agricultural labor personally; they apparently thought others would see to the actual cultivation of the ground."

They sowed a negligible part of their allotted fields, sowed too late by waiting for the weather to warm up, sowed five seasons in a row on a field plowed only once; used the wrong seed or lost their seed, did not rotate their crops, broke their farming tools through inexperience, or simply sold them, slaughtered livestock for meat and then complained of not having any, heated their houses with straw meant for feeding the cattle, etc., etc. . . . (Condensed from pp. 83, 85-86)

Animals, tools and seeds were given to them several times over; new loans were constantly extended to them to assure their subsistence. Many simply ran away, setting up as tavern keepers again in nearby towns. There were just enough successful families to excite furious envy in all the rest, who feared the authorities would force everyone to work once a single family had shown it possible for Jews to farm.

During the reign of Alexander II (1855–1881) the government gradually acknowledged failure and abandoned the project. “But what are we to say after the experience of the colonization of Palestine,” asks Solzhenitsyn, “where the Jews perfectly mastered the art of working the land under conditions much less favorable than in New Russia?” (p. 173).

Jews took with far greater success to Russian language education and new forms of commerce. Jews were acknowledged to be better merchants than Russians; once, when the Russian merchants of Kiev managed to get their Jewish competition expelled, the cost of living in the city noticeably rose. Industries such as logging, tobacco, sugar, railroad construction, and the grain and lumber trades were developed by Jews.

A new class of Jewish professionals arose in the capitals (university graduates being permitted to settle outside the Pale). Some Jews even gained titles of nobility. The era of Alexander II, the liberator of the serfs, was “without doubt the best period of Russian history for the Jews,” according to one of Solzhenitsyn’s Jewish sources.

These years also introduce the most controversial and difficult theme in Solzhenitsyn’s work. For it was during this time of optimism and confidence, strangely, that the revolutionary movement first took form. It was certainly not Jewish in *origin*: no leader of the early days was Jewish. “Until the beginning of the 1870s,” writes Solzhenitsyn, “only a very small number of Jews belonged to the revolutionary movement, and in secondary roles” (p. 236). He gives the names of some of these early Jewish revolutionaries, and biographical details for a few.

But more significant is his evocation of the atmosphere of those days, when enthusiasm for revolution was first ignited among Jewish university students. He quotes from the memoirs of Leo Deutsch, who was one of the pioneers: “Even the most fanatical *yeshiva* student, immersed in the study of the Talmud,” could not withstand “two or three minutes’ discussion with a nihilist [i.e., radical]. . . . Even a pious

Jew who had only brushed up against 'goy' culture, only made a break with his own traditional world view, was already capable of going very far, even to extremes."

These young men would have been astounded by the claims made in later days that the revolutionary movement they were joining was a "Jewish thing." They were *enfants perdus* who felt nothing but contempt for their benighted ancestors. Their heroes were all "advanced" Russian thinkers such as Dobrolyubov, Chernishevsky, and Pisarev. (Solzhenitsyn notes, however, that Jewish families rarely disowned their radical offspring—something that often happened with ethnically Russian revolutionaries.)

Jewish revolutionaries thought of themselves as working toward the happiness of mankind—or, at the very least, all the peoples of the Russian Empire. Leo Deutsch recalls that "none of the Jewish revolutionaries of the 70s could imagine the idea that one should act only for one's own nation. For us, the Jew had to assimilate completely into the native stock." One symptom of their lack of national aims was that they showed virtually no interest in abolishing the Pale of Settlement. How important could a detail like that appear to young men preparing to usher in a radiant future for the world? On this point Solzhenitsyn is emphatic: "Anti-Russian motivations cannot be imputed to these first Jewish revolutionaries, as certain persons in Russia claim today—not at all!" (p. 241).

According to Deutsch, just ten or twelve Jews were involved in the early phase of revolutionary terror. And Solzhenitsyn points out that terrorist groups often favored Russian members for carrying out their attacks: no Jews were directly involved in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, for example. Nevertheless, the unforeseen effect of that assassination was a series of anti-Jewish pogroms in Ukraine. Apparently, Jewish involvement in the revolutionary movement was notorious enough by 1881 to be taken for granted by many ordinary Russians.

How extensive was it, though, and how accurate the common perception? It is difficult to measure trends like this, but Solzhenitsyn does find some relevant numbers: in the first six months of 1879, 4 percent of the 379 persons charged with crimes against the state were Jews; for the entire year 1880, 6.5 percent of the 1054 persons tried before the Imperial Senate were Jews (p. 263). This would seem to indicate that, on the eve of the pogroms, Jewish participation in the revolutionary movement was already beginning to surpass their share in

the general population (around 4 percent).

