

**Class Struggle, Nationality and Religion: the Soviet Jewish
Question 1917-1936**

by

Jeffrey J. D. Brown

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Master of Arts
in
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THE SOVIET JEWISH QUESTION 1917-1936

BY

JEFFREY J.D. BROWN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis examines the question of the Soviet treatment of Jews between 1917 and 1936. The core of the problem is the juxtaposition between the ideological imperatives of Bolshevik policy toward Jews and the politics of the Soviet Jewish question. On an ideological plane the Bolsheviks considered Jews as a persecuted national minority, a religious minority and ultimately, as a community like any other, divided by class. Jews fit poorly into the class interested policies of the Bolsheviks which emphasized the fully urban industrial proletariat, and tended to be petty bourgeois, living in Soviet urban communities, with a community life permeated by the institutions and values of Judaism. The Bolsheviks saw the social cleavages that characterized Jews as artificially reinforced impediments to the assimilation of Jews, which would occur readily following the end to discrimination against Jews under the Bolsheviks. On the other hand, the politics of anti-semitism and the distinctive features of Jewish life demanded that Jews receive more attention than might have been expected. The result of the disjuncture between ideology and the demands of practical politics was a contradictory policy programme that inflicted great damage upon the Jewish community and failed to alleviate the misery of many Jews.

The thesis examines the Bolshevnik notions of society's revolutionary transformation, and the Bolshevnik response to the politics of the Jewish question in Soviet Russia as the primary influences on Soviet Jewish policy. Proceeding chronologically, the thesis takes up the question of the place of Jews in Soviet society under the Bolshevniks, with reference to the Bolshevnik's understanding of Jews and the teleological ends of Marxism.

The thesis concludes that the Soviet treatment of Jews was the result of policies steeped in ideological and political considerations that often left Jews in a position of great misery, and without many of the community institutions and values that had defined "Jewishness" in Soviet Russia. The peculiar structure of the Jewish community left it vulnerable to the assaults of Bolshevnik policy, and Jewish life as it was known in the pre-revolutionary era was destroyed.

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It is never possible to complete a project such as a thesis in a vacuum, although it may sometimes feel like one is condemned to such an environment. I would like to acknowledge five individuals who helped me to complete the following thesis. Sharon and Kurtis Mann, who extended not only their friendship, but their home for the better part of a year while I finished writing the thesis. Ben Lombardi, who provided valuable comments and was encouraging and optimistic when the light at the end of the tunnel appeared as the oncoming train. Finally, I should like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, Ruth and Donald Brown, who did all that was in their power to facilitate the completion of this project. Thank you all for your support.

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The lion once said to the rooster: I shall devour you. Why have I deserved it? asked the rooster.- Because, said the lion, after the floor is swept, you scratch up the garbage again.- But, objected the rooster, because of my scratch, valuable things are sometimes found in the garbage.- I shall devour you insisted the lion.- Why? wondered the rooster.- Because you wake up people in the morning.- But my crowing makes people get up and go to work, protested the rooster.- I shall devour you, the lion said again.- Why now? wondered the rooster.- Because I am strong and you are weak, explained the lion.- This time the rooster was quiet; he could not find any more questions to ask.

-Jewish parable

Introduction

This thesis examines the theoretical origins of the Russian Communist Party's [RCP(b)] policies towards Soviet Jewry between 1917 and 1936, and the practical affects of these policies on Soviet Jewish life. In other words, the general subject matter of the thesis is the "Jewish question" in the first nineteen years of the Soviet Union's history. In its simplest formulation, the Soviet Jewish question is about the place of Judaism and traditional Jewish culture in Soviet society under a regime whose stated aim was the revolutionary transformation of that society. To put the question in another way, given Marxist categories of analysis, what were the problems posed by the "special" features of the Soviet Jewish community during the transition to communism, and what was the place of Soviet Jewry following this transition? These are the questions that will be taken up in this thesis.

The Soviet Jewish question is not a simple one, and the many sides of the Jewish question are not easily explained. The problem of the place of Jews in Soviet society was not simply about how Jews fit into Soviet Marxist categories of analysis, or Soviet Marxist expectations about the place of Jews in society following Soviet Russia's transformation to communism. Leonard Schapiro commented that the Soviet Jew's "peculiar historical and cultural predicament calls for a

special and complex kind of tolerance, if he is to fulfil himself both as a Jew and a citizen of the Soviet Union."¹ Two sides of the same issue are called forth by Schapiro. Jews could not remain as Jews without the tolerance of the regime, and the Soviet regime was incapable of tolerating the presence of a group not fully integrated into society. The Jew could be a loyal Soviet citizen, and remain attached to his deep roots to his historical and religious roots as a Jew. His "peculiar historical and cultural predicament" demanded of the rest of society the opportunity to participate as a Jew. The Bolsheviks' intolerance stems from the conviction that part of the logic of history was the constant progression beyond all social expressions of particularism to new universal ones, and could only allow the Jew to participate as a Soviet citizen. Ideologically Bolshevism was incapable of tolerating the duality of "Jewishness". Jewishness was unimportant to the Bolsheviks because logic of history indicated their merging with rest of society. Homogenization as part of the course of modernization was the Bolsheviks' answer to the Jewish question.

History was not so kind as to follow the logic of Soviet Marxism. However Soviet Marxist theory had understood the

¹ Leonard Schapiro, "Introduction", in Lionel Kochan, (Ed.), The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917, (Third Edition), Oxford University Press, London, 1978, p.6.

solution to the Jewish question, the predicament of Jews became part of the Bolsheviks' own uncomfortable situation after the seizure of power in 1917. The manipulation of popular antisemitism² had been a weapon in the attempt to quash the forces of revolution in Russia. When the Bolsheviks seized power they were linked to the Jews, and blamed for the upheaval and dislocation of the times not only as a revolutionary government, but as Jews. In the turmoil of the Civil War popular antisemitism had to be overcome as Bolsheviks tried to consolidate their power.

Popular antisemitism had put the problem of the place of Jews in society on the Bolshevik agenda. The Jewish question was also important to the Bolsheviks because the Jewish population of the Western extremes of the former Empire represented a large portion of the better educated urban dwellers of a region where the Bolsheviks had virtually no support. A firm base among the Jews would lend to the revolution the valuable talents of a group of people who had

² The spelling of the word antisemitism without the hyphen is a spelling that is gaining some currency in the literature. Emile Fackenheim, reasoned "...the spelling ought to be antisemitism without the hyphen, dispelling the notion that there is an entity 'Semitism' which 'anti-Semitism' opposes." Emily Fackenheim, "Post-Holocaust Anti-Jewishness, Jewish Identity and the Centrality of Israel," in Moshe Davis, (Ed.), World Jewry and the State of Israel, Arno Press, New York, 1977, as cited in Denis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism, Simon Schuster, Inc., New York. 1983, p.199, f.n.1.

no loyalty to the Tsarist regime. The problem was there were not that many Jews who were committed absolutely to the Bolshevik government. Moreover, the Bolshevik campaign to overcome antisemitism did not stop the regime from moving purposefully to move Jews on to the road to socialist transformation.

The thesis argues that, given their understanding of historical change and progress, the Bolsheviks' ambition to "reconstruct Jewish life" was grounded in the same considerations that gave rise to their long term expectations for all national or religious groups in Soviet society. The thesis argues further that antisemitism did not motivate the Bolsheviks' programme to reconstruct Soviet Jewish life. The extent of the destruction and social dislocation experienced by Jews during the years of revolution and war before the Bolsheviks gained full control of regions where most Jews of the former Empire lived, did much to set the stage for even more dislocation after 1920. The socio-economic structure of the Jewish communities, and the close relationship between religion and culture in the daily lives of Jews, left most Jews vulnerable to the general assaults of the new order on all manifestations of the **ancien regime**. The disintegration of traditional Jewish life was furthered by Jewish communists, who more often than not carried out the destructive campaigns of the Bolsheviks with excessive force.

The response of the Bolsheviks to the social and economic dislocation endured by the Jewish community was combined with their efforts to reconstruct Jewish life, and to undermine the values of this close knit community. The result was a contradictory policy programme that gave little direction to the apparatus established to oversee the transformation of Jewish life. What follows traces the relationship between the theoretical perspectives of the Bolsheviks and their attempt put them into practice as the regime struggled for power, whilst initiating the dawn of a new society and a new man.

The first chapter is an explanation of the process of revolutionary transformation as understood in Soviet Marxist theory. It examines the notion of class struggle as an approach to social transformation. Religion and nationality are discussed as part of Soviet Marxism's theoretical understanding of the impediments to society's transformation. The purpose of discussing the more general notions of class struggle, nationality and religion is to locate the Soviet Marxist commentary on the Jewish question within the context of the larger issues of society's transformation.

The second chapter considers Soviet Jewry during the period of War Communism. The chapter begins by reviewing the

affects of the Civil War on Soviet Jewry, along with the role played by the utopian policies of the regime in Jewish life. Following a discussion of the status of Jews as a nationality, the establishment of an apparatus to deal with the Jewish population is described, and its purpose examined. An account of the first of the Bolsheviks anti-religious campaigns, and its infringement on Jewish religious life rounds off this second chapter.

In the next chapter, the thesis moves on to the NEP and its influence on the regime's Jewish policies. The activities of the RCP's Jewish apparatus in the effort to "reconstruct" the Jewish way of life, and to address the poverty of Jews living in the townships of the former Pale of Settlement are recounted. The attention of the third chapter then turns to the programme of agricultural colonization, which became the centre piece of Soviet Jewish policy during the NEP, and culminated in the colonization project in a region of Siberia known as the Birobidzhan. Yiddishization, the other important initiative taken by the regime in the area of nationality, is examined with respect to the Soviet administrative apparatus. The "reprieve" from the oppressive methods in the regime's anti-religious campaign is commented on to end the chapter.

The final chapter is devoted to the place of Jews in Soviet society during Stalin's "revolution from above". A

discussion of the differences between the early years of Stalinism and the NEP as regards Soviet Jewry introduces the chapter. From this general commentary the chapter proceeds to discuss the changes to the regime's anti-religious legislation, and considers the role played by the anti-religious campaign in undermining the influence of Judaism in the daily lives of Soviet Jews. The demise of Jewish institutions controlled by the Party is examined in light of the political environment in the 1930s as regards the area of nationalities.

Even though the motivation for the Bolsheviks to transform its Jewish population did not vary from that informing attempts to revolutionize other religious and national groups, there are good reasons to examine the Soviet treatment of Jews between 1917 and 1936. The fact that the Jewish question is raised by the commentaries of Marx, Lenin and Stalin in the course of examining the difficulties presented by the revolutionary transformation of society, recommends the study of the Soviet Jewish question. Furthermore, the effort of the Bolsheviks devoted to setting up an apparatus for work in areas populated by high concentrations of Jews, despite this work being circumscribed by more fundamental issues, was also an indication that some importance was assigned to the Jewish problem by the Bolsheviks.

The commentary of Western scholars on Soviet Jewry also makes the topic worthy of further consideration. After the Second World War, the indulgence of antisemitism in the Soviet Union in a world sensitized to the persecution of world Jewry has led to a literature that often assumes antisemitism to be an integral part of Soviet policy and ideology. The record shows that antisemitism has not always had the importance assigned to it by critics of the regime.

In the existing literature the Jewish question in the Soviet Union has been paid considerable attention. There are a number of well documented and carefully argued monographs and articles. Zvi Gitelman's **Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930**,³ and Solomon Schwarz's **The Jews in the Soviet Union**⁴ deserve to be singled out in this regard; both these books proved invaluable. The research that went into these works is evidenced by the extensive use of primary sources, which have been quoted often in this thesis. In general, the high calibre of the literature relating to the years between 1917 and 1936 period has provided an account of Soviet Jewry which has made

³ Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1972.

⁴ Solomon M. Schwarz, The Jews in the Soviet Union, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1951.

it rewarding to undertake a study of this topic.

There are, nonetheless, some deficiencies in the literature. For the most part, what has been written presents a fragmented picture of the regime's approach to its Jewish population. There are few authors who put the interesting and important work that has been done between the covers of one volume. Nora Levin's recently published two volume work **The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917** is the most comprehensive overview to date.⁵ Gitelman is partly successful in offering a more comprehensive approach, but he is in the end limited by his focus on the Party's Jewish apparatus, and a time frame that ends quite logically in 1930 with the demise of the Jewish Sections. Schwarz, is useful for the purpose of establishing an overall view of the Soviet Jewish question, but has been outdated, as has the shorter work of Avrahm Yarmolinsky, which offers a unique perspective because it was written in 1928.⁶ Salo Baron's **The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets** is useful as a general history, but falls short of the level of analysis achieved in other works.⁷ The remainder of

⁵ Nora Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival, 2 Vols., New York University Press, New York, 1988.

⁶ Avrahm Yarmolinsky, The Jews and Other Minor Nationalities Under the Soviets, Vanguard Press, New York, 1928.

⁷ Salo Baron The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets, (Second Edition), Schocken Books, New York, 1987.

the literature consists of a goodly number of articles and essays, as well as, a few monographs that devote themselves to a narrower treatment of different aspects of Jewish life in the Soviet Union. The present thesis should find its place in the literature as a sustained treatment of Soviet Marxism's theoretical approach to the Jewish question, and as an account of the political events surrounding the policy agenda of the Bolsheviks towards Jews between 1917 and 1936. It should also throw some light on the origins of the difficulties faced by contemporary Soviet Jewry, and only recently alleviated by the reform programme of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Chapter 1

Class Struggle and the Jewish Question

The Bolshevik approach to the Jewish question follows from Marx's understanding of the revolutionary transformation of society, and from the Marxist categories of analysis applied by the Bolsheviks to assess the revolutionary situation in Russia. Regardless of the Bolsheviks' conclusions about the status of Jews as a religious group or a nationality, the Bolsheviks subordinated their attitude towards Jews to the proletarian class struggle. The purpose of the present chapter is to locate the Jewish question in the Marxist scheme for the revolutionary transformation of society, and to explain how the Marxist categories of social analysis- class, religion and nationality- set the tone for the Bolsheviks' attitude to the Jewish question.

1.1 Bolshevism and the Revolutionary Transformation of Society

The actions of the Bolsheviks took the form of a revolutionary praxis, steeped in Marxist methodology and categories of analysis, and responsive to the Russian historical environment. Bolshevik praxis was clearly evident

in their approach to the Jewish question, and therefore, without some understanding of the theoretical concepts embodied in the Soviet Marxist notion of revolution as the transformation of society, the Soviet approach to the Jewish question makes little sense. A brief review of the Marxist notion of revolutionary change will set the ground work for an examination of the Soviet Marxist approach to the problems presented by the religious and nationalities questions, and particularly the Jewish question.

Karl Marx understood revolution to be a process of social, political and economic transformation. Its premises were to be found in the dynamic relations between the objective and subjective factors of man's social conditions and organization. Marx asserted that in the final analysis the economic activity of men preponderated in determining the forms of the ideas and institutions, (the superstructure), arising from all levels of man's social interaction. In this manner, the process of social and political transformation reflected the qualitative progression in man's economic

activity.¹

Transformation in the economic sphere, required confirmation in man's socio-political relations in order to complete the transition from one historical epoch to the next. The socio-political transformation of society was not automatic. The realization of the possibilities of man's productive capacity in his social relations "presumes the action and consciousness of the revolutionary class."² Revolution depended on a man aware of the social and natural world around him. The tool of man's awareness was critical philosophy, which saw man's existence under capitalism as one characterized by alienation and exploitation under a political order that served to perpetuate conditions in direct contradiction to the possibilities held by the present level of socio-economic development. The symptoms of this alienated

¹ As Engels once wrote, "The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure...also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in some cases may preponderate in determining their **form**." Engels, "To Joseph Bloch", in Robert C. Tucker, (ed.), The Marx-Engels Reader, (Second Edition), W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1978, p.760.

² Herbert Marcuse, Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis, Vintage Books, New York, 1961, pp. 136-7.

existence are found in man's "mystical consciousness, which is unclear to itself, regardless whether it is religious or political."³ The reform of consciousness necessary to overcoming alienation is a task which "consists **only** in making the world aware of its perception, waking up from its own dream, **explaining** its own actions...What is involved is a **confession**, and nothing else. In order to have its sins pardoned, mankind only needs to interpret them for what they are."⁴ The direction of historical development was toward a new world that "the present carries in its womb", all man had to do was realize it.⁵

Marx expected a transformation in the attitude of man towards his world and his fellow man to follow from the development of a secular consciousness based on the reason of philosophy. This view of the world was one unincumbered by the

³ Karl Marx, "To Arnold Ruge (in Dresden) Kreuznach, September, 1843", in Saul K. Padover, The Letters of Karl Marx, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1979, p.32. (Hereafter, "Letter #11".)

⁴ Marx, "Letter #11", p.32.

⁵ Karl Marx, "To Arnold Ruge (in Dresden) Cologne, May, 1843", in Padover, Op. Cit., p.29.

complex of "bourgeois theoretical notions" that were not only symptoms of man's alienation, but sources of its perpetuation. The reformed consciousness Marx spoke of was an affirmation of man's socio-economic conditions in his ideas and world view. These conditions were best exemplified in the "real life" conditions of the most "universal" representative of mankind, the proletariat. The proletariat's alienation was the most complete, and as such the working class was the social representative of society's "complete loss of humanity and [could] only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity", and humanity's total redemption could only be found in the "dissolution of the existing order of things." ⁶

The Bolshevik revolutionary project was to actualize the teleological ends of Marx's theory. The Bolshevik Revolution was not merely the seizure of power in the name of the proletariat signalling the transition to a new historical era, it required the complete transformation of society to a

⁶ Karl Marx, "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction", in Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, The Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, p.263. (Hereafter, "Critique of Hegel: Introduction".)

qualitatively new state of social existence. The Bolsheviks ruled by an agenda for socio-economic development that aimed at both the "dissolution of the existing order", and the creation of a new society free of classes and other social divisions. Their class struggle had assumed a new political form, namely state power. The politics of the struggle shifted to the problems of society's transformation to socialism.

The realization of socialism in Russia meant creating an economic system, based on the public ownership of the means of production, and pursuing a programme of industrialization to develop the capacity of the forces of production in order to fulfil the material needs of society. In the social sphere, class struggle meant overcoming the existing cleavages in Soviet society, which acted as impediments to the "reform of consciousness". It required the destruction of institutional impediments to change and dispelling the ideas that perpetuated these cleavages.

The normative goals of abolishing classes, combating religious prejudices and expressions of nationalism, were firmly grounded in the objective course of historical development. For the Bolsheviks, the socio-economic processes

that had created the material conditions for overcoming want, and the social conditions for overcoming a false and illusory view of the world, were revered as part of the progressive unfolding of history. For example, it was not simply accepted that the homogenizing tendency of industrial development would inevitably breakdown social distinctions. Safe in the knowledge that they were merely accelerating the inevitable course of history, the Bolsheviks felt obligated to promote the process of homogenization as part of their efforts to stimulate the modernization of Russia. All that impeded the objective course of history, or fostered an alternative view of the world was counterrevolutionary, and was to be purged from society.

The social processes that characterized the transformation of Russia's social forms were understood using a class interested sociology. The process of transformation was identified with the most progressive class, the proletariat. Since, it was in the general interest of the proletariat, and indeed all of society, to encourage all the social and economic manifestations of modernization, any analysis of society ought to be interpreted in light of the proletariat's interests.

Lenin subscribed to the notion of a "partisan" sociology, because the purpose of sociological analysis was to assess the state of class relations in society, and to identify tasks facing the Party.⁷ In Lenin's understanding of sociology the notion of a "group", whether "religious, political or ethnological", was inadequate to the demands of a social science. The notion of class was the crucial category of analysis.

The content of all "socio-economic formations" was determined by class, and other social cleavages were ideological or political variables that merely determined the form of a given class.⁸ In this regard, religion and

⁷ Lenin, "The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve's Book", Collected Works, Vol.1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, pp.400-401, 410, 418 and 420-421 (hereafter "Mr Struve's Book"). The class interested perspective inherent in Soviet sociological theory resulting in a discriminatory praxis that sees the promotion of the general interests of the proletariat, and the forwarding of the interests of mankind as being identical. The theoretical basis of Soviet class interested sociology can be found in Ibid., pp.395-424, passim. For a discussion of Soviet sociology see, James L. Hildebrand, The Sociology of Soviet Law, William S. Hein Co., Inc., Law Book Publishers, Buffalo, New York, 1972, pp.178-186.

⁸ Lenin, "Mr.Struve's Book", p.410.

nationality were variables that came into play during the course of the proletariat's class struggle, but these two expressions of the class divisions characterizing any society were historically determined and their disappearance along with classes was part of the social transformation completed by the proletarian revolution.

The Bolsheviks' partisan sociology was borne out in its political significance after the Revolution. The notion that class was the determining feature of all social cleavages became very important to the development of an "economic nomenclature", which was used as the chief criterion for access to the rights of Soviet citizens was decided.⁹ Similarly, in the 1930s as Stalin proceeded with the industrialization of Soviet Russia the notion that class relations indicated the level of historical and political development was significant. The transition to socialism attended Stalin's effort to industrialize the Soviet Union and it was expected that economic development would be reflected in the social development. A great deal of attention was given

⁹ The term "economic nomenclature" is used by Avraham Yarmolinsky, The Jews and Other Minor Nationalities Under the Soviets, Vanguard Press, New York, 1928, p.68.

to the changing social composition of the USSR as socialism was being completed.

1.2 Bolshevism and Religion and Nationalism

In practice, the Bolsheviks' attention to the considerations of circumstance accounted for their success in attaining power and establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, but the ends of the revolution responded to Marx's understanding of revolution as the transformation of society, and the premises upon which it was predicated. The dynamic relationship between theory and practice was manifest in the elaboration of the Bolshevik approach to the Jewish question.

The Bolsheviks considered the Jewish question in light of the politics of the struggle to attain power, and after the revolution as one variation of the social questions facing the regime. The Jewish question was different in form, but its essential content was the same as all other social questions arising from the process of transformation. The Jewish question was subject to Marxist sociological categories of analysis, like any other social question, and the Bolshevik

analysis of the Jews was couched in the language of class struggle, not religious or national oppression. It was a question of class interests involving both religious and national forms, and the interests of the proletariat lay with the objective course of history not with the preservation of Jewish religion and culture. It was on this basis that Jewish political parties and religious and community institutions were attacked.

The Bolshevik theory of religion and nationalism clearly stem from the writings of Marx. The Bolsheviks considered expressions of religion and nationalism to be part of the existing superstructure that stood between man and his final liberation. Both were temporary phenomena rather than permanent features of society, and both served to perpetuate man's alienation, as well as, the existing order. Religion obscured the alienation of man and the need for social change. In Russia, the Orthodox Church was an arm of the state that supported the Tsarist autocracy through its power as an institution, and the sway it held over a majority of the population. The nationality question was important to the Bolsheviks because the national aspirations of minorities threatened to penetrate the social democratic movement and

divide the proletariat of the Empire, and divert their energies and attention from the class struggle of the proletariat. The Jewish community under the rule of the Tsars could be considered as both a religious and national minority, and so it is appropriate to examine the Soviet Marxist understanding of religion and nationalism before discussing the Bolshevik theoretical perspective on Jews.

1.2.1 Marx on Religion

Marx saw philosophy and not religion as the true reflection of man's *weltanschauung* and morality. He asserted that "human self-consciousness (was) the highest divinity," because ontologically the existence of self-consciousness was immediate in being thought.¹⁰ Philosophy considered the world from man's perspective. Through philosophy, (the process of "scientific" critical reasoning),¹¹ man could come to

¹⁰ Karl Marx, "Notes to the Doctoral Dissertation (1839-41)", in Easton and Guddat, Op. Cit., p.66. (Hereafter, "Notes".)

¹¹ "Scientific" in this context means given the assumption of universal rationality, through logic man can come to know the ultimate truth.

understand himself and the world, and in so doing he would become conscious of his own freedom. Marx was concerned to make philosophy relevant to life, and his understanding of philosophy could only be realized through practical endeavour.

In contrast to his understanding of philosophy Marx saw religion as an illusory creation of man. He considered faith in God to be inconsistent with man's true rational nature. "...God exists for the man to whom the world is non-rational and who is therefore non-rational himself. In other words non-rationality is God's existence."¹² For Marx philosophy was universal in its representation of man's essence. By contrast, Marx saw religion as being particularistic and positive, not only in its view of the world, but also in its morals.¹³ True morality could only be realized through philosophy. Philosophy's rationality was the universal reflection of man's

¹² Karl Marx, "Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction", in Easton and Guddat, *Op. Cit.*, p.66. (Hereafter, "Prussian Censorship".) (Unless otherwise noted emphases are found in the original).

¹³ C.f., Marx, "Prussian Censorship", p.78, and Karl Marx, "The Leading Article in No.179 of the *Kölnische Zeitung: Religion, Free Press and Philosophy*," pp.118, 124-125 and 127, (hereafter "Leading Article").

self-consciousness and, as such, granted autonomy to the human spirit by liberating it from dependence upon an external entity. Philosophy allowed man to find true morality, and could interpret the rights of humanity in a universal way, as opposed to the positivist and particularist nature of religious morality.

Marx saw two social purposes in religion. First, it was a comfort in that it taught man to accept suffering in the present world by promising that faith would be rewarded in the after life.¹⁴ Second, it was a form of social control. Religion taught deference to authority, because "every authority is ordained by God."¹⁵

¹⁴ C.f. Marx, "Notes", p.58, and "Leading Article", p.126.

¹⁵ "Leading Article", p.128. In this regard, Marx's later writings are instructive since they allow a more comprehensive and more subtle understanding of the ruling class' power and the maintenance of that power through the superstructure. The ideas which engender and sustain the legitimacy of the existing order are not arrived at in a conniving or calculated a manner as the rhetoric of Marx's articles on the censorship instruction, or later the "Communist Manifesto" could lead one to believe. (Of course the impulse to make simple deductions on this matter has been promoted by the propaganda of communists either in power or seeking it throughout the twentieth century.)

If one examines Marx's notion of ideology, which for

The state professing a state religion was the most obvious example of the relationship between the state and religion as integral parts of the superstructure. In its role as a "philosophy" of state¹⁶ religion served as a hypocritical and undemocratic foundation of the state. It was hypocritical because it used the institutions and laws of man, and not Christian morals as its practical norms.¹⁷ Its lack of

Marx is a part of the bourgeois superstructure "consisting of the false moral judicial and social values" of the bourgeoisie, one finds that Marx sees the tools of power as reflections of the material relations arising out of the capitalist mode of production. Ideology as a legitimating aspect of power is supplemented by traditions and legacies of the past which survive as part of the old superstructure within the new one. Whether or not the ideas of the superstructure are "innocently and unconsciously or fraudulently... (used) to bolster (the bourgeoisie's) own economic hegemony..." is unimportant. The point is that they are part of the regime and its political and social foundations in civil society, and as such must change in order for a democratic and free society to develop. Later Marx concludes that the only way to achieve these changes is to change their material foundation.

¹⁶ Marx notes that by making religion a theory of law and the state religion become a sort of philosophy. "Leading Article", p.126.

¹⁷ In his explanation of the nature of the hypocrisy of the Christian state in practice, Marx asks, "Do you offer your right cheek if you are struck on the left, or do you not bring legal action for assault?" "Leading Article", p.126.

democracy in practice stemmed from the particularism of religious confessions. For example, as a Christian state, Prussia by its very nature would discriminate against other religions, because the moral norms and practices of non-Christian religions would be at variance with those which informed the state. Thus:

...instead of being a free association of moral human beings, (the Christian state) is an association of believers, and ... instead of aiming at the actualization of freedom it aims at the actualization of dogma.¹⁸

In order to become "the actualization of rational freedom," Marx held that the state had to be built on the basis of

reason in human relations, a task philosophy accomplishes ... it cannot be developed out of Christianity, (because the development of the state of rational freedom) does not lie in the tendency of Christianity.¹⁹

Philosophy revealed the rights of humanity and only a state ordered on philosophical principles could guarantee these rights.

¹⁸ "Leading Article", p.118.

¹⁹ Marx, "Leading Article", p.128. In support of his argument for a philosophic basis of the state, Marx notes that the non-Christian religions appeal to the rights of humanity in their pleas for equality, and not to Christian ethics. "Leading Article", p.127.

If religion imperfectly served to preserve the social order, it was not solely a product of elite design. It was a product of society:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man. And indeed religion is the self-consciousness and self-regard of man who has either not yet found or has already lost himself. But man is not an abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state and this society, produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world ... It is the fantastic realization of the human essence inasmuch as the human essence posses no true reality.²⁰

Religion was a way of projecting onto a fantastic being all that man could not be in his real life circumstances. Religion did nothing to explain the world of men. It only perpetuated a false understanding of man's place in the world. However, this flawed understanding of the world was not unrelated to man's material existence, or his emotional response to the misery promoted by the existing order.

Religious suffering is the expression of real suffering and at the same time the protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is

²⁰ Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel: Introduction", p.250.

the opium of the people.²¹

Religion not only mediated suffering and placated the masses, it was a sign of their wish to escape suffering.

While the suffering expressed through religion's false consciousness was real, its solution lay in the abolition of the conditions, which make religious illusions necessary.

The abolition of religion as people's illusory happiness is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to abandon illusions about their condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is thus in embryo a criticism of the vale of tears, whose halo is religion.²²

Critical philosophy could reveal the true source of man's misery, and the criticism of religion was only the beginning of the exposure of human suffering. For example, an examination of Protestant Christianity reveals a source of the ethos of capitalism.²³ In the end, like all expressions of alienation and the other features of the superstructure, Marx

²¹ Marx, "Critique of Hegel: Introduction", p.250.

²² Marx, "Critique of Hegel: Introduction", p.250.

²³ See Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in Harold J. Laski, Communist Manifesto Socialist Landmark, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1948, p.143. (Hereafter, "The Communist Manifesto").

expected religion to become less important in the proletariat's everyday life, and eventually religion would find its place in the dustbin of history following the proletarian revolution.

1.2.2 Lenin on Religion

The sympathy for religious believers that Marx expresses finds little resonance in Lenin. As part of the bourgeois superstructure, and more so in Russia because it was a branch of the Tsarist autocracy, religion in its institutional and spiritual forms was to be combated with the same if not greater vigour than the rest of the superstructure. Lenin was uninterested in the nature of religion and his lack of sympathy for believers was probably a function of his "concentration on the practical ways of both combating religion and exploiting religious dissent for political ends."²⁴ The whole complex of perspectives that comprises Lenin's view of religion centres around the contribution of religion to the superstructural constraints on, and

²⁴ Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "Lenin and Religion", in Leonard Schapiro and Peter Reddaway, (Eds.), Lenin: The Man, the Theorist, the Leader, Pall Mall Press, London, 1967, p.108.

impediments to, class struggle.

God is (in history and in real life) first of all the complex of ideas generated by the brutish subjugation of man both by external nature and by the class yoke - ideas which **consolidate** that subjugation, lull to sleep the class struggle."²⁵

Religion dulled the class struggle by spreading ideals among the masses that were not easily rooted out. Even on the issue of establishing an alternative to God, Lenin worried that religious spirituality would prove problematic for the revolutionary transformation of society.

...any religious idea, any idea of any god at all, any flirtation even with a god, is the most inexpressible foulness, particularly tolerantly (and often even favourably) accepted by the **democratic bourgeoisie**- for that very reason it is the most dangerous foulness, the most shameful "infection".²⁶

Lenin's fears that overcoming religious beliefs would be a difficult task are reflected in his commentary on corruption in the church. It was easier to expose the bankruptcy of a

²⁵ Lenin, "Letter to Maxim Gorky", Collected Works, Vol.35, p.128, (hereafter, "Gorky I"). See also Vladimir Gsovski, "The Legal Status of the Church in Soviet Russia", Fordham Law Review, Vol.8 (1), 1939, pp.3-4. (Hereafter, "The Church in Soviet Russia".)

²⁶ "Letter to Maxim Gorky", Collected Works, Vol.35, p.122, (hereafter, Gorky- II). See also, Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.6.

church riddled with immorality and corruption, than it was to convince believers of the contribution to their continued misery and exploitation made by a religious institution that was charitable and benevolent in its relations with the masses.²⁷

Religious spirituality was not only damaging to the struggles of social democracy, it was a source of oppression, a part of the confluence of institutions and ideas that perpetuated man's alienation by preventing him from realizing the real causes of his misery.

The economic oppression of the workers inevitably calls forth and engenders all forms of political oppression and social humiliation, the coarsening and darkening of the spiritual and moral life of the masses... Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, overburdened by their perpetual work for others, by want and isolation.²⁸

Solace in religion left little room for class solidarity, or the commitment required of the proletariat if it was going to be successful in its class struggle. Instead, religion oppressed the masses to the point where alternatives to

²⁷ Lenin, "Gorky- II", p.122.

²⁸ Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", Collected Works, Vol.10, p.83.

suffering were not considered.

The spiritual oppression of man was actively promoted by the church as an institution:

Religion is the opium of the people, this dictum is the corner-stone of the whole Marxist view on religion. Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches, and each and every religious organisation, as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class.²⁹

In this recollection of Marx's characterization of religion as the opiate of the people, Lenin was concerned with the spiritual expression of religion as a narcotic used to lull society's undermass into a blissful acquiescence that hid the source of the exploitative relations under which they lived, and taught the acceptance of the existing state of affairs. In the main, religion served to conceal the basic issues facing the proletariat.³⁰ The "drugging of the working class"

²⁹ Lenin, "The Attitude of the Worker's Party to Religion", Collected Works, Vol. 15, pp.402-403. See also Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.2.

³⁰ Lenin states elsewhere that: "Impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the exploiters just as inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death as impotence of the savage in his battle with nature gives rise to the belief in gods, devils, miracles and the like. Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth and take comfort in the hope of a heavenly

was, in Lenin's view, fully part of the machinery of capitalist exploitation manipulated by the bourgeoisie to keep the toiling masses under wraps.

Lenin's conviction that religion was actively utilized by the ruling classes to manipulate the undermass of society was confirmed in the relationship between the church and the state.

What a profitable faith it is indeed for the governing classes! In a society so organized that the insignificant minority enjoys wealth and power, while the masses constantly suffer "privations" and bear "severe obligations", it is quite natural for the exploiters to sympathize with a religion that teaches people to bear "uncomplainingly" the hell on earth for the sake of the alleged celestial paradise.³¹

The dependence on the state by the church "link[ed] cosy government jobs and government-derived incomes with the

reward...Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man." Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", pp.83-84.

³¹ Lenin, "Political Agitation and 'The Class Point of View,'" Collected Works, Vol.5, p.338. See also, Delos B. Mckowen, The Classical Marxist Critique of Religion: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Kautsky, M. Nijhoff, The Hague, 1975, p.106.

dispensation of this or that dope by the established church."³² In Lenin's mind, the institution of the church was as much a part of the state institutions as the bureaucracy.

Lenin fully expected that the influence of religion, like all features of the superstructure, would disappear from working class life as society completed its transformation during the latter stages of industrial capitalist development, and the working class attained full-consciousness through its struggles against the many manifestations of its exploitation.

The modern, class-conscious worker, reared by large-scale factory industry and enlightened by urban life, contemptuously casts aside religious prejudices, leaves heaven to the priests and bourgeois bigots and tries to win a better life for himself here on earth... (under the proletarian state), cleansed of medieval mildew, the proletariat will wage a broad and open struggle for the elimination of economic slavery the true source of the religious humbugging of mankind.³³

Nevertheless, for Bolsheviki it was not enough to know and understand the process of religion's demise. The tenacity of religious "prejudice" and "superstition" was not to be underestimated. It was incumbent upon the Party to actively

³² Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", pp.84-85.

³³ Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", pp.84 and 87.

discourage religious ideas by means of scientific propaganda, and reason.³⁴

1.2.3 Marx and Engels on the Nationality Question

Marx noted that man's religious development reflected in his theoretical struggles, while his practical struggles were marked in the realm of politics.³⁵ The political struggles of the proletariat were class struggles, but if the workers of the world were to unite they would have to overcome national differences. Throughout the nineteenth century nationalism asserted itself as a powerful and compelling aggregator of interests across a broad section of society. Yet, Marx expected the proletarian revolution would be an international one. Clearly the role to be played by the forces of nationalism would be important.³⁶

³⁴ C.f. Mckowen, Op. Cit., pp.97, 98, 107 and 120, and Bociurkiw, Op. Cit., pp.117-118.

³⁵ Marx, "Letter #11", p.31.

³⁶ See Marx, "The German Ideology", in Easton and Guddat, Op. Cit., pp.427-428.

Nationality was an important political consideration in the elaboration and implementation of the revolutionary movement's programme. Before a fully conscious proletariat came to recognize the international nature of its mission, national differences and distinctions constituted conditions that placed artificial barriers between proletarians of different nations. The role of nationalism and the attitude of the revolutionary proletariat to different nationalist movements constituted the "national question" in its most general form. More specific understandings of the national question are derived from the geographical and historical circumstances, i.e. levels of economic development, which informed more localized, as well as national struggles.

Engels traced the genesis of the relationship between the nation and the state in his outline of the evolution of social organization from the gens to the bourgeois nation-state in **The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State.**³⁷ The distinction between the two terms nation and nationality is never made clear by either Marx or Engels. One author

³⁷ See, Fredrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., London, 1941, pp. 162-237, *passim*.

offers the following as a summary of Engels definition of a nationality:

...nationality is an historical phenomenon identifiable as a community of individuals speaking the same language or dialect, which has its origins in primitive tribal society and arises as the result of an amalgamation of separate tribes with similar language patterns.³⁸

For Engels nationality is essentially an ethnic group composed of two or more tribes who share a common language or dialect.³⁹

Engels appears to make a distinction between a "nationality" as described in the above quotation and the "nation" in his description of the Roman Empire and its effect on the tribes of Europe. The merging of tribes with "similar language patterns" took on a political dimension as the feudal system began to develop. The Roman empire, which was held together by the Roman state, broke up "the old kinship groups and with them the last vestige of local and national independence." Because the Roman empire "expressed no

³⁸ Joseph A. Petrus, "Marx and Engels on the National Question," Journal of Politics, Vol.33(3), August, 1971, p.812.

³⁹ Engels, The Origin of the Family, pp.156-157 and 166-167.

nationality," as it declined the differentiation of Latin dialectics throughout the empire became "the elements of new nations." The union of feudal estates under the earliest monarchs for military purposes served to distinguish the great nations of Europe.⁴⁰ The "nation" was a political entity encompassing the territory of the feudal estates under a monarch, and was inhabited by one "nationality".

The transition from feudalism to capitalism changed the nation. Nationality was no longer the basis of the nation because the great European nations were no longer homogenous entities.

