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THE
HOLOCAUST
IN THE
SOVIET
UNION

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THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SOVIET UNION

YITZHAK ARAD

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Preface

This book covers the borders of the Soviet Union as they were on June 22, 1941, the day on which Germany attacked the USSR. These areas include the Soviet Republics: Belorussia, Ukraine, and parts of the Federative Republic of Russia occupied by the German army, which up until September 17, 1939, were part of the Soviet Union and the territories annexed by the USSR during 1939–40, the Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; parts of former Poland—west Belorussia and west Ukraine; and Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, which were formerly a part of Romania. Until the German occupation, these territories were home to between 4.1 and 4.2 million Jews—half of them in the old territories and half in the annexed territories.

This study is based on German, Soviet, and Jewish archival sources. Up to the late 1980s and early 1990s, most of the archival material available to researchers was German. It consisted mainly of reports of the Einsatzgruppen, Nazi war criminal trials, reports and orders issued by the German military administration, orders and directives issued by Third Reich Nazi leadership and the German army high command, documentation of the German civilian administration in the occupied territories, testimonials, and memoirs. Included in these documents is correspondence between various German authorities regarding their policies toward the Jews.

But what made this study possible to carry out and to include all of the important subjects, without leaving "White Stains," was the use of all the available material from Soviet archives opened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This included the extensive documentation collected by the Special State Commission for Determining and Investigating the War Crimes Committed by the Fascist-German Occupiers in the Temporarily Occupied Soviet Territories.

The documents of this special commission yielded records of events during the German occupation of most of the cities and townships in these regions. Researchers could also study documents kept in the Communist Party archives, the Soviet partisans' movement, the Soviet military archives, from trials of war criminals that took place in the Soviet Union, and to some extent documents in the KGB archives.

At first, much of the material from Jewish sources consisted of survivors' testimonies, diaries, memoirs, local or regional monographs, and some underground ghetto archives, mostly from the annexed territories in 1939–40. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has made it possible to receive additional archival material from Jewish sources, such as that from the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Local Jewish initiative in the former Soviet Union resulted in the collection and publication of many Holocaust testimonials in the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Russia. Many Holocaust testimonies have also been collected from Soviet immigrants who came to Israel during the past decade.

The rich and varied basis provided by all the aforementioned sources is what made possible this comprehensive study of the Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. The detailed description of events during the Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union in this study is preceded by the history of the Jews in these territories before the Holocaust.

The Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union is described here both chronologically and geographically. The German occupation lasted for various lengths of time—from several months in the region around the foothills of the Caucasian Mountains to four years in western Latvia. But with the exception of western Latvia, it is possible to confine the time of occupation from the summer of 1941 until the summer of 1944, when the last of the areas of Lithuania, Estonia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and Bessarabia were liberated by the Soviet army.

Murder of Jews in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union continued throughout the period of occupation, but there were times when the murders peaked and other times when they declined, as a result of various circumstances that are detailed in the body of the study. The study is divided into three periods:

> First period: from the beginning of Germany's attack on the Soviet Union until the winter of 1941–42, during which most of the Jews of the Baltic states and the old territories of the Soviet Union were annihilated.
>
> Second period: from the spring of 1942 and up to the German defeat in Stalingrad late in 1942, during which the Jews of west Belorussia, west Ukraine, and regions of southern Russia captured by the Germans during the summer and autumn of 1942 were annihilated.
>
> Third period: from early 1943 until the German withdrawal in the summer and fall of 1944, during which the last Jews remaining in the ghettos and the camps were annihilated.

The murder of Jews is described in each of the chronological periods, in accordance with the administrative divisions made by the Germans in the occupied territories of Soviet Union:

Areas of German civilian administration, which included the more western occupied territories: Reichskommissariat Ostland and Reichskommissariat Ukraine.

Areas of German military administration, which included areas closer to the front line: the subdivision of these areas conformed with the areas under the control of the German "North," "Center," and "South" army groups.

Areas of eastern Galicia, which were annexed to General Government of Poland.

Areas under Romanian control: Transnistria (part of Ukraine between the rivers Dnestr and Bug), Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina.

This study focuses on the following subjects:

The characteristics of the Soviet Jews on the eve of the Holocaust.

The ideological roots and practical preparations in Germany for the annihilation of the Soviet Jews.

German administration in the occupied territories and their anti-Jewish policy: the SS, the army, and the civilian administration.

The extermination process and its uniqueness in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Jews and their confrontation and reactions to the atrocities.

The involvement of the German army and the military administration in anti-Jewish policies and acts of annihilation.

The involvement of the German civil administration and its responsibility of anti-Jewish policies.

The role and participation of local collaborators—civilians and police—in the persecution and murder of Jews.

Attitudes of the local populations toward the annihilation of their Jewish neighbors.