The word "pogrom" (literally "devastation") had been used before this time for anti-Jewish riots in Odessa in 1821, 1859, and 1871. These, however, had been isolated occurrences involving mainly the local Greek community, who were commercial rivals of the Jews. But the pogroms the world remembers began on the 15th of April 1881 in the town of Yelisavetgrad (now Kirovohrad), Ukraine. Once begun, peasants from the surrounding villages began arriving to take part. Local troops remained passive at first, not knowing what to do. A cavalry regiment in the vicinity eventually arrived to put a stop to the violence by the 17th. Some sources say there were no fatalities in this first incident; others say there was just one.

For several weeks following, pogroms broke out unpredictably in dozens of towns, including the major cities of Odessa and Kiev. "It was like the unleashing of an elemental force," writes one of Solzhenitsyn's Jewish sources; "the local populace who, for various reasons, wanted to mix it up with the Jews posted proclamations and appeals to recruit forces." Common criminals and thieves followed in their wake. Jewish taverns were a favorite target, but shops and houses were also attacked. The assassination of the Tsar was more occasion than cause of this violence. Those close to the events emphasized economic grievances as the true motivation: Russians felt taken advantage of by Jews. Rioters are said to have believed themselves acting justly and "carrying out the Tsar's will." When police arrived at their houses later to recover stolen property, they protested "it's our own blood you are taking!"

Many radicals were not at all displeased by the pogroms, which they hoped to steer in the direction of a general uprising against autocracy. One tract of August, 1881 even painted the Jews as the local "bourgeoisie," and advocated "revolutionary" attacks upon them.

According to a Jewish contemporary of these events, "they pillaged the Jews, beat them, but did not kill them." Other sources speak of six or seven victims. In the period 1880-1890, no one mentions multiple murders or rapes.

Nikolai Ignatiev, installed as Minister of the Interior in May 1881, decided on a policy of firm repression, although it was made difficult by the unforeseeable character of the outbreaks and his limited forces. Nevertheless, he ordered his men to fire upon rioters. In the towns of Borisov and Nezhin this resulted in fatalities. In Kiev, 1400 arrests

were made. Many in the government felt this was still inadequate. The police chief of Kiev wrote apologetically to the Tsar that the local military tribunals had been too lenient with the rioters; Alexander III wrote in the margin: "This is inexcusable!"

Solzhenitsyn's account, based on documents close to the events, differs dramatically from the common version whereby the pogroms were *instigated by the government itself*. The American Rabbi Max Raisin, e.g., in his widely reprinted *History of the Jews in Modern Times*, writes of ". . . the ravaging of women and the killing or maiming of thousands of men, women, and children"; and adds: "As was subsequently shown, these disturbances were inspired and premeditated by the government, which abetted the rioters in their work and hindered the Jews from defending themselves."

In the autumn of 1881, at Ignatiev's recommendation, a committee was created to draft new Jewish legislation in response to the pogroms. Unlike previous "Jewish committees" – there had been eight of them already – it operated on the assumption that assimilation was an unattainable goal. (This is what many Jews were starting to think as well.) The committee recommended looking to the past for guidance, apparently meaning the customs of pre-emancipation Europe. The new sentiment was that, "Jews had always been considered a foreign element, and must once and for all be considered such."

Ignatiev himself recommended strong measures to prevent further trouble, including the expulsion of Jews from rural villages "so the inhabitants of the countryside may know the government is protecting them from exploitation by the Jews," and also because "governmental power is unable to defend [the Jews] against pogroms which might occur in scattered villages." The Imperial Senate found this proposal overly coercive and refused to ratify it. Instead, on the 3rd of May 1882 a set of "provisional regulations" was issued which merely forbade *new* Jewish settlement in the countryside. A list of villages exempt from the ban was appended, and it grew over time.

Nevertheless, Solzhenitsyn finds an historian asserting that the authorities "threw nearly a million Jews out on the street and out of the villages in order to confine them in the cities of the Pale of Settlement."

Jewish emigration, especially to America, began to increase in the years following the pogroms, and it is widely asserted that this occurred *because* of the pogroms. The emigrants, however, came mostly

from Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland—not from Ukraine, where the violence had actually occurred. In fact, there was even a Jewish internal migration *toward* the more thinly populated Ukraine in these same years. And Jewish emigration to America only became a mass phenomenon in the late 1890s: Solzhenitsyn suggests that the State monopoly on distilling instituted in 1896 was a principal cause. In any case, the evidence indicates that Jews came to America as economic migrants, not as refugees “fleeing the Tsarist pogroms.”