It is a natural consequence of the confused and slow working historical development through which Europe has passed during the last thousand years, that almost every great nation has parted with some outlying portions of its own body, which have become separated from the national life, and in most cases participated in the national life of some other people; so much so that they do not wish to rejoin their own main stock."⁴¹

The nationality of the great nations of Europe had been

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.206-216, passim.

⁴¹ Marx and Engels, "What have the Working Classes to Do with Poland?," in Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz, The Russian Menace to Europe, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1953, p.99.

diluted, although the nation remained as a basis for a new political entity, the nation-state. The significance of this point is emphasized by Engels. "... the ruins of peoples... must be incorporated into the larger nations and either dissolve in them or else remain as ethnographic monuments of no political significance."⁴² Nationality as defined earlier was no longer a significant factor in defining a nation. Instead, nationality in its politicized form became important.

The politicization of nationality took the form of "bourgeois nationalism."⁴³ Nationalism was the flagship of capitalists seeking to secure an economic territory under the existing feudal estates in order to give them national forms.

(Civil society) comprises the entire commercial and industrial life of (the capitalist stage of production) and hence transcends the state and the nation even though that life, on the other hand, is manifested in foreign affairs as nationality and

⁴² F. Engels, Po und Rhein, Stuttgart, 1915, p.51, as quoted in Richard Pipes, The Formation of the Soviet Union, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1954, p.21.

⁴³ See Petrus, Op. Cit., pp.805-6.

organized within a state.⁴⁴

Under capitalism the nation-state, while projecting the historic greatness of itself as a nationality, in fact is not determined by its nationality, which is diluted anyway, but by its viability as a state; that is, "as an economic and political entity."⁴⁵ In the advanced nation-states of the world nationality's importance remained only in the minds of men as a disposition that united members of different classes and obscured the conditions that separated them.

In the view of Marx and Engels, the unifying role of nationalism in society as the political expression of the bourgeois nation-state was important. Its emergence was part of the process that destroyed feudal parochialism and promoted the tendency of capitalism to develop universal forms. In this context nationalism was clearly a bourgeois phenomenon, but could be a progressive political force which served the ultimate goal of proletarian revolution. Proletarian

⁴⁴ Marx, The German Ideology, p.469.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Claude Fisera, and Gunter Minnerup, "Marx, Engels and the Nationalities Question," in Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fisera, Eds., Socialism and Nationalism, (Vol.1), Spokesman, Nottingham, England, 1978, pp.7-8.

participation in bourgeois-democratic revolution helped to raise the proletariat's consciousness of the differences between its interests and those of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁶

The intimate relationship that developed between the nation and the state under capitalism is important to understanding the Soviet Marxist perspective on the nationalities question. The nation-state was a historical phenomenon that had a progressive role to play in man's socio-economic development. Under the conditions of capitalist economic development a contiguous territorial market was indicated, and it took the form of the nation-state.

The necessary consequence of this [a centralized means of production] was political centralization. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff.⁴⁷

The transformation of the feudal social organization based on estates to the bourgeois nation-state made the national question a political question of fundamental importance to the

⁴⁶ See Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Tucker, Op. Cit., pp.601-5.

⁴⁷ Marx, "The Communist Manifesto", p.125.

advancement of society. As Norman Levine points out, the establishment of a nation-state freed the "nation" from the "archaic political forms" of feudalism, and was therefore a necessary pre-condition for the movement towards socialism.⁴⁸

There could be no communist revolution without the seizure of state power, and there could be no seizure of power without the prior existence of the state. Therefore the proletariat must... conquer power within a state that already existed...⁴⁹

State power existed as the government of the nation-state. In the words of Marx, the proletariat "must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation".⁵⁰ It becomes the nation in as much as its interests constitute the general interests of the nation-states' population.⁵¹ The proletariat once constituted as the nation-state could link its revolutionary efforts to those of the proletariat in other nation-states.

⁴⁸ C.f. Norman Levine, The Tragic Deception: Marx Contra Engels, Clio Books, Santa Barbara, 1975, pp.63-4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.64.

⁵⁰ Marx, "Communist Manifesto", p.142.

⁵¹ See Marx, The German Ideology, pp.424 and 425, and Marx, "Critique of Hegel: Introduction", pp.260-261 and 262-264.

Marx had posited that the revolutionary movement would of necessity be an international one.⁵² The expansion of capitalism into a "world-historical" force created a level of economic inter-dependence among nation-states that could not be resisted by a communist society within the bounds of one nation-state.⁵³ The universal material conditions shared by the proletariat had in practice eliminated the "theoretical notions" of the bourgeois superstructure for the underclass, and so Marx claimed that, "The working men have no country".⁵⁴ In this respect, the task for the advanced ranks of the proletariat in every nation-state was clear.

In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, [working class parties] point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independent of all nationality.⁵⁵

Although at first the struggle would national in form, the

⁵² In Marx's words, the expansionist nature of capitalism "produce[d] in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the 'propertyless' mass (universal competition), ma[de] each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally replace[d] local individuals with world historical, empirically universal individuals." Marx, The German Ideology, p.427.

⁵³ See Marx, The German Ideology, p.427-429.

⁵⁴ Marx, "The Communist Manifesto", p.142.

⁵⁵ Marx, "The Communist Manifesto", p.135.

universal conditions that made a misery of the lives of proletarians everywhere would give the revolution an international content, and the world proletariat would confront their oppressors on the basis of class, not nationality.⁵⁶

The focus on internationalism did not exclude the support of nationalist causes. For Marx, nationalism, as well as colonialism,⁵⁷ have a dialectical purpose, a "double mission" of destruction and progress. Both would help different societies progress towards the communist epoch. The attitude adopted by the proletariat to nationalist struggles was to be determined by political circumstances. Those struggles serving to weaken the forces of reaction were to be welcomed, and

⁵⁶ C.f. Marx, "The Communist Manifesto", pp.134,142-143 and 159-160, and The German Ideology, pp.429-431.

⁵⁷ Colonialism, despite its horrors was a good thing in Marx's opinion. It brought the non-European world out of its stagnation and "laid the foundations for the material foundation of Western society in Asia." The exploitative relationship between the colonists and the colonies would result in anti-colonial revolutions which would strike a blow to capitalism, and help to create conditions for proletarian revolution in the "civilized world." See Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India", in Shlomo Avineri, Ed., Marx on Colonialism and Modernization, Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1969, pp.132-133.

those that would serve to divide the existing capitalist nation-states could not be supported. In this respect, the national question in the capitalist era was also about the effects of different levels of economic and political development on the class struggles of the proletariat.

Marx raises the problem of economically backward nationalities and nations in relation to the progressive struggles of the proletariat. As a definite historical category associated with a particular level of economic development, the nation-state was a creature of capitalism. Of course, even in Europe, not every national group developed at the same rate, and so not every nationality developed into a nation-state. While the nationalism of the advanced nation-states of Europe was no longer progressive, the nationalism of the less developed nations of Europe could have a positive effect on the class struggle in advanced nation-states.

For example, Marx and Engels supported the nationalist struggles of Poland and Ireland. Marx felt that nationalist revolutions in Poland and Ireland would strike a blow to the forces of reaction which impeded the progress of man towards socialism. In the case of Poland, Russia would be pushed

further east by an independent Poland, which would destroy the base of support for the reactionary Prussian and Austrian aristocracies, thereby creating the conditions for a nationalist revolution in Germany.⁵⁸

In the case of Ireland, the British aristocracy, who had large land holdings in Ireland, would lose their material base, and thus, their domination of England would end. Also the bourgeoisie would lose their source of cheap labour, the Irish worker, and the exploitation of antagonisms between English and Irish workers by the bourgeoisie to maintain its power would end, allowing the socialist revolution in England to mature.⁵⁹

Despite of the progress achieved by some nationalist

⁵⁸ C.f., Engels, "The Debate on Poland in Frankfurt," in Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz, (Eds), The Russian Menace to Europe, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1953, pp.91-95, and Marx, "Poland's European Mission," in Ibid., pp.104-108.

⁵⁹ C.f. Marx, "Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann" in R. Dixon, Ireland and the Irish Question: A Collection of Writings by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, International Publishers, New York, 1972, p.150, Marx, "From Confidential Communication" in Ibid., pp.160-162, Marx, "Marx to Sigfreid Meyer and August Vogt", in Ibid., p.293 and Marx, "Marx to John Swinton", in Ibid., pp.325-26.

struggles, Marx and Engels stated that the struggles of some nationalities were lost causes for social democrats. One author upon reviewing the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* position on the Czech uprisings in 1848 concluded the following:

... the fact of national oppression **by itself** in no way obliges democrats to take up the cause of the nationality oppressed; rather, this obligation rises only when political actions of the nationality in question bear a revolutionary character and therefore lie in the specific interests of democracy; but otherwise the "so-called" national movement could claim no support in its defence.⁶⁰

The "specific interests of democracy" are those of the proletariat. In this regard, Marx sees the proletarian revolution as the consummate democratic movement. Reconciling the interests of the proletariat with the aspirations of oppressed nationalities was the one of central point of Marx's analysis of the national question that Lenin and the Bolsheviks took up.

1.2.4 Lenin on the National Question

Lenin's perspective on the nationalities question

⁶⁰ Roman Rosdolsky, Engels and the "Nonhistoric" Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848, Critique Books, Glasgow, 1987, p.30.

underwent a number of changes which corresponded to the changing political situation he faced. In the pre-revolutionary period Lenin was preoccupied with the overthrow of the Tsarist regime. From 1918-1921, Lenin concentrated on consolidating the revolutionary government's power, and from 1921 until his death Lenin was concerned with the establishment of the Soviet state.⁶¹

Lenin's writings on the national question, for the most part, examined the political dimensions of the national question, and were less concerned with definitions.⁶² In most cases, Lenin used the two terms nation and nationality interchangeably, and understood both as indicators of historical progress.

... one of the modern requirements of capitalism is undoubtedly the greatest possible uniformity of the population, for nationality and language identity are an important factor making for the complete conquest of the home market and for the complete

⁶¹ C.f. Norman Levine, "Lenin on Jewish Nationalism", The Wiener Library Bulletin, 33, 1980, pp.46-51, Pipes, Op.Cit., p.35, and Helen Carrere d'Encausse, "The Bolsheviki and the National Question (1903-1929)", in Cahm and Fisera, Op. Cit., (Vol.3), pp.113-123.

⁶² Gunter Minnerup, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination: Bauer, Stalin, Lenin", in Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fisera, (Eds.), Socialism and Nationalism, (Vol. I), Spokesman, Nottingham, 1978, p.24.

freedom of economic intercourse.⁶³

Lenin used the term nationality to refer to an ethnic awareness coincidental with a common language. The importance of nationality was its contribution to the development of capitalism and the establishment of the nation-state.

Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies in the national question. The first is the awakening of national life and national movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of national states.⁶⁴

The idea of nationality was used to establish a community of interests between members of the an economic group, the emerging bourgeoisie, who were seeking to find a political form by which to regulate their commercial ventures. The territory of the nationality, and the nationality's common means of communication facilitate the creation of an economic entity in response to the needs of capitalist production. The marriage between the economic requirements of capitalism and the realm of bourgeois ideas, finds expression in the move to constitute the nation as a political entity, namely the

⁶³ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", Collected Works, Vol.20, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1964, p.48.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.27.

nation-state.

With the development of capitalism, nationality was politicized, and was unquestionably associated with the bourgeoisie.

The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism; hence the exclusiveness of bourgeois nationality.⁶⁵

Nationalism as a political expression of nationality, reflected the interests of bourgeoisie in their pursuit of political power and subsequent to attaining power to legitimize their rule of the bourgeois nation-state.

The exclusivity of bourgeois nationalism was part of its class interested nature. Nationalism was part of bourgeois ideology whether the bourgeoisie was in conflict with the existing order, as was the case in much of the Russian Empire, or it had constituted itself as the ruling class, as was the case in much of Western Europe. As capitalist production developed in the Russian Empire, the aspirations of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nationalities had to be

⁶⁵ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", p.35.

considered from the point of view of the class interests of the proletariat. Lenin was interested in the ways in which nationalism might be used to benefit the cause of social democracy, but he was especially worried by the potential of nationalism to divide the working class.

In Russia and Europe, nationalism was a historically necessary force, but it had become reactionary. The reactionary nature of nationalism posed a dangerous threat to the Social Democrats in that it "**divides the nations** and in fact draws the workers and the bourgeoisie of any one nation closer together..."⁶⁶ Any concession to nationalism by the proletariat threatened the unity of the Russian social democratic movement, which had to draw on the proletariat

⁶⁶ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", p.42. Lenin's fears were realized during World War I. As one Soviet author commented with bitterness: "The majority of the leaders of the second international's social democratic parties, who were joined by the Mensheviks, slid into positions of militant chauvinism. The double-dyed opportunists, petit bourgeois conciliators, and pseudorevolutionary shouters broke with socialism and met on the soil of nationalism." S. E. Moskin, "The 24th CPSU Congress on Intensifying the Struggle Against Nationalism and Revisionism," Joint Publications Research Service, as cited in Walker Conner, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984, p.31.

throughout the Empire if the Tsarist autocracy was to be brought down. Lenin rejected the advocates of national cultural autonomy in the party, because it would be a concession to nationalism that only promoted the culture of landowners, the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, not international proletarian culture.⁶⁷

The only force which could combat the reactionary nature of nationalism was a proletariat unified by democratic and internationalist principles.⁶⁸ Lenin's rigid adherence to the principles of internationalism was based on his understanding of the nature of capitalism.

(The second tendency of developing capitalism) is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the break down of national barriers, the creation of international unity of capital, of economic life in

⁶⁷ Lenin "Draft Platform for the Fourth Congress of Social Democrats of the Latvian Area", Collected Works, Vol.19, Op. Cit., p.116.

⁶⁸ C.f. Lenin, "The National Question in Our Programme", Collected Works, Vol.6, p.462, "Resolutions of the Summer, 1913, Joint Conference of the Central Committee of the RSDWP and Party Officials", in Ibid., Vol.19, pp.427-429, and "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right to Self-Determination", Ibid., Vol. 21, p.408.

general, of politics, science, etc.⁶⁹

In Lenin's view, capitalism's tendency toward universal forms led to the assimilation of nations, and was part of the process of social transformation preceding the transition to socialism.⁷⁰ Hence:

Other things being equal, the class-conscious proletariat would always stand for the large state. It will fight against medieval particularism and will always welcome the closest possible economic amalgamation of large territories in which the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeoisie can develop on a broad basis.⁷¹

Nationalism had no place in the proletarian movement. Not only did it run against the grain of internationalism, it defied the progressive course of historical development. The tendency of capital development was to develop universal forms and in the national question that meant the end to national differences as the homogenizing processes accompanying industrialization reshaped society.

⁶⁹ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", p.27.

⁷⁰ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", p.28.

⁷¹ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", p.45. See also, R. Vaidyanath, "Lenin on National Minorities," India Quarterly, Vol.27(1), January-March, 1971, p.32.

Lenin's opposition to nationalism within the ranks of Social Democrats did not stop him from seeking to exploit the aspirations of the oppressed nations under the rule of the Tsars by adopting a political position asserting the right of nations to "self-determination", ("...the political separation of [nations] from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state").⁷² This slogan was applicable in both the Russian and the international spheres. In Russia, the right to secede, along with the support of all democratic rights, could help unite the forces opposing Tsarism, which Lenin considered a crucial political condition for the felling of the Empire. Internationally, Lenin asserted that in the age of imperialism nations are divided into two categories, the oppressors and the oppressed. The only way to fight this oppression was through the unity of the proletariat in oppressor and oppressed nations. The demand for self-determination for the oppressed nations was the only credible way to wage an international struggle against global capital.

⁷² Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Collected Works, Vol.20, p.397.

The struggle against Tsarism and the assertion of the interests of the proletariat demanded the unity of the Russian proletariat with the proletarians of all the oppressed nations of the Empire. In practice, the right to self-determination was a legitimate democratic demand, but it had to be understood in the context of the proletariat's class struggle and the historical circumstances of that struggle. Not every demand for national self-determination could be supported.

As the party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party considers it to be its positive and principle task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations ... we **subordinate** to the interests of the proletarian struggle our support of the demand for national independence...⁷³

Self-determination was a democratic political right, which treated all proletarians of a given nation equally. Under the continued rule of the Tsars all forms of oppression were to be opposed by social democracy.⁷⁴

⁷³ Lenin, "The National Question in Our Programme", pp.454 and 461.

⁷⁴ The prevailing political conditions under the Tsarist autocracy informed the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat. In Lenin's words: "The object of the practical activities of the Social-Democrats is, as is well known, to lead the class struggle of the proletariat and to organize that struggle in

The principle of self determination was a political concession to the nationalities used by Lenin to try and defuse an explosive issue which could destroy the unity crucial to the success of the proletarian struggle, and to capitalize on the potentially explosive forces of latent nationalism present in the various minorities of the Russian Empire. Lenin expected it was a right nationalities would not wish to exercise, because the larger territory of the Empire was advantageous from the stand point of economics.

After the proletariat's ascent to power the right to self-determination would be meaningless since the industrial development of Russia would break down all national differences. The dictatorship of the proletariat would end the last vestiges of national oppression with the overthrow of capitalism, the real source of national and all other forms of oppression. Until that time, the exercise of the right to

both its manifestations: socialist (the fight against the capitalist class aimed at destroying the class system and organizing socialist society), and democratic (the fight against absolutism aimed at winning political liberty in Russia and democratizing the political and social system of Russia)." Lenin, "The Tasks of Russian Social Democrats", Collected Works, Vol.2, p.328.

self-determination would have to be examined with reference to the benefits to be accrued by the proletariat in its class struggle if the right was to be exercised.

Following the October Revolution, the RKP(b), which had substituted itself in place of the proletariat, decided on the advisability of exercising the right to self-determination. After the revolution the nationality question became a pressing matter that demanded a solution if the Bolsheviks were going to pull together the assorted nationalities of the former empire under the banner of socialism. Failure might see the dictatorship of the proletariat presiding over the disintegration of the former Russian Empire into its constituent ethnic territories in direct contradiction to the laws of history.

1.2.5 Stalin on the National Question

Stalin's contribution to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory was minimal, but his definitions and approaches to nationality policy were important to the Soviet "solution" to the nationalities question. Stalin's initial contribution to the Soviet Marxist perspective on the national

question was made in 1913 when he wrote his pamphlet "Marxism and the National Question."⁷⁵ In this pamphlet, Stalin made clear his definition of a nation and distinguished the nation from a nationality.

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.⁷⁶

If any of these four characteristics was not present in a particular group that group could not be considered to be a nation.⁷⁷

Stalin distinguished between a nation and a nationality by considering the latter to be a group of people who possess a "national character", but do not necessarily constitute a

⁷⁵ Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", in Joseph Stalin, Marxism and the National-Colonial Question, Proletarian Publishers, San Francisco, 1975, pp.15-99.

⁷⁶ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.22.

⁷⁷ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.22.

nation.⁷⁸ Stalin uses the term nation, a "historical category" which develops under capitalism, in the same sense that Marx speaks of the bourgeois nation-state.⁷⁹ Stalin also developed the concept of the "multi-national state", or a state in which elements of feudalism continue to exist, capitalism is weak and nationalities, unable to consolidate themselves as independent nation states, are ruled by the "semi-feudal regime".⁸⁰

Stalin's definition of the nation gives greater emphasis to "secondary factors" such as territory, ethnicity and culture than Marx, Engels and Lenin did.⁸¹ The importance placed on secondary factors by Stalin cannot be overlooked. Stalin's definitions of the nation and a nationality became

⁷⁸ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.22.

⁷⁹ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.28.

⁸⁰ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", pp.29 and 30.

⁸¹ Carrere d'Encausse, Helen, "Determinants and Parameters of Soviet Nationalities Policy", in Jeremy R. Azrael, (Ed.), Soviet Nationalities Policies and Practices, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1978, p.48.

the administrative criteria for the recognition of national rights following the Revolution.

Stalin shared with Lenin the view that nationalism was a response of national minorities to their oppression by another nation. It was in the immediate interests of the proletariat to oppose all forms of oppression that brought suffering on the masses. In the longer term, national oppression had to be fought because it "only serve(d) to retard the free development of the intellectual forces of the proletariat of subject nations."⁸² The progression of history and the party's struggles depended on the successful utilization of all grievances to weaken the Tsarist autocracy and strengthen the proletariat's ability to influence events in Russia, which made the Empire's minorities attractive as potential, if only temporary allies.

Stalin too, was worried by potential of nationalist sentiments to divert the working class from its class struggle, and cause unnecessary divisions in the revolutionary

⁸² Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.34.

movement.⁸³ Stalin argued strongly against all concessions to nationalism, but realized that its sources had to be combatted with more than appeals to internationalism. The removal of national privileges, the institution of language and other national rights and the establishment of relations between the various nations of the Soviet Union and "the centre" based on the general interests of the masses, were to be guiding principles to overcoming the legacies of past oppression.⁸⁴

The right to self-determination was part of the Bolsheviks' attempt to deal with the national question. Stalin made clear the different attitudes assumed by the Bolsheviks toward the principle of self-determination before and after the Revolution. Before the revolution the Party supported the principle of self-determination in an effort to enlist the support of the Empire's disgruntled nationalities. Stalin took self-determination to mean:

... that only the nation itself has the right to determine its destiny, that no one has the right **forcibly** to interfere in the life of the nation, to **destroy** its schools and other institutions, to

⁸³ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", pp.34-35.

⁸⁴ See Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", pp.33 and 91-92, and "The Policy of the Soviet Government on the Nationality Question in Russia", pp.127-129.

violate its habits and customs, to repress its language, or curtail its rights.⁸⁵

The right of self-determination, as Stalin explained it entailed a comprehensive set of national rights, but he was clear that the support of the proletariat was far from unequivocal.

Social-Democracy [would not] support every custom and institution of a nation, [because] the obligations of Social-Democracy, which defend[ed] the interests of the proletariat, and the rights of a nation, which consist[ed] of various classes [were] two different things.⁸⁶

If the interests of the proletariat were served by the exercise of the right to self-determination, clearly it could be supported. However, given the premium placed on the promotion of the universalizing tendencies of progressive historical development it is difficult to imagine circumstances in the Russian Empire that might warrant the proletariat's support of secession from the Empire. After the October Revolution Stalin was clear about the ultimate decision on the exercise of the right to self-determination.

⁸⁵ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.36.

⁸⁶ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", pp.36 and 36-37.

In an article on the Russian national question in 1920 Stalin wrote, "the interests of the masses render the demand for the secession of the border regions at the present stage of the revolution a profoundly counter revolutionary one."⁸⁷ Self-determination was a constitutional right, but it was the Party who decided on the advisability of exercising that right.

The cultural rights granted as part of the right to self-determination were not given the unqualified support of the regime.

...Social-Democracy will [not] support every custom and institution of a nation. While combating the coercion of any nation, it will uphold only the right of the **nation** itself to determine its own destiny, at the same time agitating against harmful customs and institutions of that nation in order to enable the toiling strata of the nation to emancipate themselves from them.⁸⁸

Prior to the revolution the Bolsheviki reserved the right to "(agitate) and to endeavour to influence the will of nations so that the nations may arrange their affairs in the way that

⁸⁷ Stalin, "The Policy of the Soviet government on the National Question in Russia", in Marxism and the National-Colonial Question, p.125.

⁸⁸ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.36.

will best correspond to the interests of the proletariat."⁸⁹ After the revolution Bolshevik agitation against "harmful customs and institutions" was carried out using all of the instruments of state power to impose their will on the population.

On the question of assimilation Stalin had little difficulty accepting that "belated nations and nationalities" would be merged into other nations. In the Caucasus, where there were many small national groups that failed to satisfy the definition of a nation for one reason or another, the solution to the national question was to draw the "belated nations and nationalities into the common stream of a higher culture."⁹⁰ This was a progressive solution that anticipated

⁸⁹ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.84. The same applied to religion. "According to (the programme of the Social-Democrats) any group of persons **have the right to profess any religion they please...** Social-Democrats will combat all forms of religious persecution...they will defend the right of nations to profess any religion they please; but at the same time, on the basis of the correct understanding of the interests of the proletariat, they will carry on agitation against Catholicism, Protestantism, and the religion of the Orthodox Church in order to achieve the triumph of the socialist world outlook." Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.83.

⁹⁰ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.79.

both the dispersal of smaller nations and their drawing together which followed from the homogenizing tendencies of modernization.⁹¹ Quoting Marx, Stalin asserted that "'National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing' and that 'the supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster.'"⁹² Not only were the forces of capitalism at work in the process of dissolving nations and nationalities, these forces would be urged and encouraged by the revolutionary proletariat.

Lenin and Stalin realized the potential divisiveness of the forces of nationalism. Both men tried to fight the nationally inspired demands of various groups in the All-Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party [A-RSDWP(b)]. They understood such demands to be contrary to the centralist principles of Bolshevism, and the principle of proletarian internationalism. In this regard, nationalist demands threatened the unity the proletariat in the Empire, which Lenin thought was crucial to the social democratic cause.

⁹¹ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.54.

⁹² Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.56. Stalin is quoting "The Communist Manifesto". See Marx, "Communist Manifesto", pp.142 and 143.

Furthermore, nationalist demands were in contradiction with the progressive tendency of history to develop more universal forms of social organization. Despite the attention paid the national question, the Bolsheviks failed in their endeavour to keep the proletariat of the Empire united under a single political apparatus. Their perspective that the national question had to be subordinated to the class struggle left no room for the aspirations of the minorities under the rule of the Tsars. The nationalities could only look forward their homogenization as a part of the process of industrialization and the transformation of society from an economically and socially backward Empire to a modern socialist society.

1.3 Bolshevism and Jewish Nationality and Religion

Together, the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on religion, nationalism and class struggle set the theoretical parameters of the Bolshevik approach to the Jewish question in Russia. They indicated the sources of social cleavages in society, and the attitude the A-RSDWP(b) should take to the social and cognitive expressions of these social divisions as it endeavoured to precipitate the end of the **ancien regime**. Later as the party sought to transform Russian

society the theoretical positions on nationalism and religion in relation to the class interests of the proletariat became sources of policy. The Soviet Marxist writings on the Jewish question attempt to address the particular problems posed by the features of Jewish life with regard to the transformation of society to socialism. They also indicate the place of Jews in society following its transformation.

1.3.1 Marx and the Jewish Question

Marx's writings on the Jewish question were occasioned by the debates in Prussia over Jewish emancipation.⁹³ He was uninterested in issuing a comprehensive statement on the problems of Jews in society, and was instead concerned to show that their condition was an example of the suffering of all men living in bourgeois society. As a result, Marx's commentary on the status of Jews as a nation or as members of a distinct religious community is neither systematic nor exhaustive; but, instead, is tailored to the larger issues

⁹³ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", pp.218-248. On the background to these debates see, Julius Carlebach, Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978, pp.9-141.

which concern him.

Before going on to explain Marx's views on the Jewish question it is appropriate at this juncture to pass comment on the questionable terms in which Marx couches his essays on Jewish emancipation. Marx's writings on the Jewish question have left a difficult legacy for his followers. Although the writings are important in number of ways, they have been overshadowed by the not unjustified charge that these writings are antisemitic.

Marx's commentary on the economic sources of man's alienation are couched in the most unfortunate terms. The German word "Judentum" has a double meaning. In its contemporary vulgar form it was commonly understood to mean commerce as well as Judaism.⁹⁴ Marx purposefully exploited the ambiguity of the term **Judentum** to emphasize the usury of capitalism present in the relations between all men by linking the common stereotype of the usurious Jew to the commercial

⁹⁴ See, David McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought, MacMillan, London, 1987, p.20 and Robert C. Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader, (Second Edition), W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1978, p.50 f.n.6.

ethos of capitalism. In 1842, when "On the Jewish Question" was written, Marx's critique of nineteenth century capitalism did not have the benefit of the terminology or the categories of analysis found in his later commentary. As a result, "Marx concentrates his entire critique on a metaphysical abstraction called 'the Jew', whom he has equated with every facet of an emerging capitalist system."⁹⁵

Marx denied the existence of Jews as a nation. Instead, in as much as he is concerned with their distinction from the rest of European society he, considered Jews as an economic group and as members of a religious confession. In Marx's view

⁹⁵ Carlebach, Op. Cit., p.161. Marx's play on the word **Judentum** sets the tone for the rest of the essay. He makes an equation between Jews and traders and between Judaism and capitalist commerce, and when Marx launches his venomous attack on the bourgeoisie and the economic sources of alienation under capitalism neither Jews nor Judaism are spared from his wrath. In this Marx is consistent throughout his essays to the point of being offensive. Marx's racism can neither be excused or ignored. Nevertheless, a number of important propositions lie beneath the overt prejudice that envelops these writings, and they deserve an examination on their own merits independent of the controversy surrounding them. On the range of perspectives found in the debate over Marx's antisemitism: C.f., Julius Carlebach, pp.261-358, passim, Dagobert Rune, Karl Marx: A World Without Jews, (4th Ed.), New York, 1960, Edmund Silbner, "Was Marx an Anti-Semite?", Historica Judaica, Vol.11(1), April, 1949, pp.3-52, and Henry Patchter, "Marx and the Jews," Dissent, Fall, 1979, pp.450-467.

the idea of a Jewish nation is a that "chimera."⁹⁶ Jewish nationality exists only in the mind of the Jew. The Jew remained as a member of a "primitive tribal community" perpetuated by "his separation from humanity...(and his) abstain(ing) on principle from participation in the historical movement..."⁹⁷ There is no Jewish nation, but rather there exists "the everyday Jew", the member of a "trading nation" indistinguishable in every respect from traders all over Europe.⁹⁸

Marx reduces Jewish nationality to an occupational category, and not just any occupational category, but one "handed down" from the Middle Ages.⁹⁹ In Marx's view the continued existence of the Jews is part of the reactionary consciousness of the class he associates with Jews, the petty

⁹⁶ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", pp.217 and 246.

⁹⁷ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", pp.217-218. See also, Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume One", in Tucker, Op. Cit., p.327, (hereafter, "Capital I").

⁹⁸ Marx, "Capital I", p.327, The German Ideology, p.446 and "On the Jewish Question", p.243.

⁹⁹ Marx, The German Ideology, p.446.

bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, distinctions between men of all nations and religious confessions are irrelevant. The process of history will eventually eradicate the petty bourgeoisie, who will "sink gradually into the proletariat".¹⁰¹ For Marx, the Jewish nation quite simply does not exist. The distinguishing feature of Jews, membership in a particular occupation category, would cease to exist as the petty bourgeoisie were abolished by history.

In considering the "everyday Jew", who is Jewish only in name, Marx uses the double entendre **Judentum** mixing the religious and commercial implications of the term. By considering the "Sabbath Jew", and his religion, Judaism in this light, Marx was commenting on the "merchant" or trader, and nineteenth century commerce. The contempt Marx holds for Judaism is exhibited in the deprecating terms he used to describe the Jewish faith, while simultaneously attacking the

¹⁰⁰ C.f. Marx, "Communist Manifesto", p.132, and "Capital I", p.327.

¹⁰¹ C.f. Marx, "Communist Manifesto", p.129, "Capital I", p.327 and "On the Jewish Question", p.246.

egregious injustices he sees in capitalist society.¹⁰²

What is the secular basis of Judaism? **Practical need, Self-interest.**

What is the worldly cult of the Jew? **Bargaining.**
 What is his worldly god? **Money...** Money is the
 Jealous god of Israel before whom no other god may
 exist.¹⁰³

The ready substitution of the word commerce for Judaism and merchant for Jew does not reduce the offensive nature of the commentary. It does, however, indicate that Marx was talking about a social group other than just Jews. He was commenting on capitalist commercial practices and capitalism as sources of man's exploitation and alienated relations.

Whatever the depth of Marx's animosity toward Judaism, he also saw Judaism, as he saw all religion, as an expression of man's alienation. Religious alienation, like all forms of alienation, was "the practice of externalization." In Marx's words:

¹⁰² Marx made his views more explicit in his private correspondence when he wrote to Arnold Ruge that he would support a Jewish petition on emancipation even though he considered the "Israelite religion" to be "detestable". See Shlomo Avineri, "Marx and Jewish Emancipation", Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol.(25)3, July-Sept., 1964, p.448, f.n. 17.

¹⁰³ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", pp.243 and 245.

As long as man is captivated in religion, knows his nature only as objectified, and thereby converts his nature into an alien illusory being, so under the dominion of egoistic need he can only act practically, only produce objects, by subordinating both his products and his activity to the domination of an alien being, bestowing upon them the significance of an alien entity- of money.¹⁰⁴

The problem of alienation took on different forms, but its essence was the same. Judaism was but one form of alienation to be overcome by man's liberation from society as it was presently constituted.

While it is clear that Marx expected Jews to give up their religion as a condition of their full emancipation, he expected nothing less of Christians, whose own particularism alienated them from, and prejudiced them against, Jews. "Judaism is an offensive fact to the religious eye of the Christian. As soon as the Christian's eye ceases to be religious, this fact ceases to offend it."¹⁰⁵ Religion prejudiced man's relations and impeded the realization of his species being. In this regard, Jews were no different from the rest of mankind. Freedom from religious alienation depended

¹⁰⁴ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.248.

¹⁰⁵ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.242.

on religious men overcoming their particularism and entering into relations with the rest of the world simply as men.

Marx's real interest in the Jewish question was the problem of emancipation, and elaborating its universal rather than its particular forms. In this respect, the focal point of Marx's essays on the Jewish question is the juxtaposition between political emancipation and human emancipation. Proceeding from his writings on the relationship between religion and the state, Marx examined the relationship between civil society and the state as an index of levels of political development, and the role of this relationship in determining the conditions of political emancipation. Marx argued that political emancipation was only partial in nature. In theory, political rights made all men citizens, and as citizens all men were equal. However, in practice, the freedoms guaranteed by the liberal-democratic state left mankind alienated from his true nature as a social being.¹⁰⁶ While Marx considered the extension of political rights to Jews a progressive step, the political emancipation of Jews, like the political emancipation of all men, would be an incomplete form of

¹⁰⁶ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.240 and 241.

emancipation.¹⁰⁷

The gulf between man as a citizen of the state, and as a member of civil society, showed political emancipation to be a partial and inadequate form of emancipation. Its limitations were a result of its confinement to the political realm, a realm of opposed interests. Indeed, the political realm was one where completely contradictory interests were in competition.¹⁰⁸ Once civil society "separate[d] itself completely from political life," (i.e., once the universalism of man as a citizen is no longer true in his everyday relations with other men), civil society "sever[ed] all man's species-ties, substitut[ed] egoism and selfish need for those ties, and dissolv[ed] the human world into a world of atomistic, mutually hostile individuals."¹⁰⁹ "Equality" in the political realm, that is, equality between citizens, was inadequate to the redress of society's wrongs.

¹⁰⁷ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.232

¹⁰⁸ See Marx, "Communist Manifesto", p.131.

¹⁰⁹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.247.

The source of the social ills afflicting mankind and the sphere of man's relations requiring change was economics. As one commentator suggests:

(Marx) began to realize that the division between civil society and the state had economic causes that were recalcitrant to political reform; the politicization of civil society does not lead to its dissolution- the democratic state is but an extension of the political state- and therefore political emancipation alone cannot provide human emancipation.¹¹⁰

Political emancipation was not only deficient as a form of liberation, it was an integral part of the very social system which oppressed man.

The extension of Marx's search beyond political barriers to include economic and social barriers to human emancipation, led him to examine the commercial ethos of capitalism. He found that the commercial spirit not only informed capitalist economic activity, but turned all relations between men into objects of commerce.

Practical need, egoism is the principle of civil society, and appears purely as such soon as civil society has fully delivered itself of the political state. The god of practical need and self interest

¹¹⁰ David Ingram, "Rights and Privileges: Marx and the Jewish Question", Studies in Soviet Thought, Vol.35(2), February, 1988, p.133.

is money.¹¹¹

Political emancipation did nothing to end the alienated existence Marx describes. On the contrary, it was part of the very circumstances that perpetuated alienation. "Formal political equality" was not a substitute for human emancipation, "which signifies the transcending of alienation." Human emancipation "necessarily presupposes the destruction of bourgeois society as the sphere of men's egotistic interests contrasted with universal human attributes."¹¹² The revolution Marx sought was a social revolution. A revolution that would remove the privileges of wealth, and to give all men access to the benefits supposedly granted by political emancipation.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.245. Marx goes on to say, "Money is the general, self-sufficient value of everything. Hence it has robbed the whole world, the human world as well as nature, of its proper worth. Money is the alienated essence of man's labour and life, and this essence dominates him as he worships it." Marx, "On the Jewish Question", pp.245-246.

¹¹² Avineri, "Marx and Jewish Emancipation", Op. Cit., p.445.

¹¹³ The reformist approach to man's problems under the existing system was not enough. There was only one route to real emancipation. In Marx's words, "Radical revolution, universal human emancipation, is not a utopian dream... What is utopian is the partial, the merely political revolution,

Marx did not distinguish between various forms of alienation, and so when he says, "The **social** emancipation of the Jew is the **emancipation of society from Judaism**", he permits the ready substitution of any of the other intended meanings for the words Jew and Judaism.¹¹⁴ The manifestations of alienation and particularism present in Judaism, and Jewish economic life stood between Jews and their recognition of man's universal nature, just as every particular form of alienation stood between particular groups of men and the same recognition. In this broader context, the trading practices of the merchant, of money and commercial relations, and of alienation and egoism must all end if man is to be emancipated from the real life conditions that oppress him. In this sense, for Marx there was no solution to the Jewish question arising

the revolution which would leave the pillars of the house standing. What is the basis of a partial and merely political revolution? It is **part of civil society** emancipating itself and attaining **universal** supremacy, a particular class by virtue of its **special situation** undertaking the general emancipation of society. This class emancipates the whole of society but only on the condition that the whole of society is in the same position as this class, **for example**, that it has or can easily acquire money and education." Marx, "Critique of Hegel: Introduction", p.260. See also, "The Critique of Hegel: Introduction", pp.257-258.

¹¹⁴ See Marx, "On the Jewish Question", p.248.

from the hopes and aspirations of Jews. The only solution was one that required Jews, as it required all national groups and religions, to shed their particularism and find liberation in the end to the exploitation of man by man, and freedom in overcoming want. True human emancipation could only be realized following the end to the exploitative relations attending the capitalist system.

1.3.2 Lenin and Stalin on the Jewish Question

Marx's essays on the Jewish question, written in the early- and mid-1840s are rarely referred to in the writings of Lenin and Stalin. Nevertheless, both men read the essays and Marx's influence is evident in their contributions to the Soviet-Marxist position on the Jewish question. Lenin's concern with the Jewish question in Russia was of a different nature than Marx's. Although Lenin did not disagree with Marx's conclusions, he would have found it hard to dismiss the Jews in Russia as an "ancient social organism of production" or to adopt Marx's offensive and abrasive presentation of the Jewish question. The circumstances of Russian Jews were different than those living in Western Europe. Lenin and the Bolsheviks grasped the political ramifications of this fact,

but their approach to the Jewish question after assuming power, indicated that the wider significance of these differences was not fully appreciated.