Effects of the situation on the front line and partisan warfare on the timing of the murder of Jews.

German policies toward mixed marriages and Mischlinge, toward the Karaites, the Krimchaks, the Mountain Jews, and Soviet Jewish prisoners of war.

The Jewish armed resistance in the ghettos and partisan groups in the forests.

These are the guidelines according to which this study deals with events in the various localities:

1. For large Jewish communities, such as those in Vilnius, Kaunas, Minsk, and Lvov, in which ghettos had existed for several years, the events there are given a more detailed description in this book. Cities such as Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, and Kishiniev, whose large Jewish communities were annihilated at the start of the occupation, are given a more limited review.
2. Events in the Jewish communities numbering above 5,000 which are not included among the larger communities are given brief mention in this study. Some of the smaller communities are mentioned in the notes. Emphasis is given in this study to the small Jewish communities in some larger cities, such as Kursk, Oriol, Krasnodar, and Stalingrad, about whom little has so far been written in Holocaust research and literature. The Jewish agricultural settlements (kolkhoz) in the former Soviet Union provided a wide-scale phenomenon. Almost all of them were located in the German-occupied territories, and their fate is described at length.
3. Large and small towns in which armed resistance took place are discussed in the relevant chapters.
4. The number of Jewish Holocaust victims in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union is estimated.

The objective of this study has been to supply the reader with a description of the Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, alongside an analysis of the elements that affected the events.

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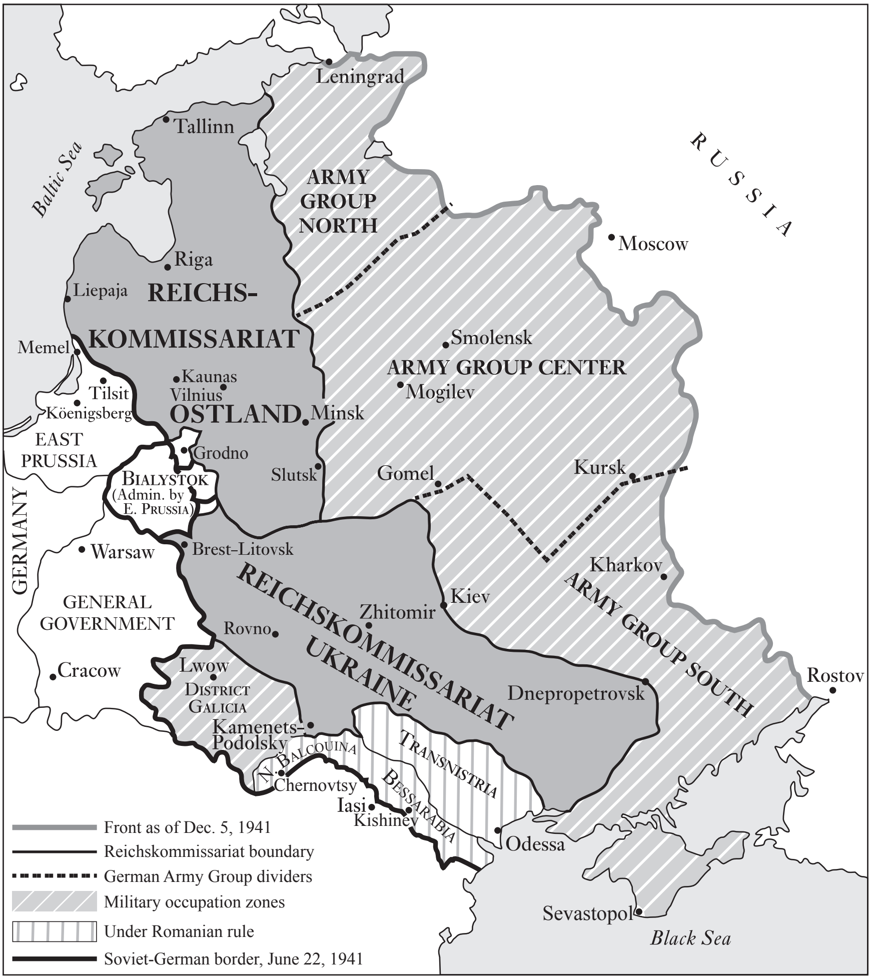
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Mogilev
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Grodno
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Chernovtsy
Iasi
Kishinev
BESSARABIA
Odessa
Sevastopol
Black Sea
Front as of Dec. 5, 1941
Reichskommissariat boundary
German Army Group dividers
Military occupation zones
Under Romanian rule
Soviet-German border, June 22, 1941

OCCUPIED SOVIET TERRITORY, DECEMBER 1941

ONE

The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union before World War II

1

Jews in Czarist Russia

ASSIMILATION, PERSECUTION, AND EMIGRATION

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the world's largest concentration of Jews lived between the banks of the Vistula River to the west and the river Dnepr to the east, in the kingdom of Poland. According to various estimates, this Jewish population numbered over 1 million people. There were virtually no Jews at that time in the area east of Poland, in the Russian empire. Some tens of thousands of Jews who had lived there, mainly in Moscow and St. Petersburg, had recently been expelled. As a result of political unrest and internal struggles during the years 1772–95 between the king and the country's aristocracy, the Polish kingdom was divided among its three neighbors—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—and ceased to exist. As part of these divisions, the provinces of Belorussia, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia were annexed to Russia.