There was, however, a general tendency toward greater restrictions on Jews in the years following the pogroms. The introduction of a *numerus clausus* system in schools was among the most important. It began in individual institutions as early as 1882, and became government policy in 1887. The general rule was to allow a maximum of 10 percent Jewish enrollment within the Pale of Settlement, 5 percent outside, and 3 percent in the two capitals. (Jews were around 4 percent of the population of the Empire.) A few institutions closed themselves entirely to Jewish students. Alexander III’s closest advisor candidly explained to the visiting Moritz von Hirsch that the Jews “rich with their multi-millennial culture, were a spiritually and intellectually more powerful element than the ignorant and coarse Russians,” who therefore required a bit of handicapping.

Solzhenitsyn then lists the various exceptions and mitigations to the system for Jews: (1) schools for girls and women were not affected, (2) neither were private schools, and new ones began springing up in response to the regulations, (3) schools of commerce were excepted, (4) schools in places without enough Jews to fill the *numerus clausus* could accept Jewish students from elsewhere, (5) Jews shut out of professional schools could study at home and still sit for professional qualifying exams. If all else failed, they could simply go abroad: Yiddish speakers acquire German easily, and many “Russian” students in German institutions over the next few decades were Jewish. “In sum,” writes Solzhenitsyn, “the admission quotas did not at all slow the Jewish aspiration to education” (p. 307). Indeed, by the time he finished, I found myself wondering whether complacent white students in the USA might not benefit from some analogous sort of goading.

In these same years there was also a crackdown on Jewish avoidance of military service. This had reached the scandalous rate of 31.6 percent for the period 1876–1883, while the figure for the rest of the population was 0.19 percent. The crackdown may also have contrib-

uted to the rise in Jewish emigration. The authorities were unable, however, to get the Jewish rate below 10 percent for long.

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw the rise of modern racial anti-Semitism in Western Europe. This found an echo in occasional anti-Jewish remarks in the Russian press as early as the 1870s, but "without the strongly theoretical coloration they had in Germany." In the course of the war with Turkey in the Balkans (1878–1879), the panslavist newspaper *Novoe Vremia* reported on acts of plunder committed by Jewish supply masters. Gradually the paper shifted to a frank anti-Semitic line, calling for firm measures against Jewish "control" of Russian science, literature, and art.

The Jews, mindful of the recent pogroms, felt these developments added insult to injury and entirely abandoned the idea of assimilation. Calls for an independent Jewish state were even heard in Russia as early as 1882, fourteen years before Theodor Herzl's *Judenstaat* was published. The rise of Zionism might have been expected to encroach upon Jewish involvement in the revolutionary movement. Individual cases of such "conversion" are certainly known, but the overall trend of these years was toward ever greater Jewish participation in revolutionary politics. All imaginable combinations of socialism and Zionism also found their advocates.

Marxism seemed unpromising as a Jewish revolutionary ideology. Traditionally, Jews put a high priority on the chance to become their own masters, and would only take up trades which held out this prospect. Accepting work in a factory was considered humiliating and dishonorable, almost like an admission of personal failure. Accordingly, there scarcely existed a Jewish "proletariat."

Anyone familiar with the workings of the ideological mind will not be surprised that a way was found around this difficulty. Marx's failure to offer a precise definition of "class" was helpful. Jewish theorists cobbled together a makeshift "revolutionary vanguard" out of artisans (e.g., dentists, tailors, nurses, pharmacists), shop-keepers, apprentices, low-level state employees, and even commercial middlemen – anyone who did not employ wage-workers.

The General Jewish Workers Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, commonly known as the Bund, was the most important Jewish socialist organization in Russia during the last twenty years of Tsarist rule. It was organized as early as 1895 according to Solzhenitsyn, although its first official conference was held in Vilnius only in 1897.

The Bund's leading spirit was Julius Tsederbaum, known to history as Martov and reputed to be the nearest thing Lenin ever had to a personal friend. "Martov's idea," writes Solzhenitsyn, "was that henceforward priority needed to be given to propagating socialism among the masses rather than within small circles, and to this end they needed to make their materials more 'Jewish,' notably by translating them into Yiddish" (p. 269). Up to the very eve of the events of 1905, the Bund was the most powerful Social Democratic organization in Russia.