Lenin once said the Jewish question was simply "assimilation or separation",¹¹⁵ but circumstance forced him to consider the Jewish question in various ways. Jews were members of a religious confession and, at the same, time considered themselves to be a nation. Lenin attacked Judaism as he attacked all religions, although his opposition to Judaism was not pressed with the urgency that informed his campaign to destroy the Orthodox Church. The focus of Lenin's attention with respect to the Jewish question was the various aspects of Jewish "nationality" in Russian society. The question of Jewish nationality took a number of forms in Russia and within the Russian social-democratic movement. In this regard, Lenin commented on the status of Jews as a nation, antisemitism and Zionism as a form of Jewish nationalism.

¹¹⁵ Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party", Collected Works, Vol.7, p.101.

Although Lenin admitted that "no nationality in Russia is so oppressed as persecuted as the Jewish",¹¹⁶ he also subscribed to Kautsky's view that Jews were only a caste, "an occupational group distinguished from the rest of society by its urban character and by the financial, commercial, and intellectual nature of its economic pursuits."¹¹⁷ In Western Europe the assimilating process of capitalist development was breaking down the features of Jewish life that distinguished them from the rest of society. Lenin thought the same process was acting on Russian Jews, as Russia experienced the process of industrial development and modernization. Moreover the process of assimilation was part of Jewish emancipation.¹¹⁸ As far as Lenin was concerned, the Jews of Russia had maintained a semblance of nationality only through their religion, and because of the external pressure perpetrated against Jews by the discrimination of Tsars and the general populace. Jews would find their place in Russian society once the prejudices

¹¹⁶ Lenin "The National Equality Bill", Collected Works, Vol.20, p.172.

¹¹⁷ Yoav Peled, Lenin on the Jewish Question: the Theoretical Setting", Political Studies, Vol.35(1), 1987, p.67.

¹¹⁸ Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party", p.100.

against them ended, and Jews entered the mainstream of Russian society as it was transformed by the process of modernization.¹¹⁹

Lenin asserted that Jews fell short of the conditions "implied by the concept of a nation."¹²⁰ Jews should not even be considered a nationality. Such ideas were rejected out of hand, as running contrary to the proletariat's interests.

The idea of a Jewish "nationality"... runs counter to the interests of the Jewish proletariat, for it fosters among them, directly or indirectly, a spirit hostile to assimilation, the spirit of the "ghetto".¹²¹

Lenin was concerned that no concessions be made to nationalism in any form, or on the part of any segment of the proletariat. Bourgeois nationalism was political untenable among Jews because it reinforced an artificial exclusivity.

¹¹⁹ C.f., Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party", p.101 and Peled, Op. Cit., pp.67-68 and 69.

¹²⁰ Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party", pp.99-100.

¹²¹ Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party", Op. Cit., p.101.

The question of Jewish nationality first entered into the debates of the RSDWP in connection with the demands of the General Union of Jewish Labourers (more commonly known as the Bund) for autonomy in Jewish matters in 1902, and came a head at the RSDWP's Second Party Congress in 1903. The position of the Bund on the full range of issues to do with the organizational principles of a social democratic party was in direct contradiction to Lenin's views. The Bund's demands for a federalist party organization threatened the principle of centralization, which the Iskraists felt was necessary to the success of their efforts to better organize the Russian social democratic movement.¹²²

Despite Lenin's charges of "economism" and "tailism", the Bund was a tightly knit conspiratorial organization that had deep roots in the Jewish of the working class.¹²³ The Bund did

¹²² At this time various other social democrats took into account nationalist aspirations and favoured a federalist structure, which Lenin had come to oppose with great resolution because of its potential to divide the proletariat of the oppressed nationalities from the Russian proletariat. For example see Lenin, "On the Manifesto of the Armenian Social-Democrats," Collected Works, Vol.6, pp.326-329.

¹²³ In this respect the Bund possessed much of the organizational discipline and prowess that Lenin felt sure he could establish within the Russian social democratic movement

not wish to have its achievements destroyed either by design or by the incompetent bungling that they felt characterized the Russian social democratic organization. Following Lenin's machinations to destroy the attempt of a number of social-democratic groups outside of his influence to unite at a Second Party congress, the Bund decided that in consideration of all the issues arising from an association with the Russian social-democrats that a federative approach would be the best arrangement to allow them to retain control over the considerable organization built up by Jewish Social Democrats. Under such an arrangement the Bund could fulfil its commitment to serve the Jewish proletariat in the western region of the Empire, an area where Lenin and the Iskraists had virtually no influence, and the circumstances of the proletariat were different from that of the Russian proletariat.¹²⁴

generally, if he could only buy the time to bring the RSDWP under the influence of the Iskra group. C.f. Henry J. Tobias, "The Bund and the First Congress of the RSDWP: An Addendum", The Russian Review, Vol.24(4), October, 1965, p.394, Henry J. Tobias, "The Bund and Lenin Until 1903", The Russian Review, Vol.20(4), October, 1961, p.353, Schapiro, "Jews in the Revolutionary Movement", pp.279-280, Mishinski, Op. Cit., p.31 and 32, and Mendelsohn, Op.Cit., p.89.

¹²⁴ On the circumstances of the Jewish proletariat and labour organizations in the Pale see, Nora Levin, While Messiah Tarryed: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917, Schocken Books, New York, 1977, pp.38-40 and 221-226, passim,

The Bolsheviks' dispute with the Bund was telling and took on some significance after the revolution. Prominent Jewish figures in the Bolshevik leadership were not closely tied to their people.¹²⁵ The dispute with the Bund alienated the very people who could have resolved many of the difficulties faced by the Party in its efforts to deal with its Jewish population. The small importance Lenin and the Iskraists attached to the substance of the Bund's demands was a function of their understanding that the Bund's views were unimportant since Jews would easily and quickly be assimilated into Russian society. Such was the Bolshevik attitude to Russian Jewry, but as Stalin noted "...the process of amalgamation of nations [proved] far more complicated a matter

Moshe Mishinski, "Regional Factors in the Formation of the Jewish Labour Movement in Czarist Russia", YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol. 14, pp.38-39, and 40, and Ezra Mendelsohn, "The Russian Jewish Labour Movement and Others", YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol. 14, 1969, pp.87-89, 92-95 and 97-98. On the Bolsheviks' lack of influence in the western regions of the former Empire that came under their control see M. Altshuler, "The Attitude of the Communist Party of Russia to Jewish National Survival, 1918-1930," YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol. 14, 1969, p.76.

¹²⁵ Trotsky, for example is reported to have remarked "I am a Social Democrat and only that." Lucy Davidowicz, (Ed.), The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe, Beacon Press, Boston, 1967, p.447.

than might have appeared formerly, in the period prior to the war, or in the period prior to the October Revolution."¹²⁶ This was no less true in the case of the Russian Jewry and the Bolsheviks were forced to proceed in a manner that accounted for the differences in the Jewish community as they tried to transform Russia.

The homogenizing forces of historical development might be relied upon to resolve the Jewish question in the future, but two aspects of the Jewish question were a source of worry for the Bolsheviks. The antisemitism of government officials and popular antisemitism, as well as, the rise of political Zionism proved to be the two prominent aspects of the Jewish question given consideration by the party. Both antisemitism and Zionism were viewed in connection with the nationality question and its bearing on the revolutionary struggle.

One dimension of antisemitism in Tsarist Russia that required Lenin's attention, was the official role in the persecution of Russian Jewry. Since the late nineteenth century, officials of the Tsarist bureaucracy had used

¹²⁶ Stalin, "Against Federalism", Works, Vol.3, p.33. See also Altshuler, Op. Cit., pp.74-75 .

antisemitism as a tool against the revolutionary movement. The prominence of Jews among Russia's revolutionary underground allowed officials to make the argument that the revolutionaries were dominated by Jews, adding to the popular suspicions, misunderstandings and prejudices against Jews the notion that Jews were seeking Russia's destruction.¹²⁷

The politics of antisemitism in Russia were the politics of reaction. Not only did the regime's officials foster and exploit antisemitism, in Lenin's mind antisemitism was germane to the ruling classes of Russia, and a weapon of the growing bourgeoisie. He was certain that "a link **undoubtedly** exist(ed) between anti-semitism and the interests of the bourgeoisie."¹²⁸ It was Lenin's contention that antisemitic pogroms provided the opportunity to crush workers and students fighting to

¹²⁷ On the antisemitism of the Russian Government, and its role in the pogroms see, Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, Vol.2, pp.19-26, Hans Rogger, "The Jewish Policy of Late Tsarism: A Reappraisal", The Weiner Library Bulletin, 25(1 and 2), 1971, pp.43-47, and Zvi Gitelman, Anti-Semitism in the USSR: Sources, Types, Consequences, Synagogue Council of America, New York, 1974, p.7-8.

¹²⁸ Lenin, "Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an Independent Political Party?", Collected Works, Vol.6, pp.333-334.

protect Jews from these violent outbursts.¹²⁹ Antisemitism was both a foil for the ruling class, and a device used to create divisions in society.

[The parties of the Right] speak of... preserving the old traditions in general, and they spare no efforts to foment distrust towards non-Russians, particularly towards Jews, to insight the utterly ignorant, the utterly benighted, to pogroms, to "Yid"-baiting. They seek to conceal the privileges of the nobility, the bureaucrats and the landlords with talk about the "oppression" of Russians by non-Russians.¹³⁰

The ruling class hid behind the antisemitism they stirred up, and their association with antisemitism was clear enough that Lenin even added the "Jew Baiter" to his invective against the forces of reaction.¹³¹

Antisemitism was also a sign of Russia's general backwardness which Russian officials exploited.

Tsarism adroitly exploited the basest anti-Jewish

¹²⁹ C.f., Lenin, "Preface to the Pamphlet Memorandum of Police Department Superintendent Lopukhin", Collected Works, Vol.8, p.204, "The Decisive Moment is at Hand", Collected Works, Vol.9, p.450, "The Reaction is Taking to Arms", Collected Works, Vol.10, p.508-513, "Guerilla Warfare", Collected Works, Vol.11, p.215.

¹³⁰ Lenin, "Political Parties in Russia", Collected Works, Vol.18, p.48.

¹³¹ For example, see Lenin, "The Dark Forces Are for the Cadets, the Mensheviks and Narodniks Are in One Government with the Cadets," Collected Works, Vol. 24, pp.529-530.

prejudices of the most ignorant strata of the population in order to organize, if not lead directly, pogroms...¹³²

Not even the working class was not exempt from the general backwardness of Russia. However, antisemitism did not serve the proletariat's interests, despite its presence among "dozens or even hundreds of unorganized workers, nine-tenths of whom are still quite ignorant, (and) take part in a pogrom."¹³³ By playing on the fears and misunderstandings of the populace, government sponsored propaganda and other anti-Jewish activities helped spread antisemitism, and threatened to alienate potential allies and supporters of the Bolsheviks, as well as, divide the working class. In this respect, the consequences of antisemitism for the proletariat's struggle were no different than any other "bourgeois fetish" such as, nationalism or "chauvinism".¹³⁴

Lenin was not only worried about the divisiveness caused

¹³² Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution", Collected Works, Vol.23, p.250.

¹³³ Lenin, "Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an Independent Political Party?", p.334.

¹³⁴ C.f., Lenin, "Preface to the Pamphlet Memorandum of Police Superintendent Lopukhin", and Lenin, "Against Boycott", Collected Works, Vol.13, p.30.

by persistence of antisemitism among workers. He worried that if the issue was poorly handled, as was the case with the Bund's position on antisemitism, it threatened to alienate Jewish workers from the Russian social democratic movement.

(the) angry comment of the Bund has only confused the issue and planted in the minds of Jewish workers ideas which tend to blunt their class consciousness.¹³⁵

Furthermore, the Bund's position lent credence to the "Zionist fable" that antisemitism was "eternal",¹³⁶ and in so doing fostered closer community ties among the already compact social organization that characterized Russian Jewish life.

Zionism was the inverse of antisemitism in that it was a reactionary response to the suffering visited upon Jews by the Tsarist autocracy, and the whims of popular prejudice. It was as illusory as any nationalism, because it obscured the real economic sources of Jewish suffering. The Jewish proletariat could as easily be emancipated in Russia as in Palestine, or anywhere else. Zionism was also combined with

¹³⁵ Lenin, "Does the Jewish Proletariat need an Independent Political Party?", p.334.

¹³⁶ Lenin, "Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an Independent Political Party?", p.334.

socialism in Russia was as dangerous as any nationalist tendency, and was another potential source of the working class movement's fragmentation.

Despite their sensitivity to antisemitism and its implications, the Bolsheviks were not so astute when they railed against any manifestation of Jewish nationalism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks associated Zionism with the ruling class in the Jewish communities. An elite that kept the Jewish community complacent, and benign in its views of Tsarist oppression. Any manifestation of Jewish nationalism was linked in a pejorative way to the Jewish ruling class. For example: "Jewish national culture is the slogan of Rabbis and the bourgeoisie, the slogan of our enemies."¹³⁷ At one point, the dispute with the Bund occasioned Lenin's assessment of Jewish nationalism as a form of "bourgeois reactionary clericalism".¹³⁸ Zionism was also used as a term of slander against the Jewish ruling classes and other Jewish nationalists. The Jewish nation was called a "Zionist idea

¹³⁷ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", p.26.

¹³⁸ Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", pp.22-26.

[which] is absolutely false and essentially reactionary."¹³⁹ The derogatory use of the term "Zionism" was particularly common in the Bolshevik polemics against the Bund. Quite possibly dangerous precedents were set at this early date for the rancid antisemitic propaganda that surfaced in the 1960s.

Stalin's writing on the Jewish question follows from his treatment of the national question. Using the criteria of the four elements of his definition, shared language, culture, economy and territory, Stalin asserts that Jews did not constitute a nation. Jews were "economically disunited, inhabit[ed] different territories, [and spoke] different languages..."¹⁴⁰ Stalin did allow that Jews possessed a "national character", but it was meaningless because the elements common to nations and nationalities were not common to Jews.¹⁴¹ In the end Stalin posits that what was left of Jews as an identifiable social group was "their religion, their common

¹³⁹ Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party", Op. Cit., p.99. See also, Lenin, "Maximum Brazenness and Minimum Logic", Collected Works, Vol.7, p.63.

¹⁴⁰ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.22.

¹⁴¹ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", pp.22-23, 24-25 and 60.

origin and certain relics of the national character."¹⁴²

Stalin could easily foresee the disappearance of the Jewish community.

...the Jews as a rule serve "foreign" nations as manufacturers and traders and as members of liberal professions, naturally adapting themselves to the "foreign nations" in respect to language and so forth. All this, taken together with the increasing re-shuffling of nationalities characteristic of developed capitalism, leads to the assimilation of the Jews. The abolition of the "Pale of Settlement" would only serve to hasten this process of assimilation.¹⁴³

Stalin's economic characterization of jews was close to that of Marx. Summarizing Marx's position Stalin notes, "the Jewish nation is coming to an end...The Jews are being assimilated."¹⁴⁴ What stood in the way of this "objective process (of assimilation)" were "encroachments" on the

¹⁴² Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.25.

¹⁴³ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.60.

¹⁴⁴ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", p.59. Certainly Stalin's understanding of the Jewish question is not backed up by the other issues Marx is concerned to address, nonetheless Stalin considers himself to be writing in the same vein as Marx.

democratic freedoms of Jews, such as pogroms.¹⁴⁵ The elimination of pressure from the surrounding nations, and above all the lifting of restrictions that kept the Jews of the Empire together would end the Jewish question, as the process of assimilation would proceed unimpeded.

Stalin maintained, as Lenin did, that antisemitism was a manifestation of continued backwardness, "a vestige of the misanthropic customs characteristic of the period of cannibalism."¹⁴⁶ Stalin saw antisemitism as a weapon of the bourgeoisie.

Anti-semitism is of advantage to the exploiters as a lightning conductor that deflects the blows aimed by the working people at capitalism. Anti-semitism is dangerous for the working people as being a false path that leads them off the right road and lands them in the jungle.¹⁴⁷

Anti-semitism was merely another foil of the reactionary classes that threatened to divert the attention of the working class from the more important sources of their misery, and in

¹⁴⁵ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", pp.62 and 65.

¹⁴⁶ Stalin, "Anti-semitism: Reply to an Enquiry of the Jewish News Agency in the United States", Collected Works, Vol.13, p.30, (hereafter, "Anti-semitism").

¹⁴⁷ Stalin, "Anti-semitism", p.30.

so doing protected the ruling class.

The Bolsheviks' theoretical treatment of the Jewish question was inadequate to the circumstances of Russia's Jews. It was complicated by the reliance on a Western European experiences and expectations, the dispute with the Bund and by antisemitism in the Russian Empire. Antisemitism's ugliest manifestations were abhorred by the many committed "internationalists" in the ranks of the A-RSDWP(b), but it was seen as another expression of Russia's backwardness to be overcome by modernization. The conclusion reached by Marx, that the Jewish question was only a part of the larger issues confronting mankind remained an important consideration for the Bolsheviks, even after their seizure of power, when the problems with their perspective became obvious.

Chapter 2

Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the Jewish Streets

On 7 November, 1917 the Bolshevik faction of the All-Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, (A-RSDWP) seized power in Petrograd and began the process of establishing itself as the new government of Russia. Riding on a wave of popular revolt, the Bolsheviks took advantage of the social and political upheaval in Russia to an extent that no other political force in the collapsing Empire seemed to be able to do. While the Bolshevik coup d'etat in no way ensured that Lenin and his followers would become the undisputed rulers of Russia, it did not take the Bolsheviks long to seize whatever reins of power they could and quickly turn them to their own advantage.

The purpose of the present chapter is to examine the first phase of the Bolshevik effort to transform the Jews of the former Empire. Between 1917 and 1921 the force of circumstance caused the Bolsheviks to pay attention to the Jewish population under its rule. The anti-Bolshevik forces' use antisemitism in their struggle against Bolsheviks, and the fact that approximately 2,500,000 Jews lived in the areas that had comprised the area under Bolshevik rule were foremost of the A-RSDWP(b)'s reasons to deal with Jews. The need for allies in the Western regions of the former Empire, where the

great majority of Jews lived motivated the Bolsheviks, as well.

The first period of the Russian revolution, known as "Militant" or "War Communism"¹, was ruled by the exigencies of the Civil War and the utopianism of the Bolshevik's version of Marxism. The Bolshevik seizure of power by no means ended revolutionary class struggle in Russia. Beyond the obvious difficulties attending the consolidation of power, the central tasks facing the new regime were to elaborate an agenda for socio-economic change grounded in the teleology of Marxism, and to establish a system of government to direct society's transformation to socialism. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia, would mean more than overseeing the rooting out of the ideas, institutions and supporters of the old class order. Russia would have to be transformed from an

¹ The Russian word for "war" and "militant" is the same, but their meaning in the present context are different. The Bolsheviks used both senses of the term for war and militant. "War Communism" referred to the Bolsheviks' Civil War efforts, and the political priorities arising from the military and security requirement of the day. "Militant Communism" referred to the destruction of the old social order, and the attempt to give society new organizational forms that reflected and anticipated society's transformation to communism. As Lenin said, it was the imposition of communism "by assault." C.f., Vladimir Gsovski, Soviet Civil Law: Private Rights and their Background Under the Soviet Regime, Vol.I, University of Michigan Law School, Ann Arbor, 1948, p.10, and Boris Souvaraine, Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism, Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1939, p.275.

under-industrialized, fundamentally rural country to fully industrialized, socialist society.

The agenda set by circumstance had to be reconciled with the prescriptions of Marx's theory. The Bolshevik blue print for economic and social development had been drafted to respond to the fundamental backwardness of Russia. As a result, the objective factors of development which Marx assumed would exist as a point of departure for the establishment of communism became normative goals for the regime. Rather than acting as administrators of the transition from capitalism to communism, the Party became was charged with coordinating the creation of a material base and the social relations appropriate to building communism.

2.1 Jews and the Bolshevik Seizure of Power

Following the October revolution the Jewish question was located squarely at the centre of the problems arising from the emerging pattern of development. Having recognized that the Jews of Russia could not be ignored, the Bolsheviks found themselves faced with a close knit community whose traditional community life had by its special circumstances been largely unaffected by the homogenizing forces of modernization. The Bolsheviks had proposed to completely transform society, but the structure of Jewish community life appeared to be

recalcitrant to far-reaching change.

At the time of the Revolution there were approximately 2.5 million Jews living in Soviet Russia, and approximately 86% lived in the Western regions of the former Empire, in what had been the Pale of Settlement. About 90% Jews lived in either cities or the small market towns, known as **shtetls**, throughout the regions of the Pale. The **shtetls** were often considered urban, although this characterization is somewhat misleading. Many of the **shtetl** had populations no larger than 200 people.² The description might better be understood as a differentiation between the activities of the **shtetl** and the rural lifestyle of the peasants.

The economic activity of the **shtetls** centred around the "traditional" occupations of small scale production and merchandising activities associated with mediating between the urban and rural economies. A combination of the upheaval caused by World War I, the Civil War, the pogroms and the Bolsheviks' nationalization of the economy made it nearly impossible to make a living in the **shtetl**. More and more it became clear that success would have to be found in the cities, and Jews took advantage of the opportunity to move out

² Alec Nove and J.A. Newth, "The Jewish population: Demographic Trends and Occupational Patterns", in Lionel Kochan, The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917, (Third Edition), Oxford University Press, 1978, p.138.

of the Pale of Settlement to escape the poverty of the *shtetl*. After the Revolutions of 1917 many of the Jews living in large urban centres were as likely to be engaged in an urban profession as any of the traditional economic activities.³

Traditional community life continued to play an important part in the everyday lives of many Jews. Social and cultural activities, community welfare, and education were inextricably linked to religious principles and institutions. The community councils, or the *kehillah*, which served social and religious purposes coordinated much of the activity.

Jews had welcomed the downfall of the Tsarist system, and the apparent end of their oppression.⁴ Opportunities which had been closed to them were now open. The February Revolution had destroyed the political system of the old regime, and on April 2, 1917 all disabilities against Jews were removed.⁵

³ Figures for, and an analysis of the shifts in occupations and the trend towards urbanization established by Russian Jews see Gurevitz, Op. Cit., pp.67-69, and Nove and Newth, Op. Cit., p.138.

⁴ Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-30, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1972, p.69, (hereafter, Jewish Nationality), and Avraham Yarmolinsky, The Jews and Other Minor Nationalities in the Soviet Union, Vanguard Press, New York, 1928, p.48.

⁵ The sweeping clause of the decree read as follows. "All restrictions imposed upon the rights of Russian citizens by legislative acts now in force and based on their adherence to a particular religious sect or nationality are herewith repealed." Quoted in Solomon Schwarz, The Jews in the Soviet

Jewish life, at this time, enjoyed a revival. The First World War had forced Jews to expand their own social welfare organizations, as they were often ineligible for membership in "official relief committees".⁶ After the fall of the Tsar, social activities of all kinds thrived throughout the Jewish communities under Russian rule. Political parties, community and religious organizations, Jewish education, and culture all began to thrive under the Provisional Government.⁷

There was little excitement in the Jewish community over the Bolshevik seizure of power. The Bolsheviks took up the commitment of the Provisional Government to end government discrimination on the basis of nationality or religion. However, whereas, the revolution had promised power to the workers Soviets, and land for the peasants, for Jews the revolution offered uncertainty, and new disabilities.⁸

2.2 Antisemitism and the Civil War

Union, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1951, p.90.

⁶ C.f. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.48-50, M. Altshuler, "Russia and Her Jews- The Impact of the 1914 War", Wiener Library Bulletin, Vol.27(30/31), 1973/74, p.15.

⁷ C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.70-82, and Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.48-50,

⁸ See Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.50-1.

The recent revitalization of Jewish life gave little indication of the decline of the institutions and ideas that the Bolsheviks saw as barriers to the transformation to socialism. The lack of support for the Bolsheviks among Jews was overwhelming, as the Constituent Assembly election had attested.⁹ In order to place themselves in a position to initiate the transformation of Russian Jews the Bolsheviks had to solicit the support of the Jewish community, or at least find a toe hold. The violent waves of antisemitism that swept over many Jewish communities throughout the Civil War provided the Bolsheviks with the opportunities it needed.

Jews might not have been overly enthusiastic about the Bolshevik assumption of power in 1917, but the Bolsheviks did what they could to do away with discrimination against Jews. They not only took up the commitment of the Provisional Government to abolish government discriminatory practices against Jews¹⁰, in July 1918 antisemitism was outlawed by the "Decree of the Council of People's Commissars on the Uprooting of the Anti-Semitic Movements".

⁹ The majority of Jews voted for Zionist or religious parties, not only in the constituent Assembly elections, but in elections to the **Kehillah** and the Jewish Congress. See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.78-81.

¹⁰ The Bolsheviks passed a Decree similar to that promulgated by the Provisional Government outlawing discrimination on the basis of nationality or religion. Part of the text of the Decree is reproduced in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.60.

The Council of People's Commissars declares that the anti-Semitic movement and pogroms against the Jews are fatal to the interests of the workers' and peasants' revolution and calls upon the toiling people of Socialist Russia to fight this evil with all the means at their disposal.

National hostility weakens the ranks of our revolutionaries, disrupts the united front of toilers without distinctions of nationality and helps only our enemies.

The Council of People's Commissars instructs all Soviet deputies to take uncompromising measures to tear the anti-Semitic movement out by the roots. Pogromists and pogrom-agitators are to be placed outside the law.¹¹

The Bolsheviks had little choice in the matter. Forces opposed to Bolshevik rule had identified Bolshevism as a Jewish phenomena, and it was clear that antisemitism was being used as a tool of the counterrevolution.¹²

Antisemitism reached epidemic proportions during the Bolshevik effort to bring the Western Regions of the former Empire under their control. Just as the forces of reaction under the Tsar had used antisemitism as a propaganda weapon to discredit opposition to the regime, its critics, so too did

¹¹ Izvestia, July 27, 1918, as quoted in Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets, (Second Edition), Schocken Books, New York, 1987, p.180, see also Joseph Nedava, Trotsky and the Jews, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1972, p.171.

¹² See Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.38 and 39.

the anti-Bolshevik forces following the Revolution.¹³ In its more violent form, antisemitism was manifest in the pogroms that subjected Jews to wanton destruction during the Civil War.

The propaganda of the anti-Bolshevik forces was successful, because the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Jews was not hard to establish. Jews were prominent in the Bolshevik leadership. Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Sverdlov were all of Jewish descent. The Red Army defended Jews, and there were even all Jewish units.¹⁴ Under the Tsars Jews were an anomaly in state service. Under the Bolsheviks, with the end of discriminatory hiring practices and residency restrictions, Jews became state functionaries at all levels in a regime that was expanding the role of the state.¹⁵ Jews took clerical jobs filled positions as tax collectors,

¹³ C.f. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.50, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.160-161, Leonard Schapiro, "The Role of Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement" in Leonard Schapiro, Russian Studies, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1988, p.286, Bernard D. Weinryb, "Anti-Semitism in Soviet Russia", in Lionel Kochan, The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917, Oxford University Press, London 1978, p.305, and Shmuel Ettinger, "Historical and Internal Political Factors in Soviet Anti-Semitism", in Jacob M. Kelman, Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union: Its Roots and Consequences, Vol.2, The Centre for Research and Documentation of East-European Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1980, p.48.

¹⁴ On Jews in the Red Army see, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.159-167, and Yarmolinsky, p.57.

¹⁵ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.57.

warehousemen and merchandisers, and were not uncommon in the Cheka.¹⁶ In general, people found it was no longer unusual to be dealing with a Jewish state official in their encounters with the new regime.

The prominence of Jews in the regime was used in all sorts of anti-Bolshevik propaganda, which was couched in antisemitic terms.¹⁷ Vladivostok was covered with posters "urging the citizenry to kill the Jews, and appeals were made to the Red Guards to throw off the yoke of their Jewish rulers."¹⁸ Other propaganda explained the Revolution as an "atheistic-Jewish plot".¹⁹ It was pointed out that much of the illegal trade that resulted in blackmarketeers commanding high prices for goods was also carried out by Jews. Whatever its form, the antisemitic propaganda of anti-Bolshevik forces was widespread, and was aimed at undermining support for the Bolsheviks.

¹⁶ C.f. Nedava, Op. Cit. pp.154-5, 156 and 157-158, Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.53, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.47, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.115-116, 117 and Schapiro, "Jews in the Revolutionary Movement", p.286.

¹⁷ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.52, 55 and 60.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.60.

¹⁹ Zvi Gitelman, Anti-Semitism in the USSR: Sources, Types, Consequences, The Synagogue of America, New York, 1974, p.12.

The most dangerous manifestation of antisemitism appeared in the form of pogroms.²⁰ The pogroms during the Civil War were perpetrated by the Ukrainian Rada troops, the White Armies, by groups of bandits, by gangs of peasant, and even in some instances by Red Army troops. The numerous pogroms that occurred throughout European Russia often left Jews subject to the whims of the anti-Bolshevik forces, and unprotected from the pogromists.²¹

The participation of the Red Army in pogroms was not unheard of, but occurred on a much smaller scale than was the case with the Whites.²² The pogromist activities of the Red Army troops did not receive sanction from the Bolshevik leadership, who punished soldiers and disbanded units that were involved in carrying out pogroms. The Reds' measures to address the antisemitic propaganda of the White forces were

²⁰ Examples of the brutality which Jews attacked can be found in Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.40-41 and 42.

²¹ Simon Petlura, commander of the Ukrainian Rada troops, is reported to have said, "I am sorry for the pogroms, but they help to maintain the discipline of the army." Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.55 and see Ibid., p.70. On the participation of the Ukrainian Rada troops and the Whites in the pogroms and their attitudes toward Jews, c.f., N. Gergel, "The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-21", pp.240-242, Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.54-57 and 60, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union, Vol.1, pp. 39, 40-41, 42-43.

²² On the Red forces and the pogroms and antisemitism among the soldiers see Gergel, Op. Cit., pp.224-25, Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit. p.57, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.43 and Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.49.

coordinated by a special anti-pogrom department attached to the Commissariat of War.²³ The protection Bolsheviki offered to Jews and their efforts to combat antisemitism among Red Army troops met with considerable success, and were rewarded by the support of Jews in many of the small villages which changed hands several times during the Civil War.²⁴

The new regime won a measure of support from Jews with their campaigns against antisemitism, and the Red Army's efforts to stop the pogroms. The removal of disabilities against service in the bureaucracy and other features of official discrimination under the Tsars also helped. The nature of Jewish support for the Bolsheviki was not ideological. The words of a Jewish medical professor was typical.

...though in the old Russia I could get no promotion for twenty years by reason of being a Jew, today I am not only a professor but also a dean of the medical school. I am not a radical but I must acknowledge the debt of the Jews to the new regime.²⁵

Jews supported the Bolshevik regime out of self-interest in as much as it offered some protraction from the pogromists of

²³ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.57.

²⁴ For examples of the Jewish reaction to the Red forces. C.f. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.57, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.43-44.

²⁵ Quotation from Boris D. Bogen, Born a Jew, MacMillan, New York 1930, p.339, as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.116.

all ilks, and continued to keep opportunities previously closed to them open. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks were the best available alternative to the forces of reaction seeking to restore the old order.²⁶ Regardless of its thin nature, support by some Jews for the Bolsheviks was better than none, which was virtually the extent of Bolshevik support in many Jewish communities before the Civil War.

2.3 The Establishment of a Jewish Apparatus

Jews might have been glad for the reprieves granted them under the Bolsheviks, but the Party needed to establish deeper roots in the Jewish community if they were going to exercise any influence over Soviet Jewry. The urgency which the Bolsheviks viewed the need to get their message to the Jewish population, in particular the class conscious Jewish workers, should not be underestimated. It was precisely the urban Jewish proletariat inhabiting the western extremities of Russia who potentially could provide the base of support the Bolsheviks needed in that region of the country.²⁷

²⁶ See George Katov, Russia 1917: The February Revolution, Longmans, London, 1967, p.61, and Gitleman, Jewish Nationality, pp.116-117, f.n.28.

²⁷ To this it might be added that the Bolshevik's belief in the immediacy of revolution in Europe may have led them to believe that the establishment of a Commissariat of Jewish National Affairs and Jewish Sections in the Party would carry weight with the Jewish social democrats in the West, who would help with the communization of Russia's Jews. M. Altshuler, "The Attitude of the Communist party of Russia to Jewish

If the Bolsheviks hoped to get their message to the Jewish masses it would have to be communicated in Yiddish. A report from the Smolensk Party archives illustrates the point.

In the Pioneer detachment the work suffers in view of the fact that among the Jewish children work is done in Russian which they cannot master. Completely different results may be expected if the educational work, both among the Komsomols and the Jewish Pioneers, were to be conducted in Yiddish.²⁸

It was important for the Bolsheviks to establish themselves in the Jewish community. Without conducting their efforts in Yiddish they were unlikely to meet with success.

The task of carrying the Bolshevik message to the Jewish street was a difficult one for the Bolsheviks, because there were very few Yiddish speaking Bolsheviks. Most of the Jews in the Party had long since severed their connections to the Jewish community.²⁹ Those revolutionaries who had been serious about the national and cultural concerns of Jews had found their place in Jewish political parties and organizations, many of whom were opposed to the Bolshevik coup. With

National Survival, 1918-1930", YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol.14, 1969, pp.75-76. (Hereafter, "Jewish National Survival".)

²⁸ Merle Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1958, p.442.

²⁹ C.f., Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.106-108, Schwarz, Op. Cit., p. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, pp.48-49 and Nedava, Op. Cit., pp.133-134.

virtually no basis in the "Jewish revolutionary intelligentsia" the Bolsheviks set about establishing the institutional apparatus required to make contact with the Jewish populace, to take their message to the street and to implement their programmes to transform Russian Jewry.³⁰

The Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs (YevKom) was established in January 1918, under the supervision of the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs, as a result of the Party's decision "to create Jewish 'organizational forms' within both the state and Party apparatuses."³¹ Yevkom represented the first attempt to elaborate an organization to oversee the transformation of Soviet Jews. Throughout its short history, Yevkom faced a number of difficulties and these were not uncharacteristic of "Jewish work" right until the cessation of such work in the 1930s.³²

The scope for work in the Jewish community was enormous. The magnitude of the tasks ahead of Yevkom were described in its newspaper, *Di varheit*:

³⁰ C.f. Schwarz, Op. Cit., p., Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.124, Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.25, Chimen Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project, 1927-1959", in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.66. (Hereafter, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project".)

³¹ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.122.

³² The term "Jewish work" was popular among the officials of the day, and referred to any work by the Party or the state relating to Jewish affairs.

The Jewish Commissariat sees its task as the reconstruction of Jewish national life on a proletarian-socialist basis. The Jewish masses have the complete right to control all existing Jewish social institutions, to give a socialist direction to our people's school's, to give Jews the opportunity to enter agricultural work on the socialized land, to concern themselves with the fate of the homeless, to see that the needy get government relief, to fight anti-Semitism, pogroms, etc.³³

The long list of relief activities was indicative of the need to deal with the many problems faced by Jews resulting from the dislocation of the Civil War. The Yevkom had an opportunity to lead the Jewish working class in its efforts to address Jewish suffering, and to find a role in the Jewish community.

The Yevkom's involvement in the Jewish community served contradictory purposes. The opportunity to play a positive role by aiding Jews in their desperate circumstances did not fit easily into the ideological mandate of the Yevkom's work. A resolution of the First Conference of Jewish Commissariats and Jewish Sections in October 1918, confirmed Yevkom's leading role as an institution of the dictatorship of the Jewish proletariat.

Made strong by the victory of the proletariat and the October revolution, the Jewish worker takes power into his own hands, proclaiming the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Jewish street and calling upon all Jewish workers to rally around

³³ Di varheit, June 2, 1918, as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.124.

the Jewish Commissariat to safe guard this dictatorship.³⁴

The confidence inspired by such statements received little vindication in the overall scheme of things. The problem of finding ideologically suitable personnel was an enormous obstacle that stood between the Yevkom and the realization of its ambitious mandate.

The problem of personnel was perennial in Jewish activities in state and Party organizations alike. In point of fact, even the establishment of Yevkom was not unaffected by the dearth of appropriate personnel. As Semen Dimanshtain, the Commissar for Jewish National Affairs admitted, the delay in founding the Jewish Commissariat was a function of staffing problems. "... there was simply no one to do it."³⁵

Despite the grandiose plans and declarations the problem of personnel in the first two years of Yevkom's short existence made even the establishment of a "Jewish paper"³⁶

³⁴ Samuil Agurskii, Der idisher arberter in der kommunistisher bavegun, 1917-1921, Minsk, 1925, pp.48ff, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.111.

³⁵ Semen Dimanshtain, Beim likht fun komunizm, Evmkom, Moscow, 1919, p.280, quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.122, also see p.126.

³⁶ Yevkom's publication Di varheit was first printed on March 8, 1918, but was never published on a regular basis. By August, 1918 the name of the paper was changed to Der emes, which became the official organ of the Yevseksiia. For details of Di varheit's content and fate see Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.127-128, and also Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.94 and

difficult, never mind creating the organization to service the "reconstruction of Jewish national life." The simple task of translating articles from Russian into Yiddish was complicated by the lack of suitable persons to do the job. One author quotes Dimanshtain in this regard. "...our situation at that time was such that we had to place a comrade who did not understand Yiddish in the post of executive secretary of the Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs."³⁷

Lack of personnel meant that even more focused tasks such as combatting Zionism met with difficulty. The vice-chairman of the Moscow Jewish council was quoted as saying, "(Yevkom) which at first proclaimed the combatting of Zionism... as one of its chief tasks, has up to now accomplished nothing of consequence."³⁸ Once again the reason for Yevkom's failure was to be found in its personnel, who had no reason to attack Zionist groups, and in the end their passivity in this matter became a trait of the Yevkom as an organization which "had neither time nor incentive or particular inclination to

Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.25.

³⁷ Semen Dimanshtain, Preface to Samuil Agurskii, Yevreiskii rabochii v kommunisticheskom dvizhenii (1917-1921 gg.) [The Jewish Worker in the Communist Movement, (1917-1921)], Minsk, 1926, p.6, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.93.

³⁸ J. B. Schechtman, "The U.S.S.R., Zionism, and Israel", in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.109.

indulge in a sustained anti-Zionist crusade."³⁹ The participation of Poale-Zionists in Yevkom, and the solicitation of a cross section of Jewish organizations, especially those which could raise funds from abroad, probably helped to take the edge off Yevkom's anti-Zionist stance.