For generations, these regions had been home to many thousands of Jews. Russia, whose policies prohibited Jews from living in its confines, now found itself in control of a large Jewish community. These Jews filled important roles in local and interregional commerce. Because of their number and economic importance, it was no longer possible to expel them.

Russian empress Catherine the Great (1762–96) legislated several laws that allowed the Jews to continue living in the annexed territories, although they were forbidden to settle in other parts of Russia. The scope of this settlement was defined in a directive issued by Catherine the Great on December 23, 1791.[1] This area, where the Jews were permitted to live, known as the Pale of Settlement, was expanded in 1804 to include the southern Ukraine on the banks of the Black Sea and the Crimean peninsula. Russia had captured these sparsely populated territories from the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the eighteenth century and was interested in developing them. During the nineteenth century, thousands of Jews relocated to these areas, and the large Jewish communities of Odessa and other cities were established in southern Russia. Bessarabia, formerly a part of the principality of Moldavia, was annexed to Russia in 1812 and was included in the Jewish Pale of Settlement. At the Congress of Vienna, following the fall of Napoleon, areas of central Poland, including the city of Warsaw with its large Jewish population, were incorporated as a separate kingdom under the Russian emperors' sovereignty.

Demography

During the nineteenth century the people of Russia, especially the Jews among them, underwent a demographic revolution. It was a period of natural growth that followed improvements in health services and a general rise in standards of education. The first general population census to be conducted in Russia, in 1897, included 5,189,400 Jews, constituting 4 percent of the country's population.[2] Following the persecutions and pogroms and the harsh economic situation, some 1,850,000 Jews left Russia during the period between the 1880s and the outbreak of World War I.[3] In spite of this mass migration, their numbers did not decrease, owing to the high birthrate of Russia's remaining Jews. On the eve of World War I, Russia's Jewish numbered some 5,200,000.[4]

Government Policy: Reinforcing Assimilatory Trends

The government authorities in Russia were concerned by the ever-growing Jewish population and considered them a threat to the country. Most of the Jews were urban dwellers who jealously guarded their religion and customs; they lived in well-organized communities and were occupied mainly as traders, shopkeepers, and artisans. The authorities were not prepared to grant the Jews equal rights, and the process of emancipation of the Jews in central and west Europe in the nineteenth century skipped over the Jews of Russia.

Czar Alexander I (1801–25), who at the beginning of his reign adopted the policies of an enlightened leader, appointed a committee in December 1802 to examine the Jewish situation. In December 1804, the committee published its recommendations in the form of "Laws for Jews," the main objective being to force the Jews to assimilate into their non-Jewish surrounds. The laws encouraged the Jews to introduce changes in their traditional sources of income and direct them toward more productive professions. One of the plans to "reform" the Jews made it possible for Jewish children to be admitted into state-run schools and universities. The objective behind this was assimilatory, since the atmosphere in these institutions was orthodox Christian.

Czar Nicholas I (1825–55) legislated dozens of new laws aimed at solving the problem by oppressing the Jews and forcing them to assimilate. One of the laws was forced military service—a tragic event in the history of Russia's Jews, known as the "Cantonist Laws." On August 26, 1827, a law was passed imposing upon

Jewish males the duty of military service. Recruitment age at that time was 18 to 35, and young men were required to serve in the army for 25 years. Service conditions were harsh for everyone, but the Jews were forced to suffer conditions that were especially brutal. Based on the premise that Jews were not accustomed to military service, the minimum age for recruiting Jewish soldiers was dropped from 18 to 12. Recruits under the age of 18 were sent to special institutions that were known as Schools for Cantonists—thus the name "Cantonist Laws." Of the 70,000 Jewish youngsters recruited according to the Cantonist Laws, 50,000 were under 18.[5]

The objective in recruiting Jewish youngsters was to sever them from their Jewish environment and to transfer them to regions beyond the Jewish Pale of Settlement, in the hope that military service in an atmosphere and spirit of the Russian Orthodox Church, coupled with plenty of physical and emotional pressure, would induce the young men to assimilate and convert to Christianity. In order to force them to adopt Christianity, they were sent on long marches, they were beaten and starved, and entire companies were brought to churches where they underwent organized baptism. There were many cases of martyrdom and suicides in order to avoid baptism, but over half of the 70,000 Cantonists were forced to become Christians.[6] In the end, however, the regime's recruitment policies were of no use. Those of the Cantonists who did change their religion did not come back as Jewish community leaders; rather, they disassociated themselves from mainstream Jewish life and were assimilated into their new Christian environment.