Officially, the Bund held that there was no single Jewish people, but merely a Jewish bourgeoisie ("the most wretched, most base in the world") and a Jewish proletariat ("the vanguard of the workers' army in Russia"). Yet this socialist party became a unifying factor in Jewish life, and as it grew it increasingly emphasized nationality. Solzhenitsyn notes with approval a Bund member's assertion that "national does not mean nationalist."

The year following the Vilnius conference, the Russian Social Democratic Party opened its own first conference in Minsk. Of the eight delegates, five were Jewish and three were members of the Bund. Although their origins were closely entwined—Lenin was at one point considered for the editorship of the Bund's party organ!—relations between Bundists and Russian Social Democrats were never easy. The Bund consented to enter the Russian Social Democratic Party, but only as a *whole*, preserving full autonomy in regard to Jewish affairs. In 1902, it escalated its demands, preferring a mere federation with the Social Democrats which could allow differences in policy. The leadership even began arguing that "the Jewish proletariat is a part of the Jewish people which occupies a place set apart among the nations."

At this, Lenin saw red. He argued that the Jews were not a nation at all, since they had neither a common language nor a common territory, a view Solzhenitsyn characterized as:

. . . an unimaginatively materialistic judgment: the Jews are one of the most authentic, most tightly-bound nations on earth—bound in spirit. With his superficial and vulgar internationalism, Lenin understood nothing of the depth and historical rootedness of the Jewish question. (p. 275)

When the Social Democratic Party split into Bolshevik and Menshevik

factions in 1903, most Bundists sided with the Martov and the Mensheviks.

There was a long lull in anti-Jewish violence in Russia after the pogroms of the 1880s. But the events in Kishinev on 6–7 April 1903 surpassed in fury all which had gone before. Capital of the province of Bessarabia (now Moldova), Kishinev was a town of 50,000 Jews, 50,000 Romanians, 8,000 Russians (mostly Ukrainians), and several thousand of various other nationalities. Solzhenitsyn bases his account primarily upon the speeches for the prosecution in the ensuing trial, which were in turn based on the results of the official investigation. There were forty-two fatalities in this pogrom, thirty-eight of them Jewish. 1,350 houses were sacked, amounting to nearly one third of the houses in the city. Solzhenitsyn considers that the police were both disorganized to the point of incompetence and culpably negligent. It was the soldiers of a nearby garrison who finally quelled the rioting.

Solzhenitsyn finds no evidence that the pogrom was fomented "from above," a view which still has its advocates.<sup>6</sup> He traces such speculation to the desire of those times "to exploit the suffering as a means to striking a blow against Tsarist power," and laments that the pogrom has been used "to blacken Russia and mark it forever with a seal of infamy" (p. 361). It certainly was: hysterical exaggerations, including grisly stories of rape and torture, were widely reported in the international press and almost everywhere laid at the doorstep of the Imperial government. A forged letter supposedly written by Interior Minister Plehve made the rounds to give apparent substance to the charge. The Hearst papers called upon the God of Justice to wipe Russia off the face of the earth.

In the months following the Kishinev pogrom, Jews throughout the Pale armed themselves and formed self-defense organizations. In Gomel (White Russia), a town about evenly divided between Christians and Jews, the young were trained in the use of revolvers. Many went out of their way to provoke Christians and express contempt for them in the weeks following the events in Kishinev.

On the 29th of August a fight broke out in a marketplace, and a group of Jews began beating a Christian. When some nearby peasants attempted to come to the man's aid, the Jews whistled, an agreed-

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, "Pogrome in Rußland" (in English), <http://www.sog.uni-hd.de/lehrstuhl/POGROME.html>.

upon signal to summon other Jews in the area. According to government prosecutors at the subsequent trial, what followed amounted to an anti-Russian pogrom carried out by the Jews of Gomel: only Russians were killed during this day. Attacks continued through the afternoon and, as in Kishinev, were only put down when soldiers were called in. Three days later, violence broke out again among the Russian workers at a factory, but troops were on hand. The way into town was blocked, but some 250 Jewish houses in the suburbs were sacked. The Jews behaved violently on this day as well. Five Christians and four Jews were killed. Solzhenitsyn asserts that "no description of these events is found in the work of any Jewish author."