It was not only a lack of qualified personnel that troubled the organization and staffing of Yevkom, but a lack of interest among party workers in "Jewish matters" period.⁴⁰ The veritable flood of Jews into the state bureaucracy, and to a lesser extent the Communist Party, did not mean that Jewish work was their interest. Most of these people were taking advantage of the regime's dispensation with discrimination against Jews to get out of the *shtetls* for economic and personal reasons, not because of a commitment to the Jewish community.⁴¹

One result of the personnel problem was the inability of Yevkom to replace community organizations that were fulfilling functions under its mandate because Yevkom could not hope to staff them. The inability of Yevkom to fill the void created by the regime's outlawing of the *kehillot*, or Jewish community

³⁹ Ibid., p.109.

⁴⁰ C.f. Jacob Miller, "Soviet Theory on the Jews", in Kochan, Op. Cit., pp.56-57, and Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p. 25.

⁴¹ See Baron, Op. Cit., pp.188-189.

councils, and other organizations that facilitated the care for community members who met with misfortune, led to a mixture of cooperation with and tolerance of various non-Bolshevik organizations. Cooperation was a reflection of the shallow roots of the Bolsheviks in Russia's Jewish communities, and under the circumstances it made sense to coordinate the many necessary Jewish social institutions and organizations to help unfortunates. However, Yevkom's mandate, and its chief's belief that eventually Jewish social organizations could be made into communist forms,⁴² made it clear that cooperation was a means to establish Bolshevik control.

The problems caused by the Bolsheviks' dependence on people from outside of the party quickly led the Yevkom into difficulty, particularly in the political climate of July 1918. The coalition between the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (SR's) broke down following the SR's attempted coup. A more general "purge" of various organization

⁴² See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.122-123, esp. f.n.44. It is interesting to note that during the brief spell of freedom enjoyed by the kehillot, the potential to turn these traditional community organization to secular ends was expressed by a number of non-religious Jewish political parties, in particular this was pursued by the Bund. See Jewish Nationality, pp. 50-51 and 54, as well as, 70, 77-78 and 295.

ensued and Yevkom did not escape.⁴³ Having removed the Poale-Zionist from the Board of Yevkom a sweep of the entire apparatus began, as is related in the following account.

Early in July 1918 the Jewish Commissariat got rid of its partners. The Left SR's were eliminated from the Commissariat, and from the government in general, because of the attempted uprising against the Soviet government on July 5, 1918. And the Poale-Zionists were eliminated -because the Poale-Zionist Rabinovich, a member of the Board of the Jewish Commissariat, took part as a delegate in the convention of Jewish communities [kehiles] that met in Moscow in July 1918. At this convention Rabinovich stated that the Poale-Zion participated in the work of the Commissariat in order to make it possible to prepare for a convention of communities... Put differently, this means: the Poale-Zionists, according to Rabinovich, had joined the Jewish Commissariat to protect the interests of the clerical communities upon which the Jewish Commissariat had declared merciless war. This is why the Poale-Zionists were promptly removed from the Commissariat.

After[ward], the work at once took a different direction. Instead of non-party Jewish Worker's Soviets, Jewish Sections of the Communist Party began to be established at once.⁴⁴

The delicate balance between the use of Jewish social and political organizations to do work the Yevkom could not do, and the Bolsheviks' hope to take them over from inside was upset by extra-party personnel who worked with the Bolsheviks,

⁴³ C.f., Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.54-55, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.139.

⁴⁴ Samuil Agurskii, Der idisher arbiter in der komunistisher bavequng (1917-1921), Melukhe-farlag fun veisrusland, Minsk, 1925, pp.23 f, (hereafter Der idisher arbiter), as quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.96. Also, c.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.124-126 and Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.49.

only because it enabled them to continue serving their community.

The need to encourage the participation of "all who accepted the platform of the Soviet government" had led to Poale-Zion along with the representatives of other non-Bolshevik organizations playing a prominent role in Yevkom.⁴⁵ After the events of July, the role of extra-Party organizations was curtailed, and doubts were cast on the Yevkom as a whole. At times even the head of Yevkom was uncertain of the organization's permanence.⁴⁶

The overwhelming difficulties faced by Yevkom were manifest in its uneven record. Nevertheless, the organization did meet with some success in its efforts to relieve the suffering visited upon Russian Jewry by war, revolution and

⁴⁵ The extent of non-Bolshevik participation is evidenced by the composition of some of the local Yevkomy. For example, in Perm the membership was comprised of "two 'Left Bundists, two members of the Poalai Tsion, one Left SR, and not a single Bolshevik.'" Di varheit, June 21, 1918, as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.138.

⁴⁶ See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.122-123, f.n.44. Dimanshtain was quoted as having said of the first years of Yevkom, "In those days we would count the weeks that we would be able to hold out, and then we were convinced that we would be allowed to exist for only a few months." From Agurskii, Di yidishe komisariatn un di yidishe momunistishe sektsie (protokoln, rezolutsies un dokumentn 1918-1921), Histpart TsKKP(B)V, Minsk, 1928, p.5, (hereafter Di yidishe komisariatn), as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.233.

counterrevolution. A description of the results of the destructive forces that had acted upon Jews during the first years of Bolshevik power will help to explain the wide scope of Yevkom's activities.

The dislocation and upheaval of the Civil War only added to that caused by World War I, which took place in areas with high concentrations of Jews, and did much damage to the ability of Jews to pursue their livelihood. Beyond the difficulties attributable to living in a war zone, there was the misery and suffering visited upon Jews by the pogromists. The pogroms caused no end of personal tragedy, and the damage to property and enterprises multiplied the economic difficulties encompassing much of the Jewish population. For example, in twenty one of the "townlets" in the former province of Kiev only 1,556 of the 6,707 Jewish houses in existence before the pogroms were inhabitable after the pogroms, and of those remaining 363 required repairs. The estimates of property damage ran into the billions of rubles.⁴⁷

Militant Communism, which put the Jewish community under pressure as it did many people in Soviet Russia, added to the destruction caused by the pogroms and the Civil War. Along

⁴⁷ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.59 and 64.

with their political struggles, military and otherwise, the Bolsheviks initiated economic and social policies that gave priority to workers and the toiling masses. The regime's sociology singled out social and economic groups of the *ancien regime* as targets for agitation and propaganda. Those who did not fit into the ideologically correct sociological categories suffered political sanctions such as the removal of voting privileges, and other rights granted to more "suitable" citizens.

Jews fell into a number of the regime's "sociological categories," of undesirable. For the most part, membership in any one of these categories entailed a mixture of coercive and persuasive policies aimed at directing the Jewish community to follow particular lines of development. Citizens without voting privileges were declared "lishentsy", (without rights), and were common in the Jewish community throughout the 1920's.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The primary consideration in the denial of rights was class, which was more precisely defined by occupation. The franchise was denied to the clergy of all religious confessions, landlords, entrepreneurs employing other workers, money lenders, innkeepers, petty shopkeepers, and persons without clear means of support to name the more relevant classifications. To be declared *lyshentsy* meant more than the deprivation of one's voting privileges. It also entailed the loss of other privileges such as trade union membership and the right to lawful employment, food rations, and the pursuit of education at the university level by one's children. C.f. Vladimir Gsovski, "Legal Status of the Church in Soviet Russia", Fordham Law Review, Vol.8(1), January, 1939, p.24, (hereafter, "Legal Status"), Baron, Op.Cit., p.190 and Jacob Lvai, "Jewish Agricultural Settlement in the USSR", Soviet

In the establishment of socialist forms of production and in social policy Jews were discriminated against, but largely as members of a socio-economic class.⁴⁹ The enthusiasm of the early years of the revolution, and the disorder caused by the Civil War led, to much unnecessary suffering throughout the territories of the new state. The hardships for Jews were multiplied by the occupational structure of the Jewish *shtetls*.⁵⁰ Government nationalizations devastated the bulk of Jewish traders.⁵¹ Under War Communism many Jews continued to trade illegally or turned to speculation in order to survive.⁵²

The Bolsheviks were contributors to the misery of Jews, but they did make some attempts to help Jews in dire circumstances, as part of their effort to prepare the way of the transformation of the Jews. Eventually, Yevkom's organization was constituted by departments which examined

Jewish Affairs, Vol.1(1), June, 1971, pp.91-92.

⁴⁹ There were exceptions to this. For example, in Eastern Ukraine Jews working in heavy industry was rare, and under the Soviets, mining enterprises usually hired non-Jews when there were openings. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.75.

⁵⁰ Small villages and hamlets primarily inhabited by Jewish artisans and petty traders.

⁵¹ See Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.50-51.

⁵² Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.51.

particular problems, including "culture and education, press, provinces, war refugees, combatting anti-Semitism, and economic work."⁵³ Through these departments Yevkom pursued the practical tasks arising from its role as the coordinator of "administrative agencies" for Soviet Jewish policies. The primary task of Yevkom in "economic affairs" was to facilitate the relief from the desperate circumstances faced the Russian Jewish community, and beyond that, as far as was possible, to aid in the "economic transformation and rehabilitation of the Jewish population."⁵⁴ Relief efforts were taken all the more seriously by Yevkom when it coincided with other goals of a more general nature.

The relief efforts Yevkom was involved in included emigration,⁵⁵ and establishing an agency, the Jewish Social Committee, (Yevobkom) charged with coordinating the work of various "Jewish welfare organizations (such) as EKOPQ, OZE,

⁵³ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.136-137. Gitelman goes on to explain the activities of the various departments. See Jewish Nationality, pp.137-138.

⁵⁴ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.233-235.

⁵⁵ The criteria for emigration were clearly class based as was witnessed by the willingness of the regime to let some of those who could not find their place in society under Bolshevik rule. This came to a halt with the end of the Civil War. It had been a temporary solution as part of a quick response to dire and pressing circumstances. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.233-241, *passim*.

SETMAS, and ORT."⁵⁶ The Yevobkom was formed in July 1920, and was dominated by Yevkom and the Yevseksiia.⁵⁷ Its attractiveness to the regime, beyond the its much needed work among Jews, lay in the solicitation and receipt of funds from American Jewish philanthropic organizations, especially the Joint Distribution Committee, which sent clothes, food, medical supplies and large amounts of money.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.236. The abbreviations for these organizations are explained by Gitelman: "EKOPO was the **Evreiskii komitet pomoshchi**- Committee for Jewish Relief- established in 1916 to aid war victims. OZE was the **Obshchestvo zdavookhranenia evreiskogo naseleniia**- Society for the Preservation of the Health of the Jewish Population. SETMAS was the **Soiuz evreiskikh trudiashchikhsia mass**- Union of Jewish Toiling Masses...ORT, which exists to this day, though not in the Soviet Union, is the Organization for the Rehabilitation and Training founded in St. Petersburg in 1880, as the **Obshchestvo remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi Evreev**- The Society for Artisanal and Agricultural Work among Jews." Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.236-7, f.n.12.

⁵⁷ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.236-237. Baron posits that Yevobkom set up in response to the seeming insensitivity of the regime to Jewish sensibilities. The ill effects of the general disarray of the regime on Jews in need of welfare institutions led to rumours that the suffering of these people was being increased at the hands of the Bolsheviks by design. See Baron, Op. Cit., p.175. While this reasoning cannot be discounted, the facts speak to more practical justifications for the existence of the Yevobkom.

⁵⁸ One author cites figures from the Jewish American Year Book showing the contributions of the JDC towards relief and reconstruction totalling \$9.5 million in European Russia and \$0.5 million in Siberia, between 1920 and 1924. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.59. C.f. also, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.237-238 and Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp.19, 113-114 and 115, f.n.18.

Under its umbrella, Yevobkom's constituent organizations attempted to address a number of problems facing the Jewish community, such as caring for victims of the pogroms, providing work through employment centres, job training programmes and vocational schools, medical facilities, and the administration of kindergartens and playgrounds.⁵⁹ Eventually the functions of these organizations were taken over by the Yevsektsiia, as it grew in size and ability, and the Yevobkom organizations had served their purpose in addressing a temporary, yet crisis ridden situation.⁶⁰

The Yevkom did not have a long history after its tumultuous beginnings. Organizationally the Jewish Commissariat was to be formed into sections of the local Soviets, subordinate to a regional Jewish Soviet, that held its own congresses, and finally congresses would be held at the All-Russian level to elaborate a policy "for all questions touching on Jewish life."⁶¹ The organization was never elaborated to such an extent, and was abandoned in favour of setting up Jewish sections in the Party on a territorial

⁵⁹ C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.237 and Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.59.

⁶⁰ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.238-239 and 241. By 1921, many of the extra-Party members of the organizations had left, giving the Yevsektsiia even greater control. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.241.

⁶¹ Di varheit, June 2, 1918, quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.125.

basis, and instead the administrative apparatus to coordinate Jewish work in the state was established on an extra-territorial basis.⁶²

The greater emphasis given to Party organizations over the state was mirrored in Jewish work, and Yevkom's activities became the province of the Jewish Sections of the RCP(b), (the Yevseksiia). In 1920, the Yevkom was changed to a Jewish Department of the Peoples' Commissariat for Nationalities. At the local level Yevkom organs often functioned briefly in order to prepare the way for the establishment of local Jewish sections of the Party apparatus.⁶³ Following a further reshuffling in 1924 all that remained of Yevkom was a single official, the "instructor of Jewish affairs", an office which one author described as "merely a vestigial organ".⁶⁴

The Yevseksiia were established in July 1918, shortly after the Yevkom. The early history of the Yevseksiia was tied to its counterpart in the state apparatus. The political and personnel problems that had led to a purge of the Yevkom gave impetus to the establishment of Jewish organizations in

⁶² See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp. 125-126, esp. f.n.49.

⁶³ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.95.

⁶⁴ C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.245, Gurevitz, Op.Cit., p.27, Baron, Op. Cit., p.192 and Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.102.

the Party.⁶⁵ The rush to straighten out the Yevkom organization at all levels and the move to swiftly create Jewish sections in the party left the Bolsheviki with two organizations that were poorly staffed and disorganized, and the hurried conditions under which the Yevsektsiia were founded lead to an overlap in the practical work of the two organizations.⁶⁶

According to Semen Dimanshtain the Yevsektsiia's mandate was to perform a "dual task: on the one hand, the purely technical assignment of propagandizing among Jewish workers; on the other hand, we must make the dictatorship of the proletariat prevail in the Jewish street..."⁶⁷ These "tasks", elaborated at the First Conference of Jewish Sections and Jewish Commissariats, differed little from the broad mandate of Yevkom. The difference in activities varied little, especially as the Yevsektsiia later assumed the functions of Yevkom as the latter was being parred down. However, the class priorities of the Sections made them a creature of the party and its general line.

⁶⁵ Agurskii, Der idisher arbiter, pp.23ff, cited in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.96.

⁶⁶ C.f. Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.95, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.144, Levin, Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, p.55 and Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.26.

⁶⁷ Dimanshtain is quoted by Samuil Agurskii, in Di Idische komisariatn, pp.21f., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.97.

In October of 1918, a Conference between the Yevseksiia and Yevkom was held the better coordinate their activities. In a discussion of the reasoning behind the establishment of the Yevseksiia Dimanshtain made clear his estimate of the breadth of Yevseksiia activity, and how it might differ from Yevkom.

The general [organization of the] Russian Communist Party is not in a position to conduct its activities in different languages. Jewish Communist sections have to be set up...

Our main task is to carry out everything the communist party undertakes to do. We are not a separate party existing by itself; we are merely a part of the Communist Party, the part made up of Jewish workers.

Since we are internationalists, we do not set ourselves any special national tasks, but only class tasks as proletarians. Since we speak our own language, we have to see to it that the Jewish masses have a chance to satisfy all their intellectual needs in that language...⁶⁸

The Yevkom had attempted to bridge differences between non-party Jewish organizations and served short term government aims and requirements. The Yevseksiia, by contrast were Party organs governed by the class attitudes of the Party, and were committed to the "internationalism" and "proletarianism" of their parent organization, which left no room for compromise with other classes or any other non-socialist social forms.

⁶⁸ Agurskii, Der idisher arbeter, pp.f. quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.97.

The positive role of Yevkom in alleviating the economic and social dislocation and "coordinating" the various non-party organizations to this end was not emulated by the Yevseksiia, during Militant Communism. Yevseksiia declared class war as the Yevkom had, but was far more vigilant in its efforts to destroy traditional institutions. It was the instrument of the dictatorship of the Jewish proletariat, and had its "special tasks in the Jewish street."⁶⁹ Its resolution abolishing the *kehillot* provides an illustration.

...all institutions hitherto operating in the Jewish quarter, like the "communities" and the rest, no longer have any place in our life... All such institutions and establishments are harmful to the essential interests of the broad Jewish masses whom they lull by saccharine songs of alleged Jewish democratism.⁷⁰

Let us destroy the old, outmoded forms of national activity and create new ones in the spirit of the new world, a world which has arisen from the socialist revolution!⁷¹

The Yevseksiia had the mandate to carry out the first phase of the revolution. Their work towards the complete destruction of traditional Jewish life to prepare the way for socialism was completely in line with Lenin's characterization of War Communism as the imposition of communism "by assault".

⁶⁹ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.99.

⁷⁰ Quoted without reference by Baron, Op. Cit., p.175.

⁷¹ Agurskii, Der idisher arbeter, pp.155ff., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.99.

In the Yevsektsiia Dimanshtain had envisioned the establishment of an "organization 'somewhat similar' to the independent Jewish labour parties, 'and afterwards, in the course of the work, in time, the Jewish activists would become convinced that they must tie themselves closer to the party and reject their isolation.'" ⁷² This vision of the Yevsektsiia was called into question by Yakov Sverdlov, who had great authority in all matters of party organization. Far from encouraging the establishment and flourishing of Jewish sections in the RCP(b), Dimanshtain believed the Sverdlov "wanted only a Jewish party newspaper and no more..." ⁷³ The limited scope entailed by Sverdlov's position soon fell to the wayside when Dimanshtain appealed directly to Lenin, who "approved (Dimanshtain's) views and the possibility of far-reaching Jewish work was created." ⁷⁴ Lenin's support of

⁷² Semen Dimanshtain, "10 yor komprese in yidish," Emes, February 29, 1918, (hereafter, "10 yor"), quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.123. The edge was taken off of Dimanshtain's hopes for the Yevsektsiia when the status of the sections was called into question following the establishment of the territorial communist parties at the end of 1918. See Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.26.

⁷³ Dimanshtain, "10 yor" quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.123.

⁷⁴ Dimanshtain, "10 yor" quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.124. The result of Lenin's support for Jewish sections in the party was certainly a wider scope of activity the mere running of a "Jewish paper." However, Lenin's support was not unqualified. He shared some of the reservations that Sverdlov expressed with great vehemence. In particular, Lenin was worried about the Party "fall(ing) into Bundism," but lent his support because "(the Bolsheviks) could not go against

Dimanshtain over Sverdlov had given the go ahead to an institution which aspired, with great ambition, to change the face of Russian Jewry.

Unfortunately, the initial reaction of Sverdlov proved to be usual in many areas of Soviet Russia, and appeals to the centre to allow the Yevsektsiia to carry out its work were all too common. The lack of support for Jewish work among state and party officials made the wish to take "far-reaching" initiatives by the head of Yevkom problematic. The scepticism with which Jewish organizations were viewed by other officials caused endless difficulties for the Jewish officials. Local state and Party officials saw Jewish organizations as a nuisance and were even suspicious of new personnel.

Part of the reason Yevkom probably lacked credibility in the eyes of many "old Bolsheviks", was because of its personnel. In its desperation for staff the Yevkom hoped only that its personnel would "stand on the Soviet platform". The following appeal appeared in *Di varheit* some six months after Yevkom's founding, "We turn to all Jewish comrades who support the platform of the Soviet government [Bolsheviks, Left SR's,

national needs." C.f. Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.26 and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.119-120.

Poalai Tsion, Left Bundists, etc.] to help us in our work..."⁷⁵ The Jewish apparatus was being staffed with the very people the Bolsheviks had had running battles with in the pre-revolutionary era, which made for poor relations.⁷⁶

The record of relations between Jewish party workers and local officials varied. In the Ukraine relations between the Yevsektsiia and local party officials deteriorated rapidly, and at one point the Yevsektsiia were all but eliminated.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the relations between the Yevsektsiia in Byelorussia and Union party officials were generally good. Each lent the other support in their demands of the central apparatus, and the "alliance" met with some success.⁷⁸

Despite the rallying cries of Yevsektsiia officials to take the dictatorship of the proletariat into the Jewish street, they were plagued by the problem of personnel. Both shortages of ideologically pure persons who spoke Yiddish, and the difficulties of having to worry about relying on non-Bolshevik personnel presented problems for the Yevsektsiia.

⁷⁵ Di varheit, June 11, 1918, quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.130, f.n.63.

⁷⁶ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol. 1, p.56.

⁷⁷ See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.252-254.

⁷⁸ See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.263.

In 1921, the merger of the Bund and the RCP(b) provided the Yevseksiia with some badly needed personnel and a leadership conversant with and sensitive to the circumstances of the Jewish proletariat.

The attitudes of the Bundists who joined the Yevseksiia were effectively expressed by Ester Frumkin after the final congress of the Bund, where it was decided to merge with the RCP.

The merger was done for the sake of the Jewish interest and for the sake of the revolution in the Jewish areas. The merger was a sacrifice that we had taken upon ourselves for the success of the revolution among the Jews. Our main concern was to work among the Jews, and the only way to succeed was to work through the Yevseksiia and continue to fulfil Bundist ideas..⁷⁹

There was little possibility of the Bund remaining as a political entity in Russia under Bolshevism. The Bundist leadership entered the Yevseksiia optimistic that they would be able to use the Jewish sections to continue their commitment to work with the Jewish masses. The opportunity to lead the Jewish proletariat to socialism was the most important contribution ex-Bundist could make.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Der Veker, April 18, 1921, quoted in Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.38.

⁸⁰ C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.210-213, 225 and 228, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.64, and 65.

Once Bundists made the decision to join the RKP and the Yevsektsiia their dilemmas were far from over. Most had decided to accept Bolshevik hegemony, but only to continue working with Jews. The loyalties of the Bundists were to socialism and the needs of the Jewish community during the transition to socialism. The price of remaining active was to give emphasis to the task of building socialism. Its consequences for Jews had to be subordinated to that end.

We must consider the probability of... assimilation... and we must by our approach, accustom Jewish workers and Jewish public figures not to Judge this or that activity from the point of view of national self-preservation but from the point of view of its usefulness to socialist construction.⁸¹

The Bundists' sympathy for Jewish conditions did not modify the Yevsektsiia's programme to destroy Jewish traditions and institutions. It is arguable that the Bundists felt compelled to give up dissenting views on questions of ideology, particularly after the Party purge of 1921, which saw the ex-Bundists' numbers drop by half.

The former Bundists may have been muted by the suspicions that characterized the views of some of the Yevsektsiia officials. In the words of one official writing in *Der emes*:

...it is no secret that we have members who were won over to the party solely because the Soviet government does not pogromize the Jews. The Jewish

⁸¹ Alfarbandishe Baratung fun de Idishe Sekties fun der A.KP(B), Shul un Bukh, Moscow, 1927, p.127, as quoted in Gurevitz, Op. Cit., pp.89-90.

question was the door through which they came to us...Stress should be laid...on whether these members have truly freed themselves of petit bourgeois and religious beliefs...⁸²

The Yevseksiia did have problems bringing in personnel whose motivations were not necessarily the same as the Bolsheviks'. What was different from Yevkom was the socialist outlook of most of the new personnel. There was a greater coincidence of interests between Bolsheviks and the former Bundists who joined the Yevseksiia. Those coming from outside of the Bolshevik party may have felt the need to compensate for their questionable Party credentials and were more ready to conform to Bolsheviks than the non-Bolsheviks who had been involved in Yevkom.

The infusion of a number of Bundists into the Yevseksiia elite was a significant event. Bundists offered much needed experience working the Jewish streets, and were sensitive to the difficult circumstances faced by many Jews and saw a role for the Yevseksiia in relief efforts. The boost in the quality of the Yevseksiia's personnel was important. One analyst even speculates that the infusion of Bundists into the Yevseksiia may have been responsible for its continued existence.⁸³

⁸² Der emes, September 16, 1921, quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.222-223.

⁸³ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.230.

The end of the Bund was also the end of all the Yevsektsiia's chief remaining rival on the Jewish Streets. The Bundists had their own brand of social democracy, and their own revolutionary tradition that had been much more successful among Jews than the Bolsheviks had been. Many of the Bundists had bitterly opposed the Bolshevik takeover. However, it became clearer that the divisions caused by the disagreements over how to treat the Bolshevik ascension to power, and the difficulties arising from the confusion and upheaval of the Civil War were precipitating the disintegration of the Bund. While the Bolsheviks had been accumulating more power and the forces pulling the Bund apart were increasingly difficult to resist.⁸⁴

Despite great difficulties the Jewish apparatus was successful in attaining some of its goals. During the early years of the regime the Yevkom and the Yevsektsiia were able to gain a toehold in the Jewish communities, and exert some influence over them. More importantly many non-Bolshevik Jewish organizations were neutralized by being disbanded, or being brought under the influence of the Bolshevik Jewish apparatus having provided useful and necessary work in the

⁸⁴ On the demise of the Bund in Soviet Russia see Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.169-215, Gurevitz, pp.30-31 and 34-35 and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.59-67, *passim*.

Jewish community.

2.4 Jewish Nationality Status

If the establishment of Jewish institutions within the state and party apparatus was an indication that Jews were being given, even in a partial way, status as a nationality, it was a temporary concession tailored to the requirements of the moment. Like the elaboration of Jewish state and Party organizations and the many social welfare activities among Jews, the Bolsheviks' selective recognition of some features of Jewish nationality would expand the Bolsheviks' opportunities to reach out to its Jewish population.

The issue of Jewish nationality was a difficult one during the first years of the regime. Officially, Jewish "nationality" was still considered to reside in the their reaction to the prejudice of other social groups, the vestiges of an outdated religion, and the propaganda of the reactionary bourgeois-clerical community elite, whose privileged positions relied on the closed nature of the Jewish community. It seemed unlikely that the status of Jews as a nationality would receive support in the constitution, because Jews failed to satisfy the demographic and territorial requirements in any of the political administrative units of the fledgling

regime.⁸⁵ However, the Bolsheviks could not have simply ignored the Jews. The politics of the Civil War placed Jews at the centre of too many problems requiring their attention. The status of Jews as a nationality would have to be considered. The Bolsheviks' solution was to straddle both sides of the fence between theory and practice by granting limited recognition of Jewish nationality.

The regime needed allies, and the Jews were numerous in areas where there was limited support for the Bolsheviks. The support of Jews, like that of the nationalities in other regions of Russia held the potential of stabilizing the regime.⁸⁶ The contradiction between the "centrist-integrationist theoretical position... and the actual policy... (which) was to win... the confidence of the nationalities of Russia"⁸⁷ certainly came into play as the

⁸⁵ It should be noted that for much of this period the Bolshevik's control over the territories where the bulk of Russian Jewry resided was most tenuous, and it was impossible to set up a permanent administrative apparatus until the end of the Civil War.

⁸⁶ The Bolsheviks were sensitive to the possibilities offered by the support of Jews. Some years later, Stalin was reported to have remarked following the signing of the Non-aggression Pact with Nazi Germany that he "could not yet dispense with Jews in key positions." Meir Michaelis, "'Jewish Bolshevism' and Russo-German Relations in 1933: a Documentary Note", Soviet Jewish Affairs, No.2, Nov., 1971, p.117, f.n.7.

⁸⁷ Altshuler, "Jewish National Survival", p.74. Altshuler's assessment is echoed, and expanded in Walker Conner's assessment of Bolshevik position on the nationality question during the early 1920s. See Walker Conner, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy,

Bolsheviks considered the problem of Jewish nationality. The compromise, as was the case with compromises in the national question in general, was only supposed to take the edge off the Bolsheviks' ultimate objective of overseeing the homogenization of Soviet society. The "centrist-integrationist theoretical position" may have been somewhat diluted by the exigencies of the moment, but that was not a signal to abandon teleologically derived long term goals, or not to continue to try and realize them where ever possible.

The expectation that Jews would be assimilated if only the various obstacles to that process could be removed, was reflected in the Bolshevik treatment of Jews as a nationality. Although they might have wished otherwise, the Bolsheviks could not afford to treat Jews as a religious group with an artificial national conscience that survived only under pressure from the society around them. Jews felt themselves to be distinct from other groups in society. Moreover, the rampant antisemitism of the times would not have allowed Jews to be easily assimilated into the surrounding population. The state of relations between Jews and the rest of the population did not alter the long term expectations of the Bolsheviks, but it did contribute to the contradictory nature of their policy of short term compromise.

The contradictions present in the Bolsheviks' policy aims were manifest in their efforts to take their message to the Jewish street. Communicating with Jews in their own language was essential for the Bolsheviks' attempts to gain influence in the Jewish community. It meant temporarily recognizing the legitimacy of some features of Jewish national life, while at the same time combatting other features of Jewish nationality. The acceptance of Yiddish, the "jargon" of the Jewish street, as the locus of an acceptable secular Jewish culture provides an example of the former tendency. The active discouragement of the Hebrew language as part of the effort to combat Judaism and Zionism is an example of the second tendency.

The work of the Yevkom and the Yevseksiia during Militant Communism was described as a manifestation of the Civil War in the Jewish Street.⁸⁸ One example of the Jewish

⁸⁸ The term "Jewish civil war" was used to describe the efforts of Jewish communists against the ideas and institutions and the stiff opposition that was encountered. For example during one anti-Zionist campaign it was remarked "...we are dealing with a manifestation of Jewish civil war... this concretizes the dictatorship of the Jewish proletariat in the Jewish street...[and] the time has come when the civil war in the Jewish world will be, not a paper revolution, but one of deeds, sweeping out Jewish Reaction." See Tsherikover, In der tkufe fun revolutsie: memoirn, materialn, dokumentn, Vol.I, Yidisher Literarisher Farlag, Berlin, 1924, quoted in Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-30, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, p.273.

Civil War was the treatment received by Yiddish and Hebrew. Yiddish was considered the language of the Jewish street, where the Bolsheviks hoped to gain influence among the Jewish petty bourgeoisie and proletariat.⁸⁹ Yiddish was associated with a secular literature that could serve the masses under the Soviets even in the pre-revolutionary era. In contrast to the support received by Yiddish Hebrew was the object of intense activity to purge it from Soviet Jewish life. Hebrew was considered as the language of Judaism and Zionism, and was described as a "dead language" from the pre-revolutionary era, and even called a foreign language.

The contrast in the treatment of the two languages was often couched in terms of class. One article described the class struggle in terms of the two languages in the following terms:

It is clear that the struggle between the two currents- Yiddishists and Hebraist- is a fight between the worker and the petite bourgeois element,

⁸⁹ According to the census of 1897 some ninety seven percent of Jews claimed Yiddish as their first language. See William Korey, "The Legal Position of Soviet Jewry: A Historical Enquiry", in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.79. It should be noted that approximately 74.2% of Jews were artisans, petty traders, workers or unemployed. The figure includes: Workers (14.8%); Family members who are assisting in work (10.2%); Self-employed, without employees (21.0%); Self-employed, with employees (2.5%); Self-employed, with family assistance (8.6%); Unskilled labourers (7.8%); and unemployed (9.3%). See Gurevitz, Op. Cit., Table 7, p.70.

between the progressive and the clerical trends.⁹⁰

The clash between the Yiddishists and the Hebraists over language policies for schools and cultural affairs was one which owed its origins to debates in the Jewish community before the revolution.

As Yehoshua Gilboa contends in a well reasoned argument, there were no obvious grounds in Bolshevik ideology or policy for the treatment of Hebrew as a "dead language" of reactionary elements in the Jewish community.⁹¹ Indeed when one rabbi went to see Lunacharsky, Commissar for Education, to protest policies restricting the use of Hebrew in Jewish schools he was met with the following response:

I don't know of anyone who is disputing the value of Hebrew except your own brothers- the Jewish communists. They maintain that since Hebrew is the language of the bourgeois and not of the masses, it can have no rightful place in public schools.⁹²

The evidence points to the Jews in the apparatus as the source of the Hebrew language's suppression. The debates between secularist, and left of centre non-Zionists in favour of

⁹⁰ Sh. Genrich, "Tsu Unser Konferents", Kulture un Bildung, 7 (October 15, 1918), pp.1-2, quoted in Yehoshua A. Gilboa, A Language Silenced: The Suppression of Hebrew Literature and Culture in the Soviet Union, Herzl Press, New York, 1982, p.70.

⁹¹ Gilboa, Op. Cit., pp.47-65.

⁹² Jacob Maze, Zichronot, Vol.4, Tel Aviv, 1936, pp.12-14, quoted in Zvi Haley, Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism: A Struggle for Cultural Identity, Springer Publishing Company, New York, 1976, p.131.

developing Yiddish as the language of Jewish culture, and religiously minded people and Zionists who favoured Hebrew were intense.⁹³ If nothing else elements of the former group found themselves in positions of authority in the Bolshevik Jewish apparatus and their views, which were not inconsistent with the achievement of the regime's long term objectives, prevailed.

What ever its impetus, the struggle to eradicate Hebrew was consistent with attempt to remove all manifestations of Jewish religiosity and nationalism. Its disappearance was consistent with the promotion of cultural homogenization. As the language of the Bible and the Prayer Book, the sanctions against Hebrew were in line with the anti-religious campaign. Its literature was laden with biblical images, and its revival in the years prior to the revolution was partly inspired the growing Zionist movement. If Jewish communists wanted to destroy expressions of their religious and cultural heritage the Bolsheviks were willing to stand back and let them.

The attempt to establish a Yiddish education system illustrates the different sides of the Bolsheviks recognition

⁹³ On the debates over Yiddish and Hebrew see, Ch. Shmeruk, "Yiddish Literature in the U.S.S.R.", in Kochan, Op. Cit., pp.243-244, Haley, Op. Cit., pp.75-78, and Elias Schulman, A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union, Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1971, pp.1-15 *passim*.

of Yiddish. The educational setting was right for the inculcation of new values, and the dispelling of old ones, for promoting the dual revolutionary tendencies of progress and destruction. Education was an instrument of the proletariat, an agent of propaganda to further society's transformation.⁹⁴ In the short term, public education afforded the Bolsheviks another opportunity to expand its role in Jewish community.

Yiddish schools provided the Bolsheviks with a forum suited to the conduct of an extensive propaganda campaign against Jewish traditional life, culture and institutions. It was also a chance to promote secular Yiddish culture and proletarian values. The directives of the Third Congress of Jewish communists are indicative of the comprehensive goals of Yiddish education.

The Chief aim of all cultural and educational work among the Jewish population is to develop among the Jewish people a communist ideology, to deepen their class consciousness, to strengthen the struggle of the Jewish proletariat and to prepare it for the rebuilding of society.

Therefore, the conference recommends that the Jewish educational organizations free themselves of those cultural traditions that are a result of a different epoch and do not express the needs of the present epoch of the universal proletarian revolution. The activity and work of the technical organizations

⁹⁴ Lenin described the role of education in the following terms: "In the field of public education the Communist Party strives to convert the school, which was a tool of the ruling capitalist class, into an arm to completely destroy the class society and into a means of rebuilding the old society into a new communist society." Lenin, quoted in Schulman, Op. Cit., p.76.

should be the introduction of proletarian culture in all fields of education.⁹⁵

The far reaching goals and expectations were typical of the scope given to Jewish educational work. Yiddish language schools were used of necessity to promote the values of proletarian society. However its negative function probably had more impact. Its function was not just to promote the values of the proletariat, it was to sever the ties between Jewish children and their past. It replaced the *heder*, (elementary religious schools) an institution important to the process of passing Jewish culture and tradition from one generation to the next, and had been useful in the removal of Hebrew from the educational experiences of Jewish children.

The course of the Yiddish school system's development between 1918 and 1921 was uneven. Many areas were not brought under Bolshevik control until 1920, and in the chaos and confusion in areas that were subjected to Bolshevik rule it was not always possible to organize educational work. The example of the Ukraine is striking.

To the Comrade Commissars:

Six weeks have passed since the Ministry of Jewish Affairs was taken over by the Soviet government. During this period no work has been done by the Department of Education. Inquiries and memoranda have not been acknowledged, nor answered. Thus, the very idea of Jewish public education is being

⁹⁵ *Yedies-Partei-Materialn*, (News- Party materials) of the Central Bureau of the Jewish sections of the Russian Communist Party, No.1, Moscow, October 20, 1920, p.25, as quoted Schulman, *Op. Cit.*, p.80.

discredited, and its very foundation is being destroyed. We the officials, do not know what to do. we therefore ask to be relieved of our duties.⁹⁶

The letter is signed by five Senior Education officials, the Director of the Department of Education, the Director of Schools, the Director of Out-School Department, the Director of Publications, and the Director of Pre-school Dept. At a time when there were complaints about the sabotage of the Yiddish schools by Jewish intellectuals and teachers it is surprising that the Bolsheviks let the opportunity of taking over the considerable apparatus for Jewish education set up under the Ukrainian Rada.⁹⁷

The establishment of a Yiddish school system had been difficult, but it was far from a disaster from the regimes point of view. The Yiddish schools had made an important contribution to the struggle against the influence of the Jewish past. An apparatus, however basic, to oversee the full elaboration of a Yiddish school system was established. Many

⁹⁶ Abram Revultsky, In di Shvere Teg af Ukraine, (In the Difficult Days of the Ukraine), Berlin, 1924, p.181, as quoted in Schulman, Op. Cit., pp.43-44.

⁹⁷ Samuil Agurskii had complained that plans for the Yiddish school system were unfulfilled because of the Jewish intelligentsia who "conducted a fanatical campaign against the Soviet power and especially the Jewish Commissariat. Every effort by the Jewish Commissariat was met with bitter opposition and sabotage by the Jewish intelligentsia." Agurskii, Der idisher arbeter, p.28 as quoted in Zvi Halevy, Jewish Schools under Czarism and Communism: a struggle for cultural identity, Springer Publishing Company, New York, 1976, p.161.

non-Bolshevik schools were taken over. A curriculum matching the propaganda needs of the regime was instituted and one feature of Jewish life and culture, the Hebrew language, was effectively isolated.

2.5 Judaism and the Anti-Religious Campaign

One area the Jewish apparatus excelled in was the anti-religious campaign. However, the successes in this area were not theirs alone. The anti-religious laws of the regime laid the ground work for the destructive efforts of the Yevseksiia. A summary of the anti-religious laws and their effects on Jews is appropriate at this juncture.

The attack on Jewish religious and community institutions destroyed a great deal of Jewish life. The institutions functioning to perpetuate and facilitate this community life were both religious and secular, and equally indistinguishable in their roles in the religious and secular life of the community. During the early years of the regime the most important features linking Jewish secular and community life were the first to come under attack.