On August 26, 1856, the hated Cantonist system was repealed. The military reforms of 1874, which determined a compulsory period of four years of military service for all young Russian men, was enforced also on the Jews.[7]

The reactionary turn in the policies of Czar Alexander II (1855–81) brought about a growing wave of terrorism, and on March 1, 1881, he was assassinated by members of Narodnaia Vollia (the wish of the people), a socialist organization that supported a peasant-led revolution and believed that the way to achieve its goals lay in the use of terror.[8]

Persecution and Pogroms

The rise of Alexander III (1881–94) heralded the beginning of the worst period in the history of Russia's Jews. As a result of the Russian people's growing opposition to the autocratic regime, the government decided to take advantage of the people's inherent hatred for the Jews and use it as a basis for policies that would make the masses forget their fury at the government. There followed a wave of pogroms, organized by government authorities, reactionary organizations, and the secret police.

The government spread rumors that the Jews were leading the revolutionary waves that were washing over Russia and that the Jews were responsible for the assassination of Alexander II. The pogroms began on April 15, 1881, in Elizavetgrad and spread to Kiev, Odessa, and other cities in the Ukraine and several other places throughout Russia. The spring/summer 1881 pogroms affected about 215 Jewish communities.[9] The violence continued on and off until 1884 and focused mainly on Ukraine, traditionally a stronghold of anti-Semitic riots and disturbances.[10]

On May 5, 1882, the Russian government published a new list of rules that prevented Jews from working on Sundays and on Christian holidays. Other laws included restrictions on employing Jews in the civil service. Jews were barred from becoming army officers. Schools and universities operated a quota system—or *numerus clausus*—limiting the number of Jews admitted to each institution. This was a deviation from previous policy, which aimed at including Jews in the general education system in order to induce them to assimilate.[11] In 1891 some 20,000 Jewish artisans were expelled from Moscow. They had been allowed to live there during the previous czar's reign and made up the majority of Moscow's Jewish population. The reason given for the expulsion was "to purge the holy capital of Jews."[12]

Nicholas II (1894–1917), the last of the Russian czars, was under the absolute influence of reactionary circles in the royal court. Unrest and dissidence against the czar's rule were growing among the population. Liberal and revolutionary groups began forming and demanding reforms in the country's government. Like his predecessors, the czar blamed the Jews for the people's unrest and accused them of being responsible for Russia's poverty and shortcomings. Anti-Semitic propaganda and incitement of the masses to anti-Jewish violence became a political tool of the government.[13]

The authorities adopted the old method of blood libel. At the beginning of 1903, the ravaged body of a Christian boy was found in Kishinev, the capital of Bessarabia. The boy's uncle confessed to the murder. But, encouraged by the authorities, a local paper accused the Jews of the "ritual slaughter" of the boy and called for revenge. On Sunday, April 6, 1903, an organized and incited mob set out on a rampage of murder and robbery. The Kishinev pogrom aroused a wave of protest around the world, and heads of state protested to the czar. Russian intellectuals also protested against the riots. The protests did nothing to change the government's policies, and in 1903 further pogroms were organized under the auspices of the government in Gomel, Mogilev, and other cities in the Ukraine and Belorussia.

The Russo-Japanese war broke out at the beginning of 1904, and Russia's failure at the front reinforced the revolutionary movement in the country. In order to combat the growing revolutionary tendencies, the regime established an organization called "Union of the Russian Nation," as well as groups of hooligans, the "Black Hundreds," who were sent to fight the revolutionaries and the Jews. The anti-Semitic press accused the Jews of supporting Japan and of distributing revolutionary propaganda in order to weaken Russia, ignoring the fact that 30,000 Jewish soldiers were fighting at that very time on the front against Japan.[14]

In answer to the unrest and demonstrations of the workers, the czar promised the nation a constitution and a legislative assembly (called Duma). But the revolutionary wave continued, and members of the Union of the Russian Nation and the Black Hundreds organized processions that soon turned into a wave of riots and pogroms. More than 300 Jews were murdered in Odessa, and over 2,000 were wounded during October 18–21, 1905. The rioting spread to sixty-four towns and cities, including Kiev, Simferopol, and Bialystok, as well as hundreds of townships in the Ukraine and other regions. The rioters were joined by members of the police, and the pogroms continued until the end of the summer of 1906. The death toll of this wave of violence was around 800. Thousands more were wounded, and there was extensive damage to property.