The Jewish movement for equal rights continued during these years, although this was now joined by a demand for Jewish national autonomy which was blandly assumed to be a compatible aim. An eminent Russian-Jewish jurist remarked: "it must be admitted that those who made these demands had no clear idea of their content." Solzhenitsyn points to an ambiguity many readers will be familiar with from other contexts:

The Jewish intelligentsia did not at all renounce its national identity. [Things had changed greatly since the 1870s!] Even the most extreme socialists tried as best they could to reconcile their ideology with the national sentiment. At the same time, however, no voice arose among the Jews to say that the Russian intelligentsia, which wholeheartedly supported its persecuted brothers, did not have to renounce *its own* national sentiment. Equity would have demanded this. But no one perceived the disparity at that time: by the notion of equal rights, the Jews understood *something more*. (p. 523)

In 1904 Russia, in the midst of a new wave of political assassinations and social unrest, ill-advisedly entered into war with Japan. The government suffered from its reputation as a persecutor when it was denied credit by Jewish bankers in the West. Between twenty and thirty thousand Jews fought in this war, and their courage was recognized by all. Many Jewish public figures, however, adopted a defeatist position, as did the entire intelligentsia. The war ended, of course, in a humiliating defeat for Russia.

What we call the Revolution of 1905 was not a single event, but a

series of strikes, uprisings, and mutinies which occurred against the background of military defeat and was egged on by the press and the socialist parties. Jews were especially prominent in the wave of strikes which began in the winter of 1904-1905. One Jewish writer later lamented that "nearly everywhere the strikes were observed only by Jewish workers. . . . In a whole series of towns, Russian workers opposed a stiff resistance to attempts to shut down the factories." There are even cases recorded of Russian factory hands making short work of Jews who attempted political agitation among them.

The Jewish self-defense organizations of the Pale continued to grow after the events in Gomel. In 1905 they acted as a kind of amateur revolutionary army, working closely with the radical parties. Many cities were in a kind of continual revolutionary ferment that year, with policemen assassinated, universities taken over by radicals, and communications shut down. Young Jews took the lead in the disorder, and were especially forward in defacing Imperial flags and images of the Tsar. The Imperial Manifest of October 17th, granting numerous liberties and an elective parliament, met with nothing but scorn from the radical mobs, who viewed it as a mere symptom of weakness.

In the days which followed the Manifest, widespread but disorganized reprisals were directed against Jews. Beatings and destruction of Jewish merchandise were accompanied by shouts such as: "There's your liberation! There's your Revolution! And that's for the portrait of the Tsar!" The violence in Kiev is known as the "Kiev Pogrom of 1905," although only twelve of the forty-seven victims were Jewish. In Odessa some five hundred people died in the riots following the Imperial Manifest, the largest figure for any pre-Revolutionary pogrom. Most of the young revolutionaries escaped the violence while the price for their actions was paid by innocent Jewish shopkeepers. Twenty-four pogroms are also said to have occurred outside the Pale of Settlement, directed not against Jews but any "progressive" elements that could be found.

In November 1905, the Union of the Russian People was formed to combat "the destructive anti-governmental action of the Jewish masses, united in their hatred for everything Russian and indifferent to the means they use." It never amounted to much, but does seem to have had a real existence for a few years. This is more than can be said for the "Black Hundreds," that fearful-sounding epitome of all that is reactionary. No one seems to know exactly who or what the Black

Hundreds were. During the period following the revolution of 1905, the term became a kind of brickbat to use against anyone considered insufficiently “progressive,” rather like the expression “white supremacist” today.

During the winter of 1905–1906, press censorship was abolished, rights of association and assembly guaranteed, and elections held for a Duma, or National Legislature. In April the government promulgated a new Fundamental Law (the word “Constitution” was carefully avoided). The Jewish Bund, like the Bolsheviks, boycotted the election. There were twelve Jews among the 439 deputies elected to the first Duma, all denounced as traitors by Jewish socialists. Most Jews who accepted the “bourgeois” institution of a Duma joined the Constitutional Democratic Party, commonly known after their Russian acronym as the Kadets. Jewish equality was the first plank of the party’s program. Their leader, the Russian Pavel Milyukov, was the object of comically exaggerated admiration and praise by the Jewish men and (especially) women of the party. The first Duma was found both incompetent and intractable, and was dissolved by order of the Tsar after ten weeks. Anyone who reads contemporary descriptions of the deputies and their behavior (“drunken savages”) will understand that this was an entirely practical decision and not a high-handed act of despotism. Russia was quite unprepared for universal suffrage.