Under the Tsars Jews were able to govern their own cultural and religious affairs through a **kehillah** or community

council.⁹⁸ After the overthrow of the Tsar the **kehillot** began to enjoy an even more active role in Jewish community life.⁹⁹ This was cut short in June 1919, when Stalin signed the act to dissolve the **kehillot** adopted at the first conference of Yevseksiia and Yevkom in 1918.¹⁰⁰

The **kehillah** was the institutional focal point uniting Jewish community and religious life. The proximity between its functions in these two spheres lay in the very nature of East European Jewish life. In the words of one author, "Religion and religious concepts permeated all walks of life. Indeed, the 'religious' observances were indistinguishable from the 'Jewish' customs and Jewish way of life."¹⁰¹ The responsibilities of the **kehillah** reflected the blending of

⁹⁸ There are three meanings of the term **kehillah** (plural form **kehillot**). "It can signify the totality of a Jewish community, or the institution that directs its affairs, or the governing body of that institution." The second meaning of the term will be used here. Mark Friedman, "The Kehillah in Lithuania 1919-1926: A Study Based on Panevezys and Ukmerge (Vilkomir)", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.6(2), 1976, p.83.

⁹⁹ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.70.

¹⁰⁰ Ironically the delay was caused by the inability of the Soviet government to fill the vacuum that would have been left by the immediate disbanding of the **Kehillot**. See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.271-272, and Joshua Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.171. (Hereafter, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union".)

¹⁰¹ Joshua Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1971, p.1. (Hereafter, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union.)

Jewish community and religious life. The *kehillah* organized the ritual slaughter and the distribution of Kosher meat for the community. The contributions from the sale of the meat, and various levies, such as the appropriation of funds from wealthy estates, kept the *kehillah* financially solvent. These funds went to help the disadvantaged in the community, paid the rabbi, and kept the network of educational and social services intact. The destruction of the *kehillah* did much to disrupt the Jewish community's institutional system of support and fragmented the functions of the community's religious personnel and institutions.¹⁰²

The legal status of Judaism did not differ from that of other confessions. Soviet laws on religion were an expression of class rule under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The mobilization of the state in the campaign to root out religion in Soviet Russia included firstly the attempt to undermine the influence of the church by destroying its social functions of the church and also to destabilize the very institution of the church itself. Judaism suffered as other religions suffered at the hands of the Bolsheviks, and the Yevseksiia made good use of the broad and sweeping nature of the laws on religion in its application of them to Jewish religious institutions, making the practice of Jewish religious rites difficult.

¹⁰² C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.297 and Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.171.

Following the October Revolution Lenin moved quickly to quash institutional power of the Russian Orthodox Church. To this end the Decree "On the Separation of Church from State and School from Church" was passed on January 23, 1918, by the Council of Peoples Commissars. The Decree denied the religious institutions property rights, prohibited the teaching of religion in school and rendered religious organizations legal non-entities. Together with other pieces of anti-religious legislation the Bolsheviks effected an assault on religion that left many religious institutions in a greatly weakened position. Although the initial target of Soviet religious legislation had been the Orthodox Church, some of the laws governing religious practice had little effect on Jewish religious practices. Others had struck at the heart of Jewish religious life.

Additionally, Judaism was subject to legislation that focused on Jewish religious institutions and religious rites, as were all other confessions. Legislation specifically directed against Judaism aimed to destroy the institutional support for Judaism, and to hamper the observance of religious rituals. In practice, many of the institutions and personnel central to the exercise of Judaic rites faced many difficulties but legally their existence was not prohibited. The real problem was the harassment afforded by the loose

wording of religious legislation and the legal technicalities of other laws that were not specific to religious matters, but were invoked to stop the uninhibited exercise of religious rites.

Various Jewish rituals came under official pressure although in some cases they were not prohibited. Two examples will suffice. There was nothing in Soviet law prohibiting the **shohet**, (religious slaughterer), from practising the **shehita**, or ritual slaughter.¹⁰³ For the most part the closure of **shohtim** were perpetrated on the grounds that they were unsanitary. The **shohtim**, were considered by the regime to be part of the clergy and, therefore, were declared **lyshentsy**. The tightest restrictions on the practice of kosher slaughtering were placed on the **shohtim** who had to register with the government on the grounds that the act of slaughter by the **shohet** was a religious rite and could only be performed by a member of the clergy. Also because the **shohet** was paid a fee for his services he had to registered for income tax purposes.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ There were prohibitions of ritual slaughter in some areas, but these were reversed, and there has never been a general ban on **shehita**. See Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.102.

¹⁰⁴ C.f. Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, pp.101-103.

The same sorts of tangential legal arguments circumscribed the operation of Mikvahs, (ritual bath houses). Going to the Mikvah was part of the male ritual preparations for the sabbath. The Mikvahs had been ravaged by the Civil War and the pogroms, and the Jewish community was unable to finance their restoration. The government only added to the difficulties by setting very high sanitation standards. Standards that put repairs fiscally out of the Jewish community's reach and left many of the Mikvahs closed.¹⁰⁵

Religious institutions were subject to the 1917 land reforms, and all church lands were confiscated without compensation. The deprivation of property rights under the January 23, 1918 Decree covered forms of property other than land, namely "buildings and objects especially used for the purposes of worship..."¹⁰⁶ Church property was the property of the people and was to be loaned to religious groups "by resolution of the local, or Central State authorities."¹⁰⁷ This

¹⁰⁵ See Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, pp.108-109.

¹⁰⁶ "Decree of the Soviet Commissars Concerning Separation of Church and State, and of School and Church", in Boleslaw Szczesniak, (Ed.), The Russian Revolution and religion: A Collection of Documents Concerning the Suppression of religion by the Communists, 1917-1925, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1959, p.35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.35. Article 4 of the "Resolution of the Commissariat of Justice Concerning Execution of the Decree of Separation of Church and State, and of School from Church" ordered that "all property which ... was under the management of the Orthodox Ecclesiastical Department and other religious

property was made available to registered religious associations who accepted them for use in the exercise of religious rites on condition that they, by agreement with the local Soviet, take responsibility for the care and maintenance of all religious articles.¹⁰⁸

In order for religious groups to retain their premises it was not just a matter of signing an agreement with local authorities. There was the threat of losing the premises. In 1919, a circular of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs was issued a guide to the closing of prayer houses. The following circumstances warranted closure:

- (1) In cases where there was a shortage of buildings for residential purposes, medical and sanitation services, cultural educational institutions, etc., the prayer houses could be appropriately converted;
- (2) at the instigation of "the mass of the people" through mass petitions, resolutions passed at meetings etc.¹⁰⁹

The circular provided the Yevseksiia with all it required to begin a closure campaign. Prayer houses were taken over for all these purposes, and more. Some were turned into office space, and one was even converted to a shoe factory.¹¹⁰

and ecclesiastical institutions and associations...be transferred to the direct management of the local Soviet of Workmen-Peasant Deputies..." See Ibid., p.40.

¹⁰⁸ See Ibid., pp.40 and 46-48.

¹⁰⁹ Areyeh, Y. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues in the Soviet Union", p.49. (Hereafter, "The Closure of Synagogues".)

¹¹⁰ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.117.

However, closures were rare before 1921.¹¹¹

There were a few reasons for the small number of closures during Militant Communism. It is worth remembering that the areas with the largest Jewish populations were not brought under the control of the Bolsheviks until 1921, when the worst anti-religious campaign of the pre-Stalin period began. The anti-religious campaign came in fits and starts, but much of the damage was done by the legislation, which served to undermine the institutional legitimacy of religion under Bolshevik rule. Harsher legislation did not come about until the Bolsheviks had won the Civil War and could begin an all out assault on religion. The chronology of the Yevsektzia's anti-religious efforts differed little from those of the regime in general.

The confiscation of church property and the closure of religious institutions was supplemented by the anti-religious legislation relating to the social functions of religion. The weakening of the legal status of organized religions' institutions was only a part of the anti-religious legislation. The legislation was designed to stop religious institutions from fulfilling their traditional social functions.

¹¹¹ C.f., Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.49, and Levin, Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.75.

The "Revolutionary Divorce Law" and the ordinance on "Marriage, Children, and Registration of Civil Status" deprived the church of important social functions including the registration of births, deaths and marriages. Under the purview of the state the religious marriage ceremony and other important public moments in religious life were deprived of legal status, and their registration was taken over by the state.¹¹² The institution of marriage was made a mockery of under the divorce law, which provided for the annulment of a marriage "by petition of both parties or even one of them," and the decisions of religious bodies which tried "suits for the annulment of marriage" were "declared null and void".¹¹³

The general laws on education also had a great effect on Jewish religious life. In addition to the confiscation of all monastical lands, religious organizations were ordered to "transfer their 'schools, seminaries, academies, lower, intermediate and higher schools and institutions of the religious bodies' to the People's Commissariat of Education."¹¹⁴

¹¹² C.f. "Revolutionary Divorce Laws" and "Marriage, Children, and Registration of Civil Status", in Szczesniak, Op. Cit., pp.29-31 and 31-33.

¹¹³ C.f. "Revolutionary Divorce Law", in Ibid., pp.29 and 30.

¹¹⁴ Joshua Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.6.

Unlike the places of worship, religious schools sponsored by organized religion would not be permitted in any form.

The legal status of less structured religious education was never clearly defined. Certainly it was not permitted in "state schools or any other schools where general subjects were taught". The most ambiguous legislation was that surrounding the clause on "free religious teaching in a private manner". The Decree separating schools from the church left religious instruction as a matter of private enterprise for all believers, but it was never made clear what "in a private manner" meant. There were restrictions that limited private teaching. Children were not allowed private instruction in an institution "organized like a school" nor could they be instructed in groups numbering more than three. Instruction in the home was defined as in the home of the child in the home of a priest or other instructor.

In the first years of the regime the persecution of Jewish religious schools was not particularly vigilant. There were different reasons for the survival of religious schools. The most important reason was the Bolsheviks did not have full control of the areas where most Jews lived until 1921. It is also likely that the regime was unable to offer any alternative especially during the Civil War when its priorities for allocating resources lay elsewhere. When it was

possible **heders** were taken over and converted into secular schools.

The closures were left to the Yevseksiia who found the **heders**, easy targets since it was possible to claim that the buildings were not up to standard, or that the subject matter was almost exclusively religious. Also many schools were in the same buildings as the synagogues so the closure of **heders** was a logical outcome of the larger campaign to close synagogues.

The anti-religious activities of the party picked up where the state legislation left off. The laws of the proletarian state had put all organized religions, including Judaism, under a great deal of pressure in the attempt to sever the religious affiliations of the toiling masses from the institutional forums of religion. The party and its various organs were at the head of the regime's efforts to propagate scientific atheism.

The Party's commitment to the anti-religious campaign was unequivocal. To quote the Programme of the All-Russian Communist Party, article 13:

With reference to religion, the All-Russian Communist Party does not content itself with the already decreed separation of church from state-i.e., with measures which are part of the program of bourgeois democracies, but never fulfilled in those democracies because of the many various ties

binding capital with religious propaganda.

The All-Russian Communist Party is guided by the conviction that only the realization of conscious and systemic social and economic activity of the masses will lead to the disappearance of religious prejudices. The aim of the Party is finally to destroy the ties between the exploiting classes and the organization of religious propaganda, at the same time helping the toiling masses actually to liberate their minds from religious superstitions, and organizing on a wide scale scientific-educational and anti-religious propaganda.¹¹⁵

The party programme clearly indicates the road "to the disappearance of religious prejudices." The role of the party was to stimulate this disappearance.

The party's anti-religious campaign amongst Jews was conducted by the Yevseksiia, who became tireless and enthusiastic in their struggles to save the "toiling masses" from the grip of reactionary clericalists.¹¹⁶ Anti-religious activities played an increasingly important and prominent part of Yevseksiia's work. In this area of work the Yevseksiia

¹¹⁵ See, Article 13, of the Russian Communist Party (bolshevik) Programme adopted at the 8th Party Congress, March 18-23, 1919, as found in "On Religion", in Szczesniak, Op. Cit., p.49.

¹¹⁶ Indeed such was the energetic nature of the Yevseksiia's anti-religious efforts one "non-Jewish Communist was moved to remark, 'It would be nice to see the Russian Communists tear into the monasteries and the holy days as the Jewish Communists do to Yom Kippur.'" From, Yaakov Lestschinsky, Dos sovietische idantum, Yiddisher Kemfer, New York, 1941, p.313, as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.304. Also see Judd L. Teller, The Ideology and History of Soviet Jewish Policy, Farbund-Labor Zionist Order, New York, 1964, pp.9 and 10.

took very seriously its dual purpose of "enforc(ing) government policies on the Jewish milieu, and to 'enlighten the Jewish masses in the materialistic outlook'".¹¹⁷ The conviction that the evil of clericalism had to be stamped out, or at the least have its ability to influence the "Jewish milieu" was given further stimulation by the regime's worries over the perception among many people that Judaism was not suffering as other religious confessions.

Beyond their role in the closure of synagogues, the anti-religious campaign of the Yevseksiia took two usual forms; ridicule and caricature of Judaism in the press and through public anti-religious "trials", and anti-religious carnivals and demonstrations. In its anti-religious propaganda the Yevseksiia organ, *Der emes*, often took aim at various Jewish rituals. For example, in their efforts to stop the practice of circumcision the Yevseksiia stressed "the alleged harmfulness of circumcision, the non-hygienic ways in which it is performed, and the lack of medical knowledge on the part of the *mohelim*, as well as the anti-religious arguments."¹¹⁸ The paper was also used to address the protests of Jews when Soviet laws interfered with the practice of Judaism. In 1922,

¹¹⁷ Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.172.

¹¹⁸ Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.146.

when the "Workers Bill of Rights" was passed it included a provision for Sunday to be the day of rest. The protests of Jews were ridiculed and condemned by *emes*, and the protesters labelled counter-revolutionaries. Other forms of ridicule in the press were cartoons and "semi-scholarly" articles about Jewish religious practices.¹¹⁹

The Bolshevik attempts to gain some means of influencing Jews in the areas under its control was largely successful, despite setbacks, and seemingly insurmountable problems. The institutional apparatus established to carry out Bolshevik policies in the street muddled through the difficulties they faced and participated with enthusiasm in the destruction of traditional Jewish life. What is most striking about the period between 1917 and 1921 is that a disorganized group of party functionaries with little meaningful support in the Jewish community could achieve any success at all. The answer was simple. The effectiveness of the Jewish organizations as instruments of class struggle was sporadic. The real sources of the destruction of Jewish life were World War I, the Civil War and the pogroms coupled with the general policies of the regime in the areas of religion and economics and the discrimination against "class enemies", all of which put enormous pressure on the many aspects of Jewish "traditional"

¹¹⁹ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.300.

life and institutions.

Chapter 3

Revolutionizing Jewish Life: The Jewish NEP and the First Phase of Soviet Jewry's Reconstruction

By the end of 1920 the former Pale of settlement was under the control of the Bolsheviki. Jews were no longer subject to the upheavals of the Civil War. Instead the policies which had caused upheaval in Jewish communities were extended to the Western extremes of the former Russian Empire. The purpose of the present chapter is to examine how Jewish life was effected by the general events and policies of the New Economic Policy (NEP), along with the effort of the Jewish apparatus to realize Bolshevik aims with respect to the reconstruction of Jews. It shows that the era of the NEP was a time of both destruction and rebuilding for most Jews, as well as, a time when much of traditional Jewish life was eroded.

In 1921, the Yevseksiia moved to implement its policies in the regions where many Jews had been recently brought under Soviet rule. Between 1921 and 1923, the policies of the Yevseksiia reflected the inconsistencies of Party policy. The most destructive campaigns of the NEP era took place during its first two years. The traditional institutions of Judaism remained focal points of the Yevseksiia's "Jewish Civil War".

3.1 Judaism and the Anti-Religious Campaign Under the NEP

The most significant fact in the assault on Judaism after 1921, was that the Bolshevik regime brought under its control the long established home of most of Russia's Jews, the Pale of Settlement. The Yevsektsiia was buoyed by an enlarged staff, and set about its work enthusiastically. Some mention has been made of the Yevsektsiia's harsh repression of Jewish tradition and it should be kept in mind, that the pressures to prove loyalty to the regime, and to show non-Jews that Jews were not receiving favourable treatment remained important.

In 1922, Lenin set the tone for the anti-religious campaign, which was to be "carr[ie]d out with maximum speed and ruthlessness."¹ Hoping to take advantage of the famine griping Soviet Russia, to finish undermining the institutional power of the Orthodox Church, while securing badly needed funds, Lenin had ordered the confiscation of religious valuables.

Now and only now when in the famine-stricken areas people are eating people, when there are hundreds if not thousands of dead bodies lying by the roadside, can we (and therefore must we) carry out the confiscation of church valuables with stupendous and merciless energy, not stopping at repressing any

¹ V. I. Lenin, "Lenin Attacks the Church", in Religion in Communist Lands, Vol.7(1), Spring, 1979, p.47.

sort of resistance. Not and only now the overwhelming majority of the peasant masses will be either for us, or, at all events, will not be in a position to support in any decisive way that handful of ultra-reactionary priests and bourgeois reactionaries who can and want to try out a policy of violent resistance to the Soviet Decree.²

The ensuing onslaught was one of the most violent periods of Soviet history. The campaign to collect valuables led to rioting, mass arrests, and the execution and exile of religious personnel.³

The events of 1922 were significant for the anti-religious campaign organized by the Yevsektsiia in two respects. First, Jews suffered the confiscation of church valuables.⁴ Second, and perhaps more importantly, there was a strong current of opinion which saw a clear link between the godless Bolsheviks destruction of the Orthodox Church, persecution of its personnel and the Jewish presence in the RCP(b). The Bolsheviks and the Yevsektsiia were concerned by the rumours. Lenin even went so far as make sure it was

² Lenin, "Lenin Attacks the Church", p.47.

³ C.f. Boleslaw Szczesniak, (Ed.), The Russian Revolution and Religion: A Collection of Documents Concerning the Suppression of Religion by the Communists, 1917-1925, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1959, pp.15-17, and Nicholas Sergeyevech Timasheff, Religion in Soviet Russia, 1917-1942, Sheed, New York, 1942, pp.28-30.

⁴ Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-30, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, p.273. (Hereafter, Jewish Nationality.)

understood that Trotsky was to make no public statements with regard to the campaign.⁵ The reaction of Jews in the Yevseksiia was more profound.

You do not understand the danger Jews face. If the Russian people begin to feel that we are partial to Jews, it will be harmful to Jews. It is for the sake of the Jews that we are completely objective in our dealing with the clergy- Jew and non-Jew alike. The danger is that the masses may think Judaism is exempt from anti-religious propoganda. Therefore, Jewish communists must be even more ruthless with rabbis than the non-Jewish communists are with priests.⁶

These strong words were born out in the actions of the Yevseksiia. In fact one non-Jewish Communist made the telling comment, "It would be nice to see the Russian communists tear into the monasteries and the holy days as the Jewish Communists do to Yom Kippur."⁷

Against the background of such pressures the Yevseksiia made forays into Jewish communities that had had little or no contact with Bolshevik rule before 1921. One author described what the Yevseksiia faced, as they entered the "complex Jewish world".

⁵ Lenin, "Lenin Attacks the Church", p.47.

⁶ Quotation from Boris D. Bogen, Born a Jew, MacMillan, New York, 1930, p.329, in Nora Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, new York University Press, New York, 1988, p.73, also quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.310.

⁷ Yaakov Lestschinsky, Dos sovetishe identum, Yidisher Kemfer, New York, 1941, p.313. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.304.

Here, a formidable array of traditional institutions and loyalties balked their advance: the intricate synagogue and kehillah structures, the force of traditional Judaism, networks of Jewish schools and teachers, social cultural, and economic secular organizations, the numerous Zionist organizations, and the Hebrew cultural movement- all of which formed trusted and familiar sources of loyalty and authority to their members, and all of which were opposed to Bolshevik ideology.⁸

With all of the pressures acting on the Yevseksiia in mind it is not hard to see why its members felt it was necessary to act vigorously and purposefully, as they waged their anti-religious struggles against the communities of the Pale.⁹

The first focused assaults on Judaism began in 1921 and continued unabated until 1924. The *kehillot* were abolished because they were "a nest of the reactionary bourgeois and clerical elements", and they did not limit themselves to

⁸ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.73-74.

⁹ Trotsky was a dissenting voice in regard to the harshness of the Yevseksiia. "Trotsky...counselled moderation in the methods of anti-religious propaganda... and advised 'a milder and even respectful attitude toward those who, because of their background, cannot lift their minds to an understanding of modern ideas.'" Boris D. Bogen, Born a Jew, Macmillan, New York, 1930, p.329, quoted in Joseph Nedava, Trotsky and the Jews, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1972, pp.107-108. Trotsky's urging came in 1923, when the anti-religious campaign broke down completely after having produced an enormous backlash. At that time the party generally pushed for restraint. However, Trotsky, and many of the other Bolsheviks in the RCP(b) had not been involved in the pre-revolutionary disputes of Jewish politics, that contributed to the Yevseksiia's zeal.

religious matters.¹⁰ Synagogues and prayer houses were closed, and rabbis shot. Jews signed petitions to protest the closures but usually without effect.

Prior to 1921, neither the Yevseksiia nor the Bolsheviks had the resources to wage a full campaign against religion, but with the end of the Civil War that was now possible. The various "legal" provisions could now be brought into force to close synagogues.¹¹ The anti-religious legislation had provided for the transfer of religious buildings to workers upon request. This provision was used to effect a closure campaign, and included the closure of synagogues. The Yevseksiia were active in carrying out the policies of the regime by orchestrating the closure of synagogues and other religious institutions. Using the instruction on the separation of church from state the local Yevsektsy would call a packed meeting to discuss the use of a synagogue and they would call for a vote on whether or not the building should be given over fully as a cultural centre for working men.¹²

¹⁰ Avrahm Yarmolinsky, The Jews and Other Minor Nationalities Under the Soviets, Vanguard Press, New York, 1928, p.120.

¹¹ Aryeh Y. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues in the Soviet Union", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.3(1), 1973, pp.48-49. (Hereafter, "The Closure of Synagogues".)

¹² Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.51.

Choral synagogues were singled out for particular persecution. Typically choral synagogues were situated in large cities, and served a "relatively well-to-do and less Orthodox public."¹³ Sometimes it was asserted that such people were not attending for religious purposes, but to use the choral synagogue like a club. Often the Yevseksiia used a series of staged meetings and letters to the editors pressed for the closure choral synagogues.¹⁴

The Yevseksiia were usually successful in their attempts to close synagogues and prayer houses. Jews did not, however, stand by without protest. Central authorities were petitioned. In some cases violence broke out, and in one famous incident the cavalry was called in to remove Jews standing wrapped in their prayer shawls, blocking the way of officials, and hurling mud and stones at "workers" who tried to "liberate" the synagogue.¹⁵

¹³ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.50.

¹⁴ C.f. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.50 and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.77.

¹⁵ C.f. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.49, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.76-77, Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.174, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.306. For accounts of similar incidents c.f., Yodfat "The Closure of Synagogues" p.49 and Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, pp.40-42.

The closure of synagogues was complicated by the problem of antisemitism. The closure of Orthodox Churches and the confiscation of religious articles had outraged Christians, and the Jewish presence in the midst of the activists only furthered their anger. The result was the repression of Jewish clerics and the closure of synagogues on a scale out of proportion with the size of the Jewish religious community relative to the other religious confessions in a given region, because the closure of one Orthodox church often led to the closure of a synagogue.¹⁶

One major propaganda initiative was the trying of various Jewish rituals and institutions. These events often coincided with Jewish holidays. A summary of the proceedings of one trial of Judaism based on a contemporary report reads as follows:

On **Rosh Hashonoh**, 1921, the **Evseksiia** in Kiev "tried the Jewish religion...According to a non-communist source, a weird cast of characters appeared before the "judges": a lady dressed in old-fashioned clothes explained that she sent her children to **kherder** because, she proclaimed haughtily, she was no "low-class tailor or cobbler" but of a "distinguished religious family." This was submitted as evidence that the Jewish religion was a creature of the bourgeoisie. A "rabbi" testified that he taught religion in order to keep the masses ignorant and servile... After further testimony by a corpulent "bourgeois," bedecked with glittering gold and diamond rings, the **Evseksiia** "prosecutor"

¹⁶ C.f. Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.39, and Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.176, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union, Vol.1, p.71.

summarized the "case against the Jewish religion" and asked for a "sentence of death for the Jewish religion."... The "judges" retired to their chambers and returned with a verdict of death to the Jewish religion.¹⁷

The offensive attempt to link the institutions of Judaism and Jewish religious personal to the bourgeoisie met with little success. At the "trial" the "rabbi", who had admitted to "poison[ing] Jewish youth with religious fairy tales and chauvinistic ideas", was called a "lying ignoramus," by someone in the crowd, who was greeted by the "stormy applause" of his fellows in the audience. Later a Hebrew teacher defended Judaism and also carried the crowd with him. Both these men were arrested and neither their protests, nor the sympathies of the crowd had any effect on the "verdict".¹⁸

The trials covered numerous topics including Jewish religious schools, circumcision and other aspects of Jewish religious life.¹⁹ One trial in Vitebsk, to try the *heder* was called off after a crowd of 5,000 gathered outside threatening to close the theatre down if the trial proceeded. The trial

¹⁷ Y.K.D., "Der mishpet iber der yidisher religie", in Elias Tsherikover, (Ed.), In der tkufe fun revolutsie: memoirn, materialn, dokumentn, Vol.1, Yidisher Literarisher Farlag, Berlin, 1924, pp.385ff, as found in Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.301. A discussion of the same "trial" may be found in Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.78-79.

¹⁸ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.301.

¹⁹ C.f. Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union," pp.172-173.

proceeded at a later date. Evidence was presented to show that the heders were "veritable pigsties in which the boys spent unconscionably long hours under masters ignorant of the rudiments of pedagogy." The verdict went against the heder, and a condemnation was issued stated that the heder "tend[ed] to produce a generation of mentally weak and spiritless human beings, in short, as representing counter-revolution in education."²⁰ Such efforts often backfired provoking a hostile reaction from Jews, rather than persuading them to give up Judaism.

Rooting out religious rituals and practices even from the vanguard organizations was difficult. Despite the ban on the circumcision of Jewish party member's male offspring and the sanctions against those who violated the ban, many Jewish party officials, continued to have their children circumcised.²¹ The easy identification between religious and secular life in Jewish culture made the destruction of the links to religious holidays hard, as the account of the following incident attests.

In a small Soviet town, after the conclusion of Simachas Torah services in the synagogue, the worshippers started to dancing on the street, whereupon young people, among them members of the

²⁰ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.123-124. C.f. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.78, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.301.

²¹ Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, pp.142 and 147-149.

Komsomol, joined the dancing circle. This so enraged the local Party officials that an investigation was initiated which "discovered" that "party work in the town was in a state of disorganization, and this in turn was the fault of the local rabbi." The rabbi was charged with "counterrevolutionary propaganda" and was reportedly saved from severe punishment by one of the judges who "covered for him."²²

The party and Yevsektsiia could make claims for their successes in the campaign against religion, but as indicated by the above incident there were difficulties and failures.

Between 1923 and 1928 the Soviet government pursued a two track policy towards religion. Despite its "relaxation" during this period, the regime's anti-religious prejudice remained steadfast and its policy merely shifted from one extreme of the coercion-persuasion continuum to the other. Specifically the state continued to place religious organizations in a legal straitjacket,²³ and in conjunction with this approach initiated a comprehensive and vigorous propaganda campaign which was punctuated by anti-religious activities aimed at disrupting important celebrations of all religious confessions.

²² Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, pp.82-83.

²³ The provisions of the legislation in 1922 and 1923 do not vary significantly from that which was passed in 1929. Under the "relaxation" of the NEP the legislative measures were not applied with the same effect as those passed in 1929. The 1929 legislation receives treatment in Chapter 4, and there is no need to repeat the explanation of the legislation here.

Between 1923 and 1928 Judaism was subject to the same measures as all confessions. The general assault on the institutions of religion and anti-religious propaganda message were inescapable. The call for greater tact in anti-religious propaganda seemed to have little effect. While the number of religious trials declined in the mid-1920s, and apparently ended in the late 1920s, the arsenal of the anti-religious crusaders in the Yevseksiia was hardly supplemented by "scientific" practices.

On the occasion of religious holidays Jews were treated to the spectacle of street carnivals and demonstrations outside of prayer houses and synagogues. These included not only the harassment of believers,²⁴ but the attempt to create socialist equivalents of the religious rituals and religious objects. Unleaven bread was baked in the shape of a hammer and sickle. The seder was mocked and even a "Red Haggadah" was

²⁴ For example, in 1920 the "Evseksiia 'Yom Kippurnik' consisted of a demonstration outside the man synagogue on the Day of Atonement. Using axes and saws, the holy vessels of the proletarian cult, the demonstrators created such a fearful racket that services were disrupted." As the practice spread it often ended in violence, especially in smaller towns. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.302. Similar incidents are recounted in Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.86 and Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.116-117.

written.²⁵ All of this was attended by unrelenting propaganda campaigns in the atheist journals and especially in the Yiddish organ of the "Fighting Atheists", *Apikoires*.

Jews continued to resist the endless propaganda, the offensive demonstrations and "carnivals" during important holidays. The resistance of the those who tried to keep religious education alive was tenacious, and, "Well into the late 1920s there existed in the Soviet Union a network of underground kheders and yeshivas."²⁶ However, the effectiveness of Jewish resistance was at best inconsistent.

Jews were not singularly united in their reaction to their circumstances. The tensions within the community were reflected by the changes among Jewish youth. life. Before the revolution the tight knit community and the restrictive laws of the Tsars created an environment where Jewish youths received the traditions of Jewish religion in their day to day life. After the revolution there were many pressures on youths that mitigated against a religious life. The fanatics who disrupted services in the synagogue, and those among the 60,000 who joined the Komsomol, were an exaggeration of the

²⁵ C.f. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.119, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.80-81, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.302-303.

²⁶ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.306-308, f.n. 204.

growing disregard for the religion among young Jews.²⁷

The changing circumstances of Jewish life made religious observation more difficult, as the problem of the day of rest illustrates. The opposition to the Sunday day of rest received some attention in *Der emes*. Jews protested that it was unfair and discriminatory that the declared day of rest was Sunday, the Christian Sabbath, and fought for their right to observe the Saturday Sabbath. In the end, the regime won out. *Emes* happily reported on the success of the "anti-Saturday" campaign.

If a year ago some workers hesitate whether to work or not, now they do not hesitate any more. Bearded elderly Jewish workers are standing on Saturdays on the scaffolds, paint houses in the market place, are not afraid of God and are not ashamed of people".²⁸

The victory of the Yevseksiia was not entirely its own. Economic necessity forced people to break the Sabbath, even when they were able to establish Saturday as the day of rest.²⁹

²⁷ C.f. Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.116-117, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.86, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.304. Figure from, Aryeh Yodfat, "Jewish Religious Communities in the USSR", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.3(1), 1973, p.64, (hereafter "Religious Communities").

²⁸ As quoted in Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.71.

²⁹ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.304.

Jewish cooperatives (artels) and kolkhozes were able to organize themselves to ensure that the sabbath could be observed. However, as one author notes agricultural work was ill suited to observation of the Sabbath. On Friday, after the lighting of candles women would return to the barn to milk the cows.³⁰ In another incident during a heavy rain:

a number of older men gathered in a large hut, an improvised synagogue... Suddenly in the midst of their prayers, the rain stopped, as it often does on the steppe. Through the last drops of rain the hot clear rays of the sun were shining. The worshippers one and all took off their praying shawls and rushed out on the steppe to gather in the hay that had been exposed to the rain for several hours.³¹

The Yevseksiia added to the disintegration caused by farm life later in the 1920s, when meetings at Jewish agricultural artels would be stacked and by a vote Sundays were made the day of rest. The resistance mounted by Jews was strong, but it was clear that the changes in their lives had hampered their ability to carry on with the traditions of Judaism as they had in the past.

The damage done to Jewish traditional life was a result of a cycle of destruction and erosion. As the conditions of Jewish life did more to destroy traditional religious institutions and practices, the regime was better able to

³⁰ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.118.

³¹ Issacher Ryback, On the Jewish Fields of the Ukraine, Paris, 1926, p.15, as quoted in Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.118.

effect its anti-religious policies. The resistance of Jews was significant, but the pressures exerted by the conditions fostered by the regime were greater. The circumstances of Jewish life that fed the process of erosion were wide spread, to the point that the regime was forced to deal with the dislocation caused by these effects of the homogenization they had expected and hoped to promote.

3.2 The Jewish NEP: "Productivization"

With the end of the Jewish Civil War in 1923 it was possible to speak of a "Jewish NEP". Civil War in the Jewish street was no longer an approach that was producing positive results from Jewish Communists' point of view. To quote one Yevkom official, Samuil Agurskii:

I thought speculation could be wiped out by repression, by driving the shtetl to the wall, I should be the first to advocate establishing Jewish detachments of the Cheka; but since repression won't work, we must put the Jewish petty bourgeois in the way to becoming useful to society, instead of a parasite and a burden. As soon as possible we must use exceptional measures to rescue the Jewish masses from hunger and want - and from engaging in speculation...³²

³² The term Jewish NEP signified the Yevseksiia's new policy of attempting to reconcile with the Jewish petite bourgeoisie bringing it more in line with the party's general policies. From Samuil Agurskii, (Ed.), Di Idische Kommissariatn un di Idische Komunistische Sektsiyes (Protokoln, Rezolutsiyes un Dokumentn, 1918-1921), Party History Department, Central Committee of the Communist Party of White Russia, Minsk, 1928, p.216, (hereafter Rezolutsiyes un Dokumentn), as quoted in Solomon Schwarz, The Jew in the Soviet Union, Syracuse

The economic crisis among Jews in the *shtetl* was the legacy of the Civil War and the pogroms. The NEP offered some hope, but even so it was difficult for Jews to establish themselves in their former occupations, and speculation became a means of survival.

Much like the revolution itself, the NEP brought opportunities to those Jews who could take advantage of it. By encouraging the re-establishment of small scale industry and commerce the regime legalized much of the underground market activity of Jews. "The businessman, who had almost lost the habit of dealing in the open, gradually and cautiously crept out from underground."³³ The traditional role of middleman between town and country which had been all, but destroyed by the upheaval of the Civil War enjoyed a limited revival at the start of the NEP. The problem with the NEP was that it tried to do too much too fast. The result was a

University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1951, p.162.

³³ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.65. Also see Baruch Gurevitz, National Communism in the Soviet Union 1918-1928, University Centre for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburg, 1980, pp.65-66. Many traders finding the promises of NEP "illusory" returned to the underground economy rather than face the onerous discriminatory taxes levied by the regime on the "Nepmen". This was even more common after 1926 when some aspects of NEP had fallen out of favour. C.f. Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew under Tsar and Soviets, (Second Edition), Schocken Books, New York, 1987, pp.209-210 and Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.92.

contradictory set of policies that tried to serve too many different goals.

Jews should have been generally well suited to take advantage of the importance the Bolsheviks placed on tapping the energies of the private producer and to a lesser extent the petty trader, to fill the gaps in the production and distribution of consumer goods. Jews faced two major difficulties. First, while some were able to take advantage of the opportunities NEP opened to them, conditions for trade and small scale manufacturing had changed significantly. The pogroms had destroyed Jewish shops and businesses, and many Jews found that their absence had led their peasant clients to seek other suppliers, or to find ways of improvising with home manufactured items.³⁴ Second, almost as soon as the NEP was under way the Bolsheviks were concerned to bring private producers and traders under their control by inducing them to join cooperatives. The negative incentives were often enough to wipe out most struggling Jewish artisans.

As far as unemployment was concerned the NEP was inconsistent in its alleviation of the often desperate circumstances of Jews. The increasing difficulty of carrying

³⁴ Yarmolinsky, Op.Cit., pp.65-66. Also c.f. S. Ettinger, "The Modern Period", in H.H. Ben-Sasson, (Ed.), A History of the Jewish People, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976, p.969. Gurevitz, Op. Cit., pp.65-66.

out private business under the NEP added the devastation caused the Civil War, Bolshevik nationalizations under War Communism and the pogroms. Even the end of the Civil War contributed to unemployment among Jews because of the closure of a number of enterprises, and a reduction in the staffs of some ministries, made redundant by the conclusion of hostilities.³⁵

Unemployment was prominent among Jews everywhere, and plagued them in greater numbers than many of the other nationalities around them. According to the census of 1926 unemployment among Jews throughout the Soviet Union was at 9.3%.³⁶ A comparison between unemployment rates of Jews and non-Jews in 1926 yields the following figures: in Moscow 14.6% of Jews were unemployed compared to 12% of non-Jews; in the Ukraine 8.9% of Jews were unemployed, compared with 0.8% of non-Jews; in the urban areas of the Ukraine 11.3% of Jews were unemployed, compared with 5.8% of non-Jews; in Byelorussia 7.0% of Jews were unemployed, compared to 1.3% of Russians, 1.1% of Poles and 2.8% of Byelorussians.³⁷ Perhaps the figures are inflated somewhat by those engaged in underground trade

³⁵ Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., p.65.

³⁶ Figures cited from Table 7 in Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.70.

³⁷ See, Ibid., Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 on pp.70-73.

and speculation, but regardless of this Jewish unemployment was high throughout the 1920s.³⁸

One other important fact helps to account for the economic difficulties faced by Jews. According to one estimate some 830,000 Jews were declared *lyshentsy*, and in some areas as much as 45% of the population were deprived of rights.³⁹ It will be recalled that to be declared *lyshentsy* meant, among other disabilities, rent subsidies were unavailable, and high taxes were levied. There was much that worked to disadvantage Soviet Jewry, and the opportunities for individuals to rise above their poverty contracted during the years of the NEP. In 1924, the problems reached crisis proportions, and the necessity for action was readily apparent.⁴⁰

The Jewish NEP was to be carried out by the Yevseksiia. Between 1923 and 1925 Yevseksiia was transformed from "an agitprop organ and instrument for mobilization" taking the communist message to the Jewish street, to an organization fully active "in the economic, Soviet and social spheres" of

³⁸ C.f. Baron, Op. Cit., p.209-210, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.158, 160-161, 163 and 166, and Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.66.

³⁹ C.f. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.152-153, Baron, Op. Cit., p.190 and Jacob Lvavi, "Jewish Agricultural Settlement in the USSR", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.1(1), June, 1971, pp.91-92.

⁴⁰ Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.92.

Jewish life, and intimately involved in "implementing the general party and Soviet line in the Jewish environment."⁴¹ In this regard, the Yevsektsiia took on new responsibilities and was able to play a more constructive role than had been true over the first five years after the revolution.

The crisis in the *shtetl* was not only a problem for Jewish communists. Like most of the misfortunes suffered by Soviet Jewry, it presented the Yevsektsiia with the opportunity to encourage the transformation of the Jews. The gradualist approach recommended by the general course of the NEP informed the spirit of the Yevsektsiia's efforts to reconstruct Jewish social, cultural and economic life, but the slowed pace of reconstruction under NEP never left the end result in doubt.