Between 1903 and 1905 several versions of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" were published in Russia. These were written by members of the Russian Secret Police. The protocols became a tool for anti-Jewish incitement, both in Russia and worldwide.[15]

Following the Kishinev pogrom, the Jews in most of the large Jewish communities established self-defense groups. The pogrom at Melitopol, for example, which took place in April 1905, was smaller than elsewhere, because armed Jewish self-defense units managed to curb and injure dozens of their attackers. At the end of April 1905, the Russian soldiers and police joined the pogrom in Zhitomir, killing 15 members of the Jewish defense league and wounding about 100 more. In several places, the Jewish defenders were joined by Russians, but these were but a few, against huge rioting mobs.[16] By defending themselves against the rioters, Russia's Jews raised their self-awareness and reinforced their national identity.

The first Duma to be elected in free elections, in which Jews were granted voting rights, brought in twelve Jewish delegates, representing a bloc that consisted of various Jewish political parties. The Duma was convened for the first time at the end of April 1906, and its Jewish delegates demanded an end to the pogroms and legislation that would grant equal rights to the Jews. But in July 1906, before their activity had a chance to bear fruit, the czar dispersed the Duma. Another Duma was elected before the outbreak of World War I, but its authority was curbed.

The anti-Jewish campaign continued, and a new blood libel, known as the "Beilis affair," shocked public opinion in Russia and the rest of the world. The body of a Christian youth was found in a Kiev suburb on March 20, 1911. The boy had been murdered by a gang of young criminals, but anti-Semitic circles accused Mendel Beilis, a Jewish inhabitant of Kiev, of ritual murder. The authorities knew the identity of the murderers, but with the help of false witnesses, they set out to prove Beilis's guilt. The trial began in September 1913 and aroused a sharp public debate. The prosecution found "expert witnesses" who tried to prove that Jews are required to murder Christians for their blood, which is then used in Jewish ritual. Beilis was represented by the finest Jewish and Russian defense lawyers. Although the judge helped the prosecution, the twelve-man jury — most of whom were peasants, appointed by the authorities — decided to acquit Beilis. Their sense of justice was greater than that of the legal representatives of the government, who staged both the libel and the trial.[17]

THE STRUGGLE OF THE JEWS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

The vast majority of Jewish society in Russia was Orthodox, conservative, and isolated from its non-Jewish surrounds. In general, it was a society that rejected any deviation from the traditional religious way of life that it had known for generations. Unlike the Jews of central and western Europe, the Jews of Russia felt no cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the majority of the non-Jews with whom they came in contact. The latter were mostly rural, and their culture and lifestyle bore no attractions that could tempt the Jews into relinquishing their own culture, traditions, and values.

Under the influence of the enlightened ideas that were making their way from Jewish communities in central Europe during the early years of the nineteenth century, an Enlightenment, or Maskilim Movement, began establishing itself among the Jews of Russia. Its founders, the Maskilim (Hebrew for "educated"), wanted to bring about change in the lifestyle of Jewish society and to establish and reinforce cultural ties with non-Jewish society. The Enlighteners focused mainly on reform in education, to expose Jewish children to a more secular way of life and to make them familiar with the language of the country, in order to bring them closer to their neighboring nations. In Russia, the Jewish Enlightenment developed differently from its central and western European counterpart, although it was there that it had first taken root. In Russia the Enlightenment turned its activity inward into its own Jewish society. It aimed at resurrecting the Hebrew language and laid the foundations for the growth of a new secular literary culture. Under the influence of Russian and other nations' romantic literature, the

Enlightenment began writing extensively about subjects from the Bible, glorified their historical past in the Land of Israel, and, by doing so, aroused hopes of change in their depressing present. The Enlightenment writers in the Hebrew language included Peretz Smolensky and Abraham Mapu.

To influence the broad Jewish masses, the Enlightenment turned to Yiddish literature as well, and among the leading writers in this language were Mendele Mocher Sforim (Sholem Jacob Abramovich) and Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinovich). The aim of these writers was to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment and to criticize the faults in Jewish society, but without relinquishing their Jewishness. In contrast to the Enlightened literature in western Europe, these writings, in Hebrew and Yiddish, reinforced, rather than weakened, the Jewish identity of the masses.[18]

Ideas of religious reform were not adopted by members of the Russian Jewish Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, which constituted a small minority in Jewish society, found it hard to pitch its ideas against the traditional leaders of the communities and conservative rabbis. Also, Jewish society was not yet open to the ideas of Enlightenment.[19] Nonetheless, the movement expanded by way of the state-run schools and the modern secular Jewish schools where, in addition to religious lessons, the pupils were taught a variety of other subjects. The Enlightenment press in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian, which appeared during the 1850s, was also instrumental in spreading the movement's ideologies. Enlightenment in Russia succeeded in raising the cultural level of Jewish society, but influenced only a small part of the Jewish population. Most Jews continued to live as they always had, due to the government's policies, the lack of civil rights, and the reluctance of Russian society to accept Jews as their equals.[20]