Widespread public disorder continued throughout 1906–1907. The revolution may yet have succeeded had it not been for the Tsar’s inspired appointment of Peter Stolypin, first as Minister of the Interior (April 1906), then—following the dissolution of the First Duma—as Prime Minister (July 1906). Stolypin is Solzhenitsyn’s model of prudent statesmanship and the subject of a long, appreciative section of *August 1914*. He put down the revolution with strong measures, including an eight month period of summary justice.

Stolypin drew up a plan for lifting many restrictions upon the Jews in December 1906. The Tsar did not ratify it, but gave permission to have it presented to the Second Duma, which met in February 1907. There were only four Jews this time, but many new leftwing deputies, all of whom proclaimed their devotion to the cause of Jewish equality. Regarding Stolypin’s generous Jewish proposal, however, they did nothing.

Solzhenitsyn explains this strange inaction as part of the political theater of the left:

The goal being to combat Autocracy, their interest lay in forever increasing pressure on the Jewish question, but never solving it: thus one kept one's ammunition in reserve. These knights of liberty reasoned: let's not allow the lifting of restrictions on the Jews dampen their ardor for battle. (p. 465)

Stolypin later carried out most of his plan through administrative decrees, as the Fundamental Law allowed him to do between Duma sessions. He was quickly attacked in *Novoe Vremia* as a pawn of the Jews, while the "progressive" press remained hostile to him.

Disproportionate Jewish influence in the press was as much an issue in late Tsarist Russia as it is in modern America, and one more freely discussed. The author reproduces the following anecdote:

Journalists set up their own press bureau which determined access to Duma sessions. Its members refused to accredit the correspondent from *Kolokol* ("The Bell"), the preferred newspaper of rural priests. [Russian journalist Adriana] Tyrkova intervened, observing that "one must not deprive these readers of the chance to be informed about Duma debates by a newspaper they trusted more than those of the opposition." But [said Tyrkova] "my colleagues, who were mostly Jews, took offense and began shouting angrily that no one reads *Kolokol*, that the newspaper was good for nothing." (p. 468)

A Duma deputy once pointed to the press gallery in the midst of a speech, calling it "this Pale of Jewish Settlement!" It became a standing joke.

The Second Duma was dissolved in June 1907 for similar reasons as the first. Many in the government would have been happy to rescind the Imperial Manifest altogether, but Stolypin insisted on drawing "society" (i.e., the intelligentsia) into some sort of partnership with the government. This would, if successful, have conferred greater legitimacy on the government and taught greater realism and responsibility to the intellectuals. So he restricted the franchise significantly, let a Third Duma be elected, and allowed it to finish out its legally foreseen five-year term. There were just two Jewish members.

The keystone of Stolypin's policy was an agrarian reform which would have broken up rural communes in favor of family farms. This

might have dealt a deathblow to socialism by eliminating its political base in peasant envy. In foreign policy, Stolypin favored cultivating good relations with Germany: a Stolypin government would never have blundered into war with her in 1914 simply to please the governments of France and Britain. The Russian Revolution of 1917 would have been unthinkable.

But after five years in office, on the 14th of September 1911, Solypin was assassinated in Kiev. The assassin, Dmitri Bogrov, was Jewish.

The reader will find a detailed reconstruction of this consequential assassination in *August 1914*. Solzhenitsyn, in common with certain contemporaries of the event, has been called "anti-Semitic" for *not disguising* Bogrov's Jewishness, an accusation he treats with all the respect it deserves.

Everyone present at the event agrees that Bogrov might as easily have shot the Tsar as Stolypin. The twenty-three year old assassin seems to have comprehended something of Stolypin's importance. But his precise motives are not understood. Solzhenitsyn the novelist ascribes to Bogrov in *August 1914* some concern about Stolypin's Jewish policy, but this is speculation. In any event, there were no pogroms against the Jews for the death of a mere Prime Minister.

The most dramatic event in Russian-Jewish history between this assassination and 1917 was the mass expulsion of Jews from the area of the front lines, ordered by General Yanushkevich during the German offensive of 1915. Thousands of Jews fled into the Russian interior, effectively marking the end of the Pale of Settlement. Thanks to this decision, when their long-awaited hour of "liberation" struck in February 1917, an unprecedented number of Jews were living in the capitals and larger cities of European Russia, in a position to take part in the formative struggles of the new regime.

*F. Roger Devlin's review of Two Hundred Years Together will conclude in the next issue of The Occidental Quarterly (vol. 8, no. 4) with a consideration of Vol. 2: Russians and Jews during the Soviet Period.*