(Socialism) alone in its onward march solves the **practical problems** of the national masses. Our work among the Jewish masses has such concrete objectives as the radical alteration of the social composition of the Jewish population, the creation of a Jewish peasantry, and the establishment of a proletarian preponderance in the Jewish population... all this [we envisage] **as steps along the international proletariat's path to socialism...**⁴²

⁴¹ Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.317 and 392.

⁴² Aleksandr Chemeriskii, "Orientierung in der Idisher Arbet", introduction to Alfarbandishe Baratung fun di Idishe Sektsies fun der a,KP/B (Dekabr 1926), publications Shul un Bukh, Moscow, 1927, pp.6f., (hereafter "Orientierung"), quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.128. (Emphasis Chemeriskii's.)

Addressing the "practical problems" of Jewish life was more than a process of helping Jews overcome their poverty. The Jewish NEP would be as oriented to class struggle as Militant Communism had been. It sought to use with some subtlety the crisis of impoverished Jews to realize the normative objectives set by the Bolsheviks for the development of a socialist class structure in the Jewish community.

In the first instance the Bolshevik programme for social and economic development of Soviet Jewry sought to address the peculiarities of the Jewish community's sociological profile. The task was to be accomplished by "productivizing" the "unproductive" "petite bourgeois elements" of Soviet Jewry. Productivization depended on a combination of positive and negative inducements to urge Soviet Jewry towards the socialist era by changing the unfavourable sociological profile arising from the Jewish community's occupational structure. The unproductive elements and the *lishentsy*, which existed in such great numbers among Jews would have to be integrated into the mainstream of Soviet society in the future.

Integration in the first instance meant a change of occupation into "productive work", an important point of departure for further socialization. In this regard the class composition of Soviet Jewry remained a primary consideration

in the elaboration of Bolshevik policy. The productivization of work through proletarianization was the party's preferred solution to the Jewish question and certainly this position was supported by people in the Yevseksiia.⁴³ However, this alternative required rapid industrialization, a path of development indefinitely deferred to the future by the NEP. It was necessary to come up with an interregnum position that attended to the regime's agenda for modernization and development of the economy, as well as, the needs of those people who were the object of the policy.

The *shtetls*, and their diminishing and impoverished population of struggling, *kustari*,⁴⁴ became objects of Jewish work after the beginning of the "Jewish NEP". At the political and social levels, reconciliation with "petite bourgeois elements" in the Jewish population was an important and

⁴³ "We consider industrialization of the Jewish masses the shortest and soundest way to socialism..." Chemeriskii, "Orientirung", pp.6ff, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.128.

⁴⁴ "The *kustar* was defined as 'an artisan who works alone at his trade in his own home, using his own or his customer's raw material, and sells his product on the market either to retailer or customer. There are individual *kustars* who do employ hired labour, and entrepreneur *kustars* who employ apprentices as well as hired workers. The *kustar* differs from the entrepreneur capitalist in that the former not only organizes production but also participates in the work itself.'" Quoted from B. Slutskii, Y. Liberberg, and H. Kozakevich, Leksikon fun politishe un fremd-verter, Kiev, 1929, p.886, in Gitelman, Op. Cit., f.n.98, pp.358-59.

integral part of the Jewish NEP. The Yevseksiia's policies aimed first at neutralizing the *kustari* and then at finding ways to bring them into the Soviet system.

"It is clear that... we can create a friendly attitude toward the Soviet regime among a significant part of the Jewish petite bourgeoisie. We can breed a friendly attitude on the part of the *kustars* toward the proletariat. Of course the *kustar* question is not one of neutralization alone". Rather, it was the job of Evseksiia to "think about methods whereby the Party and the Soviet government can approach the *kustars*."⁴⁵

The satisfaction of the political agenda, "neutralizing" the *kustari*, and bringing the Jewish population to productive work, laid the stepping stones to further socialization and eventually the proletarianization of the Jewish population.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Gitelman, *Op. Cit.*, p.359. One of Stalin's comments on the NEP and the national question helps to put the Yevseksiia's position into perspective. "... it was necessary to have a respite, to heal our wounds, the wounds of the advanced detachment, the proletariat, to establish contact with the peasant rear and to conduct further work among the reserves, which were lagging behind us..." Although Stalin only mentions the peasant here it is not unreasonable to infer that he is including "the small urban working people", (part of the "labouring masses of the culturally and economically backward nationalities"), targeted by the NEP. C.f. Joseph Stalin, "Report on National Factor in Party and State Affairs", in Stalin, *Op. Cit.*, pp.217, 228 and Joseph Stalin, "The October Revolution and the Question of the Middle Strata", in Stalin, *Op. Cit.*, p.275. This conforms with Lenin's definition of the "petty bourgeoisie" as being comprised of the peasantry, petty traders and artisans. See Vladimir Lenin, "The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve's Book", *Collected Works*, Vol.1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, pp.396-7.

⁴⁶ One of the reasons the Bolsheviks paid particular attention to the *kustari* was the significant role played by the *kustari* in the rural economy supplying processed foods and consumer goods. Since the Bolsheviks were unable to duplicate

Specifically the goals of these policies consisted of Bolshevizing Jewish economic activity, and encouraging the petite bourgeois elements in the Jewish population to settle in Jewish agricultural colonies.

Bolshevizing *kustari* economic activity consisted primarily of encouraging the *kustari* to organizing themselves into *artels*, (producers cooperatives). The negative incentives to change over to cooperative production were substantial. Independent producers found it hard to purchase raw materials, they were taxed at ruinous rates, commercial rents were raised and it was impossible to apprentice new artisans without being classified as an employer, which entailed higher penalties. It was not uncommon that Jews, who needed government credits to re-establish their business found themselves disqualified in one way or another.⁴⁷ Furthermore, successful entrepreneurs found themselves declared *lishentsy* which only added to their difficulties.

The attempt to move the *kustari* into cooperative production was consistent with the general principles of the

these services, in the short term it was easier to come to terms with the *kustari* than to try and establish more appropriate socialist forms of production and distribution.

⁴⁷ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.160, Baron, Op. Cit., p.209, and Yarmolinsky, Op. Cit., pp.66-67.

NEP established at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, and in particular the party line on the national question.

...(the) transition of the native toiling masses from backward economic forms to higher forms- from a nomadic life to agriculture, from guild handicrafts working for the open market to artels [producer cooperatives] working for the Soviet state (the semi-proletarian artisans to be drawn into trade unions), from artel handicraft production to factory production, from small scale farming to the planned collective cultivation of the soil.⁴⁸

In Stalin's estimate the solution to the national question would be found in the changed class structure and transformed consciousness occasioned by the engagement in productive economic activity. The transformation of the nationalities would begin at work, and their economic activity would be carried out under socialist forms.

⁴⁸ Appendix 1, "The Immediate Tasks of the Party in Connection with the National Problem, (Resolution Adopted by the Tenth Party Congress of the Russian Communist Party, March, 1921)", in Joseph Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1947, pp.276-277, (also cited in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.67). It is worth recalling that Lenin saw revolution as a war of position between the organizations representing the two opposing classes. After the revolution Lenin continued to see the dictatorship of the proletariat in class terms. The petite bourgeois producers like the peasants, although unreliable, were potential allies of the proletariat if they could be convinced that the proletariat and its vanguard were the defenders of all the oppressed. This of course meant that the petite bourgeois elements in Soviet society would have to be brought to consciousness. Lenin posited that there was only one route to consciousness - experience. In this regard, Lenin views consciousness as praxis. Proletarianization led to a praxis consistent with the ideals of a socialist state, and bringing artisans into cooperatives was, as the quoted text indicates, the first step in this process.

The encouragement of *artels*, or cooperatives, was an important vehicle of transformation. Cooperativism, and the punitive measures extended to private production were used to break down the traditional organization of artisan production. The destruction of the apprenticeship system led to a decline in artisan work as the artisan could not function on his own with all the disadvantages faced by private businesses.⁴⁹ The inability of Jewish artisans to remain solvent created further pressures on artisans to move to productive work, or to form cooperatives. The inducements to form cooperatives sometimes led artisans to form an *artel* on their own. These artisans ended up running themselves ragged.⁵⁰ When faced with the choice of bringing unskilled labour into the cooperative, or closing many chose to close. Trade unionisation further diluted what remained of the artisan tradition in the *artel*.⁵¹

The efforts to deal with the economic structure of Jews through cooperativism was a failure, in the sense that the attempt to transform the *kustari* while trying to address the misery of Jews in the *shtetl* was undermined by the effort to

⁴⁹ Baron, Op. Cit., pp.211-212.

⁵⁰ Baron, Op. Cit., p.211.

⁵¹ Following the revolution trade unions became state organs and as such perform socialization functions under the guidance of the party.

give *kustari* production a socialist form. Artisan work was undermined, as had been hoped, but the misery of the *shtetl* was increased as Jews resisted cooperativization, and toiled as terribly impoverished independent producers.

3.3 Agricultural Colonization the Productivization of Soviet Jews

The failure to transform the *kustari*, while addressing his impoverished conditions in the *shtetl* led the regime to consider agriculture an alternative solution to the Jewish problem. Jews had already begun to explore agricultural settlement themselves. The desperate circumstances of many Jews had led some to take up farming small private plots to provide sustenance for their families. The growth of "non-planned" suburban farming was steady. However:

because of the scarcity of free land, (most Jews) found their way barred to this kind of farming... and the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population could become farmers only if they were prepared to move lock, stock, and barrel into the old nineteenth-century Jewish farm colonies in the Ukraine, or if they settled on virgin land in new agricultural settlements.⁵²

⁵² Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp.160 and 161. A contemporary noted that for "ninety percent if the Jewish population there remains one way out (of a life of poverty and unproductive work)- to agriculture." Quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.411.

As a result, more enterprising Jews researched the prospects of relocating to take up farming as an alternative form of livelihood.⁵³

"Non-planned" farming received little attention from the regime in the early 1920s, but as the crisis of Jews in the *shtetl* became better known in official circles, the Yevseksiia and other organizations realized that non-planned farming pointed to a policy alternative that might improve the circumstances of impoverished Soviet Jews.⁵⁴ The resettlement into agricultural colonies had been suggested as early as 1918, and in July of 1919 following the Yevkom, conference "a detailed plan 'for the introduction of farm labour among the

⁵³ See Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.92.

⁵⁴ The fact that the regime was to use agricultural settlements to advantage by co-ordinating its efforts to address the devastation in the *shtetls* with the satisfaction of its own needs in policy spheres which had nothing to do with Jews cannot be ignored as an important part of the regime's motives, but the genuine concern on the part of some officials to relieve the human suffering visited upon Jews cannot be doubted entirely. As Gitelman noted in general "whatever the objective results of their actions, it may well be that all the Jewish activists, even the 'assimilationists', were sincerely concerned for the welfare of Soviet Jewry". Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.513. Lvavi, sees the government's position even more positively. "... the authorities... were seeking a solution to the increasing impoverishment of the Jewish masses whose plight could not be accepted indifferently. To the credit of the revolutionary government it must be said that from the start they realized the need for the 'productivization' of the Jewish masses." Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.92.

Jewish masses and the establishment of Jewish agricultural communes and cooperatives," was submitted to and approved by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture. However, the Civil War and foreign intervention prevented the government from implementing the plan.⁵⁵ In 1924 it was possible to proceed with the establishment of "planned" Jewish agriculture, and as the extent of the crisis in the *shtetls* became known to the regime the impetus to move quickly was felt strongly.

There were a multiplicity of reasons that made agricultural colonies an attractive policy alternative to the regime as it pondered the various difficulties the Jewish problem presented. Planned agriculture offered the regime the opportunity to pursue the restructuring of the Jewish community's economic activity and class composition in face of limited possibilities to integrate Soviet Jewry into the economy through industrialization. As Chemeriskii observed:

In view of the pace of the development of our industry and the great reserves of manpower in the countryside - [it was expected that large numbers

⁵⁵ See Yu. Gol'de, Zemel'noye ustroistvo trudyashchiksyayevreyev, [Rural Placement of Toiling Jews], Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR, Moscow, 1925, pp.69-74, as cited in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.162. It was also true that the NEP addressed the difficulties faced by the Jewish population since it was designed to placate the petite bourgeoisie. It would also have been noted that Jewish agriculture began to drop off with the introduction of the NEP an indication that the situation had improved. However, as one author notes for many of the Jews of the classes the NEP addressed itself to economic recovery and prosperity was a false hope and their impoverished conditions were unrelieved. See Lvavi, Op. Cit., pp.91-92.

of workers who had fled to the villages during the Civil War would return to the cities] - it must be said that the highway to the productivization of the Jewish masses is the transformation into peasants of as many as possible.⁵⁶

Given the failure to Bolshevize the *kustari* of the *shtetl*, the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies appeared as a workable alternative to bringing Jews to productive work, that would put them on a par with the masses of peasants, who would eventually be proletarianized.

The attempt to Bolshevize the *kustari* had not only failed. It had added to the considerable misery of many Jews and colonization held the promise of alleviating that misery. In the preamble to the decree granting Jews access to agricultural land in Byelorussia the regime recognized both the extent of the misery, as well as, its role in creating that misery, and hence the need to "give special attention to the poverty of the working Jewish masses".

Centuries of suppression and restriction kept the Jewish working masses off the path to a whole range of branches of productive work... They had access only to crafts and trade... The growth of the Soviet economic structure and the development of co-operatives has naturally and inevitably reduced to nil the function of petty trader and independent artisan. Thus, to the victims, in their thousands and tens of thousands, of war and pogroms and the counter-revolution, the crippled, widows and orphans, are added every day more and more people

⁵⁶ Aleksandr Chemeriskii, Di Alfarbandishe Komunistishe Partay (Bolshevikes) un di Idishe Masn, Publications Shul un Bukh, Moscow, 1926, p.17, (hereafter Di Alfarbandishe), as quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., f.n. 10, p.171.

who are disrupted, lose their livelihood, are pushed by need and despair into speculation, contraband and a beggarly life.⁵⁷

In a very immediate sense it would appear that the government did think the agricultural colonies held the potential of offering relief to the impoverished conditions of the *shtetls*, and to stem the tide of "unorganized migrations" into the cities.⁵⁸ However, the words of one Jewish activist make it abundantly clear that there were other more important purposes to the colonization of Soviet Jews:

What is at stake here is nothing more or less than the creation of a great class of Jewish peasants who will make over completely the appearance and economic basis of the Jewish population; on this transformed basis new cultural life will arise, new legal relationships, and new forms of cohabitation within one state...⁵⁹

In the mid-term colonization held the promise of a partial solution to the problems posed by the sociological structure of Soviet Jewry, and laid the ground work for further socialization in the longer term. To these ends, both the Belorussian and the Ukrainian Republics passed legislation allowing Jews to benefit from the redistribution of land, in

⁵⁷ Appendix, "Decree (postanovleniye) of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic On the Land Settlement of Working Jews", Lvavi, Op. Cit., pp.97-98.

⁵⁸ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.118.

⁵⁹ Chemeriskii, Di Alfarbandishe, pp.53f., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.163.

July of 1924.⁶⁰

The Belorussian and Ukrainian decrees were precursors to action taken by the central government. The following month, August 1924, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR established a "Committee for the agricultural organization of working class Jews, under the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR" (KOMZET). KOMZET was "to regulate the Jewish agricultural colonization on a national scale, to plan it and to direct it into desirable channels..."⁶¹ The activities of KOMZET were to be supplemented by a "Society for the agricultural organization of working class Jews in the USSR" (OZET).⁶² The primary responsibilities of OZET included recruiting candidates for settlements, publicizing the colonies, and soliciting financial and moral support from abroad.

⁶⁰ The special legislation was required because land redistribution was supposed to benefit those whose occupation was farming, while the government's programme to establish Jewish agricultural policies aimed to settle families who had no connection with the land. C.f. Baron, Op. Cit., pp.218-19, and Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.93.

⁶¹ Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.93.

⁶² See Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.93.

The OZET was able to solicit funds from outside of the Soviet Union; funds the government considered to be crucial to the fulfilment of KOMZET's plans. As one Yevseksiia official said:

It must be emphatically stated that the range and the pace of rural placement and resettlement depend solely on the [amount of] financial support they receive, since more than enough land is available, and this in large uninterrupted tracts that can accommodate large sections of the Jewish population... with a capital of some 20 to 25 million rubles the KOMZET plan (100, 000 families) could be realized to the extent of 150 percent...⁶³

In this regard, Kalinin representing the Party at the first convention of KOMZET stated:

You can't just put the settlers on the land; to put them there you have to invest at least several hundred rubles per desyatin [2. 7 acres]; neither the Soviet government nor the population has that much money. But such amounts may be raised abroad... The government for its part makes every effort to provide at least some material assistance... but, on the other hand, the government does not prevent Jewish settlers from accepting help... from Jewish capitalists abroad... help of foreign financial support.⁶⁴

The many reasons to support Jewish agricultural colonies were not great enough for the Soviet government to fund the costly venture. If the suffering of Jews was going to be relieved

⁶³ Chemeriskii, Di Alfarbandishe, pp.53f., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.163.

⁶⁴ Mikhail Kalinin, "Yevreiski vopros i pereseleniye yevreyev v krym", ["The Jewish Question and the Resettlement of Jews in the Crimea"], Izvestiia, July 11, 1926, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.271.

successfully through agriculture substantial aid would have to be solicited from other quarters.

Government concerns about funding the colonization projects were addressed by the infusion of substantial amounts of Western capital. All in all the funds solicited by the voluntary "'social organizations' (including foreign ones)" between 1924 and 1929 came to the considerable sum of 20,447,840 rubles as compared to the 9,072,500 rubles in cash and credits extended by the Soviet government, (credit from the agricultural banks comprised roughly 2.5 million rubles).⁶⁵ For its part the government did what it could to provide the settlers with "material assistance". In addition to freeing up the land for the settlements, (some 650,000 acres between 1925 and 1927), the government granted settlers a "reduction in transport rates... release from taxes and

⁶⁵ The figures cited are Baron's, and are confirmed in Gitelman who does not, however, distinguish between foreign and domestic organizations. More conservative figures, 16.7 million rubles and 5.8 million rubles are found in Schwarz, who does make a point of excluding domestic charitable contributions. The figures for domestic contributions are not given anywhere in the literature. C.f. Baron, Op. Cit., p.222, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.384, especially f.n.15, and Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.271. It is interesting to note that although the funds for the colonization projects were significant, over \$30 million was donated by the Joint Distribution Committee, [JDC (an American charity established to aide Jews in Russia)], between 1921 and 1924 to provide relief to the population. This did not include machinery, animals and seed also donated by the JDC. See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.238.

military services (as well as supplies of) building-timber, seeds..." Additionally, settlers were given livestock, agricultural machinery, and some financial assistance to carry them until their first crops were harvested. The last of these commitments was costly, and in some cases, like the fruit farmers in the Crimea, the period of support required between settling and harvesting the first crop was significant.⁶⁶

The main settlement areas were located near to some of the colonies established under the Tsars in the Crimea and the Ukraine. The KOMZET oversaw the activities of the settlement organizations that were so generously funding the colonies, and for the sake of administrative efficiency each location was funded and aided by one of the three largest settlement organizations.⁶⁷ However, even large amounts of funding and the effort to make the administration of the colonies run smoothly could not prevent set backs and disappointments. The

⁶⁶ C.f. Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.94 and Baron, Op. Cit., p.221.

⁶⁷ The Agro-Joint, founded by the American Joint Distribution Committee in 1924, was involved in the settlements in the Crimea and those settlements in the vicinity of the Sdeh-Mnuchah colony established under the Tsars. The (ICA), a reconstituted organization that had existed prior to World War I to further Jewish agriculture, was responsible for the settlements in the surrounding areas near Zaporozhe and Mariupol in the Ukraine, and the ORT-FARBAND funded the settlements near Odessa. See Lvavi, Op. Cit., p.94.

problems in the some settlements led as many as one third of the settlers to abandon their efforts and return home.⁶⁸ While some of these problems were addressed by more well thought out aid programmes, other events would more or less bring the colonization efforts in the Western areas of the Soviet Union to a halt.

The relief from famine and productivization had formed the main objectives of the colonization programme. Another reason was the opportunity to shed a positive light on the Soviet Union's treatment of its Jewish population at home and abroad. One of the primary organs of OZET's propaganda was **Tribuna**. **Tribuna** was a Russian language journal for the Jewish intelligentsia. First published in March of 1927, **Tribuna** sought "to involve (the intelligentsia) in the rehabilitation of the *shtetl*, in Jewish agricultural settlement and in the development of Jewish culture."⁶⁹ Additionally, it aimed to inform non-Jews about the productivization of Jews, and to enlist their support.

⁶⁸ See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp. 386-87.

⁶⁹ Yehuda Slutsky, "**Tribuna**- a Soviet Jewish Russian Journal, 1927-1937", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.12(2), May, 1982, p.51. (Hereafter, "**Tribuna-II**".)

The format of *Tribuna* was a "coffee table" approach to propaganda. It covered a wide range of topics, and included poems and essays in addition to propaganda articles. The quality of *Tribuna* varied over the ten years of its existence, and its circulation never rose above 22,000 copies.⁷⁰ It seems doubtful that its effect was much greater than the propaganda value of its mere existence.

The attempt to improve the lot of the Jewish community through agricultural settlement was an important source of propaganda for the regime, and at home and abroad. At home it offered a concrete solution to the difficulties faced by Jews and in so doing, in the Party's view, reduced the validity of the Zionists' arguments, and it was touted as part of the regime's efforts to eliminate antisemitism.⁷¹

3.4 Antisemitism During the NEP

At the end of the Civil War the most open manifestations of antisemitism subsided. It was not long, however, before it

⁷⁰ See Yehuda Slutsky, "*Tribuna*- a Soviet Jewish Russian Journal, 1927-1937", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol.12(1), February, 1982, pp.45-46, (hereafter, "*Tribuna-I*", and Slutsky, "*Tribuna-II*", pp.42-43.

⁷¹ Schwarz, *Op. Cit.*, p.162. Outside of the Soviet Union it gave the regime credibility with a group in the West that it considered to be powerful and influential.

made a reappearance in Soviet society. In the mid-1920s, antisemitism once again became widespread. There was a difference from the antisemitism of the past, and the government's reaction was different from that of the pre-revolutionary era.

In 1926 the antisemitic impulse did not come from the peasantry. The advanced urban elements so prominently featured in the new world of Bolshevik ideology and idealism were not beyond the reach of antisemitic feelings. It was prevalent among intellectuals and workers, and was found even among trade union officials and members of the Party apparatus.

The new wave of antisemitism might have had something to do with the influx of peasants into the cities, but also "originated to a large extent among dispossessed urban groups, people that is, whose families, having lost their middle class independence, saw themselves reduced to working for a wage or salary in factories and offices."⁷² Professionals faced stiff competition for jobs as Jews arrived in cities and towns where they were previously unknown. As one author points out, all of society was undergoing great changes, and Jews, who were willing to move, were seen to be the beneficiaries of those

⁷² Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.250. Also see Zvi Gitelman, Anti-semitism in the USSR: Sources, Types, Consequences, Synagogue Council of America, 1974, p.13. (Hereafter, "Anti-semitism".)

changes, while others found their lives thrown into disarray.⁷³

Even those who were supposed to be rid of bourgeois chauvinism and prejudices, such as members of the Komsomol showed themselves to be fully capable of antisemitic acts. In the many accounts of the day one of the most violent incidents took place in Pskov, where one Komsomol workers hacked to death a Jewish komsomol worker with an axe. When asked why he had committed the murder, the suspect replied, "I killed him because I am a Russian and he was a Jew."⁷⁴ There were other instances of antisemitism among officials, including petty discrimination having to do with the allocation of apartments, tax assessment and the like.⁷⁵

Antisemitism received a fair amount of attention in the press, and the government thought it was important enough to set-up educational programmes in school, and planned propaganda campaigns. Most of the programmes remained on paper, but were never implemented. Yuri Larin, the head of KOMZET, was most critical of the poor effort to fight antisemitism.

⁷³ Gitelman, "Anti-semitism", p.13. Also see Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.73.

⁷⁴ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.247.

⁷⁵ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.252.

This timid reluctance to "hammer away at the Jewish question" (in order it is said, "not to provoke still more anti-semitism") actually results, along this sector of the ideological front, in obscuring the struggle against bourgeois counterrevolutionary sabotage.⁷⁶

It was important to be seen to be doing something about the problem of antisemitism, but the problem was obviously not of enough worry for the regime to act resolutely in the matter. If it had been, as was the case during the Civil War, the Bolsheviki would have made a more concerted effort. Instead, the Bolsheviki chose to disarm antisemites by changing Jews, as the best way to "hammer away at the Jewish question", rather than confronting antisemitism directly.

3.5 Yiddishization: Indigenization in the Jewish Street

During NEP the nationalities question was one of the central issues facing the regime. The problem of laying the ground work for the transformation of the nationalities was coupled with cultural concessions and a degree of administrative power under Stalin's formula "socialist in content, national in form". Soviet power and the proletarian vision were to be brought to the peoples of the Soviet Union in their own language. Under the auspices of a programme of "indigenization", the Bolsheviki began to govern their

⁷⁶ Yuri Larin, Evrei i antisemitizm v SSR, Gosizdat, Moscow-Leningrad, 1929, p.280, as quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.285.

nationalities.

Indigenization benefited Jews within the circumscribed recognition of some feature of Jewish nationality, and had its Jewish equivalent - "Yiddishization". Like indigenization, Yiddishization had a strong administrative component, and came to include most public organizations in areas with high concentrations of Jews.

The Yevseksiia presided over the Yiddishization programme, which included the introduction of Yiddish into the courts, trade unions, local soviets and the extension of the Yiddish state schools in areas where there were high concentrations of Jews.

...In order to strengthen the work among the Jewish toiling masses, it is necessary to introduce Yiddish as the official language in trade unions, in the cells of the Communist Party and in the organizations of the Young Communist League where Jews constitute a majority. Party propaganda and cultural work in Yiddish must be increased... The conference also recommends publishing more books in Yiddish, organizing local Jewish Soviets, and adjusting the government apparatus to serve the Jewish population in its native language.⁷⁷

Yiddishization provided the opportunity to expand the network of Bolshevik organizations in the Jewish street. It provided further impetus to involve Jews in Soviet institutions, and

⁷⁷ Rezolutzies Onnumene Af Der Alukrainisher Baratung fun de Idsektsies fun IP(b)U, Kiev, Kulture-Lige, 1926, in A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union, Ktav, New York, 1971 p. Also see, Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.84.

had the potential to weaken further, if not break down completely, the Jewish community's bonds to its own traditional autonomous institutions. On this level, Yiddishization was a logical extension of the reasoning that had motivated the party to establish the Yevseksiia and Yevkom.

The Sovietization of the *shtetl* was part of Yiddishization. Like Sovietization everywhere the effort largely consisted of trying to divide the community into its poor and "privileged" classes, in order to break the "forces of reaction", and supplant them using the Soviet as the new and progressive form of administration.⁷⁸

...We intend to smash Jewish clericalism, the new focus of counterrevolutionary concentration. The network of Jewish Soviets and the new [Jewish] districts provide a new form of governmental organization of the Jewish masses. Social differentiation and class struggle will be also be stimulated by the new stratum of Jewish officeholders wielding power in the [Jewish] Soviet. The national unity [of the Jewish group] will be dealt a deathblow by the poor, who now hold power under the leadership of the proletariat.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, the very forces who were to "wield power in the Jewish Soviet" were the very people who were leaving the *shtetls* in droves, "leaving behind the old folks, 'clericals'

⁷⁸ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.151.

⁷⁹ Chemeriskii, "Orientirung", as quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.151, f.n. 12.

and inveterate 'petty bourgeois'... defeat(ing) what might have been the purpose of the establishment of Jewish local Soviets".⁸⁰ The *kustari* suffering the disabilities of having an occupation that singled him out for persecution as one of the *lyshentsy* was being "dealt a deathblow", even though he was poor.

The attempt to supplant traditional institutions and values was only part of indigenization in the administrative sphere. The party's programme to "develop" national cultures, through indigenization (i.e. to bring proletarian institutions to the nationalities, and to give their culture proletarian content), attended to the task of governing a multilingual state, which meant serving national minority populations in their native tongue. One example of the indigenization of an administrative body was the "national courts".

After 1922, the *ad hoc* arrangements that had characterized the "legal system" of Militant Communism were replaced with more "permanent" structures, and the entire legal system was revamped. As part of the reconstruction of the Soviet legal system, and in conjunction with the goals of the Tenth Party

⁸⁰ Schwarz, *Op. Cit.*, p.151. The economic condition of the *shtetls* led to the departure of the young and hence the hopes of establishing Soviet power in the *shtetls* faded. The rate of unemployment amongst youth in the *shtetl* was astronomical. See, Gurevitz, *Op. Cit.*, p.66.

Congress in the field of nationalities, provisions were made for national courts. In the Union Republics these courts were to hold proceedings in the language of the Union Republics' minority populations.

The Yiddish courts typified many of the difficulties surrounding the Yiddishization of all government institutions. The purposes of the courts were varied. The courts served as a political symbol of Jewish autonomy, even if that autonomy was not considered to be indefinite, and were a concrete affirmation of the government's commitment to address all forms of national inequality, and to uphold language rights.⁸¹ But, the symbolic and practical significance of the courts were not unqualified.

We are not concerned with the rights of the Yiddish language; we try to see to it that the Jewish masses are adequately served by the People's Courts, that they understand our revolutionary legislation, and we want to bring them into the sphere of socialist construction; one cannot even imagine that the Jewish masses will be compelled to be judged in Yiddish, but the obstacles to using Yiddish have to be removed in those places where the Jewish working masses can best be served in this language.⁸²

⁸¹ The national courts in general were part of the measures taken to pacify the fears of minority nationalities living in one of the Union Republics that their cultural and language rights would not suffer under the process of indigenization. The process of "regionalization", or the establishment of local national Soviets was similarly motivated. C.f. Benjamin Pinkus, "Yiddish Language Courts and Nationalities Policy in the Soviet Union", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.1(2), Nov. 1971, pp.47, 50 and 58.

⁸² Pinkus, Op. Cit., p.45.

The courts were to function in Yiddish, but the educational function so important to the regular courts was front and centre in the Yiddish courts. The fact that the Yiddish courts were only courts of first instance suggests that the petty disputes could be solved in the Yiddish courts, which would expose more ordinary Jews to the principles of Soviet revolutionary justice, while more weighty cases could be pursued through the regular court system.

The courts were used as a weapon against the class enemies of the proletariat. This not only meant prosecuting counter revolutionary elements, it also meant identifying them.⁸³ The partisan nature of the courts also involved them in the general struggle against all autonomous institutions, and in the attendant propaganda. Included in the cases heard before the Yiddish court were the anti-religious and "social" trials of Jewish institutions.

Another function of the Yiddish courts was to eradicate the rabbinic tribunals. The tribunals had long served Jews as a forum for the settlement of disputes. As was the case with most of the struggles against Jewish institutions the

⁸³ This function was of particular importance to many Jews who had been declared *lyshentsy*. The decision of the court on this matter was important of the future of the accused's children, and often determined the fate of the family. See Pinkus, *Op. Cit.*, p.56.

Yevsektsiia saw the attempt to end the influence of the tribunals as a form of class struggle. In one official's estimate the Yiddish courts "eliminated the rabbinic administration of Justice, formerly so common in the Jewish shtetl, and had thus emancipated large groups of the poor from the influence of their class enemy."⁸⁴ On a purely practical level the Yiddish courts were simply the most appropriate forum from which to dispense justice to Jews whose only language was Yiddish.

In 1924 the Yiddish courts numbered two and both were in the Ukraine. By the end of the NEP their numbers had grown to forty three.⁸⁵ The growth of the Yiddish court system was slow, and plans to increase the number of courts were only partially filled.⁸⁶ The courts suffered numerous difficulties and disadvantages. The primary problem was the one that seemed to dog all Jewish work - finding appropriate qualified personnel. In addition to fluency in Yiddish, officers of the

⁸⁴ Yakov Kantor, National Reconstruction among the Jews in the Soviet Union, ed. by E. Ostrovskii, Moscow, 1934, pp.29. ff as quoted in Baron, Op. Cit., p.189. C.f. also, Pinkus, Op. Cit., pp.44,47,50 and 55-56, Schwarz, Op. Cit., Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.174 and 176, pp.157-8 and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.364.

⁸⁵ The geographical distribution of the 43 Yiddish courts existing in 1928 was as follows: 36 in the Ukraine, 6 in Byelorussia and 1 in the RSFSR. See Pinkus, Table 1, Op. Cit., p.48.

⁸⁶ See Pinkus, Op. Cit., pp.50-51.

court had to meet criteria based on political and class background. Given the high proportion of Jews declared lishentsy suitable candidates were few and far between.⁸⁷ Nor did the Yiddish courts escape the woefully inadequate financial commitments of the regime that so often plagued Jewish work. These two factors alone were prominent reasons for the inadequate administrative and legal infrastructure upon which the Yiddish courts were supposed to depend.⁸⁸ These problems were compounded by the need to invent a new Yiddish legal ease since that which existed, such as it was, was "tainted" by its rabbinical etymological roots.⁸⁹ The slow translation of Soviet laws into Yiddish and the non-existence of legal codes for the day to day court procedures added to the Yiddish courts' considerable difficulties.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ C.f. Pinkus, Op. Cit., pp.52 and 56, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.365, and Baron, Op. Cit., p.189.

⁸⁸ The combination of under funding and a lack of personnel made it virtually impossible for the Yiddish courts to dispense justice from "investigation to verdict", even though the procuracy was required by law to conduct its investigation of cases going before the Yiddish court in Yiddish. The poor relations between the Yiddish courts and local investigators merely exacerbated the problem. C.f. Pinkus, Op. Cit., pp.44 and 48, as well as, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.365

⁸⁹ The pace at which this undertaking was completed was not what it might have been. The first book of Yiddish legal terminology was not even published until 1926. C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.365, and Pinkus, Op. Cit., p.56.

⁹⁰ Pinkus, Op. Cit., p.56.

The structural and organizational difficulties specific to the courts were a result of varied requirements of the Republics governing the establishment of the courts. In Byelorussia the courts were established on an extra-territorial basis. There were supposed to be a number of courts in any one province to serve all Yiddish speaking people. The problem was not enough courts were opened to serve the Yiddish speaking community. Some had to travel many miles to get to a Yiddish court.⁹¹ In the Ukraine, the territorial principle required a minimum population of 10,000 in a local administrative unit to justify opening a national court. This approach failed to take into account that very few local administrative units had 10,000 inhabitants of the same minority nationality, nor did it make allowances for those living outside of the district.⁹² The problems arising out of these impractical administrative requirements were appended by the wilful interference of local officials, and often implementation was delayed by the appeals to central administrative organs to order local apparatchiks to cooperate.⁹³

⁹¹ C.f. Pinkus, Op. Cit., p.51, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.365.

⁹² In the end the Ukrainian administration adopted the extra-territorial organization of the Belorussians in practice, but the difficulties with this practice remained. See, Pinkus, Op. Cit., pp.51-52.

⁹³ See, Ibid., f.n.21, p.59. The general unwillingness of local officials to help further the process of Yiddishization was made more keen by the participation of the Yevseksiia in the expanding the number of Yiddishized government organs. When the Yevseksiia took over Yevkom's

The effectiveness of the Yiddish courts was also diminished by the reaction of the Jewish community. The main clientele of the Yiddish courts were the inhabitants of the *shtetls*. Many of these people used the courts only when necessary, and instead turned to more traditional dispute mechanisms, namely the Rabbi. Nonetheless, the language of the *shtetl* was Yiddish and when it was necessary Jews preferred to stand before a court that operated in their native tongue.⁹⁴ The Jewish community's general suspicions of the Yiddish courts were not alleviated by Jewish lawyers who openly opposed the courts and would recommend the general courts to their clients seeking legal remedy.⁹⁵ Eventually the

responsibilities following the disbanding of the latter in 1924 it inherited the poor relations that existed between Yevkom and local state officials, which were not helped by the poor state of the Yevseksiia's relations with local party officials.

⁹⁴ There was quite obviously an element of uncertainty among some segments of the Jewish population about the role of the new courts. This is revealed by the not insignificant number of cases where the court was being asked to force a rabbi to grant a divorce or make some other such ruling on matters he no longer had the authority to pass legal judgement. C.f. *Ibid*, pp.54, and 56.

⁹⁵ Pinkus implies that this was in part because of the poor quality of the judges, many of whom were artisans or industrial workers. The uneven relationship between local officials and the Yiddish courts also meant that many cases were not transferred to the Yiddish court and the process of having cases moved from one court to the next mitigated against these cases coming to trial quickly. In criminal cases, conducting the investigation in Yiddish caused delays, and the problems finding a Yiddish judge to sit in a court of second instance in case of appeal may also have contributed to the lack of enthusiasm for the Yiddish courts displayed by

Yiddish courts became institutions of justice for the older generation of Jews whose knowledge of Russian and other languages spoken more widely than Yiddish did not equal that of the younger generation whose preference lay with the general courts.⁹⁶

The reaction of the Jewish population to the Yiddishization of Soviet institutions generally was not any different than their reaction to the Yiddish courts. The disappointing response of Soviet Jews to Yiddishization was as important to the failings of the regime's initiatives as any of the other reasons under discussion, and the field of education provides another good indicator of these failings.

The situation of Yiddish schools was characterized by under funding, a lack of qualified teachers, a poorly elaborated programme and in general suffered the liturgy of problems afflicting most Jewish work.⁹⁷ Beyond these difficulties it might be added that the need to set up Yiddish schools was created by the destruction of *heders*, and the

Jewish lawyers. See Pinkus, Ibid., pp.52 and 57.

⁹⁶ C.f. Pinkus, Ibid., p.54, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.365.

⁹⁷ C.f. Zvi Halevy, Jewish Schools under Czarism and Communism, Springer Publishing Company, New York, 1978, pp.160-161, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.183, Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.335-38.

regime was unable to found Yiddish schools in the large numbers required to replace the religious education system that had encompassed the vast majority of Soviet Jewish children.⁹⁸

The schools were poorly received by a sizable portion of the Jewish population.⁹⁹ The hopes of some Yevsektsiia officials to "work systematically to see that Jewish workers and toilers should participate actively in the building of the Yiddish school, (and) to popularize the principles of proletarian education" were hardly realized in the response of the Jewish "workers and toilers".¹⁰⁰

There were important reasons for the incongruence between the hopes of some Yevseks and the Jewish community's unenthusiastic reaction. Most importantly, "Jewish schools could be Jewish in language only. Jewish culture was largely inappropriate because of its religious and Hebraic roots."¹⁰¹ Without the satisfactions of having their children educated

⁹⁸ Traditionally, a **heder** education was mandatory, and "each community, no matter how small, had a **cheder**". Halevy, p.39. Also see, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.177.