The Jewish Enlightenment developed three main trends during the 1880s and 1890s. The first trend aimed for general political and social integration, in keeping with the process that had taken place in western Europe. Many of those in support of this trend had cut themselves off from their people, assimilated into Russian society, and even changed their religion. This process took place among those Jews who had been permitted to live outside of the Pale of Settlement. The second trend turned to Jewish national revival and the various aspects of Zionism. The third trend concerned socialism, in its various aspects, which was beginning at that time to take root in Russian society.[21]

Already, in the 1870s, Zionist ideas and thoughts of a return to the Land of Israel had begun to appear in the Enlightenment press and literature. The rise of nationalism throughout Europe and the increasing pan-Slavism in Russia, with its attendant anti-Semitic voices, provided the catalyst for a Zionist reawakening.

The decisive about-face took place as a result of the 1881–82 wave of pogroms, which reaffirmed to the Jews how powerful was the antagonism toward them, both from the masses and from the Russian government. Certain members of the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia began to return to their people and to national-Zionist ideas. Enlightenment thinker Y. L. Pinsker provided an ideological basis for these ideals in the booklet *Autoemancipation,* which he published in 1882. Pinsker pointed out gentile society's hatred of the Jews and blamed it on the Jews' unique existence and the fact that the Jews were strangers everywhere they lived. Their return to a position of being a normal nation — by establishing a sovereign state of their own — might alleviate the hatred toward them, but this would require a change in the self-awareness of the Jews — not emancipation granted to the Jews by other nations, but autoemancipation in their own land.

The Zionist idea took hold in Russia with the publication of the Russian and Hebrew translations of Theodore Herzl's book *The Jewish State* in 1896. In August 1897 the Zionist organization was founded in Bialystok, and like other political organizations in Russia, it also acted illegally. In 1903 its number of branches was 1,500.[22] The Poale Zion (workers of Zion) party, which created the ideological synthesis between Socialism and Zionism, was founded in February 1906.[23] Emigration of Russian Jews to the Land of Israel continued between the pogrom years (1903–6) and the outbreak of World War I and even increased. Among these early immigrants were those who became leaders of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel, such as David Ben-Gurion.[24]

In October 1897 a group of Jewish socialists convened in Vilna and founded the Jewish Workers Party, the Bund. At the first meeting of the new organization, Arkadi Kramer, one of its leaders, said that the objective of the Bund was "not only the struggle for Russian political demands" but also "to protect the specific interests of Jewish workers . . . since the Jewish workers are suffering not only as workers but also as Jews."[25] The Bund played an important role in the establishment of an all-Russian Social Democratic Party in March 1898, under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. It was decided that the Bund would be given the status within the new party of an autonomous organization. The Bund's influence spread among the Jewish workers, and between 1900 and 1905 its membership grew from 5,600 to 30,000.[26] At the second Russian Social Democratic Party convention in Brussels, Belgium, in 1903, the Bund demanded the reorganization of the party into a federation of national parties, a demand that was rejected. As a result, the Bund left the Russian Social Democratic Party.[27]

The Bund increased its political activity, and its influence among the Jewish public grew during the anti-Jewish riots of 1903–6, when it organized self-defense units. The Bund made a valuable contribution to the culture and increased self-awareness of the Jewish proletariat; it resisted Zionism.

The Bund took an active part in the 1905 revolution.[28] The years of general reaction following the repression of the 1905–6 revolutionary wave, and up to the deposition of the czar in 1917, saw a decline in the Bund's activity. Some of the Bund's activists were exiled to Siberia, while others emigrated from Russia. As part of the internal struggles of Russian social democracy, the Bund supported the Mensheviks, who recognized the principle of national-cultural autonomy, and opposed the Bolsheviks, who rejected this principle.[29]

RUSSIAN JEWS IN WORLD WAR I AND DURING THE REVOLUTION

The Jews during the War

Russia's Jews received the outbreak of war with expressions of patriotism. Thousands of Jews enlisted in the army, and many believed that the authorities would reward them for doing so by granting them equal civil rights. But this did not happen. Much of the war took place within the area of the Jewish Pale of Settlement, and the whole population suffered badly, but the suffering of the Jews was twofold. In the early months of the war, the Russian army command accused the Jews of supporting the Germans, and they were expelled from the regions close to the front, despite the fact that according to estimates, between 500,000 and 600,000 Jewish soldiers served in the Russian army during the war, many of whom were wounded or killed.