⁹⁹ See Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp.136-137.

¹⁰⁰ Ester Frumkin, Rezolutzies Ognumene, quoted in Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.84.

¹⁰¹ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.338.

in an environment sensitive to Jewish culture it is not surprising many parents saw little point in sending their children to the Yiddish school. Even the mandatory course in Yiddish literature was bastardized by the strict attention to the personal and literary background of the authors to be studied.¹⁰² More over, religious Jews found that sending their child to a Yiddish school meant more than the child simply not being educated as a Jew. It meant that the child was subject to anti-Judaic propaganda as part of the curriculum in the Jewish schools.¹⁰³ The Yiddish schools also failed to address the concern of many parents who worried that sending their children to a Yiddish school jeopardized the child's chances of passing university entrance exams because of poor Russian language skills.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The curriculum at the Yiddish schools varied little from that of the general schools. In the few subject areas where Jewish life was in any way taken into account the curriculum was filled with propaganda. One contemporary wrote: "The very concept of 'Jewish history' is excluded from the school. Any general course in the history of class struggles may include elements describing the struggle of Jewish artisans against their employers and of Jewish workers against the Jewish or any other bourgeoisie." Y. Dardak, "Undzere dergraikhungen for 15 yor oktiabr afn gebit fun folk-bildung," Tsum XV yortoog fun der oktiabr revoliutsie - sotsial ekonomisher zamlbukh, White-Russian Academy of Sciences, Jewish Sector, Minsk, 1932, as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.339. See also Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.131.

¹⁰³ C.f. Schoolman, Op. Cit., p.148, Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.147, f.n. 20, and Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.341.

¹⁰⁴ This fear was not without foundation. The number of languages student at Yiddish schools were required to learn made proficiency at any of them difficult. C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.340-41 and 343-45.

The preference of many Jewish parents to send their children to non-Yiddish schools was not always accepted by overzealous Yevsektsiia officials, and it was not uncommon to find that a number of children in a Yiddish school had been registered against their parent's will.¹⁰⁵

It was not clear to all cultural activists that Yiddish is not an end in itself but a means to an ease the cultural development of the Yiddish speaking masses. This led to the tendency to drag all Jewish children into Yiddish schools by force, taking no account of the language they use or the wishes of their parents. It turned out that we were building Yiddish schools not for Yiddish speakers who really need them, but for all citizens of Jewish origin... as a result gross distortions occurred in some cities where people who do not need Yiddish schools were forced -by use of terror- to attend them.¹⁰⁶

Forcing Jewish children to attend the Yiddish school was part of the Yevsektsiia's effort to make the schools succeed in their political tasks. The schools were used to weed out Zionism, hebraism and all other expressions of Jewish life that were gaining popularity among significant segments of Jewish youth.¹⁰⁷ Yiddish schools were important to the competition for the hearts and mind of Jewish youth, but forced education did more harm than good. The Yevsektsiia

¹⁰⁵ C.f. Schoolman, Op. Cit., pp.153-154.

¹⁰⁶ M. Kiper, "Oifgabn in der kulture-oiifkler arbet," Shtern, June 28, 1927, quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.341-2, see also Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.134.

¹⁰⁷ C.f. Halevy, Op. Cit., p.184, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.93-94 and 185.

hierarchy, aware of the false wisdom of pushing Yiddish schools on people who did not want them, put a stop to the practice. Ultimately it was decided that while the Yiddish school "revolutionizes the Jewish way of life more easily... in no case should freedom (to choose the language of instruction) be impeded."¹⁰⁸

For those attending Yiddish schools there can be little doubts about the significance of "revolutionizing Jewish life":

The employment of all means at the disposal of the Soviet government helped the school achieve one victory after another. First, the Sabbath day of rest was done away with. Secondly, all books tinctured with nationalism were removed from the schools. This enabled the school to raise its level and to include anti-religious and internationalist material in its program.¹⁰⁹

Given the high proportion of Yiddish speaking students in the *shtetl*, where all aspects Jewish life were under great pressure, it would seem that the Yiddish schools played an important part in the destruction of these semi-urban Jewish communities.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.343. This did little for those living in the *shtetl* who had no choice but to send their child to the Yiddish school since it was the only school in the vicinity. C.f. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.345 and Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.135.

¹⁰⁹ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.131.

¹¹⁰ See Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp.136-37.

3.6 The Birobidzhan

The Birobidzhan project in the Far East was an important experiment following from the colonization projects. The failure to redress the impoverished lot of many Jews left officials in search of more appropriate projects to fulfil the many goals of Jewish policy under the NEP. In 1926, following indications that the Soviet government was prepared to entertain, and even act upon the notion of a distinct Jewish nationhood, the Jewish colonization programme and indigenization met in the idea of establishing a Jewish territorial unit.

Abram Bragin, an organizer of the highly successful 1923 agricultural exhibition in Moscow and advocate of a national solution to the Jewish question, raised the issue of a territorial solution to address the extreme circumstances of Soviet Jewry at the first meeting of OZET in 1926.

The significance of our work is that we are laying the foundation for national self-determination of the Jewish nation, according to the policy of the Communist Party and the Leninist conception... We have become complacent and think that we have enough time to work on the reconstruction of the Jewish economy... We have to understand that the individual settlements which are not connected to one national union... is building in the air without foundation. We demand that not only Petrovsky and Chicherin should make declaration but our own leaders should demand in the name of the Jewish masses that we

build our life on the basis of national self-determination.¹¹¹

Bragin's position pushed the Bolsheviks' recognition of certain features of Jewish nationality to the extreme.¹¹² There were reservations among the members of the Yevseksiia's Central Bureau about Bragin's position.

While Bragin's position received a mixed response from the Yevseksiia's Central Bureau, Mikhail Kalinin's admission that there was a possibility for Jews to attain the status of a nationality was of greater importance.

As a reaction to assimilation and national erosion which threaten all small peoples deprived of the opportunities for national evolution, the Jewish people has developed the instinct of self-preservation, of the struggle to maintain its identity... The Jewish people now faces the great task of preserving its nationality. For this purpose a large segment of the Jewish population must transform itself into a compact farming population, numbering at least several thousand souls.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ershter Alfarbandisher Tsuzmanfor fun 'Gerzerd' Moshve 15-20 Nov. 1926 Stenografisher Barikht, GERZERD, Moscow, 1927, as quoted in Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.80.

¹¹² Bragin's position was not the only one, but it was indicative of that segment of officials in Jewish organizations who considered their work for a national-cultural perspective.

¹¹³ Emes, Moscow, July 11, 1927, quoted in Chimen Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project, 1927-1959", in Lionel Kochan, (Ed.), The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917, (Third Edition), Oxford University Press, 1978, p.69.

The change of heart was primarily linked to the relief of Jewish poverty, which remained a serious and intractable problem. The inability of the government to provide jobs for the impoverished Jewish masses was a function of the general decline in the economy.¹¹⁴ Kalinin's support of the idea of a Jewish nationality was consistent with existing programmes, and colonization was important to the satisfaction of the principle of territoriality, the major theoretical impediment to the enjoyment of full national rights by Jews.

The idea of giving Jews a territory would allow Jews to fulfil the crucial criterion for recognition as a national group according to Stalin's definition. This political consideration fit neatly with the colonization efforts and would put Jews on an equal footing with other nationalities for assimilation.

...we need a compact Jewish settlement not for any kind of nationalist purposes, from which we are removed, but for the sake of concrete goals which are connected with the general upbuilding of socialism in our country. Under healthier cultural and economic conditions the Jewish masses will be

¹¹⁴ By 1926 the number of Jewish unemployed began to rise again as taxes and other negative incentives exerted more and more pressure on the Nepman. The situation had been anticipated earlier when colonization had been considered as part of the solution to the Jewish question. "...a certain falling-off... could be anticipated in the pace of industrial expansion, which would reduce the capacity of industry to absorb additional masses of Jewish luftmensch when this is the case, 'the relative importance of rural resettlement will increase.'", Alfarbandishe Baratung fun de Idishe Sektsies fun der A.K.P.(B), publications Shul un Bukh, Moscow, 1927, p.103, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.163.

transformed into component and exemplary builders of the new socialist life. Toward this goal we ought to work energetically,¹¹⁵ while combatting all nationalist tendencies.

Having granted a territory for a "compact Jewish settlement" the Soviets expected to see progress in their efforts to productivize the Jewish masses through "agrarianization," as settlers were shaped by the progressive social developments that attended the process of agricultural colonization.¹¹⁶ Those who did not wish to go to Birobidzhan could expect not to be able to retain even in the mid term their cultural

¹¹⁵ Simon Dimanshtain as quoted in Baron, Op. Cit., p.194. This was echoed by Ester Frumkin who spoke to the OZET conference. "The Jewish masses will help to build socialism in two ways: as a nation presumably gathered together in its own territory, and as participants, in other territories, in the international work of construction.

Now that we are calling Jewish metal workers and Jewish miners into existence in those areas where Jews are numerically weak, we have every reason to expect that in those places the Jewish worker of the coming generation will assimilate with the proletariat of the other nationalities around him...It is very likely that the process of assimilation will embrace those national minorities which are scattered in the cities...We must consider the probability of the assimilation of such minorities and we must, by our approach, accustom Jewish workers and public figures not to judge this or that activity from the point of view of national self-preservation but from the point of view of its usefulness to socialist construction." Alfarbandishe Baratung, p.130, as quoted in Gurevitz, Op. Cit., pp.89-90.

¹¹⁶ As Ester Frumkin stated: "What indeed does agrarianization mean to us? It is a way to transfer to productive occupations those luftmenshn who are either non-productive to begin with or have been cast out of production." Alfarbandishe Baratung, p.129, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.164.

heritage.¹¹⁷ The territorial solution proved consistent with all the goals that the Yevsektsiia and KOMZET had hoped would lead to the productivization and eventually assimilation of the Jewish masses, while alleviating the impoverished circumstances of large numbers of Soviet Jews.

Initially the proposal for a Jewish territory was to extend the colonization efforts to build up the pre-World War I colonies in the Crimea and the Ukraine.¹¹⁸ However, the first efforts in these regions showed that the influx of a large number of Jews into either of these regions would be poorly received. At the end of 1927 a commission was established to seek out alternative locations, and in the spring of 1928 the commission concluded its work. On March 28, 1928, the Birobidzhan located in the south eastern region of Siberia on the Amur river, came under the purview of the KOMZET "to meet the requirements of the close settlement of Jewish toilers on free land."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Kalinin noted in a speech on the hopes for Jewish cultural life in Birobidzhan that "the Jews in Moscow will have to assimilate..." Quotation take from Yidn in F.S.S.R., Moscow, 1935, quoted in Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project", p.74.

¹¹⁸ C.f. Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.90. and Baron, Op. Cit., pp.219-220.

¹¹⁹ A. N. Merezhin, O Birobidzhane, [In Re Birobidzhan], ed. KOMZET, Moscow, 1929, p.76f., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.175. To this end "further allotment of land in the Birobidzhan district, except on applications certified by KOMZET" was prohibited. Yurii Larin, Yevrei i Antisemitizm v SSSR, [Jews and Antisemitism in the USSR], Moscow, 1929,

The choice of the Birobidzhan was not an obvious one. There were no Jewish settlers in the region, unlike the Crimea, the Ukraine and even Byelorussia.¹²⁰ The antisemitic reaction of the existing populations in the Crimea and the Ukrainian were enough to prompt the regime to look elsewhere.¹²¹ The geographic region known as the Birobidzhan was chosen for a number of reasons that suited the needs of the regime and had nothing to do with the aspirations of Jews.¹²²

The rising tensions in the Far East were becoming worrisome, much of the land under Soviet control was sparsely populated, and the actions of the Japanese indicated the strong possibility that Soviet Russia might be affected by the Japanese machinations in Manchuria.

Aside from a solution to the 'Jewish question', the Central Executive Committee outlined in this connection the solution of another, no less important problem, that of populating- or to be correct, assimilating by the Soviet state- the vast

pp.184f., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.175.

¹²⁰ It is an oddity that the initiatives of the Belorussian party to lure the colonization project to that republic were rebuffed by the centre. Yevsektsiia supported the move but the central administration had other ideas. C.f. Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.90.

¹²¹ Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.74, f.n. 19.

¹²² The proposal of Birobidzhan came from the Commissariat for Agriculture and was supported by the Commissariat for defense. See Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.90.

spaces of the Far East, the continuing emptiness of which whets the appetite of our imperialist neighbours.¹²³

The influx of Chinese and Koreans into the area in large numbers also was considered troublesome and it became important to establish a Soviet population.¹²⁴

The propaganda possibilities held by the Birobidzhan proposal were not lost on the Bolsheviks. The Birobidzhan territory gave the regime the luxury of setting an example at home and abroad that was testimony to their concern for the lot of Soviet Jews. This was particularly important to foreign propaganda since the funding of the project required

¹²³ Viktor Fink, "Birobidzhan", in Sovietskoye Stroitel'stvo, May, 1930, p.117, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.175. The head of the OZET Yurii Larin, also noted that the settlement of Birobidzhan was of decisive importance in Soviet efforts to reduce the number of "factors that inevitably lure Japanese imperialism to the Soviet Far East." Yurii Larin, Yevrei i Antisemitizm v SSSR, pp.184f., quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.175.

¹²⁴ Baron, Op. Cit., p.195. As one official reported in July of 1928, "In about ten to fifteen years a dense mass of Chinese will have moved close to the Amur and Sungari rivers. The Manchurian population will then have reached about thirty million. Hence the question is whether it will be possible to people the Amur area of Birobidzhan within the coming ten or fifteen years. If it is peopled in time, the immigration of Chinese agriculturalists will have been made impossible." Abram N. Merezhin, O Birobidzhane, p.10, as quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.175.

substantial support from abroad.¹²⁵ At home, the rising Zionism among Jews, particularly among Jewish youths in the *shtetls*, was another political reason for establishing a Jewish territory.¹²⁶ Many of the statements about the settlement of Birobidzhan attempted to tout this solution as superior to the return of Jews to Palestine, and was perhaps best exemplified in the slogan "To a Jewish land."¹²⁷

The willingness to pull at the heart strings of Jews was supplemented by arguments that Birobidzhan was not a Zionist project. The colonizers felt it was important to emphasize that the aims of colonization were strictly socialist and not nationalist, as the chief of OZET said:

If the purpose of Jewish agricultural settlements in the Soviet Union were to consist exclusively in the initiation of small national units in order to perpetuate Jewish people as such, it would not warrant moving of a finger for such work because of the total absence of any historical prospects for success... We do not believe that every people must

¹²⁵ This is evidenced in the presence of the a number of high ranking diplomats and Kalinin at the founding Conference of KOMZET. See Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project", p.69 and, also Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.87, above on the importance of foreign aid.

¹²⁶ *Der emes*, October 27, 1925, quoted in "The U.S.S.R., Zionism, and Israel" in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.116. C.f. Baron, Op. Cit., pp.194-195. Paraphrasing one official Schwarz notes: "The chief purpose of the Soviet experiments in rural settlement of Jews was to win over to the Soviet government 'the Jewish petty-bourgeois masses in the USSR and abroad,' and to deal 'a deadly blow to Zionism and to the ideology of the petty-bourgeois masses.'" Alfarbandishe Baratung, p.49, in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.127.

¹²⁷ C.f. Gurevitz, Op. Cit., p.90.

exist forever as a national unit; we believe, on the contrary, that ultimately all peoples will be fused together into one people.¹²⁸

The lack of a guarantee for the national-cultural survival of Jews in Birobidzhan reflected the interest in "productivization" that went hand in hand with the colonization projects, but it made for a typically contradictory statement of aims given Kalinin's position.

The Birobidzhan proposal represented a coming together of interests, as far as the regime was concerned. It held the potential of the relief from poverty for Jews. It solved the question of territoriality, which stood between Jews and a more comprehensive legal sanctioning of Jewish national rights. The colonization of Birobidzhan was consistent with the goal of productivizing Jews, and could take advantage of the measured success of the agricultural settlement organizations and their experiences. Finally, Birobidzhan would help to meet more immediate concerns of the regime in the Far East, and afforded the Bolsheviks another opportunity to showcase its favourable treatment of Jews. The question remained, would Jews agree that Birobidzhan was a workable compromise reflecting a community of interests?

¹²⁸ As quoted in Baron, Op. Cit., p.220. (Baron does not give a reference for the source of the quotation.)

During the NEP the Yevseksiia had proved useful in establishing the Bolshevik regime in the Jewish streets, but it had not solved the Jewish problem. The successes recorded by the Yevseksiia in its many attempts to effect the transformation of the Jews of the former Empire were largely negative ones. Religious and community institutions were destroyed, but the latter's Soviet replacements received little support in the Jewish public. The attempt to bring traditional occupations under semi-socialist productive forms, or to encourage Jews to take up new productive work were also failures, and did not enjoy a positive response from the Jewish population.

In sum, the promotion of gradual approaches to change was in the main undermined by the campaigns of destruction, and less violent ideologically derived policies that discriminated against the socio-economic positions prevalent in the Jewish communities of Soviet Russia. The regime was largely successful in its effort to remove the socio-economic impediments to preparing Jews for the transition to socialism. However, it was often out of desperation not enticement that Jews followed the lead of the Bolsheviks.

Chapter 4

Soviet Jews and Stalin's Revolution From Above

Between 1928 and 1936 the fundamental contradiction between Jewish identity and the Soviet man that had burdened Soviet Jewish policy came to a head. The destruction of the remaining institutional supports for traditional Jewish religious and cultural life, and the end of the occupational structure of traditional Jewish economic life occurred quickly under Stalin. The drive to industrialize Soviet Russia and to collectivize agriculture in the name of socialism had a far reaching social component that encouraged the homogenizing tendencies found in the Soviet Marxist understanding of modernization. What follows is an explanation of the working out of the fundamental contradiction in Soviet Jewish policy during the period when Stalin claimed socialism had been realized.

The economic and political priorities of the Soviet government under Stalin played a significant role in the changing circumstances of Jewish life. The end to capitalist economic forms and "exploiters", as well as bourgeois nationalism and religion were integral parts of the programmatic transformation of society to socialism. A short summary, of the Stalinist regime's principal political and

economic objectives will provide a touchstone for the many changes to Soviet Jewry.

In 1928, the NEP came to a close, and was replaced by the First Five Year Plan. Stalin and his supporters, who had viewed the NEP with mounting dissatisfaction changed the regime's approach to the Soviet Union's transformation to a socialist society. This change in tactics ushered in a new era of transition, Stalin's so called "revolution from above". The new era was a "period of the reconstruction of the whole economy on the basis of socialism."¹ Stalin's concern to get on with the task of building socialism demanded the quick fulfilment of the Five Year Plan.

In and of itself industrialization was ideologically insufficient. Stalin had said, the purpose of the drive to industrialize the economy was to achieve an "increase in the productivity of national labour, namely, an increase that will guarantee the systematic supremacy of the Socialist sector of the national economy over the capitalist sector,"² [and] to create the economic base for the abolition of classes in the U.S.S.R."³ The changes made to the economy were part of the

¹ Stalin, Problems of Leninism, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1947, p.249.

² Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p.278.

³ Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p.397.

effort to fulfil the teleology of Soviet Marxism in the social realm by destroying the economic roots of the last vestiges of bourgeois society in the Soviet Union. Stalin's revolution from above was another stage in the dictatorship of the proletariat, and it gave "rise to new class changes, to an intensification of class struggle."⁴ The most obvious manifestations of bourgeois influence in society would suffer direct assaults by whatever means were necessary to eradicate them.

The tasks of the First Five Year Plan and the urgent pressing for their fulfilment changed the tenor of the regime's approach to the transition to socialism. There was an end to tolerance and persuasive methods of change. The chaos caused by the forced collectivization of agriculture, and industrialization created a situation of general social and political upheaval. In Stalin's opinion greater discipline in the Party, a return to ideological militancy and tighter control of the periphery by the centre was the only way that the Plan could succeed, and for socialism to be realized. It was a time when failure to meet objectives set by the Five Year Plan was considered "sabotage" and even "counterrevolutionary".⁵ Under these conditions the Stalinist

⁴ Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p.249.

⁵ Alec Nove, Stalinism and After: The Road to Gorbachev, (Third Edition), Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1989, p.47.

system was more overtly ideological in the establishment and pursuit of its goals, and could not be pragmatic in its relations with social groups that fit poorly into its normatively founded sociological categories, as was the case for many Jews.

4.1 Judaism and Stalin's Assault on Religion

During the first decade of Bolshevik rule the mainstays of traditional Jewish life came under varying degrees of pressure. Jews had resisted the Bolsheviks, but were unable to stop the erosion of their close knit community life centred around Judaism and its institutions. Under the Stalinist order new legislation and a renewal of the anti-religious campaign stepped up the pressure once again.

In April 1929, Soviet religious legislation was consolidated in the "Law on Religious Associations" and its implementation was governed by the "Instruction of the People's Commissariat of the Interior: On the Rights and Obligations of Religious Associations." The tendency of all previous anti-religious legislation was to hone the regime's ability to control and monitor religious groups, and their activities. The 1929 legislation was no different. It represented the consolidation of anti-religious legislation

under one Decree.⁶

The 1929 legislation contained a number of articles that were important to the continued practice of Judaism. The Decree recognised religious believers as either members of a "religious society", or a "group of believers." The former had twenty or more members, and the latter had less the twenty members.⁷ The changing demographics of the Jewish population, particularly in the *shtetls*, and sanctions against believers made it difficult to find twenty people willing to sign their

⁶ Vladimir Gsovski, "The Legal Status of the Church in Soviet Russia", Fordham Law Review, Vol.8(1), 1939, p.17. (Hereafter, "The Church in Soviet Russia".) The legislation covers a full range of concerns, including: 1) Defining the religious organization, membership and registration [Articles 2 through 9, and 62 and 63]; 2) establishing the conditions for the use of religious articles and buildings [Articles 10, 11, 25, 27, 28, 38, 55(1), 57(1) and 58]; 3) The election of an executive body, and outlining its responsibilities [Articles 11, 13 through 16 and 56]; 4) Restriction of the organization's activities to religious rites and services [Articles 10(1), 17, 19]; 5) Restrictions on religious teaching [Article 18]; 6) The "liquidation" of religious buildings [Articles 36 through 40 and 46 and 49]; 7) Funding and expense arrangements [Articles 22(a) and (b), 54 through 56]; 8) All-Union, and Union Republic conferences and congresses [Articles 20 through 22]; 10) Permits for processions and occasional or irregular meetings [Articles 12, 57(2) and 59 through 61]. (Note the relevant articles are listed after each category.) Much of the text of the law may be found in Mervyn Matthews, "The Status of Religious Groups Defined", Soviet Government: A Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policies, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, pp.63-70. (Hereafter, "The Status of Religious Groups".)

⁷ Article 2 (1) and (2), "The Status of Religious Groups", p.63. Either of these entities are described as religious associations.

name to the government contract.⁸ The 1929 laws admitted the possibility of traditional religious services with all the sacred objects necessary to religious ceremonies for religious societies, but "groups of believers" were unable to make use of ritual objects and buildings, which were government property.⁹ Article 28 of the legislation speaks for it self.

In accordance with the contract, the religious building and the objects which it contains are handed over by a representative of the volost or raion executive committee or town soviet to at least twenty members of the religious society...¹⁰

⁸ C.f. Joshua Rothenberg, "The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", in Lionel Kochan, (Ed.), The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917, (Third Edition), Oxford University Press, 1978, p.179, Nora Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union: Paradox of Survival, Vol.1, New York University Press, New York, 1988, pp.251-252, Alec Nove and J. A. Newth, "The Jewish Population: Demographic Trends and Occupational Patterns", in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.143.

⁹ C.f. Article 25, "The Status of Religious Groups", pp.66-67, and Joshua Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1971, pp.32-34, and 66.

¹⁰ Article 28, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.67. (Emphasis with underscoring added.) The contract referred to is that between the religious society and the appropriate local authorities permitting "the use of religious buildings and ritual objects." See Article 28, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.67. The regime had no problem using this as one of the reasons for closing a synagogue or liquidating a group that fell short of 20 members. C.f. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues in the Soviet Union", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.3(1), 1973, p.51, (hereafter, "The Closure of Synagogues"), and Article 66, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.70.

Most Jewish synagogues were organized as groups of believers.¹¹ By definition, groups of believers had less than twenty members, so it was impossible for them to qualify for the "free" use of religious buildings.¹² The only alternative was to rent commercial premises, adding to the group's expenses and the personal financial responsibilities of religious believers.¹³

For the impoverished Jews of the *shtetl* with their declining population, continuance of religious life was made more difficult by the financial obligations resulting from the 1929 law. Religious buildings were expensive to maintain. Electricity and other utilities were provided at higher rates. Fire insurance, which was mandatory, local land taxes and the like added to the onerous financial burdens of regular maintenance.¹⁴ The conditions of the contract required that

¹¹ Aryeh Yodfat, "Jewish Religious Communities in the USSR", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.9(2), 1979, p.63. (Hereafter, "Religious Communities".)

¹² Although the building was provided free of charge in urban areas there was a rental fee for the land upon which the building was located, and in the entire country a tax equal to 1/2% of the value of the land and the building was levied. Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.12.

¹³ C.f. Article 10, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.64, and Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", pp.53-54.

¹⁴ The annual taxation rate was 1/2% of the value of the building in addition to other taxes. See Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.12. and Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.54.

buildings, which were the collective responsibility of the individuals who signed the contract, had to be returned in the same condition they were in at the time of the contract's signing. Even the cost of damage resulting from demonstrations and hooliganism added the expense of formal association with an organized religion.¹⁵

The existence of the small synagogues which did manage to get twenty signatures for the contract was made more tenuous by the threat of abolition should the society's membership fall to less than twenty. At that time the contract for the use of the building would be nullified, and the membership of the former society would have to register as a "group of believers". Such a registration entailed the loss of the "privileges" that came with qualifying as a religious society, assuming the registration was approved. Beyond the problem of people moving, dying or leaving the society for personal reasons, the pressure exerted by various representatives of the regime against members of religious associations to "withdraw their signature" from the contract were great. Trade Unions, for example, expelled people for membership in religious associations. Sometimes participation in a religious ceremony, such as a marriage was enough to

¹⁵ C.f. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.54, and Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", pp.12-13.

warrant expulsion from the Union.¹⁶ Youths worried about being denied access to higher education and the opportunities it held rejected religion.¹⁷

The legislation served to isolate religious associations in a number of different ways. All religious associations were considered to be "local" organizations by the legislation, and were registered with local government administrative units, (the *volost* or *raion*).¹⁸ The territorialism established by the legislation made each religious association a separate entity in the eyes of the government. Each association was left to the whims of local government officials, who did not consider their actions with reference to the implementation of policy in other administrative units.¹⁹ The result was an inconsistent application of the policies, and the uneven results showed in the closing of synagogues. In the Ukraine, where officials were less sympathetic to Jews, or felt it necessary to close one synagogue for every church that was closed down the legal synagogue nearly disappeared. By

¹⁶ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.51, and Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.175.

¹⁷ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.234, and Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.175.

¹⁸ C.f. Gsovski, "Legal Status of the Church in Soviet Russia", p.8. and Articles, 2,3,4 and 19 "The Status of Religious Groups", pp.63-64, 64 and 65-66.

¹⁹ Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.16.

contrast, in Moscow the proximity to central authorities allowed rabbis to argue their case with higher level officials if they could not find satisfaction at the local level.²⁰

The membership rules further separated associations one from another. Membership in one religious association was exclusive under the 1929 Decree.²¹ This was significant for Jews since daily public prayers in prayer houses required membership in one association, while keeping the synagogue open for the Sabbath would have required a second association, which was an legal impossibility, and the alternative, that the same association use both premises was equally impossible under the law.²² Although the restriction of a religious association's meetings to a single location was primarily aimed at the "monasteries and cathedrals of the Russian Orthodox churches which occasionally embraced several small chapels", it affected Jewish religious institutions, because

²⁰ C.f. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", pp.52- 53 and 54, and Yodfat, "Religious Communities", pp.63 and 64. In the RSFSR, the number of closures (126) was less because most Jews living out side the Western region of the country had only recently move from the former Pale of Settlement. For the figures in the RSFSR, see Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", pp.15, f.n.69.

²¹ C.f., Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.8, and Article 2(2), "The Status of Religious Groups", p.63.

²² C.f. Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.8, and Article 10(3), "The Status of Religious Groups", p.64.

of the different functions of prayer houses and synagogues.²³ Local authorities were given greater scope for harassment by the provision that any meetings taking place outside of the "location of the religious association" required the permission.

The restrictions forced religious institutions to cease functioning in any capacity save the exercise of religious rites. Article 17 of the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations prohibited religious organizations from engaging in any humanitarian or charity work.²⁴ The intimate role of the synagogue in social and community welfare functions was effectively stifled by this provision. Other articles are specific about the use of ritual objects being restricted to the exclusive use in the "performance of the cult." The legislation goes so far as to stipulate that "the only books which may be kept in religious buildings or on religious premises are those indispensable for conducting a service."²⁵ In synagogues, which were often in the same building as the religious schools that had been closed, the confiscations not only included religious books unnecessary to "the celebration

²³ Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", pp.8-9.

²⁴ See Article 17, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.65.

²⁵ Article 17, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.65

of the cult", but even Torah scrolls.²⁶

Other religions were able to organize All-Union conferences and congresses, as the 1929 Decree provided. The "Instruction" sent to the Commissariat of the interior, who decided on whether or not such conferences or congresses would be permitted, stated that a religious centre was the criteria for granting permission for these meetings to take place. Jews were considered not to have a religious centre, and their request to establish an All-Union organization was denied. The lack of a "religious centre", of Central governing body, made it difficult for religious Jews to resist the endless assaults on their beliefs, and made it nearly impossible for them to produce the ritual articles required in the exercise of religious rites.²⁷

Some of the legislation's most damaging provisions reiterated previous restrictions on religious education. Before 1929, private religious education was permitted for groups of up to three children. The 1929 legislation limited religious education to a child's parents. All other forms of

²⁶ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.49 and Article 17, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.65.

²⁷ See William Korey, "Key Law on Religious Associations: Implications for Judaism", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.2(2), 1972, pp.40-41.

religious education were illegal.²⁸

The ability of Jews to educate their children was hampered in many ways. Hebrew, the language of the Bible and the prayer book was not taught in school. Religious publications were very hard to find.²⁹ Above all the parent was forced to compete with the barrage of atheist propaganda of Soviet schools, the Young Pioneers and Komsomol. In some cases, it was not just propaganda that forced the child to turn from religion. At one school, children were told if they were out for Rosha Hashanah they would lose their ration cards.³⁰

The end to religious education on a large scale was a most damaging feature of the Soviet religious laws. Religious education was the life blood of Judaism. From the conduct of oneself in day to day living to the deepest roots of Jewish history Jewish education was important to the process of passing on the national and religious heritage from one generation to the next. The denial of such a rich process of acculturation opened the doorway to assimilation that much

²⁸ Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.19.

²⁹ In 1928, the last prayer book was published until after Stalin's death.

³⁰ C.f. Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.179, Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.234.

wider.

The effects of the legislation on Judaism and its institutions were somewhat different than its effects on other religions. Many of the ill affects, other than those resulting from the arbitrariness of local officials, had to do with the institutions of Jewish life. In the *shtetl*, prayer houses and synagogues were numerous, but each only encompassed a small number of people.³¹ The central role played by religious institutions in Jewish community life meant that the legislation undermined their pivotal role in the community and, in many cases, threatened the community's very existence. The destruction of the traditional role of Jewish religious institutions created an enormous void in Jewish life, and did much to add to the many changes tearing the core out of traditional Jewish life.

Other important legislation affecting religion included the six day week established in August 1929, which meant that the day of rest fell on a different day each week.³² The purpose of the legislation was to improve production, but this

³¹ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.48.

³² The "rest days" were on the 6th, 12th, 18th, 24th and 30th of each month, and so it was only on an irregular basis that the sabbath coincided with the rest days, and even less frequently was it possible to celebrate holy days without being absent from work. See Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.20, and p.20 f.n. 108.

was not inconsistent with other goals. As the Trade Union Council stated, "this measure will inevitably lead to a fundamental change in the old tradition of life... and facilitate a more successful struggle against religion and other survivals of the old way of life."³³ Sanctions against absences from work also served to dissuade believers from observing the sabbath or religious holidays. In 1932, a decree was promulgated to punish unauthorized absenteeism with "the deprivation of the right to ration cards and to the use of housing facilities of the enterprise concerned."³⁴

The disadvantages visited upon Jews by the 1929 anti-religious legislation were accompanied by another campaign of belligerent propaganda and the destruction of religious institutions in the name of militant atheism. The regime made use of every advantage available to them. In the early going, the campaign signalled a return to the violence and arbitrariness of assaults on religion carried out under War Communism. One of the most prominent features of the 1929 anti-religious campaign was the "closure campaign", which was waged against all religious institutions.

³³ As quoted in Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.16.

³⁴ Rothenberg, The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union, p.16.

The closure of synagogues proceeded at a pace unequalled at any other time in Soviet history. By the end of 1930 there was not a single synagogue remaining in Kiev.³⁵ Packed meetings were organized by the Yevsektsiia, Komsomol or the Militant Atheists to request the use of a synagogue or a prayer house for the cultural activities of "Jewish toilers", as the anti-religious legislation allowed.³⁶ Synagogues were closed for failing to meet building standards after local officials requested engineering reports. Failure to pay taxes or rent, constituted some of the various reasons for closure.³⁷ The words of one author speak to the thorough going nature of the closure campaign.

If in 1928, at the end of the NEP period, there was no place Jews lived which did not have a synagogue, by 1932 one could find many places where there were large numbers of Jews but no legal synagogue at all. Prayers in public could be conducted there only illegally.³⁸

The confiscations slowed down in the 1930s, but it was too late. The damage of the 1929 campaigns was too extensive for

³⁵ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", pp.52-53 and 54.

³⁶ Article 36, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.67.

³⁷ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", pp.52-53 and 54. In point of fact the government had numerous options available to it under the 1929 Law on Religious Associations. It did not even need some of the excuses it built into the legislation. All that was required was a decree passed by any of a number of different levels of government. There was of course the right of appeal and in fact there were some successful cases partly the result of the over enthusiasm of some local officials. C.f. Articles 36 and 37, "The Status of Religious Groups", p.67, and Yodfat, "The Closure Synagogues" p.54.

³⁸ Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", p.54.

organized Judaism to recover its former standing.³⁹

The organization of anti-religious propaganda continued along with the closure campaign. The constitutional changes in 1929 stopping the promotion of any religious confession did not, of course, deny the state the ability to engage in anti-religious propaganda. The regime used every means available to it to promote atheism. Anti-religious propaganda took place at school, and at trade union meetings. Trade Unions were instructed to include anti-religious propaganda in their "plan of the work of the clubs and cultural divisions... as a necessary part of their activities."⁴⁰ There were no social organizations encountered by many Jews where anti-religious propaganda could be avoided.

Anti-religious propaganda filled the pages of periodicals of all kinds. The Militant Atheists had their own Yiddish Journal, the *Der Apikoires*, which was active in organizing demonstrations, as well as, spreading written propaganda.⁴¹

³⁹ The era of the purges proved to be the final blow for organized Judaism. The arrest, execution and exile of Jewish rabbis was perpetrated on a large scale. C.f. Yodfat, "The Closure of Synagogues", pp.54-55.

⁴⁰ Circular of the Supreme Council of the Trade Unions, Sept. 12, 1927, as quoted in Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.23.

⁴¹ Rothenberg, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union", p.174.

Even *Tribuna*, which targeted Jewish intellectuals took up the struggle against religion. Its propaganda was as crude as any form of ridicule employed by the regime. As an organ of OZET much of its content centred around Jewish agriculture, and a favourite topic was Jewish pig farming. In one review of an artist's works she was singled out for recognition for her "anti-religious placard 'Pig-raising on a Jewish kolkhoz': the pig had 'attained the rights of citizenship in Jewish life.'"⁴² It is indicative of the times that *Tribuna* was criticized for the lack of vigour in its anti-religious efforts.⁴³

In addition to the various party sponsored associations, the state education system was enlisted to aid in the reinvigorated campaign against religion. The Commissariat for Education instructed school teachers to "permeate the entire instruction with the spirit of militant atheism,"⁴⁴ and to "cultivate in the children a hatred for those ties which religion imposes....(and) demand of the child to be a fighter

⁴² *Tribuna*, no.25, 1932 as quoted in Yehudah Slutsky, "*Tribuna*- a Soviet Jewish Russian Journal, 1927-1937", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol.12(2), 1982, p.44. (Hereafter, "*Tribuna*-II".)

⁴³ Slutsky, "*Tribuna*-II", pp.44-45.

⁴⁴ From "Editorial", *For Communist Education*, (May 8, 1937), as quoted in Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.21.

against religion anywhere, at school and in the family."⁴⁵ The process of socialization began to take place outside the home as a function of modern urban life, and the anti-religious campaign exaggerated its effects on the Jewish family.

4.2 The Changing Demography and Economy of Jews

The anti-religious campaign had been effective because of the changes to the structure of the Jewish community. By the early 1930s, the demographics of Soviet Jewry indicated that the urban industrial environment was home to a growing majority of Jews from the disintegrating *shtetls*. The demographic trends had made little difference to the way the anti-religious campaign had been waged, but in other areas of Jewish policy demographic changes effected a noticeable difference in the attitudes of the Soviet government. Between 1929 and 1936 the Soviet's assessment of the Jewish population changed, and consequently their approach to Jewry changed. In the areas of "productivization" and other areas of economic policy, as well as, in the national component of Jewish policy the new attitudes were most noticeable.

⁴⁵ Yaroslavsky, Against Nationalism, Against Religion, (Russian Edition, 1931), quoted in Gsovski, "The Church in Soviet Russia", p.21.

Jews had been seemingly well placed to take advantage of the NEP when it was first introduced. The process of transforming the occupational structure Jews should have proceeded at a steady pace through productivization programmes, and in the mean time the economic activities of Jews could help to stabilize the regime. Events did not follow the course the Bolsheviks expected. Jews were not productivized. Private traders and artisans were disadvantaged to the point of being unable to contribute on the scale the Bolsheviks might have hoped. Instead, the Jewish *shtetl* was driven to abject poverty.