The expulsion of Jews eastward began in March 1915, and more than 500,000 Jews were forced out of their homes in the areas of Poland and Lithuania. The transfer was carried out with the utmost brutality, with the Jews having to leave their homes with only twenty-four to forty-eight hours' notice and to make their way eastwards, some on foot, others in goods trains. The swift advance of the German army and its occupation of vast territories prevented the expulsion of many thousands of additional Jews.[30]

The Germans took control of large areas, including the cities of Lodz, Warsaw, and Vilnius as well as east Galicia. Around 1.5 million Jews lived in the areas occupied by the Germans. In order to gain the support of the Jewish population, the Germans eased restrictions on Jewish political parties and institutions. Nevertheless, the general condition of the Jews in the occupied regions was bad because of the war and increased anti-Semitism among the local population.[31]

The Jews between the 1917 February and October Revolutions

Their defeats in the war, coupled with the poverty and hunger inside Russia, resulted in unrest among the working classes. The army was sent in to suppress a workers' rally in Petrograd on February 26, 1917, and it opened fire, killing or wounding many of the participants. This caused more disturbances, and soldiers, sent to repress them, joined the demonstrators. Nicholas II was forced to abdicate.

A provisional government was convened, made up of parties at the center of the political map. Alexander Kerensky became prime minister, and the new government decided to continue with the war against the Germans. Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, who until that time had been in exile in Switzerland, returned to Russia with the help of the German authorities and demanded the overthrow of the new regime and an end to the war. On November 7 (October 24, according to the old calendar), armed forces loyal to the Bolshevik cause stormed the Winter Palace, residence of the Kerensky government, arrested most of the ministers, and took control of the country.

For the Jews of Russia, the eight months between the February and October revolutions were the best and most productive in their entire history. The Jews had welcomed the February revolution, and indeed, on March 22, 1917, the provisional government issued a decree granting equal rights for all citizens, regardless of religion or ethnic origin.

The Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, was received enthusiastically by Russian Zionists. But the tragedy of Russian Zionism was that the Bolshevik revolution broke out only five days after the Balfour Declaration and cut off Russian Jewry from world Jewry.[32]

The Bund was involved more closely in internal Russian politics, and most of its members supported the Mensheviks, who claimed that the time was not yet ripe for a proletariat revolution, and Russia should first undergo a period of capitalism. It was a position that refuted the concepts of the Bolsheviks, whose objective was to establish a communist regime without delay.[33]

Civil War and Pogroms

The Bolsheviks' seizure of power started a new era in Russia and in the history of Russia's Jews. The new Soviet regime was in need of peace at all costs. On March 3, 1918, the German-Russian peace treaty was signed in Brest-Litovsk, according to terms dictated by Germany. Russia was obliged to give up territories in Belorussia, the Baltic states, and in Ukraine, including the city of Kiev.

The anti-Soviet forces, who were known as the "White Army" (distinguishing them from the Soviet "Red Army"), recovered and with the help of France, Britain, the United States, and Japan, who opposed Russia's withdrawal from the war, began military operations to quell the Bolshevik revolution. Between 1918 and 1920, a bloody civil war raged in Russia. The antirevolutionary forces were anti-Semitic, and in their propaganda they accused the Bolshevik regime of being a Jewish regime.

Jews did indeed take key positions in the Soviet government, since most of the members of the former government officials had joined the antirevolutionary forces. However, the Jews in question were only a very small minority and consisted almost entirely of assimilated Jews. The large majority of Jews had no reason to rejoice at the Bolshevik revolution. The provisional government under Kerensky had given them equal rights, and for the few months between the February and October revolutions the Jews had enjoyed an unprecedented renaissance in their political and cultural lives. But for the antirevolutionary forces it was easy to point out the few Jews in the upper echelons of the communist leadership and to disregard completely the millions of Jews who were far removed from communism. There was also an excuse for the antirevolutionary forces to present the Bolsheviks as Jews and to initiate a huge wave of anti-Jewish pogroms. The situation was especially bad in the Ukraine, with its tradition of anti-Semitism.

With its defeat in the war, Germany withdrew from the Ukraine. An independent Ukrainian government was established in December 1918, and Semion Petlyura was appointed chief of staff of the Ukrainian army. Fierce battles raged on Ukrainian soil from 1918 through 1920 between the White Army, under the command of Anton Denikin, alongside Ukrainian nationalist forces against the Red Army. Lacking a stable government, large areas of the Ukraine were gripped by anarchy for many months. The country was at the mercy of local gangs under the command of atamans.