Events may have unfolded in a manner somewhat different to Bolshevik expectations, but from the Bolsheviks' point of view, the conditions that had merited the special attention given to Jewish productivization under the NEP for the most part no longer existed. Many Jews, particularly young people, had left the *shtetl* and found productive work elsewhere. Between 1926 and 1930, the Jewish proletariat grew from 394,000 manual labourers and white collar workers to 562,000 proletarians, one year later there were 787,000 proletarians, and by 1935 their numbers reached 1,100,000.⁴⁶ The steady climb of the number of Jews classified as proletarians was not

⁴⁶ C.f. Salo Baron, The Jew under Tsar and Soviet, (Second edition), Schocken Books, New York, 1987, p.215, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.250.

only a function of their entrance into the mainstream of Soviet Economic activity. During the 1930s as the transition to socialism progressed many jobs were reclassified as state employment.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, statistically Jews were losing their distinctive occupational structure.

The reclassification of jobs notwithstanding, the change in the occupational structure of Jews was a function of the drive for industrialization, which required human resources at all levels of production. Jews, were recruited into the growing bureaucracy in large numbers because of their level of education and their sizable urban presence.⁴⁸ Along with demographic features well suited to entering the professions, many Jews aspired to the professional positions once beyond their consideration.⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that Jews went outside the Pale of Settlement to pursue higher education, and as a result there were greater numbers of white

⁴⁷ Baron, Op. Cit., p.217.

⁴⁸ C.f. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.250, 252 f.n.55, and 253, Nove and Newth, Op. Cit., p.153. On university education of Jews in the late twenties and the early thirties c.f., Zvi Haley, Jewish Students in Soviet Universities in the 1920's", Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol.6(1), pp.56-70, passim, (hereafter "Jewish Students"), and Baron, Op. Cit., p.216.

⁴⁹ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.253.

collar Jewish workers outside of the Ukraine and Byelorussia.⁵⁰

Jewish agriculture continued to grow in the first years of the Stalinist regime, and the number of agricultural workers peaked in 1933 at 270,000 according to one Soviet source.⁵¹ The figure seems somewhat high especially give the figure of 110,000 involved in "farm employment" the following year according to another Soviet source.⁵² Whatever, the exact figures might have been they are indicative of a change in Jewish participation in farming. Industrialization, which drew Jews of all ages off of the land, and the shrinking number of *lyshentsy*, the main source of new colonists, account for part of the reversal in the Jewish farm population figures.⁵³

⁵⁰ C.f. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.251 and Table 11.3 p.252, and Zvi Haley, "Jewish Students", pp.59-60.

⁵¹ See Jacob Lvaiv, "Jewish Agricultural Settlement in the USSR", Soviet Jewish Affairs, No.1, June, 1971, p.96. Baron provides the figure of 250,000 Jews engaged in farming outside of Birobidzhan in 1931. The figure is an estimate based on the statistic of 51,910 Jewish families involved in agriculture. See Baron, Op. Cit., p.222.

⁵² C.f. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union, Vol.1, p.253, and Lvaiv, Op. Cit., p.96.

⁵³ Baron, Op. Cit., pp.222-223, and Lvaiv, Op. Cit., p.95.

Collectivization⁵⁴ and the famine in the Ukraine can be blamed for the rest.

Collectivization and the famine were two of the central events of Soviet history in the early 1930s. Both had widespread ramifications for the areas where Jewish agricultural colonies were located, especially the Ukraine. Jewish agriculturalists did not escape the devastation of either. Assertions by the Yevsektsiia that Jewish agricultural colonies would not be forcibly collectivized, but instead would only be responsible for meeting grain requisitions did not hold up. In the first place, the Yevsektsiia was disbanded in early 1930. Other less unique reasons can be sighted. The antisemitic argument that Jews were receiving favourable treatment was a cause for the collectivization of colonies,⁵⁵ and in some areas, Jews were collectivized, because of the equipment they were able to use as a result of foreign aid programmes.⁵⁶ Another reason was the reduced scope for foreign aid programmes after 1930. A combination of official discouragement of foreign aid to the colonists outside of

⁵⁴ Stalin defined collectivization as the "pass[ing] from small individual peasant farming to large-scale collective agriculture equipped with tractors and modern agricultural machinery..." Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p.408.

⁵⁵ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917, Vol.1, p.228.

⁵⁶ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.228.

Birobidzhan, and later a purge of the organization ended foreign sponsorship of Jewish agriculture.⁵⁷ In other regions, the government wanted to "internationalize" certain farms, and Jewish agricultural colonies were combined with non-Jewish agricultural enterprises.⁵⁸ The ill effects of the famine only added to the frustration and despair of the settlers and they left the colonies in large numbers.⁵⁹

The transformation of Jewish economic life took place largely as the rest of Soviet society was transformed during the first eight years of Stalin's rule. The economic structure of the *shtetl* was destroyed by the new economic priorities of the regime. The transition to socialism had presupposed the victory over the lingering vestiges of the bourgeoisie. It assumed the transfer of almost all productive activity to socialist economic forms, which was in accord with the occupational taxonomy of the regime's sociology. Production

⁵⁷ Levin, devotes some space to the participation of the American Agro-Joint projects in the Soviet Union, and makes extensive use of the papers of James A. Rosen, the Chairman of the American Joint Distribution Committee's American Society for Jewish Farm Settlements in Russia. Rosen's experiences were first hand and Levin makes good use of the interesting and insightful perspective afforded by Rosen's unique position. See Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.226-233 *passim* and 237.

⁵⁸ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.230.

⁵⁹ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.235, Baron, Op.Cit., p.223.

had to be adapted to socialist economic forms, which meant an end to almost all private production.⁶⁰ Even intermediary economic forms like the artels were given over to socialist production methods. Factories were favoured over workshops, and government owned store over cooperatives and private shops. In agriculture, the "collectivization" drive, favoured large agricultural enterprises over small forms of cooperation. Together collectivization and industrialization represented the "economic foundations of socialism"; the preponderance of socialist "social-economic formulations" over the remnants of capitalist ones⁶¹ and Jews found their place in the economic system of Stalin's socialism.

⁶⁰ In 1932 all private commerce was outlawed and, in Stalin's words, "eliminated the private traders, merchants, and middlemen of any kind." The legal status of small scale production was less certain, as their continued existence was permitted by the 1936 constitution, but the "Order of the Federal People's Commissariat for Finance concerning the registration of handicraft and artisan trades" promulgated that same year contained a description of prohibited activities and regulated the few activities permitted to the extent that the ability to carry on small scale production would nearly impossible. Moreover, even if a request for licence to engage in small scale was granted production there was no guarantee that the products could be sold. See. Vladimir Gsovski, Soviet Civil Law: Private Rights and their Background Under the Soviet Regime, Vol.1, University of Michagan Law School Ann Arbor, 1948, p.346-352, *passim*.

⁶¹ Stalin, Problems of Leninism, pp.408 and 472.

4.3 Jewish Nationality

In the social sphere, Jewish institutions and culture no longer stood between Jews and the homogenizing processes of modernization, and the transformation to socialism. The structure of Jewish life and the pressure exerted against it did not allow Jews to benefit from the "liberalizations" of the 1920s to the extent enjoyed by other national groups. Against the changes in Soviet Jewry was the background of a very different Soviet Union. It was claimed that Marxist teleology was being realized in the social and economic spheres. The renewal of ideological priorities pushed the advantages of tolerance, and the encouragement of cultural forms to the side.

The recognition of some aspects of Jewish nationality that had characterized the policy of Yiddishization became meaningless in the 1930s. The status of Jewish nationality was revealed in the demise of the many facets of the Jewish apparatus set up throughout the first 12 years of Soviet rule, and the symbolic recognition of a Jewish presence through the Birobidzhan project.

In January 1930, the Jewish sections of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, were liquidated. The end of the Jewish apparatus in the Party was precipitated by a

combination of factors, some of which were to specific to the organization, and others due to the general course of events in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The forces working against the Yevsektsiia were clearly weighted in the political and policy currants of the day. However, had there been any opportunity to mount an effective opposition to the dispersal of the Sections proponents would have been hard pressed to come up with supporting arguments rooted in the merits of the Yevsektsiia as an organization.

The Yevsektsiia was an organization fraught with the complications attending the infusion of the representatives of the many points of view found in the Left-leaning Jewish organizations of pre-Revolutionary Russia. Gitelman described its last All-Union Conference in December of 1926 as "the scene of the clash between Evsektsiia 'neutralists', 'nationalists' and 'assimilationists'."⁶² After the Conference the Yevsektsiia became embroiled in the divisive tendencies arising from the ideological disputes, personal rivalries and factional power struggles brought into the open by the

⁶² Zvi Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1972, p.421, (hereafter Jewish Nationality). On the range of the debates at the conference see Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.420-425, Baruch Gurevitz, National Communism in the Soviet Union, University Centre for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, 1980, pp.86-90, Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.122, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.149.

Conference.

The last years of the Yevseksiia's work were hampered by the petty disputes over "abstract and quite irrelevant issues which were used only to veil the personal antagonisms which were the real issues."⁶³ By 1929 one Yiddish writer could only describe the sorry state of affairs in the following terms. "In this atmosphere... much falseness, cowardice, and vacillation have manifested themselves and it is becoming somewhat impossible [sic] to work."⁶⁴ The deterioration of the organization denied the Yevseksiia the ability to respond to the decided shift in policy orientation under Stalin's Five Year Plan. One contemporary offered this description.

Programs were not thoroughly or efficiently prepared, or worked out through political or economic institutions... Things were in chaos, thrown together. The Evseksiya had no coherent program of direction. It simply followed events.⁶⁵

It is of no surprise that events caught the Yevseksiia off

⁶³ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.444. The many facets of the intra-organizational disputes of the Yevseksiia are explained in some detail by Gitelman, and are beyond the scope of the present work. See Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.443-472.

⁶⁴ Letter to Joseph Opatoshu, November 25, 1929, in Shlomo Bikel, (Ed.), Pinkes far der forschung fun der yidisher literatur un prese, New York, 1965, pp.328-329, quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp.471-472.

⁶⁵ Yaakov Lestchinsky, Dos sovetishe idntum, Yidisher Kemfer, New York, 1941, pp.161 and 162 as quoted in Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, p.256.

guard when it was quite apparent the Party intended to liquidate the Jewish sections.⁶⁶

The Five Year Plan advanced the disintegrating tendencies that ran throughout the Jewish communities under Bolshevik rule, served to further undermine the Yevsektsiia's *raison d'etre*. On January 26, 1930 an article discussing industrialization and collectivization appeared in *Der emes*. The article went on to explain:

Because of these phenomena, some forms of Party leadership are, of course obsolete, and it became necessary to reconstruct the backbone of the Party in accordance with this...Bolsheviks have never made a fetish of **given** forms... The so-called Jewish work must find its new forms, in accordance with the new developments whereby new masses of Jewish workers enter industry and, in Jewish villages, new mass collectives are being organized.⁶⁷

The transition to socialism no longer required an apparatus to oversee the transformation of the Jews. The *shtetl* had been the focus of the Yevsektsiia's work. By 1930, it was almost completely destroyed.

In 1930, Stalin's efforts to tighten Party discipline by reorganizing and centralizing it, led to the end of the national sections in the Party. The Yevsektsiia were a casualty of this reorganization. The political environment

⁶⁶ Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, pp. 473-474.

⁶⁷ *Der Emes*, January 1930, as quoted in Gitelman, Jewish Nationality, p.474.

and the tasks of the day mitigated against the continued recognition of expressions of particularism in the Party organizational structure, especially given the ideological argument that economic development under the Five Year Plan would erase all social expressions of exclusivity and particularism. The Jewish Sections had always been creatures of the RCP(b), and as the revolution began to devour its young, the Yevseksiia were swallowed in the process.

Apparently the Central authorities had decided that between the economic and political struggles under the Five Year Plan, and the events of the 1920s had established a level playing field for the transformation of Soviet Jews. The 1920s had left Jews without means to effectively support their community life. The Yevseksiia's contribution it would seem was to punctuate the devastation of events and Bolshevik policy with a crude and often disorganized campaign against a traditional life that many Jews in the Party had fought to escape. The fulfilment of that function made "Jewish work" redundant.

The larger issues that had played a role in the Yevseksiia's demise asserted themselves in the field of nationality generally. The regime had once given tactual recognition to Jewish nationality by recognizing certain national and social features peculiar to Soviet Jewry but, at

the least in theory, the transition to socialism eroded their economic base. The new Party line on the nationalities question unavoidably laid the ground for the arguments denying the existence of all manifestations of Jewish national life.

Stalin continued to take the nationality question seriously throughout the 1930s. The fight against all forms of "right wing deviation" included a struggle against all varieties of local nationalism. During the new period of the struggle for socialism the nationalities question was part of the larger questions of transformation in the social and mental spheres. To quote Stalin, "It should be observed that the survivals of capitalism in people's minds are much more tenacious in the sphere of the national problem than any other sphere."⁶⁸

Stalin's solution was the same as in all spheres of the transition to socialism. Through class struggle, propaganda and "ideological work" national deviations could be overcome. The deviations from Marxism-Leninism in the national question consisted of the "deviation towards local nationalism" and the "deviation towards Great Russian nationalism". Both were to be combatted in the early thirties, although the problems in the Ukraine, where nationalists had attempted the marriage of

⁶⁸ Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p.506.

national aspirations with the ideals of socialism, began to receive greater emphasis. The problem was not unique to the Ukraine. "Similar 'dislocations' are observed among certain comrades in other national republics as well."⁶⁹

By the early 1930s Stalin's authority was nearly unassailable. As part of his struggle against right wing deviations Stalin was able to reverse the trends in the nationality question established under the NEP. The new tendency in the nationalities policy was clearly orientated toward assimilation. Stalin had expressed the notion that eventually nations would "assimilate [as a] result of the general process of development..."⁷⁰ Under the changing conditions of Soviet socio-economic development all social distinctions were fading, and a new Soviet man would emerge. The imperative to destroy all expressions of exclusivity in the area of nationality spelled the end of "indigenization".

Jewish institutions and programmes were casualties of Stalin's fight against local nationalism. As indigenization came to a close Jewish organizations were wound up, and programmes that had been designed to address the problems unique to the Jewish population, especially economic problems,

⁶⁹ Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p.506.

⁷⁰ Stalin, "Speech t the University of the Peoples of the East", as quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.41.

were brought to an end.

By the early 1930s, the population base for many Yiddish institutions no longer existed. The migration of Jews out of the Pale led to the closure of Yiddish courts, and it has been estimated that in 1937 only twenty to twenty-five Yiddish courts remained. The subsequent conversion of these courts into bi-lingual and tri-lingual courts was the last step in their extinction.⁷¹

The Yiddish schools fell into decline during the 1930s, although their numbers did not decrease as rapidly as the courts. A full statistical account of the Yiddish schools in the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the RSFSR is not available. The existing evidence shows that in 1931, roughly half of school age Jewish children, 82,000 were in attendance at 786 Yiddish schools. At the beginning of the following year the figure jumped to 94,872 pupils at 831 schools, and another source cites the substantially higher figures of 1,100 schools with 130,000 students.⁷² Mandatory attendance at school was introduced in 1930, which would account for the substantial

⁷¹ Benjamin Pinkus, "Yiddish Language Courts and Nationalities Policy in the Soviet Union", Soviet Jewish Affairs, No.2, Nov., 1971, p.57.

⁷² See Elias Schulman, A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union, Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1971, p.93.

increase in the number of students, but the increase of nearly 300 schools seems highly unlikely. It is more probable that there were a much greater number of Yiddish schools.⁷³ After 1930-31 the statistical evidence becomes more scanty, but that which exists indicates a decline to 75,000 pupils, or 20% of school age Jewish children, by 1939.⁷⁴

There is little to relate by way of an explanation for the decline of the Yiddish schools, other than to note that the schools suffered the fate of Jewish work generally. A decline of support by central authorities for Jewish institutions, in an environment of fear and suspicion among officials at all levels could not sustain a programme such as Yiddish schools. The situation worsened during the purges between 1937 and 1938, when the remnants of Jewish state and party officials were wiped out along with many of Soviet Jewry's cultural elites.

⁷³ Figures used by Levin would indicate that at least 1,315 schools were in operation throughout the Soviet Union in 1930. The figures cited are as follows: In 1930, there were 996 primary and secondary schools attended by 83,414 students in the Ukraine; that same year 28,310 students attended 209 Yiddish language schools in Byelorussia; and in 1931 there were 110 schools for 11,000 pupils in the RSFSR. (The 1931 figure for the RSFSR is used in the absence of data from 1930, and because the number of schools is more conservative for the purposes of estimation than the figure of 129 cited for the year 1928, despite an increase of nearly 4,700 students.) See Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, Table 8.1, p.184.

⁷⁴ Schulman, Op. Cit., p.159.

The obstacles to the success of the various organizations accounted for their inability to replace the web of Jewish community institutions. As their circumstances changed, Jews exercised their preference for Soviet organizations that would best serve their immediate and long term interests, and minimized contact with the offensive propaganda specifically aimed at traditional Jewish life and institutions. The circumstances of the majority of Soviet Jews, the direction of political events and the most significant policy initiatives of the Stalin regime made the Jewish apparatus obsolete.

The one programme for Jews that the regime continued to devote some energy to was the Birobidzhan, where Yiddishization and productivization had met in the idea of a Jewish territorial presence. The Birobidzhan continued to figure in the "solution" to the Jewish question, and became the centre piece of what remained of Jewish work under Stalin. Although its practical results can only be described as a miserable failure, the importance for the whole of Soviet Jewry should not be underestimated.

Shortly, after the decision was taken in 1928 to settle the Birobidzhan the government began to issue resettlement permits to Jews who had applied to go to the new colony.

Between April and June 1928 the first group of settlers from Kazan, Minsk and Smolensk, and consisted of 450 families and 150 individuals who had received permits.⁷⁵ Komzet had set quotas for the number of settlers in the first year at 3,000 families. Each year thereafter the quotas increased substantially, and by the end of the First Five Year Plan, in 1933, it was hoped that 60,000 Jews would be settled in the Birobizhan.⁷⁶

The quota targets were hopelessly optimistic. The unrealistic views of KOMZET as regarded setting quotas for settlers was in keeping with the lack of foresight and planning. So poorly organized and hurried were the initial settlement efforts that the information of the rather extensive report of the commission established late in the previous year on the prime locations for agricultural production were ignored completely. There were not enough resources to establish that many settlers once they arrived at the rail station, where they found only inadequate crowded and dirty barracks. The distribution of land had not been fully thought out and there were virtually no roads through the swamp and taiga dominating the inhospitable landscape.

⁷⁵ C.f. Chimen Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project", in Kochan, Op. Cit., p.73, and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.286.

⁷⁶ C.f. Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.176 and Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.289.

One prominent Jewish economist, Larin, who voiced his opposition to the selection of the Birobidzhan noted that the region:

consisted of swamps, 'gnus' [a kind of tsetse fly], floods, along winter in which the temperatures dropped to minus 40 [degrees celsius] and lay over 1000 kilometres from the sea.⁷⁷

By the end of the first year only one third of the settlers remained. some returned home, and others went further east in search of better prospects.⁷⁸

The circumstances of the colonists did little to help promote Birobidzhan among potential colonists. Stories got back to the rest of the Jewish population, and there was little to strike a cord with Jews of the *shtetl*, particularly in the 1930s when the opportunities to better their lot increased dramatically. It was not long before the number of people returning from Birobidzhan exceeded the number of new settlers, or as *Der emes* put it "in 1933 reflux even exceeded the influx of immigrants."⁷⁹ The result was a change in the

⁷⁷ Baron, Op. Cit., p.399, f.n.8.

⁷⁸ For descriptions of the unbelievable disorder and terrific conditions faced by the settlers, c.f. Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917, Vol.1, pp.286-287, 289 and 305, Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.176, (especially f.n.9), Baron, Op. Cit., p.196 and Abramsky, Op. Cit., p.72

⁷⁹ *Der emes*, November 30, 1934, quoted in Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp.177-178. Also, c.f. Ibid., p.181, Baron, Op. Cit., 196-197 and Abramsky, Op. Cit., pp.173-174.

recruitment programme.

In 1934, productive Jewish workers, and agricultural colonists were sought out as the new colonists of Birobidzhan. There was a rise in the number of new arrivals, but the stream leaving the region flowed steadily. Official figures were never given beyond the embarrassing admission that the Jewish population was "about 20,000" in 1937, as opposed to the 8,185 colonists living in Birobidzhan in 1933.⁸⁰ It should be noted that despite the explicit prohibition of non-Jewish colonists in the 1928 enactment non-Jews did settle in Birobidzhan, and in far greater numbers than Jews. In 1937 the number of non-Jews stood at about 52,000.⁸¹

The propaganda efforts promoting the Birobidzhan were considerable. The newspaper of the Yevseksiia, *Emes*, and the KOMZET journal *Tribuna* both carried articles trying to entice would be settlers and gain support for the project.⁸² To a certain extent the propaganda campaign to gain acceptance of the project was received well. This was particularly true among intellectuals who visited, and even moved to Birobidzhan, and used it as a vehicle to advance Yiddish

⁸⁰ C.f. Schwarz, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 180-181 and Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, Vol.1, p.302.

⁸¹ Baron, *Op. Cit.*, p.201.

⁸² Abramsky, *Op. Cit.*, p.72.

culture. Travelogues by writers and poets appeared in the pages of *Tribuna*, and much was made of Jewish artists moving to Birobidzhan.⁸³ However, most Jews gave the project a vote of approval with their hands not with their feet, and the propaganda efforts of the regime could do little to persuade Jews in large number to disregard the horror stories coming out of the region from those trying to settle.⁸⁴

Birobidzhan was supposed to have been an important part of the regime's commitment to the productivization of Soviet Russia's Jews. It was envisioned that the colonists would go to practice agriculture.⁸⁵ The harshness of the climate, poor preparation and a lack of interest in farming made the agricultural efforts of the Jewish settlers all but futile. The obvious failure led one historian to comment:

Instead of a socially rehabilitated Jewish nation, the JAP [Jewish Autonomous Province] saw the recrudescence of the unhealthy socio-economic structure of the semi-Sovietized Jewish town of the Ukraine or White Russia. The only difference was a greater proportion of Jews in the administration, especially in the city of Birobidzhan, where the percentage of Jews among the inhabitants is higher than in the province as a whole.⁸⁶

⁸³ Slutsky, "*Tribuna-II*", pp.38-9 and 51.

⁸⁴ *Der emes*, April 1928, as cited in Abramsky, *Op. Cit.*, p.72.

⁸⁵ C.f. Schwarz, *Op. Cit.*, p.174, and Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1*, pp.304-305.

⁸⁶ Schwarz, *Op. Cit.*, pp.184-185.

Jewish agriculture had fallen off everywhere, and it is hardly surprising that those who were poorly prepared to farm would chose some other occupation when faced with the difficulties faced by agriculturalists in the region. Most Jews who remained in Birobidzhan went into the public service in government offices and store, and some even returned to artisan production and trading. The non-agricultural population of Jews comprised 85% of Jews in the region's capital Birobidzhan.⁸⁷

The regime tried to be encouraging about the project in the early and mid-1930s, and in 1934 the Birobidzhan was given political recognition as an Autonomous Region in a speech by Kalinin to KOMZET.⁸⁸ The speech talked about the possibilities offered to the preservation of Jewish culture.

You ask why the Jewish autonomous region was formed. The reason is that we have three million Jews, and they do not have a state system of their own, being the only nationality in the Soviet Union in this situation. The creation of such a region is the only means of a normal development of for this nationality. The Jews of Moscow will have to assimilate... In ten years' time the Biro-Bidzhan will become the most important guardian of the Jewish-national culture and those who cherish a Jewish national culture must link up with Biro-Bidzhan...We already consider Biro-Bidzhan a Jewish national state.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.184.

⁸⁸ Abramsky, Op. Cit., p.74.

⁸⁹ Quoted from Yidn in F.S.S.R., Moscow, 1935, in Abramsky, Op. Cit., pp.74-75.

Kalinin even dangled the possibility of Birobidzhan being elevated to the status of a Jewish Republic in front of his audience.⁹⁰ The propaganda effort was the main impetus for the fanfare over the administrative status in 1934. Constitutionally, the autonomous region is not given the status of statehood, like the Union or Autonomous Republics.⁹¹

The optimism and hopes for the fledgling Jewish Autonomous Region faded quickly. In 1935, Stalin made it clear by his definition of the requirements of a Union Republic that the Birobidzhan would never qualify.⁹² Emigration continued to tapering off, and by the end of the 1930s the Jewish organizations, KOMZET and OZET, that had facilitated the attempt to give Jews a territory, were wound up and many of the top organizers suffered the fate of millions as Stalin's purges rocked Soviet society. The Jewish intelligentsia who had lent its support to the project did not escape this fate.⁹³ At the end of the day, the Birobidzhan was a miserable failure on all fronts and survives today merely as a relic of an era now long since past in the history of Soviet Jewry.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.75.

⁹¹ See Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.181.

⁹² Abramsky, Op. Cit., p.75.

⁹³ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.182.

During the Stalin period the status of Jews as a nationality received official affirmation in two principle ways. Through an administrative process of registration for passports and as an administrative territory. Both forms of recognition were important in their own way. The fact of recognition might also have been considered as taking into account the advance of Jews from their "medievalism" to a nationality living under socialism, and being transformed with the rest of Soviet society.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the acceptance of a Jewish nationality, which had been implied from the early days of the regime, and batted about in the mid 1920s before gaining currency among the party leadership, was significant because it implied that Jews had been placed on a legal footing equal to other members of society as Jews.

It was a combination of the Jewish policies of the 1920s and the new approach to development under the First Five Year Plan that lead to the administrative understanding of Jews in the 1930s. The effect, also often seemed to be the case, when Jews as a social entity were treated on the same basis as other groups, was more devastating than was the case with most

⁹⁴ This is not confirmed in the literature but seems reasonable given Soviet notions of progress and development in the nationality question. The lack of a common territory had been Stalin's main objection to the idea of a Jewish nationality, and the principle of territoriality. Birobidzhan satisfied that objection. It also implied the movement of Jews beyond another source of their backwardness in the official view, Judaism, which had been completely undermined.

other groups. As regards the issue of nationality in the 1930s, the problems were as follows. An insignificant proportion of the Jewish population lived in the Jewish territory given administrative recognition. Jews were spread out all over the country in small groups, and they were constantly being spread more thinly by the process of industrialization and by colonization. In urban areas where higher concentrations of Jews could be found the alienation of urban living did little to foster communities as had been true in the Pale, and despite the number of Jews in urban areas, they still constituted a minority in the urban population. Official recognition of Jewish nationality under these circumstances did not entail any rights, making the status of Jews as a nationality meaningless.

The importance of Birobidzhan to Jewish nationality rights was two fold. In the first instance, it gave Jews territorial recognition, and as such guaranteed certain language and cultural rights for the inhabitants of the autonomous region. The obvious difficulty was that only a small minority of Soviet Jewry had moved to Birobidzhan. Without the benefits of indigenization Jews outside of the Birobidzhan had no claims to special treatment under the law. In the early 1930s the organizational principle of territoriality was imposed. Union Republican parties became communist parties. Everything was organized on a territorial

basis. This included party work and other organizations sponsored by the party.

The results of the principle of territoriality were that Jews outside of the Birobidzhan would have to assimilate, as Kalinin had suggested. As support for indigenization waned in the 1930s Jewish communities in the Ukraine and Byelorussia found their position weakened. In the Ukraine all minorities lost the standing they had enjoyed under the NEP. In Byelorussia, where Yiddish was one of four official languages, the decline of indigenization also left its mark on the Jewish community, as support for Jewish culture subsided and in 1937 the new Belorussian constitution no longer recognized Yiddish as an official language of the Republic.⁹⁵

The 1930s witnessed many changes in the Jewish community, and these were supposedly reflected in their relations with other social groups. During the first years of the Stalinist period antisemitism continued on a wide scale. The incidents remained very much the same as those which began under the NEP. However, almost as quickly as it had appeared, the most overt expressions of antisemitism, in particular violence against Jews, subsided in the early 1930s.

⁹⁵ C.f. Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp. 84-86.

The marked reduction in the incidents of violent antisemitism are attributable to different factors. Solomon Schwarz makes the argument that the many changes in Soviet society and to Soviet Jewry contributed to the decline in antisemitism. The changes in the Jewish community were significant in this regard. The end to Jewish petty traders and curbing of speculation under the Five year Plan took away a favourite argument of the antisemites.⁹⁶ Racists also began to look at the other minorities who had arrived in the urban centres and saw a growing "Asiatic" and "Oriental" presence. In this climate of diversity the Jews did not look unlike the European Russian and Ukrainians.⁹⁷

The other significant factor in the decline of antisemitism had to do with the regime itself. The attention turned to the campaign against "chauvinism" displaced a specific campaign against antisemitism. The regime had not wanted to do too much about antisemitism, and as it seemed to wane in the 1930s, Central authorities may have felt it was better to leave it alone, lest the campaign against "chauvinism" be seen as "fighting for Jews".⁹⁸ It might also be argued that with the "progress" in establishing socialist

⁹⁶ Schwarz, Op. Cit., pp.293-294.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.294-295, also see Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917 Vol.1, pp.261-262.

⁹⁸ Schwarz, Op. Cit., p.292.

relations of production antisemitism was given less press simply because it was a symbol of a backwardness of an age that was quickly being surpassed by Stalin's Socialist Russia.

Antisemitism in the Soviet Union did not end in the 1930s. The fact that the regime was not prepared to do much if anything about antisemitism was an important failing. By not cutting antisemitism off when it was apparently subsiding, the Stalinist regime not only missed an opportunity, but sent a message to Soviet officials, who as has been shown were far from being above antisemitic outbursts, that antisemitism would not evoke any punitive response from the government. The fight against Trotsky may well have been a factor, since Jews were often supporters of Trotsky, and so "anti-Jewish bias overlapped with ideological hostility."⁹⁹

What ever the reason antisemitism no longer received official attention, perhaps the new attitude was reflected best in the manager's response to a question about antisemitism in his factory.

"Have you eliminated antisemitism from this factory?" asks the reporter. "Yes sir," answers the manager briskly, "there is no more antisemitism in this factory. We have discharged all the Jews."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, p.265.

¹⁰⁰ Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917, Vol.1, pp.264-265.

Antisemitism was swept under the carpet, it was not eliminated. The answer to antisemitism was assimilation, not the end of a prejudice that at one time had posed an enormous threat to Bolshevik power.

In 1936, the Stalin constitution announced the arrival of Socialism in the Soviet Union. The state of the workers, peasants and intellectuals was officially free of class antagonisms. The economic sources of social cleavages had been eliminated by industrialization and collectivization. The Jews had undergone a third phase of transformation. By 1936, Jews did not look very different from the sociological profile characterizing the rest of society. The biggest difference was owing to their small population, which had been spread out over the Soviet Union, Jews left them without meaningful national rights, or institutions to support a Jewish identity. By the end of the 1930s even the government organizations were wound up.

The Bolshevik solution to the Jewish question turned out to be no solution at all. Antisemitism remained and Jews could not fulfil their aspirations as Jews. Moreover, even those who preferred simply to move on could not. They were reminded of their roots by antisemitism and by their passports. What remained was the symbol of the Jew, and Birobidzhan, a land completely removed from the experience and dreams of Soviet

Jewry.

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Conclusion

The thesis has considered the treatment of Soviet Jewry between 1917 and 1936. It has argued that the Bolsheviks were forced by circumstance to assign some importance to an issue that had been considered a manifestation of the many sides of the nationality and religious questions involving a small minority. It has explained the ideological motivations for the Bolshevik approach to modernization, and the general policy initiatives arising from that approach. The role of these two factors in the Bolshevik policy programme to reconstruct the life of the Jews in the former Russian Empire, and the effects of those policies on Jews are examined as well.

The Soviet Jewish question is about the treatment received by Jews at the hands of the Soviet government. There are two sides to the question of the role of the government, the first has to do with the question of whether or not the Soviet government persecuted Jews as Jews. The second side is, given a social environment permeated with widespread antisemitism, what did the Bolsheviks do about antisemitism?

The thesis has argued that the Bolshevik regime was not antisemitic. Traditional Jewish life suffered from the dislocations of war, revolution and violent persecution at the hands of pogromists. Combined with the adverse effects of

the regime's general policy programme for development, and the more focused attacks on Jewish institutions, Jews were forced out of the social environment of the *shtetl* into different walks of life all over the Soviet Union. At the same time, many Jews took advantage of the opportunity to escape the poverty of the *shtetl*. The ideological priorities of the regime clashed with virtually every aspect of Jewish life in the former empire, and the vigilance of the Jewish communists implementing Bolshevik policies destroyed what remained of a community ravaged by violence.

Bolshevik ideology had no place for any expression of social cleavages. During the process of transformation the Bolsheviks could only treat Jews as members of an economic class, a religious group and/or a nationality. Jews fit poorly into Soviet Marxist categories of analysis, in the sense the majority of Jews were petty bourgeois. Jewish community life centred around religion and the Bolsheviks only reluctantly were willing to recognize that Jews possessed some features of a nationality.

Under an ideological regime determined to realize a teleology which foresaw the end of social differentiation Jewish distinctiveness came under attack directly and indirectly, as did all nationalities and religious groups. What made it worse for Jews was the structure of the Jewish

community, and its institutions that left it more vulnerable in face of the assaults of the Bolsheviks than larger and more concentrated minorities. Moreover, the ideological imperative to transform society often coloured efforts to address the real suffering that was prevalent in the Jewish population, and added to the damage.

Antisemitism complicated the implementation of policy. Jews were supposed to be protected by a regime free of antisemitism, but political reality of antisemitism compelled Jewish communists to implement policy and carry out campaigns with greater forcefulness in order that the regime not be seen as a representative of Jewish interests at the expense of others. The attitudes of the Jewish communists were further complicated by their non-Bolshevik roots, and the debates of a community with its own differences and, at times, divisive politics.

Antisemitism quickly became politicized following the revolution, and remained in the world of politics until the 1930s, when it faded from the Soviet political agenda. In one important respect, the Jewish question was about the politics of three very different perceptions about Jews and their place in society. The perceptions were those of the non-Jewish population, those of the Jews and those of the Bolsheviks.

The perceptions about Jews held by Non-Jews were rooted in the mythology of the Orthodox Church surrounding the Jews as the killers of Christ, the example of the antisemitism sponsored by officials of the Tsarist autocracy, which became increasingly given to violence in the last forty years of Tsarist rule, and the hostilities and distrust between the peasants and Jews of the Pale born of the economic relations between two impoverished and oppressed peoples.¹ Against a backdrop where antisemitism was never far below the surface of the consciousness of non-Jews, Jews were closely associated with an unpopular regime that had brought its share of misery to the peoples of the former Empire in the name of an ideology that represented an attack on the traditions and culture of the vast majority.

Anti-Bolshevik forces exploited the popular antisemitism of the peoples of the Pale in their propaganda campaign against the Bolsheviks, and allowed their own troops to engage in violent outbursts against Jews in the form of pogroms. They reminded non-Jews of the Jewish presence in the Bolshevik regime, and the connection was borne out in the increasing contacts between Soviet Jewish officials and a population being forcibly brought under Bolshevik rule by the Red Army. At the same time Bolshevik troops were seen to be protecting

¹ Isaac Deutscher, The Non-Jewish Jew and other essays, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, pp.69-70.

Jews, and they made a point of publicizing their campaign against antisemitism. With the foregoing in mind it is not hard to imagine that antisemitism continued to be manifest in the expressions of popular discontent in the years following the Civil War.

Both the Jews and the Bolsheviks had shared a recognition of the need for change in Russia, but there was a disjuncture between the hopes of Jews and the Bolshevik revolutionary programme. Jewish cultural, religious and political life was fuelled by the fall of Tsarism, as was the desire to participate in society without the disabilities imposed on them by the old order. The response of many Jews to their new found freedom was expressed in a renewal of religious life, an invigoration of Jewish community institutions and lively debate over cultural issues. Soon after the Bolshevik assumption of power growing numbers of Jews had the opportunity to participate in Soviet society, but were unable to realize their aspirations as Jews. The problem was Bolshevik ideology made the fulfilment of Jewish expectations contingent on their coincidence with the teleology of Soviet Marxism. It was difficult to see how a regime fully certain of the increasing homogenization of the social order could find a place in the long term for a separate Jewish identity.

The problem was added to by the Bolsheviks' ignorance of

Russia's Jews and their difficulties. The Bolshevik model of Jews was one imported from Western Europe where Jews had been able to find their place in society more easily than had been the case under the Tsars. Under the *ancien regime* in Russia the place of Jews was unusual. Jews were forced into a social and cultural ghetto by persecution, and prejudice, which helped to foster a particular socio-economic structure. Yet, the livelihood of Jews depended on contact with a society they in which they could not fully participate. At the same time, Jews were forced to rely on themselves, and had to draw together as a community in face of the threat of the antisemitic acts of the surrounding populace.

The Bolsheviks had little idea of the fullness of Jewish community life or the close connections between all aspects of the Jewish communities stimulated by the social and political environment of the Pale. "Family relations, work, prayer, study, recreation, and culture were all part of a seamless web, no element of which could be disturbed without disturbing the whole."² The entire network of social affirmation and support of a Jewish identity was vulnerable to the upheavals of the Revolution. The inability of Bolshevism to accommodate the central aspects of traditional

² Nora Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival, Vol.1, New York University Press, New York, 1988, pp.70-71.

Jewish life destroyed that life. It is one of the sad ironies of the revolution that the efforts of the Bolsheviks to uproot traditional Russian society, which had contributed to the long history of oppression suffered by Jews under the Tsars, did much to dislodge some of the sources of the distinctive place of Jews in Russian society, as well as, some of the manifestations of that distinctiveness.

The Bolshevik approach to the Soviet Jewish question was circumscribed by the notions of class struggle, nationality and religion. Each of these notions left particular, and sometimes contradictory sign posts for Soviet Jewish policies. In this respect, the Jewish question raised matters the Bolsheviks treated as being of secondary importance, given the more fundamental questions concerning the consolidation and enhancement of Bolshevik power, and its attempt to build a modern industrial society. The regime continued to have faith in the ability of urbanization and proletarianization to resolve some of the difficulties presented by the need to transform "backward elements of the toiling masses". Industrialization was still regarded as the best of all possible approaches to the Jewish question, because it would incorporate Jews into the most progressive element in society, the proletariat, and introduce them to the most cultured environment in the Soviet Union, the large urban centre. The propaganda efforts of the party and its

assorted organizations would be enough to remove the remaining prejudices of the past from the mind of the urbanized Jew as it would in the case of all urban dwellers.

For the Bolsheviks the Jewish question was about the politics and pace of Soviet Russia's transformation. The fundamental tension in the Jewish question was between the need for a pragmatic response to the politics of a given historical environment, and ideology of a regime committed to the pursuit of society's transformation in a manner consistent with a teleology to be manifest a future ideal society where the social cleavages that make politics necessary no longer exist. The tension was resolved by the end of a community with a rich history and traditions, and its replacement by an empty shell- **homo Sovieticus Judaeus**.³

³ The term has been borrowed from, Nora Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival, Vol.1, p.280.

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