The civil war was accompanied by cruel anti-Jewish pogroms, perpetrated by the White Armies, gangs of atamans and rioters from among the local population, involving looting, rape, and murder. Between March-April 1918 and 1920, over 1,200 pogroms took place throughout the Ukraine, with the largest wave during 1919 and continuing on a smaller scale into 1920. Typical of these pogroms was the one perpetrated by Petlyura's men in the town of Proskurov (now Khmelnitski) on March 15, 1919. After the Soviet troops were forced out, the Ukrainian brigade, under the command of Ataman Samosenko, marched through the town in a victory parade. After the parade, the soldiers split up into small teams and made their way through the town, from house to house, murdering 1,600 Jews. The order to cease the pogrom came four hours later, and the soldiers marched to the railway station, accompanied by a brass band and patriotic songs. In the nearby township of Felshtin, the pogrom was joined by peasants from the local villages, and 485 people were murdered there.[34] Similar pogroms were carried out by Petlyura's men and gangs of Ukrainians in Elizavetgrad, where 1,526 Jews were murdered between May 15 and May 17, 1919; in Radomysl the death toll was 1,000 Jews on June 1, 1919.[35]

In his diary, one Jew described the pogrom in Chernobyl, north of Kiev, between April 7 and May 2, 1919, when an Ukrainian unit under the command of Ataman Struk took control of the town:

> Armed murderers burst into the houses, shooting, killing. . . . I had hidden the children in the cellar. . . . The market is full of farmers' wagons—it appears that Struk had ordered the peasants to follow his soldiers, to pillage. . . . Any Jews they catch, they see as communists and kill them. . . . The local inhabitants go about the town as if all this is nothing to do with them, secretly gloating. . . . The Russians have marked their own homes with crosses and written "here lives a Christian." They didn't allow the Jews into their homes.[36]

The White Army pogroms were as cruel as those carried out by gangs led by atamans. A few days after entering Kiev in mid-October 1919, Denikin's men killed 600 Jews and looted most of their homes. In late December, Denikin's men murdered 1,800 Jews in the town of Fastov and wiped out entire Jewish neighborhoods.[37]

Some 50,000 Jews were murdered in these pogroms, and together with those who later died of their wounds, hunger, and sickness as a result of the civil war and pogroms, the death toll reached 150,000. Half a million Jews were expelled or escaped from their homes, and many small communities were destroyed, never to be resurrected. In certain places, such as Odessa, the Jews succeeded in organizing self-defense units.[38] Maxim Gorky, one of the great twentieth-century Russian writers, was horrified by the pogroms and wrote in 1921:

> There is no hiding from the grim truth—nowhere else in the world are Jews slaughtered and annihilated, with such love . . . as here, in Russia. Judging by the energies invested in them, the pogroms against the Jews must surely take first place in the list of "Great Historical Operations of the Russian Nation," and it is quite obvious to me that this kind of activity is on the increase. . . . I can see this increase since 1885, when I myself witnessed the annihilation of a small number of Jews in Novgorod, but numerically and quality-wise the pogroms of the 1880s fall short of the pogroms of 1905–6, and the horrors of today—from the point of view of numbers and cruelty—leave the infamous Kishniev and Bialystok murders far behind. The sophistication is obvious.[39]

That which communist ideology had not accomplished among the Jews was achieved by the pogroms. As far as the Jews were concerned, the Red Army and the Soviet regime were the ones who rescued them from the pogroms, and many

Jews who had formerly been far removed from communist ideology joined the ranks of the Red Army.

The armies of Denikin and Petlyura were defeated at the end of 1919, and the Red Army took control of all of east Ukraine. Gangs led by atamans continued to fight until 1921, when they were finally defeated by the Red Army.

While battle raged in the east Ukraine, a war was also being fought in western Ukraine. On November 1, 1918, the Ukrainians in Lvov declared west Ukraine an independent republic. Poland, which had just achieved independence, was unwilling to relinquish east Galicia, and its army conquered Lvov on November 23. The Polish army's triumphant entry into Lvov was accompanied by an anti-Jewish pogrom. More than 100 Jews were murdered, hundreds of others were wounded, and there was widespread looting of property. As an excuse for the pogrom, its perpetrators claimed that the Jews supported the Ukrainians. The truth was that the Jews, aware of their tenuous situation, were careful to keep neutral in the Polish-Ukrainian conflict.[40]

During the 1919–20 war between Poland and Soviet Russia, the Polish army treated the Jews as if they were Soviet supporters. Polish soldiers conducted anti-Jewish pogroms when they reconquered Vilnius, Pinsk, and Lida.[41]

An armistice was reached in October 1920 between Poland and Soviet Russia. At the war's end, after the final borders between the Soviet Union and Poland had been determined, western Belorussia and western Ukraine remained under Polish sovereignty. The Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were given independence, and Bessarabia was annexed to Romania. Of the over 5 million Jews in czarist Russia on the eve of World War I, only half remained in the USSR. The other half were included in the newly independent states of postwar eastern Europe.[42]